The devil's drool

Julio Cortázar

It will never be known how to tell this, whether in the first person or in the second, using the third of the plural or continuously inventing forms that will do no good. If it could be said: I saw the moon rise, or: the depths of my eyes hurt us, and above all like this: you the blonde woman were the clouds that follow

running in front of my your their our your their faces. What the hell.

Let's face it, if you could go out and drink a bock and the machine was still on its own (because I type), it would be perfection. And that's not a way of saying. Perfection, yes, because here the hole to be counted is also a machine (of another kind, a Contax 1. 1.2) and maybe a machine knows more about another machine than me, you, herthe blonde woman and the clouds. But as a fool I'm just lucky, and I know that if I leave, this Remington will remain petrified on the table with that doubly still air that movable things have when they don't move. Then I have to write. One of us all has to write, if all this is going to be told. It's better that it's me who's dead, who's less committed than the rest; I who can only see the clouds and can think without being distracted, write without being distracted (there's another one, with a gray border) and remember without being distracted, I who am dead (and alive, it's not about deceiving anyone, it'll be seen when the time comes, because somehow I have to start and I've started at this point, the one at the back, the one at the beginning, that at the end and

after all, it is the best tip when you want to tell something).

Suddenly I wonder why I have to tell this, but if one were to start wondering why he does everything he does, if one were to wonder only why he accepts an invitation to dinner (now a pigeon is passing by, and it seems to me that a sparrow) or why when someone has told us a good story, it immediately starts like a tickle in the stomach and one is not calm until one enters the next office and tells the story in turn; only then one is well, is happy and can go back to his work. As far as I know no one has explained this, so the best thing is to stop being shy and tell, because after all no one is ashamed of breathing or putting on shoes; they are things, that are done, and when something weird happens, when we find a spider inside the shoe or when breathing it feels like a broken glass, then we have to tell what happens, tell the guys at the office or the doctor. Oh, Doctor, every

every time I breathe... Always tell it, always get rid of that annoying tickle from the stomach.

And since we are going to tell it, let's put some order, let's go down the stairs of this house until Sunday, November 7th, just a month ago. One goes down five floors and it's already Sunday, with an unsuspected November sun in Paris, really wanting to walk around, to see things, to take pictures (because we were photographers, I'm a photographer). I know that the most difficult thing is going to be finding a way to tell it, and I'm not afraid to repeat myself. It's going to be difficult because no one really knows who is really telling, whether it's me or what happened, or what I'm seeing (clouds, and sometimes a dove) or if I simply tell a truth that is only my truth, and then it's not the truth except

for my stomach, for this urge to run out and somehow end this, whatever it is.

We are going to tell it slowly, we will see what happens as I write it. If they replace me, if I don't know what to say anymore, if the clouds end and something else starts (because it can't be that this is constantly seeing clouds passing by, and sometimes a pigeon), if something of all that... And after the

"yes", what am I going to put, how am I going to close the sentence correctly? But if I start asking questions I won't tell anything; it's better to tell, maybe telling is like an answer, at least for someone who reads it.

Roberto Michel, Francochileno, translator and amateur photographer, left the number 11 of the rue Monsieur LePrince on Sunday, November 7 of the current year (now two smaller ones pass, with silver edges). I had been working for three weeks on the French version of the treaty on recusations and appeals of José Norberto Allende, a professor at the University of Santiago. It is rare that there is wind in Paris, much less a wind that swirled and rose in the corners punishing the

old wooden shutters behind which surprised ladies commented in various ways on the instability of the weather in recent years. But the sun was also there, riding the wind and a friend of cats, so nothing would stop me from taking a walk along the Seine quays and taking some photos of the Concierge and the SainteChapelle. It was barely ten o'clock, and I calculated that by eleven o'clock I would have good light, the best possible in autumn; to waste time I drifted to Saint-Louis Island and started walking along the Quai d'Anjou, I looked at the Hotel de Lauzun for a while, I recited some fragments of Apollinaire that always come to mind when I pass in front of the Hotel de Lauzun (and I should remember another poet, but Michel is a sucker), and when all of a sudden the wind stopped and the sun got at least twice as big (I mean warmer, but really it's the same), I sat down on the parapet and I felt

terribly happy on a Sunday morning.

Among the many ways to combat nothingness, one of the best is to take photographs, an activity that should be taught to children early, because it requires discipline, aesthetic education, a good eye and confident fingers. It's not about stalking the lie like any reporter, and catching the stupid silhouette of the character that comes out of number 10 Downing Street, but anyway when walking with the camera there is like the duty to be attentive, not to miss that abrupt and delicious bounce of a sunbeam on an old stone, or the braids running in the air of a little girl who returns with a bread or a bottle of milk. Michel knew that the photographer always operates as a permutation of his personal way of seeing the world by another that the camera insidiously imposes on him (now a large almost black cloud passes by), but he did not distrust, knowing that it was enough for him to go out without the Contax to recover the distracted tone, the vision without framing, the light without a diaphragm or 1/25O. Right now (what a word, now, what a stupid lie) I could stay sitting on the parapet over the river, watching the black and red pinnaces pass by, without thinking about the scenes photographically, nothing more than letting myself go in the letting go of things, running

immobile with time. And the wind wasn't blowing anymore.

Then I continued along the Quai de Bourbon until I reached the tip of the island, where the intimate little square (intimate because small and not because demure, because she gives her whole breast to the river and the sky) I like and it tastes good to me. There were only a couple and, of course, pigeons; maybe some of the ones that are now going through what I'm seeing. With a jump I settled on the parapet and let myself be wrapped and tied by the sun, giving him my face, ears, both hands (I kept the gloves in my pocket). I didn't feel like taking pictures, and I lit a cigarette for

to do something; I think that at the moment when I was putting the match to the tobacco I saw the little boy for the first time.

What I had taken for a couple looked much more like a boy with his mother, although at the same time I realized that he was not a boy with his mother, that he was a couple in the sense that we always give to couples when we see them leaning on the parapets or hugging on the benches of the squares. Since I had nothing to do, I had plenty of time to wonder why the little boy was so nervous, like a colt or a hare, putting his hands in his pockets, immediately taking out one and then the other, running his fingers through his hair, changing his posture, and above all why he was afraid, because he guessed that in every gesture, a fear suffocated by shame, an impulse to back out that was noticeable as if his body was on the verge of flight, with having himself in a last

and pitiful decorum.

All that was so clear, there five meters away and we were alone against the parapet, at the tip of the island, that at first the boy's fear did not let me see the blonde woman well. Now, thinking about it, I see her much better in that first moment when I read her face (she had suddenly turned like a copper weathervane, and the eyes, the eyes were there), when I vaguely understood what could be happening to the boy and I said to myself that it was worth staying and watching (the wind was carrying away the words, the barely murmurs). I think I know how to look, if I know anything at all, and that all looking exudes falseness, because it's what throws us further outside ourselves, without the slightest guarantee, as far as smelling, or (but Michel forks easily, we shouldn't let him declaim at ease). In any case, if the probable falsehood is foreseen in advance, looking becomes possible; it is enough, perhaps, to choose well between looking and what is being looked at, to strip things of so many other people's clothes.

Y. Of course, all this is rather difficult.

Of the boy I remember the image before the real body (this will be understood later), while