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INNER ARCHITECTURE: novel

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From the SelectedWorks of Gene Washington

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INNER ARCHITECTURE: novel

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INNER ARCHITECTURE

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will be able to replicate it or run

a computer simulation to model it

The events of a life are arranged in an

order that is not chronological.

But, rather, corresponds to

an ***inner architecture***. Italo Calvino

I

Citizen: Before the Invasion, and the occupation of my house, I was a part owner and editor of a small publishing house in ***. I was middle aged, with a wife a little older than me, a daughter 13 years old and a son somewhat younger. My oldest son, J***, was killed resisting the first wave of Invaders. My wife's brother who lived with us for several years (after his divorce), left when the Invaders reached the city. We lost complete track of him.

***

Last night's dream: *We are walking along together for a ways and then, we part. He is with someone. I can follow them without thinking. But I don't know where they will go, the places where they will pause. We pass through what seems to be a shanty-town. There are windows with photos in them. He will never be here. I see a face that could be*

his. The face emanates a complete, almost a bitter intelligence. But it is a face that doesn't exist. It is perhaps the face of J****also taken out of life. We know the occasion. But we will never know the reasons it happened.*

***

The Invasion became the metaphor that underlay my journey to hunger, humiliation and cowardice. It was a recognition of the never ending tooth-and-nail conflict that underlay all human interaction in those days. The Invasion gave orgiastic expression to the murderous impulses only temporally restrained beneath the facade of the man in the street. Hundreds of the Invaders and many of our fellow citizens wished us dead. They included people waiting behind us in line. People who didn't have a house when we did—even, perhaps, one's children who waited for you to get out of their way.

Life in the Invasion was what you made of it, but only as long as it allowed you to do so.

The Invasion ruined my business. I had published schoolbooks for elementary schoolchildren and an occasional novel for young adults. There was, of course, no way a business like that could survive under the new, and brutal, regime. My wife had a small inheritance. But it was not enough to support us, even before the Invasion. During the Invasion we were reduced to a bare necessity. We had to move into a smaller house further removed from the center of the city. There was no public transportation there. And none anywhere after the Invasion. So we had to walk for food, sometimes water and other supplies.

What happened to us was disgusting, horrible and degrading. Nobody could bring us to accept it or to persuade ourselves that it might be good to die. It is disgusting to be at the mercy of a idiotic blind fate…the entire secret inner dissolution that is stupid and offensive: no matter what kind of an explanation there may be for it.

The usual heresy then consisted in denying the existence of the God that created us. To us, it was a much more interesting heresy to imagine that possible God has created us than to say that there isn't the least reason for us to be impressed by that event. Certainly not to be thankful for it.

Many of us thought that if there is a God it was our duty to say no. If there is a God then it was our task to be his negation.

My wife took it upon herself, and many of her friends, to say a great, clear NO. But we always began again. We never gave up.

***

In my journal of the times—now irretrievably gone—I had written, under two heads, some of my impressions of selected events of the Invasion. The headings were "mist" and "smoke."

Mist: By this, if I remember right, I meant something natural that thins or parts or deepens further; something through which a shifting truth may be glimpsed with pleasure or stained with fear. Mist: breathable, water passing by in a cloud.

Smoke: By this I meant man-made smoke, complex molecules conjured up for obscure reasons, yet having their source in a single explicable one. Clever to make, but

not safe to breathe. After you've blown it away you were looking at a shell. But by the time you understand what it was, it was useless.

I did not discuss these metaphoric categories, or their usefulness, with my family or my neighbors. And I withhold here examples of each in the expectation that whoever reads this MS (on the slight possibility it will last and be found) will want to apply the categories to events recorded here: perhaps to the events that transpire whenever one country invades another.

As you might expect, after the Invasion we were no longer a happy family. But we still had good hearts and we did our best to console each other in our impoverishment. I myself was soft-spoken with a mind perhaps over cultivated from reading. I was, and still am, a small person, with slightly sloping shoulders, and perhaps a little paunchy. I have always tried to put on a cheerful look, even though friends have told me that they sometimes observed something heavy and often drooping in my face. My eyes are still deep blue. I have always tried to keep a friendly look in them.

My wife, who had been beautiful in her girlhood, with wide eyes and pouting lips, suffered from heart-trouble, to which was added a touch of hypochondria. She had grown lazy and stout. Shadowy wrinkles had become strewn across her face. Her mouth had grown tight, her eyes protruded and had pouches under them. She was an orphan, adopted and raised by an uncle and his wife. They, being wealthy, had spoiled her. Myself, taking up after they died, had also (I suppose) spoiled her too. It was, I soon learned at the beginning of the Invasion, a mistake. It made everything later—when the hard times

came—harder for her. The first year of the Invasion seemed to bring out only the weaknesses of her character.

My son was bright, but a little strange. He had over-excited eyes, turned up lips and a fixed hard expression. If you looked at him or spoke to him, he eyes seemed to occillate between dancing and losing their luster. He was very close to his older brother. When the Invasion came, he said he hoped that it would go on a long time. He wanted it to last until he got old enough to enlist in the army. He quietly took the news of his brother death in the war with the invaders. But after that he began to talk about how much he hated them. He said he wanted to kill at least one of them. Many of his games, I begin to notice at the time, were tests of physical strength.

Were they solely for the sake of revenge?

But he was weak, not strong. I was afraid that he had inherited the bad health that ran in our family. Even though we had more to eat than the average family, my son seemed to be shrinking, not growing, and I think I saw signs of a developing apot belly of the hungry. My daughter had the physical stamina that my son lacked. But we worried about her too. Her mind seemed undeveloped. She had always been slow at her studies, though we never thought much about it until the Invasion. Then, in that terrible year, her infant character took on a strange quality, as if she were drawing in which her breathe all the confusion and humiliation of the times.

She had pure white skin like that of her mother. But strangely she was not pretty. Her teeth protruded and her cheekbones seemed to be out of proportion to the rest of her face. But the most worrying thing was the expression, or lack of one. Often, when

something went wrong, or something happened she could not understand, her face seemed to shrink and hang like a heavy leaf in rain. She never wanted to play with anyone except her brother. She hardly ever spoke, sitting and watching other at play…but never saying a word. Whatever we said to her, or whatever happened to her, she responded indifferently. She gave no sign of devotion to either my wife or me. Her feelings were directly only at her brother. When our few relatives came for a visit, I would say to them, "A***is more like a daughter-in-law than a loved daughter."

It was a kind of delicate, obscure joke that I liked to make. I used my low voice accompanied by a smile. There was, however, truth in it. My small boy and daughter appeared to me then like a new bride and groom—like one found in a fairy-tale, a diminutive, uncanny couple, on as bewitched as the other.

Talking incessantly my son confided to my daughter his fantasy of taking revenge on some invaders.. He expressed himself with extreme passion and marks of childish atrocity. It frightened my daughter, because it was her brother, her dull face would light up wit hard attention. I thought at times of punishing my son for his wild talk. I thought it had a bad effect on my daughter and us. The kind of Invasion we suffered, and its effects, has always been the hardest on children. My wife tried to get the children to think of it as an illness (a temporary one) in the family; or as an earthquake or flood. No one was to blame. But I could see she failed. Where, we thought, did our son get his vengeful ideas? We feared that if he went on thinking this way, either in daydreams or nightmares, he would soon feel that he must do something to make the ideas real. In fact, he was not capable of carrying out any revenge against the invaders. If he tried, he would fail and likely be caught and punished by the invaders. Had we not, as a family, suffered enough?

I shook my head often. I refused to punish my son. His futile patriotic fame did not depress my daughter as my as my wife's foreboding. Children, I now know, are often immune to their own cruelty. One day we overheard my wife's parents discussing our children. My wife began to cry. There was a close bond between my daughter and my wife…the motherly anxiety being reflected in the daughter as if it were a shadow overhanging a stagnant pond.

One afternoon in the *** of *** my daughter had a surprise. My son was delivering a message to one of my friends. My daughter went out and down to a vacant lot where my son had promised to meet her. Then, some time later, my son came back to the house alone, saying,

"Mother, where is A***"?

Then, about an hour later, my daughter returned. She looked like a sleepwalker. For several days she would not, or could not, eat, move or sleep. She sat, no matter where she was, all day long. She would lie in her bed at night, breathing with her mouth wide open. She often stared straight ahead, her eyes taking on the aspect of polished marble. The doctor who came to examine her could not explain it. On the third day, a remark of my son's, returned to her old self…the usual poor, listless condition. But until that time we never learned what had frightened her.

We had a few newcomers on our street. But at first my wife did not know, or did not care to know, any of them. But then she started going to them to ask them about the mysterious adventure of my daughter. Finally, she found a family with a small daughter, a little older than mine, who said she had gone with my son to look for my daughter. It

turned out that my daughter had been misdirected by another child and had consequently strayed into a side street. It was near a large square where a group of hungry townspeople had gathered to protest against even more strict rules of the invaders. Instead of negotiating with the protesters the invaders had fired into them. Several bodies lay on the pavement. Some had grimacing faces, all with grimacing limbs, rags of flesh in tattered clothing. There was a wall against some had been pinned and as they fell that streaked it with their blood. Only one person as alive when my daughter arrived there. In her confusion she went up to an Invader. For awhile, he paid no attention to her. Then he shouted at her to run away,

"Run, run, for god's sake, run!"

We thought that our daughter would never forget the scene. She had a sort of placidity about her…but never an alarm or panic. But we could tell that something was always weighing on her thoughts, oppressing her spirit as if a heavy skull was too tight for her sad mind.

We tried, but could never forget the loss of J***, our oldest son, in the first battle with the Invaders. From his birth he had been an intelligent, healthy and promising boy and young adult. But we had a practical realism and respect for the finality of death. So we closed our minds to our son's death. We never discussed it with each other. There was heartbreak enough, in those evil times, in having to bring up children. Added to all our problems was the question of my wife's brother. Was he too dead, killed by the Invaders?

"Probably he too is dead," my wife would say.

"Oh, I suspect he will turn up one of these days…when we least expect him."

I had never got along with my wife's brother. He seemed cynical and sycophantic. Before the Invaders came, he had held a government position under our late king. He belonged to a social club where they talked the platitudes of years long gone. They discussed and made up posters against the democratic government we had before the Invasion. I often wonder whether or not he had deserted to the Invaders. They could always use, I thought at the time, someone like him, a native of the country versed in its customs, myths and rules. My wife defended her brother against my opinions of him. We began to have an uneasy relationship, to have more disagreements and stranger issues. Still, I think that she believed as I did. That her brother had gone over to the enemy. But we silently agreed to drop the issue. We had reached the point of the sorrows of the Invasion when nothing mattered except our survival.

I always suspected that my wife's brother was a sort of heavy daytime drinker. Certainly that sort was more troublesome to others than they think. And the others, teetotalers like me, were often more unjust to them than to their roaring festive companions. Half the time, daytime drinkers, are not aware of any incapacity or lack of charm. Or perhaps they did know and thought that you did not, when you did, you did not tell them you knew. It would have been a breach of good manners. Drinkers like my brother in law often made an effort, often a heroic one. You then felt that you had to respect and even applaud that: whether or not it was fun for you.

But the worst injustice must be when you scarcely knew them, and you judged the without reference to their habit: as in my case with my brother-in-law. He simply seemed mediocre, old for his…weak for his size, dull and rather vain. My wife had not warned me that I was not seeing him at his best. I now suppose it was his nature only at that time.

Perhaps, at other times, I told myself, that his nature was ideal, his mind vigorous and fresh. That would explain the love my wife still bore him.

***

We had always been loyal to our democratic government. Three or four of our extended family had been heroes to us and our neighbors. They had become leaders of the resistance…saboteurs and snipers…who made trouble for the Invaders. One was a cousin***another an uncle***. Still some of us were suspicious of my wife's youngest brother. We were convinced (though the reasons have now escaped me) that he was alive somewhere, collaborating with the Invaders. I remember, on one occasion, an cousin of mine blaming me for marrying into such a family.

I realize now, after all the in-between years have passed, that I myself was to blame for some of the trouble my wife and I had with each other. I was too sedentary, too philosophical, too calm during the Invasion. But as least I was staying out of danger by not participating in the resistance movement. I could never think of anything that I might have done to do in that way. As some of my relatives let me know, at the few family meetings we had, or by not attending them, what they thought of my supposed cowardice.

***

What it like for J*** in the days before his death? J****sits on the bed. His head leans back against the wall. He looks around the room. Everything seems ordinary, Everything seems poor. Sometimes he seems depressed by C*** imperfections. They should not be important. But they often become real, ready to take control of C***.*

*Hidden by the brilliance of language and the quality of X***he knows he will never understand them.*

*He waits for C***to put on her coat. She avoids his eyes. In silence they descend to the street. He waits for her to say something.*

***

Unlike the others, I had come to understand the source of the tension between strangeness and familiarity that characterized our relations with the Invaders. It was like a great building, visible from far away, at the end of a straight road that cut across what seemed to be level plains. Only when we drew near were we brought up sharp, on the edge of a great canyon, invisible from the road, that cut its way between us and the monument we sought. We realized that we were looking at the Invaders as if from across a silent drop of thousands of years of different histories.

I became depressed when we had to take an Invader in to live with us. I could see, in part because of my relationship with my kinsmen, that I was bound to bring me and wife disgrace…as well as distress and difficulty. I was my weakness to be timid, to be conciliatory. I then knew, in the physical presence of the Invader, that I would be even less able to correct my weakness. I knew how deeply my wife hated the Invaders. Had they not killed her oldest, and most loved, son? But I must have known at the time that it was, in those circumstances, hard to distinguish between hatred and fear. It had been in my wife's nature to imagine that the worst things could become even more worse. Perhaps, I had thought at the time, that the Invader would take advantage of this fear.

Then what would our kinsmen think of us? Would they take our non-resistance to the Invader as treason…to despise us?

Little did we know then how it would all turn out.

***

After a few months of the Invasion I was able to distinguish ranks within their army. So, before the arrival of the Invader who was to live with us—he turned out to be of fairly high rank—two Invaders of lower rank came to our neighborhood. They explained to us that they were to make a survey of our section of town. It was to find suitable lodging for an officer of their army.

The officer arrived a day or two later. With an indifferent air, but methodically, he ordered us to open all the doors, not forgetting the kitchen cupboards and the clothes closets. He looked carefully down to the street from the windows. Then he inspected us as carefully as he did our rooms and the furniture. He gave us to understand that we were to wait on him personally. He requested a telephone and gave instructions that one of us was to stay in the house until someone came to install the phone. The officer took the best bedroom and the living room for his exclusive use. He tested the bed for its comfort and then ordered that it be replaced by another bed.

He ordered us to have all our personal effects removed from the rooms he had taken by five o'clock that evening. He then left with what I took to be an aide. Then, about four thirty that evening he returned with his aide carrying his luggage and several large boxes of books.

"I shall probably be here for the duration of the Invasion," he said flatly.

All that day and the next few days my wife worked and wept. I myself and the children were inefficient help for her. I had no idea of how to comfort her. I only hoped that we might get along with the officer. For an Invader, he seemed reasonable enough. But it was a hope mixed with dread. Would our relatives disapprove? Especially, if we got on well with the officer? Would they believe that we were collaborating with the Invaders?

In any case, I knew the Invader's presence in our house was going to be hard on my wife. After all it was her concern to see that the housekeeping, and care of the children were properly done. I kept assuring her that I would help her. And I tried to persuade her not to presume anything about the character of the Invader.

"We should reserve judgment for a while on his character and especially our own tactfulness toward him," I said. I included the children on this advice. I was surprised, I must admit, that they all promised me and my wife to be on their best behavior.

"Furthermore, " I said to them, "the Invader's presence here is not a thing for you to hold against him or his comrades. Every army of occupation has to lodge some of its officers with private citizens. It is just normal. If our own army should come to liberate us, their officers would probably want to take the best rooms in the best houses."

But during the week, I had begun to understand…or perhaps feel…something of the strangeness of the Invader. It was like finally coming to fathom (at least some) of the temperament of him. As a history buff, I had always had an interest in knowing foreigners, even our enemies, by means of their history. Were they always so aggressive

in their attitude toward other countries? What did they have in mind for us, the occupied? In these ruminations I was careful not to over-generalize.

From what I could learn from our neighbors—some of whom had Invaders thrust on them—was that it was their opinion that it was a policy of the Invaders to subjugate a foreign country by individuals. Each Invader, lodged in a particular house, was there to acquire the most minute detail of the ways and character of individual homeowners.

The name of our occupier was Z***. I find it written on one of his bags. He was, I suppose, of middle age, tall and active. I suppose you might even say he was good-looking in his way. His only weakness, I could then observe, was that he was susceptible to colds and coughing spells. From my point of view, and I think my wife would have agreed, that there was something odd about his face. It was a peculiar asymmetry. It looked like someone had carved it, with a dull knife, out of wood or some similar substance. There were places below the eyes and around the lips where such a knife-carver had allowed his knife to slip. Added to these features there was the matter of how you looked at his face. It always seemed in profile. It did not align itself straight at you. Along one cheek was a noticeable scar. Was it a dueling scar? Now, after all these years, I remember the scar, not an unbecoming one, as something like a sore that had healed badly. Even though his ears were small they protruded out from his head a remarkable distance. His chin was rather long. Over it the skin was slightly pitted and discolored.

We had a distinct advantage over most of our neighbors with their domestic Invader. It was the basis, we thought at the time, to establish good relations with him. My wife and I both knew his language. (I omit here the details of how we learned his

language. I may have time, however, report on that matter after I finish this text. It has to do with my interest, at the time, in archaeology.)

At first my wife and I could not conceive of why the Invader has chosen our modest house. I have always thought that a man of his rank would have selected a more spacious perhaps wealthy establishment. Or even a villa. But after observing his way of life, we came to the conclusion (a false one it turned out) that his choice was quite sensible. He had something to do with supplies for the army. He went to his work early in the morning and stayed late in the evening. Sometimes he stayed all night. Then he would come back for a short nap. What he obviously liked about living with us was the convenience of it. The office from which he worked was just in the next block. In any event we soon found out that our waiting n him meant more to him than just comfort. His power over us was more than vanity.

Our house was small. The Invader had taken over more than half of it. We were left with the foyer and a corridor, which was too narrow for any use, and the kitchen and one bedroom. Please remember, there were three adults and two children in that small space. I was lucky to remember an cousin who had a good-size folding cot. I persuaded her to exchange a old single bed for it. I put that in the kitchen for me and my wife. The two children were put in the bedroom to sleep. They were, unfortunately, light sleepers, A***because he was so…call it meditative. Our daughter was timid and given to bad dreams. When something disturbed at night they were high-strung and nervous the next day. There was always some disturbance, especially in the kitchen. The captain often sat up late and wanted a hot drink before he went to bed. Sometimes he would ring for in the

middle of the night—just to run some trivial chore. Then, of course, we had to rise early to fix his breakfast.

Our plan was to use the children's room for a sitting room during the day. But it happened that the children spent most of their time in the kitchen. To be where our part time help used to be seemed to make it easier for the children not to forget all the things they now had to do. We intended to keep the cot folded and back against the wall. But, before long, we were using it as a couch. We sat side by side on it while we ate. We rested there when we were able to. The bedcovers got very dirty. But we taught ourselves not to mind that.

Our domestic Invader insisted on having the bathroom all to himself. He said it was for his hygiene.

"All you***have bad diseases…including venereal ones."

Since we had to be careful about how much water we used, and could not afford soap, we had only the kitchen sink to wash in. The trip downstairs, to the outdoors, and across the street to a public toilet was hard, especially for my wife with a bad heart.

On cold winter nights the house got too cold for the Invader to get out of bed to go to the bathroom:

"I don't want to catch cold," he said.

Then he would ring for me or my wife to bring him a bed-pan and to wait for him while he used it. I used to think that I was the one who always had to answer the Invader's call. But I was beginning then to get quite deaf. So my wife would rise to answer the call. She

said she didn't want to disturb me. We never know whether an Invader of his class was used to this kind of service, or whether our humiliation amused him. He did not smile or joke about anything. But I observed, on occasion, that his blue eyes seemed to twinkle at our work for him.

You are perhaps thinking that keeping house and the Invader would not have kept us busy from morning to night. But it did, straining all our nerves. We were responsible for going to the market, which usually took all day. Nearby markets often had nothing edible. If they did, the lines were long. Some days we had to stood all afternoon, waiting. Coal and wood for the stove had to be brought in for a long way. It was often in small amounts, sometimes just a few days supply. My son would sometimes go more than once a day to fetch fuel for the stove. He also had to do, due to my wife's heart condition, most of the house cleaning.

We came to be resigned to our dirty clothes. But the Invader expected us to wash and iron his shirts, pants and sometimes his underwear. My wife was forever sewing and mending. As time went on, and our clothes wore out, there was more and more of this work to do.

One afternoon as my wife sat with me on the cot, thrusting her needle faster and faster, yanking the thread until it broke, she said, in a soft hysterical tone,

"There may be one advantage in our children's not having enough to eat and not growing as they should. They can go on wearing he same old clothes longer than normal children."

I took the needle and thread away from her, put my arms around her, and told her that this was no way for her to talk. Unintentionally or not, it was almost like a parody of my own ironic speech. It disturbed me, somehow between sadness and anger. Our nerves were on edge. We were unaccustomed to everything, inefficient at everything. Consequently, we alternately blamed and apologized to each other.

*J***is about to depart. The sun is low at ***. There is almost no wind. It reminds him, strangely, of a vast malicious calm you sometimes feel after a storm. In the distance, blue as winter, the dim roofs of the city appear. (J***always has good eyesight). He looks in another direction. It is getting dark there.*

*Now, abroad the ***, everything is brilliant. J***sits by a window as they move. His weapon leans precariously on the seat in front of him. Suddenly, his imagination starts to panic, to rush from one image to another.* **I have followed him so long I am sensitive to the danger he feels he is now in.** *The ***makes a turn into another direction. Now, at what seems the last moment of time, it begins to move faster. Out the window, now racing along the ***, the lights go dim and begin to vanish. Now everything outside disappears.*

Silently, all the seasons deep in the darkness of night are left behind.

***

In the past, like most persons of our class, we had servants. Even in the early days of defeat and poverty, until the Invader came, we were able to keep one old woman ***. She moved, as a maid of all work, from ***to be near us. She worked by the day. In the Invader's opinion, which he often expressed, we had no need of her. Also he took an

almost instant dislike of her. For a person of his temperament, and habits, to be waited on by someone from an inferior class, was an unbearable condescension.

"None of you," addressing us one day, "has any talent for domestic service." Pointing to our maid he continued, "this kind of ill-natured, meek, broken down, old country rustic is insufferable." He also complained of her having an offensive body odor. At the end of a two-week period or so, he ordered us to fire her and not to hire any replacement. This made our life twice as laborious: as we expected. It was especially hard on my wife. This, I surmised, this was because of the peculiar way she felt about everything. Firing the maid was one of the bitterest of humiliations inflicted on us by the Invader. It was all the more biter because it was no exactly an injustice. I remember saying to the family that we ought to be able to manage our small housework ourselves. All of us were away of the maid's inefficient service and shortcomings of character. We also minded the musky exhalation of her old body and old clothes. She had been around us so long that her faults were like infirmities of our own flesh, perversities of our own soul.

It had been some forty years before that ***, as a buxom girl, has been brought from a town near us to care for my wife when she had been a sickly motherless infant. To have her rejected, fired, and sent away by the overly (to my mind) fastidious Invader, was very troubling my wife, then with her heart condition. It seemed to my wife to be a curse on all of them, a profamation of all that time. Yet, she did not complain of it in her normal, repetitious, way. For one thing she knew that the children, and perhaps myself as well, agreed with the Invader about the old woman's uselessness, crude ways and bad temper. My wife, I believed, wanted to forget all about the maid. But I wondered at this.

It was not like her to forget anything. The reason was perhaps that letting her mind wander back in the years had shared with the maid had affected her sanity. Perhaps she was having vague apprehensions of losing her mind altogether.

For my wife things were going too far.

We often, like most persons would have done in our position, speculated about the Invader's past. What was his background? Did he have a family? On the top of my desk, now the Invader's, he had put three photos. One was in a leather frame. It showed a rigid lady with her arms around a slim little girl. The other two photos, postcard size, unframed, were of two boys, with Nordic faces, in uniforms. They were both had a morose look on their faces. One evening, when the Invader was there writing, I brought him, from his collection, a glass of wine, I pointed at the older woman in the photo and said,

"Your wife, If I may"?

"That is not my wife," he snapped. "My wife is the daughter in the picture. But, if you please, that is none of your business. You are never to concern yourself with anything of mine. Do you understand"?

I had always understood that praising a man's mother-in-law was never ingratiating. I sighed and begged pardon. Then I recall going into the bedroom to draw the curtains and turn down the bedcovers. There, in the mirror, I could see the back of the Invader's head. He was sitting with his lifted up stiffly, staring at the photos. His hands were, I recall, clenched on the arms of his chair. Suddenly, he grabbed the photos

and shoved them into a drawer. Then he fidgeted a few minutes, opening and closing books and rearranging papers on his desk, before going back to writing.

At that moment, I thought that I understood the Invader better. His staring at the photos and his general impatience meant that he could not keep his on his writing. With the blurry eyes f the slim girl and boys facing them from the photos, his imagination had become overheated.

He had been overcome with a wild and miserable affection for the faces in the photos!

Men of our culture and history do not have many sentiments in our talk, or even in our thoughts. But we were almost all familiar with the feeling for family. In some extreme instances it might have been a positive feeling in our blood. But, then in our extreme hardship, it scarcely applied to me. My wife had changed. My children were suffering. I could then feel sentiment for them. The inhumanity of that war, the loneliness, had turned my character into a kind of melodrama. From this I could imagine that the Invader's pride, intolerance and unpredictable temper had….

I had, I believe, become more conscious of the coldness of my own marriage and my disappointment with my children. It was if my old age had begun before it was due. (Actually I believe I had been younger than the Invader). Trying to rid myself of those thoughts I must have tiptoed out of the Invader's room into our marriage bed in the kitchen.

One evening a week, the Invader went out to his club. It was the only socialized he did. He would return without the least look of pleasure spent, or even of fatigue. We

never detected the smell of liquor on his breathe. He had no fellow Invaders visit him. No one saw him in a café or anywhere with any sort of boon companions. There was no sign of his being with a woman. Except for a big appetite for breakfast and dinner no other creature comfort appeared to tempt him. I had never known a person of his age to be so systematic in his habits. Or so independent, ascetic and self-denying. Since we were conventional middle-class people, I had begun to suspect that we, in spite of ourselves, had a fleeting admiration for that side of the Invader.

His instructions were to have his room carefully cleaned every day. But we had to stay out of his room when he was out of the house. On no occasion were we to use his desk. One day while dusting, my wife disturbed some of his papers on the desk. He reproved her for it with all his vehemence and malice. After that I witnessed him keeping a dustcloth in his drawer. From then on he did that bit of housework himself. Every night, except his club night, the Invader would write letters. Then he would study, and sometimes, revise them. Or he would prop over a book and copy lines from it. Sometimes I could hear him reading aloud from a book—always in a language I had never heard before.

One day, when my wife was out with the children—I did not want to set them a bad example—I slipped into his room and examined his books and notebooks on the desk. I found several volumes of military history and the art of war. There was a topographical atlas, a handbook of fortifications and (what looked to me) to be a centuries old treatise on the proper military diet. In a notebook I found exercises in math and, apparently, in the unknown language I had heard him reading aloud.

I had, at that time, the creepy feeling I was examining the desk of a modern day Alexander the Great. Or perhaps Napoleon?

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By that time the city was starving. There were beggars everywhere, some of the so hungry they walked lunatics. But they were too weak to do any harm. Some lay down and died wherever they happened to be. Sometimes they were persons you knew. Some were servants, or small shopkeepers, or somebody's poor relation. But famine had given them faces that you might not recognize. My wife was afraid to go out of the house. Fortunately my son took care of his sister. He understood her moods. He was a good with her as her mother. He was not squeamish. He would go down in the street. There he would investigate to see if any dead lay in our street. Then he would take her out to play if it was all right.

Those families who had Invaders in their homes were entitled to certain supplies. The Invaders reserved these for the families out of the supplies they shipped in. At first we expected to live fairly well on our Invader's leftovers. But he had other ideas about that. Once a day he went to the kitchen had all of the cupboards opened. He examined what staples we had and what we had been able to buy. He was very good at identifying what was there.

"You see. The Invader's work in supplies for the army is something like housekeeping. But on a larger scale," I said to my wife. "There's no deceiving him. We might as well be honest with him."

My wife resented this comment.

"You must remember," I replied, "how you used to keep a eye on our help. And remember we were not starving then."

The Invader never seemed to forget a thing. He required that his meals to be brought to the table in covered dishes. This allowed him to check the amount we were serving him against what he had seen in the cupboards. He was a heavy eater. Sometimes he left a little bit of stew or soup. But he smoked a cigar after eating and used his plate as an ashtray. After rising from the table he would stop and brush the crumbs from his clothes into his palm. Then he would throw them out of the window for the birds. It always seemed to me to be a test of frugality with hints of lavishness.

Our Invader often played cards with his superior**** at the club. The club occupied a requisitioned a house of the ***in the next block over. The owners had an old, half-blind dog, an English bull-terrier or something. When the famine began they had plans to put it out of it misery. It took an enormous amount of food. But the superior of our Invader had taken a liking to it. The dog was spared. But its owners were wasting away. Now, it later turned, we were later to share in the wasting away. When there were scraps left from our Invader's meal, a crust of bread or a piece of meat, he would order us to deliver it to his superior's dog.

The delivery was usually done by my son.

One day, our Invader said to us,

"My friend and superior***appreciates your generosity for sharing your leftovers with his dog. The animal, as a result, is in fine condition." He paused. "By the way did you know that the dog has one of the best bloodlines of its breed. He has won numerous

prizes at dog shows." He paused again. "In addition. I believe that it is good exercise for your boy. Someone his age should always exercise after eating." He looked intently at me and my wife.

"Don't you agree?"

I begin to suspect that our Invader and his superior were comparing notes about the amount of food our son delivering for the dog. I could never find out about their calculations. Did they get it right? Or did they miscalculate? At any rate, they started accusing our son of helping himself to the food on his way to them. One of them boxed his ears. The other beat him.

I questioned my son about the matter. He admitted that the food he was carrying tempted him. After-all, he was hungry. What had he eaten at the evening meal? Nothing , of course, but weak soup and a single piece of bread. I was convinced that he was innocent. Still, a few days later, the Invader and his friend—he had started calling his superior that—repeated the charge of my son's stealing food and punished him again.

I devised a plan to protect my son.

"My son," I said to our Invader, " is a growing boy. He suffers from his appetite. If you have him deliver he food for the dog he will steal some of it. He cannot help it. I suggest you please let me carry it to the dog myself." This false story made me angry. Persons of my type, passive and well-meaning, have a big capacity for anger. The Invader, observing my angry face (and, I am ashamed to say it, watery eyes) took my remarks to mean that I was ashamed of my son.

My plan worked.

"You people are all thieves," the Invader said. Only the old, broken down ones like yourself, know that you cannot get away with thieving." I didn't at that time know much about class-distinctions with the Invaders. But I believed that I was correct in thinking that our Invader was well educated. His manners were distinguished. Yet even so they did not prevent him from ugly outburst at times—ones without a trace of self-consciousness. The outburst were never real fury. I myself was never disturbed by it. Out of the dignity of his manners, it would suddenly come on him. He would let himself go for a few minutes before falling back into his composure. To fly into a rage without losing one's temper? Without getting out of breathe? What kind of contradiction of behavior is that?

It seemed to me inhuman. Or was he indeed human? I remember often waking from a dream to what might be called a vision. It was the blissful realization that my consciousness was a mistake. Death will release all us back to unity with the blind unconscious will that is the endlessly creative essence of all that exists. But by the light of day and the humiliations of my life I then thought that perhaps one's dreams often (at all times?) lie to us.

I was trying to understand the Invaders by our Invader. This, I believe, that to understand the Invaders, in a general way, I could solve our domestic problem. So I started by studying the other Invaders around town and questioning my fellow citizens about their behavior. I began to see that there was something self-conscious and methodical about the Invaders' behavior. It was as if they had been instructed in it

according to some historical, or psychological, theory. They seemed complacent, even the young ones. They seemed to believe that everything would turn out in their favor. I concluded that this attitude came from their experiences in other countries that had invaded. Strangely, this conclusion inspired in me a weird kind of patriotism. I knew that our psychology differed from that of the other countries they may have invaded. But sometimes my heart sank. Were I and my family withstanding the Invasion? I could not tell. Everything depended on how long it lasted.

I was told by a neighbor that the Invaders struck their domestic help, even in peacetime. But so far, with the exception of the business with our son's delivery of the dog food, we experienced no physical abuse from our Invader. True, his fists were generally clenched. It was as if he wanted to punctuate his ill-temper that he would swing them this way and that. He apparently did not mind whether you wee hit by them or not. He would walk up and down and randomly swinging his legs. We were always in danger of being kicked. When I helped him on with his coat, or any other close personal service, he would elbow or shoulder me aside. I often had trouble keeping my feet. When I removed his boots I had to look out for his feet. But, if I kept withdrawing and dodging him, he seemed calm enough. He was too proud to follow you across the room to give you a beating. It seemed that the look of self-preservation and shame on your face was enough for him.

I thought, as he shook his fist or kicked, that he was perhaps human. The unnerving thing was his manner, serene and abstract. It was almost a mannerism but with insincerity in it. But it was always combined with conviction of purpose. Priests had a

manner somewhat like his, especially in their sacerdotal functions. So had actors, especially when they were sure that the play they were in was good.

So had madmen when they dream.

It seemed to me that our Invader saw himself as the minister of a power much greater than any of us could understand. It was, I imagined, greater than the past, present and future of the world. It appeared to me, and perhaps to my wife, that how he interpreted himself was far more frightening than anything he actually did or could do.

As for myself I had almost come to the conclusion that I was a coward. But it was not exactly physical cowardice. I mostly felt that way when the Invader frightened my wife or children. The invader, looking back at it, perhaps sensed that.

In the Invader's opinion corporal punished was the thing for a boy of my son's age—especially a nervous cowardly one. The Invader said that it was disgraceful how we had spoiled our song. He suggested to us that he expected to see improvement in our son because of him living with us. "You should be thankful for my being here," he said one morning. He apparently hated nervousness and cowardice as much as he did gluttony and thievery. Our son reported to us that the Invader had twisted his arm and stock him with the flat of his hand several times. Our son assured us that he was good at leaping away from the cuffs and kicks of the Invader. When he was hit, he said he forgot the matter as soon as the pain went away.

But all this bothered me and my wife. We spent a lot of time discussing what it might be about our son that provoked the Invader. Perhaps, we thought, if we punished our son more severely, the Invader would stop his punishment of him?

Once in a while, when we were getting in bed, my wife showed me bruises on her pallid body. This angered and depressed me. But after questioning her, and having grown accustomed to the Invader's way, I had to admit to myself that in some ways it was perhaps my wife’s fault. She was panic-stricken all day and night and nothing she had to do for the Invader was well done. She never had the patience to listen to his sneering and complaining. I don't believe he actually hit her. It was only the violent gesturing of the Invader that I myself had to contend with: the digs of his elbow, nervousness of his boots. In my wife's fear, she was forever springing sideways, throwing herself into corners and knocking against the furniture. She often tripped and fell. It was these that caused the bruises on her body.

"My love," I said to my wife, "you must remember that our ways seem funny to the Invader. He can't help himself. So listen to me. Don't reveal your feelings to him. That's the only safe way. Never let him see that you are afraid of him." Night after night, before we went to bed in our cot, I tried to impress on her this advice. But she never understood my words. She merely wept and fell asleep. Then, the next door, there was her same panic and recklessness. The bad outcome of this was the increased episodes of pain in her chest.

Our city, meanwhile, was going from bad to worse. We were so absorbed in our domestic problems, afraid and angry, tired and hungry, that the long process of the Invasion scarcely mattered to us. Some thing we heard about, some of our friends escaping the worse effects of the Invasion made us feel good, almost happy. We were thankful for the small favor of fortune.

We knew, for example, of a neighbor's child who had learned to relieve its hunger by sucking blood out of the palm of its hand. It had made the cut and kept it open. I remembered how my daughter, in her early years, had sucked her thumb. We tried everything but could not stop her. Our dentist later said that was the cause of her protruding teeth. My wife, out of her vanity, had expected our daughter to inherit her own good looks. There was no question of our daughter not having a normal mind. But she disappointed us. Her pudgy face grew more pudgier by the day.

Then as my wife gazed at the neighbor's child, with its pale mouth buried in a skinny hand, it remembered her of the mouth of rat on the neck of a chicken. My wife was suddenly ashamed of herself. What was she thinking? That all the hardships of our lives before the Invasion were a fool's paradise?

I talked with a friend whose brother had escaped from *****. He had given a fantastic account of what happened there. I had almost been interested in *****. In my youth I had studied anthropology and archaeology. I tried to interest (in vain) myself in pre-historic religions and cultures.

"The cruelest part of the mythology of our county", I told my wife, "came from *****. But think about the stories that will be told about our times. These will be harder to believe than the old stories."

Outside *****the Invaders had a burial ground for their members lost in the Invasion. Children, playing in he cemetery, had unwilling knocked over some of the gravestones. The Invaders punished the whole community. They dug a long shallow ditch and lined up 20 or more of the citizens before the ditch. There was one armed Invader

facing each citizen. It was a firing squad. Behind the squad were assembled the families, mothers, wives and children of the 20 citizens. Their execution was to teach the families a lesson. The Invaders made it clear that they would not tolerate any impatience or outcry from the families.

It started to rain. Water ran down the citizens to be executed. It formed puddles around there feet. The rain became harder. Now it was flooding into the ditch. Some of the citizens kneeled down in the muddy water to pray. Whenever anyone in the families watching the scene said anything or had his or her face in their hands, or any child started to cry, an Invader would forward to discipline them. The rain was gradually turning to snow. It got colder as the wind came up, blowing the snow over the scene. Two of the 20 tried to escape. Soldiers shot them in the legs. They left them crawling and moaning on the ground. The remaining 18 were lined up in a tighter formation along the edge of the ditch. Then they were shot, falling abruptly into the snow mixed mud at the bottom of the ditch.

An Invader made a speech. "Courage is the high virtue," he said. "These two," pointing at the injured crawling on the ground, "are like worms, obviously cowards. Absolute obedience to our army and to the will of our leader are required of everyone. These two," pointing at the now motion-less injured, " are more guilty of disobedience than those now dead." Then he ordered them to be thrown into the ditch and be buried alive.

Then the burial was done with the families watching.

My wife didn't wan to believe the story of the execution. "Can the Invaders make a speech in our language? And who of us could understand it if they did. Their pronunciation is terrible.

"Maybe some of it is myth," I said. "But I still believe it. The Invaders are cruel, very cruel."

My wife asked me not to tell her any more stories like that, true or not, and for me not to listen to them. "What good can come of knowing what is happening to others. It only makes thing worse. It even may make us incapable of doing our work."

It made me think that we were lucky to live where we did. The Invaders at the execution of the 20 citizens were obviously worse than the ones in our city. Our Invader was difficult, hard to fathom in many ways, but a rather pathetic person. Other Invaders may have imagined themselves in a tragic drama or opera. Maybe they sensed in the war the beginning of a new religion. And, as with new religions, things were often improvised. Perhaps they thought of the execution of the 20 as a ritual?

Or perhaps they were dreamers? The war gave them the opportunity to make their dreams come true?

I heard of worse things about the Invaders. For example, how they would torture members of the underground to betray their fellows. How the torture involved surgeries gone wrong and mechanical devices for crushing bones.

I did not report any of this to my wife. But sometimes in the middle of the night, when something our Invader had eaten had disagreed with him (and he had called us

repeatedly), I related to my wife some atrocities I had heard about. "I think it would be useless to report these things to anyone," I said. "It suppose it's our animal instinct. Atrocities are not so bad if they are not happening to us. There is in all this a kind of stupid emotion. But some might call it a blessing."

My wife was generally too tired to listen to any of this. She pulled the bedclothes over her head to keep from hearing it and then went to sleep.

So the terrors of the Invasion gave our particular lives a background, a historical or psychological one. Only it seemed a distant, out of focus one. Every day and night even the slightest circumstances seemed to be more nightmarish. There hurt feelings, fatigue, the body and soul sore—each round of domestic difficulty, a tired mind moving from one trouble to the next…like the jerking movement of a clock.

Sometimes we remembered our friends who got away from the Invasion to other friendly countries. This, of course, only increased our distress, our loneliness, sense of separation of the mind. What of the time to come and the present realities? After the war would we want to tell our friends who left what we had been through?

It is not easy for me to describe our domestic ordeal and do it justice. I can only exaggerate it or make a mockery of it. It just has to be believed. It should be told with severity, perhaps even with irony. But its effects on us made irony impossible.

We decided not to say anything about the cruelties of the Invasion until it was over—if we lived to see that happen. Our having to be able to bear it would be nothing to boast about. We had begun to think of the Invasion like a disease. That would be our story but we would be too ashamed to tell it.

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Strangely, the effect of the Invader's living with us was not all bad. It had a small benefit. It had changed the family life inwardly, somewhat for the better. My wife no longer worried about our son…at least not as she would have done had there been no Invasion. The presence of the Invader in our house seemed to have taken the boyishness (call it romanticism) out of our son. Now he never breathed a word of resistance to anyone. His mother had become pleased to think that he was learning to be realistic. In her view this was an important lesson. She hoped he would never forget it. She could not, of course, expect me to agree with her about this. I had the honor of my family too much in mind. It was my ideal.

At first I scarcely knew what to think. Maybe my son had become a coward. Perhaps, with his limited emotions, he simply wanted our approval of his change. But the more I thought about it, the more I doubted it. My son had stood up to the violence of the Invader well enough before. It was when the Invader stood and stared at him that he trembled and turned pale.

While my son watched the Invader, I watched him. I was puzzled at first by what I saw shining in the infantile dark eyes. Then, little by little, and with a lot of difficulty I came to understand it. It was a thrilling thing, I thought. It was a sense of evil I saw in his eyes. It was not a dread of injury only fascination not fright. It was the stare which the youngest of our species will give another species. I trembled at it. I knew my son's shortcomings as well as my own. The thought never came to me that in a time like this we must be the inferior species.

But it was only a thought. I knew it wasn't true.

In those moments of the looks of my son…even then…I was almost pleased. What did his spindling legs, faminous belly over-obvious joints matter? They were he work of the Invader. The work of his love, all that was left of it, I thought was his soul. It appeared as he watched the Invader. The look in my son's eye was hatred. But it was beautiful, like a flower held up by a spindly stem.

Whatever I might have thought of my son, I must have half believed that he was my inferior. It was just an instinct, an obtuseness and egoism, just as one my see in a worm. So I disagreed with my wife in the matter of our son's change. It was not reasonableness in him, but a grave kind of reality. It was not a renunciation of revenge, but the gestation of it. I had reason to point out to my wife that our son was like our fierce cousins, not at all like her vanished brother. But I refrained from this. I argued gently with her, and didn't mention her brother, but the subject of our son always made her cry.

I had no illusions about our son. He was unfortunate, perverse, stunted little boy. Still, I knew, that was life left in him. He was fierce and growing up. He was a brave boy, and if the time came, he would do some harm to the Invaders. But would he survive the famine and the Invasion?

The thought frightened me and my wife. It increased my depression. I knew that I, as a potential avenger of my country's suffering, that I was good for nothing. But, as a father, I felt a little prouder of myself. I actually believed that I was a better father. It raised my self-respect just when everything seemed hopeless. I stopped talking about this

to my wife but I believed that she sensed what was on my mind. She still believed that I was wrong about our son. But she did not mind.

I made me feel better.

Our daughter seemed to have become fascinated with our Invader. She seemed to have lost her fear of him. To my dismay, she appeared to actually like him. When she heard him in the corridor, about to leave, she slip in beside him. Then she would smile up at him, seductively, almost like a courtesan. Sometimes she would take his hand. Or she would hold out a small, grimy, hand to stroke his uniform. In the meantime she grew less fond of her brother. Maybe she was disappointed with him. He no longer told her interesting stories. Maybe had had noticed her friendly manner with the Invader. Had he scolded her for it?

We didn't know what to make of it. Was there more feeling in her small mind than we knew about? Was she being seductive in order to be on the safe side…in self-defense? Whatever it was, it seemed to work. Our daughter was the only one, of probably the entire city, for whom the Invaders looked on with respect.

One evening, stretched out in his armchair, while I was removing his boots, the Invader asked our daughter what she had done that day. She could never answer him. But she did smile. In the mornings, as he was leaving and giving us instructions, he would sometimes give her a pat on the head with a gloved hand. He never, I noticed, gave it un-gloved. One morning he called our attention to this fact. He sarcastically explained it—the child's hair was an ugly tangle, full of lice. He said he had also noticed scabs on our daughter's scalp.My wife burst into tears. It made her feel ashamed of not taking proper

care of her children. Did our daughter, in her chronic day-dreaming, not realize what we were talking about? She did not notice her mother crying. She stood and gazed at the sarcastic Invader with a blissful expression.

Thinking this over, I took her behavior as a good thing.

"Of course, it's shocking. But we must look at it from her point of view," I told my wife. "Poor thing, she has never had any pleasure in her short life. Can we begrudge her any kind of happiness? I used to think that her love of her brother something like incest. Now this, with the Invader, you might say is a kind of treason. But what does it matter? It is innocence."

My wife never understood this way of my talking. "We should not, I suppose, expect too much from our children," she resignedly said.

Perhaps it is true that our attachments based on kinship contain inherent disappointments. For their comfort we had to return to a greater intimacy, though not on our early passionate love. Usually the males of our culture, even in times of passion, were indifferent to domestic matters. But at that time the housekeeping was too much for my wife. I had to help her more and more. We were together more as we had been in our youth. You might say were like an old team of horses now in double harness.

When the Invader was at home he demanded strict silence. Our daughter was always silent. But it was hard for our son. And an even harder rule for us to enforce. We could never learn to work as keep a division of responsibilities. The simplest task required our asking each other's advice; or coming to each other's rescue. The walls in the

house were thin. If we disturbed the Invader might he not then make my wife do all the work? How would she manage? These thoughts made us speak, if necessary, without a sound and read each other's lips.

We learned to communicate with glances and gestures, as prisoners or inmates of asylums do.

If our commonplace marriage had not be engulfed in misery, their habits broken or our normal expectations overthrown, we might never had known the extent of our affections. We were middle-aged. But we felt older. Even the death of our oldest son, had not revived our old attitudes and stale sentiments much. Our life with the Invader did. It wasn't the autumn of our love now. It was suddenly winter. With all the illness, starvation and decrepitude around us, the coldest of marriages became kinder, more mature. There wasn't anything sensual about it. I was impotent. My wife's menopause had come early. It was probably because of her poor health. Yet at night we had an extraordinary intimacy as we lay in a heap on our cot. We knew again the double egocentricity of lovers, a confusion of two in one. Everyone and everything could have vanished in a forgotten sky. The purpose of the earth, turning toward another day, seemed to exist only for the purpose of moving them together, both physically and emotionally.

The Invader would call them to be waited on. I would sometimes start to snore. My wife would wake me up. Then we would lie awake awhile. With her lips pressed to my ear, my wife would whisper the things she had not dared say during the day. She was pouring her heart into mine. I would try, with the best of my ability, to comfort her.

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In the spring of ******our Invader decided to take leave. When he informed us about it we could hardly contain our joy. But, with his small steely eyes on us, we did not have the courage to wish him a safe journey. It turned out that he would have to wait a few weeks for transportation. That was hard for us. What with all our work and worry, this added uncertainty, we thought, might destroy our joy.

But his transportation came. We carried his luggage down to the sidewalk. Even my wife, with her bad heart, insisted on carrying one piece. Then we stood watching as the vehicle carrying the Invader slowly started, shifted gears and then turned the corner out of sight. But we were afraid to rejoice. What if there were neighbors looking at us?

Back in the house, we still had our anxious composure. It was as if the furniture in the Invader's rooms would betray them. The thought made us hurry into the kitchen and suddenly shut the door. We danced around and hugged each other. Our children asked us questions about our unusual behavior. I told a few jokes. My wife smiled and cried at the same time. It was obvious. In spite of our irremediable poverty, deteriorating health and hunger, we expected to have a good time during the Invader's absence.

"I remember burying a case of wine under the shed in back" I told my wife. "I will go get it."

"Now," my wife replied, "we can take the children out to the sea-shore. It will do all of us good."

We heard our son talking with our daughter about the Invader. When he comes back we will coax him out on the balcony. We will trip him and watch him fall on the street."

It was just our son's imagination. The time the Invader was gone did not turn out to be what we imagined and hoped for. Coming like a foretaste of the liberation of our country it made us impatient, even self-indulgent. The Invader's absence allowed to take stock of our situation and judge our losses. We finally understood that his absence had come too late. Would our country’s liberation also come too late?

Our loneliness for our dead soldier son came again. It was like a wound that begins to ache because of a change in temperature. For days, my wife could talk of nothing but her dead son. I tried to console her. I thought that if she took this period as an occasion for grieving, it might increase her changes of another heart attack.

I went out to dig up the buried wine. It wasn't there. Had someone stolen it? I came back to the house empty handed. I tried to make a joke about it. But I could not keep up the irony of it. My wife looked discouragingly at me. My joke fell flat.

We canceled our planned trip to the sea-shore. Our children did not have the energy for anything other than their usual routine. They talked and they talked. My son did all the talking. It was like a game of marbles, played endlessly. Our children had unhealthy little naps. They stationed themselves at the kitchen door as in a trance. They were waiting to be fed. But it was usually in vain.

I now had more time to look for bargains in food. I thought of myself as the best shopper in our city. And, in spite of our Invader's wastefulness at eating, and his food for the dog, we had managed to obtain many mouthfuls from the meals we served him. (In his absence, of course, we had more to eat.) But it seemed to us that the famine was worse than ever. It was so bad that we fell into an irrational expectation of it soon

stopping. The supply of food, we imagined, would soon increase. We were looking for a miracle. I felt myself, especially in the morning, experiencing high spirits. But, short of a miracle, I was beginning to believe that our race would be exterminated. That, to my wife, was unthinkable.

My wife, indolent all her life, could not stop working. "Now it is spring. In Spring I give my house a good cleaning."

She, during her cleaning, noticed that the Invader's bed was much cleaner than ours. He, of course, bathed. We did not. This sent my wife into a senseless weeping. I became anxious about her health, something I never confessed to her. So I took over the hard part of the chores. But it was hard. It was make-believe work. Nothing went well. The fear, humiliation and anger, which we could not reveal when the Invader was in residence, now welled up in us. This, more than our fatigue and hunger made us incompetent, useless. We pretended to be doing something only to pass the time…thinking of the Invader, waiting for him.

The time passed.

Afterwards, thinking of the Invader's absence, it seemed the worst time for us. It was a soft, unstrung, time. It was a time when we lost our imagination. We could not see a future except the mistake of expecting more food. Our memory of the past seemed to be getting dimmer. What about, for example, my failure to find the wine I buried? Or thought I buried?

My wife, on one of her few excursions outside the house, saw a man in the street she took (at least for a moment) to be her runaway brother. It wasn't him. When she came

home she confessed to me she had forgotten what he looked like. If he came to our door that evening. She was sure she would not recognize him.

Our love for each other did not fail. In spite of occasional hard remarks and our deprivations. But I cannot deny that more than once we both had a death wish. One night I confided to my wife that I had been tempted, more than once, to defy the Invader. Perhaps if I carried out this need it might have put an end of my shame and enslavement. My wife said back to me, "you know you'll never have the courage to do anything like that." But she did confide in me that she too had thought about killing herself. I could see that her health was getting worse. "You have," I said to her, "always exaggerated. You know, with your passive nature, you would never commit suicide."

Then there were guilt feelings on both sides. It was mainly for our disregard of our helpless children. This brought us, I recall, to the strange belief that neither one of us felt any love for our children. We were unable to feel love for them. We blamed each other for it. But it was with a sense of guilt. We recognized the excuses we had been giving for our lack of love. The small bodies of children…their stunted minds…what was loveable in that? Even if they lived to be adults, would they ever be normal? Their shortcomings were irremediable. Their future seemed of no interest. In the lives of children irremediable conditions seemed to be far worse than in adults.

These thoughts brought us to the understanding that all they had to live for was each other. We were having through all this almost no sleep at all—clinging together, as we were forced to do, to keep from falling out of our cot on the grimy floor. Even during

the Invader's absence, we were afraid to move into his rooms. Even in our early married life, full as it was of difficulties, we had never fallen this far into wasted emotions.

Later, returned to the subject of suicide, I said to my wife, "Undernourished people almost never commit suicide. When did we last hear of one? A long time ago, right? It is a general fact. Hunger makes you want to live more. You might call it a tested philosophy. Stop and think how it is with us. Don't we live, from meal to meal, as if under a spell?"

There was another fact that applied to our situation. You can never tell from what direction things may come to make it better. It is never too late for happiness, even in the shadow of death. Indeed, death itself may come and go, as in the fascination of a spell.

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That spring, early in a week, the Invader returned. The next day we were in his presence. He made an announcement and a request. There was, I recall, sarcasm in his voice. "May I call your attention to the fact that I have been promoted. A gratifying citation for my work goes with it. Hereafter you will be required to address me with the higher rank of ******."

Our hearts sank. I realized that a glance at his new insignia would have informed us of his promotion. We had not looked. We were sorry for ourselves: to think that our oversight should now be the cause of further trouble! So soon!

But the Invader apparently did not resent our oversight. Nor, it seemed, he did not seem impressed by his promotion. Probably, I thought, this was due to the etiquette, a

cheerless and perfunctory one, of his military culture.. Or perhaps it was because he happened not to be in his usual good health. His cheeks had a drained, faded look. The whites of his were yellowish. You could see the tiny veins in them were irritated. His thin mouth was thinner. His lips were chapped. There was an unfamiliar pitch to his voice. Was a leak in his throat? He had grown thin. His uniform hung loose on him and his neck did not fill his shirt collar.

Was his appearance all due to extreme lack of sleep?

I thought about his condition a lot. Did it mean something about the course of the war? Was it possible that he didn't have enough to eat in his absence? Perhaps his own country was undergoing, as we were, deprivation. I wanted to believe that. But I was not able to.

I discussed this with my wife. But she did not approve of this kind of speculation. She pointed out that the Invader, if he had slept badly…or not at all…during his leave he would have returned hungry as a wolf. But no. He had, in fact, lost his much of his appetite.

Once again I went out looking for food for the Invader. It had to be suitable to one of his rank. My wife painstaking prepared the stew that the Invader liked. But he only pretended to eat it. He tried and failed to eat the stew. Then he sent it back, almost untouched, to the kitchen. This, partly because of her pride in her cooking, bothered my wife.

The Invader was morose and listless. He breathed with difficulty. But he never appeared to spare himself. Some nights he stayed at his headquarters until sunrise. Once,

after supper, I came in his room to remove the half-empty dishes. My wife followed me to put away his shirts that she had washed and ironed. The Invader suddenly, and loudly, cleared his throat. This caused me and my wife to come to attention beside him. We could see that his eyes were blinking, almost anxiously. His thin lips were drawn up as if in an effort to say something pleasant,

"How did things go for you in my absence?"

It was a strange, embarrassing experience. We wanted answer but the Invader had trained us so long to shrink and apologize, we did not know how. We stood there gapping like children. We tried to make amiable faces to match his. We tried to look him in the eyes. But our gaze kept veering off toward each other.

The Invader had addressed us in his own strange language. We still did not reply. He apparently thought we had not understood his question. He addressed again in our own language. (As I recall it was very bad. He apparently didn't think it was necessary to take the time to learn it properly.). The upshot was that he must have thought we were afraid of him. A curious expression, smug, passed over his face. As if to relieve our embarrassment he rose and quickly announced that he had more work to do at headquarter. He then left.

We began to understand that our Invader was a different man. His character had changed. It was something more than bad health, his loss of weight and appetite. Part of the change, I surmised, must have been something between us and him. Was it simply a human matter? For the first time, he had spoken to us in a civil way. I believe that we then came, in a strange way, to regret not being more pleasant with him. Mixed with

regret was fear. Had he resented our bad manners, our tied tongues? We could not help it. He had surprised us too quickly.

We became fearful of our next meeting with him. What if his civil question, "How did things go in my absence"? had been a slip of his tongue. Perhaps our eyes deluded us? We tried to recall the exact wording, syntax and inflection of the question. This became the subject of many subsequent arguments between me and my wife.

It was, I believe, the morning after the Invader asked us the question that I went with my wife to serve the Invader his breakfast. Looking at him closely I think I noticed the respectful look he had had the day before. He said good morning politely. This reassured us that the events of the previous day were not a delusion on our part.

The Invader calmly asked what brought me and my wife to his bedroom so early. Once more we were tongue tied. He seemed to want to be friendly with us. But we still couldn't reply.

"Welcome, welcome, " he said. Then addressing my wife, "you are, after all, the housewife here, aren't you? Always worrying about something, somewhere in the house, from morning to night"?

My wife stood blushing.

After that there was some amazement for us every day. Day and night a continuous analysis of things he said. Whatever it meant, whatever had changed him, had begun the day he returned from leave. We had noticed his thinness and weariness without understanding them. We went back, almost every night, over the evidence. But still we

did not understand. I wanted to accept everything. Or at least to interpret everything as an improvement in the Invader's behavior. My wife was never sure. She stood on guard against the mystery of the Invader. It was in her nature to reserve judgment.

I was naturally sociable. I wanted to think well of everyone, even the Invaders. It had been my life-long habit. My wife began to mistrust my judgment. She lived in dread of us making some mistake or falling into the Invader's trap. Every once and while I could feel what she felt. She was keeping me in uncertainty about everything.

One day, I remember, our Invader returned from work after only half a day. I watched as he sat on the edge of his bed. I heard him sigh. He gritted his teeth. I knelt, as usual, to remove his boots. He stopped me:

"It is ridiculous for you to have to do that. It's a humiliating thing."

After that I no longer took his boots off. Matter of fact I believe that there was hardly any waiting on him—at least of the boot-removing kind. Sometimes I would, however, begin a service of that kind. Bt our Invader would interrupt me:

"No, it's not necessary. Let it go. I don't want it done."

My wife suggested that the Invader didn't like the work I did. That I was clumsy at it. Her opinion was part of pointing out every obscurity and uncertainty in our lives. She thought the Invader's action was to make things easier for me.

The Invader seemed to make the same point: "After all," he said to me, "aren't you a man of the world…a man of some distinction"? He paused. "It was be hard for you to be reduced to domestic service." He seemed to how all this was contradicting he attitude

before his leave. Apparently he had forgotten the martinet he was. How he had humiliated us. Strangely he had become indifferent to domestic comfort. Somehow he has lost the pride he had gotten from petty over-lording us.

One morning, as I was bringing in the Invader's breakfast I spilled the coffee. A few drops of the coffee fell on the Invader's dress uniform. But didn't seem to bother him. Previously, he would have clenched his fists and ordered me out of his bedroom. Even my wife's disposal of some of the Invader's important papers, later in that day, did he not seem to mind.

Some way the erstwhile bad temper and petty tyranny had shifted way…like a season of the year. If he wanted something out of the ordinary, he would explain it with patience. Sometimes he did not get what he wanted. Then he would complain. But softly as one might to a friend. Or whenever one patronizes one's children. Whatever happened—a noise when he was napping, something inedible in his meal, a bad smell—he would remain calm, almost sympathetic.

One night, on his way to bed early, he came to the kitchen door and asked for a pot of hot water. Later that night, walking with my heavy shoes in the corridor, I woke the Invader up. Next morning he complained of his insomnia. He mentioned hearing my steps:

"Please," he said to me," be more careful in the future."

After that night, tiptoeing past his door, I could hear how restlessly he slept. But he never rang for us to wait on him.

He stopped smiling. We didn't mind. His smile had always been a disquieting thing. It showed more teeth than lips. He drew it in suddenly. We had never been fond of his smiling at us. In a strange way he seemed more amiable looking and handsomer . Now a slight squint and frown softened his gimlet eyes. The previous dead calm and rigid strength were gone from his mouth.

The Invader's voice was still rough, even when the sense of his words was benign. Sometimes, however, a sharp focus of his small eyes would discourage me from attempting to get closer to him. But we then didn't care. By his own accord he seemed to becoming more friendly.

Now he stopped inspecting our provisions and the day's shopping. This enabled us to eat a little more freely. My wife, however, was suspicious. She was, in my opinion, too much accustomed to the old regime. She was, as the saying, broken to last year's harness.

When it was time for the Invader to go to his headquarters it was the usual thing to stand at the door and take his orders. But he could not find anything to say to us. There were no orders, nothing was as usual. Mr. wife complained about this. Without his usual criticism, she said, she had no way of knowing whether he was satisfied. Had she done the right thing the day before? Should she do all the housework on her own? Would it displease the Invader?

"But have we ever precisely known," I said to her, "what he expects of us? Or what he should expect of us?"

In the past, in the Invader's bad temper, my wife answered, that she at least had something to go by, some hope that eventually she would know how to meet his

approval. Even disapproval, she said, was better than nothing. As their tyrant, let him tyrannize…little by little, so that they might know where they stood.

How else could they be expected to give him satisfaction?

For some reason, but perhaps only for the moment, my wife said, the Invader had lost interest in her housekeeping. It was not natural for him not to get his own way. Indifference inefficiency, civility: none of these qualities was in the Invader's character. Before long, she said to me, we should expect him back at our heels—with a vengeance.

I could only guess at what was bothering her. Was she tired of housekeeping? To the extent she couldn't be reasonable about it? By her account she apparently their work was getting sloppy. The meals were tasteless. We kept our accounts badly. The children wee taking more liberties. My wife had a sense of guilt about all this. She blamed the changed Invader for it. It was his new carelessness about what we did. He indulged whatever they did. This allowed us to become guilty

My wife could not keep herself up to the mark. She feared there would come a day of reckoning. I became impatient with her when she talked like that. But I tried to be patient. I kept point out that we were better off than we had been last year. If only she would not excite herself! Allow herself to be overcome by foreboding! She never denied what I said was true. But she could not control her anxiety.

After dinner, the Invader used to study military history. But now he had lost interest in it. Instead he now read cheap novels and periodicals. We saw him sitting, evening after evening, reading, or pretending to read. Had I not seen this, I would not have believed it.

My wife found dust accumulating on the books he used to read: volumes on strategy and diet, an old atlas. But, remembering a reproof of last year, she left them alone. Then, one evening, he complained about the clutter on his desk. He asked her to make room for some of my books in different languages. I was puzzled by this. "Now that I have been promoted," I said to my wife, "the Invader no longer needs to study military history."

I had always been able to find something to say about any situation. Often something humorous. But in this case nothing came to mind. Words seemed pointless and ambiguous. My wife took less and less interest in my feeble jokes.

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An event, early in that spring, I had a crisis. I tried to keep it to myself but my wife knew about it. While I had been criticizing her for her anxiety, mine own imagination was running away with me. I became intensely curious about the causes of the changes in the Invader. It made me miserable. I could joke about it, but I could not get ride of it. All my life I had taken pride in understanding how the minds of others worked. But now. There was a sudden change in the Invader. I ws dumbfounded and almost incapacitated by it. I felt stupid. Somehow the terrible spirit of the Invader seemed like a great snake. I became a rabbit that couldn't move. Now I couldn't make up my mind about anything. It was as if I was gripped by unintelligible nightmares.

What was wrong with the Invader? Why was he so sad? Why was he being kind of us? Perhaps it was some scheme or trap. Perhaps one day he would make some terrible demand on us. We had no other purpose but to serve his needs. It puzzled me that he

seemed to have even lost interest in our submission. Since when do sadness and kindness go together?

I thought about it a lot. The days passed, I grew tried of thinking about it. But then another reduction of our servitude, or added kindness of the Invader, would start me thinking again. My wife had always taken my speculations about the Invader as just worthless theories. But then she had another explanation.

"My brother," she whispered to me one night, "isn't dead. I think it must be to him we have to thank for the Invader's change."

"What?"

"Don't you see? My brother, wherever he is, has become a senior member of the Invaders. He's now determining their policy."

"You mean he has ordered our Invader to be kind to us?"

"Yes, of course. My brother remembers us. He wants to make up to us."

I hated to hear this. Last year, when the Invader was oppressing us hard, my disapproval of my brother-in-law turned to detestation. I felt the need that perhaps everyone in an oppressed country felt—the need to blame someone personally. There must have been citizens in our country that helped to bring about our defeat. It was in this sense that I had been concentrating on my brother-in-law. (I hadn't mentioned of this to my wife). That departed, perhaps dead, person had become my scapegoat. Having a scapegoat, especially in times of an Invasion, is a good thing. It allowed me to lift the burden of our problems.

So, when my wife whispered to me, her thoughts of her brother, I lost my temper. I sapped at her. I even shook her with the arm the she often laid on in the night. "What a ridiculous idea you have?" I said. "Your brother a senior member of the Invaders? What a stupid idea."

She let it pass with further argument. For a day or two the shadow of the ambiguous brother in law came between them. But once more great matrimony, close in each other's arms at night, over came it.

Perhaps, the year of our oppression had given my wife a new insight into human nature. She could remember things that were wrong with her brother. These might have developed into real evil by now. It seemed preferable to her to think of him dead. In this way she could avoid dishonoring him and also avoid feeling dishonored by him.

She stopped speaking of him as alive. She again mourned him as dead. Then she ceased mourning and more or less forgot about him. She continued in this way, even at a later time when she would have desperate need of him.

I, however, could not change my wife's attitude toward our Invader. In it her nervousness ruled. Her talk about her attitude was bitter and contradictory. We both got tired of it. However, even in that spring, I still had the last word about most things. But not about the Invader.

However my wife contradicted herself, it was always intuition or instinct. It was like some deformed growth in a dark cellar now coming into the light. It was too strange, too tender, for my mind. But I kept arguing with her to try to meet the Invader halfway. She ought, I said, give him the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps by appreciating what

kindness he showed it might inspire in him more. In this she would be doing it for the sake of our family. But no. She either could not, or would no, do.

Sometimes, in the night, I would imagine her attitude was a kind of strange patriotism. She was feeling ashamed to take a more cheerful view of what was happening to us. I was much more aware of what was happening around us. The tragedy of our country. The occasion for every citizen to mourn, day and night.

I could see tragedy in things. But I was not always in a tragic mood. There were usually circumstances that smiled at me like the changing seasons. But my wife's congenial unhappiness often made me ashamed of myself.

One evening my wife, in the midst of an argument, told me that our dead son******appeared to her in a dream. She said that he warned her. I did not know what the warning was about. Nor did I ask her because I did not want her…us… to dwell on our bereavement.

How my wife had changed in that spring. All the previous year, she was a little old woman. Now she was like a wild inexperienced girl. Then she had talked against my cousins in the resistance. Now never a word. She had become as rebellious as they were. Then she had talked about our son's spirit of revenge and how she tried to stop it. Now she was the irrepressible one. Every day she indulged in her sense of injustice. She who used to say that we were lucky to be alive.

About that time I remembered that I had not heard from my cousins in weeks. They were not like me. They were implacable. They possessed extreme energy. I could not imagine what they might be doing. Or were they dead? My son was unlikely, I

thought, to grow up like them, a rebel and a fighter. I was glad about this. I realized that my son's romanticism had passed during those spring months. My own life with only my wife, children and the Invader preoccupied me. This was, I then thought and still do, because we were all together in a small space. Among other things, our fears, our hunger and exhaustion, it forced me to see how deep our uncertainty about the future had become.

To me our situation was not unlike a stage with painted shadows, darkened light. The whole household seemed to be changing places almost like a dance to inaudible music. At times I could scarcely see the face of my wife dancing closest to me. But the old habitual strength of my love for her stayed with me. I suppose I lived with her, as many lovers do, under certain illusions and theories. Yet I still knew how to explain most about her to myself. For example: because our Invader had grown weak my wife's feelings about him gew reckless. His unhappy spirit, weariness and softness encouraged her to show fight…at least in her imagination, behind his back. Her spirit was strained. Her thoughts about him clenched like a fist.

During the Invader's absence my wife went on holiday. It was a change but also a taste of independence. It had put ideas in her head. For two weeks (if I remember right) she had been out from under the Invader's gaze. It was not the rough, punitive, gaze of earlier times. But still she fought against it. Those weeks had been bad for us. We even toyed with the idea of suicide. But somehow it had changed her for the better. I marveled at this. Out of it came her tirades. To me this was evidence of energy.

At times, however, I felt that she had become less loveable. My wife had never been an easy person to get along with. But he had never minded this in the past. What he did mind, however, was her general resentfulness and mistrust of people. I hated to see her now assuming a kind of despair. Even when she did admit that things were generally better it seemed forced.

To her the change in the Invader's attitude was too good to be true.

We really thought that it was too good to last. Any amiability of the victorious Invader was bound to lead to an advantage in the end. That was what victory meant. Victory was a lasting thing. For the victims, like us, nothing was going to last. But I tried to be calm about it. What insecurity I felt provoked a certain thankfulness for every moment that lasted.

While the Invaders maintained their rule, a kind word from them, a little less mortification for us: what more should we ask for? As the our world then stood it was not just like a prison but more a prison-cell. So any change in our Invader's attitude toward us became like a chink in the wall…a faint beam of sunshine…a door slightly open.

There was, I believed at the time, that a situation like this, would sometimes serve as a condition for happiness. If not that, then perhaps a supposed security.

(One evening, several weeks after his return, our Invader said he was going out for the evening. Instead, he stayed in and began writing a letter. I noticed how quiet he was…not a step could I hear around his room, not a cough or sigh.)

Later that night I went into his room with the usual kettle of warm water. I found him stretched out fast asleep in his bed. He was wearing his uniform all buttoned up along with his boots. He seemed dead to the world, his hands were loose on his stomach. His legs were straight out to the foot of the bed. His long, heavy, feet were pointed up. I wanted to wake him up. Then I thought it would be kinder not to. I tiptoed across the room and stood gazing at him. In his sleep he look vulnerable. In the dim light his face was a bony mask. The flesh was drawn loosely over the bone. His cheeks were slack and pallid. A scar on his face had a strange pink glow. His lips, always pressed together when he was awake, were now open and slack.

What was the matter with him? Is he feeling remorse for the Invaders cruelties? Or for that matter, their cruelties all over the world? In my imagination ran images of the rack, the branding iron, the whip, the club, thumbscrew and the wheel.

A different explanation came to me. Perhaps our domestic Invader was not in himself cruel. Instead, perhaps he was brooding on the cruelties of his comrades. The guilt he was feeling, little by little, was at last more than he could bear? Cumulative shock, regret, helpless indignation. Were they the source of his problems? But did he see them as *problems*? I surmised at the time that if they were, then there was nothing he could do about them. An individual Invader, even one of his rank, could scarcely be expected to change the Invaders' overall policy.

I watched the Invader lay there without moving. Even in his corpse like position, it was not peaceful. I observed some almost invisible motion in his features. Now the motion was in one feature, now in another. It reminded me of a leaf on stagnant water.

You see, or think you see, the water the leaf rode on welling slightly up then then slightly down.

Perhaps it was not remorse I saw in the Invader's face. Perhaps it was fear. Perhaps the Invaders were beginning to lose the war with us. Our Invader had then began to realize it. His leave would have taken him through scenes that would suggest defeat for the Invasion. I had, however, never heard any news about a defeat. How I would have liked to hear it! Even without believing in it! I never believed in it. No, I kept telling myself…lest I go made with impatience…there was nothing to suggest defeat for the Invaders.

Still, I could imagine what it would be like when all the Invaders began to panic. It would happen when all their conquered slaves, of every invaded country, rose up against them. Was this possibility on our Invader's mind? If it would have taken the joy out of life for him; even perhaps inspired in him a little more kindness for us, the victims of the Invasion.

I moved a little closer to the Invader's bed. I leaned over the rawboned figure. I peered into his depressed face with it uneasy animation. Was he having bad dreams? I imagined I could see the flesh over his cheekbones begin to creep. Was he dreaming about the defeat of the Invaders? For myself I wanted to believe it. It was like an ecstatic moment. I drew in my breath in sips. My temples and throat pulsed audibly. My knees shook.

But I did not believe what I was imagining. A man of my age, after all, is never very good at believing in things: certainly not his imagination. But why not? Why not, for

one foolish moment, could I not deceive myself? But I also had the ability to catch myself in a lie. I confess I was somewhat shocked at the ferocity of my desire. With my wild stares and strange imaginings about the sleeping Invader, I seemed to ridiculing myself. Her I was: an old man servant at my enemy's bedside holding a kettle of warm water…shaking…sloshing in my hand…allowing myself to think what I wanted to think…

I was civilized. This meant I had a prejudice against the inroads of the imagination. Fighting for my life, having lost the fight, a person of my age and education should always maintain moderation in all things. In truth, wasn't it citizens like me that invented civilization, one that prized reality?

Only one Invader, the one before him, concerned me personally. At that moment he was at my mercy, helpless in his sleep. Even then my feelings of revenge were moderate ones.

Just then our domestic Invader shook his head. He rolled to one side. He gave a little grunt. It started me out of my foolish reverie. The Invader was not awake. He began to snore. With his hed turned sideways in a different light, his appearance seemed to change. Still, his face was not one of remorse or defeat. I shrugged. There was no Invader's remorse, not revenge from us. It had all been imagined. The face of the Invader was simply unhappy. Later, perhaps, I thought I would discover the cause of its unhappiness. But my curiosity was not, at that time, intense enough. It had perhaps run its course.

So I remember saying to myself: let the Invader, with his boots and uniform on, sleep on like a common soldier. Still, I had a little resentment. I had wasted a kettleful of warm water. Would he later miss not being able to wash his face?

I was not sleepy. But I was tired. It seemed a long way down to the kitchen. It was hard to undress and to get into the shaky cot without waking my wife. Would she have minded if I had waked her? I had the thought that I should whisper to her. But not necessarily what I had been thinking, rather something trivial. I realized at moments like that, that I could not have lived without her. It was her female mind, her concentration on what was really important, that kept me going.

I poured out the water from the kettle. I was too weary to use it myself. I resigned myself to weariness and being dirty, perhaps for always. Just before going to bed I learned out the kitchen window. I turned my stiff neck around to look out into the dark night. I thought of the misfortunes we had suffered. But also of those, war, defeat, vengeance, that the humanity of the world had suffered. I imagined myself being a part of that humanity. But who was I? A nobody, no-one special, of not consequence.

Our misfortunes seemed infinite. It seemed, at that moment, like a dark sky full of mad clouds. Above me, the stars seem to burn with our anguish. Or was it their indifference? My heart seemed to shrink. Was it pity? But who can tell the different between pity in general and self pity? I was in despair. Yet it seemed then to be better than anger fueled by self-pity.

My wife is still awake. "What are you doing," she said. "Hanging out that window. Someday someone is going to slip and break his neck. We ought to have a bar put across it."

Soon we were both asleep. But I couldn't stay asleep. I kept waking my wife and frightening her with my thoughts. Sometimes before morning I heard our Invader wake up. Then I heard his footstep and a closet door opening. I heard the sound of boots dropping. Had he gone back to bed?

Next morning, up and about my work I found myself strangely cheerful. Was I somehow purged of vindictiveness and sentimentality? My war fever had lessened. I, of course did not expect to be completely happy. But I had begun to think, if our Invader continued in his reformed way, I might be a little less unhappy. I then resolved to put my mind to it.

Our Invader continued to be a reformed person. But was he? Looking back on it a week or so later, I felt that the Invader's sleeping in his uniform had perhaps been a turning point in the Invader's life. He was still melancholy. But he appeared to have made up his mind to something. He seemed determined not to make it any worse by resisting his will. I noticed a freakish sirit in his kindness. Now it seemed to relax into an simpler manner. This, you felt, you could trust. A seemingly new person, the newness wore the Invader. He seemed to have settled into a change with better grace.

Even my wife appreciated this. For a while she appeared to forget her anxiety. I myself thought that she had come around to his point of view; the possibility, within him, of happiness and hope for the best.

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That month my wife and I were happy to see (we thought) an improvement in our children. They were in good health all month. They were much easier to manage. Soon my son would be fourteen. Yet his body seemed not really to be growing. Perhaps I thought, there were shadowy change in his mind—ones not unlike those in all teenage boys.

I still lurked, at a distance, around the Invader. I occasionally tiptoed to his door to attempt to spy on his changed ways. But I had lost most of my old animus. Now my spying was rather like a game, blind-man's-bluff or hide-and-seek. Once in a while I had the urge to provoke my old enemy. It was, I supposed to prove to me—and to my family—that I was not afraid of t he Invader. It was as if I was saying to myself, "our Invader does not mind me any more."

My son's curiosity about the Invader caused him to invent romantic stories about the Invader. We did not pay it much attention. He was good at telling false stories. He had developed the rudiments of humor. He used it to make his sister laugh. But she hard to make laugh.

My son must have heard my remark about the Invader not studying anymore in the evening. With many variations, he told it to my daughter. "It's what they call a promotion," he said. "It makes all the difference. It makes them lose their appetite. They teach themselves to remove their own boots. But they do refuse to have anything to do with housekeeping."

"I wish I knew their leader. I wonder what he is like," my daughter said.

I was not displeased to overhear this conversation. But my wife, strangely enough, lost her temper. She cried out that our son was diabolical. On one occasion he even grabbed him the shoulders and shook him. I could see that this hurt our son's feelings. He sulked all that afternoon. I was sorry to see it. But he got over it. Perhaps he thought of some explanation of his mother's fury? Next morning, in the kitchen, he repeated his feelings about our Invader, to his mother. With sharp glances he seemed to be defying her to lose her temper about it again. But she didn't. He laughed, apologized to him. Then catching him by the shoulder, she gave him a kiss. This seemed to please him.

I sometimes thought that our son wanted more physical tenderness than he got. His mother, I noticed, rarely kissed or caressed him.

For our daughter, since she had not suffered from the Invader's former bad temper, there was less change. But she was still sensitive to the atmosphere around her. She reacted to the moods of others as it they were good or bad weather, sunshine or sundown. I could see it did her good to have her parents less anxious and indignant. We thought that she might be coming out of her dismay and apathy. Often she seemed innocent, uninhibited. Toward the end of that month, she, the silent one, said a few words to her mother. My wife thought it was a miracle.

When the Invader appeared, she would assume an air of triumph. She was seeming to remember that she had been right about him. He, however, did not welcome her affection as he had done. Now treating everyone well enough, no one was his favorite. He no longer made the old distinction between our son and our daughter. She may have taken this as a disgrace. In the old days, her caresses and glances had ticked his

sense of humor. Now nothing amused him. Our daughter, in her mind, had no sense of mockery. To her a smile was a smile. She seemingly missed being laughed at. Sometimes a feeling of being ignored swept over her like a sudden storm.

One afternoon, as the Invader strolled by her, she reached out to take his hand. He did not notice it. Or perhaps would not permit it. She then grabbed his sleeve with a dirty hand. He then jerked it out of fingers. This caused her to sink down on the floor. She hid her face in her hands. Finally, her mother appeared to rescue her and take her to bed.

I worked hard to remove my daughter's dirty hand marks from the our Invader's sleeve. I had to work fast. He said he had to be on time at his club that night. When he came back, late that night, he called me to say something my wife would not have wanted to hear.

"I want you to know," he said, "that I have not been thoughtless about your little daughter. I have not been cruel to her. My actions have been for your sake." He paused. "She seems to prefer me to everyone. I suspect you have noticed that. But a child of her ought, in my experience, to love her father more than anyone. So I have decided it is best for me to be standoffish with her. Do you agree?"

I grimaced and took a deep breath. Could someone with his power really steal my daughter's affections? Then, at almost the same time, restore her affections to me?

He looked at me. "What do you think?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Well, there's something else. I don't expect you to understand it very well."

"What sir?"

"I wonder if you are familiar with the new science of child-psychology. It is one of our discoveries. I have happened to have read the most authoritative books on the subject." He paused and looked at me. Was he waiting for my confession of ignorance on the matter?

"Children of your daughter's age," he went on, "often develop sudden attachments. They are very passionate. Now I don't want her to cling to me. Or trembling when I come near." He stopped and looked hard at me. "I don't like it. I don't like your daughter grabbing my hand. I find it offensive."

I started to protest. But I stopped. I did not know what to say. Or perhaps I did but did not dare say it. I turned my head and coughed. Looking back I think I was filled with shame. I had expressed shame of my daughter. And I was ashamed for her. I remembered things I had said about her in the Invader's company. I was ashamed of every word.

No, no that wasn't it. I had spoken only in secret to myself and to my wife. I had interpreted falsely. Our daughter belonged to us. She was a fruit of our long marriage. Shame had never been a part of our relationship with our children.

"You know, "the Invader continued," I take you for a man of the world. I knew that you would appreciate my saying that." The Invader took no notice of my burning face or speechless breath. "You know, I feel friendly toward you," he said. "It has been pleasant spending time with you." I looked back on that time in a different way. I recall

the Invader's insults, the injuries I had to endure. I gave him a hard look. What he had just said about our daughter was especially insulting.

"Are you listening to me?" he continued. "Something should be done for your daughter. We brought with us a great doctor. He has published a treatise on psychotherapy. One of my friends introduced me to him last evening. His work here is primarily interrogating prisoners. You know how science works, all things to all men. I believe that what works for prisoners would also work for children." I forced myself to relax. I smiled and (at least inwardly) forgave the Invader. Still no anger toward another person troubled me so much.

I determined not to say a word to my wife about the Invader's insulting remarks about our daughter. She did not have my capacity my for forgiveness. I wanted her to live calmly with our Invader. Anger would damage an already unhealthy heart.

A few days later, right after our daughter, had a bad spell, my wife surprised me. "Do you suppose that the Invader would do what he promised? Take our poor daughter to his famous specialist."

"How did you know about that? Who told you? Did the Invader talk to you about our daughter?"

No. it turned out that my wife had heard me and the Invader talking about our daughter and the specialist. As I have mentioned several times in this journal, the walls in our house were very thin. She apparently had heard our entire conversation.

My surprise at this caused me to think that my wife's material instinct were stronger than her paternal ones. The material ones were not so proud. They allowed her to resist being easily hurt. When I tried to explain what an ordeal my conversation with our Invader had been, she only smiled.

"Perhaps you have too much pride," she softly said. "Sometimes I think that you are the strangest person I've known. Why would any reasonable person resent another's offer to help us with our poor daughter?"

"But…."

"What can we do ourselves to help her," she interrupted. "Nothing. We feed her what food there is…we get her out of bed in the morning. We wash her when we have time. She gets some exercise with our son. That is all her life. We do not understand her. We, at least I, don't have any understanding of her health."

***

I think of the symbol of J***'s *existence. It continually appears and re-appears To me, emerging from behind the trees in the dusk. Its lights float out, its dark shape fleeing along the road. Journey and intimations of journeys. I see now that he had always kept himself close to the life that flowed, was transient, blown away.*

He is now joined to the brevity of things.

II

Citizen's Wife: Our domestic Invader had my husband arrested. (This was right after we had learned that his wife and children had been killed) My husband's arrest was because of something he had said about the leader of the Invasion. Whatever got into

him, I thought to myself? Why didn't he simply express his opinions only to me! I tried to stop the arrest. I was there when two young Invaders came to take my husband away. Our Invader was there pointing a gun at my husband. The two young Invaders came up the stairs from the street. Our Invader, pointing his revolver at my husband, met them on the landing Then they all went out into the street to a waiting vehicle.

I sat on the edge of the cot. I wanted to take my glasses off and fling them across the room. I wanted to put my hands on my scalp and peel off the sad, tormented, face. To unbutton the dress, unbuckle the belt, remove the frail slip I wanted to reach behind my neck and unhook the flesh from the bone. Trample it. Raise a fist to God.

It is snowing outside. I thought that I owed it to my husband to continue his novel. But, at the same time, I have to be truthful to my reader: DON'T EXPECT MY MEMORY TO BE AS GOOD AS MY IMAGINATION!

I see that it has stopped snowing.

The doctor had arrived. It was about my bad heart. He didn't have the right pills. But it made me feel better. I recall I fell asleep right after he left. The Invader, who had decided to stay on, apparently came back that night. Early next morning I heard him moving around in his room. But he left without having his breakfast.

I was required, on doctor orders, to stay in bed for the next few days. The children waited on me. Our Invader, who still stayed with us, apparently took his meals in the town or at his headquarters. A few days later he came to the kitchen to see me. His temper, that caused my husband's arrest, had passed. It was as if he had forgotten it. He expressed his good will to me and his concern for my recovery.

What little he had to say about my husband seemed to me encouraging. At any rate, it was not ill-tempered or vengeful.

"You know, Mrs***, do not be alarmed. You will not be blamed for his stupidity. If he is reasonable. It might be over with him soon.

I was full of hatred. My body shook. The Invader took no notice of any of this. My emotions, thankfully, did not cause me to have a heart attack. The shock of my husband's arrest had apparently brought its own remedy. I realized that there was not enough energy, real fear or grief in my emotions. Perhaps it was only stupid optimism and loneliness that possessed me.

I decided to stay in bed longer.

I knew I was optimistic. But was I also stupid? I sensed that having to eat in restaurants, or look for another place to stay, worried the Invader. Perhaps then, at this point, he regretted arresting my husband? I imagined I could take advantage of this. So I made a plan. I would get well as quickly as possible. Then I would work hard and try to make the Invader as comfortable as possible. Then I would fall ill again, or threaten to. This behavior might stimulate him to release my husband as promptly as possible.

The Invader sent a doctor to see me on the next day. He came unexpectedly, and in uniform. It frightened me so much it disturbed my heart. The doctor, in order to please our Invader, took this seriously. The doctor was a sad gruff man. He had a bag full of medicines. This, together with his scientific air, impressed me. It was the first time during the Invasion I came to really like an Invader. But it was for me, I realized, too late to like truly any Invader. They were all hateful.

The doctor gave me various kinds of pills. "These," he said, "are to counteract undernourishment. Make sure you don't waste them on your children." Then he smiled. He could see by my expression that I was not going to obey his instruction: which, in fact, I didn't.

I resumed my life, housework and care for the children. Without my husband the work was hard. But my illness, and my plan to influence the Invader with my good - house-keeping, had, I believed, been my salvation. They kept me from thinking, grieving or even hoping. My daughter began a new sort of crying fit daily. She would sink to the floor with her arms crossed over her face. Her every breath, like a tiny moan, became audible. My son had gone back to his former wildness: Invaderphobia and melodramatic fancies. He apparently took the darkest possible view of his father's situation. He would talk with his sister about it. I was forced to scold him, sometimes severely, for his overwrought behavior.

***

My dreams now are all nightmare. *I am here in the grip of terrible ignorance and superstition. I've been wanting to go outside and pee for some time. But there are large bats flying around. Their wings, like leaves blown around in fall, are knocking against the windows. I hear screams coming from the river.*

Sounds of digging are coming from the basement. It happens at the same time every day. But nothing has changed down there.

I feel as if the houses are staring down at me with malicious expressions, full of nameless spite: the doors are black, gaping mouths in which the tongues have rotted

*away, throats that might at any moment give out a piercing cry, so piercing an*d full of *hate that it would strike fear to the very roots of our soul.*

It's the law…you have to turn left at all the intersections.

No one told me about the insects or the bats or the zombies. No one told me the truth about the lousy infrastructure here. So what if I didn't think to ask? Somebody could have told me: the cruel things that go on right in my backyard for everyone to see.

***

The days passed. Sometimes I felt a kind of exaltation, stoicism and even a sense of humor. One morning about midday, I was alone in the house. I stood at the kitchen window, looking out in the direct of the cathedral. I could not remember when I had last looked at it. Perhaps not once in the entire time of the Invader's lodging with us. As long as I did the expected housework, I had had no leisure, or thought I didn't, for anything like looking at the cathedral.

My plan of influenced the Invader was failing I imagined that he was too tired and too sad to noticee; that he was grieving for his dead wife and children. I fancied that he was lonelier than ever—especially without my husband to keep him company.

In any case: I thought to hell with housework. The powerful, and evil, Invader did not rule me. Nor did my foolish husband. I was determined, for a few minutes each day, before the children come home for lunch, to look out the kitchen window over the city.

What did the neighbors think of me? Was I, in their minds, a narrow minded, uneducated woman? No. I was not that at all. I had enough culture to know that persons

of my culture wee esteemed throughout the world. Every country was indebted to our way of life. And that they expressed their indebtedness was proof of that. Out my kitchen window I could see the chief national monuments of our country. Persons from all over the world came to see them. No amount of invasions had been able to destroy them. The monuments were remnants of the past on portions of eternity.

Now, looking at them, I felt a certain grandiloquence and blissful stubbornness. Then as I stood and looked I assumed an attitude which, in physical sensation, conformed to my spirit. It was an attitude prompted perhaps by an unconscious memory of ancient art. I had seen it all my life, though perhaps without caring for it especially. I felt my head settle back. I looked at my soiled hands on my chest. Just then I felt a thrill, a palpitation. The pain felt like the stiches of an infinitely strong and invisible seamstress.

Was the pain anginal? "One of the Fates," I said to myself aloud. "The baleful trio. But I did not mind the thought. The time of not minding my fate had arrived.

***

Last night's nightmare. I seemed to be writing a letter:

I'm sitting here, friend, afraid to go outside and I'm writing my apology to you. We've had a bad harvest. The price of grain is increasing. The devil appeared at the marketplace here last week. He wore a cap in three different colors of red and he carried a sign with NEVER LOSE TOUCH WITH EVIL written on it.

The mayor and his wife started drinking heavily at the thought of the devil returning. Yesterday the mayor got blind on a combination of beer and vodka. Then he splashed some of the vodka on his wife and set her on fire.

The sheriff's wife, trying to put out the fire, died in the flames. So we've got one more angry ghost to contend with.

By the way, the beer here is terrible. It's because the ants are having sex in it.

Everybody tells me lies. Not only the ones you would expect in a place like this but also the kind that surprises you. Nobody told me about the footsteps alongside my house at night. Or the annual tax on sidewalks and shoes.

My house sits at the edge of a woods, alone. I hear howls at night. One evening a local contractor was sitting on a stump in the woods reading The Plumbing Ordinances and something hit him from behind. He sat there for three days, staring straight ahead.

Most of the husbands here turn into wolves at night. When someone's knocks at the door the wife never opens it on the first knock. If a wife did she would see her husband while he is still a wolf and he would eat her up and run off and never be seen again. When he knocks for the second time she still mustn't open, because she would see him with a man's body and a wolf's head. Only at the third knock can she let him in. By that time the change is complete. The wolf has disappeared and he is the same man he was before.

Never, never open the door before they have knocked three times.

***

Minutes must have passed. I was still looking out over the city at the monuments…the castle in ruins…the empty cathedral like a vast container with a broken lid. The stones of the cathedral were bright, though not pure white, in the setting sun. The hill which served as the cathedral's platform (or pedestal?) was flat. At the front, steep steps led downward. Even at that time of day, the steps were darkening. Far beyond the cathedral hill I could see other hilltops and slopes. There were others out of sight. But I could conjure them because they were part of my homeland.

I watched as the sun, casting pale purple and yellow colors, started to disappear below the horizon. In the old days, before the Invasion, we had gone there on off days in when it was not too windy. We would have a picnic, walk around, in admiration of the work and art that had gone into the monuments there. My husband would always go with us. He liked to express himself on the meaning of the place. For that he needed an audience. I had, I must admit, never shared his degree of enthusiasm for the place. It had bothered me to see monuments so glorious in my husband's mind so ruinous now. "How futile and how unreal is his mind." I would sometimes think. "How he talks and talks."

But still I listened to my husband. It was, I thought, my duty to do so. "What this place needs," he said on one trip on a summer's day. "is an olive orchard around it. It would be like a garment of wavering branches, top to bottom." He then went to compare his vision with the human body with its sensitive nerves and infinite number of blood vessels from head to foot. "Just think of it: delicious fruit to pick from, all the way from the top to the bottom. " Suddenly, as in a dream the scene of ruined monuments changed. Now I saw monuments in their pristine condition. They were clouded with thin lively foliage, flicking, like unreal things—as moonlight might in the midst of the sunlight.

But then I thought: "how would his olive orchard flourish on that blasted scene? Did he imagine that there had once been on that summit rich soil? Soft rains?" It made me think that my husband's knowledge of the past was not all that he pre tended. Did he make up the past? Not only his but also the history of our city and country?

At any rate, I preferred the site the way it was. nothing but rock with no nerves, no flesh on its bones, no veins or arteries. It all seemed appropriate. It had suffered, in its past, the worst possible things. But there it stood. That gave me some comfort.

I remembered other things my husband had told me. My loneliness for him touched a part of my mind. It was, I suppose, that part that had absorbed long passages of his talk. It remembered things, almost word for word, his talk about things I did not understand. He would talk about the dark prehistoric past, its cruel mythology and long gone philosophies.

My husband and I were (or should I say "are) an ideal couple. It's real love. He would never look at another woman. I always tried to be good to him. I runs in the family. I understand men. Of course, we've had our problems. I've had thoughts of leaving him. Usually after some small mistreatment. I've heard that you can pretend to leave your husband. That it makes him treat you better. But I not sure about that.

My worst mistreatment was a dog my husband kept. There are things only a patient wife can bear. But his dog, a huge mastiff, was not one of them. The dog was untrained. He couldn't control himself. He would make his messes when he felt the need. Strange about men. They haven't the same natural shame about things that women have.

My husband always claimed he knew how to control dogs. But that mastiff wasn't one of them. Before the dog died, he started keeping it in the bedroom, because it didn't being outside or any other room in the house. He felt sorry for it. I'd lie awake all night hearing it move the bed. When I was beginning to fall asleep I'd think it was going to attack me. I would dream about it. Sometimes it seemed like some obscene thing. I would wake up, reach over to my husband. But he was always asleep. He took no notice of me. I tell you, it wasn't healthy.

I had an uncle who saw ghosts. My dreaming about the dog was like that. Another time I dreamed that the dog was an wicker basket some evil demon had woven. Imagine that!

***

Our dead son, J***, loved hearing his father talk. But J*** confided to me one day that this was because the brightness of his father eyes and charm of his rhetoric. J***, like me, did not understand much of the talk. We used to joke about our always pretending to understand it. We used the "we" and "yes," a lot when we scarcely understood a word.

Now I think my husband was right about most things. Perhaps, as an ordinary woman, I was no stupider than any other. I felt all those things as my husband said them as he expected me to. Perhaps what made everything obscure and often nonsensical to me was not what he said but the way he had said it. Perhaps he intended to sweep me off my feet rather than to explain anything seriously.

Or perhaps it was nonsense: a man's make-believe, typical of most men; a kind of game that the idle, over-educated male brain played for the fun of it? No matter now. Remembering it now gave me a sense of importance and intellectual outlook. It became a pleasant thing, one of very few left in the world for me. Wasn't it surprising, I said to myself, for an ordinary woman, in circumstances like mine, defeated and bereft, ailing with heart trouble, to have a mind full of abstruse words that my husband uttered long ago?

Looking out the kitchen window, a moment of the vanity of intellect charmed me. It was if around the unfortunate dark figure of myself, the kitchen window had developed larger. It had a higher ratio of height to width than it had in fact. I sensed a sweeter breeze than the actual ones of the city below. The heat of the streets, I thought, must be higher than the air here: at midday.

Then, with a heavy feeling, I turned around to the dirty kitchen and patiently resumed work on it.

That night I lay awake on the kitchen cot—almost comfortable now that the large man (my husband) was not with me. I tried to think what I could do get him out of prison. He had now been in prison more than a week. In the first few days I had done my weeping. Then, for a day or two, I had been like an empty shell. It repeatedly ran through my mind what a fine man he was: the obscure, but profound, things he said. I thought about the next day. I felt capable of doing something. If only I could think what I should do? Should I go and explain to the Invaders that my husband was a law-abiding man; that he was a man who had yielded to facts, to fate, not only recently but all his life? Perhaps I

would say to Invaders that he was far past his prime. That he was a good servant for one of their own, our domestic Invader?

It was true enough. But I had become too proud to say those things. Or perhaps I was too passive…too something? In bitter moments of self-criticism, tossing and turning on the old cot, I sometimes thought I had become lazy. I refused to admit to myself that I was growing hopeless. One other thing I did not do. I did not try to discover where my brother was. If he was alive and in touch with the Invaders perhaps he could help get my husband released from prison.

***

Last night's nightmare: I seem to have finished my letter…but to whom?

Back of my house is a deep ravine. A house has dropped to its edge and has been hanging there for years with one half of it in the air, propped up by a flimsy pole. I'm told that three or four generations of the undead have lived in it indifferent to the perilous position of the house.

Why didn't anyone tell me about round-the-clock sound of sirens?

A citizen went to relieve himself in the woods the other day and saw heads without bodies rolling around in a clearing. He told his wife about it and then he died.

Now all he can do is fly around and fluoresce.

In order to increase revenue, the town council is renting out all public buildings for the storage of toxic waste.

This place is full of the enemies of progress. There are trolls, witches and werewolves everywhere and the inhabitants of this place refuse to do anything about them. Every time the highway department builds a new bridge over a river here the zombies burn it down.

All this, my friend, is keeping me from buying the stamps at the post office you want in order to complete your collection. I'm sorry. I apologize. Everybody is entitled to have a complete collection.

I believe, with all this going on, that I have a good reasons for not posting this letter.

***

I decided that it was best to think of my brother as dead. My husband had never liked him. And there was the matter of thinking my brother appeared in my dreams. But when I awoke I invariably knew it was someone else, not T***. One morning, awaking, I had the sudden thought that I should go and see my husband's cousins. Ask them for help, though I knew that they despised my husband. But, still, they might help. After all, wasn't blood thicker than water? But then the thought of contacting the cousins made me shiver. Probably by that time they had—as part of the resistance— been driven to criminal violence…to bombing, assassinations and burning for their cause? It was the way of the underground, as my husband informed me. I had already heard reports of those things when I went shopping. They were then less shocking than before.

About this time a rumor went around that men of the underground were beginning to quarrel among themselves. In any case, if this rumor was true, there wasn't anything I

could do about it. If any of those men were mixed up in the case of my husband then it would surely be his end. It would only prove to the Invaders that he was part of the underground too.

The thought of this shook me and the cot trembled under me.

As things stood, I tried to assure myself, there was no reason to think that the Invaders would not release my husband. Wouldn't it make them ridiculous in their own eyes if they didn't? But what if they didn't? What if he never comes home? As such inner questions would pass through my mind I felt real fear. The fear had the semblance of outer reality: gloomy as midnight, an evil odor like that of the dirty kitchen.

But then I would blink and the fear was not there. I blew my nose, turned the pillow over, drew up the covers over my head and went to sleep.

I began the next day thinking it was ridiculous. The Invaders were not gods, were they? Would they do what they did just to make a story Wasn't it reasonable to believe that they wanted their conquest of our country to last? Wasn't it possible to believe that they knew that they made a mistake in arresting my husband for his slip of the tongue?

So my imagination would arise, merge with a dream, then wake again with a start. But all it told me was what I wanted to think.

***.

Imagination: often it seemed to work in two ways, for or against me. Standing at the kitchen window, I could think of nothing but the ugliest facts…the painful present

tense. Then my mind could not, or would not, take refuge in any remembrance of the past. And it had not capacity for the future.

What had I, outworn and ailing, to do with the future? The only time that troubled me were the days I had to wait until my husband came home. Had I ever understood anything of the past, the ancient history of our country? Nothing. Nothing except a pretended interest for my husband's sake. The past was his hobby, and is wekness. Apart from his poor dear sentimentality, and pretentions to scholarship, what did it amount to? Tumbledown monuments, dead religions, obscure dramaturgy and the cruelty of myths. The myths of today, as I remembered him saying, were even worse.

No help for it, no refuge from it: my city and country: what did they amount to? Dust, stench, fatigue, beggars and cadavers. I was unable to think of anything else to think about, worth thinking about. The worst of it was what was happening to my children. But how much better off, I imagined, were my wild children than average ones. We were not as bad off as many other families. We had an Invader living with us. This meant we had something to eat every day. We did not have to depend, what still existed, on charity for our food.

None of the charities had milk enough or medicine enough to go around. Their policy as to select the healthiest child in each poor family and concentrate on it. This meant that he or she would be the one most likely to survive. In very poor families I say unprecedented injustice and inequality: I saw only one, the chosen child, living amid brothers and sisters with distended stomachs, lank arms and leg, dying. It could not be helped. The families could not afford to waste food on the un-chosen. The rumor went

around that they preferred girls. Was the idea that one male might serve several girls in order to re-populate the country.

One morning there was a poor woman standing in line at the market place ahead of me. Another poor woman came and tried to push her out of line. She shouted "move!" But then, strangely, she stood back and started explaining to everyone that she never allowed herself to get angry. "I am a religious person," she said. The woman was young, but old looking. She may have been a gypsy. Her dark skin was drawn leanly over her nose and cheekbones. It looked like copper sheathing. She wore a ragged dark scarf. It fell from the top of her head loosely down the side of her face. She had gathered it up and pinned it o one shoulder.

"I am a religious woman," she repeated to us. I pray, every day, for my little children doomed to die." She then turned to me: "I pray for them to die faster." I felt deep sympathy for her. I criticized her for her behavior. But I felt her desperation. Sensing my sympathy, she said that death was the only prospect that seemed to her the only reasonable thing to pray for.

She had spoken in a cracked voice. She stared into space, this way and that. She turned her back on me. She seemed to have forgotten me.

"I have one who is not doomed." She was not addressing anyone in particular. She spoke only to the space in front of her. "My youngest son. He receives milk and medicine from charity. He is a tough little thing. He is a fighter who does not need to be prayed for." Then she fell silent. When she had finished her shopping for food she showed it to me. "It's sad when I find something to eat. It's because I have to feed my youngest

separately. He is much stronger than his older brother and sister. He always takes more than they do."

Mothers, in particular, have a dread of the future. Often it is the only imagination they have. What will become of these tough children, I asked myself, those who drink milk and eat vitamins, when they grow up? How will the starvation of their brothers and sisters effect them? It seemed to me to be a survival of the fittest in the worst way. But the mothers had no choice in the matter. Neither did the charities. The country did not have a choice. A new generation had to be brought up this way. They were like murderous pigs at the charities' toughs.

I reflected that men and women of my generation had to finish their lives as best they could—good people becoming slaves, outlaws, firebugs, bomb-throwers and assassins. My husband, I thought, seemed to be the only man in the city who had been able to keep a middle way.

And now the fools have arrested him!

Hatred of the Invaders was often in my mind. It was something snarling and talking with itself. I was thinking what it was trying to say to me. But it often seemed distinct from the rest of my thoughts. It was louder than the others and it went on incessantly. I could scarcely keep up with it. What I was pretty certain of, however, was that was an indictment of the Invaders—of what they did, had done, were doing and also for what they were, how they looked and spoke. They spoke with big words, reiterating them like incantations. They had strong jaws because they kept gritting their teeth. Their mouths were somewhat shapeless because they were continually licking their lips. Their

noses did not seem centered correctly between their cheeks. At first you might think they had the color and shape of pigs' eyes. But then you knew they were more like the eyes of some other animal. Frenzy and cruelty shone through them.

My memory filled up with hateful details, such as the busy way their jaws and lips worked when they were eating. At times it made me think of strangling, or trying to, one of them. My hands rose in front of me as if it was a reflex action. The fingers, rigidly curving, appeared like a pair of pincers. I had looked down at them and was immediately disgusted at their slight, violent, energy being wasted on thin air.

I was led to make foolish observations of the Invaders' character. It seemed to me that it was their wish to be feared and loved at the same time. Or that they had set their mind on being scientific and mysterious at the same time. Their body odor: were my senses deluded by it? Even so, the thought gave me a certain contaminated feeling. I usually sensed the odor standing at the kitchen window. Then I would turn away from the window and go to the sink. I would wet my hands and not face, sometimes rubbing them exaggeratedly. Then, because I only had a few towels for the children, I would have to go back to the window to let my hands and face dry in the wind.

But the unpleasant odor was still in my nostrils.

Actually, it was probably not the odor of the Invaders in general that disgusted me. It was that of our domestic Invader that sickened me. It increased my hatred for him: of being dominated, reminded of his cruelty and misled by him.

I tried not to let myself go on like that. I knew what it was. It was the voice of my half-mind cursed by the times we were living in. It was the ***. (I said the word with a

hiss). Until that moment, I had tried to convince myself that I was a good woman. Before that time I had never prostituted myself. No demon of the half-mind had ever taken over my mind or voice. Now I was afraid and ashamed of the demon. I prayed for the return of my former passivity, even the self-pity that had been my ordinary moods. I thought I preferred misfortune itself. It was at least a real thing, not like this hateful voice of my half-mind that sounded made. The effects of the half-mind were all against my will. And when it rose to a high pitch I could not repress it. I had to listen to it. It was as if it had persuaded my heart to join with it.

My heart, of course, tried to rebel against the half-mind. But with its fatigue, along with the imaginary evil odor, the tears would come to my eyes. My breath came in short, hard, pants. I would stand weeping at the kitchen window, the sun and wind on my face.

I was as ashamed of weeping as of hating. Fitful emotion, hysteria, fit following fit, it was a waste of time and energy. My husband lay in prison. It was another trapor spell, of the Invaders. But perhaps it was one everyone in the world fell into for a moment now and then. Drying my tears on my dirty sleeve, and trying to stop my little sobs, I resolved not to fall into it again.

Not another tear would I shed!

What use was there in it? I had no influence on the im-prisoner. It was harmless against the enemy, no hindrance to the oppressor. As it then seemed to me, this extreme (call it Invader-phobia) was to the Invaders' advantage somehow. Perhaps an Invader like our domestic one could keep his domineering temper up—not only just against us, but

other countries of the world—but for me I could not. My hatred of the Invaders would suddenly break. Then I was ashamed of it and it made me sick. I wept about it until I wore myself out. Still my husband was in prison.

It was no solution. Of course as an emotional person I did not know what solution there might be. But I felt sure that emotion was not it. My Invader was not hurt by it or even inconvenienced. My Invader, I thought, would not begrudge me my moments of letting myself go at the kitchen window. He might even feel flattered by it. What if I did gibber for a few minutes in helpless animosity? What if I did whimper away for a few minutes in revulsion and confusion: would that help my husband? As I later looked back on it (did I look back even before it was over?) it seemed to me that I had lost all my self-respect.

Lonely for my husband I tried to look up to the flat-topped rock and ruined monuments where we had had our picnics. I looked, in part, because it represented what he had loved, a national treasure of our country. But, as I had not succeeded in not weeping, they seemed only a phantom. I was left lonelier than ever.

It was early spring. But looking at those monuments it seemed mid-summer, a season in the sun. Summer appeared to me as if it were sliding down the face of the rock. Summer was slightly green with purple shadows. It tickled me in drops of sweat on my forehead and upper lip. Summer evaporated the tears off my cheeks…yet I was as cold as ice. My unhealthy heart had almost ceased to circulate the blood in my veins. How long had I stood there that spring? Ten, fifteen minutes?

But had I, blinded by desperate thoughts, half-thoughts, really *seen* a green and purple shadowed summer? Not only had I been weeping like a fool, I had been talking to myself out loud. And already I had forgotten what I had heard myself say.

So I turned away with no more patience with myself. I angrily pulled the curtains across the wind and went to work in the shadowy kitchen. I warmed up some soup (which was more than half water) for the children's midday meal. Then I sat on the cot and waited for them to come up from the street. So well had they learned their lesson of enduring hunger, they would sometimes lose their appetite completely. Would they, at some point, forget to come home?

My good days at the kitchen window when an owl would appear on the branch of a tree on the street below. It would usually appear just at dusk, landing softly, then standing on the branch like a diver taking his time. I supposed it was weighing its options. Then suddenly it would fall into a low glide. I would follow its glide to the end of the street…then over the churchyard wall it was gone.

Its flight was silent, silencing. I never saw a kill, never a mouse limp in its beak.

Then, suddenly, I remembered the day my husband was arrested. The Invader had locked me out of the living room, my own room. In a fit of temper I left the kitchen and went running down the corridor. I took the key of the door and brought it back to the kitchen. Then I threw it out of the window.

My mind and my life seemed to shrinking away in this foolish gesture. It had been a vain ritual and symbol. Childish. The instant it was done I was ashamed of it. In spie of

my fatique. I resolved to go down to the street after the key. Then I would put it back where it belonged. I leaned far out of the window into the sunshine. I stayed there for a long time, not knowing where the key had fallen. I tried to locate it on the sidewalk and the pavement. But it was in vain. The shadows on my eyes from the blazing sun, combined with the surge of blood to my head, kept me from leaning out far enough to see the key.

My children then arrived from their play. I was ashamed to mention the key to them. Then I forgot to go down and search for it.

The Invader rarely locked his door. But the next morning by some chance he noticed the disappearance of the key. It upset him. I was in the kitchen at the time. I head him in the corridor accusing my son of taking the key to play with. My nerves quickly contracted as if I was about to cry or laugh. It was he Invader's voice. It was like a chisel, or hammer, with a temper behind it.

I came out of the kitchen into the corridor. There was the gloomy Invader facing in my direction. He towered over my small son who had his back to me. I could tell at a glance that it had begun again, the perilous antipathy. The Invader's neck was thrust forward. His eyes looked explosive. I saw the look of my son's rigid back that was maintaining his pose. He was protesting his innocence: which, perhaps for the first time I knew to be true. As I drew close to them my son was glancing hopelessly to me over his shoulder. Along the Invader's side I saw a large hand beginning to form a fist.

I took some quick steps and threw an arm around my son. I pushed him aside and stepped between him and the Invader. I faced him with my arms spread out. My entire

body was spread out like a hen between her chick and a hawk. And for the first time I addressed the Invader with real anger:

"Do not shout at my son. What if you have lost your key? My husband is gone now, thanks to your fury. Naturally things go wrong, things get misplaced. None of us has touched your blessed key. If you have lost it I am sorry. We will find it or replace it. But please do not shout anymore!"

I moved a little closer to the Invader. "Please remember that this is my property. The key you have lost. You have no reason for accusing my son of stealing it. This is my house. I will not tolerate a brawl between you and my son."

It was a fearful moment. Hearing my loud voice my daughter came io the bedroom door panic stricken. She tumbled over the threshold with a loud cry. My son pulled out of my grasp and put himself back between me and the Invader. I was, I assumed, to ward off the Invader's blows. I shrank from the Invader. I suddenly realized that the worst could then happen.

But nothing did. It was a breakdown of my common sense combined with a fit of nerves. But to my surprise it worked. I saw the Invader's face turn red. He unclenched his fist. More noticeably was the sight of his authority hesitating and hanging in the balance. He did not even say anything. He gave me a somewhat sheepish smile. Thing he turned on his heels and went into rooms he had requisitioned from us.

As he left I took my son by his shoulders and turned him around. I ordered him to pick his sister up and go for a walk with her. He was trembling. But evidently he had seen the strange surrender of the Invader. Perhaps he also thought that there was something

even more strange in my behavior with the Invader. In any case, I distinctly remember him turning and giving me a grin as he and his sister left the corridor. A few minutes later the Invader left.

"Goodbye," he said softly to me. "Mrs***.

It was a miracle. But it put me in mind of the Invader's exhausted condition from his leave. He then had a kind word for them and a more pleasant demeanor. My husband and I, fools that we were, also called that a miracle. But that was a mistake. Within a few hours of his arrival, the Invader had given my husband a beating and had him arrested.

I promised myself not to trust the Invader. But still I wondered. Was my miracle with the Invader like the earlier one? Perhaps the earlier one was different because of my husband's doting gentleness and charm. There was nothing like that with my behavior. Unlike my husband, I had fought back against the authority of the Invader and had won. The force of my spirit had somehow prevailed over the Invader's tyranny and physical force. Somehow the man's spirit seemed really broken. His ego had been undermined. I sensed that his energy had waned.

Perhaps the Invader's brutality with my husband took all the strength he had left. Then it was for me to pursue that advantage

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In my dreams I sometimes see myself wandering in **J***'s** room.

*Many fragments came to me, are discovered. I wandered about the room picking up his things…or recalling other things. He was fond of climbing magazines and books about mountain ascents, especially those in the ***…that…..*

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As kind as the Invader sometimes appeared to be, I know he had no feelings finally. He had none for good or bad. In the depths of his being, no matter what happened, he was left cold, impenetrable to remorse, grief, or happiness. He could pretend well enough, even to the point of fooling himself. His soul resided in a still deep emotionless, cold pond of silence. He was a killer.

I suspect that the Invader was a heavy daytime drinker. I often found empty bottles in the trash. And I could sometimes hear the clatter of empty bottles in his pack when he left his room. My own father was a daytime drinker. He was more troublesome to others than he thought. And others, non-drinkers like my husband and I, were often…perhaps…overly unjust to him, in his reeling and roaring manner. Half the time he was himself only half aware of any incapacity. Or perhaps he knew, and he thought that we did not, and we do, that it was not good manners to tell him so.

My father's drinking made him seem mediocre; old for his age and weak for his size, dull, vain and cross. No one had warned us that we were not seeing him at his best. It was his character, for all I knew, the nature of the creature. Suppose you have learned to like or to love such a man when he was sober. You happened to dislike him intensity when he was not. And he didn't know the difference or can't help it. The temptation to interfere, the false hope of reformation, was very great.

Did the Invader's drinking contribute to his behavior with us?

III

Invader: In speaking of my duties do not neglect to speak also of my pain, my joys, my disappointments, my doubts, sorrows and my surprises.

Helena: I met her at a sea town, that tall curious girl with her long legs and bony frame. She had beautiful gray eyes. The flesh of her cheeks beneath them clung tightly to her head. She was smartly groomed. She was forthright, yet curiously uncertain in her movements. They were half tomboyish, half virginal nymph. She fascinated me, especially in that setting, summer forest, sunny languor and mental repose. I was indulging myself in there. She was studying something, philosophy perhaps. My first impression was that she had a touch of pedantry. But it was clear that she was well educated. She wore clothes with large pockets to carry her books. In combination with a certain boyish naivete, her store of learning embellished a cloistered maturity, that of a strong and introspective woman.

When you speak of the Greek goddess Pallas do not forget her virginity.

We easily became friends. Perhaps this was because we were both amused by each other peculiarities. I felt that this wise girl was making an effort to read me as if I were a new, rather surprising book. This delighted me. There are women who have a mania for regarding people as if they were psychological novels: they expect persons to be either types of characters. They endeavor to read their souls, making profound judgments about them with self-assurance. Consequently, they arrive at conclusions that are either plain and simple injustices or complicated mistakes. Helena was, in her

mistakes, forthright but complicated. Me, the man she went on walks with in the forest, one who loved to talk, who was smart, skeptical about everything, was to her something on the order of a Lord Byron. But in her room I imagined her analyzing me; breaking me into bits and pieces of information.

At the time I found nothing in myself more interesting than a pinch of salt.

On our walks together, though, Helena had no time to think about me. She was too busy listening, her pretty eyes looking ahead. I could tell she was amused by my restless animation. At times she herself spoke up, softly and hesitantly. She didn't know that, in me, her voice rang with a melodious clarity. To me she was a clear, graceful, high-spirited note filled with purity. It was as if the note was Athena's, amid the woods and sunlight. I could not tell if she was aware of all this. But I suspected that she had new feeling that she was pretty. Here, on these forest paths, she seemed to sense it with blushing pleasure.

She walked by my side, scarcely saying a word. She seemed to be surprised to discover that it suited her to be completely female. She do not seem to harbor within her an rebellion against a male need to dominate. The day was fine and memorable. Helena had a sense of camaraderie that brimmed with admiration for me. Was it because she believed that I had given her back the pleasure of being a young woman?

Then came to the spa a young woman, blonde, dissolute beauty. On the first evening she singled me out. She gave me to understand that my attentions would not be in vain. Helena noticed this. Strangely, this was a shock to her. She suddenly found her face disgusting and her body clumsy. When I tried to talk with her she responded to me

in a disagreeable manner. I could see that she hated herself for such feelings. And I could see that she was trying to control them.

Next morning she did not meet me for our usual walk. One of the staff members told me she had gone for a walk on a high wooded hillside back of the lodge.

"She has, I believe, discovered a seat formed by boulders up there," he said. "It has a beautiful view of the town and spa." Then he turned and pointed to the hill. "You might enjoy going up there. It's a sunny day." So up the hill I went, among the flowering mullein and blackberries. Helena was indeed there, sitting between some large rocks. She saw me then abruptly turned her eyes away. I sat down and started to talk. I said I had been looking for her. Soon we were in friendly conversation. Noon came and we were still seated. It seemed to me that everything was back to normal. Then, below, I spotted a white speck with a red umbrella. Was it the blonde beauty?

Helena continued to sit with her large hands pressed between her knees. She was not smiling with her lips. But was she smiling within, with her soul?

"What time is it?" she finally asked.

"Two o'clock," I said.

She nodded and rose from her seat. On the way back she picked a few flowers and put them in her belt. Perhaps she intended to preserve them as relics? We arrived back at the spa in the late afternoon. Perhaps the persons there perceived this as a scandal? Or perhaps not.

The following days were undisturbed ones. Helena and I wandered in unclouded joy. God seemed to have scattered discoveries and adventures for us along the way. We found nesting birds and sometimes we startled a rabbit. One hot afternoon we sat in an

outside café. Another day we were overtaken in an open field by a heavy shower. It drove us to find shelter inside a deserted farm building. Then a rainbow erected itself before us. It was a magic, triumphal arch. One morning we came into a clearing where a family of deer were grazing. We find a dead goldfinch and buried it.

One evening we were caught in a snowstorm. Helena became transfixed by the soft creature-like snowflakes lighting on my hat brim. She was like that, enraptured by peripheral things as if setting them to music. She marveled at the mountains surrounding us, how they took in the light. How they'd bounce it down or suck it up as was their will.

"Look," she said, pointing at the mountains, "it's a kind of mountain bureaucracy. Nobody can do anything about the way the mountains manage the light—especially the sun."

Hearing her voice, there was nothing I could think of except my own thinking. I seemed to be in the depthless dimensions of my own soul.

We were mutually grateful for the adventures and incidents we experienced together. Helena accepted all my boyish fascinations as her own. I was revitalized by a double joy, a joy in new things and a joy in sharing. We were in agreement about everything. Did she realize her contribution to our joy? She didn't seem to know. She just smiled with downcast eyes.

***

I left the spa town. But Helena wrote to me. At first I was a little alarmed by her disorderly handwriting. I thought I saw in it a violence I had not noticed before. The tone of the letters seemed artificial. Was her cheerfulness a pretence? Why should she want me to read about finding the bones of cat in her backyard? I confess I didn't know how to

respond. I thought it strange how people's attitudes can change when we are no longer together.

I met Helena again where I was then stationed. It was in the fall. I liked to walk with her on the outskirts of the city where struggles between the country and city were taking place. These were places full of gloom and desolation, almost like now-silent battlefields where the country is wounded and the city almost done for: like an animal expiring on a pile of debris.

Then ,too, there were places of great simplicity, such as the woods, the light-changing mountains, the unpeopled hillsides. Most of all there was the R*** River, beautiful and mysterious. There were the morning hours, most precious of all, unknown to city-dwellers. If you took passage on a steamer, going against the current, you would hear voices so intimate you would forget everything about human habitation.

One morning Helena and I were walking together along a towpath on the river. It was a silvery autumn day. The R*** River appeared to be a stream of light filled with a soft, metallic murmuring. The softness seemed to rub off on everything. I believe it started me talking about what I wished to be and what I had not become. I described what I wanted to do and what had eluded me. I opened my heart to Helena, abandoning all restraint. I felt that by my confession I was ridding myself of all my weakness. I seemed to imagine I was looking at the towpath from a great distance. The walkers on the other side of the river seemed insignificant: somehow meaningless in the presence of the river, the valley and the sky.

Was their presence meant to illustrate the loneliness and desolation of it all? Here there seemed to be more solitude than in the depths of a summer woods.

"Helena," I said. "This isn't life. It's growing old, tedium, killing time or what have you, but it isn't life. I'm good for nothing, I can't do anything, and if I do start on something, I always think, what's the use. All I do is follow orders." I pointed to my uniform. "I feel like a slave to this uniform and all it represents…myself, I myself. My whole life long, I've thought only of myself. How can an egoist help himself." I paused and looked in her eyes:

"Your patience amazes me."

I pointed with my finger. Helena lowered her eyes and then raised them. She looked at me with shining eyes. I was confused by how wholeheartedly she looked at me. I didn't know how to go on. Helena was dumbfounded. She neither spoke nor listened.

Then we were at the end of our walk. We parted. The reminder of the day was unimportant to me. But a letter came from Helena the next day.

While it is still today, began the letter in a shaky hand, *I must thank you, my dear, my dearest….* I put the letter down. What was the meaning of "dearest?" I paced the room while reading the rest of the letter:

While it is still today, I must thank you, my dear, my dearest, for the most beautiful day of my life. You have given me everything, you have given me love. Yesterday I lived in a bad dream that was not life. Today I stand at the window with arms outspread. It is for you that I spread them wide. I know I'm mad and maybe in time I will regret what I write here. I kiss you, my dear, don't ask me why because I don't know what's happening to me. I am yours and I don't want anything that isn't yours. I wish I could embrace you, humble myself before you. Bear me up my darling. I have no control. I will put my head on your shoulder and you will kiss me…if only I were with you!

I read the letter through again, noting each error of punctuation, every instance of incoherence in the wild letter. All the time I felt ashamed. What have I done, how did I bring this about? Did I make a confession of love to her? Then I thought: perhaps this was mailed to the wrong address? I scanned the letter again. There was no doubt. It was addressed to me. When did I speak love to her? She was dear to me, but only because, yes, precisely because….

I went over the letter again. The handwriting was deranged, as if written in a dark room. The letter seemed evidence of a crisis. Did she want kisses, something more than kisses? She was not beautiful. But I saw again her beautiful eyes. I spoke to her in my mind: "Helena, perhaps your heart is deranged. But tomorrow it will be serene again, at peace with itself. Don't give it another thought." Perhaps, I told myself, I should write her a letter? But then the doorbell rang. It was Helena. She was leaning against the door-frame both hands pressed to her breast.

"Come in," I said.

"I came to tell you…" she said. "I came to ask you to return my letter." She raised her eyes and looked at me as if in despair.

She threw her purse on the sofa, took off her hat and started to remove her cost. It was horrible…I hadn't asked her to do this when she entered the room. The coat was caught on a button. With her trembling fingers she not unfasten it. Still I didn't move to help her. She yanked it blindly and I heard something rip. Then she let the coat drop to the floor. As I leaned to picked it up, she clutched my head in both hands> I quickly rose up. It caused her to stagger. She would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms. I felt her hands loosen their grip and she went with all her weight into my embrace. Her head

was thrown back and her eyes were closed. Her teeth were exposed and I could see the point of her tongue trembling between them. She lifted her face to me in a wonderment of expectation. I kissed her lightly on the cheek and removed her hands from my chest.

"Sit down, Helena."

She sat down as if drunk and covered her face with her hands.

"Forgive me," I went on. "for thinking today about tomorrow. It would be better if there weren't one. Can you be certain that tomorrow won't revenge itself on us?"

Helena, her face covered, shook her head.

"You came to place yourself inn my hands. Here I am. Do as you will with me. But is that possible? Am I to hold you for a while, grasp you firmly, set ou down somewhere else, what? How can I know in what way I would hurt you most? Helena, please don't ask me to decide what to do with you…my will is gone, but I am fond of you…please, get hold of yourself."

She sat motionless, rigid, mute. I was incredibly sorry for her. I anxiously tried to find the tenderest words to explain matters to her. So, in order to be nearer to her I sat down on the back of the sofa. I looked down on her coarse hair.

"Please get hold of yourself," I repeated gently. "You are very good. Don't throw it away. I hardly know you. I have a feeling that today was sent to me by fate…so I can think more highly of you than before. Helena, I delighted in your company. Now I will respect you as a woman who has surmounted herself. You will be a self-assured, accomplished woman."

Helena did something then unexpected, yet simply. She uncovered her face and put her chin on my knee. It was a movement that was at one and the same time childlike

and amorous. She held that position and closed her eyes. I imagined she was saying, "now say whatever you wish."

I was confused by the sudden realization that what I was saying was false. When I spoke again, it was with sadness. "Helena, I'm no longer young enough to…believe in love? When I hear the word 'love' I think of pain and disappointment…the most vulgar sort of relationships, lies and divorces….

Is this a great fault?"

Helena, her eyes still closed, shook her head. I could feel the beating of the artery in her throat. She was pale, as if asleep. She breathed rapidly through parted lips. Now her expression seemed to say, "at this moment all is as one to me." She became almost beautiful. She was looking up at me, her face like an ivory mask. I bent over her and said:

"Helena, it's not love that you should desire. Love is hard and always humbling. It's not for you. You should not go where others go, what others endure would crush you. I don't know whether it's because you are wiser than others or because of what has happened to you….

What more can I say?"

Helena's cheeks turned red. Suddenly, she looked attractive. Her features softened. Her eyes looked out mysteriously, in no particular direction. I stroked her hair, softly. "Helena, you must never come to see me again….

Goodbye, Helena."

Obediently, she stood and allowed me to put on her coat. I helped her fasten the hairpin in her hair. She smiled at me.

As she was leaving, she turned, shook her head and said, "you are…so…noble." In spite of everything, I had to bite my lips.

From that day on we never walked together. Years later I heard that Helena spoke of me with unconcealed animosity, as someone who had hurt her badly.

I was sorry for that…even to this day

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Dog: I found him at the ***. He had been there the whole afternoon. Someone had given him scraps to eat. The embarrassing thing was when I tried to take him with me he didn't want to move. He resisted, planting his paws on the ground.

That was embarrassing. The people who were watching. They seemed to get the impression that I would treat the dog badly. But that simply wasn't true. It was something else. I simply, to this day, don't know what it was. It seemed as if the dog was frightened in some peculiar way.

I have had him now for eleven years. I 'm not treating him any differently than when he was a pup. It may be that I'm a bit short-tempered sometimes, but certainly no to the point of frightening him. The dog knows me inside and out, he has known me since he was a pup.

There is only one reasonable explanation: the dog is gradually getting so old that certain subtle changes are taking place somehow in the olfactory perceptions stored in his brain. He simply doesn't recognize me anymore.

On the one hand I think that he hardly sees. On the other hand his eyesight may not be not very important to him.

During the winter in the early ***I once used to ski with him. At that time I was still on special duty at ***. I could only go skiing on Sundays. On Sunday…it was a beautiful day…I came over the top of a hill. I saw a man in a blue hooded jacket about 100 yards ahead of me.

The whole time the dog had been running several yards ahead of me. He certainly knew that the man was there. No doubt the dog had detected his scent many yards earlier. At this point, the man, who looked older than me, moved to let us go by. But then, inexplicably, the dog ran right into him. Then I realized that for the dog a man dressed in blue didn't exist. For the animal there was only a smell he could follow…one that gets stronger and stronger. I realized that he relied on it so blindly that he didn't even raise his head when he ran into the man.

The incident was definitely connected with the sense of smell. Nothing could be done about it. He had always been a good dog. And I hope he'll be with me for a long time.

Sometimes I think the dog doesn't recognize me anymore. Or more precisely, that he recognizes me, but only from very close up, when I can bring him to really see me and listen to me instead of going only by the smell.

There are always other explanations of course. But I don't want to discuss them here.

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Marriage: About this subject I must begin with a peculiar story of a meeting that comes to mind. Not far from where I lived then there was a young woman, almost still a girl, who was very pretty. She had a good figure. I found her quite attractive. Her face

had strikingly vivid colors. Her eyes were very dark, her neck long and white. For a long time I had been tempted to fall in love with her. But I never saw her anywhere but in the church at ***. In the first years after my divorce, my contact with people, outside the military, was very limited.

After a while I really wanted to see whether what I imagined about her was true. Then I found a good opportunity. It was during an organ concert at the church. During the interval I went up to her in the vestibule of the church and greeted her. I had no other plan, no other intention, then simply to hear what she would say. So I addressed her in a casual courteous way. But, at the moment I was about to open my mouth in order to introduce myself her…to have a really good look at her…I saw a large number of disgusting little pimples on her face. It looked as if she had some peculiar type of skin disease. It made me change my intentions.

However, I continued the conversation. Her responses were relaxed, in a congenial and polite way. To tell the truth, it was not out of the question that I happened to make her acquaintance on one of those awkward days when sex is self-prohibitive. In that area of the country I now suspect that she was considered a real beauty.

In spite of everything, I felt somehow relieved after this meeting. It had freed me of something which had seemed like a disruption of tranquility. I thought to myself that it had something to do with my bad habit of fixating on all possible objects which then attracted my restless attention. A strange type of neurosis?

When we love someone, or better stated perhaps, fall in love with someone, what are we really doing? Do we love our image of a person, or do we love that individual in his or her own right?

Perhaps we can only relate to our own imaginings? Are we only in love with our own image?

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Love and Distance: When a person we love goes away…on a train, a plane…or on foot…we sometimes experience a kind of relief. We are escaping reality and can complacently return to live with an image.

So: what is the maximum distance from which you can love a person? A girl I loved deeply in my early school days went off to ***. We exchanged letters for many years. But then, as you might expect, it petered out. Did she exist at that time for me? Or had the person I related to been an image all along?

Is then the maximum distance from which you can love a human being 500 miles? 150? 1000? It has been an old desire of mind to have someone I love in the neighboring town of ***. I would only have to travel 45 minutes or so to get there. This would be in the summer of course. In the winter, with the streets icy, it would take longer.

When we had finally decided to get a divorce, ***had already been thinking about finding an apartment in ***. Something strange happened. We went around in our apartment, looking at various things. We were trying to determine which books were hers, which mine…where she had brought this or that…whether she should take this old filing cabinet or chair.

We both got into a good mood. We teased and talked with one another in a way we hadn't done in over three years. Somehow we were both relieved and even astonished how real each of us appeared to the other.

We didn't have to live only with images anymore.

***

Money, Sex, Friendship: At the Academy I had very little money. Money was worth more than it is today. Along with the usual hardships, one had to go for a long period of time without it. The problem was especially acute when I went off base to chase girls.

But I was interested in seduction. A somewhat exalted expression perhaps. But sex was precisely what matter to me then. I wanted to prove that I was *real*. Not just another sex-crazed soldier.

You can prove that one is real only one way. You have to have an impact on another human being. The stronger the impact, the stronger your sense of having proven your own reality.

In those years I had the need to be seen. And when you succeed in seducing someone, you also succeed in being seen.

Back then there were fabulous dances in ***. It was a mad throng. The scent of cheap perfume, the girls on one side of the dance floor and boys on the other. It was a miracle that the heat didn't melt the lacquer on the portraits of the politicians and generals hanging on the walls.

You only needed to take your pick. In a peculiarly impersonal way. For me the somewhat reserved girls were the most seductive; those who could be changed in one way or another The girls who trembled a little when you danced with them: whose bodies tensed a little.

As I recall I believe that I took it all pretty mechanically. I mean I set a chain of events in motion this chain served exclusively to prove something to me about myself.

"Myself…myself:" Now I find this expression stupid. Does it have any meaning? (I can't precisely explain, however, by what I mean by that). Strange?

Three of us were drafted together, ***, *** and me. But my two friends soon begin to withdraw from me. They had found their own circle of friends. I suppose that wasn't the only reason they stopped seeing me. Both of them were very dedicated, hardworking, soldiers. They have felt that I was a bad influence on them. That I lured them into bars too much, ones none of us could really afford.

We went into the bars coatless. We didn't have the money to pay the cloakroom attendants.

Acquaintances who saw me some years later would tell me that I had changed a great deal. I never quite understood what they meant by that. I never had the sense of changing. Perhaps I was then considered unreliable. Did they make up stories about me?

What I best remember was the eternal problem of money…the misery of constant borrowing here and there, the debts I had to pay and the debts you could conceivably ignore. Toward the end of my time at the Academy: it was the worst time of all. Everyone I had borrowed money from stopped speaking to me.

About that time I met a girl named Kerstin…or was it Christine? It must have been in the spring of ***. I still think today that she was genuinely fond of me…almost loved me…or at least there was something about me which may have fascinated her.

But at the same time I have never known a human being who was so obviously afraid of me. Of what about me?

Much later I thought a lot about that and I put together all kinds of subtle explanations. I read her letters and saw her girlish analyses of my soul (egotist, sexist,

egocentric, unable to have a relationship with another human being). Eventually however I came to a different conclusion. She came from a nice physician family in ***. It was not a particularly rich family. But it was a highly educated one and they had planned for their daughter to go to medical school.

I was clear that I could not offer her the future she or her family wanted for her. I think she found me attractive. But from a social point of view I was something of a failure. Then there was the low regard persons of her class had of the military.

One Sunday morning we had a terrible argument. That was the last time I saw Kristin.

Childhood: It was winter, sometimes around ***, very cold, a lot of snow. We lived in a small house down by a small canal. The canal was frozen over. In the afternoon, after school, we children would skate on the frozen canal. We had those old fashioned skates whose tips curve upward like pokers. All this is very vivid. My little sister had difficulty tying the skates to her clumsy, high-bottomed boots. So I had to help her with the laces.

We glided through the dull, diffused light between afternoon and evening. Large barges, smelling of tar, were frozen solid in the ice. We went on board to look around. We found several beer bottles left by the bargemen on deck. They were the old fashioned kind: green with long necks.

One afternoon…in the undergrowth along the canal I found the frozen corpse of a young woman. The only thing protruding was an arm. It was a young woman who had drowned herself something the previous autumn. It wasn't frightening to me at all. It almost seemed natural to me.

When I got home, however, and reported my discovery there was great excitement. People ran out, ice cutters came from the city with their long saws. We children were allowed to watch….

A certain kind of gullible person might, at this point, start talking about transmigration of the soul and about memories of a previous existence. But, of course, such complicated explanations are not at all necessary.

When the unconscious mind is left to its own devices for a shile it simply begins to make things up. It creates an identity for itself, adjusts to its surroundigs, produces, quite spontaneously, new forms to fill in the vacuum …especially when we forget our everyday reality.

Apparently the unconscious mind does not fear anything more than the sensation of not being anyone at all.

PAIN, DOUBT, WEATHER: There are signs that the trees are beginning to put out their leaves. How quickly winter has passed. I'm not sure whether I want the springtime yet at all. I am not yet ready for it. Loneliness grows in me like compost. The strangest and strongest plants grow from it: **DOUBT.**

Every morning the same fear. Will the pains come again. The entire winter I felt pains. Now I am suffering from as just as much from the fear of pain. P. 135.

There are three kinds of pain, dull pains, stabbing, and burning pains. Our language has terms for color. But not special words to define various painful sensations. Is this because two persons can see the same colors while the same persons cannot experience the same pains?

My pain is dull. But not always. One some days it burns. But on most days it's dull.

Invasion Handbook: I see the need for such a handbook. But the one we were issued in basic training has been a disappointment. For example, on page 45, entitled "The Women of ***," we are told that we would find them, during our invasion, to be "charming, petulant, witty and gay. Many will b rather helpless and appealing."

*In a single violent motion ***stooped and caught the young woman against his chest. He thrust her head back, crushing her lips against his own. She made fierce, passionate gesture of revolt, and then, all of a sudden she surrendered herself, sliding to the floor, on to the broken tiles.*

Whatever: As a teenager I was often sent to pick firewood from the woods, especially after a storm had wrenched sticks loose. On these occasions I would carry my father's shotgun. I remember vividly one summer morning. Light met me as I stepped outside, the living day met me with its details, the scuffling blackbird that had its nest in our apple tree. The blackbird, a female, was, I believe, busy feeding her young.

I leaned forward swung my shotgun carefully around from my back and raised it so the stock rested firmly along my jawbone. I fixed the blackbird between the two beads of the sight and fired. It was a "whatever" moment, inexplicable then and now. Later, in successive invasions I believe this incident was part of a broader pattern.

***

The citizens of this city know only one form of rhetoric, namely the complaint. You only need to go a short distance on any form of transportation (including walking or riding one of their horses) to see how it is. If they don't have any other reason for

complaining, they complain about their illnesses, their aching knees, their gallstones and stomach ulcers, their varicose veins, their hiccups and their heartburn. And, at the same time, they always imagine *somebody is actually concerned about them*, if they only complain.

Right now, for instance, I feel a pulsing pain which may, in a few minutes, keep me from finishing these sentences. It began far down somewhere in the right calf. It feels something like liquid metal, or like something which has hooked onto the muscles. Then it radiates to the right thigh, down along the back of the leg. When I lie down it hurts even more. When I stay seated, it goes up to the back, although it doesn't always maintain the same intensity.

But do I blame anyone for this? Nobody.

***

You can learn lot about yourself by standing in front a mirror. It has always helped me with both my private and public identity: that is, how I am and how others know me. But mirror images, depending on the size, shape and location of the mirror, can be deceptive. You need to align each of these conditions up with your intentions.

For me mirror imagining myself began in high-school, right after basketball practice. We were all taking a shower when ***spotted ***with an erection. It was enormous:

"***has a hard on. ***has a hard on. Look! He has a hard on."

I looked through the steam to where *** was pointing. Sure enough. There was *** standing with his arms hanging down and a big grin on his face. His stiff dick looked like a large banana.

I don't know for sure. But I think the girls in our class had prior knowledge of the size of ***'s penis. His habit was to sit in the classroom with his legs apart.

After school I went home and stood naked in front of the hall mirror (my parents were still at work.). Why the hall mirror? Because the one in the bathroom was too small and too high on the wall. After checking the size of my slack penis (it looked about right) I then moved on other body parts, The eyes came first. I looked deep into their mirror image. The first time I could only hold contact for two or three minutes. But later, as I gained confidence, I increased that to ten minutes. This, it later turned out, played a big part in a promotion to ***.

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KINSHIP: I have always thought it is good to know who you are, where you come from, what you feel, what your concerns are. Many of these qualities, I think you will agree, originate with your ancestors, especially your grandfather and greatgrandfather. This, being the case, requires that we know something about how our grandfathers represented themselves, their feelings, thoughts and the activities they indulged in.

To this end, I publish here, from time to time, excepts from my grandfather's handwritten journals. In the following entry we read his therapist's report on my grandfather's mental condition at the time and the therapist's recommended cure (inserted in the journal and given here in italics)

I am the doctor mentioned below. I publish these pages now, not because I wish to take revenge on my patient's hostility to my methods, but because I wish to show how difficult the practice of psychotherapy has become with the new breed of patients: stiff-

necked, humorless, verbose, mendacious. The reader may think, after reading these pages, that I am publishing only the fantasies of a fever, not the ordinary effusions of a truly sick mind. I am not displeased with this. I falsify nothing. I simulate nothing. I do not despond, even as the memory of my youth, days of innocence and inexperience, start to fade, lose their edge and texture.

In fact, I am enraptured. The general course of things proves what I have known all along--that the profound sickness that keeps psychotherapy going and expanding, a sickness hitherto confined to a select number of our patients, has now spreading to the general writing and reading public.

As to the overuse of parenthetical statements and the "!," I can say nothing significant. Perhaps they have some outmoded rhetorical function known only to the patient. Perhaps they are a sign of the immediate collapse of his last snippet of sanity.

I leave these matters wholly to the judgment of posterity..

"Writing this is part of my therapy. 'Write it all down'! the doctor said. 'Remember everything. Show me what you write. It will direct me toward the appropriate course of cure.' Dr. Gladgelter is a good looking man. My first meeting with him was last week. It was mid-summer, hot, humid. But the doctor was formally dressed, looking the picture of elegance and good fashion. All his clothes, with the exception of a white tie, were a shiny black. He had a neatly trimmed black beard and a piercing black eye. I could sense that our relationship would grow to be a mutually beneficial one.

I've noticed that things lying dormant in my mind are coming to the surface as I write. It's helping me to see their significance. I can now trace some of my habits (good and bad) almost back to the beginnings of memory. Who knows? If I continue this long enough, I may be able to remember every significant thing that's happened to me. True, remembering things in the order they happened became a problem for me several years ago. Another one of Mother Nature's mysteries! So getting the story of my life right may not be all that easy. I may discover myself revising quite a bit (perhaps that too will be part of my therapy? I may decide to set certain days of the weeks aside for revising my document or to do it on alternate days.) I've made some progress. I have a few pages done.

I am sitting here after lunch in an easy chair near the window. It's open and the curtains are pulled back. Outside in the street I hear the voices of children. Would that I had taught myself, when I was their age, to remember better. To forget nothing. Perhaps my health would have been better. Perhaps writing wouldn't have to be part of my cure. I have my clipboard and pencil in hand. I've been following this routine for the last three days, allowing myself an hour, remembering, writing, before going back to the office. I think the doctor will be pleased with what I described in these pages. He may even lose some of that melancholy air he puts on when he describes my illness and the condition of my cure.

My next appointment with the doctor is this Wednesday. I feel a little drowsy. The muscles along my jaw seem to be relaxing. But that's only natural, after a good lunch, a few glasses of wine, a sunny place to sit and write.

It's clear that riding a bicycle can be an important way of living--if conscientiously pursued. It's no good looking in books why that is true: you consult books only to establish a relationship with the past or to steady your nerves for moving into the future. It's myself, my bicycle, the things and people I meet because of it, that constitute the true reasons for riding. With bicycling, you never have enough time to be idle, develop bad habits; or catch a fatal disease. Think how good the exercise is (blood flowing briskly through your lower body, rapid exchanges of air in the lungs) for your health. My whole family, except my mother (who had another kind of living to do) used to ride. It's a good, you might say, a delicious, sensation. Resting after riding all day. Like (remember the feeling?) of resting against your mother when you were a kid. Generally on a big sofa in the living room. That's before adolescence comes, however. A terrible time, adolescence (especially for males). It's the time when I first got an inkling that life may be a giant machine out to grind me up. I set out to teach myself how to ride, swerve, turn through its cogs and wheels.

I remember clearly my first bicycle ride. I stole my father's machine. He'd parked it in the garage while he went into the living room (a large, airy one) to talk to my mother about his business, which had to do the manufacture of cement. Father was a tall, powerfully built man, with one of those smooth, unwrinkled foreheads that never seem to age. His beard was always a bit unruly, though his appearance was always formal and somewhat unbending. I can still remember his voice, heavy, dishonest, Midwestern. I used to think that was because he was so old. He has just turned forty and was less cultivated than my

mother, but still exercised a kind of paternal authority over her. As I pedaled out of the driveway, in a hurry to get out of sight before my father appeared, I caught a glimpse of my mother's face at the living room window. So sweet, oval-shaped, framed in light-brown curls! Her eyes never seemed to be animated by either curiosity or pity. But they would always become tender when I was around. But she could assume an expression of great severity whenever my father was late for supper. One evening late (I was in bed listening, my teeth chattering from the cold) she declared quite firmly to my father that he would have to go to bed hungry. It was a splendid dissent from (up to that time) father's authority. I made a resolution that when I was a married man (even though I was only nine years old at the time) never to come home late for supper.

My father's bicycle was one made by M. Michaux, of 29, Avenue Montaigne, Paris. I give the address in full because it was the first factory in which bicycles were made and sold in an ordinary, commercial way. Father, who was a good businessman, but an easy sell for any mechanical innovation, paid $73.31 for his machine. It belonged in a class that later came to be known as a boneshaker. It had two wheels of almost equal size (the front was larger) and the driving cranks and pedals were attached to the axle of the front wheel. It was, I recall, the first machine to employ a full rotary crank. The wooden wheels, heavy iron tires and frame, made it an extremely uncomfortable machine to ride--especially on rough roads. The vibration was simply terrible. Father sometimes complained about a sore neck from the shaking. But he never stopped riding the machine. No one could say that he lacked determination! Some riders, friends of father,

complained that the vibration gave them bad bowel movements and loosened their teeth. A later version, which gave a smoother ride, had ball-bearings in the wheels. I later remarked to mother how unfortunate father, and his generation, were in having to ride the boneshaker. The "ordinary" bicycle, introduced the year after my father died, was perfect for a man of my father's height and build. Men shorter than my father (father's generation had a number of these) preferred the tricycle--not only for its wheel-height but also for its stability. The ordinary had a 60 inch front wheel and a 12 inch back one. The large front wheel insured a greater distance of travel with every revolution of the crank. If father had been there to hear my discussion with mother, I am certain he would have approved of my representation of his age's chief means of self-propulsion. Certainly, up to the time of my mother's own death, I would always to keep every touch of harshness, or criticism, out my voice when I discussed father's own performance with his bicycle. Though I thought then that father, as far as cycling was concerned, suffered from an ill-timed birth. When he was young, riding every day, the boneshaker was the only machine of self-propulsion available to him. Then when we finally had the "ordinary," a machine of much greater efficiency and comfort, he was far too old to ride. Naturally, I continued to respect him, especially his loyalty to the boneshaker. Most people of his age preferred to walk or ride a horse.

I pause here (laying down my pen) to light a cigarette. I have seriously been thinking about stopping smoking. It's a weakness shared by all the male members of my family. This may be my last cigarette. Or it may be the last I smoke while

not riding my bicycle. I am not sure. There's no question that smoking helps me to remember the details that Dr. Gladgelter says he needs in order to effect a cure. If I have learned anything at all from the Doctor, it is that the efficacy of a cure has a direct correlation with remembering of personal details.

I have my father's smoking jacket on. He wanted it to go to his brother in the navy. This, I now realize, was connected with a curious illusion of father's that his brother might renew his faith in life by wearing a family member's clothes. But it was mother's decision to give the jacket to me. I noticed her fondness for Uncle George diminished quite rapidly after father's death. Perhaps it was his propensity for telling long stories about sailing and the sea. (I confess I was myself quite bored at times with them.)

It's very pleasant here, next to the window, smoking what may be my last cigarette, thinking about the next sentence. I've discovered that it helps me to write longer, more effective, sentences if I lean back in my chair and look at the smoke drifting toward the ceiling.

Dr. Gladgelter seems to feel a great need of my respect (even affection) for him. After our last session (though it seemed much longer, and was widely publicized as a 50 minute-session, it only lasted, according to a watch I always carry with me, 37 minutes!), he took me by the arm, opened the door for me, and walked with me downstairs to the front steps. I confess I stiffened some when he first took me by the arm. It was (I now realize!) for fear that I might fall into my old habit of attempting to invade the personal space of every male that

came along. At the door he went on talking for some time. He mentioned that his wife was ill--something he had not first attached any importance to. But lately, he said, he had begun to worry. Her eyes, he said, had become larger, her face thinner. I sensed that the doctor's character was changing, that his wife's illness had made him more open, more talkative (even I hesitate to say it, almost clinging!). His piercing black eye had, I observed, a misty cast. Perhaps he was allowing himself to become overmuch involved in my own cure. I resolved with myself never to mention again in his presence that word: ILLNESS.

The time I stole my father's bicycle I rode down the street and back up. I remember thinking at the time (recalling, I suppose, a remark by father) that the only way balance can be maintained upon a "boneshaker" is not to allow it to decide which way to collapse. The ride gave me a great sense of confidence. My first ride: and without once falling off the machine or allowing it to collapse! Actually, I had ridden a friend's bicycle a time or two before. It was then I learned that if you're not a natural bicyclist, then you must at least appear to be. I noticed that day a couple of bicyclists following me. They were enjoying comparing their skill with a bicycle to my own general bad performance--which I attributed, not to lack of experience, but too a general emaciation from the diet of warm root-beer and flax seed I was then on. Obviously, if I was going to appear like an ordinary rider, I was going to have to read more about bicycling. As I read, I began to feel as if the secrets of the machine had been revealed to me. I completely stopped reading on every other subject. I even stopped taking naps with mother on her big sofa. It was the first time I realized that there must be

many people like me who allow an idea to usurp their mind to the exclusion of all other ideas. I confess it made me feel better when Dr. Gladgelter identified my obsession with books on bicycles as a common one for a person of my age to pass through. He called it the 'machine-complex stage of development.' Had I been of the opposite sex, the doctor continued, the stage would have doubtless manifested itself with a fascination with mechanical dolls. Though the details of this stage are still somewhat unclear to me, the doctor's analysis did give me something real to work with in getting at the true source of my problem. I had also learned by then (this was my third session with the doctor) that the typical 50 minute session could be reduced substantially by agreeing with him, if only with a slight nod of the head.

Once or twice the doctor has accompanied me, even after a snowfall, as far as his garden. Could he have guessed how grateful I am for this kindness? My face, capable of expressing extraordinary consideration and respect, could scarcely express my joy. Even the blowing snow seemed less violent. Another one of Nature's puzzles!

My first real bicycle was given to me by Uncle Jim. It was difficult at the time for me to know why he was so generous with me. Perhaps he didn't know himself. Perhaps he wanted to be a father to me--now that my own father was dead--and marry my mother. I confess I was surprised at how friendly he had become to my mother and me after my father's funeral. He traveled widely on business. He adored trains, especially German ones, which always departed on time! Our cuckoo-clock, which now sits, giving erroneous time, on a low table in

the room in which I am now writing, was one of his gifts to us. I've since learned that he paid for most of my birthday parties. But it was his constant praise of my mother that revealed to me his true intentions. He would often say, in my presence, that he had never heard say a single unkind word about anyone. I smiled at this for I knew that my mother did not say anything against other people for the simple reason that she did not take any interest whatsoever in anyone else's affairs.

My bicycle was a 'safety,' familiar to many riders as the 'low bicycle,' essentially the modern machine of today. Its 'geared-up"\' transmission was what made the machine possible. (Strangely enough, one still can hear riders describing the 'gear' of a bicycle by comparing it with an 'ordinary.' For example, I heard on the radio yesterday an elderly bicycle repairman saying a bicycle geared to 65 will travel as far, with one turn of the cranks, as will an 'ordinary' bicycle with a 65-in front wheel. I believe my father, in particular, would have been pleased to hear that.

That 'safety' was a truly miraculous machine! Its success was the direct result of the inter-working of its various parts. With its moving parts, in particular, you got the impression that they would move forever, that their stoppage would itself be miraculous. Still, I knew that some parts, like the hubs or driving sprockets, were destined (as if prepared from birth!) to wear out. Collapse of any one part, I knew, would throw an additional burden on the other parts of the machine, resulting in metal fatigue, even failure. I didn't want that to happen, especially while Uncle Jim was alive. Proper maintenance of my

'safety,' a regular grease-job, proper tension on the drive-chain, fully inflated tires, and new paint (as needed) became as natural to me as the extract of monkey glands was to Uncle Jim--who was, I recall, making a final attempt, with weekly injections of the extract, to rejuvenate a collapsing sexual-function.

There's not much point in my trying to describe how I first met Felicia, a girl about my age. As with us old men, remembering the particulars of one's own life can only mean a slow and simultaneous weakening of all the organs. Woe to our attempt to re-tell our story if the organ responsible for remembering should, as it were, 'lag behind'--that is, stay younger than the other organs! I suspect that the organ of memory, which worked in harmony with the other organs in my youth, may now be in conflict with them. I fear that the facts of my life that I can remember may be too many for Dr. Gladgelter. Perhaps he will leave me if I write in too fine a detail! He has hinted several times that his growing practice does not allow him the leisure he once enjoyed.

Perhaps writing your story in the right detail is like finding the correct quantity of medicine to mix in your drink. A drop or two of digitalis in your milk or oil of rue (an excellent purgative!) in your wine. However, I find myself wandering away from my subject, how it was I met Felicia. It was directly due to my "safety." The machine is not only easy to house, but can be ridden 15 or 20 miles in an hour. Now, as an old man, it is my destiny to make pleasant bows at pedestrians as I pedal slowly by them. But in those days, I would pedal furiously by everyone and everything. I now know that I was looking for a woman to share, indeed, embellish, my life. Of course I could have walked to the shop where

Felicia worked. (I had first wheeled in there to get out of a hailstorm and to buy a pack of cigarettes.) After I'd given up my diet, and had started to eat meat again, I felt strong enough to walk hard all day. At that time, Felicia was a blonde who dressed in a variety of different colors. She obviously took the same kind of pride in her beauty as I did in my safety. From the waist up (perhaps it was because of the clothes she wore then) her body resembled an elegant Greek vase on its base.

I am interrupting my writing here to go look for an old photo of me and Felicia standing by my safety. My grandson, in whom I am disappointed (he has the round, weak face of his father), has said that he sees in my look in the photo an ill-concealed lust for Felicia. It makes me feel a little sad, remembering my life with my safety. After we started courting seriously, Felicia made me trade it in for a tandem. This machine was designed to carry two persons, both of whom, if any forward motion was to be achieved, had to pedal in unison. The machine was certainly the most expensive one I've ever owned. The controls were on the front handlebars. The steering, until you were fully experienced with the machine, was much stiffer than my safety--though not as stiff, and unforgiving, as father's boneshaker.

All the tandems in those days had the backseat designed for women. Those who have never ridden the machine, or have never married, may not assign much significance to that. But the position, and I might say, shape, of the seat had a direct bearing on how our courtship, and later our marriage, turned out.

As I write now, I have almost reached my grandfather's age. The shadows in my room seem to have grown longer. I seem to need to want to take deeper and deeper breaths. Is Nature trying to reveal to me something of the nature of the end of life? Or perhaps the beginning of the end? I know for a fact (another truth Dr. Gladgelter has taught me!) that is perfectly possible to be conscious of possessing a good memory even though being aware of it is the only evidence one has of having such a memory. For this reason, I have decided to give a full, and exact, description of the things I have missed in life. I realize that I set myself a demanding task, rather like describing a missing coach in a string of coaches being drawn up a fog-obscured hillside by an engine. An unenviable task! When I observe myself with the things I have missed I often imagine myself on a celeripede bouncing happily through streets on an errand for my mother. But is it worth describing what one has never experienced? Certainly the celeripede was an important development in the history of the bicycle, even though its top speed was barely equal to a brisk walking pace. A simple contrivance, first invented by Maurice Niepce, a pioneer of photography, it consisted of two wheels and a crossbar upon which the rider sat. Propulsion was effected, in the absence of a downhill slope, by pushing one's feet briskly against the ground. In 1817, I believe, the machine was further improved by Baron de Saverbrun, who was said to have performed some incredible feats of speed upon it.

I put my pen down and lean back in my chair. Smoke from my cigarette drifts, in a curling motion, up toward the ceiling. It's my last cigarette. I believe it's true that the taste of a cigarette is more intense if it's your last one. I believe

that's true because it signals a feeling of victory over yourself and the hope (even at my age!) of an increased productivity. I feel certain that Dr. Gladgelter will approve of my decision to quit smoking. He has indicated several times to me that he believes that we are very close to a strong, ideal, cure! But it that belief based on sound scientific evidence? Time will tell!

Here ends my written account of my cycling adventures. The next chapter in my book (yes, I'm convinced that my literary efforts will culminate, not only in a cure, but also in a book!) will be an extensive description of my life in folk dance. It was a boundary-less, time-bending time! A period of entrepreneurial brio! Writing it all down, I assure myself, will be a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of the roots of my sickness and a way of dispelling the effects of a dreary present. But enough preview of what's to come. First a glass of wine, a cigarette and then a nap!

Then there is….