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SELECTED WORKS

Plan de Evasión (Plan of Escape), a novel by Adolfo Bioy Casares
El Adefesio (The Freak), a three-act play by Rafael Alberti
Selections from Cántico (Canticle), poetry by Jorge Guillén
"Otoño" ("Autumn"), a poem by Alfonso Canales
Los Excelentes Varones (The Perfect Gentlemen), a one-act play by Max Aub

Translated from the Spanish
by

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B.A., University of California, Irvine, 1969

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is composed of the translation of previously untranslated works of important modern Spanish authors from Spain, Argentina and Mexico:

Adolfo Bioy Casares (Argentine novelist and frequent collaborator with Jorge Luis Borges): PLAN DE EVASIÓN, 1945. The entire novel is structured on a "fantastical" formula of physiological-philosophical ideas--rooted in the psychological theories of William James and encompassing even the borders of the current threshold of biological engineering. This "formula" is presented near the end of the novel and serves as the key to the reality of the novel itself: to the manner of its architecture, its mental and emotional perceptions and its ultimate "resolution" which turns the conclusion back on its parts, forcing the reader to make a reassessment of the perplexing components of reality in the novel and, perhaps, even to re-examine the questions of the nature of reality itself. In a fully fictional and highly symmetrical manner, the novel explores the question of reality, building its own structure of a network

of multiple and conflicting realities which are each developed to be consistent with themselves but which conflict insolubly at their ultimate junctures with each other.

Rafael Alberti (poet and dramatist of the famous "Generation of 1927" in Spain): EL ADEFESIO, 1944. This work, often compared with García Lorca's "House of Bernarda Alba", is considered by the critics to be his finest play, and in Spain his work is more highly regarded than that of Lorca. Like Lorca, in El Adefesio Alberti utilizes common Spanish folklore, but unlike Lorca he uses it only as a springboard to larger and more complex ends. In the play he interweaves Spanish folklore with Greek mythology and Christian legend, employing a naked, fluid symbolism in a way that is at moments strikingly modern and existential. In the play he achieves a startling poetic counterpoint between the classical, lyrical ritual of tradition, with its elevated emotion, and a dissonant ritual of grotesqueries suggestive of the modern theatre of the absurd--resulting in a poetic unity that is both rich and complex.

Jorge Guillén (an imagist poet, also of the "Generation of 1927" in Spain): CÁNTICO, 1928. His self-professed aims in

Cántico (a "poetry of affirmation") are to express his concept of the basic unity, harmony and abundance of life and of the intimate relatedness of all things in time and space. In the poems of Cántico Guillén pursues this affirmation through purity, intensity of vision and exclusion, his verses characterized by a refined, joyful classicism and brilliant metaphor.

Alfonso Canales (an important member of the school of modern Spanish poets, whose works date from 1950 to the present): OTOÑO, 1956. This poem is from his book of poetry El Candado.

Max Aub (major modern playwright and fervent anti-fascist, self-exiled from Spain and now residing in Mexico since 1942): LOS EXCELENTES VARONES, 1946. Although his work is no longer recognized in Spain, Aub is generally regarded by critics as one of the finest living Spanish playwrights. The concerns which have dominated Aub's post-Spain writings are those of war, fascism, exile, humanism and the dignity of man under pressure in relation to moral values. Although Los Excelentes Varones, by Aub's own classification, belongs to the genre of his work which he calls "police theatre", it is much more than that, being also a piercing black farce satirizing the recurrent and ominous impulse of society--past, present and possibly future--toward the police state.

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P L A N O F E S C A P E

by

ADOLFO BIOY CASARES

(Buenos Aires, Argentina - 1945)

Translated from the Spanish by

MEREDYTH SAVAGE

My first afternoon on these islands hasn't yet ended and already I have seen something of so grave a nature that I must ask for your help directly, without hesitation. I will try to explain myself in due order.

This is the first paragraph of the first letter from my nephew, naval lieutenant Henri Nevers. Among friends and relatives there will always be someone who will say that his most extraordinary and terrible adventures would seem to justify this tone of alarm, but that they, his "intimates", know that the real justification lies in his timorous nature. I myself find in that paragraph the proportion of truth and error to which the best prophets aspire; furthermore, I do not believe that it would be right to define Nevers as a coward. It is true that he himself has realized that he was a hero totally inadequate to the catastrophes that took place. We must not forget what his real preoccupations were, nor, at the same time, the extraordinary nature of those catastrophes.

Since the day I left Saint-Martin until today, uncontrollably, as in a delirium, I have thought of Irene, Nevers says with his customary lack of decorum, and he continues:

I have also thought of my friends, those nights we talked

together in some cafe on the rue Vauban, among dark mirrors, on the illusory border of metaphysics. I think of the life I have left and I do not know whom I despise most, Pierre or myself.

Pierre is my older brother; as the head of the family he decided on Henry's exile; the responsibility falls on him.

On the 27th of January, 1913, my nephew boarded the Nicolás Baudin and set sail for Cayenne. He spent the best moments of the journey with the books of Jules Verne, or with a book of medicine, Tropical Diseases For Everyone or writing his Addenda to the Monograph on the Rolls of Olerón; the most ridiculous moments were spent fleeing conversations on politics or the next war, conversations he later regretted not having heard. Some forty deportees were travelling in the hold. By his own admission, Nevers used to imagine at night (first as a kind of story he told himself to forget his awful appointment, later as an involuntary thing, recurring with almost irritating persistence) that he went down to the hold and urged them to mutiny. In the colony there is no danger of relapsing into those imaginings, he declares. Confused by the dread of living in a prison he made no distinctions: the guards, the convicts, the exiles: they all repelled him.

On the 18th of February he disembarked in Cayenne. He was received by the adjutant Legrain, a shabby man, a sort of country barber with kinky blond hair and azure eyes. Nevers asked for the governor.

"He's out on the islands."

"Let's go see him."

"Very well," Legrain said softly. "There's time for us to reach the governor's mansion, have something to drink and rest a bit. We can't go until the Schelcher pulls out."

"When does she leave?"

"The 22nd."

That was four days away.

They entered a sagging, dark carriage, worn with age. Nevers studied the city laboriously. Its citizens were black, or yellowish white, with excessively full shirts and wide hats made of straw. Or there were the prisoners, in red and white stripes. The houses were wood huts, of an ocherous color, or pink, or bottle green or cerulean blue. The streets were not paved; from time to time a sparse reddish dust enveloped them. Nevers writes: The modest governor's palace owes its fame to its elevated floor and to its use of the country's lumber, as durable as rocks, which the Jesuits used in construction. The penetrating insects and the humidity are beginning to rot the place.

Those days that he spent in the capital of the penitentiary seemed to him a season in hell.[1] He cursed his own weakness, he cursed that moment in which he had consented to go to Cayenne,

[1] Une saison en enfer

to distance himself for one year from his fiancee. He feared everything: from illness, an accident, the incompletion of his purposes, a delay or obstacle to his return to, even, an inconceivable betrayal by Irene. He imagined that he was condemned to these calamities by having permitted, without resistance, their disposal of his destiny. Among convicts, parolees and jailers he considered himself a convict.

The night before leaving for the islands, a Mr. and Mrs. Frinziné invited him to dinner. He asked Legrain if he could make excuses. Legrain replied that they were "very solid" persons and it would not be advisable to make enemies of them. He added:

"Besides, they're already on your side. The governor has offended all the right society of Cayenne. He is an anarchist."

I looked for a brilliant, disdainful reply, Nevers writes. As I couldn't find one right away, I had to thank him for his advice, I had to enter into that felonious civility and be received at nine sharp by Mr. and Mrs. Frinziné.

He began to get ready long before time. Seized by a fear that they would interrogate him, or perhaps because of a diabolic relish for symmetries, he studied the article on prisons in the Larousse.

It must have been twenty to nine when he went down the perron steps of the government palace. He crossed the square with the palm trees, stopped to contemplate the disagreeable monument to

Victor Hugues, condescended to let a shoeblack give him a bit of a shine, and, detouring round the Botanical Gardens, he arrived in front of the Frinziné household. It was vast and green, with wide adobe walls.

A ceremonious concierge conducted him along lengthy corridors, through the secret distillery, and at the vestibule of a purple-carpeted salon with gold incrustations on the walls, she called out his name. There were twenty people. Nevers remembered very few of them: the owners of the house--Philip Frinziné, the nameless wife, and Charlotte, their twelve or thirteen-year-old daughter--all hugely obese, short, polished, pink; a Mr. Lambert, who cornered him against a mountain of pastries and asked him if he didn't think that the most important element in man was dignity (Nevers realized with alarm that Mr Lambert expected an answer, but another guest intervened: "You're right, the attitude of the governor..." Nevers moved away. He wanted to discover the "mystery" about the governor but he didn't want the complications of intrigues. He repeated the sentence of the unknown guest, he repeated Lambert's sentence, he said to himself "anything is the symbol of anything" and he felt vainly satisfied.) He also remembered a Mrs. Wernaer: she hovered languidly around them and he went over to speak to her. He immediately learned of the evolution of Frinziné, king of the colony's gold mines, yesterday, dishwasher in a back-street tavern. He also learned that Lambert was commander of the islands,

that Peter Castel, the governor, had established himself on the islands and that he had sent the commander to Cayenne. This was objectionable: Cayenne had always been the seat of government. But Castel was a subversive, he wanted to be alone with the prisoners... The woman also accused Castel of having written--and published in prestigious guild newspapers--small poems in prose.

They went into the dining room. To Nevers' right sat Mrs. Frinzine and on his left the wife of the president of the Bank of Guiana; across from him, beyond four carnations that arched over a tall vase of blue glass, Charlotte, the daughter of his hosts. At first there was laughter and great animation. Nevers noticed that immediately around him the conversation slackened. But, he confesses, when he was spoken to he did not answer: he tried to recall what he had prepared that afternoon in the Larousse. Finally he overcame his amnesia; the sudden illumination burst into words, and with horrible enthusiasm he spoke of the urbane Bentham, author of The Defense of Usury and inventor of hedonistic computation and panoptic prisons; he also evoked the penal system of useless labor and debilitation,of Auburn. He thought he noticed that some of the guests took advantage of his pauses to try to change the subject; long afterwards it occurred to him that speaking of prisons was perhaps not appropriate for such a reunion. He was confused, not hearing the few words still being said, until suddenly he heard from the lips of Mrs. Frinzine (as at night when

we hear our own outcry that wakes us) a name: René Ghill. Nevers "explains": I, even unconsciously, could remember the poet; that Mrs. Frinziné should evoke him was inconceivable. He asked impertinently:

"You knew Ghill?"

"I know him very well. You don't know the times he held me on his knee, in my father's restaurant in Marseilles. I was a little girl...a child then."

With a sudden worship Nevers asked her what she remembered of the poet's verses.

"I don't remember anything but my daughter can recite some marvelous lines for us."

This called for action and Nevers spoke immediately of the Rolls of Oleron, that great coutumier, who fixed the rights of way of the ocean. He tried to inflame his table companions against the renegades or foreigners who pretended that Richard the Lion-Hearted was the author of the Rolls; he also warned them against the candidacy--more romantic but quite fallacious--of Eleanor of Guyena. "No," he told them, "these jewels (like the immortal poems of the blind bard) were not the work of a single genius; they were the product of the citizens of our islands, each distinct and effective as each particle of an alluvium." He recalled at last the flighty Pardessus and he implored those present not to let themselves be swayed by his heresy, which was brilliant and perverse.

Once more I had supposed that my themes must be of interest to other minorities, he confesses, but he felt compassion for those listening to him and he asked:

"Would the governor be willing to help me in my investigations of the Rolls?"

The question was absurd, but I hoped to toss them sweetmeats, the word "governor", to make them happy. They argued over the degree of Castel's culture; they agreed on his "personal charm"; Lambert attempted to compare him with the wise man of a book he had read: a weak, ailing old man with plans to blow up the Comic Opera. The conversation detoured to the costs of the Comic Opera and to the question of which were the greatest theatres, those of Europe or those of America.

Mrs. Frinziné said that the poor guards went hungry because of the governor's zoo.

"If they didn't have their private chicken coops..." she insisted, shouting to be heard.

Through the carnations he looked at Charlotte. She remained silent, with her eyes circumspectfully cast on her plate.

At midnight he went out on the terrace. Resting on the balustrade, vaguely contemplating the trees of the Botanical Gardens, dark and mercurial in the radiance of the moonlight he recited some poems of Ghill. He interrupted himself; he thought he

heard a slight murmur; he said to himself: it is the murmur of the American jungle; it seemed, more likely, a murmuring of squirrels or of monkeys; then he saw a woman making signs to him from the gardens; he tried to contemplate the trees and to recite the poems of Ghill; he heard a woman's laughter.

Before he left he saw Charlotte again. She was in the room where the hats of the guests were stacked. Charlotte stretched out a short arm with her hand closed; she opened it. Confusedly, Nevers saw a radiance, then a golden mermaid.

"I give it to you," the girl said, with simplicity.

At that moment some men walked in. Charlotte shut her hand.

He didn't sleep that night. He thought about Irene, and Charlotte appeared, prophetic and obscene. He promised himself that he would never go to the Iles du Salut, that he would return to Re on the first boat.

On the 22nd he boarded the rusty Schelcher. In among black, pale and sea-sick women and huge cages of chickens, still sick from the previous night's dinner, he made the trip to the islands. He asked a sailor if there were no other means of communication between the islands and Cayenne.

"One Sunday the Schelcher, the next the Rimbaud. But the administrators got nothing to complain about, what with their motor launch..."

Everything had been ominous since I left Ré, he writes, but when I saw the islands I felt a sudden affliction. Many times he had imagined the arrival. As he arrived he felt that all hope was lost: now there would be no miracle, now there would be no calamity to keep him from his post in the prison. He later recalls that the appearance of the islands is not unpleasant. Further still: with their tall palm trees and their rocks, they were the image of the islands that he had always dreamed of, with Irene. Still, irresistably, they repelled him, and our miserable village of Saint-Martin was as if illuminated in his memory.

At three in the afternoon he arrived at Royal Island. He notes: On the pier a dark Jew was waiting for me, Dreyfus by name. Nevers greets him right off as "Mr. Governor". A guard whispers in his ear:

"That's not the governor. That's Dreyfus, the parolee."

Dreyfus couldn't have heard, because he said the governor was away. He took Nevers to his quarters in the administration; it lacked the romantic (but decayed) splendor of the palace at Cayenne; it was habitable.

"I am at your command," Dreyfus stated as he opened the luggage. "My duties are to attend the governor and yourself,lieutenant. You may order whatever you wish."

He was a man of medium height, of a greenish complexion, with

tiny brilliant eyes. He talked without moving, with a total suavity. When he listened he half-closed his eyes and slightly pursed his lips: in his expression there is an evident sarcasm, a repressed sagacity.

"Where is the governor?"

"He's on Devil's Island."

"We'll go there."

"Impossible, sir. The governor has prohibited all entry to the island."

"And you will not allow me to go out for a walk?" The question was weak. But Nevers went out slamming the door sharply. Immediately Dreyfus appeared at his side. He asked if he could join him and he smiled with a repulsive sweetness. Nevers didn't reply; they walked together. The island is not a congenial place: everywhere, the horror of seeing convicts, the horror of displaying oneself free among convicts.

"The governor anxiously awaits you," Dreyfus said. "I'm sure he will visit you this very night."

Nevers thought he perceived a certain irony. He asks himself: is this simply a manner of speaking, or did his Jewish perspicacity cause him to divine that I cursed the governor? Dreyfus eulogized the governor, he congratulated Nevers on his good fortune (to spend some years of his youth in the shadow of such a wise and cordial

leader) and himself for his own good fortune.

"I hope it won't be years," Nevers stated boldly, and corrected himself: "I hope I won't have to go on walking with you for years."

He arrived at a group of huge rocks on the coast. He looked out at the Island of St. Joseph straight ahead, Devil's Island off in the waves, further out. He thought he was alone. Suddenly, Dreyfus spoke to him in his quietest voice. Nevers felt dizzy and was afraid of falling in the sea.

"It's just me."

Dreyfus continued:

"I'm going now, lieutenant. But be careful. It's easy to slip on the moss on the rocks, and under the water the sharks are watching you."

He continued to study the islands (more careful now, pretending not to be more careful).

Then, when he was alone, he made the atrocious discovery. He thought he saw enormous serpents among the vegetation on Devil's Island, but forgetting the danger that waited in the sea, he moved forward a couple of steps and saw in full daylight (as Cawley on that astrological night on Lough Neagh, or like the redskin on the Lago de Horcones) a greenish antediluvian animal. Engrossed, he walked to other rocks. The <u>portentous truth</u> revealed itself:

Devil's Island was camouflaged. A house, a cement patio, some rocks, a small pavillion, were camouflaged.

What does this mean? Nevers writes. That the governor is a persecuted man? A madman? Or does it mean war? He believed in the hypothesis of war: he would ask to be transferred to a ship. Or will I spend all the time of the war here, far from Irene? Or will I be a deserter? He adds in a postscript: Eight hours have passed since I arrived. I still have not seen Castel, I couldn't appeal to him about these camouflages, I couldn't hear his lies.

II

February 23

Nevers traversed Royal and St. Joseph Islands (in his letter of the 23rd he tells me: I haven't yet found an excuse for making an appearance on Devil's Island).

Royal Island and St. Joseph Island aren't larger than three square kilometers each; Devil's Island is a little smaller. According to Dreyfus, there were, altogether, some seven hundred and fifty inhabitants: five on Devil's Island (the governor, the governor's secretary and three political prisoners), four hundred on Royal Island, something more than three hundred and forty on

St. Joseph. The main constructions are on Royal Island: the administration, the lighthouse, the hospital, the workshops and warehouses, and the "red compound", the former slave quarters. On St. Joseph Island there is an encampment surrounded by a wall, and a building--"the castle"--composed of three pavilions: two for those condemned to solitary confinement and one for the insane. On Devil's Island there is a building with flat roofs, that looks to be new, some straw-thratched huts and a decrépit tower.

The convicts are not obligated to perform any tasks; most of the day they wander about freely over the islands (with the exception of those confined in the "castle", who never leave it). He saw the prisoners in confinement: in minute, wet, solitary cells, with a bench and a bit of cloth, hearing the sound of the sea and the incessant shouting of the insane, exhausting themselves to write a name, a number, with their fingernails on the walls, already imbecile. He saw the insane: naked, among leftover vegetables, howling.

He returned to Royal Island; he inspected the red compound. It had the reputation of being the most stinking, bloodiest place in the colony. The guards and convicts expected his visit. Everything was in order, in a filth and misery that are unforgettable, Nevers comments with outrageous sentimentality.

He trembled as he entered the hospital. It was an almost

pleasant place. He saw fewer sick men there than in the "castle" and the red compound. He asked for the doctor.

"Doctor? We haven't had one for a long time," said a guard. "The governor and the secretary attend the sick."

Even if I only gain the enmity of the governor, he writes, I will try to assist the convicts. He then presents this obscure reflection: if I do so, I will make myself an accomplice to the existence of prisons. He adds that he will avoid anything that could in any way postpone his return to France.

III

The governor remained on Devil's Island, occupied in mysterious affairs, of whose nature Dreyfus was ignorant or said he was ignorant. Nevers resolved to discover if these affairs concealed some danger. He would have to move with extreme caution; to go to the island under the pretext of taking food or correspondence wouldn't do. It was true that there was a motor launch and more than one dinghy, but there was also a cable tramway, and an order for using it. Dreyfus said that they used this device (that couldn't hold a man) because the sea was usually rough around Devil's Island. They looked at the ocean: it was calm. Then Dreyfus asked Nevers if he had thought the tramway had been

installed at Castel's orders.

"The device was already set up when I came here," Dreyfus added. "Unfortunately, that was many years before Mr. Castel was appointed governor."

"And who lives on the island?" asked Nevers (absent-mindedly: Dreyfus had told him this on the 23rd).

"The governor, Mr. De Brinon and three political prisoners. There used to be one other, but the governor moved him to the red compound."

This (placing a political prisoner among the common prisoners) must have caused a very frank and general indignation, so general that Nevers discovered it even in the words of that fanatic follower of the governor. Nevers himself was confused, avowing that he would not tolerate such infamy. Later it crossed his mind that that act of Castel's furnished him with the least dangerous opportunity of verifying what was going on on Devil's Island; he thought the prisoner would have no objection to talking (and if he did, it would suffice for Nevers to simulate an aversion to Castel). He asked Dreyfus what the prisoner's name was.

"Ferreol Bernheim."

He added a number. Nevers took out a small notebook and entered these points in full view of Dreyfus; then he asked him who De Brinon was.

"A marvel, an Apollo," Dreyfus said with sincere enthusiasm. "He is a young male nurse, of noble family. The governor's secretary."

"Why is there no doctor on the islands?"

"There always was a doctor, but now the governor and Mr. De Brinon take care of the sick men themselves."

Neither of the two were doctors. It can be alleged that neither was Pasteur, Nevers comments petulantly. I do not know if it would be wise to antagonize the healers. In the castle and in the red compound he saw all manner of sick men, from anemics to lepers. He condemned Castel, he felt that Castel should remove the sick from the islands, send them to a hospital. He finally discovered that his passionate disapproval was not far from being a puerile fear of contaminating himself, of never again seeing Irene, of remaining on the islands a few months, until death.

IV

March 3

Today I have committed an indiscretion, he says in his letter of March 3. He had spoken with Bernheim. In the afternoon he had gone to the red compound and sent for the prisoner. He was a

little man with a shaven face the color of an old rubber ball, with dark, very deep eyes and a canine gaze, that came from far off, from below, humbly. He snapped to attention like a German soldier and tried to stand tall; he managed to stare at Nevers in an oblique manner.

"What do you want?" The voice was lofty, his glance, wretched. "Authority is everything to me. But with the present authorities I don't want any more truck than..."

Nevers made a gesture of astonishment. He said, offended:

"I am not responsible for what happened before my arrival."

"You're right," Bernheim conceded, defeated.

"What happened, then?"

"Nothing," he replied. "Nothing: that rat who is a discredit to authority yanks me out of Devil's Island and puts me in with the common prisoners."

"You must have committed some offense."

"That's clear enough," he said almost shouting. "I asked myself that very question. But you know what my duties were: 1) To gather coconuts. 2) To return promptly to the hut. I swear to you: there was never a man born who could beat me in punctuality."

"I will try to get you returned to your island."

"Don't intervene, lieutenant. I don't want to owe anything

to the governor. I am a thorn in the conscience of France."

Absurdly, Nevers writes: Bernheim seemed fascinated; he admired my scar. People assume that the cut I bear is the souvenir of a fight. It would be advantageous if the convicts were to think it is a sign of aggression.

He should not allude so lightly to a mark that, except in the eyes of women (I suspect it attracts them!), offends the human race. Nevers knows it is not a sign of aggression. He must know that it is the sign of an idiosyncracy that distinguishes him, perhaps, in the history of morbid psychology. Here lies the origin of that blemish: Nevers was twelve or thirteen years old. He used to study in a garden, near a dark arbor of laurels. One afternoon he saw a girl come out of the arbor with her hair disheveled, a girl crying and bleeding. He saw her go away; a phantasmal horror kept him from helping her. He wanted to inspect the arbor; he didn't dare. He wanted to flee; his curiosity held him back. The girl didn't live far away; her brothers, three boys a little older than Nevers, appeared very shortly. They went into the arbor; they came out immediately. They asked him if he hadn't seen a man wandering about. He said no. The boys went away. He experienced a desperate curiosity, and he shouted to them: "I didn't see anyone because I was in the arbor all afternoon." He told me that he must have shouted like a madman, because if he hadn't, the boys

wouldn't have believed him. They believed him and they left him for dead.

I return to the account of that 3rd of March, on the islands. Nevers and Bernheim went out for a walk. They had been talking for some time when Nevers suddenly thought that his conduct was imprudent. The impulsive frankness of Bernheim had captured him. He found himself agreeing with, or tolerating without refutation, well-aimed invectives against the governor and against French justice. He remembered that he wasn't there to share the indignation of this man, nor to defend him against injustice; he was there, simply, to interrogate him, since he feared that in the mystery of Devil's Island there might be something that could delay his return. He managed to reason this out while Bernheim besieged him with eloquence, suffering his calamities anew and repeating that Castel was the worst disgrace in our history. Nevers decided to interrupt him:

"And now that the governor has finished the camouflages, what is he doing?"

"He is camouflaging the inside of the house." And he added: "But we will see what his camouflages are good for when..."

Nevers didn't hear him. If Castel had camouflaged the interior of the house, he was insane; if he was insane, Nevers could forget his fears.

He was satisfied with the interview; nevertheless, he thought, the governor must not know about this; I must be on guard against his sick cunning and suspicions.

When he returned to the administration he saw, at a distance, a man walking among the rocks and palm trees on Devil's Island. A flock of heterogeneous animals was following him. A guard told him that that man was the governor.

V

On the 5th he writes: Even though he anxiously awaits me, the governor still hasn't come. My urgency to see this gentleman has its limits: for example, I want to know if his loss of reason is absolute or not, if I ought to lock him up or if his disorder is confined to a mania. He wanted to clarify other points: What did De Brinon do? Did he take care of the sick man? Did he mistreat him?

If the governor was not totally mad, Nevers would consult him about the administration. At present there was no administration whatsoever. What would that suggest? Madness? Disinterest? In that case the governor would not be abject. But who would not have doubts about a man whose vocation it is to govern a prison? Nevertheless, he reflected, I am here; is it a vocation that has

brought me?

In Castel's library there were books on medicine, psychology and several novels of the nineteenth century; there were very few of the classics. Nevers was not a medical scholar. The only fruit he had gleaned from Tropical Diseases For Everyone was a pleasant but transient prestige among the servants of his house: at least that was what he believed on March 5.

In his letter of that date he thanks me for several books that I sent him, and he tells me that his cousin Xavier Brissac was the only member of the family who bid him goodbye. Unfortunately, he writes, the name of the boat was 'Nicolás Baudin"; Xavier took advantage of the opportunity and remembered what all the residents of Oleron and Re in all the possible combinations around the tables at the "Cafe du Mirage" have repeated: Nicolás Baudin was the author of the discoveries which the English have attributed to Flinders. Xavier had added finally that as a result of Nevers' stay on those islands so propitious to both the entomologist and the insect, he hoped--for the glory of France--for works as solid as those of Baudin. But not entomological works: works more appropriate to the nature of Nevers.

Nevers later speaks of Dreyfus: I must admit that he is less overbearing in his archipelago than in our literature. I have hardly seen him, I barely hear him, but everything has been

punctual and correct, with the exception of the coffee: excellent. Immediately he asks himself if this reconciliation may not be prophetic, if this isn't the beginning of a reconciliation with destiny, and he adds: In some moment of insomnia I have known this fear: the laxity brought on by the tropics, reaching the state of no longer desiring the return. But why allude to such dangers? It is an illusion to fear them. It is the longing to dream that the climate, the insects, the incredible prison, the unspeakable absence of Irene do not exist.

Concerning the prison, the insects and even the absence of Irene I will raise no objections. With regard to the climate, I believe he exaggerates. The events which took place occurred in February, March and April, in winter. It is true that there a March summer is in the habit of introducing itself; it is true that winter in the Guianas is as sultry as summer in Paris..., but Nevers, against the will of his elders, has spent more than one vacation in Paris and has never complained.

He continued to look for an explanation for the governor's conduct; at times he was afraid he had accepted the hypothesis of madness too easily. He resolved not to forget that it was a hypothesis: it was based exclusively on the words of Bernheim. Perhaps in a casual manner of speaking, perhaps Bernheim had said "he is camouflaging the interior" to mean that he was painting it in some

extravagant fashion. Or maybe this hypothesis was based on an error of observation, or some deficiency in the observer. If the marks that Castel is painting on the inside of the house are the same as those on the outside, he thought, would it not be fitting to deduce that neither of the two instances have anything to do with "camouflages"? Perhaps it could be an experiment, something that neither Bernheim nor I understand. At any rate, he says with pathetic hopefulness, there exists the probability that these paintings are not the omens of an approaching war.

VI

One night, on the terrace, while Dreyfus was serving coffee, they had a talk. Because I detest everything in this colony, I have been unjust to this poor Jew, Nevers writes. Dreyfus was a man of some reading--he knew the titles of almost all the volumes in the library--, versed in history, naturally endowed with a gift for speaking French and Spanish with sententious elegance, with the slightest irony, effectively. His use of some archaic turns of phrase could suggest that his manner of speaking may have been studied. Nevers suspected a less fantastic explanation: Dreyfus must be a Spanish Jew , one of those whom he had seen in Cairo and in Salonica: surrounded by people of other tongues, they

continued to speak the Spanish they had spoken in Spain when they were expelled, four hundred years ago. Perhaps their ancestors were merchants or seamen and knew French, and perhaps from the mouth of Dreyfus he was hearing languages from the Middle Ages.

He thought that Dreyfus' literary taste was not exquisite. In vain Nevers tried to exact his promise (which would have cost him nothing and would have soothed my conscience) to read someday the works of Theocritus, Mosco, Bión or, at least, Marinetti. In vain he tried to avoid Dreyfus relating to him The Mystery of the Yellow Room.

According to Nevers, the historic works of his orderly were not confined to sedentary reading; Dreyfus had made several personal investigations with regard to the colony's past; he promised to show Nevers some things of interest; Nevers didn't tell him that his interest lay precisely in ignoring both the present and the history of this unfortunate region.

Later he asked Dreyfus why there were so many insane on the islands.

"The climate, deprivation, contagious disease," Dreyfus answered. "Don't get the idea that they were all as sane as you when they arrived. This question is the source of favorite slander: they will tell you that if a governor wants to get rid of such and such an assistant, he claims him to be mad and locks him

up."

To change the conversation, Nevers asked what the governor did with the animals. Dreyfus covered his face; he spoke in slow and trembling tones.

"Yes, it's horrible. You want me to acknowledge... But he is a great man."

Nevers says that Dreyfus' contained agitation increased, and that he himself felt nervous, as if an atrocious revelation were about to emerge. Dreyfus continued:

"I know: there are things one doesn't refer to. Best to forget them, forget."

Nevers did not dare to insist. He comments: "A dog can be tolerated like the vain appendix of tante Brissac. But how can you deal with, what are the limits of loathing in dealing with a man who surrounds himself with flocks of foul-smelling animals? Friendship with an animal is impossible; to live together, monstrous, my nephew continues, seeking a feeble originality. The sensory processes of the animals are different from our own. We can't imagine their experiences. Master and dog never live in the same world.

The presence of the animals and Dreyfus' horror suggest something, my cousin prophetically explains, that is not like reality. But Castel wasn't a misunderstood or sinister genius; he was a

madman, or a sordid collector who used up the prisoners' food in his zoo.

However, Nevers states; I won't write to the newspapers; I will not expose Castel for the moment. That a governor might have his enemy declared insane could be an anonymous bit of slander, or a moment of treason on the part of Dreyfus. But he might perhaps find it unwise to make an enemy of the governor of a prison, especially if the prison was an island in the middle of the sea. He would sometime return to France, and if he felt like proceeding with the exposure... But he would be with Irene, he would be happy, and the impassioned intentions he now felt would become part of the dream of Devil's Island, awful and past-tense. He felt as if he had just awakened in the middle of the night: he knew he would go back to sleep and that for some hours he would go on dreaming, but he told himself not to take things very seriously, to maintain the most flexible indifference (if he should forget that he was dreaming).

He felt relieved, certain he would not engage in further foolhardiness.

VII

He says that on the night of March 9 he was so tired he hadn't

the strength to break off his reading of Plutarch's Treatise on Isis and Osiris and go to bed.

He remembered that first visit of the governor's as the fragment of a dream. He had heard footsteps, below, in the courtyard; he went to the window; he saw no one. With the natural cunning of a subordinate, he hid the book and began leafing through a portfolio. The governor entered. He was an old man with a smiling face, a white beard and clouded blue eyes. Nevers felt he should defend himself against the easy inclination to consider him demented. The governor spread his arms and cried out in a voice like that of a mouse, or a Japanese:

"At last, my friend, at last. How I have looked forward to your coming! That good fellow, Pierre Brissac, has spoken to me about you in a long letter. I have long awaited your collaboration."

He shouted as he embraced Nevers; he shouted as he clapped him on the back, he shouted as he embraced him again. He spoke at extremely close quarters. Nevers tried to avoid that immediate face, that palpable breath.

The governor is professionally jovial, Nevers says, but he confesses that, from the first moment, he regarded the governor with hostility. This harshness is a new faculty in my nephew; perhaps the error of sending him to the Guianas has not been so great after all.

The governor placed him in charge of Royal Island and Saint Joseph's Island. He gave him the keys to the archives and the armory.

"My library is at your disposal. What is left of my library: the volumes the guards haven't rented out yet."

He is a disagreeable old man, Nevers writes. With his eyes wide-open, as though he were in a state of wonderment, he always hunted out my eyes to stare at me face to face. He must be an imbecile, or a hypocrite.

Nevers managed to tell him that he had seen the "camouflages". The governor didn't understand or pretended that he didn't.

Nevers asked:

"Are they experiments?"

He regretted having volunteered the explanation.

"Yes, experiments. But not a word more. You seem tired. Experiments, my friend."

He was extremely tired. Half-dreaming, he thought that the governor--in order not to speak of the "camouflages"--had inflicted that terrible weariness on him.

The governor looked at the portfolio and said:

"Working at this hour of the night. There is no doubt: work is intoxicating."

"Each to his own taste...," answered Nevers.

The reply was weak--not useless; it saved him from simulating (out of cowardice, mere cowardice) an infamous concurrence. However, he wasn't certain that his tone was disdainful.

"Perhaps I spoke hastily," the governor declared.

"Perhaps," Nevers stated, now set in his hostility.

The governor regarded him with his moist blue eyes. My nephew also looked back: he studied his wide forehead, his pink, puerile cheeks, his shocking white, spittle-covered beard. It seemed to him that the governor was undecided as to whether to go out slamming the doors or whether to attempt, once more, an explanation. He decided that the profit he would derive from me merited another explanation, or else it was his horrible sweetness that prevailed.

"There is one point, my friend, on which we will both agree. It will be the basis of all our operations. Do you note in me a certain anxiety to arrive at an agreement with you?"

He had noticed it; it irritated him. Castel went on:

"I will be frank: I have placed all my hopes in you. I have needed what it is most difficult to get ahold of around here: an enlightened collaborator. Your arrival brings an end to my problems, other than those of the work itself. That is why I have greeted you with an enthusiasm that may perhaps seem to you extravagant. Don't ask me to explain myself; as we get to know

one another better, we will explain ourselves to each other imperceptibly."

Nevers did not answer. Castel continued, saying:

"I will return to what we have taken as the basis of our agreement. For the great majority of men--for the poor, the sick, the imprisoned--life is terrible. There is another point on which we can agree: it is the duty of all of us to try to better those lives."

Nevers notes: I had suspected that at the bottom of the old man's anxiety there lay a political argument. Now he discovered a new horror: in accordance with his answer they could speak either of politics or concern themselves with prison systems. He did not reply.

"We have the opportunity, the difficult opportunity, of acting on the lives of a group of men. Look at it: we are practically free of controls. It doesn't matter that the group is small, that it may be lost among 'those infinite in number and in misery'. As an example our work will be world-wide. Our obligation is to save the flock that we tend, save it from its own destiny."

Castel had made more than one ambiguous and alarming affirmation; all that my nephew perceived was the word "flock". He states that that word so enraged him that he awoke from his stupor.

The governor said:

"That is why I believe that our function as jailers can be very gratifying."

"All jailers should think as you do," Nevers murmured prudently; immediately he raised his voice: "If something could be done..."

"I believe it can be. What about you?'

Nevers did not honor him with an answer.

A moment later he remembered his intention of requesting permission to visit Devil's Island; the governor had left.

VIII

March 21, afternoon

Nevers walked along the coast facing Devil's Island. His pretext was to study possible mooring sites for a furtive (and improbable) landing. Less dangerous (and more impractical) would be to openly visit Castel.

He was lost in thought when Bernheim appeared from behind as outcrop of rocks. Nevers wasn't in the least startled: there hung before him that look of a hunted dog. Bernheim asked him to hide among the rocks; he committed the imprudence of obeying him.

"My intuition is never wrong," Bernheim shouted: "I know when I can trust a man."

Nevers wasn't listening. He made a modest discovery: he perceived the unpleasant incompatibility between the haughty tone and the abject look of Bernheim. However, he heard;

"Are you a pawn of Castel's?"

He answered negatively.

"I knew it," Bernheim exclaimed, "I knew it. I hardly know you, but I will reveal something to you that puts my fate in your hands."

On top of some higher rocks Dreyfus appeared. He seemed not to have seen them; he moved away staring fixedly at some point on the unending sea. Nevers wanted to rid himself of the madman beside him; he said:

"There's Dreyfus," and he climbed up on the rocks.

When he saw him, Dreyfus showed no surprise; after walking together a while, Dreyfus asked him:

"Do you see that tower?"

The tower was on Devil's Island; it was constructed of wood painted white, it was about twenty-five feet high and terminated in a platform. Nevers asked what it was for.

"Nothing," Dreyfus assured him. "It's there to remind some of us of history and to provoke others to sneer. The governor Daniel

built it, in 1896 or 97. He placed a reserve guard on top and a Hotchkis machine-gun, and if the captain wanted to escape: fire!"

"Captain Dreyfus?"

"Yes, Dreyfus. I would like you to go up sometime: from there the archipelago looks minute."

Nevers asked him if he was related to Dreyfus.

"I don't have that honor," he replied.

"There are many Dreyfuses."

"I didn't know that," he answered with interest. "My name is Bordenave. I am called Dreyfus because they say I'm always talking about Captain Dreyfus."

"Our literature reproduces him."

"Really?" Dreyfus opened his eyes wide and smiled strangely. "If you would like to see a small museum dedicated to the captain..."

Nevers followed him. He asked him if he was born in France. He had been born in South America. Then they looked at the Dreyfus Museum. It consists of yellow mail bag, made of filament, and it contains the envelope of a letter from Mrs. Lucia Dreyfus to Daniel, governor of the prison, the handle of a penknife with initials J.D. (Jacques Dreyfus?), some francs from Martinique, and a book: Shakespeare etait-il M. Bacon, ou vice versa? par Novus Ovidius, auteur des Metamorphoses Sensorielles, membre de l'Academie des Medailles et d'Inscriptions.

Nevers wanted to leave. Dreyfus looked him in the eye; he stopped him; he asked him:

"Don't you think that Victor Hugo and Zola were the greatest men in France?"

Nevers writes: Zola is understandable: he wrote J'Accuse and Dreyfus is a fanatic on the subject of Dreyfus. But Victor Hugo ... This man who selects from the history of France--richer in generals than the most insignificant South American republic--two writers as his most ardent idols merits the brief homage of our consciences.

IX

On the night of the 22nd he couldn't sleep. Insomnious, he attributed importance to the revelation he hadn't wanted to hear from Bernheim. He vaguely feared his censure for not having heard it. With lassitude and exaltation he planned an immediate visit to the red compound. With an effort of will, he postponed the visit to daybreak. He busied himself with the particulars of that incredible visit: how to assure, after a sleepless night, his early arisal, how to begin speaking to Bernheim, how to refer to their previous encounter. In the early hours he fell asleep; he dreamed. In his dream he left once again from Saint-Martin, once

again he felt the pain of leaving Irene, and he wrote of that pain, in another letter. He recalled the first sentence: I have given in, I am leaving Irene; those persons who can keep me... Of the rest of the paragraph, he only remembered its general sense; approximately it was as follows: those persons who could keep him from returning had assured him they wouldn't do so. He did not forget the final sentence (he says that in his dream it was irrefutable; I suspect that it was merely a side-effect of his worrisome vigil): even though there are no reasons to disbelieve them I still fear the possibility of not returning, of never again seeing Irene.

On the following morning, Dreyfus brought him two letters: one from Irene, the other from Xavier Brissac.

His cousin gave him a bit of news that Nevers regarded as marvellous: on the 27th of April he would be replaced. That meant that Nevers could be in France by the middle of May. Xavier's letter also announced a forthcoming message from Irene. Nevers affirms that he felt no curiosity as to what it was. It couldn't be unpleasant or important. Irene's letter bore a more recent date than Xavier's and did not allude to such news.

He was happy; he felt serene. He endeavored to justify Pierre (he conceded that he had been right: no man was worthy of Irene, and he, pale conversationalist of coffee houses, less than others).

Let us recall the antecedents to this exile in the Guianas: the event that everyone knows about occurred (some papers important to the family's honor and to their salt marshes are lost; all appearances implicate Nevers); Pierre believed in his guilt; he tried to save Irene... Nevers spoke with him, and--he asserts--he was believed. Some fifteen days of perfect happiness followed: everything had been settled. Then Pierre called him, he spoke to him violently (hiding, perhaps, an uneasy conscience), and he ordered him to go away to the Guianas. He even let slip, as if ashamed, a threat of 'blackmail': he would tell everything to Irene if he was not obeyed. He added: "In one year you will return and you can marry Irene; at least you will have my consent." According to Nevers, this proved that Pierre admitted his innocence.

How does he explain, then, Pierre's sending him to the Guianas? With considerable confusion. He makes use of every sort of argument: the contaminations left by accusations, and he alleges to Captain Dreyfus (many who did not consider him guilty nevertheless refused to regard him as free of all blame), the hope that the trip and the rigorous life in the Guianas would break off his disagreeable personality as a nighttime addict of the coffee houses, the hope that Irene would cease to love him.

Nor does he well explain his strange conduct with Irene (he never said a word to her about the shady affair in which he was

involved). It was that conduct which permitted Pierre's move.

I have here his exact words: If I have convinced you, if I have convinced Pierre, who preferred not to believe me, what difficulty could I have with Irene, who loves me? (I write this with superstitious, with humiliating cowardice)... The only excuse for my perversity with Irene is my stupidity and my perversity with myself.

It seems that Nevers had sent Irene this verse:

> Chère, pour peu que tu ne bouges,
> Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.
> Je crains toujours, --ce qu'est d'attendre!--
> Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

Irene reproaches him (rightfully) for sending her that verse, as it was he who left her. She also asks if he means to imply that the distancing between them is not merely geographic (in the first line he uses "tu", in the fourth he calls her "vous");[1] but that was only a joke (perhaps slightly pedantic): the letter is as lucid and tender as its author.

[1] The verse is not Henry Nevers'; it is Paul Verlaine's. (Publisher's Note)

He was happy; within a month his worries would be gone. Xavier's letter, however, bothered him. Why did Irene send him a message with that imbecile? Maybe the use of such rudimentary means of communication is explained by Irene's desire not to lose a single opportunity to cheer me up, to repeat to me that she is waiting for me, that she loves me.

That was the message. That was the important message in all Irene's letters. Nevertheless, he confesses, at moments of absurd sensitivity (and--possibly due to the atmosphere, or the climate --such moments are not infrequent here), I give in to shameful fears. I should not mention these insignificant feelings: I do mention them so they will put me to shame, so they will disappear.

X

On the 23rd of March Nevers went over all of Royal Island and the red compound--not in search of Bernheim, not in search of the promised revelation (he feels it necessary to clarify this)--in the performance of his routine.

That afternoon the radiance was painful. Everything glittered: the yellow walls of the buildings, a particle of sand on the black bark of a coconut tree, the red and white stripes of the prisoners. Nevers remembered the incredible darkness of his room and he ran,

uncertain, across the brilliant courtyard.

He saw a shadow. He saw a shaded spot under a staircase; he took shelter. There was Bernheim, seated on an inverted bucket, reading. Nevers greeted him with excessive heartiness.

"You can't imagine," Bernheim answered him, anxiously seeking his words, "my progress since the first time we met. I am most enthusiastic."

The glow in his eyes was lachrymose, his countenance dismal.

"In what way have you progressed?"

"In everything. I assure you it is something big... vital... It is the ultimate, a communion with nature, God knows what..."

"Having to do with what?"

"Espionage."

"Espionage?"

"Yes, I am on guard. I must speak to you. Can you guess to whom I owe this revival?"

"I don't know."

"To Castel."

"Have you had a reconciliation?"

"Never." After a silence, he declared: "One must serve the cause."

He seemed to wait for Never's reply; he insisted slowly:

"The cause over all."

Nevers did not want to humor him. He asked him:

"What were you reading?"

"The Theory of Colors, by Goethe. A book nobody asks for. Dreyfus rents it out at a reasonable price."

"Tell me, you were on Devil's Island, what was Castel doing with the animals?"

For the first time, Nevers affirms, a trace, a "shadow" of color animated Bernheim's face. It was atrocious. I thought the man was going to vomit. When he had composed himself a little, he spoke:

"You know my creed. Violence is our bread. But not with animals..."

Nevers thought he could not stand to see Bernheim disintegrate in his presence. He changed the subject.

"You said we had to talk..."

"Yes, we must talk. Not here; follow me."

They walked to the latrine. Bernheim pointed to the ivory, and he said, trembling:

"I swear to you, I swear by the blood of all the men murdered here: there will be a revolution."

"A revolution?"

Nevers scarcely heard him. He thought that it was not easy to determine if a man was insane.

"The revolutionaries are preparing something big. You could stop it."

"I?" asked Nevers, out of courtesy.

"Yes, you. But I will clarify my situation. I am not acting in favor of the present government... I am acting out of pure self-interest. You will tell the truth: that I discovered the plot. But perhaps you think me mad. Maybe you will go looking for Dreyfus, maybe you will leave here... Someday you will believe me. Maybe not today, but you will believe me. It was you put me on the right track."

"I put you on the right track?"

"When you spoke to me about the "camouflages". There you have it: me, always thinking of war, and I hadn't even discovered that it was a question of "camouflages". From then on I have respected you. You will say that that discovery is nonsensical. All great discoveries appear to be nonsense. But everyone knows that Peter Castel is a revolutionary."

Nevers said:

"I have a great deal of work to do."

"I was prepared for that. If my words come to pass, you will believe me. Castel will take the Priest to Devil's Island, today or tomorrow. He is a common prisoner; think about it. Castel removed me from the island; he is taking the Priest there. He needs

people he can trust: outlaws. He will send you to Cayenne. There are two reasons: to rid himself of the only observer who could disturb him; to bring dynamite."

"Who will bring it?"

"You will, and you won't be the first. Your predecessor made some ten trips to Cayenne. There are enough reserves to blow the archipelago sky high."

Nevers patted him on the shoulder and told him to leave things in his hands. He crossed the courtyard, went into the administration building, climbed stairways and walked down corridors, arrived at his room. Immediately he felt a great relief.

XI

He didn't know if what Dreyfus had said might not be a terrible piece of evidence. He wanted to ask advice, but of whom? He himself, still horrified at living in a prison, was not reasoning properly (besides, he had suffered a slight sunstroke). Maybe when he got used to this life, he thought, he would recall that moment when that bit of news had seemed awful with the relief of having gotten through it, of having passed through the danger of going mad. But, even though he hadn't grown accustomed to living in a prison (and, incredible as it may seem, he celebrated that

fact), he was inclined to give importance to the news Dreyfus had brought him.

During the three days prior to the announcement, nothing memorable had taken place: Dreyfus had seemed dejected, unhappy (I decided not to trouble him with questions, says Nevers; life on these islands justifies all despair). Castel had ordered him to send for some books (Marie Gaëll's work on the resonance of touch and the topography of the octopus, a book by the English philosopher, Bain, on the senses and the intellect, a book of Marinesco's on synesthesia, and finally--daybreak after so much shadow--a Spanish classic: Suárez de Mendoza). Dreyfus sent them by the cable tramway.

On the night of the 25th, it seemed to Nevers that Dreyfus was more abject than ever; he served dinner in silence. This was oppressive: for both of them, talking together at mealtime had become a modest and pleasant tradition. Nevers asked himself if respecting the melancholy of his orderly didn't serve to increase it, didn't seem to imply that he was displeased with him. He proposed the subject he would most have wanted to avoid.

"What is Bernheim accused of?"

"Treason."

"Then it is he, and not you, who should be called Dreyfus;" he was attempting to suggest the subject of nicknames, a safer area

than that of Bernheim.

"Don't speak about Captain Dreyfus like that," said Dreyfus, offended.

"What other nicknames are used here?"

"Other nicknames... let's see: there is the Priest."

"Who is the Priest?" Nevers asked resolutely.

"Marsillac, one of the prisoners from St. Joseph's Island. I named him the Priest because he is presbyopic: he can only see at a distance; close up he sees absolutely nothing if he's not wearing spectacles. He can't see his own body."

And he remembered the lines from The Mystery of the Yellow Room:

> The presbytery did not lose its charm
> Nor has the garden lost its splendor.

Nevers congratulated him on his memory; Dreyfus seemed stricken with grief. Finally he confessed:

"Look, I spoke about the Priest, and it was precisely the Priest I didn't want to talk about. For days I've been perturbed about this. Tomorrow you will know about it; maybe it will be best if I am the one to tell you. Please, do not condemn Mr. Castel; that great man must have some motive for doing this thing. He has ordered that tomorrow, at daybreak, we are to transfer the

Priest to Devil's Island."

XII

March 27

The governor startled him. He entered the study unnoticed. Nevers heard, very close, on the back of his neck, his high-pitched outcries, and he had the frightful sensation, founded on some distant recollection, of finding himself suddenly face to face with a masked man.

"What are you reading?"

"Plutarch," it would be useless to pretend otherwise.

"Why waste your time? Culture shouldn't be a commerce with rudimentary men," pronounced the puppet voice. "Students of philosophy still cultivate the dialogues of Plato, and the most exacting readers turn to Moliere to laugh at his jokes about doctors. The future is black."

"Black, 'camouflaged'," Nevers said craftily.

There was a silence. Out of weakness, Nevers continued:

"This book interests me. It has to do with symbols."

"Symbols? Perhaps. But don't you think that in one thousand eight hundred years the subject should have enriched itself?"

Evidently, Nevers declares, Castel hadn't come to speak of such matters. He was talking to develop a conversation. He stood a while thumbing abstractedly through the Treatise on Isis and Osiris. Finally he asked:

"What have you thought about our last conversation?"

"Hardly anything."

"If you haven't given it any thought, it's because you dislike the prison intensely," Castel said quickly. "If you dislike the prison, then my thoughts on the subject can't be objectionable to you."

"I don't know," he had no desire to argue. "Your thoughts may all be well and good, but to busy yourself with these matters seems to me, in a certain sense, to make you an accomplice. I prefer to carry out my duties automatically."

"Automatically? Is this the mission of a young man? Where is your youth?"

Nevers didn't know how to answer. The other man went on:

"Youth is revolutionary. Even I, who am an old man, believe in action."

"Are you an anarchist?"

Castel kept staring into his eyes, affably, almost tearfully, until Nevers looked away. Without a doubt the governor realized he had gone quite far, but he continued in his shrill, imperturbable

voice:

"I don't know. I've never gotten involved with politics. I never had time. I believe in the division of labor. Politicians believe in the reformation of society... I believe in the reformation of the individual."

"What does that consist of?" asked Nevers with simulated interest. He felt the governor was investigating.

"Education, first of all. The transformations that can be achieved are infinite."

The governor assured him that he, Nevers, did not even suspect the possibilities of pedagogy: it could save the sick and the imprisoned. Immediately he confided that he needed a collaborator:

"What we would do is incredible. Understand my tragedy: I am surrounded by subordinates, persons who would falsely interpret my plans. Penal legislation itself is unintelligible; seclusion, as a punishment of the offender, still prevails in Europe. Now, not only do we waddle about like geese; we talk with the mouths of geese; we repeat: Punishment is the right of the offender. Needless to say, my aims run counter to that trans-Rhenish doctrine."

Nevers felt that the moment to take his revenge had arrived. He declared in a trembling voice:

"I am not interested in collaborating with you."

Castel didn't answer. He gazed serenely off into the distance,

as if the walls were not there. He seemed tired; the color of his face was leaden. Had he already been like that when he came in or was all that the effect of Nevers' reply? He did not appear to be the same man who had spoken with Nevers on the 9th of March.

I have heard that such changes occur in persons who take opium, or morphine. Nevers acknowledges that this man, whom he wanted to find abhorrent, seemed to him very old and almost dignified; he was ready to believe that the revolution would be benevolent, to offer his assistance. Then he remembered Irene, his decision to do nothing that could delay his return.

Castel remained as he was for a few painful minutes, feigning an interest in Plutarch. Perhaps he didn't want to go off abruptly and appear offended. Finally he made a gesture of discouragement, or of farewell; he smiled and left. Nevers felt no pity.

XIII

Some of the governor's remarks allowed for two interpretations: according to one, the revolution would be pedagogical. Nevers, now in full aberration, does not hesitate to declare his preferrence for the second possible interpretation: the rebellion of the prisoners.

But the governor had not spoken to him of the trip to Cayenne.

To an un-biased observer, there had been, perhaps, no confirmation of Bernheim's prophecies.

Besides, how to integrate the "camouflages" into the plan of insurrection? It would be madness to unleash the insurrection and remain on the islands. However, Nevers considered, that is what the "camouflage" indicates: a defense. In that case he shouldn't get alarmed: Castel was insane.

There was another possible explanation. The "camouflages" were a defense against an attack during the uprising (if things were not resolved with due dispatch). This seemed confirmed by the fact that the governor hadn't "camouflaged" the other islands. If he had the absurd intention of establishing himself on the islands and founding a communist republic he would have "camouflaged" the whole territory.

Castel seemed to be ignorant of Nevers' approaching departure. If not, why had he spoken to him of his secret plans? Doubtless these plans concerned him so much that he didn't even read the mail (if the replacement for Nevers was on the way, the governor would have received word). Another explanation could be that the governor was preparing the attack for a date prior to Xavier's arrival.

XIV

April 3

From under the eaves of the supply shed, Nevers looked absent-mindedly out at the prisoners who appeared and disappeared in the mist with their huge straw hats and red and white striped shirts. There was a clearing, and he saw, far off, a man walking towards him, and then the vapours returned, and then the man emerged at his side. It was Dreyfus.

"Take care, lieutenant."

"Do you think they'll try to take advantage of these mists?"

"No. I wasn't thinking of the prisoners," said Dreyfus, without astonishment. "I was thinking of the mists: the European shrouds, we call them, because they're killers."

He pauses, as if in order not to lose the effect of his words; then he went on:

"I've come from Devil's Island; the governor gave me this note for you."

He handed him an envelope. Nevers continued to stare at Dreyfus, the envelope forgotten in his hand, undetermined as to whether he should ask him what news there was from the island. Dreyfus was also watching him, on the sly. Nevers assumed he was

curious to know what the note said. This persuaded him not to ask questions, not to satisfy Dreyfus' curiosity. But he couldn't contain his own. He read the note. He confined himself to turning suddenly about to surprise Dreyfus staring at him, to confound him. Later he said with indifference:

"It seems I'll be going to Cayenne."

"To get provisions?"

Nevers didn't answer.

"I guessed," Dreyfus announced.

He didn't ask him how he had guessed. He began to suspect that Bernheim's words were, at least in part, true.

"How are the governor's paintings coming along?"

"He's finished them. The cells look just fine."

"He's painted the cells?"

"Yes, mottled."

"What else is new on the island?"

"The poor Priest had a cholera attack. Just when they were making life better for him... I found him frothing at the mouth with his eyes starting out of his head."

"Will he die?"

"I don't know. Today he was unconscious, but as red-faced and robust as ever. The governor and Mr. De Brinon believe they can save him. It would be better if he died."

Nevers asked him why he said that. Dreyfus told him the story of the Priest:

The Priest had been second mate on the Grampus, which was shipwrecked in the Pacific. There were seventeen men on board. The captain, along with five of the men, escaped in a lifeboat; the first mate and five others, in another boat; the Priest and the four remaining men in another. The lifeboats were to try to keep in sight of each other. On the third night, the Priest lost sight of the other two boats. After a week, the captain and the first mate with their crews reached the coast of Chile, near dead of thirst and almost insane. After fourteen days, an English ship--the Toowit--picked up the Priest: he was on an island covered with guano, in the ruins of an abandoned lighthouse, alone, waving a knife, furiously assailed by seagulls. He tried to attack the Englishmen. In the ship's infirmary he fell into delirium: he saw monsters and seagulls, white, ferocious, continuous seagulls. On the blade of the knife there was dried blood. It was analyzed: it was the blood of birds and men. The Priest had no recollection of his arrival at the island nor of the days he had spent on the island. There was no other proof against him than that of the disappearance of his companions and the dried blood. If the Priest had killed them, Maitre Casneau had alleged, he had killed them in a fit of madness. But a precedent in the police records--the

famous battle of 1905, among the dancers at the Casino de Tours--and the zeal of a public prosecutor in the beginnings of a promising career condemned him.

'What were the monsters?" asked Nevers.

"Hallucinations."

"And the seagulls?"

"Real. If it hadn't been for that fragment of a lighthouse they would have eaten him alive."

Nevers went to the study. Three hours of reading delivered him of all anxiety. Within a few days he would leave for Cayenne. If he was careful, he would be free of any involvement in Castel's hypothetical rebellion. Xavier was the appropriate man to replace him: he would fight, he would punish, he would command. He reflected: if he did not forget that his only purpose was to leave this accursed episode of the Guianas, he would return very shortly to France, to Irene.

Then he recalled the news Dreyfus had given him. If the Priest had had a cholera attack, there was plague on the islands. He understood this in all its horror.

XV

April 5

It has nothing to do with keeping me off Devil's Island, with keeping me from suspecting what's going on there; it has to do (Nevers believed he had irrefutable proof) with deceiving me, with provoking visions and fallacious fears. He no longer remembered the disease. There were no cholera victims here. There was no plague. The danger was the insurrection.

He reveals how he arrived at this discovery: in order to forget about the cholera, he superimposed pleasant images: a parkway in Fontainebleau, in Autumn, the face of Irene. They were translucent, as if reflected in water; if I disturbed the surface I succeeded in temporarily deforming the everlasting monster that lay at the bottom. Later he reflected: since he must think about the disease, it would be best to study it, to prevent it. He looked for the book on tropical diseases; in vain he ran through the index: the word "cholera" did not appear. Then he realized that in a book such as his, diseases are registered by their popular names; he remembered that cholera, in the words of laymen such as himself, was called "black vomit". Without difficulty he found the chapter. He read it. He remembered that he had already

read it on board. Then he made the discovery: the symptoms attributed to the Priest were not the symptoms of cholera. The fact that his eyes bulged out of their sockets was not natural, his foaming at the mouth was not probable, his being red-faced and robust was impossible.

When he saw Dreyfus he asked him:

"Who told you that the Priest had a cholera attack?"

Dreyfus did not hesitate:

"Mr. Castel."

Nevers thought of telling him of his discovery. He restrained himself. Every day Dreyfus esteemed him more highly, but Castel was still his idol. Besides, Dreyfus was quite ignorant: he didn't know what Captain Dreyfus had been accused of; he admired Victor Hugo because he confused him with Victor Hugues, a buccaneer who had once been governor of the colony... Nevers adds: Never have I believed in his irony. It is facial, like that of many of the peasants. It could be attributable to a slight, a continuous poisoning from buttercup leaves.

But he was calm. The rebellion would take place in his absence. Dreyfus had brought him the list of articles to be purchased in Cayenne: there was no dynamite nor anything that could reasonably be translated as dynamite. Castel wants to get me away from here so as to have neither witnesses nor opposers. He shall have neither,

he affirms. He has ordered me to leave on the 8th. I regret not leaving today. I am not the hero for these catastrophes...

He produces some "reflections" (his language is, by nature, imprecise, metaphorical) which I hesitate to transcribe. But if I tone down the fidelity of this report, I will at the same time weaken its effectiveness against slanderers and others of ill-intent. Furthermore, I trust that this will not fall into the hands of Nevers' enemies. He says, in effect: In my thoughts I applaud, I support any and all rebellion of prisoners. But in the urgency of reality...one must be born for action, know how, in the midst of blood and bullets, to make the right decision. He was not ignorant of his duties: to investigate if Castel was preparing a rebellion, to extinguish it, to accuse Castel. But, we must confess, he was not made of the metal of a good public official. Every man must be ready to die for many causes, at any moment, as a gentleman, he writes. But not for all causes. Do not ask me to suddenly take an interest in this, to implicate myself and die in a rebellion in the Guianas. He waited impatiently for the day of his departure.

XVI

April 7

The incredible possibility of flight: that was what preoccupied him. He had renounced further investigations. He did not want to become involved. His impatience for the arrival of the 8th increased continuously; yesterday, above all today, it was an intolerable obsession. Now everything has changed.

When he awoke from his afternoon nap, next to the bed, excessively close (since he was emerging from a remote and impersonal lethargy), stood Dreyfus. Dreyfus said to him:

"I have two letters for you; the governor sends them to you."

One was addressed to him, the other to a Mr. Leitao, in Cayenne. He opened the first one. It contained a brief note, asking him to bring back a pair of spectacles, according to the attached prescription.

"Who are the spectacles for?" he asked.

"For the Priest," Dreyfus answered.

That meant they were waiting for him, that the horrible fate, from which he had thought himself saved, threatened him.

Dreyfus spoke to him in his calmest voice:

"Do you know the news? I will be leaving you."

"Leaving me?"

"The governor has ordered my transfer to Devil's Island. At 5:00 I will take my belongings."

It was two hours until Dreyfus would be leaving. Nevers was afraid of reasoning like a man in delirium; he suspected that even persons of Dreyfus' mediocrity could take apart all his proofs, his invincible proofs that a rebellion was gestating. But to consult him, wouldn't that be madness?

Meanwhile, Dreyfus confessed the ideal of his life: to go to Buenos Aires. A couple of Brazilian smugglers had advised him that for a few centimes, in Buenos Aires a man can go about in a trolley car, throughout the entire city.

He didn't know what to decide, and there was little time till Dreyfus' departure.

XVII

I will interpolate at this point a document which will perhaps clarify some points of my narrative; it is a letter sent to me by my cousin Xavier Brissac (who replaced Henri Nevers on the Salvation Islands); it is dated April 8, 1913, on board the freighter Ularius, en route to the Guianas.

Without evil intent, guided by your emotions, no, guided by

others who looked at everything emotionally, through hate, you have judged your brother Pierre and me, you have slandered us. What happened? You wanted Henri, your protege, to be able to leave the Guianas and you thought that his anguished correspondence would perhaps move Pierre. It did not move him. Even so, he calls for me; he asks me if I would accept the charge; I accept, and, just as in his youth, at eighty five years of age, Pierre, the glorious mariner, goes into battle against politicians and bureaucrats, without a tremor; he manages to have me appointed, and I leave, in relief of Henri, your favorite, for Hell. And how do you show us your thanks? You slander Pierre in jest, and me, seriously.

Though what you said about me is extremely serious indeed, I will begin by refuting what you said about Pierre, because he is the head of the family and because I am not a litterateur, a congenial Bohemian, but the captain of the frigate Xavier Brissac --who was a full naval lieutenant and who hopes to become a full naval captain--, a man of his Country, of his Family, an ordained man.

Respectfully, but firmly, I declare that my voyage does not prove "that perverse mania of Pierre's: the sending of nephews to Devil's Island". It does prove.....
.....

After reading all the correspondence, Pierre showed signs of being tired, not a sign of being moved. Do not suppose that these letters must have caused him alarm as to Henri's state of mind; he comments: "Should I alarm myself now and especially because of these letters? It has been some long time now that his state of mind has had me alarmed and I begin to grow accustomed to that state." But he knows that if Henri returns you will experience great satisfaction; immediately Pierre undertakes the campaign, the thankless campaign, to secure his relief. It does not matter that he knows that the fruit of these labors will be the serious reduction of a punishment which he himself imposed. He also believes that his efforts will bring about a reconciliation, your return to the house in Saint-Martin and your definitive abandonment of what he calls "that absurd exile in the ruined salt marshes of Saint-Pierre."

Why has he decided that it should be me who is to relieve Henri? Don't deceive yourself; it is not his "mania"...; he supposes that in the shadow of that notable governor of the colony, I.....

.....

It is now the appropriate moment to refute the second piece of slander. It is a lie that I am the inventor of the promise that Irene made to marry me; it is an atrocious lie that I am going to

Devil's Island to torture Henri. Imagine my situation: I must support this slander without even exclaiming: ask Irene! I swore to Irene I would not talk until Henri's return, until she can explain everything to him, personally. She fears that the news, delivered by someone else, would wound him too deeply. If you were to speak to her--without my being there to defend myself--she would think that her scrupulousness does not matter to me. However, this extreme concern of Irene's has come to be my concern to the extent that in attempting to correspond perfectly, I have thought, at times of not keeping a literal fidelity to my oath. In effect, if our intent is to keep Henri from suffering too much, ought we to permit him--blind, dreaming of the happiness of returning to his beloved--to depart thus for disillusion?.....

.....

You have said that I am going to torture Henri. My noble sentiments are a pretext; the truth is the pleasure I derive in going off to strike a fallen man. Have no hopes that I will pardon the author of that abomination. I know that it wasn't you. I know that you only repeated what you were told. I also know that I will find out who said it: there weren't many who heard me speak. We know them all. They were from our family. That's why I thought I could trust them. I had forgotten it was because of that I couldn't speak to them. There are no more free spirits in our

family any longer; there are instruments of Pierre and instruments of Antoine and instruments of hate. I had forgotten. I cannot grow accustomed to living at continuous war.

Why am I going?

Because Pierre commands it, because you want Henri to return, because Henri wants to return. (I disapprove, in Henri, of his thoughts and deeds. I do not hate him himself, as you suggest.) If I do not go, everything will be delayed; we are a difficult minority, we volunteers for the tropics, for prison, cholera. I do not have in mind any miserable victories, nor do I leave blindly. I am not ignorant of my sacrifice (which you--I say it bitterly--choose to ignore). That which was a torture for him who believed himself loved, what horrors will it not afford to him who is loved? I have one consolation: for me, everything lies in waiting; for him, nothing.

As I told you, it will be on the 28th, and not the 27th, that I will arrive in Cayenne. I should like to liberate you both before then: him from his just exile, you from your unjust correspondence. But we have lost three days at anchorage; I hope there will be no further delays.

I have just re-read this letter. In order to tolerate it you will require great indulgence. I who am such a believer in hierarchy, exhorting you to set aside your convictions, to follow my

advice. I, the worst of your nephews, asking that in all our actions regarding the relief of Henri, you may see a righteous intent. I don't know if you can see this. I don't know if it is right to ask a man not to look at things through his own emotion.....

.....

In all that Pierre does--I speak with bitterness--you are inclined to see evil intentions; in everything I do--I speak without bitterness--you are inclined to see his evil intent. However, I invoke our family, its multiple pain. Leave the salt marshes of Oleron forever. I say this without selfish motive: they are a bad business. As Pierre says, you have sought asylum in a shipwreck. Come to our prosperous salt marshes in Ré. For me, for whom the privations of Devil's Island lie in wait, the privation that concerns me now is that of being deprived of the muddied salt of our home.

Ah, my dear Antoine, how very sad it is to have a discord in the family. For the good of all of us, for the good of that tiny flame that our generations must tend and transmit, because Saint-Martin, chef de canton, is watching over us and requires it for his peace of mind, let us put an end to this mutual distrust. As an officer of France, as a nephew in our venerable family...

Etcetera.

XVIII

April 8

The meal that Dreyfus' replacement served him was poor, the coffee, miserable. But Nevers was calm. The innuendos which had been haunting him were futile. He attributed these obsessions to the climate, to the pestilential mists and to the delirious effect of the sun, and also to Bernheim, that ridiculous lunatic.

Not only was he calm; he was bored. To escape his boredom he wanted to talk with Bernheim. It was true that some of his predictions had been realized; still, not the most important one, which, together with Castel's reserved and suspicious attitude, would have indicated the possibility of terrorism: there had been no order for dynamite: and if it doesn't come today, it will never come, because the governor thinks that I am leaving this afternoon for Cayenne. He planned to remain in Cayenne until the 14th or the 15th. The reason for this was that it was not long now until the 27th and Nevers wanted his return to the islands to coincide with the arrival of Xavier Brissac. He clarifies this: If the governor has, in fact, real revolutionary intentions, it would be best that matters be placed in my cousin's hands. He felt he had nothing to fear. Still, he would keep watch.

XIX

April 11

He went ashore at 8:00 in Cayenne. He writes: This city, where there are few prisoners, many parolees and even free men, is paradise on earth. In front of the market he ran into Mrs. Frinziné and her daughter, they invited him to lunch. He accepted, but he says that he was scarcely amiable and he tries to justify himself by invoking his urgent need to take a bath and change clothes. This would be admissable if he had made a journey by land; after a sea voyage, it is meaningless.

He arrived at the palace and ordered Legrain to prepare the bath. Legrain answered in all naturalness that the water had been shut off and that he couldn't bathe until 11:00.

He was so discouraged he couldn't attend to any administration matters; nor could he read, because his books were in the suitcases and he had forgotten to ask Legrain to open them and he didn't feel up to opening them himself or to calling him back.

At 11:30 Legrain entered and told him there was water. Nevers gave him the keys to open the suitcases and remove his clothes. He noticed that he had only one key ring: those to the archives and the armory were missing. Possibly the new orderly had put them in

his bags. He couldn't look for them. He had to bathe and shave: the Frinzinés lunched at twelve sharp.

He admits that the reunion with the Frinzinés was pleasant. Charlotte recited poems of Ghill. Nevers recalled the lines:

> Autour des îles les poissons-volants
> s'ils sautent, ont lui du sel de la mer:
> Hélas! les souvenirs sortis du temps
> ont du temps qui les prit le goût amer...

Afterwards, accompanied by the Frinzinés, under an invariable sun, he made the rounds of all the shops in Cayenne. He bought almost everything for which he had been commissioned; to justify the delay of his return, he forgot some of the items (among these, the Priest's spectacles).

I suspect I have been reasoning erroneously in supposing that the mysterious activities that occur on Devil's Island are political and revolutionary, he writes. Maybe Castel was a kind of Dr. Moreau. It was hard for him to believe, however, that reality could resemble a fantastic novel. Perhaps the caution that advises me to remain here until the 27th is absurd.

Overwhelmed with the heat, in the beginnings of a sunstroke, at five o'clock he managed to slip away from Mr. Frinziné. He went

to the Botanical Gardens and sat resting under the trees. Long after dark, he returned to the palace. Painfully, he thought of Irene.

XX

Night of the 10th to the 11th of April; April 11

He notes: Impossible to sleep. He reproached himself for having considered so superficially the forgetting of the keys. If the prisoners should discover them: burnings, rebellion, tribunal, guillotine, or the islands until death. He didn't think of the means of averting these calamities: anxiously he saw himself refuting, with great effort, with futility, the accusations before a court martial.

To calm himself he thought of sending a telegram. What would they say about a prison official who forgets the keys and then relays his oversight by wire? He thought of sending a letter. Laboriously, I calculated that the Rimbaud would not leave for five days. Furthermore, he had already won the governor's enmity. Would it be wise to write him such a letter? He thought of writing Dreyfus. But, what if Dreyfus should decide to fight his way clear

with the guns and flee? It would be a more natural procedure than that of secretly locking the armory (depriving himself of any credit)...

In the morning he was calmer. He decided to spend another day in Cayenne, resting. Returning to the islands would be like relapsing in an illness. Perhaps there were situations awaiting him there that would alter, that would ruin his life.

If they hadn't found the keys by this time, why should they find them precisely today? Undoubtedly, the keys were in one of his desk drawers; the trip would be useless. At any rate, he would go back the following day.

As to what he did on the 11th we have no news at all. We do know that at nightfall he rested under the trees in the Botanical Gardens.

XXI

Night of April 11

He spent the night waiting for daybreak, when he would leave. His conduct seemed inconceivable to him. Or did it seem inconceivable (he asked himself, reproachfully) merely because he couldn't sleep? And his not sleeping--was this due to his conduct or due

to his fear of insomnia? If there was even a minimal probability that these delays might jeopardize Irene (his future with Irene), his staying was unforgivable. He longed for a vivid consciousness of the situation; he had the consciousness of an actor who recites his part.

He decided to get up: he would seek out the launch--the Bellerophon--and he would go to the islands, in the middle of the night. He would arrive unexpectedly; maybe he could frustrate the rebellion. If the islands were now in the hands of the rebels, the night would be more convenient. He started to get up. He anticipated difficulties in leaving the palace; the doors were locked; he would have to call for someone. Would he explain his reason for leaving? How could he avoid their talking, conjecturing on the following day about his unecpected departure? It wasn't possible to leave by the window: there existed the danger of his being surprised in the act and recognized or of not being recognized and shot at. He also anticipated difficulties with the port authorities when he went to take out the Bellerophon.

He asked himself if the islands might not be in their horrible calm as always, and if the uprising, perhaps even a shot, might not be provoked by his arrival; he imagined the explanations, the inevitable confession to Castel. But he was resolved to go: he wanted to plan his actions and know the explanations he would give

on each occasion. Uncontrollably, he lost himself in imaginings: he saw himself warring on the islands; he was touched by Dreyfus' loyalty or he reproached him, oratorically, for his treason; or Bernheim, Castel and Charlotte Frinziné repeated, laughing, that that absurd trip had discredited him, finished him off, or he thought of Irene and he exhausted himself with interminable declarations of love and contrition.

He heard a distant outcry. It was the parolees, with their enormous carts and their oxen, collecting the garbage. He felt cold: it was, very vaguely, daybreak. If he waited a little, his departure would startle no one.

XXII

April 12

He awoke at nine. He was tired, but he had recovered his lucidity: the trip would be useless, the probability of calamities taking place, insignificant. The keys were in his office; not a single prisoner and very few guards went in there, and it wasn't impossible that the keys were in one of the desk drawers. The drawers in his desk were locked; anyone who found the keys would also have to find out that they belonged to the archives and the

armory: that would be difficult in a prison, where there are so many keys, so many things locked up with keys. To think of a rebellion was absurd; the prisoners were numbed by the rigor of prison routine, and Castel's interest in social and penal questions was strictly sadistic. I must be sick, he writes, to believe in Bernheim's ravings.

Living in a jail could make him ill. Conscience and jails are incompatible, I heard him say one night when he felt inspired. Those poor devils are living just a few yards from here (he was referring to the salt deposits at Saint-Martin). The very idea should devastate us. The instigator of this madness was his father. If he was out walking with his children when the cage of the prison van passed by, he took them by the hand and hurried them away, frantically, as if he wished to deliver them from an obscene and mortal vision. Undoubtedly, in his determination to send Henri to the Guianas, Pierre revealed his firmness, but also his marksmanship.

He opened the window that faced the courtyard and he called out. After a few minutes the orderly answered. The man appeared after a quarter of an hour. He asked:

"What can I do for you, lieutenant?"

He didn't know. That inquisitive face annoyed him; he answered:

"My bags."

"What was that?"

"Yes, suitcases, briefcases, luggage. I'm leaving."

XXIII

He ran into the Frinziné family near the Market.

"Well, here we are," said Frinziné, with some excitement. "Out for a walk. All together: it's safer. And you, where are you going with all that?" (He had finally noticed the suitcases.)

"I'm leaving."

"You're leaving us?"

Nevers assured them he might possibly return that might. That made them feel much better, the Frinzinés reiterated. Mrs. Frinziné added:

"We'll go with you down to the docks."

He tried to resist. Charlotte was his only ally; she wanted to go home, but they didn't listen to her. In the urgent cordiality of the Frinzinés, Nevers half-sensed the desire to conceal something or, perhaps, to get him away from somewhere. He looked at the city with nostalgia, as if he had a presentiment of not coming back. Ashamed, he found himself walking on the parts of the street where there was the most dust, so that he might take

away with him a little of the reddish dust of Cayenne. Absent-mindedly he discovered the cause of the Frinzinés' nervousness: he had surprised them in the vicinity of the Market. But the words they spoke to him were cordial and their nervousness reminded him of other farewells. His eyes grew moist.

XXIV

Before mooring the launch, he rounded Devil's Island. There was nothing new. He saw no one. The animals were wandering about loose, as always. He docked at Royal Island. Immediately he went to the Administration; there, in his desk, was the ring of keys. He asked the orderly who replaced Dreyfus if there was any news. There was no news.

In the afternoon Dreyfus appeared. They embraced like friends who have been separated a long time. Dreyfus did not seem ironical; he was smiling, delighted. At last he spoke:

"The governor is waiting for you."

"Can I go to Devil's Island?'

"Impossible, lieutenant... Did you bring the merchandise requested in the letter?"

"What letter?"

"The letter you took on the governor's behalf. I gave it to

you with the rest of the orders."

He thrust his hand in his pocket; there was the letter. He improvised:

"The man told me he wouldn't have anything available before the 26th."

"Before the 26th!" Dreyfus repeated.

"Not before the 26th. I brought what I could. I will return."

"What an upset for the governor. And what a time to upset him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"If you see him you won't recognize him. Do you remember when he was here the first time? He has been transformed."

"Transformed?"

"He had an attack, but this one was stronger than ever. He is grey, like ashes. You should see him move about; he's like a sleepwalker."

Nevers felt pangs of remorse. He said:

"If he wants me to, I'll go back this very afternoon. I'll try to get that fellow to deliver me the goods..."

Dreyfus asked him:

"Did you get the spectacles for the Priest?"

"No," Nevers answered.

"The man can't see well at all."

"Is he critical?"

"The governor says he's getting better; his illness was a bad one. During the day we keep him in the dark, at nighttime, wide-awake. But he doesn't see what is close to him; he can't see his own body; he only distinguishes objects that are more than two yards away from his eyes. Everything must be done for him: we must bathe him feed him. He eats in the daytime, as he sleeps."

"While he sleeps?"

"Yes; when he's awake, he's too nervous; he has to be left alone. He still raves and sees apparitions."

Nevers was repentant. Then he reflected that the spectacles wouldn't have kept the Priest from having visions. To change the subject, he asked:

"And what other news is there from the island?"

"None. Life is very distressing. Always taking care of the sick."

"The sick. There are more than one?"

"Yes. The Priest and one of the prisoners--Julien, by name. Yesterday he had an attack."

"First the Priest, then Castel, then..."

"It's not the same thing. What ails the governor is the illness he has always had: headaches. It is an honor to work for Mr. Castel. Sick as he is, he doesn't leave Julien's side for an instant. And Mr. De Brinon, the same: sacrificing himself all

day, as if he weren't a nobleman. Blood tells, lieutenant, it's their blood."

"Castel doesn't go out?"

"Hardly ever. A little while, at night, to see the Priest or to talk with the other prisoners."

"Which prisoners?"

Dreyfus refused to look at him. Then he explained:

"The rest, the ones who are healthy. They visit him at the pavilion."

"They'll catch the disease."

"No; even I can't go into the room, Mr. De Brinon takes his meals to him."

"De Brinon and the governor eat in the sick man's room?"

"They sleep there too."

"How often has the governor come to this island and to St. Joseph's Island?"

"Since you left, not once."

"And De Brinon?"

"The same."

"And you?"

"I didn't come. There is work to do, I assure you."

He asked himself if no one had noticed that the jail was without administrators. He thought it would be wise to make an

inspection and not to forget to look over the archives and the armory.

XXV

He traversed Royal and St. Joseph's Islands. The punishments, the miseries went on... Possibly the abuses of the jailers had increased; if so, it wasn't noticeable. Without directors, the most horrible of prisons functions perfectly. The convicts could only steal a boat and shipwreck in sight of the islands or dash their brains out in the latrine. All rebellion was useless. He had had an obsession, a humiliating madness.

At that moment someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned half about and looked into the eyes of an old prisoner, Pordelanne, by name. Pordelanne slowly began to raise his right arm; Nevers stepped back and he could see that the man held in his hand a miniature doghouse.

"I'll sell it to you," he said in a flutelike voice. "What will you give me for it?"

Pordelanne rolled up his pants a bit and he kneeled carefully. He placed the tiny doghouse on the ground, he drew his face near the door and shouted: "Constantine!" Immediately, out of the house leaped a wooden dog. Again he placed it inside, clapped his

hands and the dog came out once more.

"You made it?" Nevers asked.

"Yes. The dog comes out because of the effects of sound. When the batteries wear out, they can be changed. What will you give me?"

"Five francs."

He gave him fifteen and continued his patrol, uncomfortable, certain that that toy would bring about his discredit.

He noted some changes in the list of prisoners in the red compound. Deloge and Favre had been transferred to Devil's Island; Roday and Zurlinger, from Devil's Island, replaced them. Nevers recalled the nervousness that Dreyfus had showed when they spoke of the prisoners; he asked himself if Castel had waited for him to go to Cayenne to arrange the exchange. He didn't become indignant; he thought that perhaps the governor had not been unjust; on Devil's Island the prisoners received better treatment; it was possible that among the seven hundred and fifty prisoners on Royal and St. Joseph's Islands one of them might deserve it, and that three of the political prisoners on Devil's Island were incurable bastards. In principle, however, he was opposed to mixing the common prisoners with the politicals.

He returned to the governor's mansion; he went to the archives. Books, shelves, cobwebs: all was intact. He went to the armory:

nothing was missing. At the rear, as always, were the Schneider machine guns; to the right, on the floor, the boxes of ammunition, well-locked, full (he tried to lift them); to the left, the barrel of sewing machine oil, which was used for the guns; also to the left, on the shelves, the rifles. However, the yellow curtain that was drawn over the shelves of rifles was open, and in his recollection it had been closed. He undertook a new inspection. He came up with the same results: except for the curtain, everything was in order. Maybe, he thought, maybe some poor devil found the keys and after checking out the armory he chose to imagine that he hadn't prepared himself adequately, that the moment was not opportune and that he lacked an accomplice, that it would be better to leave the keys and come back by night (when he would have a plan, and, above all, a boat with provisions). Nevers confesses that as he locked the door and put the keys away, he regretted frustrating the plans of that unknown man.

He went into his room, left the toy on the bureau, closed the Venetian blinds and lay down. Dreyfus had made an impression on him: maybe Castel wasn't a bastard after all. A good director does not utterly ignore his prison, he doesn't allow it to function all on its own. All good leaders believe in the necessity of organizing, of disturbing the status quo... Perhaps Castel was an excellent man.

The fact that the Priest's symptoms did not correspond to those of cholera proved nothing against the governor; maybe the Priest had an illness resembling cholera and the governor had said cholera for the sake of simplification, so that Dreyfus would understand; or maybe Dreyfus had misunderstood, or he had explained himself poorly.

His fears were ridiculous. It disturbed him that he was, at moments, a maniac, a madman. But he also felt relieved: he would have to wait until Xavier's arrival, but he would wait in a normal world, with a normal mind. Then he remembered the prohibition of his going to Devil's Island. All the same, he thought, there is some mystery here.

XXVI

The mystery of Devil's Island does not concern me, even if it does exist. The time it took my nephew to arrive at this conclusion is extraordinary. As for ourselves, who candidly believe in duty, that mystery would not be indifferent to us.

That wasn't the case with Nevers. Once again I remembered that my stay in the Guianas was an episode in my life... Time would erase it like other dreams.

He passed from one obsession to another. He felt himself to

blame for the Priest's blindness and for the shortage of medicine for the sick. He decided to go immediately to Cayenne, to look for the supplies he hadn't brought. He called the orderly. No one answered. He packed his suitcase and carried it himself to the Bellerophon.

Before leaving, he ran the launch along the coast of Devil's Island, slowly. He saw a prisoner fishing on the cliffs at the extreme southwest. Surrounded by cliffs and, further up, by forests of squalid palm trees, the spot was out of sight of the inhabitants of Royal and St. Joseph Islands, and even (if they weren't purposely looking at the area) of the inhabitants of Devil's Island. He felt a sudden inspiration, and he determined to speak with the man. There was hardly any danger of being caught in the act, and if I am, the consequences will come too late.

He tied up; he made an extremely complicated knot that excluded all possibility of a hasty retreat.

The prisoner was immensely fat. He glanced about, as if to assure himself that there was no one nearby. To Nevers it seemed that that gesture corresponded to him, not to the prisoner; immediately he admitted the possibility that the man might be plotting some attack. With this man for an assailant, he thought, a fight would be not dangerous. But then everyone would know of his visit to Devil's Island. It was too late to go back.

"How's the fishing?" he asked.

"Fine. Fine for not getting bored," the prisoner smiled nervously.

"Is it better here than in the red compound?"

With repressed agitation he heard footsteps approaching up above; he took refuge behind a thorny shrub. Nearby, somewhere, the man was smiling, saying:

"This is marvelous. I can never thank the governor enough for what he has done for me."

"Are you Favre or Deloge?"

"Favre," said the man, striking his chest. "Favre."

"Where do you live?" Nevers asked.

"Over there." Favre pointed towards the top of the cliff. "In a hut. Deloge lives in another one, further on."

Again there was the sound of footsteps. Since his arrival in the Guianas, he was continuously hearing sentinels; never had he heard them walk with such resounding and numerous footsteps.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"The horse," Favre answered. "Haven't you seen him? Go on up the cliff and have a look."

He didn't know what to do; he didn't want to upset the prisoner, and he was afraid of climbing on up and allowing the man to take advantage of that moment to run to the launch and take off.

He climbed with silent precautions (so as not to be seen from above, so as not to lose sight of the man who was below). A horse on the loose--white and old--was running about in continuous circles. The prisoner hadn't moved.

"What's the matter with him?" Nevers asked.

"You don't know? When we turn him loose, he starts running in circles, like he was demented. He makes me laugh: he doesn't even recognize the grass. You have to put it in his mouth so he won't die of hunger. On this island all the animals are crazy."

"An epidemic?"

"No. The governor is a real philanthropist: he brings crazy animals here and he takes care of them. But now, with the sick men, he can't tend the animals."

He didn't want the conversation to break off; he said, absently:

"Then you aren't bored here?"

"You know the conditions. It's not so bad now that we spend the nights talking with the governor."

He refrained from asking what they talked about. In that first dialogue he should settle for some data on the paintings the governor had had done in the central pavilion. To approach this subject indirectly, he asked:

"The conditions, what conditions?"

The man stood up and, dramatically, he let his fishing rod fall:

"Did the governor send you to talk with me?"

"No," said Nevers, perplexed.

"Don't lie," the man shouted, and Nevers asked himself if the noise of the sea would silence those shouts. "Don't lie. You haven't caught me doing anything wrong. If I have failed to keep my word, it was by mistake. How was I to know that you had been sent to test me?"

"To test you?"

"When I saw your willingness, I thought we could talk. This very night I will explain everything to the governor."

Nevers seized him by the arms and shook him.

"I give you my word that the governor has not sent me, either to test you, or to spy on you, or anything like that. Can't you speak to anyone?"

"To Deloge."

"You owe the governor a great favor, and now you want to sadden him by telling him that you haven't carried out his orders. That isn't gratitude."

"He says he's doing it for our own good," the prisoner groaned. "He says he's going to save us, and that if we talk..."

"If you talk you'll hurt your chances," Nevers interrupted him, guided by his invincible instinct for losing opportunities.

"I will help you also. I won't say anything about this, and we will spare the governor displeasure. You won't say anything about it either. Can I count on your word?"

The man, overcome by a series of tenuous sighs, offered him a wet hand. Nevers saw it shine in the twilight, and he shook it with enthusiasm.

Later he returned to Royal Island. He maintained his intention of going to Cayenne; he would leave the following morning, since he preferred not to travel by night.

XXVI

"What are you proposing to do?" inquired Dreyfus. It was ten in the morning. Nevers was dressing.

"I'm going to Cayenne."

"The governor asks you not to bother," Dreyfus answered. "If the man won't have anything until the 26th, it would be useless for you to go. The governor wishes to visit you."

Dreyfus withdrew. Nevers felt remorseful over his previous conduct. Nevertheless he asked himself how he would manage to talk with Favre again. After that noble exchange of promises and agreement of common interests (to avoid annoying Castel, to avoid disobeying Castel), another conversation was not seemly.

It was almost night when he went down to the dock. On the way he ran into the orderly. The man asked him:

"Are you going to Cayenne?"

"No. I'm going to check out the Bellerophon. She's not running properly."

It was a miserable excuse. Motors are of interest to the human genre: he feared the orderly might follow him, or that (by the sound of the motor) he would discover the lie. He walked quickly away. He boarded the launch, started her up and went out in the open sea. He navigated in one direction and then another, as if he were testing the motor. Then he set off for Devil's Island.

Favre waved his arm. He was in the same place, fishing with another prisoner. Nevers saw no one else.

Favre greeted him cheerfully and introduced him to his companion, Deloge, to whom he said:

"Don't worry. The gentleman is a friend. He won't say anything to the governor."

Deloge was distrustful. He was short, or at least so he seemed beside Favre; he had red hair, a vaguely strange gaze and a sharp, anxious expression. With poorly hidden curiosity, he scrutinized Nevers.

"Don't be afraid," Favre insisted. "The gentleman wants to

help us. We can talk with him and know what's happening in the world."

Nevers felt he perceived that a sort of complicity had been established between Favre and himself; he wanted to take advantage of it, and he spoke, without prudence or moderation, of his resolution to leave the islands as soon as possible. He asked Favre:

"And you, if you could leave here, where would you choose to live?"

Deloge started like a frightened animal. This seemed to stimulate Favre, who said:

"I would go to a solitary island."

Until he had come to the islands, Nevers had dreamed of the solitary island. It made him indignant that that dream could beguile a recluse on Devil's Island.

"But wouldn't you rather return to France, to Paris? Maybe to America?"

"No," he replied. "It is not possible to find happiness in big cities. (Nevers thought: this is a phrase he has heard somewhere or read in a book.)

"Besides," Deloge submitted in a deep voice, "the governor has explained to us that sooner or later, we would be found out."

"Even if we were pardoned," Favre hastened to say "everyone would look at us with distrust. Even our own families."

"We would be marked men," Deloge affirmed with a sudden gaiety. He repeated: "Marked men."

"Deloge," said Favre, pointing to him, "wanted to go to Manoa, in the Dorado region."

"The Dorado?" Nevers asked.

"Yes, there the mud huts have golden roofs. But I can't swear to that, because I haven't seen anything myself. Castel set us right. He says that gold is worth the same as straw there. But I understand his reasons: Manoa is in the interior of the Guianas. How could we get through the guarded zone?..." Favre stopped talking suddenly; then he said nervously:

"It would be best if you left now. If Dreyfus should show up, or if the governor finds out..."

"Dreyfus never goes out at night," grunted Deloge.

"It's late for me as well," Nevers assured them. He didn't want to upset Favre; he didn't know what to say to calm him down. He gripped his hand firmly, half-closed his eyes and tilted his head to one side: it was an effusive language, adequately imprecise.

Was Castel preparing them for an escape? Perhaps the illnesses of Julien and the Priest frustrated his plans... He was thinking of taking them to an island. Nevers asked himself what islands there were in the Atlantic that would be adequate. He couldn't take them to the Pacific. Unless he were to take them through a

tunnel... This is not my affair... Above all, if I am absent.

But he didn't understand Castel's plans. As long as he remained on the islands he would try to investigate without running any risks. Perhaps he felt he had an obligation to me. He had confided so many nonsensical suppositions to me that now, in the face of something credible, he wanted to clear things up.

XXVII

There will be those who will proclaim my responsibility in the delirious plan that afforded Nevers his ambiguous discoveries and his enigmatic death. I do not shun responsibility, but I will not bear that which I do not deserve. In the previous chapter I have said: "Perhaps he felt he had an obligation to me. He had confided so many nonsensical suppositions to me that now, in the face of something credible, he wanted to clear things up." I repeat this. I acknowledge this. Nothing more.

Dreyfus announced to Nevers the governor's forthcoming visit that night. Nevers was preoccupied; at about 10:00 that night he conceived the plan and immediately he tossed off a few glasses to muster enough courage to carry it out. Up to 11:00 he believed that the governor would visit him: after that he was in doubt, and later he felt that it was absurd to have waited for him. With

that conviction, the alcohol and the first volume of Montaigne's Essays, he fell asleep at his desk. He was wakened by the governor.

To accuse me of a direct responsibility would be unjust: Nevers conceived the plan at 10:00, he carried it out at midnight, and I was in France and he was in the Salvation Islands. As for a general responsibility for not having discouraged him from such irregular activities, I also deny this. If some day my letters to Nevers are recovered, it will be seen that they are very few and that if I display any interest in his "investigation" it is merely the interest that courtesy requires... Possibly someone may ask how, without anyone encouraging him, this man who was not irrepressibly bold could have invented those infamous lies, which endangered his life, or his freedom, or the return that he so insistently desired, how he had dared to utter them, how he had the decisiveness and ability to put on such an act before the governor, and to succeed in convincing him.

Above all, Nevers was not timid; he wasn't verbally timid. He didn't lack the courage to speak; he did lack courage to face the consequences of what he said. He declared himself disinterested in reality. Complications interested him. His complicity (apparently without doubt) in the affair that made it necessary for him to leave France can corroborate me. His attitude in the prison (from the very first moment, in an entirely irregular manner, he

questioned the conduct of his superior) can corroborate me. A woman in Saint-Martin can corroborate me.

Furthermore, though it is true that no one encouraged him, it would be inaccurate to say that nothing encouraged him: he had been drinking. The spectacle of the governor encouraged him also.

Nevers awoke because he felt a pressure on his shoulder. It was the governor's hand. The governor was not looking at him; he began to move about; he walked around the desk,sat down facing Nevers. He drifted a little off course; he walked out of line; he passed the chair by a yard or two; he turned back and sat down, lifeless. His gaze was diffuse, his eyes half-closed and sunken. His color was that of a corpse, like that of the faces of bad actors when they play the part of old men. Perhaps that bad actor's likeness reminded Nevers of his intention to act his part.

The governor seemed ill. Nevers recalled the headaches and the "attacks" that Dreyfus had spoken of; he remembered Dreyfus' ridiculous expression: "he's like a sleepwalker". He thought that Castel's critical faculties must be diminished... If the governor were to discover some weak point in his exposition, he would let it pass by, so as not to tire himself. He resolved to attempt his superfluous and desperate move, and, solemnly, he stood up.

"Do you know why I am here?"

He spoke almost shouting, so as to inflict a real torment on

Castel. Indeed, the governor closed his eyes and held his head in his hands.

"I am here because I have been accused of stealing documents."

That night he lied, carried away by the same impulse, the same desperate curiosity that had made him lie years before on the occasion called to mind by his abiding scar. He went on in a lowered voice (so that he might be heard):

"I have been accused of having sold those documents to a foreign power. I am here because of blackmail. The person who discovered the theft knows that I am innocent, but he also knows that all appearances point to me and that no one will believe in my innocence. He said that if I went away from France for one year, he wouldn't turn me in: I accepted, as if I were guilty. Now, naturally, he has betrayed me. On the 27th my cousin, Xavier Brissac, will arrive, with the painful duty of replacing me and of delivering to you the order for my arrest."

Finally the governor asked him:

"Are you telling me the truth?"

Nevers nodded.

"How can I determine if you are innocent?" asked the governor, exasperated, spent. At the bottom of that weariness, Nevers divined the firmness of a man who has the means to resolve the situation.

"Antoine Brissac," Nevers answered slowly, "ask my uncle Antoine; or if not him, ask Pierre himself. You know them both."

Life among the prisoners had begun to undermine my nephew's character. His invocation of Pierre will perhaps stand as a mischievous bit of vengeance, but his abuse of my friendship is not right. Besides, we were in France, anf if Nevers' story had been true, how could Castel immediately obtain our testimony?

"Are you certain that you have been convicted?"

"Quite certain," Nevers answered.

He was interrogated, he was believed.

The governor, in a flat and trembling voice, again asked him if he was sure; Nevers said that he was. The governor exclaimed with a certain vivacity:

"I am glad."

Then he closed his eyes and hid his face in his hands. He left, protesting weakly as Nevers started to accompany him.

XXVIII

He unholstered his gun.

He was paralyzed. He was thinking rapidly, as if in delirium, with images. He wanted to understand, to resolve. He couldn't.

Slowly, determined, he crossed the room; he opened the door,

followed the interminable hallways, climbed the spiral staircase and went into his room, in the dark. He locked the door. He turned on the light.

He had the impression of having moved like a sleepwalker, like a phantom. He felt no desire to sleep, no weariness, no pain; he didn't feel his own body; he was waitng. He took the pistol in his left hand and extended his right. He saw that it trembled.

At that moment--or was it much later?--there was a knock on the door.

That was what he had been waiting for. After a nightmare, that knock awakened him. In the knocking he recognized reality, joyfully. Nevers, like so many men, died not knowing that his reality was dramatic.

He left the pistol on the table and went to open the door. Kahn, the guard, came in. He had seen light in the room, and he had "come in to talk".

Kahn respectfully remained standing, next to the table. Nevers picked up the gun and when he told Kahn that he had to take it apart and clean it, a bullet escaped from the chamber.

I suspect that after his brief, and, perhaps, heroic presentation before Castel he foresaw possible consequences. His nerves couldn't hold out.

XXIX

Nevers' plan had consisted of presenting the matter of the salt marshes, which divided our family and took him away from France, as a public matter; a coarse parallelism with the Dreyfus affair might be in operation here, and I don't think it essential to dwell upon this frivolous handling of a matter that any one of us, in the same circumstances, would have viewed with reverence and with terror.

Stimulated by the alcohol, he thought, perhaps, that the dangerous situation, the indefensible situation in which he had placed himself, would have no consequences. The last conversation with Favre and Deloge had convinced him that the governor was preparing the break for very soon; the exchange of prisoners between Devil's Island and St. Joseph and Royal Islands was of unquestionable significance: the concentration on Devil's Island of the prisoners whose sentences were unjust. The consequences of my false confession may be: that the governor will take me to the island and reveal his plans to me, or that he will take me there, not reveal his plans, but will make me participate in the break (I will first try to investigate, then, to withdraw from the escape), or, again, because of a justifiable grudge, he might not take me to the island, might not tell me anything and might not want me to

participate in the break at all. My "confession" will have no further consequences, even if Xavier arrives before the revolt. The governor is not in a position to look for complications; he will not accuse me. Nor will he wait for Xavier's arrival. All this was an absurd manner of reasoning: if Castel had wanted some of the prisoners to break out, Nevers would not have to break out (he could go whenever he wanted; he was not a prisoner).

Four days passed and Nevers had heard no word from the governor. This silence did not disturb him; it gave him the incredible hope that his words would have no consequences. On the fourth day he received a note, an order to present himself on Devil's Island on the 24th, at nightfall.

XXX

April 16

At twelve o'clock, as on the previous nights, he opened the door of his room; he listened; he walked along the dark corridor. He went down the creaking staircase, trying not to make a sound, not to be heard. He passed through the office, through the enormous vestibule that smelled of creosote. He opened the door: he was outside in a heavy lowering night, covered with clouds.

He walked in a straight line, then he turned to the left and stopped at a palm tree. He sighed deeply; tremuluous, he tried to hear if someone had heard his sighing. He walked silently; he paused at another tree; he started walking again; he reached a tree with low branches, extended out over the water; among the branches he saw the form of a rowboat, and, surrounding it, spectral foam that dissolved and reformed in the glittering blackness of the sea. He thought that the strokes of the oars might be heard, but that he should row immediately, that he musn't give the current a chance to carry him off down the coast. He climbed in the boat and rowed frantically.

He steered towards Devil's Island, to the place he had been with Favre and Deloge. The crossing was a little long, but the landing site seemed relatively secure. Knockings as if from spongy vaults shook the hull of the rowboat, and surfaces of a deathly pallor slid passed him. He had thought (days before, in the first crossing) that those ephemeral white patches must be waves illumined by the sparse beams of the moon that passed through openings in the clouds; then he remembered that prisoners who died on the islands were taken out by night in that rowboat and thrown into the sea; he had been told that sharks played about the boat like impatient dogs. His loathing of touching a shark urged him to land anywhere, but he continued to the site he

he had planned on. He didn't know whether to admire his courage or to despise himself for the fear that he was feeling.

He tied up the boat and climbed the cliff at the extreme southwest of the island. The cliff seemed shorter to him; right away he found himself in the forest of palm trees. For the fourth night now he had reached those trees. On the first night, he felt he clearly understood the dangers to which he was exposing himself, and he decided to go back. On the second night he went round Favre's hut. On the tiird night, he went around the central pavilion.

He was leaving a clump of trees, moving in the direction of Favre's hut, when he saw two shadows approaching him. He drew back, moving from one palm tree to another. He threw himself to the ground; he lay down on a soil chirping and crawling with insects. The shadows entered the hut. As the hut was dark, he thought it must be Favre and Deloge, come back from their talk with the governor; he decided to visit them.

But they didn't light the lantern; it might be better to go to the window and have a look. At that instant one of the two men came out, staggering. Then another appeared. One walked ahead of the other and they were carrying something, like a stretcher. Nevers watched attentively. They were carrying a man.

Immobile, sepulchred among insects, he waited for them to

go away. Then he ran to the boat and fled the island. The following day, when he wrote me, he complained of having been at such a distance, of not having seen the men's faces.

The day after that he did not go to talk with Favre and Deloge. Nor did he go that night. He didn't go the next day. He didn't go on the 18th. He would never go again. He would go on the 26th to Cayenne. On the 27th Xavier would arrive, and he, incredibly, would return to France. He was free of the abominable dream of the Salvation Islands and it seemed to him absurd to interfere in matters that had already taken place.

XXXI

There would be no consequences if the guards of Royal Island surprised him(it is clear that if they didn't recognize him, or if they pretended not to recognize him, the consequence would be a shot). But if he were surprised on Devil's Island it would have been disastrous.. Possibly everything could be reduced to an impossible explanation, but if the mysteries of the island were truly atrocious--as the adventure of the 16th seemed to indicate--, it would not be absurd to suppose that in his visits to the islands he was risking his life. Who was the man who had been taken from Favre's hut? What had happened? Was he ill? Had he been murdered?

On the night of the 19th the temptation overpowered him and he got up to go to the island. At the door of the administration building two guards were talking harshly; he returned to his room and told himself that fate had placed those two guards there to dissuade him. But on the 20th he went; he remained on the island a few minutes and returned with the impression of having saved himself from considerable danger. On the 21st he went again. Deloge's hut was lit up. Without further precautions he walked to the window; he looked in: Deloge, with his red hair, redder than ever, was preparing coffee; he was serious, whistling, and with his right hand, and at times with both hands, he was directing an imaginary orchestra. Nevers felt an urge to go in and ask him what had happened to Favre. But his aim was to find out what was going on in the central pavilion; he was resolved that this would be his last incursion in the island.

He walked to the central pavilion, from one tree to another. Suddenly, he stopped: two men were advancing toward him. Nevers ducked behind a palm tree. He followed them at a distance, losing time taking refuge behind the trees. The men went into Deloge's hut. To move in close and spy on them would be dangerous: he would have to pass in front of the door or circle the hut at too great a distance. He preferred to wait. He knew what he was waiting for. One of the men appeared in the doorway: he staggered,

as if he were dragging something. Then the other appeared. They were carrying a man. Nevers remained a while among the trees. Then he entered the hut. It seemed that everything was in disorder, as in the photographs of the room where a murder has taken place. He remembered that the disorder was the same that he had seen from the window, when Deloge was making coffee. The cup of coffee was on top of the little stove. In the room there hung a vague odor of sickness. Nevers returned to Royal Island.

XXXII

The date of his return was drawing near, and Nevers was losing interest in the mysteries of Devil's Island, he felt anxious to leave, to once and for all be rid of the obsession of those mysteries. He was determined to leave on the same ship in which Xavier would arrive; on the 26th he would be in Cayenne; on the 29th he would go to France. But before then, the night of the 24th would occur, the night he was supposed to spend on Devil's Island.

He plotted precautions for that inevitable night: he would tie the rowboat to the Bellerophon, he would take it in tow to the tree where he had always landed, and then he would go in the launch to the island wharf. If it should be necessary to flee,

he would have the rowboat ready in a safe place. He changed his plan: it would be best to leave the Bellerophon in the secret place and go to the wharf in the rowboat. For a fast getaway, the launch would be more useful.

On the 24th, at 7:30 in the afternoon, he took the Bellerophon and landed underneath the tree. He climbed the cliff, crossed the small forest of palm trees and walked to the central pavilion. He knocked; no one answered; he tried to go in; the door was locked. He was returning when he ran into Dreyfus, who seemed to be coming from the wharf.

"Where did you land?" asked Dreyfus. "I've been waiting for you since six. I thought you weren't coming."

"I've been knocking on the door for some time. I almost feel like leaving."

"Everyone's very busy here. The governor waited for you up until a little while ago. Where did you dock?"

Nevers waved his hand in the direction of the wharf.

"What has he called me for?" he asked.

"I don't know. The governor asks you to sleep in Favre's hut tonight. Tomorrow I will prepare a room for you in the central pavilion."

"Favre is ill?"

"Yes."

"The Priest, Julien and Deloge are ill?"

"How did you know that Deloge is sick?"

"How I know is not important. What does matter is that I am brought here to be contaminated. That I am made to sleep in that hut, so that I cannot escape the disease."

They went to the hut. Everything was very clean, very well prepared. Nevers thought that it was difficult to get ahold of good servants and that he ought to try to take Dreyfus to France. Dreyfus said to him:

"Since I was waiting for you, I couldn't prepare your meal. I will bring dinner at nine. Please forgive me."

Nevers had taken along a book of Baudelaire. Among the poems that he read, he mentions "Correspondances".

From 9:00 to 9:30 he was almost tranquil, almost happy. Dinner was excellent and the presence of Dreyfus comforted him. Once he was alone, he returned to his reading. Shortly before 11:00 he turned out the lantern and went to stand by the window. He stood there a long time. He felt tired and sleepy. He thought that so much time had passed he could consider himself free for that night and that he could go to bed. First he looked at the time. He lit a match. Fourteen minutes had passed. He leaned against the doorway. He stood like this a very long time. He affirms that his eyes were closing.

He opened his eyes: still at some distance, two men were walking towards him. He went inside and immediately thought that he would have to go out and hide among the trees. But the men would see him leaving. He was trapped. Then he attempted and succeeded in leaving by the window (with difficulty; it was very small). He stood there staring, not out of curiosity: he was so frightened that he couldn't move.

The men entered the hut. The shortest man leaned over the bed. Nevers heard an exclamation of rage.

"What is it?" asked a strangely odd voice.

"Light a match," said the voice that he recognized.

Nevers fled to the launch.

XXXIII

Early on the morning of the 25th Nevers docked in Cayenne. Immediately he went to the governor's palace. He lay down, but he wasn't able to sleep. He was nervous and, to calm himself and compose his ideas, he wrote me these lines:

I am in open war with Mr. Castel. At any moment the order for my arrest will arrive from the islands. It is true that it is not convenient for him to make a move; if he forces me to defend myself, he will end up losing.

I must warn Xavier. If the governor convinces him, who knows what lies in store for me. But if I convince him, the problem will be to keep Xavier from initiating proceedings against Castel, from compelling me to testify and postpone my return.

He remembered the order contained in the letter. He took the letter from his pocket, and he read:

"M. Altino Leitao
18 bis rue des Belles-Feuilles,
Cayenne."

He went to the little stove that was used for preparing breakfast and he heated water. Then he moistened his fingers and ran them along the seal of the envelope. He managed to open it, with apparent ease (at first), with impatience (moments later). He tore the paper; he read:

"Dear friend Leitao:

I would appreciate your delivering to the bearer of this note a double supply of your accredited dynamite. We have urgent and highly significant work here.

I remain your faithful and attentive client.

Signed: Peter Castel.

April 6, 1914."

Once the surprise of the first moment had passed--that the governor had not referred to him, Nevers, ironically--he tried to seal the envelope. Anyone could see that it had been opened. On another envelope he tried to imitate Castel's hand. He failed.

At 8:00 Legrain entered, very soiled and with an enormous crown of hair. Nevers asked him when Xavier's ship would arrive.

"It arrives tomorrow, at the islands."

"And when does it come here?"

"It doesn't come here."

He decided to return to the islands the following day, with the dynamite. If Castel said nothing to Xavier, he would say nothing and Castel will be convinced of my intention not to talk. If Castel accuses me, I have the dynamite, as proof.

"Tell me, Legrain, who is a Mr. Leitao?"

"Leitao? The president of a company of Brazilian smugglers. The most powerful company. If some fugitive lands on one of his ships--even though they promise to take him to Trinidad, even though they charge him for the trip, believe me--they end up

cutting him open in search of suppositories with money inside. On land he isn't dangerous."

Nevers thought that the best weapon against Castel was that letter. He should keep it; it was more convincing than the explosives themselves. Furthermore, in order to keep the letter, it was essential that he not visit the smuggler. He writes me: But if I offer the letter in evidence, not only will I demonstrate the censurable friendship of Castel with the smuggler; I will show that I have tampered with the mail. I doubt that he let himself be deceived by that fallacy; I suppose, more likely, he feared returning to the islands without fulfilling Castel's orders.

At any rate, he thought it would not be a good thing for Leitao to discover that the letter had been opened. After a lengthy meditation before the typewriter, he found the solution. On a blue envelope, without letterhead, he typed Leitao's name and address.

At 9:00 he stood in the rue des Belles-Feuilles. A half-naked negress opened the door; she took him to a small study filled with books and told him she would advise the man of the house of his presence.

Shortly afterwards, an immense man, sweating profusely and wearing grey and red striped pyjamas, came into the room. He was olive-skinned, with short, disheveled hair and a few days' beard.

His hands were tiny and white, puerile.

"What can I do for you?" he breathed heavily, and he sighed.

Nevers handed him the letter and tried to discover if Leitao looked at it with suspicion. Leitao was looking for something; inexpressive, slowly, he opened and shut one of the desk drawers. Finally, he took out a letter-opener. He delicately opened the envelope, removed the letter and spread it out on the table. He sighed and thrust his hands calmly into his pyjama pockets until he found a handkerchief; then he looked for his eyeglasses. He cleaned them, put them on and read the letter. He placed his glasses on the desk, passed his hand over his face and emerged sighing.

"How is the governor?" he asked with a smile that to Nevers seemed forced.

"He's not very well," Nevers answered.

Leitao sighed and said:

"A great man, the governor, a great man. But he doesn't believe in science. He doesn't believe in doctors. A real shame." He got up, heavy and huge, picked up the letter and left.

Half an hour later Nevers was still alone, timidly planning his getaway, resolutely fearing an ambush. Leitao entered; in his snowy, abject fingers he held up an impeccable package.

"Here it is," he said, giving the package to Nevers. "Give

my respects to the governor."

He passed his hands over his face, sighed, and bowed solemnly. Nevers stammered a salutation and moved back through the room, and back through the hall, till he reached the street.

I felt a compassion, he writes, for that slippery smuggler domiciled in Cayenne. I felt a compassion for every person and for every thing that I saw. There they were--like the people that you see from the carriage window on the sidewalks of country towns: my unmerited happiness lay in leaving.

XXXIV

27th, afternoon

It wasn't yet night when Nevers reached the islands. Someone was signalling to him from Devil's Island. He didn't answer: the sea was tossed and Nevers didn't dare let go of the tiller. Immediately he thought that in refusing to acknowledge the salutation he would confirm his fame as a strategist. He let the waves carry the Bellerophon slightly towards Devil's Island: the man was Dreyfus. After the inscrutable adventure in Deloge's hut, Nevers mistrusted everyone, even Dreyfus. Nevertheless he felt a great relief as he recognized him, and he greeted him impulsively, waving

his arm. That gesture (he believed) committed him to mooring on Devil's Island. Dreyfus was on the cliffs at the southwest, where Nevers had always landed, and with repeated gestures Dreyfus pointed in the direction of the wharf; Nevers however, moored beneath the cliffs, next to the tree that stretches out over the sea. Dreyfus came forward spreading his arms.

Nevers thought the reception auspicious, that he had not made a mistake in returning to the islands, and, finally, that he had lost his secret moorage.

"How good that you're here," shouted Dreyfus, "you've no idea how I've been waiting for you."

"Thank you," said Nevers, moved; then he thought he heard a note in Dreyfus' voice that suggested a new interpretation of the reception. He asked:

"Is something the matter?"

"What we were afraid of," Dreyfus sighed. He looked around him and continued: "We must be careful when we talk."

"Is the governor ill?" Nevers asked, as if I still believed in the attacks, as if the irrefutable episode in Deloge's hut had never happened.

"He is ill," said Dreyfus, incredibly.

Nevers had a picture of Dreyfus managing everything, organizing everyone's annihilation. But he musn't get distracted

by fantastic imaginings; it was possible he might have to face them.

The wind had calmed down. He flattered himself, affirming that the safety and firmness of the earth were virtues that only we, the mariners, appreciate. They walked uphill, to the little forest of palm trees. He stopped; he felt no urgency to reach the central pavilion, to reach all the troublesome situations I would have to resolve. But he asked without anxiety.

"Has Captain Xavier Brissac arrived?"

"Who?"

"Captain Xavier Brissac."

"No. No one has arrived here."

"You're not expecting anyone either?"

"I don't know..."

There was no reason why he should, Nevers thought. Nevertheless (he writes) I barely repressed this insane thought: Dreyfus knew nothing about Xavier's forthcoming arrival, because Xavier's forthcoming arrival would never take place. I had invented everything myself, in my desperation to leave. But it was bad enough that Xavier's ship was delayed...

"And you think this captain will come?"

"I'm certain of it."

"It would be a good thing. There are very few of us."

"Few? For what?"

"You are not ignorant of the situation in the islands. The governor fell ill some days ago. We are entirely without authority."

"Do you fear something?"

"I wouldn't go as far as that, no. But it may be that your captain will arrive too late."

XXXV

Nevers asked himself if Dreyfus would be against or in favor of the conspiracy. Dreyfus declared nobly:

"It may be a great disaster. I was afraid that trouble would break out with me alone, with the sick and Mr. De Brinon."

Nevers told himself that the situation looked extremely serious and that maintaining his prestige in front of Dreyfus was not important, that he wouldn't think now about his prestige but of the situation. He repeated that purpose to himself, four or five times.

They entered the central pavilion; there was a smell of disinfectants and a smell of food; the smell of a hospital, Nevers thought. Confusedly, he saw on the walls splotches of red and blue and yellow. It was the famous interior "camouflage"; he looked at it without curiosity, with the urge to be gone from

there. He asked:

"Where is the governor?"

"In a cell. In one of the four cells here in the pavilion..."

"You've locked him in a cell?" Nevers shouted.

Dreyfus seemed uncomfortable. He excused himself:

"It's not my fault. I carry out the orders that I'm given."

"Given by whom?"

"The governor. If it were up to me, I wouldn't have done it. I carry out orders. The governor said we were to close him up in a cell."

"Take me to him; I want to speak with the governor immediately."

Dreyfus looked at him, amazed. He repeated:

"Speak with the governor?"

"Didn't you hear me?" asked Nevers.

"The governor won't hear you. He doesn't recognize anyone."

"I want to talk to him."

"Whatever you say," said Dreyfus. "But he knows that it's night. The order is that the sick men are not to be disturbed at night."

"Are you suggesting that I should wait until tomorrow to see him?"

"To see him, no. You will see him from above. But I beg of you, don't make any noise because he is awake."

"If he's awake, why can't I talk to him?"

He regretted having gotten into a discussion with Dreyfus.

"To talk to him, you will have to wait until tomorrow, when he is asleep."

Nevers thought that he was already facing the rebellion, and that Dreyfus' irony was not merely facial: it was coarse as well. But Dreyfus was serious. Weakly, Nevers told him that he didn't understand.

"Do you think I understand?" asked Dreyfus angrily. "It is an order from the governor. Here, everything is backwards and we will all end up insane. But I am here to carry out orders."

"The order is to talk with the sick men while they are asleep?"

"Exactly. If you talk to them at night, they can't hear you, or they pretend not to hear you. I bathe and feed them in the daytime."

My nephew believed he understood. He asked:

"When they are awake?"

"No, when they're sleeping. When they are awake they are not to be disturbed. Mr. Castel left you some written instructions."

"Give them to me."

"Mr. De Brinon has them. He's on Royal Island. We could go in your launch, or in the rowboat."

"We will go. But first I will speak with Mr. Castel."

Dreyfus looked at him as if in a stupor. Nevers did not

yield. He was not to be gotten away from there before he had spoken with the governor.

XXXVI

"If you want to see them, go on in."

Dreyfus opened a door and motioned Nevers to enter first; Nevers said: "I'll follow you," and, with cunning, conscious of his weakness and theatricality, he clutched his gun. They crossed a large office, with old leather chairs and a table heaped with books and papers in impeccable order. Dreyfus stopped.

"Do you really think it wise to see Mr. Castel now? The situation on the island is deadly serious. I wouldn't waste the time."

"Obey me," Nevers shouted.

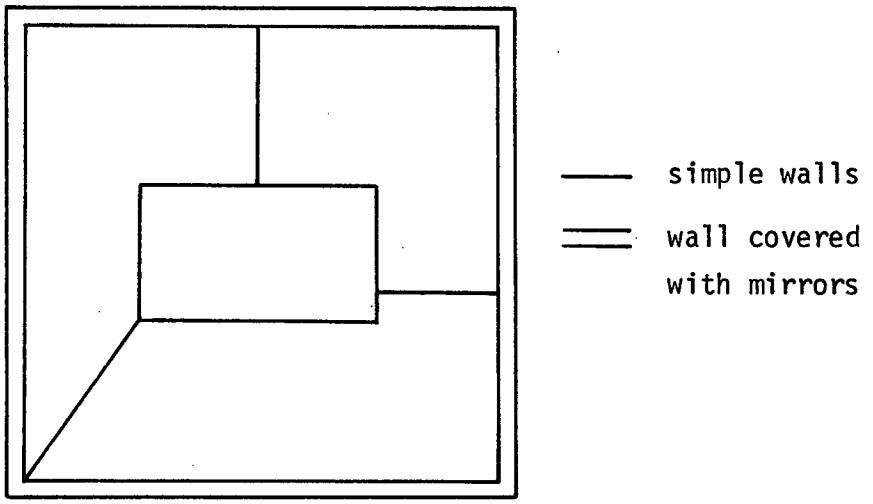
Dreyfus made a courteous gesture for him to go ahead; he consented; he regretted having consented. He climbed a stairway, and, at the top, he stopped in front of a door; he opened it; they emerged onto a flat roof top under a remote and star-covered sky. Toward the center of the roof there was a small, yellowish electric light bulb.

"Don't make a sound," Dreyfus advised. "We'll see them now."

XXXVII

In order to afford a better understanding of the incredible events that I am about to narrate, and to enable the reader to clearly imagine the first and already fantastic vision that Nevers had of the "sick men", I will describe the part of the pavilion which they occupied. In the center, on the ground floor, there is an open courtyard; in the center of the courtyard, a quadrangular construction that formerly had contained four equal cells. Dreyfus informs me that the governor had the interior walls of that construction torn down, Nevers writes. He then ordered them raised as they are now: they defined four unequal cells, of scandalously abnormal shapes. What the governor intended with these changes is a mystery which I have not ascertained.

The curious thing is that he did find out. Does this inconsistency, betray an incapacity to see his thoughts synthetically? Or, more likely, that Nevers never re-read that last letter? Castel's capricious design was (as the reader can appreciate from the plan I have attached to this chapter) that each of the four cells have one adjacent wall with the other three.



The cells have no roof; they are guarded from above. Previously the catwalks or galleries that lead from the terrace and form a network over the entire courtyard crossed over the cells. Castel cut off the part of the catwalks that projected over the cells, and he extended the upper edge of the walls, so that it could serve as a walkway for the jailers. Nevers observed: there aren't any railings, and the walls are very high; the former catwalks must have been more secure.

Rolls of canvas make it possible for the cells and the entire courtyard to be covered; at Castel's orders the canvases were spread when it rained.

One of the cells is internal. If I had to lock myself up in one of them, Nevers writes, I would choose that one. At least I

would be free of the burning horror of those mirrors. He is referring, with his customary dramatics, to the huge, cheap mirrors in the other cells. They cover, on the inside, all the walls that overlook the courtyard.

XXXVIII

He walked to the banister and looked down: the roofless pavilion in the center, the courtyard and the walls that surrounded the courtyard, were covered with intense red, yellow and blue splotches. Delirium tremens, thought Nevers. He adds: It seemed as if some person of abhorrent taste had decorated the courtyard for a celebration, and he remembered "Hell", a melancholy dance hall in Brussels where we had met an interesting group of young painters.

He walked along the catwalk; at the edge of the roofless pavilion he stopped; after a moment of hesitation he moved forward along the border of the wall. Crossing from one catwalk to another (following the rim of the wall, on the top of the pavilion) was not difficult. He thought he ought to walk without stopping, until he reached the other side; he stopped. He forgot himself, at last. In the first moments of that abominable vision he must have felt something akin to vertigo, or nausea (but it was not the lack of

a railing that gave origin to those sensations). The cells were plastered with paint; they had no other opening than that of the roof; the doors were lost in the splotches on the walls; in each cell there stood a "sick man"; the four sick men with their painted faces, like white Kafirs, with yellow paint on their lips, in identical red pyjamas with yellow and blue stipes, stood still, but in attitudes of motion, and Nevers had the impression that those attitudes were mutually dependent, that they formed a whole, or what in the Music Halls they call a tableau vivant (but he himself adds: there was no opening through which they could see each other from one cell to the next). He suspected they must be acting, that all this must be an impenetrable joke to confuse or distract him, with perverse designs. He decided to confront Castel immediately. In a voice that he couldn't control, he shouted:

"What does this mean?"

Castel didn't answer; not even the slightest contraction of his face betrayed his having heard him. He shouted again. Castel remained imperturbable; all of the sick men remained the same.

He noticed that they had changed postures; for a few seconds he thought they had changed their positions abruptly, when he was looking at the governor; then he discovered that they were moving, but in a manner that was almost imperceptible, with the sluggishness

of a minute hand.

"It's useless to shout," Dreyfus advised him. "They can't hear, or they don't want to hear."

"They don't want to hear?" asked Nevers with careful emphasis. "You said they were pretending. Are they sick or not?"

"Absolutely. But I have talked with them, and without shouting--please take note--, without raising my voice. And suddenly they didn't hear me, as if I were talking in Turkish. It was totally useless for me to shout. I got mad: I thought they were making fun of me. I even reached the point of imagining that it was me who had lost my voice, while my shouting made me deaf."

"Are they insane?"

"You know how a person changes when he is wasted with illness and fever."

It seemed incredible to be in full control of his senses and to be seeing those men, like four wax figures forming a living tableau from four isolated cells. It seemed incredible that the governor could have been in his senses and have painted the cells with that chaotic profusion. Then Nevers recalled that in the sanatoriums for mental patients there were green rooms to calm the sick, and red rooms to excite them. He looked at the paintings. Three colors predominated: red, yellow and blue; there were combinations of their variants as well. He looked at the men.

The governor, with a pencil in his hand, repeated words that were almost unintelligible and he passed slowly from perplexity to despair and from despair to joy. Favre, fatter than ever, wept without moving his face, with the distinct ugliness of grotesque statues. The Priest acted the part of a corralled beast: with his head lowered and dread in his eyes, he seemed in the act of marauding, but he was motionless. Deloge smiled vainly, as if he were in heaven and a blessed man (vile and red-haired). Nevers felt the vaguest presence of a recollection and a pronounced malaise; then he beheld that recollection: a frightful visit to the Grevin Museum, when he was eight years old.

There were no beds in the cells, nor chairs, nor other furniture. He asked Dreyfus:

"I assume that beds are put in for them to sleep on."

"Not at all," Dreyfus answered implacably. "It's the governor's orders. Nothing is set near them. When I go into the cells I put on a pair of pyjamas like theirs."

Nevers wasn't listening.

"That too must be the governor's order," he murmured. "Not the order of a human being. I am not prepared to respect it."

He pronounced very clearly the last two or three words.

"They sleep on those quilts," Dreyfus explained.

Dreyfus hadn't noticed them. They were overlaid on the floor

and painted in such a way that they vanished in the splotches of paint.

He felt loathing, not fear. Those four men seemed inoffensive enough. In the grips of what he himself calls a fleeting madness, he imagined they were under the influence of some alkaloid and that Dreyfus was the organizer of everything. The ends that Dreyfus was pursuing, and what he was expecting of Nevers, were not revelations of that madness.

XXXIX

Or could it be the governor who was responsible for all this? It didn't seem possible: he was one of the "sick men". Nevertheless, Nevers continues, there are those who operate on themselves; those who commit suicide. Maybe he has put them to sleep, and put himself to sleep, for a long time, possibly for years, possibly until death. Without a doubt Dreyfus (consciously or unconsciously) gives them some drug. Maybe, he thought, already in full conjectural furor, that drug produces two alternate types of sleep, that correspond to our sleep and to our wakefulness. One type, of repose, which these patients experience during the day, another of activity: this they experience at night, which is emptier than the daytime, less rich in events capable of

interrupting their sleep. The patients move like sleepwalkers, and their destiny--since it is dreamed--need be no more frightening, or more incalculable, than that of men awake; maybe it is more predictable (though no less complex), as it depends on the personal history and the will of the subject. From these poor mental labours, Nevers passes to I know not what metaphysical fantasies; he evokes Schopenhauer, and, pompously, narrates a dream: he has been subjected to an examination and he awaits the examiners' verdict. He awaits it greedily and with terror, because it is on that verdict that his life depends. Nevers sagaciously observes: however, I will give the verdict myself, since the examiners, like all dreams, are dependent on my will. He concludes illicitly: Perhaps all destiny(sickness, happiness, our physical appearance, misfortune) is dependent on our will.

While he was thinking this, the presence and expectations of Dreyfus made him uneasy. He must decide on his manner of conduct immediately; he started by gaining time for himself.

"Let's go to the study," he said in a voice that tried to be authoritarian and came out thin.

They went down from the roof, closed the door and Nevers sat down in the swivel chair facing the desk in the governor's office. With a solemn gesture, he motioned Dreyfus to sit down. Dreyfus, visibly impressed, sat on the edge of his chair. Nevers didn't know

what they would talk about, but he had to speak seriously if he intended to take charge of the situation, and Dreyfus expected this of him. He felt inspired; scarcely disguising his enthusiasm, he asked:

"The governor has left instructions for me?"

"Quite so," replied Dreyfus.

"Do you have them?"

"Mr. De Brinon has them."

"Where is Mr. De Brinon?"

"On Royal Island."

This was only the semblance of a dialogue, and Nevers' mind wandered while Dreyfus answered him. He contemplated a vase, or Roman urn, that stood on the desk. In the frieze, a group of dancing girls, old men and a youth were celebrating a ceremony per aes et libram; among them lay a maiden, dead.

"How can I go to Royal Island?"

"We have a dinghy. Besides, there is your launch."

Nevers was not ashamed of his question. Tranquilly, he thought that the maiden on the vase must have died on her wedding night. Undoubtedly that urn had contained her remains. Perhaps they contained them still. The urn was sealed.

"But tonight I will not move even a finger, lieutenant. I wouldn't go till tomorrow."

There was anxiety in Dreyfus' voice. Nevers asked himself if it was real or affected.

"Why wouldn't you go today?"

Nevers wanted to know if the vase contained something, and he got up to shake it. Dreyfus attributed Nevers' movement to the solemnity of what they were saying.

"Trust me, lieutenant," he exclaimed. "Leave the trip for tomorrow, and tonight I will tell you why you did the right thing."

Nevers didn't answer.

"I wouldn't get angry," Dreyfus continued, with his most insinuating sweetness. "If I were you, I would talk with me and we would draw up a plan and I would set about waiting for this captain you say is coming."

Nevers resolved to go to Royal Island immediately. He was afraid that he had been unfair to the governor and now he wanted to at least have the consideration to examine the instructions that Castel had left him; his return--he argues--might produce a convenient confusion among the mutineers.

"Are you staying or coming with me?" he asked.

It was a useful question. Dreyfus no longer protested; his passion lay in staying with the sick.

Nevers left the pavilion and went down to the tree he used for mooring. He boarded the launch; he quickly arrived at Royal

Island. He regretted not having docked more cautiously. No guard was there to receive him. He asked himself if his having triumphed so easily with Dreyfus had not been a misfortune. The island was in darkness (far off, in the hospital and in the Administration, there were a few lights). He asked himself where he would begin looking for De Brinon. He decided to start with the hospital.

While he walked up the slope he thought he saw two shadows that hid themselves among the palm trees. He thought it would be wise to walk slowly. He walked very slowly. Immediately he understood the torment that he had chosen... For an interval that seemed very long to him, he passed between the naked trunks of the palm trees, as if in an atrocious dream. He reached the hospital at last.

There was De Brinon. Nevers didn't have a moment's doubt. It was the first time he had seen that athletic young man with his frank and open face and intelligent look who was leaning absent-mindedly over a patient. The young man must be De Brinon. Nevers felt a great relief. He asked (not because the answer interested him, but to start a conversation):

"Are you De Brinon?"

XL

From outside he had heard a merry din. When he opened the door he encountered an oppressive darkness where, in the silence and the stench, three yellowish candles trembled. Next to one of the candles glowed the face with the comforting expression. De Brinon raised his head; there was intelligence in his glance; his smile was frank. He answered:

"What do you want?"

Nevers says that he had the impression that the distance which separated him from De Brinon had disappeared and that the voice which he heard sprang out--atrociously--at his side. He says that he calls this sound a "voice" because, apparently, De Brinon is a man, but he heard the bleating of a sheep. A bleating astonishingly articulate for a sheep. He adds that it resembled the voice of a ventriloquist imitating a sheep and that De Brinon scarcely opened his mouth as he spoke.

"I am De Brinon," the strange voice continued, and Nevers recognized it: it was one of the voices he had heard in the hut on Devil's Island, the night of his escape. "What do you want?"

He could sense that the voice was amiable. A puerile gaiety shone in those clear-sighted eyes. Nevers suspected that De Brinon was mentally retarded.

He began to see in the darkness of the room. There were four prisoners. There were no jailers. Since his last visit, the filth and disorder had increased. De Brinon was operating on the head of a patient, and his hands and shirt sleeves were drenched with blood.

Nevers tried to speak with a firm voice:

"I want the instructions the governor left for me."

De Brinon frowned; he looked at him with a flush of emotion, he seemed to suffocate.

"I don't know anything about the instructions the governor left me. I don't know anything."

He began to retreat like a corralled animal. Nevers felt courageous in the face of this enemy; forgetting the other men who looked at him from the shadows, he said drily:

"Give me those instructions or I'll shoot."

De Brinon cried out, as if the shot had already pierced him, and he started to cry. The men fled in a tumult. Nevers advanced with his hand outstretched. The other man pulled an envelope out of his pocket and gave it to Nevers, howling:

"I don't have anything. I don't have anything."

At that moment Dreyfus entered. Nevers looked at him in alarm, but Dreyfus' face was composed; without altering that composure his lips moved.

"Hurry, lieutenant." Nevers heard the voice that came hushed and sibilant. "Something terrible has happened."

XLI

"Deloge is dead," said Dreyfus when they were outside.

"Dead?" Nevers asked.

Until that moment the four sick men on Devil's Island had seemed virtually dead to him. Now the idea that Deloge was dead seemed inadmissible.

"What happened?"

"I don't know. I didn't see a thing. Now I'm worried about the others..."

"The others?"

"I don't know. I want to be close by."

Again he passed through the forest of palm trees. He looked insistently about him: he thought that no one was there. Immediately he heard a woman's laugh, and, dimly, he saw two shadows. At first he had an unpleasant sensation, as if the laughter offended him because Deloge had died; then he understood that that laughter suggested the possibility that Dreyfus was not insane... (if the jailers were still carrying out their jobs, their wives would have been more careful of themselves).

Dreyfus didn't take him to the wharf. Nevers was so preoccupied that he only noticed that fact much later, when he went over the events of that incredible day. They climbed into the rowboat. Dreyfus rowed vigorously. They reached Devil's Island without having spoken a single word.

While he was tying up the boat, Dreyfus lost his footing and fell in the water. Nevers asked himself if Dreyfus hadn't tried to attack him. He refused to let him go to change his clothes.

XLII

His first notion was to delay the moment of seeing Deloge, the moment when that corpse would enter his memory, with all the atrocious details. He said with authority:

"Before anything else, I want to have an overall look at things. Let's go up."

He walked through the study; as in a dream he found himself gazing at those old pieces of furniture, telling himself that the tragedy which the Iles du Salut had reserved for him had finally come to pass, and that he felt a great relief; with no relief whatsoever he trembled, he climbed the staircase, he made his way along the catwalks over the courtyard and arrived at the cells. He looked down.

It was as if there were a telepathic understanding between those men. As if they knew that something frightful had happened, as if they believed that the same thing would happen to each of them... Their postures (their imperceptible movements) were those of men who expect an attack; silent, crouched, they stalked like marauding animals, as if in a sluggish dance, as if feinting before an enemy, an enemy that was invisible to Nevers. Once again he extemporized the hypothesis of madness. He asked himself if men who are sick with the same madness had, simultaneously, the same visions.

Then he turned his attention to the dead man. Deloge was lying on the floor, near one of the walls of the cell, with the shirt of his pyjamas torn to pieces and with sinister dark stains on his neck.

He turned to look at the other men. Crouched as they were in warlike postures, they seemed pathetically defenseless. Nevers asked himself what hatred would justify the persecution and murder of those invalids.

Dreyfus was watching him inquiringly; he began to walk towards the roof top.

Nevers followed him. They went down the stairs; they passed through the study, through the courtyard.

In that terrible moment he saw himself as if from the outside

and he even allowed himself a private joke: he attributed--without much originality--the "camouflages" of the courtyard to a Mr. Van Gogh, a modernist painter. He felt that afterwards he, Nevers, would remain enclosed in his own memory as in a hell, making imbecilic jokes in that paint-plastered, nightmarish courtyard as he walked towards the horror. However, when they reached the door of the cell he was sufficiently calm to ask Dreyfus:

"Is the door locked?"

Dreyfus, trembling either with fear or cold (the humidity was so great that his clothes hadn't dried), answered affirmatively.

"Was it locked when Deloge died?"

Again Dreyfus answered that it was.

"Is there another key besides yours?"

"Yes, there is; in the study, in the safe. But the only key to the safe has been in my possession, ever since the governor got sick."

"Alright. Open the door."

He was hoping to draw on the energy of his words. Maybe he succeeded slightly. He entered the cell with resolution. The perspiration in the hair and on the face of the corpse was dry. The torn shirt and the marks on his neck were, even to someone as inexperienced as himself, evident signs of a fight.

He stated, not without a shade of complacency:

"Murder: without a doubt."

He regretted having said it. I should hide that idea from Dreyfus. Besides--he tries to justify himself--for Deloge this matter is no longer of any importance...and I shouldn't have let this infinite dream of Devil's Island take hold of me; I should have carefully avoided any possible dalays in my returning to Saint-Martin, to my destiny, to Irene. The investigation of the crime will be extensive... Maybe it is already too late.

XLIII

He asked himself what motives Dreyfus would have for killing Deloge. Still, Dreyfus had asked him not to go to Royal Island. Had he done so only to throw him off the track? Or to get him to prevent the crime, because Dreyfus was a maniac and killed when he was alone? But up until today Dreyfus has been alone with the sick men...

They left the cell and locked it. He kept the key. In the study, Dreyfus opened the iron safe; he took out a handful of keys; he explained without hesitation which key corresponded to which door. They were all there. Nevers kept them.

Wet and piteous, Dreyfus followed him with the humility of a dog. Nevers decided that he was harmless, but he didn't allow him

to go and change. He told himself that he had a precise responsibility and that Dreyfus was still the only suspect.

He found himself faced with an increasing collection of mysteries. Were they all independent of each other? Or were they bound together, did they form a system, perhaps still incomplete? He wanted to consult the governor's instructions. Dreyfus wanted to go have a look at the sick men; they went to see them. Nevers, to justify his accompanying Dreyfus, alludes to his fear that Dreyfus might run off or kill someone.

Once again he adopted the hypothesis that Dreyfus had organized everything; he considered the foundations of his suspicions against him and found that he was more confident than ever of Dreyfus' innocence. He longed to fraternize with him, to confess the suspicions he had had, so that Dreyfus might forgive them, so they could face the mysteries together. He put off that longing; he knew that the prudent thing would be to keep his reserve to the end. The next day Xavier would arrive, and he would make an impartial declaration of the facts; if Xavier didn't arrive, he would leave in the Bellerophon and he would make a declaration before the authorities in Cayenne. Then he remembered that Dreyfus had brought him over in the rowboat and that the Bellerophon was on Royal Island.

XLIV

I had to break out of that indolence, he writes. To gain time (I had no plan), I decided to check over the island concientiously. When he started speaking to Dreyfus, he saw the dangers of his proposal and he changed the word "island" to the word "building". Maybe it wouldn't be wise to go far from the cells; separating from each other, at those hours of the night, in the dark brush, would be foolhardy.

They began with Castel's office. Dreyfus looked under the sofa, behind the curtains, in a clothes closet. If the criminal had seen us, Nevers comments, we would have lost his respect. He stood motionless next to the door, directing Dreyfus' movements, keeping an eye on the courtyard and the central pavilion. Then they went to the room which Dreyfus called the "laboratory". It was large, barren, dirty and devastated; it reminded Nevers of the foul-smelling room where M. Jaquimot used to operate on the dogs and cats of the old maids of Saint-Martin. In one corner there were several rugs and two or three folding screens; all these objects were painted like the cells and the courtyard. Nevers compared them to a painter's palette and he made I know not what vagrant pronouncements on the analogy between things (which only existed in the beholder) and on symbols (which were

the only means that men had for dealing with reality).

"What does that mean?" he asked, pointing to the folding screens.

He thought they might perhaps be used for experiments on the sick men's vision (were they color-blind?). Dreyfus was thinking in a different vein:

"Mental sickness," he repeated, sorrowfully. "Do you know what he does? What he's doing right now? Through the whole night he never lets go of a pencil and a piece of paper."

"A blue pencil and a sheet of yellow paper? I've seen that. What's upsetting about that?"

Nevers asked himself what was going on in the cells.

"Nothing is as amusing as a lunatic," Dreyfus agreed, smiling. "Not even the best clowns in the circus. But the governor is pitiful. There he makes his nightly rounds reciting, like a man who's lost his memory, I don't know what lunacies about quiet seas and monsters, that suddenly turn into alphabets. Then his enthusiasm rises and he starts to rub the paper with his pencil. It looks to me like he imagines he's writing."

"This search is useless," Nevers declared. "We're wasting time."

He was going to say that they should go have a look at the cells; he changed his mind. Instead, he would demonstrate that

he wasn't frightened. He spoke in a quiet voice:

"The murderer can follow our course, either ahead of us or behind. We'll never find him this way. We should separate and each of us go over the area in opposite directions, until we meet."

Dreyfus was visibly impressed. Nevers conjectured: he will keep silent or he will make some excuse. He remained silent. Nevers didn't insist. He felt a great affection for Dreyfus, and, with genuine compassion, he noticed again his wetness and his trembling. Dreyfus must have sensed these sentiments.

"May I go and change?" he asked. "I'll put on some dry clothes and come back in two minutes."

If Dreyfus had decided to spend a few minutes alone, Nevers himself admits, he must be feeling awfully poor.

But he wanted to return immediately to the cells.

"Is there any alcohol to drink?" he asked.

Dreyfus answered affirmatively. Nevers made him take a glass of rum.

"Now let's go up and have a look at the sick men."

They reached the walkways over the courtyard. Dreyfus went ahead. Suddenly he stopped; he was pale (with that greyish pallor of mulattos), and almost without moving the muscles of his face he said:

"Another dead man."

XLV

Nevers looked down.

Immense, with his face swollen and staring hideously upwards, Favre lay on his back on the cell floor, dead. In the other cells there was nothing new; the Priest and the governor continued in their alarming attitudes of corralled animals, anxious to flee or to attack.

Dreyfus and Nevers went down, they opened Favre's cell (it was locked) and went in. Their examination of the corpse led them to assume that Favre had died of strangulation, after a violent struggle.

Nevers was depressed. His presence had not disturbed the criminal. How could anyone oppose a man who strangled his victims through the walls of a cell? Had the series concluded with Favre? Or were the other sick men still to go? He thought it was not impossible that, from some point, the eyes of the assassin were watching him.

"Let's go to the other cells," he ordered with brusque ill-humor. "You go into the Priest's cell and I'll go in Castel's. I don't want them killed."

He had a debt with the governor and now he must protect him. Dreyfus looked at him, indecisive. Nevers unbuckled his belt with

the pistol and gave it to Dreyfus.

"Have a drink," he told him. "Lock yourself in the Priest's cell and walk from one side to the other. With the movement and the rum the cold will pass. With the gun, your fear will pass as well. If I call, run."

They shook hands and each one went to the cell that he was to watch.

XLVI

The governor's cell was locked. Nevers opened the door carefully and entered on tiptoe, trying not to make a sound. The governor's back was to the door; he didn't turn around. Nevers felt he hadn't heard him come in. He didn't know whether to lock the door or not. Finally he decided to lock it, leave the key in the lock and remain next to the door. The governor was standing up, with his back to Nevers, his face to the wall that overlooked the Priest's cell. He was turning (Nevers verified this in a careful survey) to the left, with extreme slowness. Nevers could move progressively over to the right and keep the governor from seeing him. It wasn't out of fear that he would do this, though the governor's attitude seemed threatening; he wanted to avoid explanations about his delay in Cayenne; he feared the governor

would demand the package that Leitao had sent him.

Absent-mindedly and without anxiety, he could follow the governor's sluggish movements; he heard him murmur some words that he couldn't understand; he took one step to the right and moved close behind his back. The governor stopped mumbling. Nevers stood motionless, rigid; to be standing up, without moving, was, suddenly, a difficult task. The governor's murmurs began again.

He tried to hear; he moved still closer to hear. The governor was repeating several phrases. Nevers searched in his pockets for a paper to write them down; he drew out the envelope containing the instructions. The governor started to say something and immediately broke off, perplexed. Collecting fragments of phrases, Nevers wrote on the envelope:

The medallion is the pencil and the spear is the paper, the monsters are men and the still water is cement,a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i, j,k,l,m,n,o,p,q.

The governor pronounced the letters slowly, as if trying to fix them in his mind, as if he were mentally undertaking difficult sketches. On the paper he sketched "a", "b", "c" with progressive exultation; then he changed to making down-strokes and cancellations. He forgot the pencil and the paper he had in his hands; he wept; he chanted once again "The monsters are men..." and he repeated the alphabet with incipient hopefulness, with the exultation of victory.

Nevers told himself that he should read the instructions. But the governor's progress, though sluggish in the extreme, forced him to move from where he was standing. Accustomed to moving slowly, it seemed to him that he had moved dangerously far from the door. Then he realized that in two leaps he would be next to it. To suppose that the sluggishness of Castel's movements was simulated (he thought) would be insane. The governor had lost his greyish pallor; small and pink, with his chalk-white beard, he resembled a child disagreeably disguised as a gnome. His eyes were extremely wide-open and he bore an expression of hapless anxiety.

In spite of his intention of keeping himself continually on the alert, that heavy, reciprocal dance was tiring him. He thought it wouldn't matter if he let his mind wander a bit, as even a last-minute movement would suffice to put him out of the governor's range of vision. Pursuing this languid occupation, he forgot, for several moments, that his attention should not be directed so much towards the governor as towards the incredible assassin who, at any moment, would intervene.

He then observed the splotches of paint on the walls and floor of the cell. The walls were painted in yellow and blue patches, with red veins. On the floor, next to the walls, there was a border painted blue and yellow; on the rest of the floor there were

combinations of three colors and groupings of their derivative colors. Nevers made note of the following groups:

a) antique-gold
celestial-blue
crimson,

b) lilac
lemon-yellow
vermilion,

c) scarlet
saffron-yellow
marine-blue,

d) indigo
canary-yellow
purple,

e) lily-white
gold
fire-red.

The quilt, which was fastened in the cleft in the floor, was indigo, canary-yellow and purple. He remembered that the entire courtyard was painted (like the walls) in yellow and blue splotches, with red veins. The frequency of the red veins was regular.

This peculiar regularity suggested to him that behind all this tumult of colors there lay a design. He asked himself if that design could have some connection with the deaths.

XLVII

Nevers opened the envelope and he read:

"TO HENRI NEVERS"

"It will make you indignant to receive this letter; nevertheless, I must write it. I realize that you have given me clear and repeated proofs of not wanting to have anything to do with me. You will say that this letter is another manifestation of my incredible insistence, but you will also say that it is a posthumous manifestation, as you will consider me scarcely less dead than a dead man and much more lost than a dying one.

"You may rest assured that I have little time left for future insistencies. Hear me out with the calm certainty that the Peter Castel whom you have known and repudiated will not come back to pester you.

"I will start at the beginning; in the beginning we have the attitudes of each man to the other. You arrived at these islands with a bias which honors you, ready to find everything abhorrent. I, for my part, had made a discovery, and I needed a collaborator. The pains that afflicted me in these last years had progressed, and I understood that I had little time left to live.

"I needed a person capable of transmitting my discoveries to society. I could have gone to France, but not without previously presenting my resignation and waiting for my resignation to be accepted, waiting for a replacement to arrive. I didn't know if

I could wait that long. Then I found out that you were coming to the colony; I found out that I would have for an assistant the author of The Rolls of Olerón. I beseech you to imagine my relief, my joy, my impatience. I waited confidently; I said to myself: he is a cultured man; solitude and the invincible interest that lies in my discoveries will unite our spirits.

"Then I realized that I could have difficulties. It was essential to carry out experiments that called for an indifference to the laws of men and even to the lives of certain men, or, at the least, that called for a definitive faith in the transcendence of my discoveries. I knew that you were a cultured man; I knew no more. Would you consent to these experiments being made? Would my life be enough to convince you?

"I awaited you, then, with a justifiable anxiety. This anxiety, the concealments which were indispensable and your prejudice against everything on the islands produced a justifiable repugnance on your part. In vain I tried to conquer it. Let me assure you that I now feel a very vivid aversion towards you. Believe me, too, that if I charge you with publishing my discovery and if I leave you part of my estate it is because I have no other solution left.

"De Brinon is not capable of transmitting the invention. He has manual dexterity; I have taught him to work; it would be

worthwhile utilizing him in the first transformations that are made, but De Brinon is a sick man. Let's consider Bordenave: because of his condition as a parolee, Bordenave cannot leave the colony; because of his condition as an orderly, he won't be listened to. I could entrust the invention to some friends I have in France. But, until the letter arrives in France, until they take the essential measures, what will happen? What will happen to the proofs of the validity of my affirmations, to my proofs of flesh and blood? My invention is transcendental--as you yourself will observe--and to ensure its not being lost, I have no other alternative but to leave it to you; I trust that you will have no other alternative than to accept a charge which has been made so involuntarily.

"I thought I could count on a certain length of time; I was soon convinced that I must make an immediate decision. The pains were increasing. I sent you to Cayenne to bring, in addition to the provisions and other things that were running low in the prison, a sedative that would let me forget my illness and enable me to work. Either Mr. Leitao really didn't have the sedative--which is difficult to believe--or you didn't choose to bring it. The spasms grew worse to the point of being intolerable; I decided to take the step myself, the same step which, for moral reasons, was taken with the prisoners Marsillac, Favre and Deloge, the step

which for moral reasons founded on lies that you told me, I had intended you to take. From now on I cease to be a man of science, to be converted into a subject of science; from now on I shall feel no pain, I will hear (forever) the beginning of the first movement of the Symphony in E Minor, by Brahms.

"I am attaching to this letter the explanation of my discoveries, the methods of application, and the disposal of my estate."

Nevers turned the page over; on the following page he read:

DISPOSAL OF ESTATE

"On Devil's Island, 5 days prior to the month of April, 1914... If the French Government consents to either of the two petitions (a and b) which I set forth below, a tenth part of my estate should be turned over, as payment for services rendered, to the naval lieutenant Henri Nevers.

"a) That I, governor of the colony, and the prisoners Marsillac, Deloge and Favre, are to remain quartered in these cells, cared for by the parolee Bordenave, while he lives, and, afterwards, by an appointed caretaker, who is to observe the instructions I am leaving to Bordenave.

"b) That I, governor of the colony, and the prisoners Marsillac, Deloge and Favre, are to be transported by ship, in four

cabins painted as these cells, to France, and that there we are to be situated in a house that is to be built on my property at St. Brieux; this house will have a courtyard identical to that of this pavilion, and four cells identical to those which we now inhabit.

"If either of these petitions should be accepted, the costs are to be paid with the remaining nine-tenths of my estate, which is to be deposited..."

He goes on to give the instructions for the painting of the unobstructed ceiling of the cells (I note: the cells on the island have no roof), recommendations for the caretaker, threats to the government (in the case of its not consenting to either of the petitions; he says emphatically: "responsible in the eyes of posterity..."), and a mysterious final clause: "If after all our deaths (including Bordenave's), there should be a remnant of my remains, this should be delivered to the R.P.A." The meaning of these initials is an enigma which I have not resolved; I entrust it to the inquisitive generosity of the reader.

XLVIII

Nevers declares that a vain sense of shame and ill-contained repentance (because of his conduct with the governor) clouded his

mind and that he had to make a great effort to understand those astonishing pages; he owns that for a quarter of an hour, more or less, he had forgotten to watch the governor; but he declares that his diversion was not so great as to allow for the entrance and exit of a criminal without his knowing it, and I accept this qualification, because the reading in which he was occupied was not passionately engaging, and because, outside of novels, these absolute distractions are not customary. We are disposed, then, to share his opinion that nothing capable of overwhelmingly impressing the senses took place before he finished reading Castel's disposal of estate; what happened afterwards enters the category of events that had a witness; whether the witness lied, was deceived or told the truth is a question that can only be resolved by a logical study of the entirety of his declarations.

Nevers says that he heard a series of smothered cries, that there was a moment when he heard them almost unconsciously, and, another when he began to attend them, that this succession, though precise in his mind, was swift. When he raised his eyes, the governor was in the same position as when Nevers had entered, but with his arms stretched out before him, staggering. The first thing Nevers thought was, incredibly, that he had given him time to change positions and see him, and he asked himself if the governor's face would be so livid and blue from the horror of

seeing him in the cell; he asked himself this, confusing Castel's state with somnambulism and recalling the affirmation that it is dangerous to waken sleepwalkers. He went to assist the governor, though secretly restrained by an inexcusable revulsion at touching him (this revulsion was not related to the governor's appearance but to his condition, or,better said, to the astonishing ignorance which Nevers had about his condition). At that instant he was stopped by a number of shouts from Dreyfus, who called for help. Nevers confesses that he thought: he is finishing off the Priest; afterwards he will say that he died, inexplicably, before his eyes. In that exceedingly short lapse of time he also asked himself if the governor's state could be due to an awareness of the Priest's situation, and how that mysterious communication between the sick men could be produced. His indecision lasted several instants, in those instants the governor collapsed; when Nevers asked him what was the matter with him, he was already dying. Then there was a knocking on the door; he opened it. Dreyfus entered in a turmoil and asked Nevers to go help him: the Priest was in contortions and moaned as if he were dying; Dreyfus didn't know what to do...; at last he fell silent, because he saw the governor's corpse.

"Believe me," Dreyfus shouted after a pause, as if he had reached a conclusion, "believe me," he shouted again, with pathetic glee, "the poor man knows, he knows what's happening."

"There is nothing more to do here," said Nevers, taking hold of Dreyfus by the shoulders and pushing him outside; he knew how the governor's death must have impressed him. "Let's save the Priest."

Then, as Nevers went out pushing a Dreyfus suddenly stripped of his will, there might have occurred another dreadfully wondrous event. Nevers declares that, from behind, a pair of hands (or what he felt to be a pair of hands), softly, without any effort at all, tightened about his neck. He turned around. In the cell there was only the corpse.

XLIX

"We've got to save the Priest," shouted Dreyfus; for the first time impatience glowed in his face.

Nevers was in no hurry. He wasn't even thinking about the Priest. He was thinking about the governor's letter, about the instructions the governor said he had left for him but which he hadn't received. He stopped Dreyfus.

"Mr. Castel says he's left me the explanation of some discoveries that he's made. I only have a letter here and a disposal of estate."

"And that's what he calls an explanation," replied Dreyfus in

a tone of reproach. "We've got to hurry to save the Priest."

"Let's go," Nevers agreed. "But afterwards I'm going to Royal Island and clear up this matter with De Brinon."

Now Dreyfus took him by the arm and forced him to stop; he spoke with passionate conviction:

"Don't be rash."

Nevers made him walk on. They reached the Priest's cell.

"See for yourself," Dreyfus shouted. "See if what I'm saying isn't the truth. He knows what's happened."

Nevers says that, in effect, the Priest seemed agitated: he could scarcely breathe and his eyes seemed out of their orbits.

Nevers motioned Dreyfus not to talk; he explained in a low voice:

"Yes, perhaps he does know. But it would be best not to say anything to him, just in case. I would like to take him to the study."

"To the study?" asked Dreyfus, perplexed. "But you know... we're not supposed to take them out of the cells..."

"The others didn't leave their cells..."

Dreyfus' face once more expressed an enigmatic irony.

"I see," he declared, as if he understood. "I see. You think he'll be safer."

Nevers turned to the Priest:

"Mr. Marsillac," he said in a clear voice, "I would like you to accompany us to the study."

The Priest seemed to hear, not that inoffensive sentence: something frightful. The color of his face changed suddenly, he was trembling (sluggishly).

"Let's carry him," Nevers ordered. "You take hold of him under the arms; I'll get his legs."

The calm determination with which these words were uttered compelled Dreyfus to obey. But when they carried out the Priest, Nevers himself felt a rush of terror. He stammered:

"He's dead."

He was rigid. Dreyfus confirmed:

"He is."

Then Nevers noticed that the Priest was moving obstinately, slowly.

The effort the Priest made to free himself from them began to tire them. Dreyfus looked around him, as if he hoped to find someone there who would save him. When they reached the courtyard, the Priest shouted:

"I'm drowning. I'm drowning."

He articulated slowly, as if slowly counting the syllables of a line of poetry.

"Why are you drowning?" Nevers asked, forgetting that the

Priest was deaf.

"You won't let me swim," answered the Priest.

They set him down.

L

He said to Dreyfus:

"Let's carry him again."

The Priest seemed terrified; splitting the word into syllables, he shouted:

"Monsters."

They lifted him. He protested, rigid, almost immobile. He repeated:

"Monsters."

Nevers asked him:

"Why do you call us monsters?"

"I'm drowning," shouted the Priest. "I'm drowning."

They set him down. Again he undertook his slow pilgrimage towards the cell.

"Tell me why you are drowning," Nevers asked.

The Priest didn't answer.

"Let's take him to the study," said Nevers, with firm resolution.

They carried him. It wasn't easy to carry that rigid body.

The Priest shouted:

"I'm drowning. I'm drowning."

"I won't turn you loose unless you tell me why you're drowning," Nevers replied.

"The still waters," the Priest stammered.

They took him to the rear of the study, to the wall furthest from the courtyard. Immediately the Priest began to walk towards the door, slowly. The terror never left his face.

Nevers was distracted. He was not disturbed when he felt on his neck the pressure of a pair of weak hands, like a phantom. There in the study he had found a portfolio with the title: Explanation of my experience; instructions to Henri Nevers. Inside there were a number of loose notes, that must have been the first draft of the explanation. As he opened that document, he vaguely saw that the Priest was advancing, like a statue, towards the door of the courtyard.

LI

"Unless one thing can symbolize another, science and everyday life will be impossible."

H. Almar, Transmutations (Tr. I, V, 7).

Nevers read:

"1. -- Life and the world, in the vision of an ordinary man: We live upon stones and clay, among woods with green leaves, devouring fragments of the universe that includes us, among flames, among fluids, combining resonances, protecting the past and the future, suffering, thermal, ritualistic, dreaming that we dream, irritated, smelling, touching, among men, in an insatiable garden which our fall will abolish.

"The vision of physics: An opaque and interminable extension of protons and electrons, radiating in the void; or, perhaps, (universal phantom) the aggregate of radiations from a body of matter which does not exist.

"As in cryptography, in the differences in atomic movements man interprets: there: the taste of a drop of sea-water, there: the wind on dark causeways, there: the hardness of burnished metal, there: the fragrance of clover in the hecatomb of summer, here: your face. If there were a change in the movements of the atoms this lily would be, perhaps, the crash of water that plunges over the dam, or a handful of giraffes, or the glory of late afternoon. A change in the adjustment of my senses would make of the four walls of this cell perhaps the shadow of the apple tree of the first orchard.

"How do you know that the bird which crosses the air is not an immense world of voluptuousness, forbidden to your five senses?"

William Blake

"2. We admit the world as our senses reveal it to us. If we were color-blind, we would be ignorant of some color. If we had been born blind we would be ignorant of color. There are ultraviolet colors, which we do not perceive. There are whistles that dogs hear, which are inaudible to man. If dogs were to talk, their language would perhaps be poor in visual indications, but it would have terms to denote shadings of smell of which we are ignorant. A special sense notifies the fish of changes in water pressure and of the presence of rocks or other great obstacles, when they swim at night. We do not understand the orientation of migratory birds, nor what sense attracts butterflies let loose at distant points in a vast city, and those which love unites. All the animal species which the world harbors live in distinct worlds. If we look through a microscope, reality changes: the known world disappears and this fragment of matter, which to our eye is one and motionless, is plural, it moves. It cannot be affirmed that one image is more true than the other; both are interpretations of similar machines, differently gauged. Our world is a synthesis furnished by the

senses; the microscope furnishes another. If the senses should change, the image would change. We can describe the world as a mass of symbols capable of expressing anything; merely by altering the gauges of our senses, we may read another word in this natural alphabet.

"3. -- The nerve cells in man are diverse in accordance with the diversity of the senses. But there are animals that see, that smell, that touch, that hear with a single organ. Everything begins with the evolution of a cell. A noir, E blanc, I rouge... is not an absurd affirmation; it is an improvised response. The correspondence between sounds and colors exists. The essential unity of the senses and images, representations or data, exists, and it is an alchemy capable of converting pain into pleasure and the walls of a prison into plains of freedom.

"4. -- Prison walls into plains of freedom:

"This prison in which I write, these sheets of paper, are only prison and paper for a determinate sensory gauge (that of man). If I change this gauge, this will become a chaos wherein everything, in accordance with certain rules, may be imagined, or created.

"Clarification:

"We see at a distance a determinate rectangle, and we believe that we see (and we know that it is) a cylindrical tower. William James states that the world is presented to us as an indeterminate

flux, a sort of compact current, a vast inundation, where there are neither persons nor objects, but, confusedly, smells, colors, sounds, contacts, pains, temperatures... The essence of mental activity consists of restraining and separating that which is a continuous whole and grouping it, usefully, into objects, persons, animals, vegetables... As literal subjects of James, my patients will face that renovated mass, and in it they will have to remodel the world. They will give meaning once again to the aggregate of symbols. Life, preferences, my direction, will preside over this quest for lost objects, for objects which they themselves will invent in chaos.

"5. -- If the patients, once they are transformed, face the world freely, the interpretation they will give to each object would escape my forecast. There is, perhaps, an order in the universe; there is, certainly, an order in my operations... But I do not know if my life will last long enough to investigate the criterion of interpretation.

"A primary point was, then, to present the patients with a reality which would not abound in elements. Enumerate the elements of a common dwelling: chairs, tables, beds, curtains, rugs, lamps... At once the interpretations of a chair seemed to me an exhausting problem.

"While I was thinking about this I commented: it would be

ironic to give them back their freedom in their own cells. I soon became convinced that I had found the solution to my difficulties. The cells are bare chambers, and to the transformed men they can be gardens of the most boundless freedom.

"I thought: to the patients, the cells should be beautiful and desirable places. They can't be their houses of birth, because my men will not see the infinity of objects that were there in their homes; for the same reason, they cannot be a great city. They can be an island. The fable of Robinson Crusoe is one of the first myths of human illusion, and Works and Days has furthered the tradition of the Islands of the Blessed: so ancient are they in the dreams of men.

"My problems were, then: to prepare the cells in such a way that the patients would perceive them and live in them as islands; to prepare the patients in such a way that they would disinter an island from the tumultuous collection of colors, forms and perspectives which, for them, would be the cells. The life of each subject could have an influence in these interpretations. Since in each of them I would effect equal changes, and since I would present them with equal realities, in order to avoid unpleasant surprises in the interpretations it suited my purposes to select men whose lives were not too dissimilar. But circumstances and combinations are so various that looking for lives which are not too dissimilar is

possibly a vain inquiry; nevertheless, the fact that all the patients had spent more than ten years, the last ones, in a common prison, seemed to me quite promising.

"I considered, too, that if I dedicated the two or three months prior to the operation to preparing, to educating the patients, the risk of unexpected interpretations would diminish. I awakened in my men the hope of freedom; I replaced the desire to return home and to cities with the ancient dream of the solitary island. Like children, daily they asked me to repeat the description of that island where they would be happy. They came to imagine it vividly, obsessively."

Nevers' note: I spoke to Favre and Deloge during that preparatory period. Undoubtedly he had ordered them not to talk to anyone so they would keep the obsession pure, and to avoid people on the outside from drawing suspicious and erroneous conclusions (like my own).

"6. -- Program: to operate on the brain and along the nerves. To operate on the tissues (epidermis, eye, etc.). To operate on the locomotive system.

"I reduced the velocity of their movements; they were more laborious. In crossing the cell they should make the effort of

crossing an island."

Nevers' note: This explains the Priest's rigidity, when we lifted him to take him to the study.

To protect them from noise, which could communicate a contradictory reality (our own), I combined their hearing with their sense of thouch. The person or object producing sound must touch the patient in order to be heard."

Nevers' note: That is why Castel didn't hear me; that is why they heard Dreyfus at times; that is why the Priest heard me when we took him to the study.

"These combinations of senses are often produced in pathological states and, even, in states of health. Those most frequent are the syntheses of auditory sensations and chromatic sensations (once again: A noir, E blanc...) or of auditory or chromatic sensations and gustatory sensations.

"I modified their visual system. They see as if through far-sighted lenses, put on in reverse. The surface of a prison cell can seem to them like a small island.

"In order for the walls of the cell to disappear (visually),

it was indispensable to change the dimensional system in my men. I copy a paragraph from the treatise of Dr. Pelcari: 'There are parts of the membrane of the eye especially sensitive to each color' there are cells which analyze colors; others combine the chromatic and the luminous sensations; the neurons of the center of the retina permit the appreciation of space; the chromatic system and the dimensional system have their point of departure in the eye, in cells originally identical and later diversified.' Concerning this point, see also Suárez de Mendoza, Marinesco, Douney. I resolved the problem by combining the chromatic cells with the spatial. In my patients, the cells which are sensitive to color percieve space. The three essential colors gave three dimensions: blue, width; yellow, length; red,height."

Nevers' note: Would a person who is color-blind be in a two-dimensional world? A purely color-blind person--who sees one color only--in a one-dimensional world?

"A vertical wall, painted blue and yellow, would appear as a beach; with slight red touches, like a sea (the red would give the height of the waves).

"With diverse combinations of the three colors I organized, in the cells, the topography of the islands. In a second preparatory

period, immediately following the operation, I confronted the patients with those combinations. They were born, once again, to the world. They had to learn to interpret it. I guided them to see here: a knoll, here: a sea, here: an arm of water, here: a beach, here: an outcrop of rocks, here: a forest...

"My patients lost the faculty of seeing colors as colors.

"I combined sight with hearing. Other men are able to hear, more or less well, through a solid body. The transformed men can see through a body which is solid and opaque. I hereby perfected the visual extinction of the limits of the cell.

"The first of my operations induced an unforeseen association between tactile, visual and auditory nerves; as a consequence, the patient could touch at a distance (as we hear at a distance and through solids, as we see at a distance and through transparent solids).

"Due to a lack of time for comparison and resolution I did not introduce any changes in my operations; I always repeated the first one: all my patients possess this faculty (possibly beneficial) of touching at a distance."

Nevers' note: 1) <u>This explains the tenuous pressures, as if from soft hands, on my neck. 2) When they touch through a wall</u>,

do they feel the wall painfully, or as we feel a gas or a liquid, or don't they feel it at all? Although they require the excitation of the tactile centers in order to hear, I suppose that they are anesthetized in some way; if they weren't, their sight and touch would give them contradictory information.

"7. -- Panoramic vision of the man who is in the central island, or cell: bordering the island are the beaches (yellow and blue fringe, almost totally lacking in red); then the arms of the sea (the walls); then, the other islands, each with their respective settler, and their beaches; then, on to the horizon, islands surrounded by arms of the sea (the former islands, reflected in the mirrors on the surrounding walls).

"Vision of the inhabitants of the surrounding islands: on three sides they see the other islands; in the mirrors, their own island, the other islands and the islands the mirrors reflect from the other islands."

Nevers' note: The floor of the courtyard is painted like the walls of the central cell. This explains the fear of drowning, expressed by the Priest. Castel surrounded the islands by this apparent sea, so the transformed men would not undertake trips to regions of unforeseeable interpretation. The mirrors of the outer

cells propose known images, which keep the inconceivable recesses of the courtyard at a distance.

"8. -- Another possibility: To change the emotions (as they are changed by tonics or opium). The world thus achieved would have seemed like a drunkenness, heaven or love: intensities incompatible with intelligence.

"Another: To cure the insane: to change their perception of reality, in such a way as to adjust it to their madness.

"Another (for future investigators): In men whose personality and memory are horrible, to transform not only their perception of the world but also that of the ego; to achieve, through changes in the senses and through an adequate psychological preparation, the interruption of the self and the birth of a new individual within the previous one. But, as the desire for immortality is, almost always, for personal immortality, I did not attempt the experience.

"The world..."

(Here Castel's notes break off).

NEVERS' NOTES:

I suspect that to avoid unforeseeable interpretations, Castel

decided the transformed men should be spoken to, fed and washed while asleep (carrying out orders and even having brief dialogues without waking is a custom easily come by, spontaneous in many adults and in almost all children).

Alteration of the hours of waking and those of sleep: It was convenient that the cells had no roof; it was convenient that the diurnal light reached the transformed men. The interpretation of the sky would have been an arduous problem. The changing of the hours obviates these difficulties.

The animals on Devil's Island: I recall the old horse, that Favre thought was crazy. He didn't recognize the grass. Undoubtedly he was one of the first of Castel's transformations; undoubtedly the animals that Castel had on Devil's Island--all mad, according to Favre--served for experiments.

Castel's transformation. With no great difficulty he would have seen the cells as islands and the blotches of paint as beaches, seas or knolls: for months he thought of some of them as representations of the others (when he conceived of the painting of the cells, when he carried it out, when he prepared the transformed men).

In my opinion, the governor was certain of participating in the dream of the islands, which he had instilled in others, but he was afraid of losing forever our vision of reality; at some moment he was afraid. That is why he repeated the letters of the alphabet

and wanted to draw them out; that is why he tried to remember that the spear (a yellow sheet of paper, that is to say, a yellow blob, that is to say, a length) was also, a piece of paper, to remember that the medallion (a blue pencil, that is to say, a blob of blue, that is to say, a width) was, also, a pencil, to remember that the frightful still waters that surrounded him were, also, cement.

As for his enigmatic assertion that he would no longer feel pain, but that he would hear, forever, the beginnings of the first movement of Brahms' Symphony in E minor, I see only one possible explanation: that the governor had achieved, or attempted, the transmutation of the sensations of his pain into auditory sensations. But since no pain always presents itself in the same form, we will never know what music Castel is hearing.

How do the transformed men see each other? Maybe like jumbled and mobile perspectives, with no similarity to the human form; more likely, as men (as they look at their own bodies they encounter the same perspectives which they see in the others; it is not impossible that those perspectives take, for them, the human form--as others took the form of islands, knolls, seas, beaches--but neither is it impossible that those perspectives--seen, merely, as such--may be the only human image which they now know).

The Priest did not see men; he saw monsters. He found himself on an island, and it was on an island, in the Pacific, where he

had had his most vivid experience, the horrendous dream that was the key to his soul: in the madness brought about by the sun and hunger and thirst, he had seen the seagulls that relentlessly pursued him and his companions in agony as a single monster, ramified and fragmentary.

This explains the living tableaux, the sluggish ballet, the relative postures of the transformed men. They saw each other through the walls. The Priest lay in ambush. In these Islands of the Blessed, the Priest had found his ship-wrecked island, he had engaged in his central delirium, the hunting of monsters.

They touched at a distance and through the walls. The Priest strangled them. They saw themselves girdled by the Priest's hands and, through the association of ideas, they suffered strangulation. All fantasy is real for him who believes in it.

On my neck, the pressure of his hands was soft. My movements were quick for him; I didn't give him time...

Even in Dreyfus and in me (who weren't painted) he saw monsters. If he had seen himself, maybe he wouldn't have interpreted the rest of us as monsters. But he was far-sighted, and without glasses he couldn't see his own body.

Why did Castel repeat the monsters are men? Because he had repeated it to the Priest, trying to convince him? Or because he himself had been afraid, for the time when he would be in his

archipelago, of seeing himself surrounded by monsters?

Of Julien, one of the "sick men" on Devil's Island, I didn't find a trace. Like all discoveries, Castel's invention exacts, and will exact, victims. It doesn't even matter where it all comes to. What matters is the exalted, peaceful, joyous work of human intelligence.

Day is breaking. I just heard (I think) a shot. I'll have a look. Then I will come back...

LII

Fragments of a letter from the naval lieutenant Xavier Brissac, dated in the Isles du Salut, 3rd of May.

Pierre has deluded Irene; he accuses me of the theft of the documents, he slanders me... I seem to recall it was the same accusation which brought about Henri's exile. Nevertheless, Pierre will order my return. He is not unaware that the copies of Henri's correspondence fell into my hands.

I am glad that Henri's valor demonstrated during the revolt has been rewarded with this posthumous decoration. He deserved it, absolutely, due to our family's influence and due to the account sent to you by Bordenave, alias Dreyfus.

But I will not talk now of his eventual responsibility in the prisoners' conspiracy. I assure you, however, that the investigation is progressing. The keys to the armory are in his possession; the rebels did not force the door in order to enter...

Regarding Henri we still have contradicting reports. Some prisoners declare that he was killed by Marsillac, alias the Priest; others, captured in the Guianas, said he fled in a rowboat, with the pretext of pursuing De Brinon. I must confess that I found a Mr. Bernheim, a prisoner, the most determined and useful of the informants.

I am sending you some objects that belonged to Henri. Among them, a golden mermaid, miraculously saved from the greed of the prisoners.

The last events affected Bordenave. At times I ask myself (recalling the secretary's idiocy) if Castel might not have "transformed" him... At any rate, the man doesn't seem completely normal... I inspire hatred and terror in him. I understand that these sentiments are due to a lack of equilibrium on the part of Bordenave, that my part in them is minimal. I see them, however, as signs of an adverse judgement.

I know that he sent you an envelope with Henri's last letter. I know that because of reports from the prisoners. Do not imagine that he consulted me...

Now he has disappeared. I have ordered that he be apprehended: he is a dangerous criminal. Besides, I hear rumors that it is his intention to accuse me, to declare that I killed Henri. Pitifully, I think that that absurd lie could reach Saint-Martin and be employed by Pierre to torture my beloved Irene, to reproach her for her passion for me...

Etcetera.

T H E F R E A K

(FABLE OF LOVE

AND

THE OLD LADIES)

(Madrid, Spain 1944)

by

Rafael Alberti

Translated from the Spanish by

MEREDYTH SAVAGE

CHARACTERS IN THE FIRST ACT

		Alternate Names*
GORGO	(Góhr-go)	
UVA	(Óo-vah)	BITTERBERRY
AULAGA	(Ah-oo-láh-gah)	THISTLEBUSH
ALTEA	(Ahl-táy-ah)	MARSHMALLOW
BIÓN	(Bee-yóne)	BION
ÁNIMAS	(Áh-nee-mahs)	VESPER

* The alternate names are rough equivalents of the Spanish names of the characters; i.e., uva means grape, and also berry (such as dogberry, gooseberry, etc. as the case may be) -- always a fruit with negative characteristics. -- Translator's note.

The fable takes place in any year between 1874 and 1944 and in one of those fanatical fallen towns among the sierras of Southern Spain, full of Moslem recollections.

A C T O N E

Front room in a wealthy house. Side doors. Two old women, UVA and AULAGA are fussing over BIÓN, a redskinned beggar, standing on a tall stool at the center of the stage. UVA, on her knees, is mending one of the legs of his trousers. AULAGA, from high up on a chair, is combing and cutting his thick beard. It is night. Silence.

UVA: Aulaga

AULAGA: Uva.

UVA: Careful you don't forget what you're doing.

AULAGA: Why do you keep saying that?

UVA: I'm saying it now because of the beard.

BIÓN: You stuck me with the needle, you woodpecker!

UVA: Be quiet! You hear?

(Silence, halting their labors for an instant.)

UVA: Gorgo's taking a long time getting back.

AULAGA: She woke up yellow in the face this morning. All of a sudden.

UVA: And I might say that her teeth were chattering.

AULAGA: And that a bolt of lightning was about to burst from one of her eyes.

BIÓN: An eyebrow must have gotten stuck.

UVA: I said to keep quiet, or I'll baste your leg to your pants.

BIÓN: An eyebrow, an eyebrow!

AULAGA (cutting off his beard with one great clip of the scissors.): There! For being a busybody and a babbler you'll have to do without a beard.

BIÓN (furious): Doña Aulaga! But Doña Aulaga!

AULAGA" Chsst! Quiet, quiet, she's coming back.

(There are heard the dry taps of a walking cane on the floor. Illuminated by a small candlestick, Doña GORGO appears in the doorway at the rear. She is an old woman and is wearing the beard of a man. Her countenance is gloomy.)

UVA, AULAGA and BIÓN (crossing themselves): Cross, cross, cross!

GORGO (drawing herself up): Roost full of falcons! Nest of gnats! Sheepskinners! Let those of this house tremble from this day! Those of you who know me and those who have never seen me! Those who move about close by, under the point of this stick,

and those who are far away! Woe to those who are far away! Now I begin to be Gorgo. (She extinguishes the candle. Shouting) Ánimas. Ánimas. Ánimas!

BIÓN (frightened, from the top of the stool): Gorgo, Gorgo, Doña Gorgo!

AULAGA and UVA (terrified):

Holy cross,
cross of power,
I call on you
for my death's hour!

BIÓN: But how can it be that my mistress appears with my beard?

GORGO (raising her cane): With your beard, Bión? With your lice-infested beard? Out, out of here, disturber of virgins!

BIÓN (falling from the stool, supplicant):

Cry, pesky fly;
crickets for your feet
and a bridle for your teeth!

GORGO: Ánimas, Ánimas, Ánimas!

(ÁNIMAS enters, falling to her knees.)

ÁNIMAS: Dead rat, dead cat,
deliver me God,
from the boiling vat!

GORGO: Throw that rag with bristles, that indecent tatter into the garbage.

BIÓN: But my beard, Doña Gorgo, my bristles... that honored this face and this humble apparel!

GORGO: In the garbage, Ánimas! Out into the street! Over the balcony or down the hollow of the staircase! Quickly! Enough of charms and incantations--your mistress commands it.

BIÓN: My beard'. My beard! Bión will not leave alive without his beard! My mistletoe!

GORGO: Out, out of here! (Pushing him with ÁNIMAS towards the side door at the left.) Nevermore will there be in this house a beard other than mine. (Throwing the beggar's beard out the door with a gesture of disgust.) Oof! The men of this house are done with forever! (She slams the door shut.) Just like that. (She sits, depressed.) God! God's God! Why did you choose to warn me? No, I didn't deserve it. You have made me a victim of my own good faith. I, I myself stuck this bandage over my eyes. (While UVA weeps, softly, in an armchair, AULAGA stands absent-minded, lost in clouds, at one extreme of the room.) You have punished my blindness, my good faith, my lack of domination, of energy. Because you thought me authoritarian, hard, capable of stopping a bull with a single syllable, of raising a wall with only a glance. But until

today when you wounded me, when you struck me in the pupils of my eyes, shook me like an olive tree, the whip of command did not crackle in my blood, nor did the thunder of power burst forth on my tongue. God! God's God! (Pulling off the beard and looking at it.) Thank you for this symbol, for this emblem of authority that you have hung on my face and that I without knowing its special gift have kept since so long ago.

UVA: (interrupting her sobbing): Ay, his beard, his was so beautiful, soft and supple as a willow tree!

GORGO: You're not suggesting that mine is like the beard on the ear of a cornstalk.

UVA: But his beard was read. Ay!

GORGO: And mine is a saint's... A relic, Uva, a relic... The soft beard of one who flew from this world.

UVA (crying again): I want his, Bion's.

GORGO: Quills like that hog's sprout like that! (Snaps her fingers.)

UVA: Quills? Nettles, thistles, needles of a prickly pear, that's what the beard you're wearing looks like.

GORGO: Do not criticize of find fault with one who is beloved and dead...one who was your friend.

UVA: A friend of mine, with a beard? Close up I have never seen a beard other than Bión's.

GORGO: A friend of yours and Aulaga's. Of the both of you. (She puts on the beard again and starts promenading about the room.) Well, you, Aulaga. Look. But what is the matter with you? Come on! Are you so afraid of me? Do I terrify you so much now? (Shouting at her.) Aulaga! Don't you hear me? Wake up. God! God's God!

AULAGA (far away, as if asleep): Gorgo, Gorgo, Gorgoja... But is that you, Gorgoja?

GORGO: No, no! Look at me carefully. You're blind. Open your eyes. (Shaking her.) That's it, wide. Like a cow. (She comes and goes in front of AULAGA, in the manner of a man. I am no longer Gorgo now. Think, think. (Lifting UVA's face.) And you too, Uva. You have to know him, you haven't forgotten him. Look, look. (She sits, still in the style of a man,) crossing her legs and in a pensive manner.)
"The olive grove, the olive grove! Those miserable fools are robbing me. They're ruining. me. I can't take it any more, I can't! I'm going to explode!" Who suffered, who despaired like that? (She walks about, her hands on her shoulders, hopping about and saying quickly) "Sancta Maria, Sancta Dei Genitrix, Sancta Virgo Virginum, Mater Christi, Mater Divinae.

Gratiae..." Uva, Aulaga, remember.

AULAGA (with astonishment): Gorgo, Gorgo!

GORGO: More, more, more!

UVA: I see now, I see, Gorgo.

GORGO: Think, my friends... Look at me closely now... Now guess... (Sitting and weakening her voice.) Daughter, little daughter, Altea... (As if dying and groping about for someone.) Come... I'm going away... away... with your mother... But you have Gorgo there... (Choking) Gorgo... (As she drops her head as if dead and lets go of the cane) Obey her.

AULAGA and UVA: Don Dino! Don dino! Don dino!

ÁNIMAS: But what is this? Ay! What is it that my eyes see, blind fool that I am? But--it is my master, my poor lord Don Dino, just as he was when the angels took him away! (Kneeling) Master, mistress, my lord, my lady!

(UVA and AULAGA, on either side of her in tones of a responsory)

UVA: He was a firm staff of virtues.

AULAGA: Alert and watchful eye.

UVA: He was a stern and concentrated frown.

AULAGA: Just and powerful arm.

UVA: Kindness.

AULAGA: Love

UVA: Laughter.

AULAGA: Light.

ÁNIMAS: Don Dino! My benefactor! Father of my little mistress! I will run and bring her, it will give her great joy to kiss him! (She runs out, shouting) Altea! Altea!

GORGO (reviving, with a malicious little grunt.): Yes, yes, Don Dino, Din, Dinito, my dead brother. The very same, exactly. How clearly you have recognized him! Of course! It is his very beard! Not a hair less or a hair more! As he had it on the morning of his death. (She takes it off.) But now I will be your Gorgo again. Don't be afraid of me, my daughters. (Again with a half-mocking little grunt) ...Your Gorgo, your Gorgoja, your Gorgojilla, the only friend you have in the town,in this evil-minded town of lustful men... violators of innocence ...drunkards! Ha, ha!

UVA:(while GORGO brings a bottle and three glasses): Violators? Lustful men? (With malicious intent) You aren't saying that because of that poor fool of a pig... whom you also protect.

GORGO: Come, Uva, my little grape, my little catkin, my sweet little dogberry... A touch of rabies...? A little glass of brandy, and holy peace. Alright? It's good for gas pains. (Offering it to AULAGA) Aulaga?

AULAGE: No, Gorgojilla, no. You know how it makes my skin bristle up, how I turn into a porcupine.

UVA: Well, if Aulaga isn't drinking, I won't either.

GORGO: Are you calling me a drunkard, my fellow godmothers? When your blood chills you in the night... Because I've suddenly noticed that it's going cold in my veins. And I need fire, daughters, flame... and smoke, smoke...

AULAGE: I'll drink, Gorgoja.

UVA: Well, I won't right now.

GORGO (filling AULAGA's glass from her own and sitting) Thank you, Aulaga, (The two of them drink.)

AULAGA: It's that one's fault that black quills are starting to sprout from my pores.

UVA: That one? I am not that one.

GORGO: That one, that one, that one.

UVA: Uva.

GORGO: Uveal wart.

UVA: Jealous women.

AULAGA and GORGO: Ha, ha!

UVA: She did it purposely, she wanted to.

AULAGA: What venom are you gargling up?

UVA: ...because he was bursting you open...

AULAGA: Me, me?

UVA: ...because he drove you wild with rapture, he swept you away, the two of you.

GORGO: Me? That rag-picker? That foul piglet?

UVA: I don't know if he swept you like this one here.

AULAGA: This one, this one? My name is Aulaga.

UVA: This one.

GORGO: Uva.

UVA: ...that's why, pretending to be the absent-minded one, you cut off his beard with one snip of the scissors... (to GORGO) and you threw him out of the house.

GORGO (threatening): Yes, yes, And let him dare ever again to stamp his hoof in that doorway! Let him try!

UVA (tearfully): Ay, so good, so unfortunate, so beautiful!

GORGO (with feigned affection): But, Uva, my poor little goose-grape, my gooseberry, my little goat's grape, what do you know about that?

UVA: You're jealous... the two of you... because he preferred me. I won't say he loved me more... But he preferred me, that he did.

AULAGA: Preferred you? Loved you? Not you, not me, not Gorgo. The three of us, the three of us the same!

UVA: But I have been the most self-denying. Who dared to delouse him when we started protecting him?

GORGO: Delouse him? Well, what about the fingernails he had? Who clipped them to the quick?

AULAGA: With a chisel I had to break off the clay from one of his ears. And, afterwards, I've always been his barber. A worthy task, you won't deny that.

UVA: Yes, but my sacrifices, my sacrifices... If you knew! I suffer, I suffer for him more than Gorgo and you.

GORGO (the glass trembling on her lips): More than Aulaga and I! Look at the saint. The martyr. The sublime one!

AULAGA: So, you're suffering for Bión more than all of us together!

GORGO: That means, Uvita, that you... Why, that you sacrifice yourself for him so much behind my back!

AULAGA: ...that you see him, that you have seen him without Gorgo or me knowing anything about it.

GORGO: Confess, Uva. Speak.

AULAGA: Is the little girl afraid?

GORGO: Answer. You have seen him. Now I am beginning to understand your whimpering and that madness about his hair.

AULAGA: Who would have guessed, Uva! (Getting up) Who, who,who!

GORGO (shouting round about UVA): You've seen him. You've seen him. You've seen him. (Stopping herself, drily.) And what else, Uva? And what else?

AULAGA (turning about in the opposite way): She saw him! She saw him!

GORGO: And where, where, where?

AULAGA: Doggy dogberry!

GORGO: It wasn't at your house because that would have been too...

AULAGA: Greedy!

GORGO: In the dining room for the poor... No, no! I have the key in my pocket... I'm the last to leave... (More slowly and discouraged) In this house... in the garden... in the tower... (Pause) Ah! God! God's God! The coach house! Aulaga, the coach house! There, there! Through the fallen door that opens into the fields! Bark, Uva, confess! Howl, yes, go on, howl that it's true!

UVA: No, no!

AULAGA: Spill out the truth, spurt it out.

UVA: Not even in my thoughts. Never! I am a flower, a flower!

GORGO: Flower, flower! In the dung heaps on the stable floor!

UVA: Rose without stain! Purest nard!

AULAGA: Beast, mountain wild cat! I'm going to scratch your eyes out, liar! Run! I'm going to twist your hair off, pull it from its roots.

(UVA flees about the room, pursued by AULAGA and GORGO.)

UVA: I don't have a nephew, Aulaga, Aulaga!

GORGO (raising the stick): Bring that face of your over here. You'll see what sparks fly from the bone.

UVA: I have no-one! Alone! I'm alone!

GORGO: Dogberry! Cattail!

AULAGA: Run!

UVA: Kill me! Kill me! Furies, furies! Harpies!

(ANIMAS enters, stopping the three panting old women.)

GORGO (in a soft voice): What do you want, Ánimas? How is Altea?

ÁNIMAS: What, what do I want, madam? (Excited) You, yes, yes, you, you know... Who could know better than you? You should have told me.

GORGO: Why have you been gone so long, Ánimas?

ÁNIMAS: Madam, oh my mistress! When one is crying inside a tower the weeping can't be heard in the gardens.

GORGO: But he who seeks in earnest does not overlook a single corner.

ÁNIMAS: And so I did, my lady, until I found her... I mean, until I heard her... because I only heard her... Ay, my poor little child!

GORGO: You heard her? Is it true that you heard her? Did she dare, perhaps, to speak to you?

ÁNIMAS: Madam, only you know what is happening. But if you are good, compassionate, if you don't have your heart sewn up with a thread of steel, see to it that your niece, that that precious child of mine, does not lose such beautiful eyes.

GORGO (sadly, but looking in subdued mockery at UVA and AULAGA): Beautiful! Beautiful! This is the first time they have truly wept.

ÁNIMAS: They will be left without light, blind, locked in that dark tower.

(In a brief pause on the part of ÁNIMAS, AULAGA and UVA stare at one another openly.)

GORGO (her head buried): Blind... in a tower..., blind..., blind...

ÁNIMAS: I who brought her up, I who sustained her in her first steps, who placed the first flower in her hair, who took her to the mountain of the Crosses, who taught her how to graft rose bushes and to make toothpicks from the stems of jasmines. ... Out of compassion, lady, lift this penalty and free her from that prison where you have locked her away from me, for I swear that Animas will restore her to her love, to the obedience, the respect that she owes you!

GORGO: Her love... her love...

ÁNIMAS: Only yours will open the door.

GORGO: I had thought, Ánimas... But, no... Here are the keys.

ÁNIMAS (kissing her): Oh, madam!

(She starts to leave.)

GORGO: Release her and bring her to me immediately. I have some

things to talk to her about. (ÁNIMAS exits. GORGO turns, gravely, to UVA and AULAGA, but suddenly she runs toward the door, shouting) Ánimas! Ánimas! (ÁNIMAS reappears, fearful.) Dress Altea in her best dress, that one we all embroidered between us when she was queen of the vintage.

ÁNIMAS: I will dress her, madam.

(She goes. UVA sits again, grievous, with signs of weeping, and AULAGA stands as if in a trance at one extreme of the stage.)

GORGO: Love, for me! Love! Did you hear, my girls? Come, UVA don't cry any more about that. It is I who should be dying now. Gorgojilla loves you and forgives you, and so does Aulaga. Aulaga, Uva: come with me to the center of the room. I need you. What would I do in this time of crisis without my fellow godmothers? My niece is going to come. Now you will know everything. God! God's God!

AULAGA: Gorgo. Gorgo. I am listening. I'm waiting...

UVA: What did you say? What have you just said?

GORGO: Men!

UVA: Don't start again, Gorgo. I know, I already know enough.

GORGO: Don't leave me. Support me. Help me. I need to be strong, to have the word and manner of a man, to be my dead brother, uncle and father at once for this horrible cup that awaits me.

AULAGA: Men!

UVA: Love! Love!

GORGO: The mirror. Run bring it here. To the center of the room. I want to cast her in its depths. I want her to bid farewell before sinking her in the memory of this moment. (She draws back, moving like a sleepwalker, and looks at her reflection, while AULAGA and UVA move slowly around the mirror.)

Who is it I see there within?
What do you give back to me, glass?
Give me back what I've been.
What yesterday your glass did spy
(what do you give back to me, glass?)
in your glass is now lost from my eye.
Who is it I see there within,
dead there, glass, if not I?

And now, in front, three chairs. So. (Moving a few steps.) One, two, three, four, five... At a good distance from the mirror, so we can see all of her. Let's see, sit down, Aulaga. And you, Uva, to my left. (She sits between the two of them.)

AULAGA: This seems like a holy tribunal, Gorgo.

GORGO: No more, no less, my child. The day of judgement. A dead man has appointed me judge of this sad cause, on which I wish

to pass sentence with your help. Look at me. (She puts on the beard.) Will I be able to play my part worthily? (Looking heavenward.) My brother, I will only make use of them if I feel my energy failing. (She disappears for an instant to the right, returning without the beard.) Ah, Uva! Put that large armchair next to the mirror. And you, Aulaga, draw up that little table. That's it. Ah, no! (Going to look.) The little silver bell is missing. Good, there. Sit close to me. Now, now we can call her. (Ringing the bell) Animas!

(Accompanied by ÁNIMAS, ALTEA enters dressed in a luxurious native costume and crowned with vine branches. ÁNIMAS, not daring to advance, remains in the doorway.)

ALTEA (kneeling before GORGO): Forgive me, aunt, forgive me if because of my short years I have caused you some suffering, and have fallen short of the obedience, the love, the respect I have always had for you.

GORGO (sweetly): Rise, my child. An old woman has nothing to forgive the queen of beauty.

ALTEA: Thank you, aunt.

GORGO (after motioning ÁNIMAS to go): You are beautiful, Altea. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror, have you seen yourself once again as the goddess of the fields?

ALTEA (with emotion and bewilderment): Aunt!

GORGO: Come, look at yourself, child. We old women want to enjoy your youth with you. This glass is going to receive you proudly.

ALTEA (indecisive, confused): I only want to please you...

GORGO: Uva, Aulaga... Calm yourself, Altea... Take her to the mirror for her recreation.

UVA (taking her by the hand): Child!

AULAGA (by the shoulders): What a woman already! She's glorious.

UVA: You were so little...

ALTEA: I know that you love me... almost as much as Aunt Gorgo.

UVA: You are firm, child

AULAGA: Round and fresh, like a golden jar.

(ALTEA smiles sweetly.)

GORGO: Don't be humble, little niece, not with that look of a strong fresh tree about you. Be happy and take pride as I do in you. Laugh. (Getting up and going to her). No, you're not sad. Enjoy yourself, glory in your beauty, in the flower of your years. (ALTEA laughs faintly.) More, more. Come, you offend no one by delighting in your beauty. Look at yourself carefully in the mirror. See? Who is more submissive, more pleasing, obedient? The mirror adds nothing nor does it take away. It gives you back only what is yours. (Raising ALTEA's arms).

Look at these arms, child. Do you think the glass lies? Look at those eyes... what cheeks... what lips... what a cluster of hair... (She lets out ALTEA's hair.) Touch it, Aulaga, Uva.

ALTEA (sighing): Oh!

UVA (nostalgic): What softness! How it glows!

GORGO: You can boast of your shoulders... And what a throat, child! Have you seen a neck like yours in the towns of this land? No, don't lower your eyes... I tell you you're not to be modest. Have I brought you up to be like that? You alone are mistress of what is there inside. (She points to the glass.)

ALTEA: I never really looked at myself, auntie.

GORGO: Little liar. Are you going to deceive me now? Come on!

ALTEA: I am content to please you.

GORGO: Please me... please me... Well who else, my treasure? If you had someone other than me... But he closed his eyes, he left us one day, when the flower had scarcely appeared on the branch. Now you have opened, child. And I am here to care for you. I am something like your gardener. It is only me you have to thank.

ALTEA: Yes, yes, Aunt.

GORGO: But touch her, Aulaga. What shapeliness!

UVA: And what shoulders! My hand falls asleep on them...

GORGO: Oh, and this bust, my friends? Once I read that magnolias...

But not here... Lunar lemons... What fragrance! All of you is a garden.

ALTEA (as UVA sniffs her skin): It is the fresh lavender that Ánimas puts in my clothing.

GORGO: The lavender of Ánimas! The aroma of your blood, of your flower's flesh. And if that glass should see... But such things, my niece, are secrets reserved for more intimate mirrors.

ALTEA (bashful): Auntie, for the love of God, Aulaga and Uva are here.

UVA: Don't be vain; we too have had our May, you know.

GORGO: Look, she's turned red as a poppy.

ALTEA: I'll die if I cannot merit your forgiveness.

GORGO: Come now, be happy, Altea. Look, I'm not angry. What it is is... plainly... being your father without being him... Educating you... Taking care of you... Trying to see that you do only what would have pleased him, made him proud...

ALTEA: I never meant to do you harm, Aunt Gorgo.

GORGO: Do me harm! And what makes you think that, my child? I would like to know. Sit down. (ALTEA sits. After looking at her for a moment.) Pity it is not a throne! What you really deserve. But I'm going to sit down too. Do me harm! (AULAGA and UVA sit down with her.) Of course if the shutters didn't

overlook the street, surely, niece, it wouldn't have occurred to you to say what you have told me now. Do me harm! (Brief pause.) What does one see, my child, from the rooftop? Have you looked carefully? Answer me.

ALTEA (strangely): The countryside, auntie... The mountain of the Crosses...

GORGO: And something else?

ALTEA: The sky, aunt.

GORGO: And what does one see from the garden terrace?

ALTEA: The trees... the flowers... the mud walls...

GORGO: That is all?

ALTEA: Birds, the sky...

GORGO: And through the shutters in the parlor downstairs, Altea?

ALTEA: The street...

GORGO: The street and nothing more? (ALTEA keeps silent. GORGO gets up.) Nothing more? That's not very much, niece. Are you sure? Nothing more than the street?

ALTEA: The square... with the fountain...

GORGO: And nothing more?

ALTEA: ...the church.

GORGO: Only that? Because the street has been made to be walked on, so that people can walk up and down along it. Isn't that true, niece?

ALTEA: Aunt, I've loved you always, but I... How miserable I am, auntie!

GORGO: And the shutters have been made to permit one to see without being seen what comes up and goes down along the street.

ALTEA: Aunt, aunt, I beg of you.

GORGO: And to permit one also to speak with him who comes up and goes down along the street.

ALTEA (falling on her knees): Forgive me, forgive me!

GORGO: Do me harm! And he who comes up and goes down along the street, he who courts you from the street at night, isn't it true, Altea, that he must be tall, slender and brown, surely casting sparks from his eyes...?

ALTEA: You have never made me cry, auntie.

GORGO: But, my dear, I don't want you to cry. I am no harpy, no ferocious monster in ambush for your throat. Don't be frightened, child. (She raises ALTEA to her feet.) Get hold of yourself.

UVA: As for us, you can speak freely, in all confidence.

GORGO: Are you listening? Aulaga, don't wander off.

AULAGA (whose mind had wandered): Yes, yes, we're the same as Gorgo. Don't be afraid to speak.

GORGO: So he is tawny... olive-skinned... And his eyes... What color did we say his eyes were? (ALTEA remains silent.

GORGO, in a harsher tone.) Black... but like burning fire-brands... No? (ALTEA nods her head.) And he is slender, like a reed, as a good horseman should be... A great equestrian, clearly, the most gallant in these mountains. (She shakes ALTEA by the shoulders so that her niece hods her head like a stuffed doll.) And his name? That is what I do not know, what you still haven't told me, niece.

UVA: But she's going to say it, I'm sure.

AULAGA: Aunt Gorgo must know. It's for your own good, child. Why torment her?

GORGO: She will say it.

UVA: And what reason is there to keep it silent? I will help you, little morning star. And Aulaga. You'll see how we will bring it to your lips, between the two of us. Is it maybe Lino, the son of Doña Margara, of the Ranch of the Lemon Trees?

GORGO: Is it?

(ALTEA denies it weakly with her head.)

AULAGA: Could it be Leonico, the youngest of the Olmedo family?

GORGO: Is it?

(ALTEA, as before.)

UVA: Blas, the handsomest of the men of Piño Grande?

GORGO: Is it?

(ALTEA denies it silently.)

AULAGA: Hernán, of the Zorzales family? Bornos, of Viña Hermosa?

GORGO (threatening with her cane): Is it, is it, is it?

ALTEA: Aunt, aunt, please!

UVA: Well they are the richest, child, the most renowned for twenty leagues around.

GORGO (tearing off ALTEA's bodice in a sudden jerk.) Could it be some vermin, some scurvy scum from the district of louse nits? Come, child, answer or this stick will tell you what you have deserved for some time now.

UVA: Maybe's she's ashamed, Gorgo, because who knows if it isn't the barber down at the corner.

AULAGA (laughing): Or Frasco, the sheepshearer, who has no eyebrows.

GORGO: The sheepshearer? What more could this sly dead lizard want! That's too great an honor for her. Do you know who she is in love with? I'll tell you secretly. (The three of them crowded together hear something from GORGO and burst out in explosive guffaws, holding their noses in a gesture of disgust.)

UVA: Oof! Could it be possible, Gorgojilla?

AULAGA: It's disgusting, child, with such an occupation.

GORGO: Oh yes, oh yes, that's the one, the very one.

UVA: I won't be the godmother at your wedding. Whoof!

AULAGA: Even I wouldn't give him a kiss without first holding my nose.

THE THREE OF THEM: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

(Like three shades, like three sinister shawls, laughing, mocking, wounding, they come and go around ALTEA who weeps softly, her face covered by her hair.)

GORGO: I told you not to cry, broomstick. Uncover your face, or do you intend to sweep the floor with those tangles?

UVA: She looks like a frogfish.

AULAGA: The queen of the vintage!

GORGO: The queen? Of the dung heap! Of the garbage dump! We're finished with the goddesses of beauty! Off with all trappings, trimmings and colored feathers! (She starts tearing off ALTEA's costume, yanking it from her body.) Just what had you imagined! The queen! Now you're going to dress in the clothes you deserve. Bring them, Uva. They're in the closet in my bedroom. The queen! And with secret pages who court you in the dead of night! Either you confess who he is or I'll strip you naked and draw blood on your skin with my fingernails. Say it, say it...

ALTEA: I can't, aunt, I can't. Kill me... Suck out my veins... Drag me by the hair...

GORGO: No! I'll bury you alive, between four walls, and you will never go out again, not even to early morning mass.

ALTEA: Bury me in the earth... alive..., with my eyes open.

But don't ask me his name... I cannot... It is impossible... There is a knot in my throat.

GORGO: Oh you cannot? You haven't the courage? You'll see if that's true, little niece!

(UVA has returned, bringing the black dress of an old woman, long, dismal, derisive.)

GORGO: Aulaga, help Uva... The two of you, take these new endowments... for a goddess. Shut her up in them. (Starting to leave at the right.) Imprison her well. God! God's God! (As the two old women dress ALTEA silently, off-stage GORGO can be heard shouting with slight pauses) Yes! Yes! I am here... I obey you... Immediately... Yes! I'm here! (Her face covered with a black linen cloth which falls to her waist, still with her cane, GORGO returns to the room, circling slowly and sadly around ALTEA.)

Spirit that watches on high.
Never leave my side.
Spirit that suffers on high.
With me ever abide.
Spirit that shines on high.
Your light from me never hide.

(Stopping in front of ALTEA, turning her back to the audience, she silently raises the linen cloth that covers her.)

ALTEA (after a cry of horror, while she falls as if dazzled to her knees): Cástor... It is Cástor...

GORGO (still covered, she removes the beard, which she looks at for a moment before throwing it down on the table. Now uncovered, looking upwards, with anguish and as if to herself): No! See the abyss into which you plunge us, brother.

AULAGA (anguished, her voice rapt): Cástor..., my nephew... He never told me anything...

(UVA laughs soundlessly, mocking.)

GORGO (In a harsh but crestfallen manner, after lifting ALTEA from the floor she covers her niece's face with her linen cloth. Shouting): Ánimas! Ánimas! Ánimas!

ÁNIMAS (entering): Madam...

GORGO: Take this freak from before my eyes.

ÁNIMAS: Ay, my poor swallow, my little morning star!

GORGO (pointing to the exit with her cane): Silence!

(ALTEA and ÁNIMAS leave.)

GORGO (after a pause): So: Cástor, the little nephew of your dreams, Aulaga!... (To herself) My heart had said it to me.

AULAGA (breaking into tears): Gorgo... Gorgo... Gorgo...

GORGO (as if illumined, addressing the heavens): Light... Only your light, my brother...

(UVA breaks out laughing, until she is fully guffawing as the curtain slowly falls.)

CHARACTERS IN THE SECOND ACT

Same as those of the first act.

A C T T W O

The whitewashed rooftop. Creeping vines and beyond the railing the branches of several trees. From the rooftop one can see, like a labyrinth, other rooftops, turrets with their weather vanes, kitchen chimneys, etc. Flowerpots with flowers,cages with canaries, basket chairs... Dramatic, bald, yellow against the mid-afternoon sky: the Mountain of the Crosses.

Dressed in black, ALTEA is embroidering. Her beautiful hair is loose and ÁNIMAS is combing it lovingly.

ÁNIMAS: Angel, my seraph. What locks for the sun to always sing its joy in! What tresses for the breeze from the fields to comb! I would willingly seed them in flower pots and I would water them every afternoon, certain that in the morning they would be bursting with flowers. Each time I touch them it seems to me that I smooth vines that go creeping along the

whitewash of these walls, full of nests and the peeping of birds. Do you hear me, Altea? Are you listening, child?

ALTEA: I hear you, Ánimas, I hear you.

ÁNIMAS: No, you're not listening, dearest child, because I know where that head wanders, where that hurt breast flies off to.

ALTEA (throwing down the embroidery frame and rising): Leave me be, for the love of God, Ánimas! I beg you. Don't lay your hands on my hair again. I want to be uncombed, disheveled, horrible...

ÁNIMAS: Poor love, poor love!

ALTEA: I can't take it any more. I'm suffocating. I am buried while still alive, scorned, forgotten. (Messing up her hair.) Why comb me and arrange my hair if not even he remembers that someone lives in torment, a prisoner, among these mute walls. Hide my face, cover me with Aunt Gorgo's black veil. I no longer want to see the sky above this sad rooftop.

ÁNIMAS: Do not despair, flower. Let's wait a little. We don't know...

ALTEA: I do, Ánimas, but admitting it keeps me from sleeping at night.

ÁNIMAS: He will come looking for me soon. I am sure.

ALTEA: Why do you console me with lies? I know very well what is happening.

ÁNIMAS: It is true, child, he used to follow my trail at every moment, like a hunting dog. And wherever we ran into each other he would even threaten to kill me if I didn't bring your messages to him.

ALTEA: He is tired, bored with not feeling close to me, with knowing that not even my eyes are spying on him from behind the window; desperate, because he thinks all this is useless... And he has gone away, you know that he has. He has fled from me, where he will never again hear my name nor that of his Aunt Aulaga, who was tormenting him, persecuting him, harassed by Uva and Aunt Gorgo. Cástor doesn't love me any more.

ÁNIMAS: Don't slander him, Altea, don't you punish him too, not even with your thoughts.

ALTEA: Oh, and does he write me any more? And has he gone to look for you again in the town? And does he pass by in the street in the early mornings as before? And if he only went away to keep from suffering the fury of those three old women any more, how could he have done so without seeing you, without entrusting someone to tell you?

ÁNIMAS: Something is going on, child. My heart says so. What do you and I know about what those two crazy old ladies are plotting? A little patience...

ALTEA: Impossible! Impossible!

ÁNIMAS: Just a little spark like that...

ALTEA: From where could I draw strength, Animas, if at times I now dream that I am no longer in life?

GORGO'S VOICE: Altea! Altea!

ALTEA: I hate her. I hate her. May God forgive me, but I hate her. I am afraid of her, horrified. Fear steals the sleep from my eyes. Ánimas, because of your love, deliver me from her!

GORGO'S VOICE: What are you doing, Altea?

ALTEA (going to the rear wall and calling down): Nothing, aunt. (Through clenched teeth) Dear God, don't let her come up!

GORGO'S VOICE: Is Ánimas with you?

ALTEA: Yes, yes, aunt, combing my hair. (A silence, in which the bells of a campanile clock are heard striking the hour.) Her voice... her footsteps... the bells... And so it goes on, every afternoon, every night, every day... The hours wound me... I do not want to hear the clocks or look ever again at that Mountain of the Crosses... where he must have gone away...

ÁNIMAS: No, no, don't think that child. (Moving about ALTEA, as if frightening someone off with her hands) Away from here, demons! Fly off, evil spirits! Don't frighten my child. My child wants to rest. She wants to sleep in peace. She wants

to listen to the story of "The King's Peacock".

Paví, paví,
if the Prince saw me now
he would fall in love with me!;

or the story of the "Talking Bird, the Singing Tree, and the Yellow Fountain". Once upon a time...

(A clock nearer by strikes the hour, interrupting Ánimas.)

GORGO'S VOICE: Altea! Come down to the garden immediately.

ÁNIMAS: Right away, madam.

ALTEA: I'm coming down now, aunt.

(ALTEA goes, while ÁNIMAS stops to pick up the embroidery frame and sewing basket. When she starts to leave, BIÓN appears, mysterious: his beard grown out, cleaner in appearance in his suit of huge patches. Fast scene.)

BIÓN: Spirits of Purgatory!

ÁNIMAS: Jesus!

BIÓN: The mistress called for me...

ÁNIMAS: Ill-done... and may God forgive me. You frightened me.

BIÓN (laughing): I came up the chimney, like smoke...

ÁNIMAS (almost leaving): And you will go down like last time: by the staircase and shoved out the door... if not over the

balcony. I'm going to run tell the mistress.

BIÓN (confidentially): Just one little thing... Wait.

ÁNIMAS: Altea is waiting for me in the garden.

BIÓN (tender): It is for her, my little Moorish jasmine.

ÁNIMAS (intrigued, going to him): For my child, you say? Quickly, go on, Bión!

BIÓN (taking her by the waist): Right away, my golden thistle.

ÁNIMAS (breaking away): Come on, turn me loose, bindweed.!

BIÓN: Bad seed... parakeet... (Showing her a folded envelope) Well, I won't give it to you.

ÁNIMAS: Bión! Bión! What is that?

BIÓN: Yes, a little letter... from the young man.

ÁNIMAS (trying to snatch it from him): From Cástor... a letter from Cástor!

BIÓN: From the very same boy... entrusted to this beggar.

ÁNIMAS: You will give it to me, Bión.

BIÓN (with the letter between his teeth, running to one edge of the rooftop): If you come to take it from me with your golden beak...

GORGO'S VOICE (close by): Ánimas! Ánimas!

ÁNIMAS (supplicant, while the beggar hides the letter in his shirt): Bión! Bión! Out of kindness!

(GORGO appears.)

GORGO (to ÁNIMAS, distrustful and harsh): What does this mean? Altea alone in the garden and you still up on the roof? The dog does not go astray before the lamb. (ÁNIMAS attempts to reply.) To your duty. Go on.

(ÁNIMAS goes.)

BIÓN (honeylike): Doña Flower.

GORGO (with suspicion): What do you have to say to Ánimas?

BIÓN (humble): I came to do my lady a service...

GORGO (with her eternal little grunt): A service?

BIÓN: Since you have had the good heart to call for me... (He leaves for an instant, reappearing with a large bundle.) I left it there, on the stairway... I heard chattering... I said to myself: Bión, don't let anyone see it before Doña Gorgo. It is only for her. (He unwraps it, lifting on high a large cage containing a black cat.)

GORGO: Oof! What filth! A tomcat!

BIÓN: I said to myself: there isn't one in the house, Bión. Look around for a cat and take it to the mistress. See how pretty it is!

GORGO: Take it away! Take it out of my sight! It's probably full of mange.

BIÓN: If you don't like it, Doña Gorgo, if you're going to offend the poor kitty... There are plenty of housetops and roofs

where it can go wooing. (Humbly, he makes a gesture of opening the cage, reciting with sadness and authority)

Out, mangy mouser,
scabby tabby.
That's the command
of this handsome laddie.
You love me,
I love you.
You are the cat
to catch the rat.

GORGO (with pity): Well, leave it then... You can turn it loose in a little while...

BIÓN: Wherever you say.

GORGO: Well... somewhere I won't see it. Like my brother Dino, I'm mad about parrots... But no dogs or tomcats.

BIÓN: Tomcat! A tomcat! Do you think this is a tomcat, Doña Gorgo? Bión respects his mistress' judgement.

GORGO: Perhaps it's a mountain wildcat.

BIÓN: Guess, guess...

The eyes are the eyes of a tomcat, but it isn't a tomcat.
The ears, the ears of a tomcat, but it isn't a tomcat.
The paws, the paws of a tomcat, but it isn't a tomcat.
The tail, the tail of a tomcat, but it isn't a tomcat.

No, my mistress, no. Your house is large. I said to myself: a she-cat. It may have little ones... All the utilities... Now if my Doña Gorgo scorns it...

GORGO: I've said you're to leave it... I mean, you're to leave her. I am not so cruel, my friend, nor so ungrateful... If I protect you, why is that she-cat to be any less? Let her stay in the house and have all the kittens she wants. (Circling around him) But how well you look, Bión! A clean suit... lovingly mended... Your trousers... The knees patched... Your beard...

BIÓN: Now I take care of myself myself... since Doña Aulaga...

GORGO: And your knees as well? And that shining shirt? Look how industrious he is! I see the work of charitable hands that do not rest for you.

BIÓN: Doña Gorgo tells you to come back... Put on your new clothes, I said to myself... as if our holy Patron of the Crosses, which is who you are to Bión, were calling you to glory.

GORGO: Well, now you are in glory once again.

BIÓN (sweet-talking, drawing close to GORGO): And next to my guardian angel, that's how I also consider you, besides.

GORGO (between tender and mocking): Angels do not tell little lies... nor are they such great rogues. Those are things of the devil... which is what you are, Bión. (The beggar has been drawing closer and closer to her.) Oof! Get away from me, little Satan--you smell like sulphur!

BIÓN: But the devil has the face of a rabbit... and two horns on top...

GORGO: And don't you? (BIÓN searches for them with his hands.) Right there, there's where they stick out, only no one but I can see them.

BIÓN: It might be true, Doña Gorgo, but I don't know where they are... You look for them for me.

GORGO: Out, out of here--you're burning me with your breath!

BIÓN: I must already by damned when you, who are so good, say that I am. (He disappears, calling out from within, while Doña GORGO sits.) Knock! Knock!

GORGO: Who's there?

BIÓN (cavernous): The devil with his pitchfork.

GORGO: And what does the devil with his pitchfork want?

BIÓN: To come in.

Well, as for me, the devil
with his pitchfork may come in.

(BIÓN appears, carrying a palm-leaf broom in the manner of a trident.)

GORGO (following the game, halfway between impassioned and mocking, as BIÓN swirls around her)

Demon, demon, depart
from this so lonely heart.
Violater of virgins,
vampire of vestal virtue.
Igniter of nightmare dreams,
mosquito of mortal remorse.
Greedy vulture of souls,
thief of all hope.
Spin, spin, spin, spin
as the blood now raves within
and the soul, without light, grows thin.

(BIÓN, from behind Doña GORGO's back, leans over, kissing her at great length. Softly): Bión, Bión, what have you done?

BIÓN: Of all devils, Doña Gorgo.

GORGO (rising, furious): God! God's God!

BIÓN: Don't get mad my lady.

GORGO (with her cane): Get out.

BIÓN: I wanted to do you another service...

GORGO: Into the street!

BIÓN (thrusting his hand into his shirt): I have a little letter.

GORGO: What?

BIÓN (submissive): The lady has been so charitable... I can't go without giving it to her.

GORGO (changing to a softer tone): A letter, you?

BIÓN (giving it to her:: From the young man... for the little niece.

GORGO: If you aren't a demon, you are governed by them. (Seizing him by the shoulders.) Look at me, Bión, straight in my eyes. More, more.

BIÓN (emotional, looking away): I can't look at you, Doña Gorgo.

GORGO: More, a little more...

BIÓN (overwhelmed with tenderness): It makes the tears run from my eyes. Forgive me.

GORGO: Ah! I see, I see... Could it be possible? Enough.

BIÓN: I didn't want to offend you. I came only to serve you.

GORGO: And you have behaved like an angel. (Confidentially) And go on behaving yourself, Bión. You won't be sorry.

BIÓN: Beautiful Doña...

GORGO: Now, wait for me on the terrace. The ladies will be there sewing by now... Ah! and you can let that she-cat run free wherever she wants.

BIÓN (as he leaves, with the cage):

You love me,
I love you.
You are the she-cat
to now catch the rat
with a silver fork.

(He goes.)

GORGO (furious): Uva, Uva! What are you trying to do? Where is it you're going? What pit are you digging for me without knowing it? Spiteful old woman. Jealous witch. Vindictive hag ... (Squeezing the letter between her fingers and addressing her brother) Out of pity, have compassion for me! You could have intervened... Oh, nameless disgrace! But perhaps you have arranged it this way to test your sister's metal. (She reads silently for a moment) It cannot be! Are you going to tolerate this? (Reading aloud) "I am so far away, my love, so closely watched here, in this house lost in the middle of

the mountains, that I fear coming to the point of God knows what when the time comes for the dogs to make sport of me--those bribed farm hands which our furies feed for my custody..." Oh! You granted me total authority as you lay dying, you who wanted me to become you yourself, who left me your voice and even the noble attribute that inhabited your face...! (She continues reading.) "Altea, Altea: if it be so that you are still alive, if sleep has not yet returned to your eyes, as it is with your Castor since he was taken from your side, if Animas is still the only caretaker, the only support for our happiness..." Brother, brother! And that secret of yours at the hour of your death? And was it for this finale, which I hear now surrounds me, that I was capable of burying it in the most hidden corners of my bones? (She goes on reading.) "Always keep watch, Altea. See to it that every night Animas is alert at the edge of the garden. I do not yet know how, but I will root you out of that frightful prison." (Insanely) God! God's God! Fly, bats, shades of evening, and screech through the town the dishonor, the unhappy ending of a family! Make haste, chimney swallows: swoop down to the squares and repeat it to little children, that they may mock us, chanting it to the market place! (On her knees and as if in a trance) And you, my brother, strike me down! Draw back the bolt,

quickly open up the skies and send me the punishment of an arrow that will leave me riveted to the spot, nailed, like a black scarecrow on the highest of these walls! (She puts the letter away and runs towards the railing at the rear, shouting) Ánimas! Ánimas! Ánimas! Lock Altea in the tower! (They go up, confused, from the garden: sounds of their weeping and voices.) Obey me! Obey me, witch!

Spirit that grieves from afar.
Save yourself with your secret.
Spirit that weeps from afar.
Kill me with your secret.
Spirit that keeps silent from afar.
Carry me away with your secret.

Light... always your light! I need it more than ever, my brother. There is still time... if you have not already abandoned your daughter and this your wretched Gorgo. (Abruptly, AULAGA, UVA and BIÓN burst out the door and onto the rooftop, the latter holding open in his hands a wide skein of wool. UVA, who is winding it nervously, bears a huge pair of scissors dangling from her neck. AULAGA carries a sewing basket, in which balls of yarn, long needles, half-finished knit garments, other skeins of all colors, etc. can

be seen. Evening is falling; a red twilight, violent, increasingly sharpens the profile of the Mountain of the Crosses against the clouded sky.)

UVA: Gorgo! Gorgo!

BIÓN: Doña Gorgo!

AULAGA: We heard your niece crying... Ay! What's happened,Gorgo?

GORGO: My friends, my sisters! Dishonor! Disgrace! Don't come near me. Flee from me. I am stained, covered with black mud. Trodden under foot. Wounded. Buried. Dead. Can't you see me, or is it that your eyes have burst in your faces?

UVA: Rest a while, Gorgo. You're raving.

AULAGA: I must be blind... I don't see anything, daughter.

BIÓN: Does my mistress perhaps have a toothache?

GORGO (visionary): Altea is being taken from me... She is being stolen from us... She is being snatched away...

UVA (sitting and swiftly winding the yarn, facing BIÓN, who remains standing): Calm yourself, my Gorgoja. Such words and such shouting... I know what's wrong with you: you're intoxicated.

GORGO: Yes, but with misfortunes... drunk with disasters... Cástor! Cástor!

UVA: The brandy, Gorgojilla!

AYLAGA: What? Cástor? Has he come? Has he gone? Has he escaped?

GORGO: Aren't you listening at all? Have stones been tossed in

your ears?

AULAGA: That's what it must be, Gorgo, because my head is buzzing.

GORGO (almost hypnotizing AULAGA, while UVA, impassive, continues to wind the yarn): It is he! It is he! It is his very horse coming down the Mountain of the Crosses!

AULAGA: I must have mists in my eyes, Gorgo.

GORGO: Look, Aulaga! Wake up... Listen, listen.

AULAGA: Yes, yes... My poor mad boy!

GORGO: Do you see him now, Aulaga?

AULAGA: He's passing by the ironworks...

GORGO: The whole town is asleep... You are asleep... You and I are dying with sleep... He's riding the dancing horse... The yellow one.

AULAGA: It is he, it is! He's passing near the fountain... (Murmuring) What gallantry! How handsome!

GORGO: Look at him... You will never see him again... He stops... He rises up in the saddle... Ánimas, help Altea... He leaps ... He embraces her waist... Sparks fly from the hooves of his horse... A dog barks... All the dogs are barking... They run off! They run at full gallop! There, Aulaga, over there!

AULAGA (shouting): Cástor! Cástor! My little love! He's stealing her from me! Altea! Altea!

GORGO: Mercy, brother! After the thief! You are losing your daughter!

AULAGA (breaking into tears): He has taken her away! I am left without him. My boy, my boy!

GORGO: From this moment I am accursed. Forsaken by your hand. God! God's God!

(UVA breaks out in a strident guffaw, followed shortly afterward by BIÓN, while AULAGA, leaning on the railing at the rear, remains lost in space, her eyes fixed on the Mountain of the Crosses.)

GORGO (wrenching the skein away from UVA): What are you laughing about, busy bee's stinger? (Slipping the skein over BIÓN up to his elbows.) And you too, Bión? Do you dare to laugh as well? You are amused to see us so content. How witty my little royal parrots are!

BIÓN: Doña Uva was the first...

UVA: What does the little piglet know about your affairs, Gorgoja?

GORGO: What does he know? Well, let him laugh, let him laugh... That's why you begged me to bring him back... (She snatches the ball of yarn from UVA. As she binds the beggar's entire body with the yarn.) And you too can go on laughing, Uva. Come on! Ha, ha! Let's laugh together! Let's all laugh!

There is nothing happening here! Aulaga, come back to your senses. Our Uvita is happy... Bión is the happiest of beggars ... He feels like laughing... Let's see. Your ball of yarn! Your skeins! (BIÓN again laughs boisterously, to UVA's mute and growing indignation, as AULAGA imprisons him in other skeins, joining GORGO in snaring him in the thread.)

AULAGA

Pull, pull
the skein of wool!

GORGO

Quick, do not tarry,
skein of Uvita
of cat and dogberry!

AULAGA

Faster, faster,
skein of laughter!

UVA (rising, pale with fury): Enough! Leave him alone! Aulaga! Gorgo!

GORGO (exhausted, spent):

Slow now, be wary.
skein of Uvita
of dog and catberry.

UVA: What games you think up, daughters!

GORGO: No, Uva, it's just that he came to die of laughter... I too am dead... (She laughs disheartened, in a tragic manner.) Bión is good. Bión is a saint. Bión is an angel..., a seraph with silver wings... Let me celebrate his return to Paradise.

UVA: This house Paradise? That must have been in your brother's time.

GORGO: Yes, Paradise, Paradise, that Bión can enjoy as he pleases. He knows how better than you. (With mocking intent) Besides, he understands me.

UVA (with astonishment, starting, uneasy): Him!

GORGO: Yes, him, him.

UVA (jealous): That he... What is it that you understand, you miserable wretch?

BIÓN(mysterious): Chsst... Chsst... Silence, Doña Uva.

UVA: What mysteries are these?

BIÓN (laughing): Mysteries? Those that my protector makes me pray every evening.

UVA: Are you listening, Aulaga?

AULAGA: What were you saying?

UVA: That now I'm going to be the porcupine if you don't explain to me what's going on here. Quickly, the quills are starting to sprout!

AULAGA: Explain, Uvita? Leave me alone. Don't you see? They've taken my boy away...

UVA: Gorgoja's trickery, ninny. Now's the time to pay no attention to her. You hear me? Or do you too have a part in the understanding, the mystery of this one here with Bión?

GORGO: Did you say this one?

UVA: Yes, this one, this one with that one. (Unfastening the huge scissors.) And now that one's going to sing... And so are we. Come on, little rooster, sing, chant! Cockadoodledoo! What is it that's going on between you and your mistress? Spit, spurt out your saliva, horny toad... Quack, quack! Slaver with that tongue...

BIÓN: My dear mistress, Bion is only a manacled dog... A dog of the streets.

GORGO: But without a muzzle, Uva. Watch out...

UVA (cutting the threads and skeins that imprison him): Well, bite, then, bark freely! Come on! Bark! Bow wow! Howl, Bión, howl out! Owoooo! (BIÓN breaks out howling and guffawing grotesquely along with UVA.) Cursed be the hour when you came back to this house!

GORGO (trying to stop UVA's fit): Aulaga! The wool! The wool! The poor people's wool! Go on! Keep it up! Cut it with the scissors! Cut it off! Tear it! Rip it! Pull it to shreads!

AULAGA: My socks! My scarves! My knit waistcoats!

BIÓN: Doña Uva, Doña Uva!

GORGO: Be charitable! You're evil-minded!

UVA (throwing the sewing basket and scattering all the garments that are inside it over the garden): Out! Let them go naked, let them shiver with cold! The unfortunates want clean garments, and our hands only weave mud.

AULAGA: You frighten me, Uva.

UVA: Alms such as those stain the heavens.

GORGO: You are damned. I see your serpent's body.

UVA: You are plotting something... I can smell it... You do not forgive, you want everything for yourselves, gluttons. That one now, with her nephew, with that little nephew that fell to her one good day from God knows where... And you, Gorgoja,

if you could... (Giving the beggar a shove.) Why say any more? You make me blush to the tip of my nose for shame.

BIÓN: Don't be impudent, Dona Uva, because I swear to you on my honor that Bión doesn't know any mysteries.

UVA (thrusting the scissors in his face): Be quiet or I'll cut your eyes out!

BIÓN (running, followed by UVA): No, not that! My eyes... my beard! Calm your blood, my mistress.

GORGO: Uva! Uva!

AULAGA: She'll cut them! She'll cut them! Get those scissors away from her!

GORGO: She would do it with her fingernails. Vulture, vulture!

UVA: To your cave!

BIÓN: Mysteries!

GORGO: God! God's God!

UVA: To your pigsty! Get out, get out! (BIÓN flees; his cries can be heard from within.) Mysteries! Mysteries! (Panting, after a pause.) It wasn't you who threw him out now. It was my turn this time, Gorgoja.

(She sits, depressed, covering her face with her hands.)

GORGO: My poor little grape, Uvita, always suffering.

UVA: I threw him out, I threw him out! And it was me! Did you see?

GORGO: I don't want to complain, my daughter... But... what do you want me to do? This business of making a river out of a little drop of water, a mountain out of a grain of sand... In the end, even though grapes turn into raisins, the heart is a little girl always ready to play skip-rope.

UVA: Why did you agree to have him come? For this, Gorgo, for this!

GORGO (ironic): You asked me to so often. You openly pleaded with me to have him stay on with us.

UVA: Well, I hate myself, I'm disgusted that I carried on so.

GORGO: We would get so bored without him...

UVA: I am ashamed. I can't forgive myself.

GORGO (with intent, almost in her ear): Besides, Uva, Gorgo isn't spiteful... Do you understand? And least of all, vindictive. Forgive, forgive! It has made me very happy to see him here again.

UVA: Gorgo, Gorgo! Why are you saying that to me?

GORGO (making her suffer): If it doesn't offend you, if you don't act like a gooseberry, he can come back whenever he wants... Bión is good... Above all, he is serviceable... You know, You know, he even brought me a cat.

UVA: A she-cat, that he stole from a neighbor for you.

GORGO: And he was so happy! You should have seen him! Why, it

was then he told me that to him this house was glory itself.

UVA: Glory, Gorgojilla? What a stupid wretch!

GORGO: Glory, yes; not Paradise, as I said before.

UVA (more serene): What an idea, Gorgo!

GORGO: Ah! And he also swore that I was his guardian angel... Isn't that delightful, Uva? And he called me a flower. Doña Flower! The poor man was so grateful! Do you understand it all now? Those were our mysteries.

UVA: Anyway, I'm still suffering, my daughter. Forgive me.

GORGO: Calm yourself... Smile a little, jealous little girl. You have offended him, mistreated him, thrown him out...

UVA: He deserved it...

GORGO: ... only because of your suspicions, your imaginings...

UVA: I thought he deserved it. My soul is going to burst.

GORGO (growing sullen): And me? What is going to burst me open? Have you forgotten that I am dying... that I am in the midst of a battle, riddled with wounds...

UVA: Gorgo!

GORGO: ... that it is I who am going to die, if you do not sustain me, if you let me forget everything. Aulaga!

AULAGA: You called me?

GORGO (transfigured): Yes, yes. Come to me. Don't you know? He must have told you. My brother spoke to me a short while

ago. The rooftop was filled with his voice. First it was a whisper: "Gorgo, Gorgo!" I looked at the chimneys... At first I thought it was the smoke that was calling me... "Here, Gorgo: It's me." It came from the vine branches... I put my ear to the leaves... No, it was over there, beyond the weather vanes... "Do not fall asleep, sister. Your sleep would be treason. Let your eyes fall out before you close them. Altea is going to be taken away... And you know, you know... I am suffering... My spirit is in sleepless torment... It weeps... Don't you hear how it weeps? Do not condemn it to Hell."

AULAGA: Is that what he said, Gorgo?

GORGO: Didn't you hear him? Didn't you see from the terrace? I felt afraid. I locked her in the tower again... The red rooster is courting her... I hear that he is preparing himself... That he is sharpening his spurs... He is going to come, he's coming...

AULAGA: Cástor! But hasn't he gone away?

GORGO: He is going to come! We can still stop him...

AULAGA: Yes, yes!

GORGO: ... Run to him... Turn his horse...

AULAGA: He goes on, he goes on!

GORGO: ... and take him away ... far away...

AULAGA: Stop, my boy! A moment!

GORGO: ... beyond those mountains... to another countryside... until all this is swallowed on the tongue of oblivion.

AULAGA (in a delirium): Ay, my boy! My death, my life! A word ...! Hear me... You don't know, you don't know...! You're going to stay, you won't leave me, when I tell you...

UVA (piteously): Aulaga, listen, Aulaga...

AULAGA: I took you in as a little boy... They brought you to me from I don't know where... from a distant farmhouse... when you were scarcely a flower...

UVA: I beg of you... Look at me, at least...

AULAGA: ... You grew up beside my solitude... Little by little I made you mine, without your being mine... as if you had run about in my blood... inhabited my poor entrails...

UVA: Daughter, my daughter...

AULAGA: ... And then, what love, what love! My vigil, my sacrifices, my anguish, are they worth nothing to you? I tell you now, my boy, but never repeat it, never remind me of it, ever... I am not your family... not even your aunt... That is why you are everything to me... Don't leave me...

GORGO: Aulaga, Aulaga! He won't go away, he will not leave you... He won't take her away, we won't be left without them... I know, I know...

UVA: This crime must be stopped. You are a pair of egoists.

GORGO: Bite your tongue, Uva. What do you know about crimes? Haven't we consumed ourselves, waiting? Help me, it is all I ask. Sustain me a little more and you will see... (Shouting) Ánimas, Ánimas, Ánimas! Take the child from the tower and bring her to the rooftop!

AULAGA: Gorgo commands. She is the authority. The male. The man. She has her brother's enlightenment.

UVA: It must be true, daughters: Uva never knows anything. All that takes place here from now on will weigh upon your shoulders. Gorgo is responding to dictated secrets.

GORGO (illumined): I will carry them out, be certain of that... And if they should not be carried out:

May my poor eyes fall out,
unhappy spirit, spirit in disgrace.

May my tongue split in two,
spirit in mourning, spirit in darkness.

May my dry bones splinter,
spirit in sorrow, spirit without rest.

May my dry bones splinter,
spirit in sorrow, spirit without rest.

May my blood all dry up,
spirit in mortal anguish.

May my heart freeze inside me,
spirit in danger of death.

May you never recognize me,
spirit in danger of shadow.

(After an expectant silence which only serves to further darken the drama of the violent twilight, ALTEA, led by ÁNIMAS, her face covered with the black linen-cloth, appears like a shadow.)

GORGO (softly): I called you, niece, to tell you something which I have thought, that I have decided you should know... and also so that you may spend the last of the afternoon with us.

ALTEA: I don't want to know anything. I live better in oblivion.

GORGO: I suffer because of that, child.

ALTEA: I am better off silent, alone there, with the chimney swallows and the clock bells.

GORGO: Altea, Altea!

ALTEA: Don't concern yourself with me. Let me go back.

GORGO: Ánimas, remove her veil. I know your torment, child.

ÁNIMAS (<u>murmuring to ALTEA as she removes the veil</u>): Come, little flower...

UVA: Unhappy waxen rose.

AULAGA: Well, I find her as she always has been: like a garden in May.

ALTEA: I want to go.

GORGO: My wish would not have been for this. I am not my own mistress. Someone who keeps watch for your good commands me. I obey him.

ALTEA: I beg you, aunt. I am no longer on this earth. Think of me as having gone away, as having left this house a long time ago.

GORGO: My child, it is always the first love which seems the saddest. That's the way it was with me when I was a girl... That's the way it has been with all of us.

ALTEA: I don't want to talk to anyone.

GORGO: The Angelus bell is going to toll.

ALTEA: I'll hear it from the tower. Give me permission to leave.

GORGO: Ánimas, bring the poles. (<u>ÁNIMAS leaves.</u>) It is time now. Do you remember? But you were such a child...

ALTEA (decisive): I'm going.

GORGO (authoritarian): Your father was a happy man. In the springtime, above all, he wouldn't miss an afternoon out here. Uva and Aulaga won't have forgotten.

UVA: Yes, yes, we used to hunt with him.

GORGO: Today I want to remember him with you... Give him that pleasure, Altea. I do not ask for myself.

UVA: Aulaga is afraid.

AULAGA: I never hunted, but Gorgo, on the other hand...

GORGO: It isn't easy, niece. You have to be very alert. Come on. You'll get your mind off things a little. The birds... not the birds. That would be like killing defenseless flowers. But the bats... (Mysterious, obsessed) Look, look, niece... Look, all of you... They're still flying high up... They've just come out... They fly blind, avoiding the tower spires... They nest in the devil's head. And they circle round and round like remorse... Their smell is that of punished sorrow, of sick melancholy, of dry smoke, decomposing, and their wings, ribbed and featherless, are like those of fallen angels. (ÁNIMAS returns, bringing five long canes, with a black cloth at the tip of each. While ÁNIMAS hands them out to everyone) Killing them, knocking them down is like cleansing the conscience of stains, bleaching the soul of its sins.

(Now with her pole, in the center of the roof.) Spin, slowly spin those black kerchiefs and you will see them obsessed, squeaking, creaking like wooden bolts in the night... (They spin the canes about rhythmically while far off the Angelus begins to sound.)

Black messengers of death,
never nest on my forehead.

AULAGA:

Fall, fly away,
and let me rest in my dreams!

GORGO:

Never disturb my breast
with your dank and dismal designs.

UVA:

Fly away, fall,
and let me bloom in my dreams!

ÁNIMAS:

Flee, spin away,
and let her fly without fear!

GORGO:

Never cloak this dwelling
with the color of your disgrace.

ALTEA:

Fly, fly,

and let me forgotten die!

GORGO (stopping the hunt with the others): Die, die... What an extraordinary thought, niece! As if fallen from these flying demons.

ALTEA: Yes, aunt, die, die from everything... To close my eyes and never again see this prison, this rooftop, that mountain...

GORGO: These are the dark shadows of a girl in love, child. But you would be cruel, Altea, and not to yourself, nor to me, nor even to Ánimas, who goes without sleep at night for you, but to someone who is the cause...

ALTEA: I don't have anyone any more now. I am alone, surrounded by horror...

ÁNIMAS: My heart... my love.

GORGO: Alone, niece?

ALTEA: Yes, yes.

GORGO: Forgotten, niece?

ALTEA: Yes.

GORGO: Can you be certain of that, without your blood rising?

ALTEA: I don't know. But that is how I want it to be.

GORGO: Are you telling the truth? Put your ear to your heart.

ALTEA: Aunt, aunt!

GORGO: You doubt, child. I can see it.

ALTEA: Don't kill me slowly. Kill me at once. I can't endure any more.

GORGO: You are lying to me, Altea.

ALTEA: Leave me alone. I have told you what I want.

GORGO: You are unjust. Look. (She shows her the letter. Silence.)

AULAGA: Gorgo, Gorgo! A letter!

ÁNIMAS (between her teeth): My God!

GORGO: You're speechless, Altea. And you too, Uva. Yes, a letter. From Castor. Why not tell you the truth? (Pause, in which ALTEA, AULAGA and UVA take a step toward GORGO.) Don't come any closer, niece. Don't come closer, any of you... (A faint smoke begins to come out of the chimneys while the Angelus bells come and go in melancholy tones.)

ALTEA (hard): You will give it to me.

AULAGA: It belongs to me.

ALTEA (moving her aside): Out of here, thief!

UVA: It's for Altea. Give it to her.

ALTEA: I am its only mistress. It is mine.

GORGO: Yours. But you will not have it.

ALTEA: Yes.

GORGO: That won't be necessary, niece. I'm going to shout to you what it says. Listen carefully.

ALTEA: I want to read it myself.

AULAGA: No, let me.

GORGO: You don't want to die. Cástor loves you.

ALTEA: I won't believe anything from you. Give it to me.

GORGO: He is going to kill himself for you... He is living far away, he tells you, very far from this town, surrounded by mountains, guarded, abducted by these furies. (They move toward GORGO slowly.) Back, back! He will never be able to escape... and he is going to throw himself in the river... hang himself from a branch...

AULAGA: That isn't true.

ALTEA: I hate you.

UVA: You took possession of that letter.

GORGO: I took it from Bión. That's why I wanted him to come back. You have betrayed me, procurer.

ALTEA (beside herself): It's mine!

AULAGA (the same): It's mine!

(They each take up one of the poles and raise them menacingly, all but ÁNIMAS.)

GORGO: It is mine... Mine... Mine alone. (She tears it to pieces and thrusts them into her dress, at the moment that they strike her down, together.) God! God's God! (As they beat her) Strike me! Wound me! Draw my blood till it gushes! What do you know! See me now, my brother! Look at your own daughter... my faithful friends...! But I will defend you, I will obey you, I will save your honor, keeping your secret to the death... Ánimas! Ánimas! You strike me too, what are you waiting for?

(The Angelus sounds closer and louder now, while the thick smoke of the chimneys further blackens the evening and the curtain descends.)

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CHARACTERS IN THE THIRD ACT

GORGO
UVA
AULAGA
ALTEA
BIÓN
ÁNIMAS

FIRST BEGGAR
SECOND BEGGAR
THIRD BEGGAR
FOURTH BEGGAR
PEASANT
CÁSTOR

Shawl-covered women from the town and other poor people

A C T T H R E E

Doña GORGO's house garden. In the left foreground, a white wall with a door. In the background, toward the center, the sudden thrust of a slender tower: low balcony with a door, and two windows. Trees, vines along the whitewashed walls, flower pots... The garden has a romantic air and is somewhat wild and luxuriant. To the right in the foreground is a table all laid out: fruit, pitchers of wine, an immense covered dish, etc. It is night. And there is a moon.

GORGO, kneeling on the ground, illuminated by a ray of light, appears to be in a state of ecstacy. Illumined by another beam of light, ALTEA is seen in the highest window in the tower.

ALTEA:

Some towers overlook the fields.
Others, the sea, the sea.

The towers of my hope,
what do they look upon?

GORGO:

See me here struck down,
all for you, my brother:
my temples, faint
my ribs, in pain.

It was not with the stalks of lilies,
brother.
Pointed sticks, sharpened poles
were what that nailed me down.

You saw me tossed to the earth,
brother.
Eating the dust and biting
the tiles you have walked on.

To me, the thorns are dahlias,
for you, brother,
sweet violets, the blows,
warm carnations, the nails.

ALTEA (in a lower window):

There are towers that look upon highways;
others: ships that sail off to sea.
The towers of my sadness,
what will they see?

GORGO:

The fraud, the villainy,
brother;
the falsehood, madness,
humiliation, deceit;

the slow execution, the crime,
for you, brother;
the shame of forgiving
those who beat me down.

My brother: all for you,
and more still, brother;
if it be necessary, let horses
brand me with their hoofprints.

ALTEA (now on the balcony):

Towers that sing, smiling;

towers which only weep.
The towers of my agony,
what will they do?

(With the ray of light, she withdraws from the balcony.)

UVA'S VOICE (darkly): Gorgo!

GORGO:

Who is it that calls? Let them
deride me, brother;
let them mock, let them laugh
until they are left without lips.

AULAGA'S VOICE (murmuring): Gorgo!

BIÓN'S VOICE: Doña Gorgo!

GORGO:

Come! Approach! I am here,
yours, brother;
ready to save the pure name
which you have left to us.

ALTEA'S VOICE: Aunt!

ÁNIMAS' VOICE: Mistress!

GORGO:

Do not weep, hidden spirit,
brother, brother!

This very day will you be free,
holy, pure, immaculate.

VOICES OF THE FOUR BEGGARS (mysterious): Doña Gorgo! Doña Gorgo!

(The ray of light that illuminated GORGO disappears. In the garden, in a different area, UVA, AULAGA, BIÓN and THE FOUR BEGGARS have entered. ÁNIMAS and ALTEA are out on the balcony. Those who have come into the garden bring with them lighted lanterns which they set on the table or hang from the trees.)

GORGO (very humble and soft during the scene): You have come, daughters. And you also. Thanks, thanks. You are now here with me. It is the day of charity, of holy alms, which has been celebrated each year in this house. But this year I have wanted to move it forward. And also to have it at night. See what a beautiful June moon is to accompany our supper. Ánimas, Altea! I want you down in the garden. Come down, come down, the two of you.

(They with draw from the balcony.)

UVA: You have always called us together on this day so that we could help you.

AULAGA: But this time you haven't said anything to us, Gorgo.

GORGO: I have prepared everything myself. I haven't even let Ánimas spread the tablecloth.

BIÓN: And did my mistress even bring out the tables without any help? In other years, Bión carried them out and he was also the one who beheaded the lamb with his hand.

FIRST BEGGAR: What are we poor men good for? What are we for if not to be ordered about? Come get this, donkey. Go bring that, imbecile. Run here, houndog. Go there, blockhead.

SECOND BEGGAR: That's what I say, Doña Gorgo. Obey:

At the stroke of one, take the mule out of the sun.
At the stroke of two, a kick from the shoe,
At the stroke of three, take her back to the tree.
At the stroke of four, whipped to the core.
At the stroke of five...

GORGO: Enough, man, enough. That's the way of heretics, of souls without a heart.

THIRD BEGGAR: Well, we'll wash the dishes afterwards among ourselves.

FOURTH BEGGAR: And on our knees, if our mistress commands.

FIRST BEGGAR: We would clean them with our snouts if that were your pleasure.

BIÓN:

On with the dishes,
on with the platters,
to the tongues of these cats,
just made for such matters!

GORGO: That is how I would always wash yours, Bión, if you thought me worthy...

UVA: You are sublime, Gorgo.

GORGO: An unfortunate, a poor woman.

UVA: You, poor, Gorgojilla? I would like to see you barefoot, like the true unfortunates.

GORGO (continuously meek): You do not hurt me, Uvita, because that is how I am going to serve you this night. (She removes her shoes and stockings.)

UVA: Jesus!

AULAGA (deeply moved, making a kneeling gesture): Gorgo, my daughter, forgive me... I have hurt you... I doubted you... You are good...

UVA: Only a bit mad, a little hypocrite...

GORGO: And all that is worst, Uva. Speak, shout it in public, if you wish... (taking AULAGA by the arm) No, Aulaga, no, no... It is you who must forgive me... You are suffering... You aren't alive... You are sick with a passion of the spirit...

UVA: Before it was I who was the martyr. Now... Look!

GORGO: Yes, look at us, simple ones, and ridicule with Dona Uva these two sad scarecrows. It is the night for forgiveness. (Turning slowly to leave) Have the kindness to wait for me a little while... I will come back to you shortly.

Light so mournful, light divine,
today, without thorns, you will shine.
Light so sickly, light so distant,
today you will brighten in an instant.

(BIÓN and THE FOUR BEGGARS, very emotional, as GORGO walks slowly toward the door)

BIÓN: Your legs have turned into carnations, Doña Gorgo!

FIRST BEGGAR: Angel of kindness!

SECOND BEGGAR: Patron of the poor!

THIRD BEGGAR: Fountain of those in need!

FOURTH BEGGAR: Refuge for the helpless!

UVA (between her teeth): Drunkard... madwoman... crazy madwoman...

AULAGA: Saint, saint, saint!

(As Doña GORGO goes out, ALTEA and ÁNIMAS enter at the rear of the garden.)

BIÓN (happy):

Begone, be damned,
Martín, horse-man,
the moon has come,
lantern in hand!

UVA:

Altea!

AULAGA:

Altea!

BIÓN:

The sweetheart of these walls!

ÁNIMAS:

The maiden of the rooftops!

FIRST BEGGAR:

The glory that from heaven
came to pass
comes to give us what she has
and what she has not!

BIÓN (leaping about around ALTEA and ÁNIMAS):

All to the round of the jellied quince,
there'll be no bread
without twopence!

SECOND BEGGAR:

With her dark eyes of hazlenuts,
that by day are stored away
and at night are scattered.

BIÓN:

All to the round of the candied plum,
there is no weeping, no mournful drum!

THIRD BEGGAR:

With her dove's arching breast,
which by night has wings of white
and by day hides in its nest!

BIÓN:

All to the round of the red carnation,
paper less pen is no salutation!

FOURTH BEGGAR:

With her lips of fragrant pine:
by day they are orange
by night they are lime!

BIÓN:

To the round that does not go round
if there is no bread, no sterling pound!

(All of them making begging gestures)

FIRST BEGGAR:

Give us one...

SECOND BEGGAR:

Give us two...

THIRD BEGGAR:

Give us twenty...

FOURTH BEGGAR:

Flower divine!

BIÓN:

And play the fife fine!

(While the FIRST BEGGAR plays a few strident whistles on the fife, BIÓN and the other beggars seize and kiss the hands of ÁNIMAS, UVA and AULAGA, causing the women to circle ridiculously around ALTEA: there is much kicking and shouting.)

UVA (breaking the chorus): Feet of a mule!

BIÓN: To the round, follow the round, my Doña Uva!

AULAGA (panting): My heart is going to burst.

BIÓN (embracing ÁNIMAS by the waist):

Come, shepherdess, leopardess,
the hour is ever-best!

ÁNIMAS: Beast! Thief! Watch out, you'll see!

(The THREE BEGGARS advance towards ALTEA):

SECOND BEGGAR: The queen!

THIRD BEGGAR: The flower of the vintage!

FOURTH BEGGAR: The juice of the wine press!

ALTEA: Ánimas! Ánimas!

ÁNIMAS (coming between them): If you dare to touch her I will split you in two!

BIÓN (pulling AULAGA to take her off among the trees):

My Doña Aulaga, to the round, to the round:
I pay in good money--hush, don't make a sound!

AULAGA: Uva, Bión is carrying me off! He's leading me astray!

UVA (pulling AULAGA by the other hand): What more did you want, little girl? Turn her loose, you dog!

ÁNIMAS: Wicked men! Pigs! Out with all the beggars in this town!

(Suddenly the fife breaks its concert before the apparition of Doña GORGO, who is wearing the beard, carrying a washbasin and, hanging over her arm, a small towel.)

GORGO (from the doorway): Run! Jump! Be merry! It is also the night for gaeity.

(Gestures of surprise and astonishment by the BEGGARS)

BIÓN: The mistress has put on my beard again.

UVA: What lack of respect! What an insult to your brother, Gorgojilla! To come out like that in front of the poor!

AULAGA: Gorgo! My Gorgo! What is happening? You make my hair

stand on end.

ALTEA (terrified, shielding herself behind ÁNIMAS): Ánimas, I want to leave. Come with me. Let's go.

ÁNIMAS: Don Dino! Ay, my mad mistress! Let this torment stop now! Don't tremble, my child.

(The BEGGARS, at last, break out bellowing and laughing.)

FOURTH BEGGAR: Doña GORGO has turned into a goat!

THIRD BEGGAR (on all fours pretending to be a goat): Butt away, long-beard, butt away. Maa! Maa!

SECOND BEGGAR (to FIRST BEGGAR): You, sharpen its horns. And play, play! Play out loud and long!

(The FIRST BEGGAR plays a few notes on the fife.)

BIÓN (snatching the fife away from him): Have more composure; Bion is the only beggar on intimate terms here!

GORGO: Laugh. Screech. Mock me. My spirit is prepared. Don't you see? It is not Gorgo's spirit now. Your shouts and laughter illuminate it, bathing it with pleasure and limitless delight.. What did you think? Come to me. But no, don't come, don't force yourselves to take a single step. It is I, on my knees, who will come to you. (Kneeling, she moves toward them before the fear and silence of all.) What are these humble cobbles to the crevices and scratches that my flesh claims! Brambles and sharp-pointed pebbles are what

this spirit asks of me, quivering with hope. (She rises before ALTEA, presenting her with the washbasin. As she washed ALTEA's hands) Let your hands be the first, niece. It is not I who is going to wash them, returning them to their jasmine innocence...

ALTEA: I have gone blind, I have gone mad... I no longer know what I am doing, nor whom I am seeing...

GORGO: Now, pure once again, they can grip the rod with renewed strength against me. Here is my back, my poor bones that need it. (ALTEA turns her face away, covering it with her hands.) Animas, you didn't strike me, daughter, you didn't hammer your hate into the fallen pain of your mistress...

ÁNIMAS (hiding her hands): Madam, I would die first...

GORGO (washing them): I will wash yours also. Now with greater skill they can continue their secret work...

UVA: You wash my hands? Never, never! This is too much humiliation, Gorgo.

GORGO: No, my Uvita, on the contrary. (Washing them) It is my glory, it is his, his own... They will feel holy, there will blossom in them, perhaps, the new thought of caressing me a little...

AULAGA (going forward): Mine, yes, I will let you wash mine... (As she washes them) Oh, what peace! What sweetness!

What pleasure!

GORGO: Still more for me, Aulaga...

BIÓN: Bion too, my mistress, though I don't deserve it. (His head bowed, respectfully, as she washes his hands)

Blessed madam Gorgo,
in heaven there is an alcove
with altar and holy-water, Gorgo,
reserved for you.
Pater noster. Jesus. Amen.

GORGO: Bión, Bioncillo... The little devil of this house... One would need a torrent for you alone...

THE FOUR BEGGARS (rushing impetuously to the washbowl): Now us, Doña Gorgo!

FIRST BEGGAR: Me first. My hands are dirty.

SECOND BEGGAR (giving him a shove): Have you had the mange?

THIRD BEGGAR (shoving the SECOND BEGGAR): I have. And besides, I'm the new protégé.

FOURTH BEGGAR (pushing through them and plunging his hands in the water): But I'm the oldest!

GORGO: All of you, all at the same time, like good brothers. (As she pours water over their hands and dries them)

Simple souls, decried,
by this water
be purified.
Beautiful souls, denied,
by this water be deified.

(She sets down the washbasin and removes the beard.) And now, children, myself clean now and pure,all of you shining as silver, sit with me at charity's table, at this feast that today is also that of peace and good will. (GORGO goes to the center of the table and each one goes to his place, standing behind their chairs.) Let us commend ourselves, before we begin, to him who bequeathed us this holy and familiar custom.

May the table cloths of your house
always open to your love.
Give them your benediction,
bless them from heaven above.
Upon their unstained whiteness
embroider your pure heart's love:
for him embraced in your shirt-sleeves
as for him you salute with your glove.
Wine of your ripest vineyards:

run in rivers of sunlit love.
Olive trees: offer your branches
and the brown sweet bread, your bud.
Your estate, the choicest lamb,
your orchard, the choicest guavas.
Let not that which the knife cuts
be unknown to the fork of
the poor man who awaits your table
as the tree awaits the dove,
as the farmer awaits the rain,
as your glory, your sister's love.

THE WOMEN:

Amen.

THE MEN:

Amen.

GORGO:

So let it be
for him and for God.

(They all sit. As GORGO, still standing, starts to lift the lid of the great covered dish that stands in the center of the table, a PEASANT enters, panting, at the rear of the garden.)

PEASANT (emerging from the trees): Madam... Madam... (As if surprised, not expecting to see so many people) Dóña Gorgo... (The PEASANT's arrival produces a strange and tense silence.)

GORGO: What is the matter with you? Speak.

PEASANT (slowly, hesitant): Good evening... Forgive me... I thought I would find the mistress of the house alone...

GORGO (serene): As you see, it is not so.

PEASANT (vacillating): I bring a message for you...

GORGO: If it is by word of mouth, tell it to me.

PEASANT: The young man...

ALTEA (standing): Cástor!

AULAGA (as an echo): Cástor.

GORGO: Go on.

PEASANT: ... appeared at daybreak hanging from an olive tree... (A new silence)

ALTEA (shouting): You lie!

AULAGA (questioning): Gorgo, daughter...

GORGO: Is it true what you say, man?

UVA: Have you seen him?

ÁNIMAS: Answer quickly. Come on!

PEASANT: Ladies... The head shepherd has sent me... I've been riding all day... Many leagues... The boy... Go and tell the mistress... Hanged... With the rope from the well...

GORGO (with fatalism): It had to happen. He himself had written it.

ALTEA (decisively): Ánimas. I want to see him. I'm going.

ÁNIMAS: Then it will be with me, child.

AULAGA (faint, trying to walk): I..., I... The two of you alone...

UVA: You can't, daughter. Sit down.

GORGO (in front of ALTEA): Nor you, niece. It would be useless, you don't know where he is. And I will go, on this man's horse, only me. Go and prepare the horse. Do you have anything more to say?

PEASANT (confused): Madam...

(He goes. Pause)

ALTEA: You have killed him (To AULAGA) And you. (To UVA) And you also.

UVA: I wished to help you Altea. Bión and Ánimas know that. Aulaga and Gorgo know. But it couldn't be. It came out wrong.

ALTEA: You are murderers. (To the BEGGARS) Let these poor men know it. Look here at the three of them. You can shout it through the town, howl it from the rooftops, proclaim it through the streets. (BIÓN and the FOUR BEGGARS, some standing and some seated, remain motionless, as if made of stone.) What are you doing? Go. Go. Dead! Hanged from an olive tree by your own hands. Show them your hands. Let the beggars see

them well. They are the very same that drop alms and that strangle a throat.

GORGO: Accuse me alone. Go on, go on.

ALTEA: Quiet! Quiet, dismal old women, pluckers of the light from my eyes, of the joy from my years!

GORGO: Thrash me, Rend me. Claw. Say more, but to me, only to me, for presently I will tell you...

ALTEA: Tell me presently! Let no one dare! Let no one of you speak without your hands falling off! And least of all, you. You fill me with horror. All my life has been a dark room, like a sad, empty coal bin. And now it will be more so.. Leave me be. I cannot see. I would prefer the company of wolves, the nocturnal solitude of the hyenas to being with you, with all of you, old dried up females, black horrors masked as austere and pious souls. Go sleep serenely, my three custodian dogs. Now Cástor belongs to no-one... Isn't that how you preferred it, Aulaga? (AULAGA stares at her in mute aberration, as ALTEA starts to leave.) All that was between these walls were nails to me, even the leaves of the trees, except for you, Ánimas, the only merciful shoulder for my unhappy, sleepless heart...

ANIMAS: I'm going with you, my heart, to fluff your pillows with flowers so that for the first time your sleep will be soft.

ALTEA: No... Later... Tomorrow... I want to weep without anyone near me the rest of the night... Don't come with me, I ask you...

ÁNIMAS: I will do as you please, love... Go sleep, go cry alone, and I will come up then at daybreak to see that the light does not steal your rest.

ALTEA (illumined by a ray of light from above and moving slowly toward the rear of the garden, carrying a lighted lantern):

Dearest love, dearest love:
I without you, and you without me.
When all the towers
heralded your coming,
love, dearest love,
I without you, and you without me.
When in my breast you were
love, dearest love,
I without you, and you without me.
What hope for my eyes,
for my empty lips,
love, dearest love,
if I be without you, and you without me?

GORGO (deeply pained and in a low voice): Altea... Altea... Altea...

ÁNIMAS (starting to leave secretly): How can I leave you now, child? How can I not go with you now, though it be from afar, if you go as if dead?

(She follows ALTEA, very slowly.)

ALTEA (stopping a moment, beneath the door of her balcony):

Bed of my heart,
bedroom of my bliss,
love, dearest love,
without you, without me, nor I with you!

ÁNIMAS: Love, dearest love...

UVA: Love.

AULAGA: Cástor... Cástor...

(ÁNIMAS disappears.)

ALTEA (as she appears in the upper most window of the tower):

My shadow will be a tower,
yours an olive tree,
love, dearest love,
I with you and you with me.

GORGO (overcome, returning slowly to the table, going to sit down, and repeating in an obsessed tone): Dearest love... Dearest love... Dearest love... Love...

(There is heard, as if falling from a height, a horrified cry from ALTEA.)

ÁNIMAS' VOICE (wailing): Altea! Altea! Ay, ladies! Run! Help! All of you, come!

GORGO (erect and tragic): What to do now, my brother? The night of forgiveness, the supper of love and joy, I have blindly exchanged for a night of madness, for a feast of horror and of death.

(There is a profound darkness, in which there can only be heard the hurried footsteps of them all as they run about the rear of the garden, each one going off with his lantern. Immediately afterwards there begins to be heard from afar the simple melancholy music of street beggars of an organ grinder (or hornpipe, flute, etc.), and there can be seen beneath a light from above that illuminates only the table, the FOUR BEGGARS,who are stealing from the table, shoving fruit, forks, knives, etc. in their leather bags. A rhythmic, silent undertaking that is to end with quiet and mocking laughter, as the light and music are extinguished in the garden.)

GORGO (appearing on ALTEA's balcony with a lit candle and shouting):

God! God's God! Look, look well at what I have done! What an odious crime against your daughter in order to save you! (Turning, and as if ALTEA lay dead inside the tower:) There you are, beautiful little spirit, poor spoils of a love that the current of the same blood could not make possible. Yes, daughter, it was I who cast you from the tower, who has been leading you day by day to this deplorable end. Cry, Gorgo, cry; let your tears fall too, my brother, on this cruel stone that bows us down and crushes us forever!

(Lost, like a sleepwalker, AULAGA emerges from among the shadows of the garden.)

AULAGA: Who were you? Who brought you to me? Why did you come to the threshold of my loneliness and penetrate the depths of my bones?

GORGO (to AULAGA): Soul in torment, lost and errant shadow. I come to you, wretched, if it is not too late for you to understand me, to curse me and console me.

(Without even being heard by AULAGA, she withdraws from the balcony, which remains weakly illuminated. UVA emerges also from among the trees.)

UVA (speaking, as if not seeing AULAGA): I too... I too... You were not deceived, Altea... You said the truth and you burned me with your finger when you pointed me out...

AULAGA (at her side, turning slowly in circles, like a phantom): I embroidered her dresses..., and I taught her to read..., and to hunt butterflies...

UVA: I mocked you, I jeered, I insulted you with my laughter... And when I went to help you, I only did it out of spite..., out of jealousy..., out of rage against Gorgo...

AULAGA: I wanted your childhood to be the same garden as Altea's...

UVA: ... but your love only awakened my envy... Your beauty wounded me... I was furious at your youth...

(Carrying the lighted candle, GORGO appears at the rear.)

GORGO (lighting AULAGA's face): Do you see me, Aulaga? (Going up to UVA) Do you recognize me, Uva? It is I... It is I... Pity me... Hate me...

AULAGA (continuing, still as if talking to herself): I played with her... Together we looked for nests... We covered the tiles of the roof tops with our hands...

UVA: Let us hate one another, the three of us... Let us pity one another, the three of us... Let us blame each other...

GORGO (going toward the table): I promised him, I swore to him on his deathbed... (Placing the candle in the center of the table, while AULAGA and UVA circle, slowly, around her) Before that, my brother,let my eyes come loose from my eyelids, let my heart come unstuck... Aulaga, Aulaga! It was I who gave

Cástor to you...

Who put the child on your doorstep... Do you hear me?

AULAGA (not hearing): He grew... He became a fine boy... They galloped together on the mountains...

UVA: What are you saying, Gorgo? Bind your tongue...

GORGO: Castor was his son..., by a poor girl laborer of his vineyards..., from far off..., very far away...

UVA: From your lips there escape things not even you want to confess to yourself in secret.

GORGO: Aulaga, look, listen to me... My brother was a very good man... He even passed for a saint... But you know, daughters, what life in these towns is like... And so many pretty girls on his lands... He revealed his sin to me weeping... It was the secret of a dying soul...

AULAGA: Why didn't I take him away from this house, my God?

GORGO (stopping AULAGA): He was his child, do you understand? Do you comprehend? Half of Altea's blood also ran through the body of the boy... You were a saint, innocent, alone... You lived near us... Who better than you could I entrust him to?

AULAGA (she continues to wander about, in a delirium): He fell in love with her... How could I not see it? Why didn't he tell me anything?

UVA: Aulaga, Aulaga...

AULAGA: ... he fell in love with her... and he was like a dead

man then...

GORGO: Damnation... Disgrace... Madness... I have battled since that night at the shutters. I have wrestled, with frantic delirium, against the inevitable... I have lied... I have humiliated myself before the poor... I have let myself be beaten by those I most loved..., even by your daughter, brother, in whom I was defending you... And so much have I done, so much have I buried inside of me in order to save your secret, that my entrails have split open, exposing it to the wind... And now everyone knows it... And even the stones will repeat it... And Cástor will know it also..., because he has not killed himself..., and that man who came, that poor man of the fields was, without his knowing it, a msssenger of my deceit... Don't you hear? I hear a horse coming this way... Aulaga! Aulaga!

UVA: Leave her, Gorgo, it is better that she doesn't understand... speak to me, terrify me alone.

AULAGA (now out of everything, moving toward the rear of the garden): I will go looking for you, boy..., to mix my bones with yours, under the same branches of your death...

(She disappears. The beginnings of daybreak enter the garden.)

GORGO: I killed him only in myself... I killed him for Aulaga and for Altea, thinking thus to kill this bad dream... I

came to believe that what I desired, that what was only a thought had already come to pass, that the fluttering wings of scandal and dishonor had flown...

UVA: Gorgo... Gorgoja... Gorgona...

(BIÓN enters.)

GORGO (picking up the beard that she had tossed on the table): See, brother, in what an abyss you have plunged me... Your authority, the symbol of my manliness, has served for nothing... (As she burns the beard in the candle's flame) The light I have always implored from you has served only to blacken me and to end as the raving shadow of your guilt. Bión, open the garden gate, and run through the town knocking on the doors! Call out the harlots and the drunkards, the thieves and the beggars, let everyone come and hear Doña GORGO the good, the merciful, proclaiming the leprosy and the misery of her soul!

BIÓN (kneeling before her and attempting to kiss the hem of her garment): No, no. Let them come and adore her, Doña Gorgo, my poor Saint of the Crosses, my little Doña Flower...

GORGO (raising him and pulling him off towards the trees with UVA): Go, my son, wake them up! Go on! Don't let him see me... He's here already... Don't you hear me? Let him first see my crime, in the dawn that Altea and Cástor believed to be the

dawn of their happiness.

(The three disappear. After a brief pause, CÁSTOR can be seen leaping over the wall at the rear.)

CÁSTOR (secretive, moving through the garden, barely murmuring the words): Ánimas... Ánimas... Are you asleep? It's me... Cástor... It is time...

(He continues walking, noting strangely the lighted candle on the rumpled tablecloth.) Where are you? What's the matter? Your heart is asleep... (At the doorway, and seeing in the rear the faintly illumined balcony) I will take you away... by force... I'm going to tear you away now from this prison... (Entering and raising his voice until he is shouting) Altea! Altea! Altea!

(With the reappearance of GORGO and UVA, the garden starts filling with shadows: shawl-covered women from the town--like a single black cape;BIÓN, the FOUR BEGGARS and other poor people.)

GORGO (proceeding toward the balcony, supported by BIÓN and UVA):

What am I? What was I? What are we?
Weep for him and for me.
Spirit that grieves on high.
In peace you never will lie.

Who am I? What was I? What are we?
Pray for him and for me.

(The stage is slowly illuminated with a strange splendor. ALTEA's balcony opens, and supported by ANIMAS, CÁSTOR appears, altered, with his arms opened wide, in a gesture of horror and bewilderment.)

GORGO (falling on her knees): Cástor... Cástor... Here, only Animas is worthy to look at you..., to tell you your history... and collect your tears... Not I, not I... I am no more than a monster, a poor fallen fury, a freak...
(She covers herself with a black linen-cloth while the shawl-covered women and the beggars cry out this chant):

ALL:

Dawn of death, without light,
Passion's unhappy night,
on all the souls that are lost
may heaven's pardon alight.

(The light of dawn increases, the curtain slowly falls.)

Selections from: CANTICLE

by

Jorge Guillén

(Madrid, Spain, 1928)

Translated from the Spanish by

MEREDYTH SAVAGE

CHILD

Clarity of the current,
Circles of the rose,
Enigmas of snow:
Dawn and the beach in shells.

Turbulent machine,
Joys of the moon
With the vigor of patience:
Salt of the brute wave.

Moment without history,
Stubbornly abundant
With myths among things:
Sea alone with its birds.

If such grace,
So solely grace, rich,
Total in a glance:
Sea, present unity.

Poet of pure games
Without intervals,

Divine, without ingenuity:
The sea, the sea intact.

TIME LOST ON THE SHORE

The tangible day
Offers itself, extends,
Expands about me. Once again
It offers me chairs.

No. Better on foot
I will watch the colors
Of my summer,
which still does not know me.

For now, beneath
My empty hands,
A presentiment
Of blue slips forth,

Blue of another infancy
Which will have clouds
For the pursuit
Of many blues,

Possible at times
Within the house
Of friends, very close
--This also will be mine.

With access
By means of brooks, mad
With the merriment
That emerges from August,

And shadows of two
In twos, indistinct
On the banks
That invite a grey green.

Playing at the hours
That themselves play, among
All the hazards,
What love will not appear?

Save me like this, time
Lost on the shore,
Free, such love,
Such hazards, the islands!

TERRESTRIAL SPHERE

Will not even the ravisher of the waves
Nor the amorous shipwreck
Relieve you then, wise sea
Who bend among curves?

Incorruptible curves
Over the perfect blue
That denies all desire
The apparition of foam.

Midday form,
How universal! The refulgent
Waves unfold
The light into light and breeze.

And the breeze glides
--Infant seaman:

Bearing, yes, but no weight--
Among a rigor of boundaries

Which at midday tighten
With accuracy. Splendor
Deserted. The sphere,
So abstract, grieves.

THE ABSENT-MINDED MAN

How well it rains by the river!
It rains little and it rains
So tenderly
That at times
There loiters about a man the patience of moss.
Through the damp,
Threatenings of omens
Pierce and flee.

Still kindly from the last
Wooded regions,
A smoke
Makes sketches
Of ivy.
For whom in this solitude? For him most vacant?
Someone,
Someone waits.
And I go--who will it be?--by the river, by a river
Recently rained upon.

Why do the poplars
Look at me so,
If my custom hardly sees them?
In its silence, abandon extends the

Uninhabited branch.
But courteous flora emerges still over an
October rain.

I, along the smooth green,
I go,
I go looking for the two
Here lost:
For the attentive fisherman who, very young,
Headlong
At the river-edge, gathers
Aimless clouds from the current,
And for the prodigal musician who, without much skill,
From between the banks
Goes singing and leaving words in naked
And continuous syllables,
La ra ri ra,
            ta ra ri ra,
                la ra ri ra...
I must have time
Between my teeth and lips...
With eyes closed, contemplating,
Here no, beyond sight
I see.
I know of a river where in the morning
There float and cross
Curves
Of margins.
Errant
To the point of non-being, where
Does the ivy go, toward what towers
Of no-one?

Through the dampness
Tunnels yearning for exteriors
Open:

Onto covered bridges,
Onto passages under some green foliage
Onto the refuge
In remote valleys.
Hummed rapture.
How it dreams, the voice that tumbles in the lost
Song,
So lost and fluid, towards the expansion of days
Without landmarks, slippery!
Lararira,
        lararira,
                lararira...
The course of the river
Leads.
The clouds,
Crumbling quietly,
Keep their leisure, they do not pause,
And the skies approach me
In a weightless succession
Of eternal firmament.

Short, urgent
Verticals of rain, pencilled annotations!
It rains and there is no malice,
It rains.
Lararira...
I hear them fall, these drops
That scatter, without the strength of globes,
Over the last creaking
Leaves,
Still hanging from autumn.

Meanwhile, the bubbles in visible succession,
The river gathers and offers a lulling,
Continuous, secure.
No-one listens?

For me, for all the love of the moss.
Happiness?
Humming, the self rejoices in its river.

LIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Light on the mountain, dense
With space only space,
Deserted, flat: obstinate
World at the smooth defense
Of the shadow. The light thinks
Colors with a fine and cruel
Eagerness. There go
Its happy unities,
The immolation of hues
Of a gallant paradise.

A CHILD AND THE NIGHT IN THE COUNTRY

Against whom (there is no-one!) does the darkness take body?
Fear trembling with its shadows exhales in gusts.

Between sight and sleep
A child says:
"The bulls must be running!"

Then?
    It will suffice
To make the defense darker:
To hide in dreams!

And the child falls into sleep while from the dark
Forms emerge in the fields, the crowded night, bulls.

A Selection

by

Alfonso Canales

(born Málaga, Spain - 1923)

AUTUMN

That afternoon, that afternoon was
like the center of a glass where the light turns
livid, piercing a shock-white wall
of coagulated crystal.
                The trees
were moist; the rose bushes dripped; the earth
was populated with sudden snails; and fumes
of new-made roof tiles filled the air.
                Wind
stirred the sorrow of the banana trees. The high
treasure of pale gold spilled over and set
papers from old picnics dancing on the plain.
Willow-herbs showed their tongues, searching for
a new tear-drop.
                And time seemed
already lived by someone, already used, loosed
from the heart of a bird that flew in another century.

THE PERFECT GENTLEMEN

by

Max Aub

(Mexico 1946)

Translated from the Spanish

and adapted for radio

by

MEREDYTH SAVAGE

Note, then, the perfect gentleman, first to stifle his passions, or, at the very least, to conceal them with such dexterity that no counterplot may succeed in deciphering his will.

GRACIÁN, *The Hero*

C H A R A C T E R S

ROSE

GUSTAVE

WINKEL

TIME: Spring. 1939.

PLACE: Berlin.

(Berlin, 1939.[1] A stark office. On the wall: a flag with the swastika and a portrait of Hitler. ROSE, a stern, elegant man with a superior air, is seated behind the desk. He is talking with GUSTAVE, his secretary, a meek and attentive clerk.)

ROSE. The English come up with something good from time to time. Kipling said once, more or less: "We must count heads or we must cut them off".

GUSTAVE. (Laughing.) Cutting's a short cut...

ROSE. (Coldly.) You are too intelligent for the post you hold.

GUSTAVE. Please forgive me.

ROSE. Have you no wish to better yourself?

GUSTAVE. Who hasn't, Mr. Counselor General?

ROSE. What did you do before joining us here?

GUSTAVE. The war...

ROSE. And then?

GUSTAVE. I joined the police force.

ROSE. The Weimar police?

GUSTAVE. The police are always the police.

ROSE. There are shades of difference, are there not?

GUSTAVE. There are shades, Mr. Counselor General. (He laughs, ROSE smiles.)

ROSE. But to distrust the whole world leads nowhere. We must realize that a man determined to reveal nothing of his activities, a man resolved to lie to the last, is impenetrable.

GUSTAVE. Excuse me, Mr. Counselor General, but since you do me the honor of discussing my opinions, allow me to tell you, with all

due respect, that I do not agree with you, I am sorry to say, sir. The man who is guilty is our best defense, and therefore we must distrust everybody: we must find in each man the possibility of a suspect.

ROSE. I admit the logic of your deduction. But logic and reality are two different things, don't forget. With the former you can satisfy your best instincts, while the latter catches you off guard, and chance has an unknown mother. We must live in readiness for what life brings, at each hour. Your principle is a poor one because of the impossibility of putting it into practise, at least the way the police are organized to date. Each man is not as he is but as he seems. What does a potential murderer matter to us? What difference does it make if X hates us, if he is obedient?

GUSTAVE. ...A world where everything would be tied together, where you knew what everyone was thinking...it would be the end of hypocracy.

ROSE. Hypocracy is saying what you are not thinking with the hope of having your chance at a later date: if this idea could be gotten rid of, we would see an end to that hardly honorable sentiment.

GUSTAVE. It would be gratifying to live in such a world. Every man with his file up to date, in the morning...

ROSE. Maybe, one day...

GUSTAVE. We have made great progress.

ROSE. I don't deny it.

GUSTAVE. The time will come when everyone, absolutely everyone, will

be filed in the General Directory.

ROSE. And it is possible that it is then we will begin to fail...

GUSTAVE. Go on... Continue, Mr. Counselor General, if I may be so bold.

ROSE. We would have to divide up our attention in too great a number of possible offenders, in order to be effective.

GUSTAVE. That could be solved by increasing the number of the police.

ROSE. The ramifications are not so important as the roots. Once a noxious plant is torn up by the roots, its shoots lack strength and they die of starvation.

GUSTAVE. I respect your wisdom, and I follow the poetic sense of your statement, but, sincerely, I believe--without meaning in any way that I do not admire your very clear ideas--that the more we monopolize, the more smoothly the regime can move ahead.

ROSE. As a preventative measure, but not as absolute security.

GUSTAVE. Now it is you who are the idealist, Mr. Counselor General, sir... To talk of absolute security!

ROSE. The matter of idealism I will grant in jest, Mr. Hoffman. You know as well as I that security is synonymous with vigilance.

GUSTAVE. Well then...

ROSE. Doesn't it seem to you we have lost enough time with our personal ideas? Let's get to work.

GUSTAVE. You like working, sir?

ROSE. Yes.

GUSTAVE. So do I.

ROSE. Little by little the world is shaking off the great harm that Christianity has done it by regarding work as an evil imposed on

us because of original sin. Adam and Eve in paradise have come to be embodied in a couple of millionaires sprawled in the sun in the Bahamas, let us say as the American example. Vagrancy--and what were our primary parents, according to Genesis, but a couple of vagrants...?--begins to receive a bad press. Man is man because he works. It is the only thing that distinguishes him from the animals. His great value. Puts the devil in handcuffs... Could you get on without doing anything?

GUSTAVE. No, sir.

ROSE. And you like your work?

GUSTAVE. Yes, sir, Mr. Counselor General, and I ask you to forgive me: I let myself get carried away by my imaginings and went a bit out of bounds.

ROSE. The reports 404-A and 208?

GUSTAVE. Right here, sir.

ROSE. The reference from department B-20? And the 208?

GUSTAVE. Here they are.

ROSE. This silence of Bart's has me worried.

GUSTAVE. A report arrived from Paris about that, sir.

ROSE. Why haven't I seen it?

GUSTAVE. I left it here on top of your desk, yesterday.

ROSE. I haven't seen it. Look for it. You must have taken it away with the rest.

GUSTAVE. I hardly think so, sir.

ROSE. Don't argue! Nothing from Bergen, or from San Francisco?

GUSTAVE. No.

ROSE. Enquire by code.

(The telephone rings. Sound of GUSTAVE picking it up.)

GUSTAVE. Yes... It's personal, for you.

ROSE. Yes... Good, send him in...

(Sound of ROSE hanging up the receiver. To GUSTAVE.)

Please leave. I'll call you in later.

(Sounds of GUSTAVE leaving, WINKEL entering.)

ROSE. I hadn't hoped to see you down here.

WINKEL. I can imagine...

ROSE. To what do I owe this pleasant surprise?

WINKEL. Pleasant?

ROSE. Whenever we have met, it has always been a pleasure to talk with you.

WINKEL. I can say the same.

ROSE. Then we are in the best of all possible worlds.

WINKEL. In that I am in agreement with you.

ROSE. In that alone?

WINKEL. And in a thousand other things... But, returning to the pleasantness of life: Have you seen what a beautiful day it is?

ROSE. It is spring.

WINKEL. I've had time to notice: I came to your office on foot. Carefully, mind you, but on foot. For some time now I have had a horror of automobiles.

ROSE. When you passed through the park you must have observed the budding of new shoots at close hand, enjoyed the embalmed air...

WINKEL. Did you say embalmed?

ROSE. Exactly.

WINKEL. I would prefer another word.

ROSE. There is a dictionary here, at your disposal. But, forgive me, I was forgetting that you are a specialist in Egyptian history. If I am not mistaken, your historical favorites practiced three types of embalming.

WINKEL. Yes, according to the economic possibilities of each person.

ROSE. And what differences were there from type to type?

WINKEL. Any dictionary will tell you.

ROSE. So they could select, in life, what kind of mummy they would turn into?

WINKEL. Precisely. And the way their intestines were to be taken out. Whether by flank incision--that was the most expensive method--or by the injection of solvents per anum. The same way that, today, you can choose between death by being run over or from a bullet in the head.

ROSE. There are other forms of death which are more peaceful.

WINKEL. Cyanide is highly recommended.

ROSE. It's quick.

WINKEL Difficult to come by.

ROSE. Not really.

WINKEL. Do you have something else to offer me?

ROSE. It is you who have come to visit me.

WINKEL. But I would like to hear you place at my disposal, let us say, for example, a locomotive, so it could crush me, the empty cage of an elevator, so it could break my neck: a steel girder...

ROSE. So it could fall on your head as you pass by a house under construction?

WINKEL. Why not?

ROSE. Too easy. One unexpected step on the part of the pedestrian

would suffice to make it miss target.

WINKEL. Something else... I notice we haven't thought of fire, or of water. A fall in a bath tub isn't a bad solution either.

ROSE. Not to mention poison...

WINKEL. Allow me to tell you that that is more difficult. Centuries ago, when the master of the house was accustomed to eating separately, by himself, it was child's play. Now it is only used as the last remedy of vengeful wives.

ROSE. Electricity...

WINKEL. Not a bad idea, but complicated. I have come to visit you precisely to save you so much trouble.

ROSE. You are most kind. But believe me...

WINKEL. Oh, I'm sure you don't select the method of suppressing your fellow men yourself. You need only mark a cross at the side of a name and the execution--I said execution, Mr. Counselor General--the execution of your design is delegated to competent services... Am I not right?

ROSE. You will understand that I can only answer that I do not know what you are talking about.

WINKEL. I'm not surprised. You have so much work to do...! But, making an effort, I do believe that you could recall having placed a sign--a dot, a dash, a cross, I don't know what--a few days ago, beside my name...

ROSE. I never knew that historians had such imagination...

WINKEL. I am perfectly aware that I am being watched. Do you want the license number of the car? 010-421-G. Three men are quite a lot for a single man, and one as insignificant as I am.

ROSE. You astonish me, professor. Why should we be suspicious of such a zealous party member as you are? Your book on the Egyptian race is a textbook in the Universities of the Reich. I do not know what you can have to be afraid of!

WINKEL. No one doubts that I am an active supporter of the regime. But what brings me here is not some theoretical problem regarding our glorious principles.

ROSE. All the more reason not to worry. You may go in peace.

WINKEL. To die murdered at the first opportunity! No thanks... I will confess that I was quite frightened until I got here.

ROSE. And now you breathe freely?

WINKEL. As you can see, Mr. Counselor General. You police prefer to commit a "mistake"... I was very careful not to remain alone, not to walk close to the edge of sidewalks, and you know as well as I how to cross a street in the middle of a group of pedestrians: it is an excellent precaution against drivers that are inept or all too skillful. Because my death must only appear as an unhappy accident. After all, I am one of the prides of the Nazi regime. Now I've calmed down: I can talk to you.

ROSE. Why didn't you do so by telephone, professor?

WINKEL. Fear of electricity... or of being told that the Counselor General was out.

ROSE. Please tell me what you have to say.

WINKEL. The organization of our world is a curious thing, my friend Rose. Forgive me! Mr. Counselor General of Information...! You and I belong to the same party. We have the same hopes, the same reverences. The police... The people do not realize that the

police are the authentic force of the future. The armies are called to disappear en masse; they will be replaced by the police, because future wars will not be a matter of country against country: they will be internal, not civil, authentically national, in the interior of each country. The circumstances will compel Germany to assume the police surveillance of the entire world.[2]

ROSE. The world will be filled with statues of Fouché.

WINKEL. Perhaps... if justice had anything to do with all this. The police are the coercive force of the world whose birth we are now witnessing. The nation with the better force will dominate. And, in the meantime, because of a chance event which neither your will, nor my own, have anything to do with, you have to order my....suppression. It is the reign of the police. The police, proprietors of the world! The world will belong to the flatfoots! Each man with his filing card! These are the slogans I propose to you. (Pause.) ...I was not a friend of Von Klein's.

ROSE. Of course not.

WINKEL. It was an accidental conversation.

ROSE. A word tossed to the winds is never recovered...

WINKEL. Unless you make a recording...

ROSE. I don't understand, professor.

WINKEL. Analyzing the situation, I decided that it wasn't as desperate as it might seem on the face of it. You came to the conclusion that it was essential to have me eliminated. I do not doubt that some voice may have been raised in my defense...! An illustrious professor! But, as a last resort, you all decided that what would be best for the people, for the party, for the Fuhrer--would be to take the ultimate precaution... Von Klein paid

his debt and I am the only person who knows what no one ought to know: how the assasination of our ambassador in Paris was prepared and carried out. It would do me no good to tell you that I had not the slightest interest in knowing the truth. Besides, if the man was a traitor, or on the point of becoming one, he is well off dead. It was useful, was it, that his death should appear to be the work of the communists? Fine! That way you killed two birds with one stone. What need did I have to find out about it?

ROSE. None, of course. But the fact is that you do know... It is clear to us that you haven't told anyone about it. But you could do so at any moment...

WINKEL. Unfortunately that is true, even though I would have no interest in doing so.

ROSE. Then the necessity of your disappearance will not have escaped you...

WINKEL. The truth of the matter is that I have no wish to die.

ROSE. What more do you have to hope for in life? To die serving our cause...! You are no longer very young. You have an ulcer in your duodenum, your children are already married. I can promise you a statue.

WINKEL. Bust or full figure?

ROSE. Your choice.

WINKEL. And the place?

ROSE. Your home town, The university...

WINKEL. Unfortunately it is too late...

ROSE. I don't understand.

WINKEL. For the good of our country I have to renounce a violent death.

ROSE. In this too we can come to an agreement.

WINKEL. I am afraid not.

ROSE. Explain yourself at once.

WINKEL. If I should die one of these days, whatever the cause, a detailed account of everything that, unintentionally, I have learned will be published immediately, in Paris... I assume you will not doubt that I am a man who is truly devoted and loyal to my party. But I had no other choice. Believe me, if I were just anybody, I wouldn't have hesitated a moment to sacrifice myself. But I am on the verge of deciphering a palimpsest of the XXII Dynasty. How could I leave such a triumph to my colleagues! I think you can easily understand.

ROSE. Since you are so kind, could you do me the favor of advising me as to your means of delivering the account of your curious discovery to the interested government?

WINKEL. I have no objection. On the same day that Von Klein, under the effect of a nervous crisis, told me the whole plot of the execution of the ambassador and how all the machinery was set up to accuse the Jews, or the communists--the latter were selected at the last minute--, I realized the terrible situation that I was in if, as was most likely, there was someone, or something, there that was transmitting the conversation to the police.

ROSE. And then?

WINKEL. The following day I went into a record shop...

ROSE. (Consulting a card in the files.) At 2:30 P.M.

WINKEL. Everyone knows that I have a great record collection--it is another of the reasons why I do not wish to die. Since it was natural for me to be seen there, it didn't attract the attention of those who had already begun following me. At that time you had not yet made a decision.

ROSE. You cut a recording and had it sent to X... with a letter.

WINKEL. How did you know?

ROSE. It is no more than a supposition. Well then, suppose it's true. What did your letter say?

WINKEL. Don't you know?

ROSE. Let us say that I don't.

WINKEL. I breathe easier. Because, if the letter were in your possession, that is to say, if the person to whom it was addressed had been one of us, what would stop you from killing me right here?

ROSE. In spite of the fact that my task may only be that of setting crosses at the side of names...?

WINKEL. Whatever.

ROSE. The letter was addressed to Monsieur Charles Du Parc, professor at the Sorbonne, your colleague.

WINKEL. Not a difficult guess. You don't frighten me, Mr. Counselor General.

ROSE. But you have just suggested...

WINKEL. If you had the recording, you wouldn't have received me. Well, now you know: if I disappear, the recording will fall into the hands of the French Government, without fail. If nothing happens to me, it will be destroyed the day after my natural death.

ROSE. Then we must place you in the hands of the best specialists,

just in case. Such a disturbance over a simple angina pectoris!

WINKEL. My own doctor is quite good enough.

ROSE. It would be a beautiful international scandal!

WINKEL. What disgrace would descend on our government! Imagine... Matters just so trivial have provoked downfalls more famous than this.

ROSE. The foundations of the regime would be undermined... Do you have anything further to communicate to me?

WINKEL. I hope you will take the pertinent measures to see that I will be left to live in peace.

ROSE. Don't worry, professor.

WINKEL. Then, with your permission, I will leave.

ROSE. I wish you well...

WINKEL. I don't like the tone in which you say that...

ROSE. I am sorry. But you will like this even less...

(ROSE takes out a pistol, shoots and kills WINKEL. He rings a buzzer. S.S. guards enter. To guards.)

Remove him.

(The guards remove the corpse, as GUSTAVE comes in.)

GUSTAVE. The Counselor General was in danger?

ROSE. No. It was simply best to finish this business off at once.

(GUSTAVE stops behind ROSE. He draws out a gun.)

GUSTAVE. Put up your hands.

(ROSE obeys. GUSTAVE picks up the telephone.)

GUSTAVE. (Not allowing for any discussion.) Get me the Chief... Gustave Hoffman speaking. I have Rose under arrest... Don't argue with me...! I don't think he will confess... He will use

every device. If we broke every bone in his body... Yes, he is listening to me and he knows he will not leave the building alive... But all this is secondary: what matters is to get ahold of the Professor's recording. Take this down: Du Parc... Yes, D-u-p-a-r-c, professor at the Sorbonne in Paris. (To Rose.) Mr. Rose, would you be good enough to spare us the trouble of looking up the address in the directory? (Rose doesn't answer.) Find out his address... Yes... Mr. Rose did not suspect that we were listening. The move was too clever... Be quick about it--he has a capsule of cyanide in his mouth and I cannot keep him from biting into it. And it would not be suitable for his subordinates to see such a thing. (He hangs up. To Rose.) If you like, we can continue our discussion about the necessity of distrusting everyone... Who was right?

ROSE. Did you suspect me?

GUSTAVE. No. We knew there was a traitor here. Nothing more.

ROSE. You are Otto Rinkle.

GUSTAVE. Yes.

ROSE. I did not suspect.

GUSTAVE. Nor I you. It has been a surprise... Are you going to talk?

ROSE. What do you think?

GUSTAVE. You know better than anyone what measures we will have to take.

ROSE. I have the cyanide between my teeth. I have only to clench my jaws...

GUSTAVE. I am sorry... It's a speedy death.

ROSE. Tomorrow the professor's report will be published. It was worth it.

GUSTAVE. I do not think so. Professor Du Parc is a very good friend of ours. He has accepted various invitations from his friend Abetz... It will not be difficult for us to get ahold of the recording, because now who is going to know that the good Egyptologist has died? We have time ahead of us... Your gesture has been useless... You have remained at the halfway mark. I realize that it was a great temptation. It was worthwhile to chance it. Can you imagine the newspapers of the entire world publishing the truth about Von Klein's death? It was truly stupendous. Exciting. It is possible that I would have done the same thing, in your place. The trouble is that I was listening to the conversation.

ROSE. Where is the microphone?

GUSTAVE. What does it matter?

ROSE. Pure curiousity.

GUSTAVE. Keep your curiousity.

ROSE. Thank you.

GUSTAVE. You are welcome. The move was a good one. You killed the professor. The ministry would congratulate you for your decision: you saved time and spared them a problem. Who would suspect you? No one. Tomorrow Professor Winkel's confession would be published in Paris. A universal scandal. Great difficulties for us, a splendid weapon in the hands of your people. Who could know that you had found out about the existance of the recording? No one. Your act was normal. You were not responsible, officially, for the results. I admire the speediness of your decision. And your having resolved the situation yourself, without asking for instructions.

ROSE. Thank you.

GUSTAVE. But we would have given the lie to everything. And it would have sufficed. Believe me. The truth does not weigh more than the lie, once they have both been let out. All that humanity which follows us, the same as that which follows you, is disposed not to believe anything that could be harmful to it.

ROSE. (Ironically.) The Fuhrer did that, so it is well done... Do you have a concrete proposition to make to me?

GUSTAVE. I would like to hear such a thing from your own lips. (Pause.) You remain silent? What did you hope for? To trick me? Unfortunately, I know the cloth from which you are cut. This world of ours in which we happen to live also has its heroes. The trouble is that now they are not the generals of chivalry. It is we who are the heroes, whose name no one utters and never will.

ROSE. I did not know that you were a sentimental man.

GUSTAVE. No one knows it--not even my wife. I am sorry that it was you. I like you. But... You said yourself: "Our best ally, the only one, is the man who is guilty"... If you hadn't condemned yourself, who could have suspected you? What country do you belong to?

ROSE. Me? The same as you: the police...

GUSTAVE. Wouldn't you like to change parties?

ROSE. No.

GUSTAVE. You don't trust...?

ROSE. No. Nor would any of you. But that is not the problem.

GUSTAVE. You have just said that we are of the same country. within the species there should be no battle...

ROSE. Don't insist. We have no more time for discussion.

(There is knocking at the door.)

GUSTAVE. Pleasant journey.

ROSE. Thank you.

(Brief pause. There is further knocking at the door. ROSE's gasp is heard as the crushed cyanide capsule takes effect. Brief pause. Sound of ROSE's body falling to the floor. Sound of door opening. Footsteps.)

*****

1 -- The places and the date are interchangeable. (Author's note.)

2 -- This sentence is printed in italics because it has been taken from the magazine, United States News, with the only change being that of Germany for U.S.A. (Author's note.)

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