

**THE
MAN
WHO
STOLE
TODOR
TUGA'S
LIFE**

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Once upon a time, before the beginning of time, a beast walked the earth. It looked like no other creature. Sometimes it walked like a viper and sometimes like a mole. It did not seek water since it no longer felt any thirst, and it feared the skies because it feared the heights. Its haste was born out of fright, so it moved too fast to sense its own might. On its steps, the beast wore humbleness, under its arm it carried sweat fate of woes, and it was squeezing the wings of sparrow-like hope in its fist. This beast was a man.

Oh, how other beasts loved it, how they cherished and kissed its shadow! How they looked at it with pitiful gentleness and tasteless nausea, sticking their heads out of their own frailty. They delighted in the bitterness of pain arising from the graves of strangled and yet unborn dreams. They thinned down their anger with the dusty tears they cried, and they drank this bitter potion to its honor. This was their passion and their sacred ritual.

The beast was taught how to carry patiently and quietly the burden of its own fears and how to bow down before its anxiety. It was taught not to peek into the depths of its heart, never to ask for the name of the One it may find there. It was ordered to throw into the flames the children which courage conceived in it. It was taught to walk on all fours; to be like all other beasts. This beast was a man.

It was taught not to look at the skies because the skies belonged to the almighty. It was taught that if it kneeled and crawled long enough the Lord would come down to its molehill and show (it) the mercy. It was taught never to stand tall, never to ask for anything because it may ask for too much. This beast was a man.

And then one day the beast rose up. It started to walk proudly surrendering every step of its way to its own will. It stopped awing its fears, and it chained them with its impudent courage. It grabbed the slave-man that lived in it and slashed his belly. The heavy stench of timid hope poured out of the slave-man's gut. Slave-man died a shameful death of the scarecrow, which had nothing to lose except its straw. The beast then swung the sword high above its head and cut the boundaries

of the dominion of heaven. Out of the stars it made road signs for its dreams, on which it rode since the day it pronounced itself the lord of living (life). It proclaimed the earth to be its kingdom and infinity to be its home. The beast put two hearts into its chest because it had to live two lives now – one earthly life of the man-king, and one divine of the man-god.

The Stonecutters Tale, The Face and The Crime

He held heavy granite slab with his knobbly hand while trying to arrange unwritten letters with his other palm.

- I'm afraid mister this epitaph is a bit too long. This is a whole story. It won't fit the slab. Look!

The Stonecutter chewed these few words with his obsidian teeth as if they were a piece of old leather. He clucked while pausing. He spoke slowly, with effort, as if through an old pain which he long ago had learned how to keep clenched in his back teeth. Immersed in his thoughts, like a man who talks to himself, he was rearranging the sections, but the words kept gliding down the slippery surface of the obelisk.

- You can only have a half the text up to here. You could have it all if it is engraved with a smaller font, but then the text will cover the entire surface, and there will be no place left for the picture. And you do want the picture, don't you?

He lifted his gaze from the slab and glanced carelessly at the half empty bottle of brandy. Adam's apple on his short hairy neck motioned as the brandy eased the pain clenched between his teeth. He sighed. I was staring at him, and he saw it. He swiftly wiped his mouth and rubbed his black teeth.

- I have been suffering from toothache for ages, my entire life. I pulled out every single tooth as it started aching me. Some have, though, simply fallen out. Poor quality, mister, fragile stuff, that's it. The ones you see in my mouth, I made myself out of the obsidian. They are sharp, strong, so strong that I could chew a piece of wood in a second. But to be honest, they ache me too. I guess I didn't fix them properly in place. The back ones tend to fall out as soon as I open my mouth. That is why I always have to keep them busy chewing something or pressing them against one another.

He could see that I was neither interested in the sad story about his teeth nor in any excuse for his chronic drunkenness. He could see that I was anxiously trying to estimate the thickness of the darkness against the pale light coming from the oil lamp hanging above his curled hair. He could see that I was running out of night and that I was in a hurry. He could see, I guess, that I was one of those people who are always in a hurry.

- I would be happy to put the picture on the slab, but you have to tell me what kind of face you want. I'm saying this because not every face is appropriate for every sort of stone, or for every kind of text. For instance, the face of someone whose death sneaked upon him while asleep, as a thief or perhaps a savior, won't stick to white surface. The face of such blessed sleeper would turn quickly into a pale stain because it lacks those strong dark lines, you know, the lines which mark man's character. In fact, you have to choose a face for death in the same way as you, I suppose, had chosen the face for life. But the death-face, the last one in the row, you must choose extremely carefully. You see, there are people who believe that they will last longer in death than in life, and for that reason they insist more on the posthumous face. Some people even believe that the death-face is eternal, everlasting, like an important deed which cannot be undone. They even believe, which I find a bit naive, that with the death-face they can attain an ideal which remained unattained during their lives, and that now they can simply rest, unchanged and sort of fossilized in the marbled numbness of their death-face. It is naive, immature, and above all it is so vain, but if that is what suits people, if that is what people are contented with, then it does not really matter. It makes no difference to me. I'll be at your service in any case. However, it is exactly what you want, I dare to say. The face above all others. The face which bears the stamp of all those previous faces, of their best, to be sure, but at the same time the face which has something more. Such face is forced to last, to remain unchanged, to be a boundary, a benchmark, your own touchstone so to speak. So I suppose you do not wish such a thing be left at the mercy of a chance. I know these things from my own experience. I'm actually pretty good when it comes to judging faces and characters which pass on the other side of Styx, but which do not want to sail down the Lethe. And I'm telling you all this for your own good, but I guess you already know it. Let me get to the point, the trouble is that I cannot see your face very well here in the dark, so I don't know where to start.

The stonecutter continued explaining his psycho-philosophical idea about faces, people and characters. Although I was no longer listening carefully, I could not stop thinking about these two faces, the death-face and the life-face. To be frank, I did not like that guy, that bulky, slow fella. Everything on him was somehow disproportional, crude and overemphasized, including the sour stench of brandy which filled out the triangle of hempen space between us. I have never liked anything crude and rough, and this guy was like a giant rock that just slid down the mountain. Moreover, he was somehow carelessly vulgar, like an undone fly. However, I guess I disliked his overdone confidence in his convictions more than anything else, just as I disliked his boorishness

and his like a smoke choking arrogance, which made me gulp back. He knew everything and had an opinion about everything. A narrow-minded pan historian. A true log-philosopher strolling haughtily down the barren landscape of his life experience while blindly believing his prudence. Although we talked about nothing except the epitaph and the gravestone, he suddenly began elaborating a whole theory about faces. His smugness and his rustic intellect spouted out conjectures, which were more than mere conjectures. They were categorical claims turning effortlessly into truths, into the essence of things. The entire violent display of his complacency was accompanied by gestures of solemnity and fake seriousness, as well as by patronizing grin, with which he underscored some of those overly certain claims. And I have always believed that excessive certainty was a dangerous illusion at best. In fact, to me the excessive certainty was the highest degree of idiocy. I have always somewhat instinctively made the distinction between the ideal and the real form of intelligence. The ideal form possessed two degrees. The first one was imperfect and simple stupidity. I deemed it romantic naiveté, something harmless and even noble. The second degree was astuteness. It was indeed much more than that. It was the only true freedom, or at least the prophecy of freedom, its tacit promise. However, the majority of people, actually every single one of them, was in my view relegated to the real form of intelligence, which was stuck somewhere between the first two. The majority of people belonged to the category of moderately smart, assured, convinced, that is, perfectly stupid.

Despite all of it, I was now preoccupied with his face-theory because it concerned me, my face. I wished the stone face on my gravestone to be more than a mere arrangement of muscles, to be more than random ordering of bones, hair, skin and eyes. I wished something more, something significant and venerable. But he just kept talking so heedlessly and disrespectfully about this secret wish of mine as if it was something silly, worthless and cheap. He was so terribly inconsiderate, and his speech felt more and more like stench coming from the mouth of someone who just swallowed an overflowed privy.

Still, I imagined, slightly excited, my eternal face taking its voyage on the black obelisk through the gardens of eternity. On this voyage, the face was accompanied by solemn silence filled with respect and quiet admiration, but the reek of stonecutters self-hypnotized certainty was constantly disturbing me, making me extremely edgy. I might be a touchy person, a sensitive person. Whatever, the fact was that I could not bear to see this trunk-sage so brutally destroying my intimate attachment to eternity. Besides, amidst the tension of my hurt feelings, the realization that he was the type I could not contest pained me even more. In the landscape of his spirit devastated

by certainties, there was no room for anything else. There wasn't even room for the tiniest optimism because it was overcrowded with giant certitudes. That was probably the only thing both of us were sure about. Besides, I did not have time to start discussion, let alone re-education. I was in a hurry.

I looked over the table. Bending under the dusty conus of twinkling light my gaze feverishly cut through the gloom of the august night. It seemed as if something moved in the distance. I felt unease. I did not want them to find me here. It would look so stupid and unpoetic to be caught right here in the stonecutters hovel. It would be a mean prank pulled on me by my own fate if everything ended on such dull place like this one. It would be so unfair. I would look ridiculous and pathetic, like a mythical hero who met his destiny in the toilet while taking a dump. And this was my secret mission. My last mission before the great finale. A delicate and glorious thing, too momentous to be brought to an end in a place stuffed with mouldy philosophy and rocks.

The night was moonless. It made me happy. The darkness has for quite some time been my ally, my only friend. The room where we sat was a shed with a worm-eaten shingle roof. Window pane behind the stonecutters back, looking like a crack on the wall, was occasionally concealed by his head. Right under the ceiling, an odd looking tool fastened to the pillar, threw owl-like shadow on the wall. This owl was staring at me steadily. All around us laid grave stones, unfinished, silent like me, but patient unlike me.

The stonecutter's monologue continued. His words fell gently like a dust on the mute gravestones and on my silence. The gravestones still waited for the faces to be engraved on them, the faces which the stonecutter knew so well. And this night only me and the owl could hear his words. But no one, except maybe the owl, which I suspected from the beginning, could hear the silent talk of my thoughts. The voices of my thoughts did not surface so easily. The whirlpool of my inner storm was pulling them deep down into my secret mission. I was not sure whether it was the right thing to do, but I kept my thoughts jealously in the deaf solitude like in a jewelry box.

The thoughts running around my head were of all kinds. It was a true flea-market of thoughts; a true tempest in the tea cup, both real and unreal, like a toothache caused by a tooth already pulled out. In the middle of that jumble, the face kept appearing. I felt the face was important, the most important thing. It carried the solution of the riddle, the final act of a titanic struggle, the answer to challenge, a retreat in case things go wrong, a key moment, the beginning and the end of an existence which, as I firmly believed, contained a lot of yet unspoken. In a different situation, I'd be able to think about the face more calmly, but then the face would not have the same significance as it had now. Now I needed it so badly because I was running out of

time. The thought that this night was the last one scared me to death, just as the realization that along with it the time would be up for me, the time which, as I pointed earlier, I never had enough. The search party led by the dwarf followed closely on my heels. I knew this extremely well. The only reason they did not already find me was that this night preserved much of the heat able to slow down even the most resolute step. And of course, it helped when I untied the ferryboat and let it drift down the river. They had to go around and take the bridge up the river. Still, on the top of my unrest the stonecutter stood with his enlightening soliloquy. The parade of tremendous human realizations marched heavily like elephants on the last piece of my precisely calculated time.

He wasn't even trying to listen to me, and due to some inexplicable reason I didn't dare to interrupt him. Probably because I did not have anything to say, or perhaps because I have been masochistically patient my whole life. My patience, my delirium of submissiveness characteristic of a drowning person who is patiently and non-insistently waiting to be rescued has angered me my whole life, especially tonight. I have no idea how he caught my inner commotion because I have sat the whole time motionlessly. But at one moment his question rose me from my thinking, and I found myself again in the middle of the parade.

- So, what do you wish to keep from that face of yours, from your favorite mask, to put it rudely? Which things do you want the face to be silent about, and which things do you want it proudly to bear witness to? But remember, you have got to be careful about one thing. The choice is delicate not only because it is the last one, and in a way irreversible. The delicacy is in what you actually want, in the meaningfulness of the entire enterprise. Do you wish nothing of your scars and marks to be on the stone-face? Do you want it to be entirely new? Or do you essentially want to retain the same face you have been carrying and showing around all these years, the face of your favorite actor so to speak, only slightly beautified and embellished. Well, you've got to be careful now. The first option is not an option, it cannot be done. I know many people who wished to do exactly that. Hmm, the vanity is devilish thing – he sighed with disappointment and lifted his forefinger as if he were going to say something significant - You see, it would be like living a whole life as one person, and then, after you die, you want to be born on the other side as someone utterly different. In that case, the ties are broken, the ropes of time have snapped, every peculiarity and distinctiveness is erased, and you end up with the same problem, only in bit changed circumstances. Actually, a man is back at the beginning of the same problem he had before. Boundaries are gone, the circle starts again. The questions you have answered are lined up before you once again. In other words, you haven't achieved anything. Both your legs are sinking into

Lethe. You are no longer the man someone might know or recognize because you cut the ties with eternity, which is on both sides of Styx. Do you understand what I'm saying? Life and then death, death and then life, each of these two are in its own way part of existence. The one of these two, of course, always comes first, imposing its own order and custom. It is telling you how things must be, it is preaching its own message. But I stand between them, between life and death, and the only thing that matters to me is the eternity. It is I who is issuing tickets to eternity. To me, you are simply a character switching from one story to another, and my task is to provide you with valid papers so you can continue your journey along the circle. But the papers are exactly your face, that is, you yourself! That's why it is no use to falsify your documents, so you could be a character from one story reappearing now as someone else in another story, as a complete stranger. I'm not trying to pressure you. It is my duty only to inform you about these things, but you can do as you're pleased. It is your decision, and if you wish I'll make the phony face. I'll give you false documents, so you just go on traveling incognito through Elysian fields or circles of Hell. You know, one thing I've learned while doing this job is that everything is for sale, even the eternity. But I repeat, the price is high, and it is not certain it'll work. Cheating on eternity is Sisyphean labor.

Running around in the circle and shouting that the circle starts in some corner you have been hiding in, the corner from which you want to jump out entirely new at the convenient moment is doomed. In the circle there are no corners, no hidden points, everything is clear and visible; equality for all without exceptions. The circle contains everything that has been and will be. Everything is displayed in that museum of destinies, in that park where eternity has a stroll and keeps a watch. So, I would not recommend this sort of surgical intervention on your face. That's an illusion, a chimera, a poorly performed magic trick. If you'd take my advice, you have to keep on having the same face you have turned to the sun all these years. You carry your own story with you, and that is all the luggage you have got. You are your story's vanguard, its main bond linking all its events. You are the knot through which your story is tied to other people's stories. You are its lodestar, its pathway, its sign, its metaphysical chain which goes on and on. It is the street you have walked, but the street with a permanent address. Whether you like it or not your story want to carry on.

The story will actually continue whether you like it or not, and nothing can talk it out of it. That's its nature. Otherwise, it would mean that the whole world is made of soap bubbles. Therefore, it would be foolish of you to leave your story, your street, to pretend to be a stranger, to hide from your own life, to spy on it as if it thus might reveal something more, something secret. Running and hiding in the endless circle of the world is so childish. It is like when you close your

eyes and think that no one can see you. So, my dear, if you would listen to me, you've got to keep most of what your face already has because that is who you are. Besides, that is the only way to be sure that eternity some day might take you to be its lackey.

His last sentence made my flesh creep, and he noticed it. He waited for an eloquent reaction, a replay, a grimace affirming his suppositions and giving him reason to continue.

- I can see you don't like the sound of this. My suggestion doesn't seem to please you.

Long blow of fake disappointment followed his cynical look. He pretended to be worried about me - I'll tell you what, and, please don't misunderstand me. I'm telling you all this from my own experience, and keep in mind that my intentions are good. Eternity is a serious matter. Moreover, it is dangerous stuff, and one ought not to play with dangerous stuff. Am I not right? Eternity does not like teasers and impostors. She does not like the company of dirt-poor people, company of beggars and fortune hunters. Eternity can behave like a heartless and selfish wealthy person. It knows no mercy, it does not cry nor does it need to be praised. Its judgment is harsh. It is the forge where only the strongest metals are wedded with virtue. Eternity can also despise, especially flatterers, and believe me, everyone fears its contempt, even the devil himself. It is ruthless, but it can also be vain and jealous in its own way. Its heart can easily turn into an icicle. If you're caught cheating on it, the eternity will immediately expel you from its company. And you know that whatever eternity does, it does forever. So I repeat once again, think twice about what you want your face to hide, and what to reveal.

My flesh crept again, but this time the stonecutter did not seem to be paying attention to it. He was sure he was reading me as an open book, and he was convinced there was nothing I could hide from him. He was exactly as that damn eternal circle of his, convinced that nothing could remain concealed from him. He was redesigning my intentions, nullifying my wishes, he acted suspiciously and quizzically like a guard. And he was doing all of it with the best intentions, which goodness I seriously doubted. I felt he was after my face, but yet he was somewhat cautious. It seemed to me that he didn't know everything. The omniscient stonecutter did not know what I wanted and why I wanted it. He suspected something, but he wasn't sure. That was at least what I thought, believing that some uncertainty sneaked into his world after all. As the grains of darkness ooze from the sand glass of this hot summer night, I was getting surer and surer that he didn't know my secret. He didn't know my true face. I suddenly concluded with considerable relief that he did not know my crime.

I sighed with huge relief and immediately stopped thinking about the pursuit with the same intensity. According to my calculations they needed more than this night to get here, and I was pretty good in calculating time. The time calculation was after all part of my meticulously devised plan.

My breathing was getting normal. The storm let up. The dizziness and nausea disappeared. During the storm, I have sat crouched on the small stool perfectly motionless. To be honest, I wasn't moving partly because the stonecutter laid a massive granite block on my foot, which became numb due to pain. He did it as if by accident, but I was sure it was a precautionary measure. Perhaps the ugly drunken Cerberus feared that I might sneak pass him into the eternity. Anyway, I endured the pain in my foot without even batting an eye. Patient, quiet, scared, feeling chronic pain in the stomach, stiff and moronically polite. But at the same time I felt release due to my temporary certainty that he did not know everything; that he did not know the most crucial thing. Stonecutters preaching was fading away in my regained peace. The echo of his words and the chattering of his hand-made teeth gradually ebbed away. I was able now to think seriously about my face. At the same time, I was much less edgy. This is how I imagined my face.

It contained, precisely as the stonecutter insisted, many of the lines and shades it already had. However, it was precisely those old curves on the pale skin that caused the trouble. I could see my face quite clearly, yet it seemed evasive. It could disappear in a blink of an eye. It was one of those faces that could fool a mirror, or even get two mirrors to quarrel about it; it was simply elusive due to total lack of recognisability. The phantom face. The face without a look (a faceless face). The face of patience, which even time used to pass by out of fear of loosing the rhythm. The face which was forgotten by the past and overlooked by the future. The face without a shadow, without affiliation, forgettable, misty, annulled in the deepest sense of the word. If one were generous and imaginative enough, one could perhaps see paling light of tamed and fettered pride, which the face possessed in prescribed amount, just like everything else. The face was well-proportioned and symmetrical. In its dollish way, it was pretty, non-flagrant, and without conspicuous patterns, but it was gentle and tight as if it were made of majolica. It emanated fineness, and there was even something seductive about it, the engraved charm underneath the eyes like a vignette.

The light made oasis of equal size on both its sides. There was identical two of everything on it, so one never had to fight, hesitate or be perplexed by it. Regardless how you looked at it, you

always saw the same. Even a compass used to confused north with south and east with west on it. It did not have any visible messages, not even graffiti. The face was tidy, without hair and scales. One could find refined spectra of red on it, but the nuances were few, and they tend to vanish as soon as they appeared. Shyness was purple, anger light red, joy almost pink. It did not contain any punctuation marks, commas or any road signs whatsoever, but still one could never get lost on that face. Everything there was predictable, nicely trimmed, well-groomed. A genuine rose-garden, odorless, phony and prosaic - able to bore your brains out. It looked exactly the same from the distance as when you stood close to it. When it was cheerful, it could simultaneously appear on both the front and the back of the head, so one could get confused about whether, in these cheerful moments, it was moving closer or further away.

It contained the complete menu of possibilities, but because the pages couldn't be turned over, only the possibilities from the first page were served – the „menu“ and „welcome“. Someone once left a tip on it, probably by mistake, and the tip later turned into a beauty spot the face was so proud of. That tiny compliment, consisting of no more than four-five coins, became an ornament of luxurious splendor, causing other wax masks to admire it tremendously.

The face was flat and kind, like a tray on which a glass of brackish water and lukewarm vegetarian meal were served. It was sterilely clean, without sweat puddles, without mud, without spontaneous vegetation, without yellow traces of tobacco, without anger, without curse, covered with asphalt, attached to the cranium by an invisible thread, without....The face was unusually soft, and if one were to rest there, he would doze off almost instantaneously. Anyone who stared at it would soon get wrinkles, dark circles under the eyes; he would contract mumps and would probably suffer from *colon irritabile* for a long time. Some people though might just sneeze, spit out a chunk of rancid sugar, or simply break into tears without knowing why.

Sometimes the face used to be so smooth that even the light had a difficulty sticking to it. It usually happened when it wore its characteristic sardonic grin. Its laughter was monotone and uniform. It was signed calligraphically in the corner of the mouth, but because of its expensive polish, the laugh remained unfinished and short. In general, everything on that face seemed unspoken and unfinished. Although it emanated calmness, its calmness appeared too calm, unnatural, like a drawing on the wall. It prevented everyone from having high expectations as regard the face. Still, one could sense some shy indications, some hardly visible trembling, attempts, weak and tottering steps of an infant, which bore the promise of something some day but that something never came.

One could find only a prologue on it. Never a plot, or culmination, let alone sudden twist or anything of the sort. However, although people passed by the face disinterestedly as if it were an old torn apart poster, I felt it had more to offer. I knew more about the face than others, and I could feel more about it than others. I actually felt that it could be a play-act, an event or perhaps even a deed. I thought it had a lot to say. Often I felt its sponge-like tongue wiggling behind the double row of teeth like a cut off lizard's tail. The tail wanted to yell, to growl, to do anything instead of having stuck in its throat all these unspoken foolishness', carelessness', joy, inquisitiveness', thrills, nastiness, scorn; to put it shortly, everything that could glide down that tiny tongue if it had not been for that double row of firmly clenched teeth, covered with a fine layer of sardonic grin. I knew that behind its flatten beauty, behind its clayish elegance, an ordinary man's hardship was hiding, trying to come out, to explode, to spill all over the grass, over the pavement, over someone's coat.

To me there wasn't any secrets or mystery there. Under the wax epithelium, everything was so ordinary, so homely and simple it made me both cry and laugh at the same time. What a petty deceit, what an illusion, what a shameful victory over the deceived audience, which was either firmly asleep or long since had left the theatre. They did not know, but I knew. They were only thinking of and looking for something more, they suspected there was something more. They cautiously guessed, trying to solve the riddle, to penetrate deep into its essence; they had scientific debates about the true nature of my taciturn face. They tried all kinds of stuff while I had some good laughs behind the backcloth. They were placed in their soft, comfortable seats, I was hidden behind the curtain, and in between us there stood the cosmic riddle of the century – a faceless face (face without the look).

I peeped at them through the holes of my fake eyes, and I listened to their debates and discussions. In no way would they give up the belief that faces comprise an entire universe, distant and unreachable, an entire divine cozy nook carefully wrapped in fine human skin. I have to admit though that I enjoyed my face's early fame, watching through the slits of my fake eyes the stirred and colorful audience, which had such a great time. But then someone announced the end of the show and the cleaning staff entered. They cleaned the place, picked the lost items, and terrifying loneliness fell on the stage. The audience continued having fun out on the street. They soon forgot about my face, and the only thing they took with them was the conviction that human faces do carry cosmic riddle and a divine cozy nook with them after all.

I was swept away together with spilled popcorn and used tickets. But I still believed they were right, partly at least.

Perhaps my magic trick should have been unveiled, perhaps I should have been honest and violate the sacred rules of the illusionistic entertainment. I should have jumped from behind my face and step in front of the gay burghers established in their ranks, orders, manners, castes, levels and convictions; I should have stepped step before them entirely naked and say – this is it. Nothing special, nothing mysterious. There wasn't any universe or Puranic son. It is just an ordinary man trying to live behind that plastic cover. A petty man who is trading with his sorrows, trying to outsmart the merchants of eternity. A petty man like you, you carefree and merry audience! A hero without daimon, born in the thirteenth sign of the Zodiac, a general without decoration, a midget on the stilt, a dreamer suffering from insomnia, a dragon suffering from sore throat, a thief who carries the stump of eternity in his bundle and is being chased by the debt-collecting office of burgher moralism. A flawless flaw, syphilitic abscess on the inner side of the face...., but I didn't. The audience remained deceived. I spared them leniently seeing the deceit, that is, I spared them learning the truth. My face rose to the challenge by being silent. It remained flat, beautiful, smooth and seemingly broader. It remained unspoken.

Since then I started loosing the grip on the face. We started to move away from each other, to go our separate ways. The truth was rather that the face was going its own way while I, rejected by my own face, started running after it. But I was staying more and more behind. That was when my trouble with it began. One day I came up with the idea to make a drawing of it. I went to see the most famous painters, but I wasn't satisfied with their work. One of them even admitted that he couldn't catch the face with his pencil, and no matter how hard he tried, the only result was a small circle containing two short lines and a few dots representing its entire content. He was even ashamed because of that inexplicable failure, so he returned me my money. He had already forgotten the face. I wanted to say something in its defense. I wanted to make a gesture, a grimace, but nothing would change on my face. A rigid amorphous mass stood tightly stretched between me and the painter. The emptiness continued. The never- spokeness grew bigger filling the void.

And then came the discovery of panacea. The genius of the sick modern, mind in its full display, that was at play. Filling the void with emptiness, filling the silence with unuttered words. That is what I did. The whole splendor of decadence belonging to one time and one generation shone in that discovery, the discovery of the perfect and most universal lie. The eureka of existence! My original sin in its rhapsodic dispersal As a sign of protest, because I was denied the glory, I refused to speak on both sides of my face. And the face became true probably for the first time, without even realizing it. At least one of its half became true. The bigger half, prettier half. The

truthful half. The ironic half. The irony is, I believe, the dark side of truth. If you spot it first, then you can be sure you missed the truth by a couple of light years, which isn't such big miss after all.

Hence, I resolutely boycotted the life which was mine, but which my face wanted to live for on behalf of me. When my face did not want to smile, I also refused to be happy. When it didn't want to cry, I did not want to be sad either. When it simply stood still, like a herm, I too refused to move. We used to stand motionless for long periods of time, defiant, stubborn and relentless, me and my face. It was a ruthless and merciless strike consisting in standing still while everything else has moved around us with stunning speed. That was the moment when it became true for the second time, though again unintentionally. Since I stubbornly refused to move, the face couldn't but look pretty much like me – halted. And I, being deeply offended and reluctant to forgive, failed to see its truthfulness.

Thus, during the quarrel with my face, I refused to do anything since the face would be unjustly credited with it. And whenever the face attempted to do something on its own, I systematically sabotaged all those attempts. I was undermining its reputation and its authority. I felt that the reputation and the authority belonged to it, that it received credit for everything, while I was only expected to do as the face wished. I was the worm-man, a loyal and abiding lap dog people stepped on while saluting and bowing down to my face. That was the moment when I said „enough“, I said it with discretion though, trying not to make a scene. I waged war against my face out of sheer contumacy, refusing to obey it. But the war was waged silently. Nothing was visible on the surface. How could anyone possibly see something which isn't happening? The outcome was, however, that I was vanishing behind the face. That's how I saw it, at least. I felt I belonged to the face. It had a full control over me. I felt I was loosing the war. The face did not talk to anyone about my rebellion; it refused to change, to obey me, and even when it was truthful, its truths were only to its advantage. To me, this was additional humiliation, that is, the total triumph of my face over me - a tongue stuck out to me, a spittle in my meal, a cigarette put out on my forehead, triumphant rejoicing, which felt like a knife going through my chest. It caused me occasional hysterical choking fits. Resentment, resentment, resentment! The agony of defeat That was it. I suffered because of my face, because of its supremacy and because of my inability to do anything about it.

The face was still praised for its beauty. It still occupied everyone's attention. They used it to blackmail me, to influence me, to suppress my mutiny even though they did not suspect that deep under the avalanche of their delight in my face I was waging a bitter war on it. They wanted to reshape me, to teach me manners so I could be in accord with a kind and orderly face. They wanted

me to be a handsome and highly respected gentleman, to be an ornament on the shoulder of my bourgeois kind, a standard-bearer and polished mediocrity. They tried to keep me in the state of evaporation, in which I was slowly fading away. That made me angry. Their refined and well-intended violence made me extremely furious. However, at the same time I accepted it as something quite normal. That's how they are, that's how they've always been. I'm a little bit like that, I'm a little bit „they“.

And I hated the face. But I did not only hate it. I was as you may have guessed, jealous! Yes, indeed, I was terribly jealous. I, the crashed man, a timid troglodyte, a phony ascetic, the chronically injured part suffering from lever inflammation, a eunuch and an earwig, whose only moment of paroxysm was that sick jealousy - I hated it from the bottom of my heart. And the funniest thing was, it did not feel that bad at all because I could feel! Through my hatred, I could feel a tiny piece of life under my hand, and I could feel that its crust wasn't entirely cold. Through the jealousy of my own face, I was alone with myself, full of thickened anger, full of indignation, but full. I was unmistakably myself! To be frank, the „myself“ was like a wet flint, throwing only occasionally a tiny little spark, but it was enough. I could feel my own pulse. I was still alive.

Then I devised this plan, this overthrow, my personal revolution, the secret mission to dethrone the face and establish new power-order. The plan was simple. I will leave this story and reappear in another one, with a totally new face. There, in another story, I will start my man-becoming (anthropogony), my ascent or plunge, whichever.

I guess I've never possessed the knight's bravery, but now at least I had the daring foolishness of a gambler. And that was all I needed, that and a little bit of luck. Of course, I also needed rottenness of a worn-out theater with its lopped off humanity, a few starched art-lovers with dandruff and tiny subcutaneous wounds. Finding the latter didn't worry me. These things have always been in abundance. I'll leave my unfaithful face to them, the face under which the firebrand of my concealed misery has laid as if under the mat. I'll leave my embalmed face to them. Because of it, I have been numb almost my entire life, while they admired it for its fineness and tranquility, characteristic of an artifact exhibited in a museum. And I'll be as good as new, completely reformed. I'll be born from the vacuum of a suppressed feeling, from the enforced oblivion which brought relief to them, the relief and the illusion of dignity. The oblivion was their bourgeois virtue, their civic duty. I might be born as their shame or unpleasantness, as a story they are disgusted with, and which authenticity they questioned, but I shall wear my new face inside out. By wearing it inside out the face will only be able to look at me, and on its back (inner) side, that is, on its sunny

side, the words shall be written: a two-legged fool, or a Demiurge-Renegade or perhaps I might not need it at all.

The dwarf and his search party came in just perfect. The entire investigation and the interrogation, me being watched, the spreading around of the suspicion almost everyone accepted as a fact - all of it was the wind in my sails. For the first time, I succeeded in deceiving both the audience and the face. All that remained was the stonecutter. Somehow I seem to have overlooked him in my calculations. I had to take care of him before they appear. I had to convince him to do as I asked, or at least to deceive him into doing what I wanted. And believe it or not, when sitting motionlessly, crouched and squeezed under the huge stone, I was doing exactly that. I waited for the right moment to step in. In my hands, the time seemed extraordinary elastic, and tonight I have probably stretched it to the maximum. The crocodile patience, that was my favorite strategy. Let him be, let him talk, let him tell about his troubles. Once he realizes whom he is dealing with, he'll change his mind. No one could wait as long as I. This rough bear with giant paws won't be able to wait that long either. This victorious thought made my blood run wild. I exulted in a low voice, and in one moment of extreme rapture I could not resist, so I discreetly waved my tiny tail. I cornered you with my silence and with the pretense to be listening. What are you going to do now, you nasty beast? - I said with disgust.

Cracking sound of a fart rung through the front yard. While focused on the precise application of the strategy of endless waiting, I didn't notice that the stonecutter had stepped out. His ugly oversized head, wrapped in messy dark curls, stood at the window. The rest of his body was concealed by the wall. He peed on dry planks constantly shifting his gaze from his dick to me. He didn't pause in his preaching.

- So, as I said, you look a bit hesitant, young mister. This is the moment of utmost importance, formal and solemn, like swearing an oath to serve your country. Perhaps even more important. Many things are being decided now, and I do not want to push you. After all, you don't look like someone who wants to make a rush decision. You are a pedant, one could tell right away. Nothing is left to chance. Very wise! Well, I'm like that myself. Hence, we are going to agree on one thing, you are going to tell me the most significant things about the face you have been carrying so far, and then I'll see what I can do.

He was closing in on my face with „the most significant“. The wily old bird knew where he was going. But he was going exactly where I wanted him to go. I winked secretly at the owl, but it just stared at me with surprising look.

- You see, I consider myself to be an artist. What I'm doing is not merely a craft. It is more than just a skill. It is a science, and more than that. It is, it is...I can't find the right word. Please help me out, you do understand these things. It is more like magic. It is the esotericism of the finely developed sense to recognize the inner definition of value. Yes, that is it! The understanding of the subtlety of boundaries for human god-becoming, the beginning of anthropoteism, or something similar.

He poured these high-sounding attributes of his work and his knowledge through unzipped fly together with the hot stream of urine. As he staggered back to his seat, which was a gravestone of a nameless granny, I noticed that despite his gigantic stature his legs were disproportionately short, as if stolen from some short fat dude. He offered me brandy, but I declined with a smile. I guess that was a smile. I guess that was a brandy. I continued applying my cataleptic tactic. Nothing could upset my plan now. As I was becoming firmer in my belief that I had full control over the situation, I resumed thinking about my face.

I was thinking about the second trouble I had with the face. The second trouble was a regular guest in my introspections, in my self-censorship. I have been thinking a lot about it lately; I thought about it today on my way to the stonecutter's hut. The second trouble was my crime, which, as it turned out later, served as a premonition.

Every time I thought about that crime, I tried to reconstruct the chain of events that led to it. I reckoned that there had to be a stronger connection between all the events preceding it, the one that goes beyond mere temporal connection. I thought that these events somehow caused one another, and I just happened to be there, to be part of it. As if I put on someone's coat by mistake, and it turned out that the coat belonged to a murderer who was being chased by police. In his coat, they found the documents, and, unfortunately, it turned out that he looked like me, and that was it. I was caught and sentenced to stay forever behind the bars of a cruel accident. That was logical, rational and perfectly sober explanation of the crime. My favorite explanation. And in the chain of these events, some of them have been hugely significant. In fact, there were key elements in them.

First of all there was my jealousy. The jealousy turned my hair grey, then I went bald because of it, and in the end it caused small, calf-like horns to grow on my forehead. The horns, I guess, were the ossified outgrowth of my misery. It seemed to me the horns were not visible on my face, although I could feel them under my fingers. Deeply shaken by the unfaithfulness of my face and imbued by suspicion into the boundaries of reality, I decided not to believe in the corporeal metamorphosis taking place on a daily basis. However, since I wasn't sure who was realer, me or

my face, I decided to stay at home during the day. Besides, it suited me better because now I could work undisturbed during the day. That was temporary solution. My favorite kind of solution.

Secondly, there was the war, the war declared to my own face with the rebelling yell „enough“. I left every battle of that war completely bruised, messed up, depressed and faint-hearted. These two, the first and the second trouble went hand in hand, often supporting each other like staggering drunken lovers.

Then, there was Tonka and her tits, shoulders, bottom or actually bottoms because it often seemed as if she had two of them; her legs, shoe, her laughter, her shaky cheeks and shaky fat around her neck, her negligence, vulgarity, perversion, her flabby belly, bitten nails, reeking breath, shiny pubic hair, red wig, eye-bags, seductively foamy contempt, and everything else that came along with her attractive appearance. To top all these things she owned a pub filled with a bunch of losers, where she was a queen sitting on the throne made of beer crates. She sat there with her legs spread apart, emptying beer bottles bottoms up. While she was singing in her hoarse voice behind the piano, I saw in her an opera diva. While she was staggering on her way to the toilet, I saw in her an enchanting belly dancer. While she was throwing her worn-out shoes at the guests because they forgot to applaud her, in my eyes those shoes were an act of mercy. When she used to show the youngsters her tits and let them stick their hands under her skirt, I saw a benevolent act of school pedagogy in it. Every time she kicked us out of the pub waving her broom, the only thing I feared was if she was going to let me take again my place under the stairs. When she used to spit on us and to beat us, I could recognize her motherly care in it. In my world, Tonka was a yardstick of passion and sensuality. She was the woman who let the entire neighborhood live cheerful life on shaky beds, which bore traces of Tonka's nails, moans and sweat. She was the woman who juggled a whole lot of voluptuous fantasies with the gracious movements of a ballet dancer, the fantasies from which an entire generation was receiving virility and strength. Tonka was the woman who made people tremble and cry with breath-stealing ease. She used to unzip flies with her bare feet, and she laughed while doing it; she used to bite, sometimes she was giving free rides, and she defiantly fed on the curses of the ignored spinsters. Tonka slept in the bed which belonged to a murderer, who long ago rotted away in some far away jail. He held a half of Tonka's heart in his dried hand. Her youth withered in his hand, and along with it her belief in the painlessness of life had gone. With the other half of her heart, she could feel the pain, but the pain became so gentle and graceful that she could touch the delight of life with it and embrace it. She placed it at the center of her destroyed fortress. She did it strictly, without gratitude or bitterness. She did it simply because in her fortress

there was room enough for all of us and for much more. She kept the memory of that mean heart-thief on the bottom of the wine-barrel from which she was serving us drinks, but we did not remember him. We actually believed she used to take a bath in that barrel. She was cruel when drunk, gentle on the rainy days, twice a year she used to smile. The rest of the time she painted her pussy red, and with that hot wet vice she was wringing out moans, sobs and devils from our promiscuous lives. For her, it was the way to hate us, to punish her rotten murderer and her runaway heart, but to us, it was the way to live. It had given us indescribable pleasure.

The story went that Tonka's body was carved by a sculptor who was blown by a bomb. She was looking for him stubbornly among the freaks with dug out eyes and broken ribs, but she kept finding us. That made us happy, and it made her sad, but still, she wasn't angry at us, and we were grateful to her for that. To put it shortly, Tonka was the woman above all others.

After Tonka, there came a symphony, the longest and the most magnificent symphony ever written. I have worked on it feverishly for several years. The symphony was written with the notes made of dandelion heads, which disappeared as soon as the melody was played. Due to its fragility that magic piece of music could be performed only once. For that reason, I constantly postponed its performance, waiting for the appropriate occasion for the birth of that superb creative moment. I feared it wasn't quite finished or perfect enough. I feared that its beginning wasn't good that it actually was quite inappropriate, completely wrong. I was afraid it would break at one of those key points, on its way up, on the peak from where it could be embraced in its entirety. I was afraid that it suddenly would fall silent and lose its voice, that one of the instruments on which it is to be performed wasn't tuned properly, that it might get registered under a wrong name. I feared that nothing will happen after I have played its last note. Therefore, I waited and I kept working on it down to a last detail.

And lastly, there was my landlord. A fat smelly old maid (spinster). An ugly looking woman with large sweaty stains around her armpits, wearing too much of a cheap red lipstick daubing partially her teeth. Her thick legs were covered with swollen veins, and she used to place them across the stairs every time I came. She was kind and forthcoming. She could think of a number of excuses to come into my room in the attic. I know she had a habit of going through my stuff when I wasn't home, and to peek through the keyhole when I was in a shower. She used to crash into my room lightly dressed and sweat. Then she would usually open a window, creating drafts, and offer me a spinach pie which tasted like shit while carrying a charming smile on her swollen face. More than anything else I hated her nasty gargantuan legs resting on my coffee table, where I used to eat.

Sometimes she would push her toes against my ribs while I was working, and then she giggled at my angry face. She hardly ever talked. It was a dumb soul, self-satisfied in her own retarded way, but she prodigally and frivolously enjoyed her self-satisfaction. I don't know what exactly she wanted from me, a mediocre intercourse I guess, but the thoughts alone that one day I might wake up under that jellylike bulldozer threatened to make me chronically impotent. Looking at her, I saw disgust with loose limbs, and with goggle eyes turning around all over her face. However, she was untouched by my cold restraint as well as by my unconcealed disgust with her entire appearance. What irritated me additionally was the fact that she suffered from the complete absence of pride, dignity, and considerateness; she was devoid of any sense for the boundaries of my intimacy, as well as anything feminine and mystical. I was annoyed by her simplicity and straightforwardness, by the lack of sensuality and by her steadiness, which reminded me of a wood tick. She was true abomination, but as she eventually learned to ignore my repulsive behavior, I was at considerable pains in dealing with her and her big fat cat Figaro.

In the original version - the version which I later rejected for the reasons I will explain later, in the second version - I had nothing whatsoever to do with the crime. I was in no way linked to it, and I didn't even believe it actually happened. When I came up the stairs, the door was already open, the traces of the yellow mixture were spread all over the door and the doorstep. The smell of chlorine, carried by the draft, felt vaguely. Since none of it was there when I first came down the stairs that morning, I concluded it didn't have anything to do with me. It must have happened while I was away. I call the ambulance and then police, even though she wasn't giving any signs of life. I offered the doctor a glass of water. A little old man with a weak heart, breathless and sweat, was trying, for more than ten minutes, to roll over her body looking like a walrus. He was trying to give her first aid. I watched him from above, standing at the door of my flat. The entire scene seemed somewhat comical.

First he walked clumsily around her, then he tried to crawl underneath her body like a hamster and as he almost succeeded, he started choking. He laid there for several minutes, squeezed under her giant belly, gasping and trying to breathe. Partly concealed by a half open door I think I even laughed at the image of his pointed ass and his short legs struggling with the motionless trunk. He made some inarticulate sounds trying to call the driver, but the hard-of-hearing long-legged driver, looking like a praying mantis, was nonchalantly finishing his cigarette in the courtyard. The rescue attempt failed altogether, and the old doctor even lost one of his sleeves, which got hooked

on a nail sticking out of the floor. That was the moment when I brought him the glass of water. He thanked me and drunk it in one big sip.

I gave some superficial information to the police, intentionally leaving out some of the details of our relationship. I didn't find it relevant. In the end, I even expressed my regrets and my disbelief about the tragic event. I don't think the policeman believed me, but I didn't care. I even offered generously to inform the relatives, although I knew very well she didn't have any. I also offered to check the apartment, to lock the door, and to collect some of her things that may have any value, but the policeman refused. To be honest, I was just trying to come up with an excuse to come into her apartment and see what happened to the damn cat, which was the cause of everything. However, the police officer refused any of that with the same readiness with which I offered my help. He mentioned a number of rules and regulations forbidding him to allow it. To be honest, her death came as a shock to me, and initially I couldn't see any connection between it and my attempt to do away with the cat. In these early moments, I honestly didn't see the connection between her death and Figaro's disappearance, which was my work. At the same time, I felt a certain relief because one unpleasant thing was gone by itself. Much like, when someone kills a spider living in the toilet, the one that makes you feel uncomfortable when you are taking a dump. The stairs and my little tidy room were finally a safe zone.

Soon I forgot about the whole event, and I went on with my life as if nothing happened. Sometimes I used to think about her sudden death. I reckoned that it must have been a weak heart. It seemed logical because she was fat and she never motioned. Perhaps the reason was her varicose veins, which I often saw on her carelessly exposed thighs. I imagined she had them all over her body, and one of them must have exploded when she suddenly squatted down, or did something like that. Or perhaps she died from excessive sweating, I thought.

Once I ran into the police officer who conducted the investigation of the crime scene. I tried to get him to talk about the cause of death, but he was even more official; he was armored like a tank with the thick layer of regulations, which forbade him revealing any details of the investigation. He seemed cautious and distrustful. My relaxed and friendly tone didn't soften him, nor did my invitation to visit me sometime. He only murmured at the end of our short meeting that the case wasn't closed and that the police is doing their job. At that time it didn't sound like a warning, but later after I learned details concerning her death, I have often thought about what he said that day.

I learned the details quite accidentally one night while sitting in Tonka's pub, watching her chubby fingers play with the top of a beer bottle.

The word went around in confidence that she died from poisoning. Actually, no one knew with certainty what the real cause of death was - the poisoning wasn't the official explanation- but the old doctor concluded that it was probably poisoning. He sent the evidence to the hospital in another town. It took time to examine the yellow mixture, and everyone in our town waited impatiently for the results. Still, everyone in the town was convinced that it was the case of murder, with the darkest motives lying behind it and that a lot more will soon be brought to light. I left the pub that night extremely upset. Instead of going home, I went down to the river and I walked along the river bank for a long time, thinking about everything. Already then, while wading through the shallow mist, I realized that my first version wasn't good. I realized I was involved in the landlord's death much more deeply than I initially thought. Suddenly the realization that I might be the killer went through me like a cold blade. I was petrified. I spent a long sleepless night in bed. Neither sleeping pills nor Tonka's chubby fingers, which I imagined playing with the folds on my pants, helped me fall asleep. Then I began working on my second version of the murder.

I have to say that the second version was a true masterpiece of detective work. In contradistinction to the first one, in the second the crime did take a place, and the main suspect was me. To put it shortly, it was this: my attempt to get rid of the fat cat led to the landlord's death. The cat was the culmination of all my troubles with the landlord, and not only with her. The cat was her pet, her only true love, to whom she showed a lot of patience, understanding and sympathy. That animal, mean and fatten to deformation, was revered like a church icon. It was the only thing she worshiped, the only being her deepest emotion were directed to, the emotions which in my opinion were as shallow as a puddle. The cat was, thus, her little hairy idol, whose hairs I often found all over my room. I hated it because it often rummaged through my pantry. It used to open jars and eat my food, pee in my shoes, and sometimes the cat even left half-eaten rats in my bed. And the landlord not only turned her blind eye to its behavior, but she actually thought its pranks were amusing. The cat was her private entertainer, her little circus-tiger, whose favorite act was to devour someone in the audience, and she just loved that act. Thus, I had to tolerate not only her sweat gasps in my ear, the drafts she made and her tart pie, but also all those disgusting pranks her cat used to do. As time went, its behavior was getting worse and worse, so in the end I made a decision - Figaro had to die.

At some point in his life everyone is forced to draw the line, to empty the chalice filled with the spirit of reconciliation and patience, to dress his vanity in a saint's clothing. In other words, from time to time a man needs to mark the sacredness of his autonomy with a gesture, even when it is threatened by a cat. That's what I did. Getting rid of Figaro was my gesture marking the autonomy. Maybe the decision was too severe and irreconcilable with my patient and gentle character, but from the moment I made it, I knew the cat was done for. You know, I'm a touchy sensitive soul, a devious person who doesn't forget so easily, a lamb with eye teeth, and Figaro was way over the line. The elimination was supposed to be quite simple. I bought the poison in the shop. I carefully choose the jar which I knew was his favorite, the one he had always eaten from. I used to keep the cheese spread in it, but now it was full of dry bread and pieces of the landlord's pie. I added the poison to the content and stirred it well, making the yellow mixture. I put the jar back into the pantry, and I waited. Now it was just the question of time. However, it looked as if Figaro sensed I was up to something. He wasn't showing up or the next few days. I didn't see him either on the stairs or in the courtyard. Lucky bastard, I said to myself when on the fifth day I saw the jar on the shelf, unopened and intact. But then in the afternoon of that tragic fifth day, as I was climbing the stairs, I saw that the door of the landlord's apartment was half-open, with traces of the yellow mixture on it and on the doorstep. The rest was the same as in the first version. I called the ambulance, the police, I made the statement, and I watched them take her body away. In the second version, I also laughed secretly at the doctor, brought him a glass of water, and played the good-natured guy before the police officer.

However, since I was the perpetrator and the main suspect in the second version, I had to make few adjustments in order to make a sense out of it. I had to explain how the jar got at the landlord's apartment and why she ate from it. The latter wasn't difficult because she, just like the damn cat, had a habit of eating everything she could lay her hands on. Since she rarely went out, she used to look for food in other subtenant's rooms, and there were seven subtenants in the building including me. Still, what remained to be explained is how she found the jar with the poisonous mixture. I suspected Figaro. Perhaps he somehow carried the jar over to her apartment, and then she ate voraciously -she always ate voraciously - the deadly mixture. However, this sounded so unlikely that even the rules of service wouldn't allow the police officer to believe in such naive explanation. The explanation could be that the landlord, for some strange reasons, took the jar over to her apartment. This explanation, however, had two shortcomings. Firstly, I wasn't sure whether the jar has ever been in her apartment. Even if I sneaked into her apartment and found nothing there, it

could just mean that it was removed by the police and taken for the analysis. The yellow stains on the door indicated precisely that, but I couldn't be sure. The second shortcoming, which was even bigger, was the fact that the jar was still in my pantry. I found it a week or two later in the bottom of the pantry, placed on another shelf, not the one where I left it for Figaro. There was almost nothing left of the mixture. Even the finger marks were visible on the bottom, suggesting that someone used fingers to get the last bit of it. But, if she finished the jar in my room, how come the yellow stains were on the door? If she instead took the jar to her apartment, how could she climb the stairs -three floors - to get to my room and put the jar back with all that poison in her body? Besides, the jar wasn't in its place, which didn't look like her. She was extremely pedantic in her petty thefts. I don't think that she, as moronic as she was, believed that any of the subtenants suspected she was doing these kinds of things. Pressured by all these small details that didn't fit the second version, and thinking, in addition, that I was the key for understanding the whole thing, I concluded that it must have been me who took the jar to her apartment. It seemed quite logical and plausible. In any case, it seemed like a possibility the police sooner or later will consider very seriously. But in that case I needed a motive, the one that was stronger than my hatred towards the cat.

That was the time when my jealousy, my face and the war I waged against it, as well as the symphony, entered the stage. This meant that the second version had to be altered from coincidence to necessity, from the second to the first degree murder. I had to search myself in order to find the motive, and not only the motive, but the whole chain of conscious and subconscious states which led me to committing such crime in cold blood. Additional reason for altering the theory was the police officer who conducted the investigation. In the meantime, I found out his name was Spasoje Stroznik. He was extremely tall and lean man, with long and sunken face, carrying delicate wrinkles on the smooth-shaven pale skin stretched on both sides of his extraordinary pointed nose. He walked haughtily, his gaze was piercing, the uniform he wore was tidy, ironed and clean. He was a true parade horse in the parade of civic righteousness. A uniformed and conceited person, with sharp senses and rigid understanding of human nature. He was in charge of our district, so I used to meet him quite often on the street. My straightforwardness and my friendly tone in these short meetings did make him very soft. Still I managed to squeeze some information out of him, despite his reticence. I found out that he was personally in charge of the investigation, and from his overly cautious statements, which he made looking somewhere high above my head, I understood that the case got complicated and that it was too early for him to say anything conclusive.

There existed, as he put it, polysemantic indications that we were dealing with a serious crime, and refraining from making public statements was in the best interest of the investigation. The expression „polysemantic“ didn't feel at home in this sentence, which he knew by heart, and which he pulled out of his holster every time I got him to talk about the case. The expression bothered me because I couldn't figure out what he meant by it. I guessed it meant that there were different theories and that the evidence obtained was insufficient to decide in favor of any of them. What I could neither know nor read on his face was whether I appeared in any of them. Based on his lack of interest in me and in my sometimes annoying inquiries, I concluded I probably wasn't on his list of suspects. Or perhaps he was too cunning. Maybe he is only playing a game with me - I thought in the moments when my own theory seemed too stupid and naive even to me.

Few weeks have passed since the landlord's death, and our game of pretend to be accidental meetings has continued. I kept trying to tease a bit more out of him about the murder. I was stubborn, he was as firm as an oak, and it was extremely difficult to penetrate the wall of secrecy he surrounded himself with. But then came a breakthrough. It didn't come quite accidentally, but it came from where it was least expected. Blinded by my own naiveté I didn't, expect useful information to come in a round about way.

Our neighborhood was relatively small, just as our little town, and acquaintances went both across and in circles. Everyone knew someone who knew someone else, who knew something about someone third, and so on. So it turned out that some of the pub's regular guests knew my late landlord quite well. Those few drunkards who, by the way, had their permanent seats at the bar, - the seats rest of us „corner guests“ envied strongly - knew Spasoje quite well and some of the other officers from the police station. They pried into the case and have learned that the autopsy confirmed the old doctor's suspicion about poisoning. They also learned that Figaro was the key for solving the case.

The investigation, or rather the pursuit, was focused now on the cat. After hearing this, I suddenly remembered that I haven't seen the cat since the day I left the jar with the poison in my room. At first I was a bit puzzled, but then I simply forgot about it. I have always believed that the animal was so self-centered and that after realizing that the landlord was gone, it simply found another place to stay. The fact that I didn't see him in those five days prior to the landlord's death I explained by his cat luck. The fact that I didn't see him after the police took her body didn't worry me at all. He probably enjoyed one of his remaining eight lives in someone else's pantry.

The group of privileged drunkards seated at the bar had an altercation about Figaro's name. They shouted, constantly interrupting each other. All sorts of names were pouring in, mainly animal names, but one of them, to my surprise, stubbornly insisted that the cat's name was same as mine. He simply confused me with the cat. To be frank, it hurt me. To me the confusion of identity has been just another Figaro's mischief. I couldn't stand still, so I interfered. I shouted from where I sat, just under the stairs, that the cat's name was Figaro, but they didn't hear me. Their noisy argument continued with undiminished intensity. I shouted few more times with the same result. They were not noticing me at all. Then I stood up and went over to the bar. I knocked one of them on the shoulder with a finger. The round face, with several layers of fat, opened a thin fracture of mouth, making an extremely stupid expression. „The cat's name is Figaro“, I repeated importantly, raising my voice more than it was necessary. There followed a moment of silence. All four of them stared at me speechless. „Whose name is Figaro?“ the bearded man wearing too small plaid coat asked after a break lasting almost two minutes. „The cat – I said – the cat you're talking about, the one police is looking for.“ They still stared at me speechless, with disbelief. Another few unpleasant moments passed. They didn't respond to my claim, they said nothing. They just stared at me. They were actually examining me and my appearance engulfed in smoke. One of them pointed his finger towards me as if he were going to say something, as if he remembered something, but then he just continued looking at me as I was some rare and exotic little plant. I turned around and went back to my chair, quite confused but satisfied. Then the fat man shouted, „hej, that's the bat from underneath the stairs“. Then I've got it. In all this time, they were just trying to remember where they knew me from. I felt my breath getting thicker. I think even the chair under me shook a little bit from the gushing anger following the initial shock. My face went red, and I foamed at the mouth because of their disparaging and rude response. I stood up, stepped towards them, but then I suddenly stopped. The lower edge of the stairs, looking like a saw, concealed my face, so they couldn't see my upper lip quivering with fury. They probably didn't see my firmly squeezed fists either, nor did they hear tapping of my shoe against the floor continuing for five minutes there under the stairs. But I could see them clearly through the narrow space between the posts of the rail. I was boiling with rage while they nonchalantly went on with their discussion. The fat man kept on insisting that the cat's name was same as mine. I suddenly jumped from underneath the stairs and came closer to them. They didn't see me right away, or they just pretended not see me. Anyway, another few long moments passed before one of them finally looked at me again and said with arrogant smile – „Well, it is not Figaro“. He said it on purpose, just to offend me. I totally lost

control of myself, which seldom happened to me. Standing on the tip of my toes I leaned over, and I yelled from the top of my lungs – Well, it is Figaro!

I think they were shocked, pretty much as the rest of the crowd (guests). Everybody looked at us, waiting for (something) more to happen. But nothing significant happened. I stood for several moments on the tip of my toes, shaking as if in a fever, enjoying the echo of my yell. They were dumbfounded, sitting motionlessly, staring at me. The arrogant smile on their faces was replaced by caution and visible tension. The whole scene was interrupted by the icy cold water splashing over us from the top of the stairs. It was Tonka's tactics. She was furious, energetic and resolute, a true expert in dealing with the situations which could turn ugly. She then spat a fag-end on us, threw the empty bucket against the bar, and said between clenched teeth „get out“, not trying to hide her disgust.

Hurrying home I concluded that the whole episode ended well for me. I was satisfied with the outcome. The cat didn't get its real name back, although I, contrary to my wish, tried really hard to undo this injustice. However, what mattered was that I found out something valuable concerning the case. They were looking for Figaro, which meant that the cat was probably still alive. It complicated things additionally, so after thinking carefully for the whole night, I came to the conclusion that I need to find the cat before the police does. This additional piece of information didn't shed much light on the whole case, but still it was useful. If the landlord died from eating from the poisonous jar, which I left there, then finding Figaro could link me to the crime scene. I didn't know exactly how or why, but that night I believed that if the police failed to find Figaro it would free me of any suspicion. However, when I later thought about Figaro and his importance for the case, I was less inclined to believe that finding him could help me in any way, or that anything would be enlightened by it. Since I knew that the police was looking for him, I thought it would be better for me if they didn't find him, or at least if I found him first. That's how my hunt for Figaro started.

I'm not a man who has been favored by chance, and who has been petted by strange and lucky circumstances. To me nothing would ever come easy, nor could I count on an unexpected help. But in the case of Figaro this painful and humiliating life experience was utterly disproved. I found him after only three days. Actually, he came by himself. Believe it or not, I caught him trying to open the jar with the deadly mixture, or what was left of it. That was, I guess, the irony of the fate of that sadistic animal, lacking good manners. Although the jar was almost empty when he found it, it was predestined to be his doom. I approached him cautiously, pretending to want to pet him. He

pulled his little white snout out of the jar for the moment and fixed his gaze on me. I asked myself later whether he had the presentiment of what was about to happen to him; whether he in his cattish-way somehow knew that the moments just passing were his last. Anyhow, Figaro made no reaction, except for that stiff gaze fixed on me. I squatted right next to him, put my left hand on the lid, and my right hand on his soft fur. I stroke his back few times before I grabbed him from behind, forced him into the jar, and quickly put the lid back on. His flexible body filled the jar, looking twisted and somehow thicker behind the thick glass wall. He scratched the glass wall with his little paw and meowed, but his meow turned mute because the lid was screwed very firmly. I turned the light off and closed the pantry door. It was over. Although I felt somewhat dirty and my heart was beating rapidly, I concluded after quick reflection that this was necessary. After more than a half an hour, I opened the door to the pantry without turning the light on. I strained my ears to hear anything, but since I wasn't sure he was dead, I just closed the door and went back to my bed. I didn't think I was ready to listen to his death rattle and to watch his fierce struggle to come out.

I imagined his struggle as wild, but not entirely instinctive. Apart from the shock, panic surprise and pure muscle reflex, the struggle contained rage, malice, hatred, spite and lots of other things addressed to me. I felt that, while swallowing the last remaining breaths of air inside the dark space of the jar, he was thinking about me with an extreme feeling of viciousness, which was so intense that it spread all over the room as miasma. The closed door couldn't stop it. It hovered over the furniture and floor like a swaying circle of smoke, concentrating just above my bed. This ireful feeling swung its claws after me, and I was sinking deeper and deeper into the sheet. I shivered; I tried to look the other way. I pulled the duvet over my head, and I remained in that position the whole night. From time to time, I peeked through the tiny holes on the duvet just to see if the claws were still reaching after me. I believed that feeling of viciousness, dripping black tears down on me, was so tough that it probably died one hour after the cat died. Perhaps it even lived for a whole day. That's how I imagined it.

In this feeling, I could almost touch with my fingers the boiling meanness, something so diabolical that one could grasp only it if one were deceitfully locked inside the narrow space of a jar. I imagined lying restlessly in the bed that his silent agony served a higher purpose. Perhaps it was a prophecy of damnation, a poisonous act of revenge, a bad omen, a fate invoked from the darkest depths of evil in order to balance good and evil. I was actually feeling guilt, the very same guilt which, I suppose, is felt by a murderer after he had committed his first murder. The guilt

caused the fear in me, and these two - the guilt and the feeling of viciousness - looked like two snakes in the act of mating.

My crime spread the unbearable stench of a decomposing corpse, feeling like weakness in the limbs. I was lying motionless in my bed because I didn't have the strength to move, because I didn't have the strength to crawl away from the duvet and the thickened poisonous cloud hovering above my bed. The cloud felt so heavy, like a wet soil covering the grave. In those long and terribly slow passing moments the picture of the landlord came to me often. I imagined how her death rattle sounded like, but strangely enough, imagining it didn't have the same effect on me as Figaro's death. I firmly believed that she didn't know what killed her, let alone who killed her, so in the last moments of her insignificant life she wasn't thinking about me, at least not in the sense of me being the murderer. That made me feel free because it removed the vile side of the crime, the side where curses of the dying take away the last trace of innocence, looking for the antidote for the evil done. Since the crime was an accident, and since the place of the perpetrator stood empty, there was no reason for me to step into that place and occupy it.

I was still too weak to move, too weak to be guilty, too weak to beg for forgiveness, to repent, too weak to be the last thought of a dying man, or even too weak to be forgotten. While lying on the bed with the shiver intensifying every moment, I was thrown by the storm of doubt from one end of the room to the other, and I was too weak to resist, too weak to get up and open the jar. Lying like that, with my numb limbs tied into a knot, with my heart jumping fiercely, I concluded that Figaro died neither because of my resoluteness, nor my threatened autonomy, nor my wounded vanity nor my rebelling yell „enough“. Nor did he die because of my wickedness or revengefulness. Figaro died because of my weakness. While shuddering in the icy sweat I already forgave him. I honestly wanted to get up and open the jar, but I was too weak to do it.

The result was that I got rid of the misery, which made my life difficult. At the same time, a great deal of the suspicion Spasoje may have had about me was gone too. At the same time, I felt, at least in the beginning, that I was at the mercy of the cat. Figaro took the full control over me. He moved inside me, occupying a corner in my head. There he sat and purred smugly. From that corner, he watched my every move, intercepting every thought I had and plunging his sharp claws in every wish trying to sneak pass by him. I was both Figaro's slayer, and his mouse meal. The stain on my forehead was caused by this. It was the mark of the crime. A tiny door through which Figaro entered my head, his gravestone in the faceless valley of my conscience. It was a shameful fracture

on my forehead I feared to take a peek into. The scar, reddish like a burn, touchable and rough, resembling nasty wound, gave a monstrous look to my face.

I have been sick a whole week. In all that time, I didn't open the pantry door. And then, probably due to terrible feeling of hunger, I got up and went out. Cool breeze carrying the smell of willow wood along the river felt pleasant against my skin. I removed the shawl and let it caress my neck. Although the cold late autumn had already made its way into the streets, I enjoyed this gloomy day. I have walked around the town for long until I found a little restaurant to dine. Warm kale soup felt refreshing, and after a couple of hours on the street, I was reborn. I have constantly sensed Figaro's presence, but I didn't care. I generously let him stay in his corner. I felt he earned the right to it. Letting him stay there, that is, my readiness to put up with his stinging presence was my shy apology, my silent repentance which brought me so needed tranquillity. I have spent rest of the evening in a pretty good mood, and in the end I went to Tonka's pub.

Nothing was changed there. More or less the same faces occupied the same places. The content of their glasses, gazes, conversations and silence, the painful mystique of their conscience, the echo of their cries, pains and yells, rattle of their laughs, all of it remained the same. It was even mixed in strange fashion, so some of them cried although their glasses were full and their conscience clear while others tormented by pain laughed by mistake. In any case, the pub's guests did what they have always done, even though they didn't have a reason for doing it. My place under the stairs wasn't taken. I ordered a beer, but the sweaty glass stayed untouched for a long time. I was imbued with extraordinary excitement because everything remained undisturbed by my crime. The world moved like a bus, gaining momentum downhill and recovering before the next hill. The movement was constant and uniform, untroubled by anything standing along the road. Even the passengers coming on and off the bus didn't change its course. They needed the bus to move through time and space unfolding between the stations. There was something uplifting and touching about this listless pub and its smoky crowd dozing like a toddler in its nappy, crouched on the bench at the bus station. There was something optimistic and relieving in the serene movement of life through necessary chains of sheer accidents. The majestic feeling of cradled tranquility shone all over, the feeling of being unaware of the danger or one's own fragility, the feeling of calmness and carefree ignorance with which cradles are coated (cushioned) and which gives a good (night's) sleep. Sitting in my corner covered with the ribbed shadow this majestic feeling of tranquility made me sigh quietly as if after a long fit of weeping. I surrendered myself fully to the intoxicating recognition that the danger was over, that the horrors faded away, that the river washed off its banks

and that the bus was still running the same route. I smiled compassionately, but merrily. In the stuffy pantry covered with cobweb, a hermetically sealed jar firmly kept a horror, the world hasn't seen yet. Thanks to that lack of ignorance the world could carry on wallowing carelessly in its grooves. The world was safe because the ominousness was properly stored and sealed. The world even seemed good. Bacchanal continued on the white table-cloth. Quite appropriately it was decorated with fireworks of ecstasy, booze, impatience, harmless lies, envy, and malice, which as far as could tell, was barely reaching the ankles. I drank my diluted beer with considerable ease. In the stuffy image of the pub, painted with yellow mildew everything looked so bright and alive, as if newly born or washed with spring shower. The stain on my forehead seemed to have vanished entirely. The traces of the crime retreated under the blow of my good mood, carried by the fresh night breeze. I went to the toilet to take a good look at my face. The red stain was almost entirely gone and could only be seen under the sharp light. I wanted to remove even that last shameful trace from my face. I took my knife and skilfully, like someone who had done it many times before, I made a little scission from my hair ridge to the eyebrow, circling around the stain. A narrow strip of blood ran down my forehead. I quickly wiped it off. The thin pinky cut looked very good. Someone came in and caught me in my bloody ritual, but I didn't care. The stain of cunning brutality and cowardly hesitation turned into the scar of proud toughness. It looked like one of those the ancient warriors used to carry. I smiled smugly. My face, which I mistrusted, couldn't unmask me any longer.

The early state of insecurity and physical weakness was replaced by an almost tangible euphoria. It was getting stronger every day, so it seemed to me that sometimes I forgot to take the uneven strides when walking. It even seemed to me that I walked twice as fast as other people. In this quickened state, I ran into Spasoje Stroznik. This time I balanced with equilibrists intrepid on the borderline of intrusiveness when I gave him a long, quizzical look. This had an effect on him, so he told me that the case got more complicated since the last time and that he was expecting a chief inspector to come any time soon, the inspector who had a lot of experience with complicated cases. The arrival of the chief inspector sounded intriguing, but it didn't worry me. The cat, which I considered to be the only real danger, was gone, so I figured that the situation was under control. The fact that the whole case seemed more complicated to the police was something I expected to hear. They were missing the crucial piece of evidence, the cat, so they had to start from the beginning. Spasoje wasn't equal to the task, so they had to bring someone from outside, probably someone from the capitol. However, as I later realized the real reason behind my relaxed attitude

and my constant attempts to tease out things about the investigation was my euphoria. My spirit, accustomed to sadden and inert robe, bordering often to stupor, transformed abruptly into wilfulness. I used to be a tame and mild character, but now I was overbearing and almost reckless. All of a sudden I was a man with a whole lot of space, the space I kept ready for all Figaros, should they ever stand in my way. The space was the vast expanse where I could hold the entire rubbish of a hundred year old sinner without feeling weak or heavy due to overfull. I was like Mithridates the sixth immune to all poisons. Antidote made out of the crime and packed in the jar was running through my veins. Strong winds blew occasionally from that vast expanse of mine, and I used to ride on them, hovering high above reality, untouchable and uncatchable. Fierceness of these storms, raging through the expanse of my exaggerated resilience, was out of my control, but I didn't fear them. I stood in the middle of them upright, brave and defiant. Standing like that I looked a bit taller than before. I even asked for more of them. I believed I had a right to them, the right to this portion of an excessive power of will, the right to this lofty moment of triumphant haughtiness in which I was both base and noble, both heartless and merciful. I laughed from the belly, I wasn't blinking, I couldn't get sober. I was again a regular guest in Tonka's pub.

I was being born through the ringing of a thunder in my bet-lair under the stairs. Every evening I have been accompanied by a cold beer and the feeling that with a single blow or with a few words I could destroy all the illusions the goodness of this world had rested on. How odd it was that a back seat in a pub and a jar in a pantry could hide the key insights out of which the little hill of human happiness was built. But I was good hearted enough not to do it. That night, somewhere on the street or perhaps in my bed, I left my old snake-skin, the sad memory of my suffering; the suffering which I once naively believed perhaps still was just, at least when viewed from some ungraspable and unreachably remote perspective. I was being born rapidly and mightily, like a volcano. After passing through the ninth circle of hell, I was flying now like a cannonball aiming at the heights, and there, at the world's highest point, I'll place the flag in my right. I will create a whole new morality. This morality will be a mountain. On its summit, my little flag will claim the right to flutter righteously. I'll be the master of good and evil, the master who will give life to these two orphans, to these poor bastards who have been rebuffed and reclaimed more often than anyone else. I will revive the old tradition of epic heroism; I'll be mythical Phoenix, the clay Demiurge, the man with two hearts. My symphony will be the music of the epic poem dedicated to my man-birth. I'll be the son of....But I have to tell them first. I have to explain it to them. They never ask, they know everything; they are lying deaden in their graves made of certainties. I rose from my seat and

went over to a small group involved in a lively discussion. I staggered, but not out of excitement or anger; I staggered because of the speed of my steps, because of impatience and youthful elation. I listened. The discussion was about someone's guilt, about whether the guilt did or didn't exist, whether the guilty person deserved his fate and so on.

- Listen gentlemen – I started politely with a solemn tone of voice. I didn't want to scorn them right from the beginning, exterminating their certainties as if they were lice.

- Don't ask the guilty person if he is guilty, if the guilt is his. What kind of answer could he possibly give? What could he say? Nothing, gentlemen, absolutely nothing, because he doesn't have any idea what the guilt is. When you ask him if he is guilty, you are already telling him that he is guilty; you are telling him that you believe he is guilty. When you ask him about the guilt you are imbuing him with the feeling of guilt. Whether he truly has the feeling of guilt or is guilty, he doesn't know. He doesn't know what he ought to feel because he doesn't know what the guilt is. How is he supposed to tell it from other feelings, how could he know if what he feels is guilt, stomach pain, neck pain, hunger or something entirely different? The only thing he knows and the only thing you want him to say are that one plus one equals two. Gentlemen, you gave him your holy books, the holiness of your imagination written in words; the books containing the list of your wishes and catalogue of your tastes while your ugliness, your untruths, your hypocrisy and degeneration, your haughtiness and disdain have been hushed up and left unsaid in it. Then you showed him how the adding ought to be done, you showed him how he ought to think and what to feel, and now you expect him to learn all that by heart and to adopt it. You expect him, to metamorphose himself, to change, to learn how to calculate himself, to determine his average value, how to pick his favorite taste, color and number. When you, gentlemen, ask him if he feels guilty, you are asking him if he had learned to do the math as instructed by your holy books. If it turns out that he did learn, but miscalculated, then you shout – he is guilty! That is all there is to it, the magic of numbers and calculating, that's it, that guilt of yours. You say – he must know the rules, must know what is right and wrong, and if he breaks the rules, then he is guilty because he did a poor calculation. But a man is not a calculator. The man you are dreaming about and drivelling about, you bragging gentlemen, doesn't know how to add up; he cannot mathematics, and that is his trouble with guilt. He miscalculates quite often, and every time he does it, he is guilty. But he doesn't know how to calculate because he never needed it. It is wholly unnatural to him. A Man does not calculate. A man takes what he needs when he needs it. A man gives all what he can give, often more than he can give, precisely because he is lousy at calculation. A man gives the last thing

he has, the one without which neither giving nor taking ever could be, but he doesn't do it because he calculated correctly, or because he didn't want to be guilty. Essentially, a man is a generous beast, without any understanding of mathematics, schemes, contracts, logical entailments, history or anything like that. In his simple and unspoiled impurity he was born without guilt and dies without guilt. If he dies guilty or from guilt, he'll never know what he died from or what was he like when he died. He never finds out what the guilt is, or what he is guilty of. A man grabbed his meal, ate it, shared it with someone or gave it to someone, quite accidentally, out of caprice because it pleased him to do so, because it seemed interesting at the time, or because he is who he is, or because of the esthetic impression of such an act. In all this, he never calculated earnings and losses by giving or taking a meal. After he gave his last meal, he probably already forgot he gave it away. To him remembering this is a form of headache. Already now he is eating another meal, but you are after him because he made a mistake when calculating because he has eaten one too many meals, or deprived himself of one. You gentlemen, when you gave the guilt to your man, you claim to have given him something more, something holiest which makes him a man. And I am saying, gentlemen, that you deceived him. He was already a man, he was already divine, already good and evil, cruel and tender, and he probably doesn't remember when he was any of this. Before he entered your Philistine moralism with pockets full of guilt, he had already been where food is plenty, where people starve, celebrate, get killed, sing, fuck and suffer from diseases without bitterness and indignation. He had already been where no one is guilty, and no one is book-keeping the ethical parameters. This non-guilty man, this creative immemorial soul which cannot add two and two has probably already eaten number four, and now while standing before you - moral guardians and market place calculators - he is anxiously looking around trying to find the number four so he could get the right result.

They stared at me, totally petrified. One could not tell whether anything of what I said reached them. It didn't discourage me. I continued my tirade in a higher voice. I was carried away, I spoke like in a trance. I stood upright, with my knees supported by the chair. I leaned over them, and I nearly shouted.

- The space is essential, gentlemen, the space! Morality, quality, freedom, nobleness, humanity, virtue, all of it needs space. Immense space, where there is room enough for the entire fantasy of human creativity, for the myriad of intentionally created distinctiveness'. Morality and guilt require the whole cosmos, where the galaxies of spiritual creation revolve and clash into each other, where the world is reborn with deafening explosions of clashes of people's tempers. All of

this has to be in man's space before he can breathe and blink his eyes. But what did you do, gentlemen, with your guilty man, with your crippled little man wiggling on the scaffold because of the miscalculation? You took his space away, you fettered him, you tie his hands, and you injected the gases of your rotten tastes into his chest. The man wanted to love, to eat without having to remember the reason for his love or how much he ate. In his space, there was room for sins, forgiveness, oblivion, for everything low and sublime, for everything human. His space is his love, and that is why he can love with all his greatness, love everything that is in him. And what did you do with your scales and measures? You have chopped his heart into slices and squares, you have cut it into pieces of equal size and equal value, making his space so strait, and his love so monstrously deformed and meagre, so tasteless and naught that he is disgusted with the constant fear of whether he has got enough, whether he weighed properly, whether he loved enough, whether he gave too much or loved too much. He is carrying pieces of his heart in his purse like a handful of worn coins. He is paying with them, and he runs out of them every time he makes a mistake in calculating; every time he overpays something he loves because of one of his inborn habits, the habit which you find vulgar and scandalous. You are outraged at this guilty man because he fritters away his precious coins of love and goodness so carelessly; because he is wasting his parcelled space in such irrational way. He is not sober in the act of his guilt. He gives all his space to the first thing he falls in love with, he empties the bag filled with jettons of goodness and then he is guilty; guilty because he paid too high a rate for one of the things from your catalogue because he cheated in calculating; because he undermined and upset your value system, attaching too much value to one single little thing while underestimating all others. He didn't economize, didn't save a little bit for everyone, a coin for everybody. He didn't hold back his goodness, nor did he carefully economize with it. He didn't hold on to it. Instead, like a true lover and the lustfulness in its own person, like a voracious person and a manic libertine, he threw in everything he had on the table. He did it on the first impulse of desire that shone through his being. He is monomaniac, a social beast, which in the first moment of his birth used up an entire ocean of oxygen. And you claim – of that is he guilty! And here you sit and argue about his guilt, about how big or small it was perhaps medium size; whether it was harmless, or perhaps very serious. And you argue about what your guilty man, your degenerate keeper of the virtue inventory is supposed to feel. The remorse, bad conscience, bitterness, abhorrence, pain! He has to suffer morally, you say. And I say, this vile guilty person, this poor devil, I say, suffers from your castrated benevolence. This gutless Pharisee of yours, this rooster with shiny feathers, with his moral cockscomb highly raised, this braggart constantly

exposed to stomach pain due to faulty calculating - this man is on the cover page of your holy book of righteousness. But he is actually nowhere. He is so mercilessly reduced and limited. He has his hermaphroditic pros and cons for every single situation. He is chronically indecisive as regard the calculations of his goodness, chronically worried about the convertibility of his tiny portions of love. He is painfully refrained and selfish.

I think I spluttered the sparks from my mouth, or perhaps it was saliva. Anyway, I was growing bigger, together with my voice and my conviction. I was being born. There, on the pub table, a man, none of those poor bastards had ever seen or imagined before, roared fearfully like a lion. The man with space, the man of space. I grew together with that man, holding to his coat sleeve, to the edge of his wing. In our eyes the torches and flames were blazing, celebrating something magnificent, something superhuman. I wiped the saliva from the corner of my mouth and added this:

- What a success, gentlemen! What a miserable glory! What a mouldy lie rests beside the leg of this diversity conscious lover-boy of yours. In your world, he is real because he has characteristics. He is uniqueness, peculiarity, you say. He is keeping the spices used to make the most diverse meals on the feast of human vanity in his little bowl. He is constantly trying to find new anthropoid forms and apportion them their share of goodness. In his kitchen, he is keeping recipes for Neanderthal men, manlike apes, proud bipeds, sanguine men, sages, revolutionaries, orators, army commanders, thieves, magicians, comedians, great men, good-for-nothing men, victims, winners and many others. He carefully writes down their average value; he is prescribing the amount of their right to love- coins; he is checking their calculating skills, and by using the method of controlled strangulation, he is curing them of their desire to be guilty. But somewhere along the way he lost the recipe for the pure man, the man with untouched space.

I paused for the moment. I was excited, breathing heavily. They looked at me still dumbfounded. The scared and petrified troupe of simpletons, who amidst their boredom and emptiness discussed the guilt as if it were a harvest, wasn't uttering a word. The rest of the crowd was equally silent. Their glances though felt like stings on my back. But as I hovered above the table, gloomy and dreadful like a hail cloud, they looked so miserable and small. I stopped talking and enjoyed total silence, which Tonka also joined, probably for the first time. God knows what was going through their heads, and which thoughts flew through their skulls filled with alcoholic damps. As I stood perfectly mute, it seemed as if everybody were waiting for a final remark or a gesture, waiting for me to announce the end of the play officially, perhaps even a bow. Or maybe

they simply feared whether the hail cloud would pour a burning chunks and lightning all over them. Maybe they expected glasses to be smashed or a chair crashing against someone's back.

They were the audience, the audience as unreal as the guilt they talked about; as unreal as their trifling world. If they ever truly believed in their world, then it was the superstitious belief. To them nothing could be realer than scales and measuring devices, beer and leisure, coins and pussy. To them, I was only a harlequin, a five-minute entertainment on the pub table. A tasteless joke cracked by an incalculable batman. The act was over, but because of its grotesque convincingness, because of its frankness, the applause and standing ovations didn't come off. Instead, there was only confusion, frozenness and polite scorn caused by the scene, in which they were forced to watch the nakedness of a tormented and reborn soul. That was their defensive instinct, I thought trying to defend them before my own wrath, but I wasn't buying it myself. I thought it must have been conditioned reflex, which was in play every time an unclothed, miserable creature jumped like a highwayman before these cautious life-degustators, and started growling from the darkness of his dignified desperation. Frankly speaking, I expected more. Although an unbearable stench of hypocrisy, together with the absence of fantasy and the sordid spuriousness emanated from them, at Tonka's pub they were different. There in the pub they have allowed themselves to cry, to bite their fingernails, to confess their sinful thoughts and to squeeze tiny drops of honesty through the aperture on the head of their dicks. In Tonka's pub everyone has at least once left his face on the hall stand by the door and drunk cheerfully on the tables, unmasked and light like a feather. Tonka's greatness and Tonka's space calmed them down. It disarmed them. In the expanse of Tonka's iron soul, everyone would sooner or later bathe (swim) totally naked. Inside her soul everyone has got a free round of gentleness and love, which made them childishly joyous and untroubled. In other words, at Tonka's place everyone allowed himself to be true at least once. But now, every single one of them was turning his look away from my own truthfulness, away from my insolent outburst of intimacy. They looked at one another, trying to find the roundabout explanation for this distressing scene. But I strode towards my sooty lair, towards my bat-hole, determined to finish my beer before leaving this listless tomb. I left them a gratuity on the table together with my unfaithful face. The face will be yet another riddle. They strained their shrunk brains to grasp how such a tame and gentle face could undergo such transformation, how could a sheep turn into a monster.

I sensed that the fierceness with which I spoke was regarded as unheard impudence, as an insult. I didn't give them the opportunity to speak. I shouted and yelled like a lunatic. Without showing any regard and respect, I peed on their convictions as if they were an old neighbor's

hoarding. In their eyes, I was just another guilty person, morally measured up and scaled, sentenced to death by lunacy. In their heads, the whole case was tried summarily and burned at the stake, where they used to burn anything that undermined their lulled and silky reality. In my eyes, they were shadows, the phantoms able to walk through one another without getting touched. In my eyes, they were my old snake skin shimmering in the bat-hole of Tonka's pub. In their eyes, I was a mirage, phantasm that fades away, a nightmare they are trying to wake up from. In my eyes, they were palpable scars of my old "I". They were residents of my space. Or perhaps they were not. In the immense expanse of my spirit there may not be room for them after all. Maybe I wanted to punish them and humiliate them by refusing to take them into my giant heart (my giant's heart). Maybe I wanted to be guilty in my own noble way. I was, after all, permitted everything. I was the man without guilt. I was a man with a space.

The dilemma about the greatness and generosity of my heart kept on splitting me into two halves after I left the pub. It reminded me of the first moments of my anguish, the moments when lying helpless in the bed I was straining my ears to hear the cat's empty breathing in the jar. The exhaustion that lasted for a week, followed by nausea, spasms in the stomach and sudden outburst of crying, which sounded as someone else's crying was now a history. But this initial state caused the despair even when I didn't feel exhausted. The recollection of my pains and suffering alone would leave the bitter taste in my mouth, making me extremely angry with myself. Am I supposed to suffer because of an animal? Was I seriously about to give up, to be on the brink of a disaster because of such a thing?

These questions were buzzing in my head like a swarm of bees. However, it was about that time when I felt the strong urge to continue working on my symphony. The symphony was my revenge, my way out of this dark memory. I was a new man, a child of a new star constellation. My world didn't have room for weakness or remembrance. I strode forward followed by a song, by the symphony, and in that victorious march I was creating a new landscape. The expanse of this new landscape was immense. It was as prodigious as freedom. I used to take a walk through that landscape. I walked cautiously in the beginning, a bit clumsily, but I walked. I listen to its depth; I tried to picture that endlessness with vivid and flickering contours; I strained my eyes to embrace it, and I admired it deeply on the quiet. But deep inside me, I was filled with horror every time the cold hand of loneliness touched me. The space of my soul was so enormous that it was impossible to see anyone and ask for the direction. There was nothing there to hold on to. Everything in there was so enormous, so free, so hard and sickening, so terrifying and ungraspable. It was surrealistically easy

to walk through it. If a man took even the smallest step inside it, he would fall through it at the speed of light. I have lain helpless like an embryo in this wasteland without boundaries and horizon, without edges and middle point. The embryo had to grow into a new man, into a man greater than any other, man who had to fill out his space, to be as big as infinity. I was meant to be that man some day, but the thought alone sounded like unheard boldness, like arrogance and exaggerated self-confidence; like megalomania at least, but in its own way healthy and attractive megalomania

Figaro, who by now has almost become my pet, followed me all the time. He was my shortcut to eternity, the sacrifice made to my liberation. I wondered often how such dignified thing as freedom could arise from such low thing like a cat cadaver. I asked myself whether everything dignified arises from plain things, from decomposed things. I had completely forgotten about the landlord. She was an accident, a short and inconvenient episode – two frowned eyebrows resulting from a passing summer shower hitting a restaurant terrace at the sea side. She wasn't part of my ascending to space. The symphony didn't contain a single note about her. This insignificant creature has sunk into the quicksand of its insignificance and will rise from there at the highly inconvenient moment for me. But I'll return to this later.

The scar on my face already healed. Narrow and hardly visible fold on the skin resembling the letter "S", was the signature on the receipt for my discovery of space. It looked like a tiny keyhole through which I could take a peek into myself without any feeling of guilt, with a clear conscience. It was the rift for my Cyclops' eye, which was able to see the invisible. While walking the streets in the night, I looked at the space with the Cyclops' eye. The orchestra playing the chords of my symphony, of my triumphant march, followed my every footstep. I listen to it, but I didn't dare to stay in it for too long. At the same time, I was happy like a child, knowing that the space was there, that it was part of me, that it was mine. I was in space, and the space was in me. But out of habit, or perhaps weakness, or nostalgia, or modesty, or something else, I decided to wait a little bit.

The discovery of space was of massive importance, but I was unsure whether to (throw myself into it) surrender myself to it. To begin with, I will finish the symphony. That was my first decision, my first shy attempt to glance inside the space. The long night strolls and peeping at the space soon became my obsession. It was the preparation, the dress rehearsal before the final ceremony, the first swimming lessons taken on the dry land. During the preparation, I had to describe not only the landscape of space, but also the man who lived there. I had to imagine him. He had to be there. I believed somebody had the right to be in the space. I was sure somebody had to

claim the right to be there. And somebody, that is, he himself was certainly there. During the long night strolls, I followed him on the safe distance, and while sneaking a peek at him, I used to place gemlike words in his tracks. I was writing a poem about his movement, a hymn dedicated to his existence. I named it “The stroller in the street of life” and it sounded roughly like this:

Once
An age-old night glinted (sparked)
Twinkling in the corner of an eye
A man became the stroller

Through the clash of freckled shadows
Once or Twice
Tears ran down the skies
And there
Underneath us
The street of darkness
a secret in it
and our steps
I tremble, but your fingers are pulling me

To be honest I truly believed in that poem. I believed it so truly that I felt those fingers burying their nails into my flesh. I felt sometimes they were cruelly cold, merciless, and mute as if they belonged to a beast which drags me, and doesn't leave the time enough for me to prepare, to bid farewell. Sometimes I thought that only the death can pull so strongly and relentlessly. Sometimes I dreaded those fingers. That is why the gem-words in his tracks while trying to console me, shone with the following verses

One day
When we no longer are
Dead
When we become

Freckled heroes of the street
with no end
The death will whisper
It is waiting for us in the poem
No hero has ever survived

Once more, just once more
We'll look
In the street of a hundred year night
the wreck of hope carried on the palm
We will listen to
the happy ending story about nobody
And we will love
A thousand times more

But this wasn't always helping me. I confessed to those tracks that

As I tremble
I wait
Once more
For the cold crust of the north wind
to become warm
Once more or two times
I'll wish
a hundred times more
But it will be a thousand times less

Then I got carried away, I sobbed, and I spoke almost crying the gem-tears

The long street
The endless street
Once or twice
I walk the hundred night street
And if it is hundred times smaller
I'll wish it thousand times bigger

Once, only once more
Let us
wander together
through the street of secrets
through the hundred year night
Once or twice
I'll become the stroller
a freckled shadow in the eye
Don't be mad if I got tired

You and I
freckled shadows
without tears
without reason
In the street of mysteries
on the hill of loneliness
maybe I'll stop
Forgive me if I got scared

However, the tracks didn't pay attention to my grumbling. They shone like candles; they smiled with tenderness and understanding, but they didn't feel sorry for me; they didn't disrespect me. They wouldn't leave me either, even though everything around me reeked with hesitation.

These tracks waited patiently for me, and I heard when they miraculously got the promise from me, the promise sounding roughly like this:

Say it
once more
and I'll walk
the street of endless secrets
Like you
I'll stroll for long
crying before the loneliness of the promised darkness

As I shiver
the fingers of the freckled shadows
are waiting
for us to go
Only once more
for the last time
I look at
the secret of the hundred year night
And in vain I fear the street of life

It was a tiny poem, a small present from me to him, to the lover of my most hidden and most passionate wishes. I liked the poem very much. I believed it suited him, even though I knew that such ornament didn't matter to him. It was at best a tiny tail on the body of a colossus, one in a thousand. Some day it will fall off, and he won't even notice it. Despite everything, I loved the poem as loved him. He defeated and punished my unfaithful face. With two or three laughs, he burned off the painful jealousy; he put out the glowing ember of hatred burning inside me. He signed my face with the glow of happy complacency, which was so enormous that every time I broke off a piece to give it to some poor devil, a new and more beautiful bud of the very same happy complacency grew on the same spot.

My nightly walks lasted for a long time. In the footsteps breaking at the junctions of deserted, snowy streets, the quiet excitement played with snowflakes, and I breathed in those snowy whirls with every step I took. These footsteps sometimes used to cross my face, leaving the patterns of glad and joyous carelessness. The streets and the nights belonged to me. The paths of the dreamed of happiness and the soft strides made through infinity were mine.

But then, I noticed that someone has been following me. In the beginning, it was an odd feeling that something is disturbing my crystal solitude. Later, however, this feeling became stronger. I have thought it may have been Figaro. He was always there. In the pantry – a piece of animal fur with pulverized guts. In my head – the guest of honor dwelling in my space, the letter of gratitude for finding the underground passage to eternity. So I suspected him; I suspected it was his silent catwalk. He may have regained some of the malice he used to have. However, my suspicion turned out to be ungrounded. The tracks in the snow didn't belong to his tiny paws. The entire winterish scene, the landscape made of ivory didn't have a single cat-like detail. Besides, the suspicion was swiftly removed one night when I suddenly turned around and started walking in the direction of my invisible tail. I ran over to one of the buildings and made the right turn into a narrow alley. I didn't see anyone, but I saw tracks in the snow. The tracks belonged to a human, but they were unusually small, like kids' tracks. Since that night, I became cautious. Since that night, my strolls were not longer so careless and unpredictable in their paths. I often looked over my shoulder. I used to set an ambush hoping to catch that elusive spy. Sometimes I waited for several minutes hidden in the shadow of a building, but he was too cautious and too smart. He avoided my traps. I couldn't outsmart him. He appeared to be a ghost, invisible and silent. Had it not been for those tiny tracks looking like gout droppings, I wouldn't be sure that he was tailing me. I considered possible suspects, but none of them resembled the picture of the spy which I had in my head. None of the loafers and bums from the pub had the nerve to do something like this. Besides, it was extremely unlikely that some of those chicken blubbers addicted to the warmth of a stove could endure a whole night out in the cold. They are the men of today, and today's men live in the lee. It is his marvelous discovery – the lee.

It had crossed my mind that it may have been Spasoje, but he was an exceptionally tall man with pretty big feet, so the tracks in the snow couldn't be his. While busy searching through the possible suspects in my head, I suddenly remembered the landlord. I felt like someone was strangling me. I almost couldn't breathe. I didn't know why I felt like that. She was gone. She has never truly existed, unlike, for instance, my face or Tonka, unlike Figaro, the jealousy and other real

elements of my world, of my different versions of the world. She was just a passing moment of boredom, like the one a blowfly can give you; a freakish mixture of happy-go-lucky idiocy and complacent insensitivity, devoid of pride or any self-respect. To me, she was unreal mostly because she was incapable of disdain and of being insulted. She was even incapable of despising herself. That is why I despised her with special disgust and ferocity in those not so rare moments when her fat and void presence was getting on my nerves. It was my noble gesture, my raging outburst of benevolent pedagogy. I despised her because she couldn't despise herself. I did it on behalf of her. I did it for her own good. Through my scorn, I wanted to offend her, to get her back her human look, to give her some characteristic that would make her feel dissatisfied with herself, something that would make her hate herself, and make her try to change and rise proudly, to evolve from a walrus into a woman. That's how I was making her real. But that semi-real woman, that muddy boredom was permanently removed by a fortunate coincidence, and all traces linking me to her removal were erased. However, the recollection of her fat trunk lying partially on the stairs felt like the touch of the knife edge. That knife was penetrating deeper and deeper into my peace, and then one night it made a deep cut.

While trying to explain to myself the unsettling recurrence of the landlord's withered memory I suddenly remembered Spasoje Stroznik and our last meeting - the meeting when I charged boldly against the rigid uniform heavily armed with regulations, the one that took place in the early days of my birth, when I began to feel the power of recovery. I recalled he said that case - he didn't actually refer to it as a case, but I used that word in order to get him to reveal whether he suspected me - got complicated and that he asked for assistance from outside, for someone who had experience with complicated cases. Now it occurred to me the spy might be that chief-inspector. It stood so crystal-clear to me that it was him. It has been a long time since Spasoje told me that, so I have thought he may have lied about the date of the chief-inspector's arrival. What If Spasoje suspected me from the beginning? What if the chief inspector was there from the start? I remembered then, with additional dismay causing the sharp pain around the lever, that the jar had disappeared and then reappeared again in the wrong place. I could remember that the mysterious disappearance of the jar, and especially its being placed back in the wrong place, was one of the reasons I began to suspect myself. I was thinking now that Spasoje and his invisible-to-me chief-inspector may have suspected me already then. Perhaps it was them who searched through my pantry and had taken the jar to the analysis. Out of all these details rushing to my feverish pondering, the relieving idea that I didn't kill her flashed suddenly before my eyes. It wasn't really

an idea, but rather a detail I couldn't remember, the detail which seemed so unreal. I simply didn't remember the murder, or my intention to commit it. I suspected myself, but it was a silly thing to do because somewhere deep down in my serenity I was convinced I didn't do it. But the depth of my serenity and my conviction of innocence was out of reach. It resembled high seas. Scared by how things were unfolding I thought that the depth was not of great use to me. I concluded, albeit unconvinced, that I did kill her, and now I simply had to find the motive. I recalled all those certain and unquestionable moments which preceded the murder again. I thought for the most part about the jealousy, the hatred and about Tonka. These three parts seemed like a jigsaw, and while trying to get them to fit, I suddenly realized which role each of them has played. The dark side consisted of the jealousy towards my face and of my hatred for it, which was actually hatred for me while Tonka was the medicine keeping both of them off. However, I was sinking through those painful psychological states deeper into the mud of my own nothingness, and I hated because of that. I was proud, hurt, deceived, gelded like a male goat, and too weak to stand up straight, to exist. I didn't exist in my own eyes, at least not fully, not satisfactorily. That was my torture and my constant well of hatred. And the landlord was the embodiment of non-existence, of nothingness. Except that in her case it didn't cause the psychological states I was going through. That is simply who she was, a true idiot not predestined for existence, whereas I was something more. I ought to exist, I had to exist. To exist was my inalienable right, my civic duty. Therefore, I couldn't stand the humiliating and the tasteless fact that I and she, with her hollowed spirit exist equally. There were though moments when I was ready to admit that she was my happiness, which I didn't understand; that she was the most precious gift I ever got, but I took it as an insult and tore it in pieces. I didn't want happiness, not that kind of happiness, the happiness of an idiot. I wanted to be, to exist like others, enthroned, established, raised, just like my face, justified in my demands, confirmed in my achievements.

The equality of me and she had to be eliminated. The crude joke my face pulled on me must not be (retold) made public. Wading through the sulfuric depths of my wife and haughty egotism, I thought that what is unimportant doesn't have to exist. It was my verdict over me and her, but the sentence was carried out only on her. I was worthier than her. I was more important in every respect than that meaningless and unreasonably happy idiot, that vulgar spirit immune to the most refined ailments of today. My right to exist had the priority over her. It was perfectly intelligible that it had to be so, perfectly justified. If I couldn't forgive the non-existence to myself, I could even less forgive it to her. It was the truth, it had to be the truth, I thought. I was honest, you know. I have

never feared the truth. And I was fairly well equipped with adequate words. I was an intellectual with rich phrase books, being able to penetrate into the secrets of the psyche, and to find appropriate names for my troubles, I was able to step into the essence of truth carrying the torches of enlightenment. I was also honest, but I didn't need honesty and truth. I needed recognition, a reward, a medal and a ribbon. I needed someone to admire me, to bow down before me and to adore me. I wanted my face to come back to me, that is, I wanted my face to accept me as its own. I needed someone strong like Tonka to praise me and to embrace me. Anyhow, I concluded this must have been the reason why I killed her. The murder was my ultimate revenge, the dignified creation act. I was treacherous and generous, cruel and noble. I was the piece of horror and the stone pine of mercy. There was enough space in me for the myriad of contradictions I was carrying proudly like medals. But first, she had to die. That shameful existential capsule full of ruddy and abundant happiness, the kind only the lunatics would know of had to go. The fact that I didn't recall the murder and that I had to explain it to myself as to an accidental passerby was because the landlord was too insignificant for me to remember such a tiny gesture of benevolence and compassion. Besides, I have always explained myself to me. I could be close to myself only if the closeness has been somehow established by a rational and meaningful explanation. The explanations kept my all seemingly impulsive and unmotivated acts together. I could become full fulfilled only by perfecting the explanations of myself and persuading myself about their unquestionable correctness. Thus, I weaved the entire theory about the murder with incredible thoroughness, and it sounded almost perfect. Everything in it was so firmly intertwined that small shortcomings and loose ends were hardly noticeable.

As I have struggled with these entangling thoughts, I haven't been paying attention to where I was going. I suddenly hit the building wall at the end of an alley, which I was totally unaware of. I stumbled and fell into the snowdrift. My hand instinctively reached over my head, and I carefully touched my forehead. It seemed as if the mark of the crime has returned. I panicked. They are still suspecting me; they have always done it, right from the beginning. Cunning Spasoje had played his game brilliantly, but at one point he had to ask for help. I was a tough nut to crack, but he, although a bit dumb, was stubborn like a donkey. I kept repeating these words as I slowly sank into the snowdrift, disappearing under the delicate snowflake carpet. As I was holding my forehead, my old treasonous face crept under the snow blanket. I was paralyzed with fear, but beyond the fear, in the inner fire of my inflamed despair, I was working out the plan how to get rid of the face. The face was attached to me again, and it cut off the narrow footpath to happiness. The carelessness stifled

under it, and with its false kindness the face totally shaded my Cyclopes' eye, screening me off from my space. I was again chased by the face I didn't want, by the face which had to die, and which must not find me in the wastelands of eternity in which I was about to set my foot secretly for the second or third time.

I looked in front of me. I don't know how long I have been sitting here, but the night was still thick and pitch-black. The stonecutter dozed (slept). His head rested on his chest. The lower lip, dry and thick, double folded, was submerged in his hairs. His double chin was jerking underneath it. He snored and reeked like a skunk through his undone (open) fly. Right next to his bare feet the two empty bottles lied. Judging by them an hour at least must have passed while deeply immersed in thinking about my face's destiny I was remembering the second version of the landlord's murder. The owl moved a little bit and was now standing on the middle of the ceiling, seeming bit longer and darker. Stone slabs, mute and murky, lay scattered around us in disorder. Tiny flame in the oil-lamp was sleepy, crouched and almost wholly droop. The silence occupied the area all the way down to the river bank, reaching the door of the stonecutter's hut across the front yard. Further than that only the august night's heat could reach, the night in which my trouble was being resolved. The rest remained unchanged. My disciplined waiting triumphed once again. I coughed loudly and then once again a bit louder. The stone cutter slept like a log. I thought now was the time. I looked down at the stone pressing my foot.

The interrogation about the landlord's murder, the farewell with Tonka and the execution of Todor Tuga

- I am chief inspector Svetovid Sevast.

He slashed that sentence formally, without making any particular facial expression. He slashed it already at the door, and after he quickly paced across the room, he slammed it on the table together with a blue folder. He looked piercingly straight into my eyes. He stood by the table, barely reaching the top with his shoulder. I was trying really hard to restrain the eruption of laughter, biting the lips and frowning affectedly. I was genuinely surprised by his dwarfed figure in plaid suit, which was outmoded for more than a decade. He was bald on top, curled on temples; he was vital fifty-year old man, or perhaps feeble thirty-year old man. His nose, looking like a strawberry, was placed a bit off the centre. It supported the spectacles with different lenses and partially hid the trimmed mustache shaped as the letter "m" turned upside down. Under his left eye, a large shaggy birthmark was freely hanging. His elbow rested on the table, making his shoulders look narrower. This additionally emphasized disproportion between his head and the rest of his body. Looking from up close his varnished skull dominated his entire appearance, and down underneath his plaid suit, the pointed toecaps of his shoes were sticking out under the folders of his dark trousers. Although I was sitting on the chair, I was a head taller than he. It confused me, so I was avoiding his fixed look. I didn't wish to offend him or humiliate him for his physical deformation, but restraining the laughter and avoiding his eyes probably produced an even worse effect than laughter would have. He got angry at me and remained angry for the rest of our conversation. I saw it clearly in his eyes and in the tone of his voice when he finally spoke to me after almost two minutes of intense staring. Perhaps he wasn't angry at me, nor was he offended by my spontaneous reaction. Perhaps he has been angry his whole life since the day all his friends and his peers measured twice his size; since the day he realized he was a midget, and that the lord spat on the place on Earth from where he was supposed to sprout. His body was born in the moment of the total eclipse of the sun, and it remained forgotten by the biological laws in that dark corner. He was probably angry because instead of a human body, he had to wear one sewed from tiny pieces of fairy tales, primitive fears and superstitious beliefs children are being scared to. He has been an object of ridicule, an evil and nasty scarecrow which hides his venomous stingers and waits patiently for the

moment to be totally annulled, the moment of inattention and forgetfulness to inject quickly his deadly revenge. If anyone knew human disdain, stupidity, fear and cruelty, then it must have been him. His whole life he has been carrying that painful burden of humanity on his miniature legs. He tasted countless times on his own skin how the feeling of gratitude - the feeling his appearance caused in people every time they saw him - people had for having been spared his pains by the friendliness of fate quickly turned into pity, and then from pity into fear, and in the end into the ice-cold contempt. He understood people needed that contempt to keep their ever present fears on safe distance. Nothing can conceal fears so well as contempt and a feeling of disgust. He was a leper coming too close to your face, asking for a kiss, but who only gets a bundle of abhorrence and threats. He was already once in each of us, and he wanted to come back, but we kept wiping off his nasty and muddy footprints from the white, silky cover of our conscience. Entire areas of his soul were covered with scars made by sticks, halberds and pitch forks with which people kept him away from the doorsteps and alleys, from shrines and dining tables. But he fed on thrashing. He grew up in catacombs of human hypocrisy. He watched with his own eyes when the entire ice age of panicky and insensitive complacency hatched from the (spoiled) bad egg of human compassion. He watched how quickly the bowls of goodness, patience and empathy were being emptied, how the ability to be affected was firmly kept behind the electric fence of selfishness. He knew that the generosity he enjoyed on rare occasions was expensive, stale, pulled from under the mattress and well calculated; he knew that it was used to buy the right to disdain or to by God's mercy, or simply the self-love was being fed with it. The crust of his life, thickened by the numerous bites of human tolerance and understanding, has become impenetrable. That small body was incredibly resilient. That was the most alive and the most vigorous artery nothing in this world could smash, break or destroy. That was the vitality of life in its most indestructible form. He was the creature which lives out of defiance, or because he is strong enough to live or simply because he is too alive to be in any other way.

He was our fear, or at least one of our fears, its embodiment, literally. That is why his every breath, the breath in which there wasn't anger, meanness or bitterness made him even more terrible. That's why I also turned my look to the side, and stared at the stack of papers on the shelf behind the table.

I laughed, but I was actually scared to death. I feared the dwarf because he was the most terrible creature I have ever seen. He was the beast from a story, which suddenly became real, standing now in front of me, horrific, fiery, wicked and true. He was the beast which could tear me

apart or mash me like a louse; the beast which was about to grope through my past and my pantry and find the baseness there together with all my sins and crimes. To find my jar! As tiny as he was he could crawl easily into the most remote and hidden corners of my soul. He could crawl in the smallest crack and dig out something vicious and filthy, something utterly forgotten and hushed up. He knew that green meadows coated with flowers, pleasant odors and butterflies hide entire graveyards of sins, and he has been finding those graveyards in people's souls, in my soul. He probably wanted to dig us up, and find out which shame we had died from a long time ago. He wanted to know from which dirty hole our plastic bud of life grew, the bud we are hiding behind. He wanted to chase us back into those graveyards and keep us there like in the cage of restlessness. He conspired with my conscience, with its dark stains, and he did it relentlessly, but at the same time coldly and strictly, as if he were more interested in my conscience than in me. But he did it also in civic manner, kindly. I recognized in him my slightly damaged mirror of truth. I recognized in him my Rhadamanthus. Two minutes of his intense and piercing stare told me that in the smallest details.

I didn't judge him too harshly. It wasn't the question of my prejudice and my arbitrary convictions. No! I was truly horrified and petrified sitting in the chair, feeling the piercing eye of the midget like a glowing iron on my skin. I thought I hurt him, I thought he was angry with me, but after those endlessly long two minutes it stood clear that these thoughts were only my anguish. Soon it was clear to me that the traces of anger I saw on him at the beginning were actually footsteps of my fears. I feared him even when he was kind, when he smiled, let alone when he was angry at me. He took the seat at the table, opposite to me. He was calm, relaxed, looking smaller.

He opened the folder and studied one of the papers. From behind the densely printed paper a uniform speech resounded.

- You know that I am in charge with the case of late Gugica Gruban, and you know we've called you today to answer some questions. That is, we called you to clear out few points regarding your relationship with Miss Gruban.

I was already falling down before he had the chance to finish his sentence. First I fell through the wooden seat of the chair, through the hole which he burnt on it with his fiery look. Then I fell through the hole in the ground, and I stayed there for several moments peeping through the aperture above me, which was soon blocked by his head. Then I fell even deeper, through the loam, through the blackness of lies, through the self-betrayal and shame, straight into the abyss of unrest. In this fall down through the asshole of my conscience, there was nothing my nails and my fingers

could grab and hold to. There wasn't a single lie strong enough to keep me from falling down. Down at the bottom, in the darkness of my inner poverty, and additionally pissed off by the titter of my shitty luck, I waited anxiously his first question.

But due to some unknown reason the question was delayed. Maybe the dwarf was surprised by the speed of my downfall. Perhaps he looked with confusion at the tiny cloud I left behind, which was the product of my inner combustion. I evaporated in two minutes - that was a fact. That tiny cloud had the smell of something rotten and if someone touched it with the flame it would burn like a fart. Anyways, the delay of his question gave me enough time to remember my space and my stroller.

They were hopelessly far. It pinched me painfully at heart; it dried my throat and made my breathing hard. They felt so hopelessly unreal under the thick layer of cowardice, hesitation, wavering, greed, gluttony, damnation, arrogance and other low-life vegetation growing so densely inside me. I was unfaithful to them, and now they let me down (deserted me). I felt like crying over this painful realization. I wanted to blame someone for it, but I didn't know whom to blame. I couldn't blame the stroller. He didn't know what the guilt was. I was the repentant crying on the bottom of the poisonous filth. I was crying for help, but no one could hear me. No one except the dwarf who, absent and quiet, was sharpening his pencil and preparing the question as the executioner prepares his sword.

Farewell with Tonka

This was my newly emerged situation. The situation, however, was preceded by few events worth mentioning. My night wanderings along the deserted streets continued throughout the whole spring. I stalked the dweller of my space. I have walked around that grandiose landscape, which was gradually being overgrown by hedges. I was constantly somewhere outside my space, or close to its entrance. I walked; I sang pieces of my symphony, I was trimming them, juxtaposing them, I was putting makeup on them as if they were dolls; I was rearranging them and dressing them up. I admired the fields of dandelion, untouched and virgin, I admired the man in space; I often imagined his breadth (wideness), sometimes I got dizzy while doing it; I have breathed with all my lungs one and the same little bubble of air; I used to go to bed with the first sunrays, and at night I have walked around my fortress again. Our relationship was weird. I knew it was mine, the space, that horrifying and at the same time inspiring vastness. I knew this quite intimately; I knew

it every time he blinked his eyes, every time I shuddered after he touched my skin, every time the echo of his twinkling resounded throughout my deaf hesitation. Through all these things and through other things too I knew he was inside me, or around me. But I wasn't completely in the space. I walked around it for months, maybe for centuries; I kept it in my pocket as a trump card for a final act, just like the symphony. Perhaps I waited for the invitation. Perhaps the space seemed too base, too cheap, like something you just take without asking, without permission, something you don't have to earn the right to, something worthless. Perhaps someone had to lay down the red carpet before I deign to enter my space. Perhaps I was afraid of cutting the navel string to my old world, to that fake, painful, insulting, but the safe world. Anyway, a million "maybe" and a trillion "or" shackled me, trying to talk me out of my final transition.

The walks continued. The footprints in the snow following me, evanesced together with the thawing snow, but I didn't believe they were gone. From time to time, I would set the ambush or a trap, and I waited, but to no avail. The owner of these tiny footsteps wouldn't let himself get caught. I got used to him. I knew he was the chief inspector Spasoje mentioned, and all my suspicions were directed towards that invisible follower. Around the early days of summer, when due to too many people on the streets in the night I finally decided to move into my space, I had already forgotten about him. I wasn't even sure if he existed any more. Even if there were a shred of doubt, I didn't have to worry about it because I was leaving for good. Judged from the perspective of my space, the invisible stalkers were a minor event. It was perhaps quite common. The departure transition, just like anything else in my life, was carefully planned. I couldn't leave just like that. I couldn't simply disappear. Disappearing was perhaps possible or even feasible from the perspective of the space, but I still belonged to the outer space. I was still part of the established order, leaning on my spine. I had to say goodbye, but there had to be something nostalgic and sad about it. At the same time, it was the reason for celebration. Since I didn't have any friends, I decided to say goodbye only to Tonka, the only woman I have ever known in her full and sturdy being. However, since I didn't have guts to approach Tonka except for a special occasion, I had to stage one such occasion, the one she would consider acceptable. Hence, I needed a stage and a bunch of walk-ons. Of course, I could find all of it in Tonka's pub.

It wasn't easy. Despite careful planning, new circumstances and new unforeseen situations kept arising, forcing me to postpone the episode of my moving departure - the episode soaked with Tonka's tears, which I secretly wished to see. At the same time, I wasn't any good at improvising. I have always considered improvisations to be the trait of unsophisticated people. I thought of it as

rude and awkward. That is at least how I saw myself every time I got caught in situations which demanded to wed the goal with inappropriate means. For me, it was the morganatic marriage, a scarecrow made in desperation. Besides, the more I hesitated and the longer I waited the more I was overwhelmed by (the feeling of) longing. Yes, it sounds ridiculous and absurd, but although I hadn't gone yet, I already missed that lousy corner where the decay of the outer world piled up. The reason for my hesitation was also that I was at peace with all people. Since the episode when I yelled about the guilt, people hardly took notice of me. I was quiet like a shadow; I was silent, sitting withdrawn in my bet-hole, staying invisible behind the thick veil of other guest' somber self-centeredness. I used to sit for a long time in the chair, burdened by the plush melancholy, like the one a man feels when he remembers happy moments of his childhood which seems far, naive, overcome and dear. I was almost deadened by the victorious doze from the victories I credit myself with, but which were yet to come.

In my own way, the halfway, I was already there, in the space, raised and endlessly spread. I felt like the man of space, unusually light, but heavy enough in my resoluteness, that I could just sit and allow the breeze to throw on me even more of the outer world's rot. There were though moments when I felt tempted to think that this was it, that it was all, and there isn't anything beyond this illusory and imagined state, which I was living through as if it were real. I had already won, I got elevated; I performed my act of ascension and transcendence while I strode on the carpet made of cat's fur, carrying the trophy of stuffed courage under my arm. But the pub had the working hours, and after closing I was even lonelier, more unmasked, and at the same time somehow miserable because of the self-deceiving triumphant mood. The space between closed pub's door and the stroller's shadow was getting smaller, and it became so painfully narrow that I chocked in it. I knew I would have to leave at some point. I knew I would have to make a choice at some point. But, the longer I stayed dozing in my bet-hole the more clearly I realized that the choice was getting tougher due to its seeming exclusiveness and urgency. I was sweating, but the sweating couldn't ease my pains. I drank, but it didn't help me either. I needed dynamite, an explosion, a clash; I needed one true little war or maybe even a massacre, a basement revolution, an earthquake, the flash of supernova or the end of time. Something similar actually happened but on a smaller scale.

It was summer, the heat, the outbreak of the limp limbs epidemic, sticky asphalt, glowing copper roofs and the silence dying late at night. In its dying, the life was being born, the life that melted away and stopped at the noon squeezed under the large shining bowl on the polished

sky. In this birth one could hear the rage over the stolen time, over the embezzlement of the precious afternoon, roasting on the empty streets like in the baker's oven. The night was bringing cold air and refreshment. On top of it the night had to contain all the unfinished businesses, unfinished jeremiads, unsettled debts, that is, the entire stolen afternoon, which due to the heat was extended into a decade. That is why the mid-summer nights were extremely ferocious and tempestuous. Each of them carried enough hysteria and rage for another world war, or at least enough to break my triumphant doze. My night started seemingly quiet. Nothing indicated that something unusual was going to happen (come out of it – orig.). It wasn't even preceded by one of these sultry afternoons, nor was its dawn very distinctive. I arrived at the pub bit earlier, once more determined to say goodbye, once more ready to postpone it. I sat at the table, with legs crunched under the chair, scratching lightly the rim of my glass with nails. The moments of hesitation were passing sluggishly and flabbily like the river of unfulfilled wishes. I watched these moments creep on the floor, crawling into the cracks on the rotten planks, disappearing behind the door or under the drunken guests' shoes. I studied the whole scene and was a bit surprised to discover new details. This sooty coulisse gradually became part of me, so I wasn't paying attention to its details. Ever since I set my foot for the first time in this half-ruined lair, this dead corner of weakness packed with fetid human misery, I have felt it crawling under my skin. There, I saw the truth wearing black, smiling mockingly while walking from table to table. She, the truth, would throw a handful of black dust into everyone's face, and then the dark shades, which this human mite was so good in hiding under the trained grimace used in public places, were becoming visible. Outside everyone was more or less safe, but in Tonka's shit-hole, under the threateningly bent ceiling, Miss Truth has cut those humanoid puppets with a knife. She tore their flesh and their bones, taking out of their bellies what none of them wanted to have, let alone to show. She kept finding misery in us, and every time she put it on the table for public inspection, I felt we were less miserable, less false, and happier. She was cruel, but she was warm-hearted too. Despite everything, she wasn't disgusted with us, nor has she despised us. She was like Tonka, willing to forgive if a man only dared to look her in the eyes. She was the truth every honest cynic would be enchanted with.

Now I run my eye over the interior of the pub and I saw a man wrapped in the old sheepskin coat. He was old, around fifty, and no one was sure if he still breathed. Next to him there sat two giants, two toothless jerks with bloody faces, fighting over a coin lost in some foolish bet. Under them, crouched like an infant, a man-dog was lying, howling and peeping through the hole on the floor. He claimed stubbornly that his glass eye, the only one he could see with, was in the

hole. On the other side of the hole, a woman-mole howled, watching the man-dog through his glass eye. By pressing their faces against the wood rot, each from her side, they could only see each other. The tiny glass bowl in the dark cleft joined these sinful lovers. The fake eye was their true happiness. Opposite the wall, next to the toilet door, the hoary accordion player watched the empty beer bottle sadly and cried over his severed hands. He still carried around his accordion; he used to get mad at it, he used to sleep with it, he spoke to it, and he cursed it; he was showing his stumps to the accordion, and he cried.

Once he dreamt of the hands growing out of his crippled arms, but because these new hands were extremely stiff, he couldn't play the accordion with them. Ever since, he has been disconsolately sad because, as he said with sobs, the dream was more horrible than reality. To his right side four women sat, spinning wool and peeing discreetly under the table. They were dancing nude, screaming, laughing and selling their tits wrapped in the piece of greasy cloth to everyone who wanted to watch their shriveled bodies. The wing of latticed light dropped slopingly down from the ceiling onto the bar, melting into indiscernible mass the entire row of suits and shiny skulls. That was the elite. The elite of professors who spent their whole lives either in the incubator or in the retirement, but here in the pub they have been correcting the world. In their discussions, the world has always been wrong, unfinished, misunderstood or misinterpreted, and their job was to undo this ancient injustice of the world towards the human mind. The firmest insights established thus far were being shattered in their fierce discussions. They debated passionately waving the flags of promised revolutions; they were determining how many lives the progress and ignorance are worth, deciding usually in their own favor. They cheered because they stood closer to Tonka and the barrel of soured wine, which was always on their side, always ready to concede (approve of what they said). Their world was immense, often incomprehensible. It resembled metaphysical chewing gum which was inflated by injecting weighty words mixed with the stench of spoiled teeth. But they didn't care about the proportions and meaningfulness. For them, the pub wasn't the place where this mastodonic world rested its tail, but the palm from which the future and the past were red. And they did it with the precision of the sky mechanics, completely disregarding the trifle things of everyday life. Tonka's breasts and the jug of wine had long ago resolved all existential doubts (settled all existential issues). The ecstatic climax of their salutary correctives would usually end wanking in the stinky intimacy of the pub's toilet. The propylaeums raised in honor of their magnificent insights - the insights concerning only the things either invisible or unreachably distant in the past for which no one was sure ever occurred, and the things in the distant future, hardly

anyone believed will ever take place- they usually served at the end of the bar, and there the man with the pig head and lop ears sat disinterestedly and gulped all of it down with enormous pleasure. He was sweating unusually a lot, he belched, and underneath him a fresh pile of shit was constantly fuming. At the table closest to the bar, a newly married couple was giggling, kissing passionately, making plans and slurping poisonous soup. Next to them the blind cook, who made these poisonous soups, was winking to the hunchbacked undertaker, who on odd days worked also as a chimney sweeper. He was usually accompanied by a jolly short man, who was the executioner by profession. That jovial midget took over the duty to entertain other guests by telling funny anecdotes from his work. He didn't come today, so the atmosphere was a bit sadder than usual. Behind the undertaker, a beautiful woman sat immersed in thoughts. Her legs were crossed, her head resting on her arms. She was peeling off tiny scales from her bosom. Everyone thought she was dumb, feeling sorry for her, but at the same time almost everyone also admired her beauty. She was keeping her beauty for any trophy collector, who will be patient enough to take off her dear water-nymph dress. At the end of that row of tables, closest to my black hole, a priest with the mouse face had his seat. He often raised his glass making a toast to no one else but me. He used to refer to himself sometimes as seraphim, sometimes only by his name, he drank unusually a lot; he had a habit of spitting on the floor and kissing the cross. He used to scratch his balls and he was embittered due to his futile proselytism. He made me sick because I heard he has never taken a bath. That is how Tonka's pub looked that night.

I have never been terribly interested in other guests, and if any of them could arouse my interest, then it was the bunch sitting at the bar, with the swarm of emphatically pronounced phrases hovering above it. The bar was the liveliest area of the pub. The four guys I got into the quarrel about Figaro's name also used to sit there. I have never fully forgot nor forgave their rudeness and their arrogant attitude. It was even harder to forgive their stupidity, which has been educated and systematically and thoroughly studied. It was perfect. Oh goodness, how I hated human stupidity, how I hated educated people, those conceited and complacent poor devils, who voluntarily and proudly bore hard-baked clay in their freakishly combed heads. I hated their self-satisfied grin and their arrogance; I hated their self-proclaimed entitlements, which they granted to one another in precisely prescribed portions. They judged confidently and with authority every single thing; they had opinion about everything. They wanted to be good, kind and generous. They wanted to give a little bit of the clay dust carrying in their brains; they wanted to reveal some of the secrets packed into the invented words; they wanted to establish order, merit and system of values.

However, with all good will I wasn't able to see in them anything more than phlogiston sages, immune even to the fire of hell because they never truly existed. The secret of their success consisted in the specially constructed system of mirrors. When they looked through them at undiscovered places on the World map, the mirrors always showed their faces on the new tiny piece of their knowledge. And they admired the faces in the mirror. The faces were the constant they have been looking for, the sacred possibility of their perception. But we had to wear their faces, those mugs as if they were blessings. We had to carry a piece of their stupidity like a curse. They would never grant anyone the right in his beliefs, they wouldn't allow anyone simply to exist without being defined and judged; no one was allowed simply to be. This cross-eyed avant-garde has first killed the hope. When having discussions they have often shouted at the same time, interrupting each other. Still, they would always get vexed if someone were out lauded due to coughing, mischance or some trivial shortcoming. They believed that everyone in their little chosen group had the right to add something to the whole, to build a piece of himself into their truth established by voting, to mark the truth by his own mark and to acclaim it publicly. That's why their truth has always looked like Frankenstein to me. A true little freak wrapped in brocade. I knew these hypocrites feared noise more than anything else. They feared all other people beginning to speak in one voice because then their precious words would be consumed inexpediently, and their noble work would be disturbed. They feared that the words of people who have been freed and qualified to become nothing would multiply like sheep shit. Every time something like that happened or was about to happen, they stood frozen as if taken by surprise. They felt offended too, and wouldn't know where to step, fearing they might step into someone else's word and mess their shiny wisdom.

I often got the urge to go over there and smash their dead world, which was only held together with formalin. But I didn't know how, and I wasn't sure I had the nerve to do it. In an inverted way, I was much like them. I was actually their total opposite, but I was sick in the precise same way as they were. They have been incurably ill from certainties, whereas I have suffered from incurable doubt. To them the doubt was a courteous gesture at best, the fake humbleness or an amusing anecdote from the life of a recognized brilliant man. For me, the doubt has for long been what have kept me alive, or have kept me just under the surface of life. I and the doubt have been good friends for long, perhaps too long. I let it enchant me and take me over entirely, so I didn't know from where to start or where to end. Wherever I went, everything seemed suspicious after a while. I needed something more. I needed an ally. For a long time this ally-traitor, this never-came-true character from a popular saying has been preventing me from beating the bunch at the bar,

from strangling them amidst their convictions, from freeing them their stupidity. That fateful night I suddenly realized I wasn't alone. The stroller was with me. I had the ally; I had the fellow soldier in the mood for a fight.

It began with a quite trifle thing. In the middle of the hysterical outburst of their goodness, they grabbed one of the poor bastards from the rear section and tried to educate him, to reform him, to open his eyes, that is, to expand his horizons, as they put it. This charitable act seemed to me like another attempt to put in the grave and remove from the face of the Earth yet another hope, which was ticking in this poor devil like the heart of a mongoose. The poor devil was the accordion player without hands, who clumsily dreamt of a yet worse fate than the one that struck him in the so-called real life. His trouble wasn't just his fate, but the fact that he wanted both his new hands and the old life of a musician. They attacked him because of the logical absurdity of his wish. They claimed that there existed an order in the world and that the order is determined (ruled) by the number one. Everything has its beginning and its end in the one. They were explaining to him that there existed only one chain of events, only one reality, only one eye - although many mistakenly believed they had a pair of eyes - only one essence, one truth, one universe, only one moment, one honesty and so on. Hence, they concluded that, in this simple equation, his dream had value of two, meaning that it was a second-hand thing, dubious and inauthentic. That is, his dream was simply untrue and unreal. They kept repeating that the hands are cut off, that they are gone, that by now, they probably had rotted away or were eaten by worms. They lifted his stumps in the air as if making a toast, and showed them to him, trying to get him to realize his mistake. They assured him that there existed finality, that the range of possibilities was limited and that his dream wasn't among them. The same applied to his hands, and to his music. They were trying to bring him to his senses. In some perverted way, they were trying to make him happy. They were trying to encourage him by saying that his suffering was unreal, just like his dream. While raising their eyebrows, they said that all of it was invented in the moment of desperation, that he suffers from nothing, or at least suffers for the wrong reason, which was worse than suffering for the real reason. Hence, his suffering was illusory and essentially insignificant. Should one give it a second thought then it is clear that he doesn't suffer at all. It only appears to him that he suffers. They concluded in the end that he simply confused the number one with the number two in the equation of the world, meaning that he mixed up what is real with what isn't. The accordion player cried. He was trying to twist himself loose from the claws of their limited reason, but he was sinking back into his pains through his sewed up sleeves. He wanted more than

hands and music. He wanted to live in his dream, to live there really, on equal terms (equally), without a difference between the real and the imaginary, without a difference between rational and irrational, simply to live to the maximum of his possibilities. His dream wasn't only a dream. It wasn't just a frivolous and naughty play of a sober man, who can unerringly tell cardinal points, left from the right, or some other seeming opposites. For him, the dream was the same as life, or it was perhaps even more than life. He never understood all those barbed wires, palisades and other kind of fences raised across the endlessness without particular order or sense. And they attacked him because of that, because of this unreasonable behavior, because of the disorientation, because of his blindness and foolishness. They were inexorable in their morbid way, but he wouldn't give up so easily. He wept, he was wiping off his eyes, his knees buckled, but he resisted. This entire scene reminded me of an old picture, depicting the mythical fight between a brave, lonely adventurer and a beast, but the beast in the picture was actually an over-dimensioned anteater. However, I wanted to see this fight as more dignified and more formidable. The accordion player deserved it. I saw him fighting a giant octopus. I was moved by his readiness to remain loyal to himself. I was touched by his ability to hold firmly on to the mane of his beliefs, without hands and without any special explanation. He was ready to suffer more than he deserved, he was ready to atone for his clumsiness and stiff fingers that couldn't play. He was ready for the worst, ready to be the victim of his dream, but he didn't want to or couldn't give up the power to dream, even when he dreamt to his own disadvantage. But the octopus at the bar, with five or ten sticky tentacles just didn't get it. To them such stubbornness was the unforgivable sin, moral failure, the weakness of the spirit, the whooping cough in the cerebellum and God knows what else.

Toothless light coming from the broken street lights winded through the town. A warm breeze was crawling into the cracks of the concrete graves, where flocks of diligent work-lovers slept tightly together with their house insects. The silence swung over the roofs strictly like a truncheon. The only thing to be heard was the homophobic breathing of those who will once more die at dawn with the smile on their lips, just to get another piece of undisturbed snore. None of them will ever know about the clash at the bar, which in my eyes was becoming epic in character. The gray-haired accordion player was still standing at the same spot in his dream. He was standing right at the entrance of his luxurious castle. The castle breathed swiftly, growing bigger and getting ready to swallow the octopus hacked into slices. But the group of well-intentioned teachers was losing their patience. They were jumping, getting on the tiptoes, their faces flashing red. They growled, raising their horns threateningly, chattering with their eye teeth, and guzzling the wine. That night

the needle in my stomach has played for a long time. The longer I gazed at the bar, the more lively it played. At one moment one of the “elite” lost his temper, he grabbed the accordion, tossed it against the accordion player’s chest and shouted: Then play, you unreasonable donkey! Play and you will see that we are right! The hands are gone, the end of story.

At that moment, the needle moved from the stomach up into the chest, and I jumped from my chair. It only made things worse when I saw that the raging philanthrope was no one else but the fat man who got mine and Figaro’s names mixed up. What I then did, surprised me as much as them, it surprised me probably more than them. I have to admit, I felt strangely, as if in some sort of conscious trance. I was aware of my actions, yet it seemed at moments as if I was watching this entire this scene from by bet-hole. I approached the little group, going after the greasy fat man. I slammed him at the back of his bald skull, and while he started at me dumbfounded, I picked up the accordion. Before he had a chance to react, I stretched the accordion, jammed it on his nose looking like a green pepper, and squeezed firmly. The accordion produced unusually shrill and piercing tone resounding throughout the pub, and then complete silence fell. The shock was clearly visible on their faces. I was a bit puzzled about him not making a sound right away. I think his confusion overpowered the pain. I thought maliciously amidst the silence, that since he worked with limited range of possibilities, this one was probably not within his range, and that confused him totally. A few other thoughts flashed before my eyes, but some of them didn’t have an obvious connection with the entire situation. For instance, it crossed my mind that such shrill tune could be used in my unfinished symphony, perhaps at the very beginning, like an interlude. It also crossed my mind that I will have to postpone the farewell with Tonka, or speed it up. I noticed also few things. One member of the elite limped, and another one wore mesh stockings up to his knees. I thought I saw Figaro, sticking out his head behind the beer crate standing by the door. He looked frightened. That animal, petrified by what I just did, probably took off from my head. Perhaps forever. The silence lasted for all the time I held his nose squeezed, staring at his eyes. Then I let go of my hold. The accordion played the shrill glissando backwards, and blood began to gush from the mashed gristle. It was first then that he screamed, that is, howled. General confusion still lasted, at least in those initial moments. One could hear tiny drops of blood hitting the floor softly. And then one of them spoke, asking me what I was doing. I smiled mimicking contempt and disbelief with my lips. I actually first released the grip of his nose when one of the other members of the elite reminded me that I had been holding his nose for a week. The others corrected him saying that it has actually lasted for over a month. Anyway, they warned me that if I continued, it would be considered a

heavy crime. It was first then I laid down the accordion and I suddenly came to think of the landlord and her mystical death with unease. To me, it didn't seem it lasted so long, but I didn't care.

The interesting thing, however, was the conversation which started off at those long moments. It started, as I already said, with that stupid question "what are you doing?". One couldn't expect any better question coming from such a stiff, brainless burgher, but at that moment it didn't matter. I attracted his attention, which encouraged me. I got carried away, just like when I lectured about guilt. I began with a formal tone of voice, which perhaps was a bit inappropriate for this tense situation.

- What do you think I'm doing? I'm trying to draw your attention, to point to some fundamental flaws in your reasoning, to show your narrow-mindedness.

I said this without excitement, getting the impression that the whole situation was a bit unreal. It seemed as if the needle suddenly stopped jerking. Perhaps out of habit or because of the surprise they also spoke without excitement. After a short pause, one of them spoke up with distinctive nasal voice.

- Really? A flaw in our reasoning? Is that so? What are these flaws about? Can't you see the man is crippled, and on top of that he is either mad or sickly stubborn. Do you honestly believe we should leave him in this state of self-deception? It is our duty to help him. It is your duty too to help him.

- Can't you see that this poor devil lives beyond your misconceptions, beyond your reasoning? Can you see anything at all? How is it that you want to help him? You want perhaps to cripple him both in his mind and in his soul. Can't you see that he is so unreachably distant from the tiny shells where you keep the pieces of your reality as if they were museum exhibits? He does what he can, the best way he can. His dream once ran away from him, taking with it better half of his heart, but he didn't deject or yield to the reason. After that, he felt he was endlessly stretched, existing between the points which couldn't be linked by looking at a single point or from a single point. He didn't get scared, gentlemen. No! Instead with the hands he didn't have he tried to open the gate his dream-renegade went through, and he followed it. That is what you can't do. And that is exactly what you don't get. You don't understand that he can live in the world where one can play music without hands, sing without throat, breathe without lungs because the world is large enough and good enough to embrace all of it if only a man dare to dream and doesn't ask how and why. In his world, there is room even for your reason, for that hangman's halter in which your ugly, heads are dangling, but you don't see it.

I looked them in the eyes. For the moment, I hoped I had reached them. They stared at me speechless. Then they moved their gaze over to the accordion player's stumps, then at the fat-man's nose, and back at me again.

- That's what I'm trying to tell you. That's what he is trying to tell you, but it isn't easy, it is difficult....I needed a dynamite, gentlemen, to shake you a little bit. Understand? That is why this nose, although I didn't mean....

- Well then – they almost shouted in one voice - Do you believe that violence leads to enlightenment?

The question came from the man wearing stockings. He frowned. The question took me by surprise. It actually shocked me with its horn-like hardness and obstinacy. I was thinking, perhaps too long. I wasn't enlightening, teaching or leaving road signs. Edifying candles had never burnt in my hands, nor had the scepter representing higher order ever shone in my hand. A promise of a happier, easier and less painful wandering was even less likely to be seen through the colorless film of my exterior. I simply overreacted. I only wanted to bring down their walls, to wake them up from the hypnosis, to break their academic delirium. But perhaps, I didn't really know what I wanted. Anyway, this cunning rough-hewed teacher wanted to lure me on the thin ice by insisting on my mentioning of their views and flaws. He set his intellectual traps all over, and I was supposed to get caught like an old, molting wolf.

- Well, in some cases, and under certain circumstances maybe...since, actually....depending on how you take it, that is, depending on what you mean by violence or....what..

I stammered while the exultant smile enlightened his face. It pained me. The needle in my stomach became active again.

- There is no any "depending on what you mean by". You have mashed man's nose. You have broken it. The blood is running, and there was also the element of intimidation, the intention to harm. All of it adds up to the crime. Doesn't it? And all of this because of the flaws, as you said. Right?

"Right" was intended for other tentacles of the octopus, whose slimy vicinity I could feel on my skin now. He spoke from his certainties, from undeniable facts. I thought for too long again. He took advantage of it and continued.

-You cannot exercise the force any way you want. That's not the way to do it. People don't do it nowadays. The man of today has respect for the law. He knows what good manners are.

Man cannot afford himself to be violent, not if he wants to be a man. It could be that there are flaws in people's reasoning. You cannot rule out the possibility that someone has got things wrong, but it doesn't imply that

He spoke slowly with even, nasal voice, which would lull to sleep even a bull in corrida. I lost him quickly, and his speech turned into the whirring of a cement mixer, which could cause the entire human jumble on the planet to contract incurable sleeping sickness. However, somewhere in the middle of his litany the expression "today's man" stuck in my ear. I felt there lied the core of his learning, the cornerstone of his self-confidence. I felt he firmly believed that the mankind and the modernity got linked at precisely the same moment when he, the self-proclaimed folk's tribune stepped on the stage of history, hitting the kettledrums of his wisdom. This stuck-up epigone was convinced that he stood on the empyrean of knowledge and that it could happen only today, in modernity and that it could happen to no one else but him. From that dizzy height, he claimed that truths and illusions, theories and assertion cannot be established by force. He said that there exist accepted manner in which people discuss. He said that is how the knowledge becomes what it is because the manner in which people attain knowledge is an indiscernible part of it. He claimed that anything of value is part of the established order, and everything had to be part of it, or in accordance with it. When he was about to add, with the exultation in his voice, that this was a part of ennobling humankind, a driving wheel of progress, development, prosperity and other kindred forms of making people happy, which was essentially the main goal of human history, I interrupted him

– Listen, you modern man, you modern jerk – now the excitement in my voice was easily detectable – You put too much trust into that modern man (today's man) of yours and into his time. You put too much confidence into his historical dwelling place which you fixed with rusty nails to your street, your courtyard, and most surely to your ass. But it is precisely the modern man who is the cause of all your errors. He is the source of your blindness. Yes, indeed, that modern sissy is the cornerstone of all magnificent edifice of mind, but I'll tell you something about him. I'll do it because the game of feigning holiness you are playing, that revolting sanctimoniousness is resting on the shoulders of that hunchback. You truth hunters are much like politicians. To you, the truth is nothing but the power you are attempting to obtain, whereas for the politicians, the power is the truth they believe in. So, you listen carefully, gentlemen what I'm going to say about the modern man. When he, the modern man falls asleep and sleeps in the cold sweat, he is dreaming about the one who is bigger and better than he, and this bigger and better man, the strongest one in

his nightmarish visions exists only with the purpose to love him, the frightened sleeper, and he does it for the reason intelligible only to him. He hates mornings because they extinguish the last remaining illusion about the great hero whose only mission is to look after him, to look after the modern man, the awakened sleeper, and to give him consolation. That's why he can hate from dusk to dawn; he can hate all those moments of forlornness when the great man is not responding. That's why your modern man is so mad and mean, that's why he is so evil. That's why he is preparing the revenge to "the great one" during the day by fixing his private truths, which he later keeps in a safe or a cage; the truths he hopes will drive away the cold and the anguish in the sleepless ages. He knows that these provisional truths are the best of the worst because he mixed them according to his tastes, the plebeian tastes. He is taking meager portions of overcooked truths from his kettle and is giving them to the mob. And the mob rejoices because the anguish is postponed. This is the truth-hunter's truth, your truth. This is your power over the mob, and even though you don't honestly believe it, you often love it more than any other truth. But through the tiny fractures in your heart the doubt creeps in, and at night you begin to rummage through books and old writings. You, modern men, rummage through the graves where the time suspected of greater happiness and truer truths lies buried. During these stormy nights, your modern man is being transformed into a vandal. Yes, gentleman, the modern man is a vandal. He is a vandal out of despair. He is digging up the graves, trying to find one in which his God is buried - the great man from his rabbit dreams. He is vandalizing his spirit; he is a tiny helium balloon rising quickly under suitable weather conditions. Your lousy hero was searching fruitlessly for the one who is bigger than himself under his purple neat skin. Now he is only looking for the wing under which he can hide. Just take a look at today's grave keepers. They are strict and stern, haughty and jeering. It is obvious they are not guarding anything sacred. No, I'm lying, gentlemen. The grave keepers are actually insipidly soft. Their scornful sneer is patronizing and well-intended. They feign to hide the holy secret behind their smile, but there is nothing behind it except a row of broken teeth. They have learned not to believe in anything; that is why they smile so easily. They are miracle-makers, the masters of speech, the myth-makers. But it is precisely their smile what gives them away because they are not able to believe their own myths.

I paused and glanced at them. They listened carefully. The manner in which I spoke was obviously to their taste. They cared more about the manner in which I spoke than about what I spoke. I continued steadily.

- And your modern man gets tired when he is honest, or at least partially truthful. He is tired of searching. And not only that. He is fed up with futile and strenuous thinking. In those rare moments when he is equal to himself all those tricks for stilling time he so gladly let go down with him, make him sick now. He is aware that all of it weighs a couple thousand tons above the allowable load, which the tiny bridge leading him over the gorges of his screwed up heart can bear. The modern man is chronically scared. He is scared of mirrors because he is never sure whether he sees himself or someone else in it. He curses angrily at those who buried the salvation under the ground. It is too high to the skies, and too cold under the clay. Crawling on the ground is all that's left to him, but down on the ground it has been so heavily overcrowded for quite some time. But the modern man is patient. He has an understanding and respect of the order. His heart is beating in step with the rules already established, and in the darkness of his awoken nightmare he believes that there is an exact number of these beats left to him. He waits because the waiting is a virtue, the ceremonial robe of today, the uniform of his burgher personality. It is the gesture he is proud of, the gesture by which he earned his reputation. His whole life is an overcrowded waiting room, and the only thing he still believes in, because everyone else around him is waiting. He had forgotten why he is in the line, but it doesn't matter anymore. It only matters to him that in the waiting room, with the feeling of righteousness in his chest, he can consume his preserved freedom, the freedom of movement within the enclosed limited space of mind.

One of the tentacles coughed, with the intention of interrupting me. I stopped because I had nothing more to say. I have never wanted to say this much either, but it was too late now. The modern man lay on the ground, hacked in pieces, limbless and headless, without any content except few tiny drops of blood falling down from the mashed nose.

- I understand to some extent what you are saying, but I have to say I don't agree with you. It is simply wrong, and you are not doing any favors to anyone by categorically claiming such nonsense. The fear, the courage, the waiting room, it doesn't make any sense. It has nothing to do with reality. You are stretching reality as if it were dough. The dreams, the hands, give me a break, please. You have a strange way of looking at things, you have....you are actually very dissatisfied with something; with yourself, I dare to say. A little bit of self-criticism is acceptable, but you went too far. You are a cynic, a sick cynic. You suffer from dissatisfaction. It is boiling with rage inside you, and instead of coming to your senses, you are curing yourself with cynicism. You don't believe in a single stone of this world even if it breaks your head, but you do believe in some distant, stretchable worlds. That is quite unreasonable, quite foolish. Taking pleasure in

undermining established views is malevolence. It is evil. You are evil because you are sick, or you got sick because of your malice. You don't believe in the goodness. It is only in your exaggerations that you see the truth, but that is not how things are....

- I don't see anything – I continued without coughing first. – I don't see anything which is minutely measured and established, or anything of the sort. I can only see where everything is enormous, inconceivably immense and extended, where everything is magnified. It is only there I can see; only there I can breathe. And precisely because I'm there, in this unimaginable purity of chaos and contradictions, I'm not looking at the truth through a telescope as if it were something unreachably distant, something you can only guess about. I am walking in front of her; I'm walking through her magnified and infinite space. She (the truth) is walking behind me. We are walking through the row of trees, holding each other's hand.

- But that is even worse! That is megalomania. You are deranged. How do you explain the fact that we live today, right now while we are having this discussion?

I smiled with the inner side of the smile, discreetly, just for myself. He thought we were having a discussion, that "I" was having a discussion. I let him talk without revealing my inner smile.

-You are the modern man too. You belong to this time, to today's time, just like the rest of us. No matter how hard you try, you are here right now. Your denial and your rejection cannot change anything. You too are in that waiting room of yours. Besides, how do you explain the fact that we, as tiny and small as you like to put it, can see you so enormous, so overly enlarged? Please, try to explain it to us, to the plain and simple minds! I'll tell you how. We can see you because you are here, just like us. You can be resentful, you can smile malevolently at others or at yourself, but you are here. When you wake up from your dreams, from your silly daydreaming, you wake up in the same world as ours. Exactly here! Perhaps right here in this pub. You will laugh at yourself, perhaps you'll be a little bit sullen because a pleasant dreaming was interrupted, but it will become clear to you as it did to us that this world is the only one, and we are in it. And remember my dear friend, you'll be glad the day you come to your senses.

I wanted to tell them that I wasn't here. For a long time, I haven't been anywhere in particular. I was freed from the duty to be somewhere, to have my own place. I was a tiny cloud in the sky padded only with hints, and I just happened to be here now, because of a doze, because of the postponed farewell, but certainly not because I wanted to be with them. I wanted to tell him that, for a long time, I have been the eternal and not the modern man, the man with space, not the man

with place. But I didn't. My good will was cold, reserved, staying on the distance from the bar and the octopus, from the accordion and the nose. I wasn't kind enough to explain things. I didn't think he would understand any of that. I wasn't sure I understood any of that myself. I thought he might be right, but my sincerity or at least my vanity wouldn't allow me to acknowledge it. However, I was sure about one thing - I wasn't rational. That was beyond any doubt. It made me feel proud. That was the biggest difference between me and the modern man, the tentacle-man. I knew that rationality was a virtue for him. I would give him that, and I know he would be moved to tears, and would probably fly up in the air like a balloon filled with narcotic gas if he heard it from me. He might even kiss me, buy me a drink and forget about the smashed nose. But deep inside I believed that rationality is a subtle lie. I believed it was the most lavish costume which the modern man wore, the one he boasted about and bragged about, the one in which he slept, used to take a bath in, the one he used to wear instead of a wig and to wrap around his frozen feet; the costume with which his toilet seat and his catafalque were padded, and who knows what else. The costume was tailored by the latest fashion of worthless vanity, and although I wasn't any less vain than them, I hated the fashion and everything that could be stopped and exhausted in today. Besides, this base troublemaker was there only to fill out the void. If only man glanced at this feathery fair, he could see that the proud males are the most rational beings today. Women retained the honesty required, and they feared openly in their fears, without pretense, without repentance, without shame. They haven't made pathologically disfigured freak you call reason (rationality) out of their fears. A woman wore the fear as an ornament of her womanliness. It was her charm, her sexual appeal; that is how she became more a woman. That is why all those who felt threatened by another person's courage, and they were many, were attracted to her. She could buy any of these pathetic males cheaply, if only she crouched a bit and pretended she was more afraid, less brave, and less reasonable. But the men became reasonable. The men, these blunt chauvinists became simply reasonable, and that was it, but that was already too much, too reasonable.

Standing like that, in the middle of a long deep thinking and absent, I wished to tell them that courage and strength have not any tight kinship with the modern man. The blood has simply been diluted over time. It even slightly changed the color. The courage became an atavism. It became passé, cured superstition belonging to the times when people naively believed that the world is ruled by heroes and godlike men. Some of that ancient world did remain though. Perhaps a ruin, a decomposed body with few loose hairs, or a damaged statue at best. This ornament of masculinity could be traded with only in second-hand shops. All of it started when passion

dwindled in man, and the shiny aluminum grid of reason was erected in its place. That was the moment when the total pestilence of humanity began. During this Moloch of spirit, the most sacred sacrifice of a grandiose era has been made. In a single stroke honesty, grace, sincerity and who knows what else have been wiped out from the face of the earth. I have thought many times that being reasonable must have felt like magic. A single sexless metallic virtue could replace so many things. I concluded that nowadays is the time of transvestites. They thrive best in the feminised cultures governed by reason.

But I didn't tell any of this, or perhaps I did, but in some mute way, using animal language, perhaps. In any case, I was sure they knew it. Maybe it was the accordion, maybe the stroller, or the unfaithful face which once used to be a quiet freak under the stairs. Anyway, I was content; I was even more content after my eloquent silence. This feeling of satisfaction led me to reflect on the modern man's content.

I remember I asked myself often how the satisfied man of our time has thought. In the sudden attack of truthfulness, I actually wanted to know whether I was content. Am I content in the same way as the modern man, or am I content to the outermost boundaries of contentment? Do I honestly wish to be content? It seemed as if I asked this question aloud. That is what they fixed looks suggested at least. This time I had coughed before I spoke.

- Gentlemen, I'm asking myself how the content man of today feels. Has he become indifferent to the blisters he got from living in the narrow space of his insincere modesty? Or is he perhaps blasé and a dulled cynic? Well, I would say that the latter is impossible. True cynicism demands strength, and in this day and age the strength is mostly superfluous. Today it is enough to utter few words of self-praise, like in sorcery and to pretend that someone else has uttered them because that someone was suddenly overwhelmed by the uncontrollable outburst of truthfulness, and the whole thing is satisfactorily done.

- It is also necessary to follow the motto that a person needs not to know what is harmful to the vanity. Knowing more that the vanity can handle is the anathema of knowledge. That is exactly what it is, gentlemen, the anathema! The modern man looks down on fairy tales, but he is deeply convinced that he is a magic castle. Nothing which might diminish or take away its beauty is allowed beyond its gates. The modern man hardly ever forgives other people's beauty, and the envy is the defeat which pains him most because the envy lured him out of the security of his walls. As soon as he leaves the walls, he is an ordinary steak served on someone's plate, an undressed dummy

in the show window, ridiculous, shy, medium rare and discontent. That is why the modern man only unwillingly leaves the walls. This is his best recipe for the content.

They looked worried. The crippled accordion player looked sadly at me, as if he weren't sure whether I was on his side. I think even the blood stopped dripping from the mashed nose of the octopus with nine tentacles. That's why I stopped talking. At least I didn't talk loudly.

But let me mention that the entire scene got few new details. These details didn't play any decisive role, but still it is worth mentioning them here. Either due to the idle life in the pub or the general boredom our little town has suffered for years, the incident taking place at the bar drew attention of other guests. One of them couldn't resist taking part in it. He actually felt kind of invited. A small middle-aged man in the black coat made few stiff strides and placed himself next to me, but he wasn't suggesting that the vicinity symbolized the alliance. There was something theatrically slow in the movements of his hand when he stroked his mustache. I spent the whole minute watching his opening ritual.

- I do not wish to disturb - he said while disturbing – but I couldn't help listening to your argument. You see, I have often thought about contentment, about people, the way they are satisfied, the degree to which they are satisfied and things like that. I have also thought about things which make people feel satisfied. I don't mean things as objects, but things in general. Thus, I have gained some insights into these matters, and I can state that they are quite reliable. For instance, to seek satisfaction is to seek a short-lived state, resting on the coincidence of two ideas. However, a person can thereby easily overlook one crucial thing - the satisfaction is not older than happiness. A man seeks happiness, but he is satisfied when he is happy, that is, when he is

A lady coming straight from the door over to our little group interrupted him rudely. Still wearing her coat she thundered with masculine voice, saying that happiness isn't older than satisfaction. The satisfaction is older because it is closer to man, and thereby it is also tamer. A man defines the satisfaction and the degree to which he can be satisfied, whereas happiness, as she claimed, is always outside, out of reach. The happiness always dwells in some distant, often fictitious lands. It grows up in the trees, typically on the thinnest and most distant branches, and if one wants to get it, he either has to risk the life trying to reach it or cut his tree of happiness. The happiness is, she concluded, most often given as alms. It is accidental and sometimes it is even imposed. She gave us the example of her husband, who has been blind most of his life, but despite the fact that blindness made him unhappy, he could find satisfaction in things close to him, things which didn't grow on trees. To her surprise and shock her husband completely disagreed with her,

saying that both these things are illusory and unreal. He said he never had the satisfaction of seeing happiness, so he believed none of them existed. She reminded him not to interrupt, and not to disagree, but he merely told her off, adding that this only confirms his claim about the illusion of happiness and satisfaction. The octopus shook its head, rejecting both standpoints. It caused the short man to smile bitterly while stroking his mustache. They spoke all at once, they were angry; they resented each other's view. The fat man with the broken nose screamed breaking the cacophony.

One of the tentacles shouted that we strayed from the main subject of the discussion, which was the essence of the metaphysical extensibility of reality. He pointed to the blood on the floor, insisting on determining the metaphysical nature of the cruor and of the whole violent act. The reality for that gnome was the nose and nothing else.

- The nose, gentlemen, the nose! Everything is so simple and straightforward. At the bottom of all this are a broken nose and an innocent victim. The hands have been gone, and now the nose is gone too. Both of them are handed over to nothingness, and that is a simple metaphysical claim made of flesh and blood. That is all there is to it; there aren't any boundaries, there is no room for fantasy and nebulous silly talk about dreams, about extensibility and other stuff. The hands said everything there is to say, just like the nose.

Another tentacle kept repeating like a parrot with crying voice "Completely senseless, completely senseless! Completely fleshy and real, and yet so simple. Completely simple".

His cries made even the accordion player stop sobbing for the moment. Everyone was looking at me. It felt as if their gaze of jurors suddenly woke me from the sleep, but I remained calm.

I wanted to reply, but since I wasn't in a hurry, I first took a good look at the interior of the pub. The newly married couple was dying, and on their table the half eaten soup was still fuming. The undertaker was firmly asleep. The dancing women were tired, lying down on the floor. They no longer had either cloths or breasts. In front of them, there was a puddle of dark urine. One of the bumpkins was trying to drown the other one in this shallow dark-yellowish puddle. The lovers on the floor were chewing through the rotten planks and craning over their shoulders to see if Tonka has watched them. The priest took advantage of the confusion and secretly finished my beer.

I looked again at the crowd at the bar. I shrugged. My look was dull. However, the inner space of my awoken volcano wasn't yet exhausted, and my silence took over once again where the monologue stopped a little while ago. I was still thinking about the contentment. I

thought there may exist another kind of content people. I remembered a bank employee I once knew. He liked to debate about the contentment. He debated aloud, but only with himself because as he said, everything a man has to discuss regarding the contentment he has to do it by himself. Thus, I used to find him engaged in the fierce discussion on the deserted railway platforms, in public toilets, at the cancelled business meetings, and it was rumored that he used to stop in the middle of passionate love act to discuss the satisfaction and its essence. I remember he worked out a scale of satisfaction where he distinguished different levels. He assumed there were six or seven levels of satisfaction, but it was possible that there were many more, perhaps as much as forty. However, he could only identify the first two with precision while he still worked on the third one. He termed the first level the primitive or the rude, and he believed that the great majority of satisfied people were on this level. In order to reach that level it was enough to avoid harmful insights and flatter oneself on a daily basis. But the employee was an ambitious man and couldn't be content with only one level. So he moved over to the second level. When viewed from the second level, the first level - the singing of the eulogy to one's vanity- seemed quite inappropriate. He found it actually quite embarrassing. It was subcutaneous inflammation of the carefully nursed etiquette, and had to be treated. Hence, the second level required more. Most often it required objective recognition of greatness; that is, the people on the second level needed to know how great they were in order to calculate with certainty how satisfied they can be. However, as the banker found out, it turned out to be a lot more difficult to know oneself than to believe oneself. I recalled he was telling me with the lump in his throat that a little bit of vulgar self-love could settle the latter in a matter of seconds. But the knowledge was like a jigsaw. A man had to put the pieces together in a pretty convincing way, in the way that seemed as the only possible and first then could a man believe it. However, this still didn't guarantee the satisfaction, because the knowledge had to be in harmony with other kinds of knowledge, with other insights. To make things even worse, the entire enterprise demanded honesty, sincerity and impartiality, and none of these could one learn. You had to have it from the very beginning. That's why the satisfied people on the second level tried to play down and trivialize the importance of this precondition, for otherwise the entire structure would collapse due to of a pure chance, or because of mere have and not have. But this strategy didn't always produce the desired results because the whole issue regarding the satisfaction has been imagined as something you both have to know and have. I remembered once when sitting in a broken trolley, restless and bit sad, he told me the following: "You see my friend, before we can know our satisfaction, we need to know how the satisfied man looks like, and we need to know

ourselves, before we can get the correct result, that is, the result which would satisfy everyone. However, the trouble was we didn't know how the satisfied man looks like, so we were never sure whether the jigsaw would add up in your own case, which was something we feared terribly much. Therefore, we were constantly changing and rearranging pieces which didn't fit. Sometimes we used to alter the satisfied man so he could fit what we knew about ourselves, and sometimes we used to adjust the knowledge about ourselves, so it fitted what we knew about the satisfied man. We often changed the satisfied man's hairstyle, his way of walking, the color of his eyes and the accent, his convictions, tastes and the like. We dressed him up as if he were a shop dummy, and then we imitated him the best way we could. However, since it wasn't always helping, some of us resorted to outright falsification of the contentment. Some of us would simply get ourselves into the most popular formula of contentment with ascetic strictness. Others condemned it as cheating, insecurity, that is, the vanity. The interesting thing was that none of us wished to give up and go back to the first level of contentment. There existed an unwritten law prohibiting such fall once and for all, so even the most scrupulous counterfeiter refrained from that. You see, my friend, the tricky part was that we kept refusing to acknowledge the vanity. We dismissed haughtily even the most harmless insinuations that we suffered from vanity, that is, from the subjectively distorted image of our worth. To be honest, it seemed like even greater vanity to me. Either because of that or because of something else, all of us second level-satisfied people had in common to have been discontent with our contentment. That's why we were easy to spot. Our fakery was obvious because we looked at our incompleteness with resentment, with tears in our eyes. It was simply hard for us to be content. We had to get used to our satisfaction because it felt like wearing someone else's underwear or too small shoes. We were on neither side, my friend, a sort of semi-neuters. We often got envious. Imprisoned behind the scornful smile, we watched with grudge the parade of the first level satisfied people. We were getting desperate. We were envious, we doubted, we dithered. In the moments of the worst wavering, we tried, hiding it of course from one another, to unravel the secret of their satisfaction, even though we previously mocked it, rejected it and marked it as loathsome forgery. We denied ourselves the boldness of those rustic and non-objective illusionists, and it caused us additional suffering. We suffered from our monkish moderation, from our insincere modesty. We suffered with dignity though, and this at least gave us the satisfaction."

Remembering this ambitious bank employee I recalled that I was once on that damn second level. I was too obsessed with the desire to mathematically determine the path and the curvature of my content. I believed that was the way to become calm, serene and most importantly

satisfied. I recalled how I suffered. I suffered because of my face, which in no way wanted to fit into my equations. It kept leaving me in the lurch; it kept me on the verge of discontent, which stared at me black like a mining shaft. Now it all seemed so distant. My content as well as my discontent sunk together with one of those wrecks carrying people from one island of happiness to another, from one coincidence to another. They vanished together with one of my past lives, probably the one from which I only inherited a valid ticket for the circus, which long ago had left our town. I was on the third level of the satisfaction scale. Or I was perhaps on the forty-third level. Anyways, I didn't feel any of this. It didn't matter to me whether it is I or someone else flattering me. I was deaf, unreasonable, removed from the crowd and insensitive. I was the stroller, the space and many other things that couldn't make a man feel either satisfied or dissatisfied. I was simply moving too fast to think about the content. I didn't have time for that. Or perhaps I had too much of it, just like the space, so I didn't have to think about the satisfaction right now. My life wasn't stopping to weigh it; it wasn't stopping to measure the road it has walked down and to admire it. My life was moving unstoppably.

Although I only thought about these things, they heard me. They heard it all. I probably wasn't thinking so quietly, I probably blurted out all of it in a low voice, or perhaps I shouted it. Anyway, their silence felt like a bag of wet sand on my head. In the entire situation, I was endlessly generous, although it wasn't my intention. In fact, I had no any particular intention, but I wanted to give a piece of myself, even forcibly, by smashing a nose and defending two severed hands. What I said about the modern man and the contentment was an idea. One of the few I had, but what an idea! The best one I've ever had! The invigorating idea! Extremely sharp and penetrating idea! And they stood there, in front of me. So close, but so unreal, as if drawn with a finger on a misty window. The tentacle-men! I stabbed them in the eye with this idea, but none of them even bat an eye. They were blind. I hacked their ears with this idea, but again nothing happened. They were deaf. Then I stabbed them at heart, but they only compassionately smiled at me, as if they saw a mentally deranged person. They have been dead for too long. I gave up forbearingly and went back to my table. My unplanned discussion and the monologue were over. My half-loud half-thinking was over too.

The octopus waved its tentacles in discontent. Polished skulls protested raising empty glasses. Before they push me back into my sooty bat-hole, they wanted to disprove everything I have said or loudly remained silent about. They will probably disprove even the memory of me. They wanted a duel because, at that moment, it would give them the satisfaction, at least for a

while. But I couldn't any more. I was already moving away. I was moving away like a comet. The whole universe laid open before me, and I didn't want to wait any longer. The cosmic indifference was sprouting inside me. The patch around my heart was paved with monoliths, which only contained themselves and their inner completeness. I didn't even try to be satisfied with my generous deed towards those severed hands, towards the broken nose. The accordion player stopped sobbing. He probably dreamt a new dream in which he had the eyes that didn't cry or at least spongy hands which could soak up his tears. Perhaps his new dream was crippled, cheerfully crippled. Perhaps in his new dream he didn't miss someone like me, a guardian devil, someone who understands him. In any case, I was dispensable. My attack or rather my disgraceful act was over. I was overheard, forgotten and filed as usual, but I wasn't forgiven. How could I be? Broken nose isn't something one forgives so easily, let alone the forceful re-education. I didn't fear their revenge. I was out of the reach of their stupidity. The needle in my stomach slept firmly, and I was ready to forget the entire episode. I overreacted, but already in the middle of this circus act I became indifferent.

However, the whole thing got a sudden twist when Tonka interfered. I wasn't aware that she has watched us the whole time and that she heard everything I said and thought. She heard as much as they did, perhaps even more, more than I heard. She actually heard more than I thought. Tonka was on my side, and my heart started to purr rapidly. She wasn't cruel and hard that night. I didn't know what the reason was behind her unexpected openness, but I was endlessly happy when she whispered in my ears to come up the stairs with her. I went straight away, but I walked stately slow. Deep inside I felt, the moment has arrived, and that this was the final climbing, which at the same time meant goodbye. The stairs leading to the upper floor was my runway for the eternity, the solemn entering into the space. I feared the last step on this climbing was the highest moment of my rising, so I climbed the stairs with the speed of a sloth, enjoying every single step. Every step was equally dear to me, equally important. Every touch of my feet against the creaking tread was leaving the track from which the children of the new hope will arise. The marks I left on the stairs wore the buds of another eternity; they wore tiny drops holding the star constellations or a night that wanted to last as eon. I was drawing out like many times before.

In any case, my climbing was a ceremony long enough to hear everything Tonka had to say. But that night Tonka has for a long time spoken only with her gaze, and with the tips of her fingers. She spoke first. She strode in front of me and somewhere in my yet undreamed future she was finishing my unfinished thoughts. She held my hand while I shivered on her palm, staring at

her jiggly tits. I imagined how warm it was between them, burning down rapidly in that imagining. She whispered something with her eyelashes when I stood at the door of her room, but I didn't hear it. Next time she said something I was already lying totally naked on the patched sheet. She was all over the room. At one moment in bed, at another at the window, or under the bed, or behind the curtain. For an instant, I worried if she still might be on the stairs, but the voice of her artificial eyelashes drew the worries away.

Somewhere in the distance it thundered, somewhere in the distance, the sky was thickened and terrifying, somewhere in the distance the cries of the parched land could be heard, and the Elias' blazes could be seen. The whole world was vanishing in the storm, in the waiting, in the foolishness, in the horrific whirl of human fates, somewhere in the distance. The space between us melted away, and we became close like never before. There in the room, on the patched sheet, shielded from the storm by a thin curtain, the closeness grew along with the silent gasping. Only the whisper of her eyelashes could crawl under the sweat bodies' kisses. She spoke for a long time, and although I began listening too late, I could hear she was packing in her heart everything I said and thought that night. I'm lying; these tiny packages contained more than I would ever dare to think, let alone to say. She had been true as always. That stormy night she helped me deliver such a mighty truth that I would never dare to believe it. That's why I have been able to hear the whisper of her eyelashes overpowering the thunderstorm in the distance for a long time after that night.

A great deal of what she said had been lost in the thunder, or it turned into a froth, like the wave crashed against a lonely reef. Anyway, I remember she said how she once, as a young girl while weaving by the window, saw a man walking in the middle of the street. That man, in a dark formal dress, in the thronged streets, in the daybreak of hope, in the happiest illusion any town has ever seen; that man with two or three pieces of heavens wrapped around his long arms has walked towards other people with delight. But the nervous mob quickly got mad at him because he walked in the opposite direction. Barking and curses broke out. Soon after the war cry resounded. The street shook from the thud of the heavy, constant marching steps, the flags fluttered, the curses rattled, the barricades darkened, and the swords shone; the hymns were sung, people marched and yelled from the top of their lungs; someone quickly dashed off a marching song soon everyone sang along and that song, with the simple chorus, celebrated their direction of movement. But the man kept walking in the opposite direction in the middle of the street. He didn't look back, so she never saw his face. She saw him again the next day, but again the lonely stroller didn't look back, so his face remained a mystery to her. He walked down the street for several days, and she could see how his suit got

torn by all those insults they were sticking in his back. She saw one of his sleeves fall off when a woman threw her arms around his shoulder and bit his little finger. Some of the larger men kept pushing him with their bellies, the older ones used their walking sticks; the children tried to trip him, an old woman pulled out his hair, but he didn't stop walking in the opposite direction in the middle of the street. She saw when his suit fell apart, she saw when he walked only wearing a shirt, with bare feet, and in the end, she saw him walking entirely naked. The raging mob was getting angrier. Their patience was running out. That naked man, who constantly defied everyone, has now become offensive and scandalous because of the nakedness of his soul. The discontent reached its peak, and they called the police. She saw when they handcuffed him and took him into the car. She saw in the police car he sat in the opposite direction of the car's movement. She thought with horror that, by driving him backwards, they will take him back to the dark catacombs of the past in an attempt to make a new suit for him and to teach him proper direction of walking. She saw all that, but she didn't see his face. It made her sad. The situation got back to normal very quickly. The days were marching again dressed in striped shirts with numbers on the back. Along with them the victorious mob marched, content with its relentlessness and with the triumph of justice. Disturbing contrariness was removed, and now everyone could freely and safely walk again in the same direction.

But Tonka kept thinking about the opposite man, trying to imagine his face. She was under the strong impression of him. Often when she closed her eyes, she could see his butterfly steps carrying him through the muzzle of horror right into the arms of the mob, whose mouth fumed and smoked. At nights, she secretly weaved the lines she imagined were on his face. But it wasn't helping her. As time passed, she felt stronger and stronger urge to see his face. This feeling initially grew out of pity, because he wasn't guilty in her eyes. He wasn't even a flower crunching under the weight of snow, or a tree knocked over by the storm. He was more innocent than that. He was cut by the blade of the collective dullness. A prosaic wall, where the hopelessness of the fake happiness was walled up has crashed down on him. On its surface, the words of gratitude were written and adorned with urine stains and bird droppings. The town kept the memory of his skinny tortured body in the leprosarium, but she has thought compassionately that no one could be that much guilty.

Later she realized that the opposite man left the bud of delight in her heart, and not only that. The delight was only the first touch, a gentle hint promising much more. He wore the scars she felt she too was going to wear one day. Already then she could feel the painful taste of these scars, which, as she said, was liberating because it was unbearable. She wanted to walk like

him because she thought that was the only way to wear the future scars without collapsing under their weight. Walking like he was the only way to rejoice in the scars and to cry because of them, to hate them and to wear them proudly as ornaments. She didn't wish these scars, she never wished any scars, but she knew they had been waiting for her; they were going unstoppably towards her. She wanted to take a deep breath and to surface on the other side of the pain which the scars were carrying to her. Therefore, she wanted more than anything else to see his face, to see the expression in his eyes when he walked in the middle of the street. She decided then to learn something about him, to find him.

Since nobody in the town wished to mention the unpleasant incident, nor did anyone have any sympathy and understanding for the people who mentioned the opposite man, she had to carry out her plan on the sly. It was then, she said, her secret life began. Inside her, the awakened wishes rushed, inside her the desires surged, in her heart the invincible army marched. On the outside, the vortex was concealed by the silk handkerchief. Over the handkerchief, like over the still surface of the water, the hunchbacked shadows of the outer world were passing, moving, of course in, the same direction. Under it, the seeming tranquility of chaos was hiding. During this turbulent time, there existed Tonka sitting by the window, weaving, and Tonka looking for the forbidden face of the opposite man, the man who offended a whole town. But the opposite man was gone. He disappeared completely as if the earth had swallowed him up. The only thing she found during the long nightly roaming through the empty streets was the pieces of his torn suit. She was collecting them painstakingly and putting them in a box. After she had collected all pieces with the black stains of coagulated blood, she began sawing a suit out of them secretly at night. When she was done, she looked at it and threw it over her shoulders.

She used to search its pockets, and then one night, while the town was firmly asleep, she found the daybreak in the inside pocket of the suit. She got extremely scared and put it quickly back. She looked around the room, to see if anyone saw her. Her heart was beating rapidly, her palms sweated, but she couldn't resist, and she stuck her hand in the inside pocket again. The very same daybreak shone on her palm once again and the room was illuminated with reddish light of the day, which that night in Tonka's room dawned only for her.

Ghostly light and trembling, she watched with confusion the sun rising on the horizon of her soul while the night still roared over the roofs. The day hidden in the opposite man's suit was being born in Tonka's honor. At first she thought in disbelief that it was a chimera, that she was going mad, that she was having visions and that the secretly born day was purple phantom. But

soon after she ran through the void of doubt, she started believing strongly that this supernumerary day, her private day was the face of the opposite man. She saw him at last. She felt her feet sinking into the tiny bluish ray of dawning light; she stepped on the face of the opposite man. She walked through her private day, where the time dissipated like a rainfall. She let the thin cobalt clouds ruffle her hair; she let the new moon's arms warm her around the waist. She spent the whole day walking the hills where the mountain winds played with the letters of her name, mixing them with the letters of someone else's name. Surrendered to the vortex in which she felt lighter than the moonlight, she was picking the letters trying to put together the name of that someone else. But the winds kept blowing them apart. Her body perished and was born again every time she smiled. Her body became solid every time she breathed in a drop of dew, every time she saw her fingers turning into a flock of bronze birds scattered all over the sky. Her face glowed so intensely it could thaw the cold city night knocking on the window of her little room. She was hopping deliriously for a long time, leaving the kisses shaped like footprints on the face of the opposite man. Lost in the fervor of walking she could sense the depth of her untouched purity. Through the transparency of her soul, she could glimpse the vastness of the space, which made her anxious, bare-feetly free and unreally light. In the evening, she watched the sun sinking into the opposite man's eye. The eye was taking in everything the sun caressed by its rays. She got scared of the goodbye; she grabbed few remaining sun rays, made a skein out of them and played for a long time with that entangled remnant of the greatest day that has ever happened.

And then all of a sudden, a pale light of the morning splashed her street, splashing soon after the entire town. She was slapped by the uproar of hundred voices. She could hear the threats and shouting from the crowd, spittle came hitting her cheek. She looked around and saw she was walking in the middle of the street, in the direction opposite everyone else. People started beating her; they dragged her along the street, they cut her hair and tore to pieces the opposite man's suit she wore. They called her the opposite woman, the evil woman, the crazy woman. They called the police and the police took her away.

She waited for a long time for the bars to open, for the humid prison walls to crumble away and for the town to forgive. But she waited in vain. Dark nights went by one after the other, dragging a stump of the sky over the narrow roof window. Tonka waited for the fury to subside. She waited for someone to throw a little bit of mercy or at least a little bit compassion through that window. But she waited in vain. The pain grew unstoppably bigger inside the soaked rectangle of the prison cell. The contours of the content little town and its ice-cold justice slowly faded away in

her heart. Soon the only piece of its goodness left could easily fit into that tiny roof window. She was alone. Only the memory of the day which dawned in a tiny pocket lay curled up in her lap. When the prison guards dozed she used to sneak out through a key hole and walk barefooted on the face of the opposite man. The opposite man and the opposite woman danced on the tiny thread joining love with eternity in the middle of her heart. The bars through which she watched the stumps of human goodness and the mute shadows of the long prison nights left the scars on her face, the scars she foreboded she was going to wear someday. She used to wake up with the taste of moist mortar on her lips; she used to cover her sad eyes with her hands trying to swallow the toughest pieces of the pain. She was swallowing voraciously every single one of these pieces, fearing they might occupy the place of the memory of the opposite man's breadth. And she wanted to feel this breadth now more than ever. She wished to have the breadth of the opposite man forever.

Tonka kept talking for a long time about her opposite man, about someone's name never found, about the town and people, about aunts, destiny, characters and the pub. But most of the time she was talking about the breadth. She talked in a low voice while I tried to stay as deep in that talking as I could, deep inside Tonka and her breasts. I was screaming because of the fullness and delight. That night I lived and died in the explosions in which I was scattered like a purple rain all over her wrinkled body. I loved her as I never loved any other woman. In her embrace, I could shout so powerfully I could hail her from the bottom of the deepest sea. In her embrace, I wouldn't notice if someone stole the sun and put a fag-end in its place. I wouldn't even be angry about it, in her embrace. That is why I squeezed her tighter and plunged my hands into her as if in a desert well. I shone like a ducat while her eyes soaked up all my cries, smiling with tiny jade tears.

Two castaways on an island on which they are dying their final bliss, their greatest passion, that's what we were. If anyone ever finds us on that island, he'll find a treasure chest and two hearts made of mother-of-pearl in it. Not a testament, not a sign, not a motive, nothing.

In the meantime, the room was constantly changing its shape, becoming round at one moment, and flat like a pancake at the next, the pancake in which two sweaty bodies were wrapped. After the big bang, the seeds of tired passion shone everywhere around the creaky bed. Through the glimmering heat of her silent gasps, I could sense the warm touch of her closeness. I was close to her although I was parting from her. Or I was perhaps putting it off again. Anyway, the most magnificent night ran through my body, and I was holding it spasmodically through the patched sheet.

And then she said something that somehow hurt me. She pushed me away for the moment. She looked at me pleadingly and said that my stroller reminds her of her opposite man and that she wants to see him close-up, to see him walking. I stood confused. She knew about the stroller – I thought asking myself how. She was looking for her “opposite”, and she thought I could help her. She thought I might be the walking stick to lean on. The room regained its previous shape, and from the pancake the betrayed youth and the crippled desire, though still warm, rolled over each to its side. I looked at her, then at me, then back at her again. The silence lasted long. It lasted all the time I was unpacking the case of questions. She saw these questions and said that sometimes she used to follow me at night, that she knew about my Cyclopes’ eye, and that she wanted to peep through it, because she was hoping he was there. She was hoping that my stroller was her opposite man. At first I didn’t believe it was possible. At first I was sure it was impossible. The stroller was only one, only mine. I asked her why she thinks that I, since when she has been thinking that I, and how long she has been thinking that I resembled her in my departures, my wanderings, fears, half-heartedness, my doubts, hopes and longings. She said that long time ago and quite accidentally she heard one of my thoughts, the one I wrote down on the backside of an old picture. She was touched by that thought so deeply that she kept it in her bosom, trying to find its creator. She was unsure at the beginning, but she has been suspecting me for a long time now, and tonight, while listening to my duel at the bar, she was convinced it was me.

I recalled that thought. I recalled when and how it began. I recalled also that I had always shuddered at it, a little bit though. The thought was about infinity. It started long ago, and I kept coming back to it, but I never really dared to follow it to the end, just like I have never dared to follow the stroller in his-my space. It was one of those thoughts for which I hoped to be the turning point or at least the decisive weapon in the fight against all those thoughts they were forcibly putting on me like a straitjacket. It happened in the early days of my rebellion, overfilled with numerous failed attempts to be born again. I had been working out this thought in details; I adorned it, attaching fringes to it and dressing it up. At night, I used to cover myself with it, believing it could make me warm, or at least make me invisible. And then I suddenly stopped thinking it. I folded it nicely, making the edges straight, and put it in the closet where I kept some useless, but well kept things. For a long time, I had believed I was too old for it or the thought was too young for me. I don’t know what exactly Tonka saw in this thought, but I remember she mentioned something about its breadth, about it being enormously wide, and about how she saw it once basking in the sun, probably in one of those walks on the opposite man’s face she loved to take. I

remembered that the thought was broad, the broadest one I've ever thought. It was a thought about endlessness, so how else could one think of it except as endlessly broad. But I didn't feel like unpacking it. I wasn't willing to take out those dusty memories and retell them again. I was all right as it was. I didn't feel sorry about her lost youth; I didn't feel the nausea in her stomach overfilled with chunks of undigested misery. I didn't even believe that someone like her opposite man really existed. I was saying goodbye, I was leaving, and I didn't wish anything to deter me from my so many times postponed goal. I was afraid it might bring the bad luck; I feared the things might go wrong if I tumbled everything over, looking for the long-forgotten thought.

It is a lie! I was actually jealous. In the same way as I once was jealous of my face, I was now jealous of my stroller. He was mine, my creation; he was my retreat from thunder, my space, the breadth and the endlessness. No one, not even Tonka could press herself in our tiny cocoon-like room without pushing one of us out. Besides, it upset me that our love act has been interrupted. I was rubbing my deflated limb, I was mad; I could feel the emptiness of betrayal. I hesitated; I was quiet, immersed in thinking. I pretended I was listening to the thunder in the distance, I tried to change the subject, to talk about severe weather, exotic animals or distant countries, but Tonka was headstrong. She was lying right next to me, somehow bigger than me and stronger than me. But I was still mute. I decided to stay mute to the bitter end or until I cave in; I decided to take the revenge refusing to speak because my heart was passed over as if it were a puddle on the sidewalk and because my dick sadly howled. I felt when she squeezed my wrist firmly, and I blurted everything out in one breath.

The thought which Tonka mentioned and which, as it turned out later, she knew better than I did, was born one evening in my little room in the attic. I had thought about many things for a long time, but most of all about endlessness, and then one night I literally jumped out of the bed, and I started giving the lesson very enthusiastically. My audience consisted of a chest of drawers, a cupboard, a glass of water, an old picture - actually only the frame was there because I took out the painting to sell it - and a watch on the wall, which was constantly lying.

The thought was a sort of explanation of the origin of thinking, or actually of the end of thinking and the explanation of endlessness to which the pogrom of thought was inseparably linked. I started off by saying that thought was initially born as a dream. As such, it was the child of endlessness, and it could, just like a dream, move freely through endlessness. What scholars much later understood by thought had lost almost everything of its original dreamlike nature. A thought became the thought when, as people agreed unanimously, it cut the endlessness loose. But I rejected

this view, which to me looked like butchering the thought. I called it the alienation of a man from a dream. With the intent of convincing them, I pointed to a number of difficulties connected with their thought. I mentioned how their thought always comes in conflict with itself when it judges because it wants to conjoin the infinity with finality. Since they loved judging more than anything else, I knew they wouldn't be happy to hear this. I explained to them that every time they judge, even hastily, their thoughts bite into the gigantic body of the world, each from its side, and while chewing their mouthful, they begin to sing joyfully how the whole world is in their stomach. They considered this ritual to be quite harmless, and without it the judging was impossible. But the thoughts they talked about were undernourished and because of their poor diet, they also looked ridiculously dwarfish, just like those scraps of the world they used to chew. Even when their thoughts took as much as possible in a single bite, they would usually remain hungry. Instead of eating from big words, their thoughts had to eat from empty shells of tiny worms, getting thus less and less, leaving behind them only the skinny words. These skinny words were, though, handier and easier to juggle, so they could be nicely packed like a Christmas present with pink ribbon on it.

While explaining this to them, I suddenly remembered the judge who was passionately in love with mathematics and logic. This judge wanted to find out some kind of constant of truth using only two words – necessity and possibility. These two words were neither too skinny nor too unwieldy, and served more to order other words and thoughts. He personally favored necessity, because he believed that people have always had more respect for it and more confidence in it. Because of this, he has always wondered whether it was possible to determine why anything in this world is necessary. He wished everything he considered delicious and everything he liked also to be true, yet he thought of truth as being eternal and infinite, that is, as he himself has put it, necessary. However, every time he began fixing a proof according to the old, well known recipe, it turned out that a little bit of infiniteness is removed from infinity every time necessity is attached to it. This meant, as he wisely noted, fettering of infinity, and proceeding in this way one could at best get a bordered truth and bordered infinity.

The problem was in the fact that he tied firmly around his waist his contemporary world- his today's world. He liked his world, but he wanted everything he liked to be true in all possible worlds he could imagine, that is, to be necessary and thereby infinite. However, the trouble was that once you engage yourself with infinity, no matter how cautious you are, you could always chance upon another possible world in which your truth is no longer true. Every time such possible world sneaked in necessity died along with all necessities he has ever known of, or imagined. When

necessity dies, and the truth dies along with it, then infinity triumphs and the whole business of stretching the necessity into infinity remains a half-cooked soup. Thus, a man cannot judge as he wishes, nor can he judge all those he wishes to judge. The best truth he's got is like a guard dog. It is loyal as long as you feed it meat; it attacks all alien truths, and never leaves the yard. Someone who had gone far into endlessness, who is taking a walk in some remote corner of endlessness, he could sleep peacefully, utterly free and unjudged. Because, you see, from the perspective of endlessness, every thought is just another possibility among infinitely many possibilities, a sudden, fleeting blow of wind, which can tickle a little bit and that is all.

I have to say the judge-logician was an honest man. He openly admitted that he wanted to be the measure of everything. He admitted that while chained to the world he was convinced was his, he nevertheless wanted to judge about everything, or at least he believed he had a right to do so. For, you know, he was an ambitious man. He couldn't be content with only finding out how necessity behaves. That was banality since necessity always behaved like infinity, or at least highly similar to it. He wished more than that. He wished to dress his judgments and his affinities in the necessity's clothing, that is, he wished to make them infinite. However, he wasn't ready to admit that his wishes were reaching much further than his fettered thoughts and his skinny words, carrying his thoughts in their arms. He sensed that the being of a true and pure thought contains infinity, but he didn't know how to conquer or tame it. I believe he feared even more if one of his thoughts broke away and walked into infinity, he wouldn't then be able to tame it. He had feared he would then remain alone and deserted by his thoughts.

Thus, in order to escape his troubles with infinity he had to alter it since infinity didn't wish any ordinary company along reducing it, making it smaller and slower. He had to tame the wildness of infinity, so his pet, necessity, could ride on it. There existed, of course, a third possibility. He could simply shrug and accept the fact that his favorite allies, truth, necessity and infinity have been engaged in a quarrel. But his faith wouldn't allow him that. And he also feared the uprising of his skinny thoughts, to which he had promised infinite power. He could though, as one of his colleagues had cunningly suggested, diplomatically acknowledge that infinity could not be diminished by tying thoughts to one another, so it could still be at service to his darling necessity in the way he wanted. It was only required that every time he judges, he extracts a portion from infinity for which the freshly baked truth, that is his judgment, is valid. In order to keep everyone happy one could always say that the portion thus extracted is something special, it is perhaps more infinite than infinity. He could thus say that there exist lesser truths, more modest truth, and he

trusts them more because it is easier to catch a lie with them. He could also say that there exist his private truths, but I sincerely doubt he had the courage to call any truth his own private truth.

All this fuss about truth, infinity and necessity could have been avoided if he hadn't insisted on freedom, which made his trouble with them endlessly bigger. The problem lied, you see, in the fact that freedom in its pure form represented endlessness. To be straight, in my polemic with furniture this was something I asserted, not he. However, he accepted that freedom, just like endlessness, is infinitely many elements and their constellations. To be frank, I didn't expect anything like that from him. I found it strange that the judge like him, the harsh judge, the precise judge, the endless judge would allow anything to be infinite, and thereby equal to his judgment. The last thing I expected from him is to allow freedom to be infinite, to be indifferent to his judgment, for you know, more than anything else he loved to adjudge people a certain portion of freedom, which always had to be under the sway of his judgment. Anyway, to make things even worse, endlessness liked all its elements, whatever they were, to be constantly moving. It was a true *panta rhei*. In this total chaos, everything coming into existence, every constellation lasting even for a moment represents a possibility – the possibility of freedom! And don't forget gentlemen, freedom is feeding on possibilities. They are its favorite sweets.

I even dared to say that in freedom, all worlds, all possibilities and impossibilities are gathered together into a tiny bundle, which was neither smaller nor bigger than endlessness. Of course, I didn't miss the opportunity to point to the wildly spread misconceptions about freedom, according to which freedom is usually understood as realized and not as a pure possibility. As soon as a man thinks he is free or has freed himself, he is already in captivity. He is taken captive by freedom, and from his frog perspective, he is only trying to grab some crumbs of freedom falling down from the dining table where freedom is being served on giant plates. In the crumbs of freedom he sees everything. This is because he breaks off the tiny pieces from infinity and joyfully shouts that the broken piece is realized when it is broken. He shouts that this tiny bit in his biography is realer than infinity itself, from which it was broken off. But as long as one sticks to infinity, it turns out that freedom exists more as a pure possibility than as the realized one, or the experienced one - the one that has been lived through, is finished and settled once and for all by a single act. You know, as soon as a crumb fell down from the dining table on some poor devil, it turned into such prodigious mouthful that he broke his teeth trying to chew it. However, he remained hungrier than he was before. The only thing that keeps him seemingly full is the envious look other poor devils like himself are giving him, believing naively that he is stuffed, has freed himself, got lucky, has

been rescued and got away with it. I explained all this to him saying that freedom understood as the child of endlessness, and freedom as something experienced are two different things. I explained to him, gesticulating violently with my arms in the empty room, that thought in its infinity is first and foremost free and is not bound to anything, except a little bit to someone who wants to be free. But that kind of bond isn't a big deal because freedom doesn't care much about those who want to take it or only try it. There was enough of freedom for everyone, just like there was enough infinity for everyone and freedom knew it couldn't be used up.

I remember I stood up and repeated once again my initial claim that thought is originally born as the dream. I added that their thought suffers from todayness, which is nothing but an attempt to restrain the being of the pure thought. In the end, I said that the free man's mission is to free thought from its own slavery. I believe I even bowed down and applauded to myself after I finished. That is how the lecture about freedom, infinity and truth ended, the lecture I gave to the walls of my room, in the darkness, completely alone. The next morning I wrote down this grandiose intellectual creation on the back side of the painting I intended to sell. I have been convinced for a long time that it was in the closet. It seemed so distant now, but also unpleasantly alive because already then I knew that none of it was true. Absolutely nothing was true, and all of it was nonsense, a genuine young boy's embarrassment. While theorizing about endlessness I was making rapid progress, jumping from one argument to another as swiftly as a chamois. I took advantage of the fact that I was alone, and no one could oppose me, there was no one to stop me. That's why the shame caused by Tonka knowing all this felt even worse. But she saw something more in it, something uplifting, moving and unyielding. She liked the idea probably because she wanted to free herself from their judgment, to run away from those morbid judges who performed dance macabre on her soul as if it were a trophy of the planted and imposed guilt. When she realized she couldn't rid herself of her fate, she wanted at least to be free from the judgment. She admitted everything; she was guilty in the exact way they demanded from her to be guilty. She died once or twice from the guilt to which she has been sentenced so harshly. She died, perhaps, even nine times. But after she used all her deaths she could die no more, and she had to live. And something in this idea of mine reminded her of her sentence to live, to live even by force, with scars, without shame and without malice.

But as time passed, I was becoming more and more remote from this idea of infinity. I remember the last time I looked back at it, it was a tiny piece of paper attached to my heart like an ad. In the ad it probably stood that I was ready to sell my heart if someone has been ready to pay for

it with lunch, a hug or at least with the signed receipt confirming my existence. But Tonka listened carefully, holding my hand and squeezing it tighter from time to time as if she feared I would stop, I wouldn't tell everything. She had probably never heard such complicated nonsense like this, never heard an idea so eloquent and, so abstract that the only real thing in it was the canvas on which I wrote it. As I already said, on the other side of the canvas there was the painting, which Tonka bought a long time ago quite accidentally. I remembered how the empty frame had stared dully at me while I was talking nonsense about endlessness. Among all pieces of furniture, the frame seemed least interested in my wise words. Everything I said that night was disappearing into nothingness through its wide open mouth. But it turned out that the frame arranged this passionate night in which I was being roasted like in an oven.

Tonka asked me then whether I saw any of this through my Cyclopes' eye. She actually asked me whether the stroller revealed me all of this about endlessness, but then without waiting for the answer, she started talking about the opposite man. She told me that from the bottom of her heart, she believed that the stroller and the opposite man were one and the same. The opposite man had the breadth of the stroller, and the stroller, due to his endless freedom, has often moved in the direction opposite all other two-legged creatures and movable figurines, crawling through the towns of the world. In that respect, he was exactly like her opposite man.

At that moment, I realized once again that she loved her opposite man, that she loved my stroller, and that I was just some sort of marriage broker. This pained me even more. I was used, I was used though in a way that pleased me, but still this wasn't what I had in mind. Tonka believed in the part of me, which I doubted and distrusted; the part I feared because it was bigger than me. Somewhere deep inside my soul I felt lonely again. The roar of the sky was getting stronger, and I no longer believed that the thin curtain on the window could protect me anymore. It struck me again at that moment that I was a rotten cheater, flirting for too long and refusing conceitedly to be the greatest man ever born. I feared the greatness. I have rejected so many good things, so much goodness, and the only thing I wanted is to make peace with my face. That is why I was alone now, freezing in Tonka's warm embrace. But Tonka was great, she did dream about the breadth. I deceived her, I fooled her, and I gave her a reason to believe in something bigger than me, or at least in me as if I could be bigger than myself. I gave her a reason to believe that I might be hiding a tiny bit of quiet hope, that endlessness is perhaps smoldering somewhere inside me, and that it sometimes used to be within arm's reach. But then again, maybe I didn't fool her. Maybe she saw through me, maybe she watched me through my glassy lies making grimaces and faces and having a

fight with my face; she saw that while playing a preacher in a pub, I was being anxious about the jar because when viewing the world from the perspective of my bat-hole, I thought I had the right to see things differently from the way they did, but to hate in the same way as they did. She probably saw all this and had forgiven me in advance. She wanted to hear once more that which I considered unimportant and shameful, but which was taking her back to the dawn of the greatest day, which was there for her in the tiny pocket of a black torn suit.

Perhaps Tonka was right. When talking about the opposite man, she was telling me her misery and her sorrow. Every time she felt the heaven coming down on her, every time the burns on her soul were torturing her, and somebody wanted to decorate it all by pissing the letters of her name on the frozen snow, the opposite man was standing by her side. She remembered the days of imprisonment. She remembered the loneliness which cut to the bone; she remembered the icy wall of hatred, the betrayal. She remembered the murderer she nested on the throne of her heart, from which he jumped into betrayal, into recklessness and death. She drank her first potion of grief because of him, but she wouldn't let him down or chase him out of her heart. He never gave back his deserted throne. In all those moments of immense pain, the opposite man was injecting an additional dose of the breadth into her soul so she could rise once again, breathe and forgive. The passion with which she talked about him has been covered with down, and therefore it sounded so charming and so tender. That's why I could listen, or pretend to be listening. She didn't want anything from me. She was giving me something I had lost a long time ago, something I kept in the closet. My lecture, my uprising, my clumsy and insincere attempt to be born, she knew all this. She knew a lot more than that. She has saved all this for me, and now she wanted to give it back to me, to give me back to me. On that stormy august night she once again gave birth to her innocence, whereas mine, if it had been born at all, was stillborn. Seen from my perspective, I was with Tonka that night, but she was with my stroller.

While I was squeezing the patched sheet, she was distant, endlessly distant. She was truthful, and she knew, just like me, I would never follow her that far. I was ashamed of my youthful and whimsical idea to be in the secret alliance with endlessness, but now I felt shame because Tonka found my unfaithful face in the patched sheet. I admit I brought my face to her because I wanted her to touch it and kiss it. She did it, but she couldn't live in the sheet, in the room, in the pub, in the lie. I was deceived deceiver, but this time I was deceived by someone who was better and wider than me. That's why, I guess, it didn't hurt so much when she turned towards me and said: "You know, I have never seen his face, but every day I can see that divine day-break

in my little room. I don't know why he left it to me, but I'm so grateful. You know, I have never hated any of my lovers, albeit none of them had loved me as much as he did. I don't hate you either. You are good man; you have always wanted to be good and nothing more. You were good enough to cry over someone else's hands, generous enough to give yourself both to a beggar and to a miser if only they asked. You were brave enough to see through yourself, proud enough to renounce your face and noble enough to be guilty for all of us. But you have never passionately loved yourself, and you have never appreciated people who loved you. You know, you could have been his son, but you wanted to be his bastard. Sometimes you remind me so much of him, but it is precisely in those moments that you don't love yourself. If I told you that he never existed, you still wouldn't love me as much as I love you. But you would still be more precious and bigger to me than this night. If there was no him, if there were no us, you would still want to be here, embraced by some other Tonka, in her little room, and she would love you. But you would again hate yourself because you cannot be here, in this moment. You know, you are the only man who truly suffered from committing adultery against himself."

She was saying this to me with tiredness in her voice and somehow absently as if I weren't there. And I wasn't there indeed. I was hiding. I listened to all this lying hidden in the drawer of the small night cupboard. I shivered. The drawer wasn't closed tightly (completely), so I heard when she said this:

"I have met many people, you know, but I have never known their names. I have never learned his name either, but I have always called him Todor Tuga. It doesn't mean anything; it is just a name I came up with (thought up). I wanted it to be his name. Two words as a tombstone inscription on my heart. Something I'll wrap around myself if one day the world stops wishing, if it stops revolving and I happen to be on the dark side of destiny; or if we meet one day, and we have never asked each other about our names. But here, in this little room, in all those years that came after him, there were hundreds or thousands of other men. None of them wanted to have a name in this room. And I never asked, because none of those countless men came here because they wished as much as you did. They were just coming and going away. They carried tiny tin boxes in their chests, believing the boxes will make them last longer, longer than their wishes. Do you really believe that someone wants to last longer than his wishes? Those men left presents and money, but never names, never hope, nothing, not even the memories. But you came because you wished because you were the biggest wish anyone has ever wished. If you lasted as long as your wish once could have lasted, you would then....you know, I've never told you that, but you remind me of that

daybreak, and I know you can still wish as much as you once did. That's why you are afraid to love yourself; you believe that one day you are going to wake up without name, far away from your wish, far away from yourself. You are afraid you are going to wake up in someone's embrace, and that someone will have been dead for thousands of years. Tell me, do you truly fear loneliness as much as you fear yourself?"

I don't remember when exactly I sneaked out of her room, or what time it was, but I do remember that her opposite man was standing at the door, wide as never before. Or it was perhaps my stroller. She was also talking about him in a dream, perhaps even more in a dream than anywhere else. She danced before him, and he, wished by a tormented and endlessly wide heart, filled her room pushing me crudely out. Because of that giant I couldn't walk through the door, so I jumped through a tiny window. The storm, which thundered far in the distance, was now under the window. I walked down the street slashing through the thick rain curtain, but already at the first corner Spasoje Stroznik waited for me, soaking wet. He blocked my way and handcuffed me. He said something while doing this; he uttered a scroll of uniformed sentences, and we went to the police station. I didn't know if all of it has been in accordance with the rules. I didn't even know if it was expected, but I haven't been surprised, and I didn't see anything unusual in being arrested. Heavy raindrops were falling down on my face, which was covered with the shadow of the opposite man, although the lightning constantly flashed. My flat was about thirty minutes away, so it made me glad to take a shelter from the rain, even the shelter was the police station.

Svetovid Sevast again

The police car was surprisingly comfortable. It was though very stuffy inside the car due to moisture in my suit, and especially because of Spasoje's soaked uniform. I sat calmly during the entire ride, quite relaxed. I wasn't trying to start the conversation, and I saw Spasoje's quizzical look fixed on the reflection of my face in the rear-view mirror. The feeling of indifference took hold of me, threatening on every street corner to turn into apathy. I thought about Tonka, about the farewell, about the magnificent night which was so rudely taken away from me by the opposite man, or maybe it was the stroller. I thought about life, and destiny, about the cat and irony. I thought about the unpredictable and untamable flickers of life, which are constantly straying from one wish to another, from one evil fate to another as if in a child's game, and a man never knows where he will end up. He never knows if he is going to be a cat or the stroller, a giant or a mouse, if he will get endlessness or the bat-hole, a fleeting night or the eternal woman. And then, after the next swing I started thinking about love. Every time the thought about love has lit my face and warmed my heart, the opposite man would stand tall in front of me, taking me from the entrance hall of infinity back into the mouse hole.