

ALSO BY JULIO CORTÁZAR

Blow-Up & Other Stories

A Certain Lucas

Cronopios and Famas

Final Exam

Hopscotch

Nicaraguan Sketches

Twilight: Selected Poems

The Winners

crōnōpiōs ondfāmōs

Julio Cortázar

Translated from the Spanish by Paul Blackburn

A New Directions Classic

the
instruction
manual

The job of having to soften up the brick every day, the job of cleaving a passage through the glutinous mass that declares itself to be the world, to collide every morning with the same narrow rectangular space with the disgusting name, filled with doggy satisfaction that everything is probably in its place, the same woman beside you, the same shoes, the same taste of the same toothpaste, the same sad houses across the street, the filthy slats on the shutters with the inscription **THE HOTEL BELGIUM**.

Drive the head like a reluctant bull through the transparent mass at the center of which we take a coffee with milk and open the newspaper to find out what has happened in whatever corner of that glass brick. Go ahead, deny up and down that the delicate act of turning the doorknob, that act which may transform everything, is done with the indifferent vigor of a daily reflex. See you later, sweetheart. Have a good day.

Tighten your fingers around a teaspoon, feel its metal pulse, its mistrustful warning. How it hurts to refuse a spoon, to say no to a door, to deny everything that habit

has licked to a suitable smoothness. How much simpler to accept the easy request of the spoon, to use it, to stir the coffee.

And it's not that it's so bad that things meet us every day and are the same. That the same woman is there beside us, the same watch, that the novel lying open there on the table starts once more to take its bicycle ride through our glasses. What could be wrong with that? But like a sad bull, one has to lower the head, hustle out from the middle of the glass brick toward the one nearest us, who is as unattainable as the picador, however close the bull is to him. Punish the eyes looking at that which passes in the sky and cunningly accept that its name is cloud, its answer catalogued in the mind. Don't believe that the telephone is going to give you the numbers you try to call, why should it? The only thing that will come is what you have already prepared and decided, the gloomy reflection of your expectations, that monkey, who scratches himself on the table and trembles with cold. Break that monkey's head, take a run from the middle of the room to the wall and break through it. Oh, how they sing upstairs! There's an apartment upstairs in this house with other people in it. A floor upstairs where people live who don't know there's a downstairs floor and that all of us live in the glass brick. And if suddenly a moth lands on the edge of a pencil and flutters there like an ash-colored flame, look at it, I am looking at it, I am touching its tiny heart and I hear it, that moth reverberates in the pie dough of frozen glass, all is not lost. When the door opens and I lean over the stairwell, I'll know that the street begins down there; not the already accepted matrix, not the familiar houses, not the hotel

across the street: the street, that busy wilderness which can tumble upon me like a magnolia any minute, where the faces will come to life when I look at them, when I go just a little bit further, when I smash minutely against the pie dough of the glass brick and stake my life while I press forward step by step to go pick up the newspaper at the corner.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO CRY

Putting the reasons for crying aside for the moment, we might concentrate on the correct way to cry, which, be it understood, means a weeping that doesn't turn into a big commotion nor proves an affront to the smile with its parallel and dull similarity. The average, everyday weeping consists of a general contraction of the face and a spasmodic sound accompanied by tears and mucus, this last toward the end, since the cry ends at the point when one energetically blows one's nose.

In order to cry, steer the imagination toward yourself, and if this proves impossible owing to having contracted the habit of believing in the exterior world, think of a duck covered with ants or of those gulfs in the Straits of Magellan *into which no one sails ever*.

Coming to the weeping itself, cover the face decorously, using both hands, palms inward. Children are to cry with the sleeve of the dress or shirt pressed against the face, preferably in a corner of the room. Average duration of the cry, three minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO SING

Begin by breaking all the mirrors in the house, let your arms fall to your side, gaze vacantly at the wall, *forget yourself*. Sing one single note, listen to it from inside. If you hear (but this will happen much later) something like a landscape overwhelmed with dread, bonfires between the rocks with squatting half-naked silhouettes, I think you'll be well on your way, and the same if you hear a river, boats painted yellow and black are coming down it, if you hear the smell of fresh bread, the shadow of a horse.

Afterwards, buy a manual of voice instruction and a dress jacket, and please, don't sing through your nose and leave poor Schumann at peace.

INSTRUCTIONS ON or rather EXAMPLES OF HOW TO BE AFRAID

In a small town in Scotland they sell books with one blank page hidden someplace in the volume. If the reader opens to that page and it's three o'clock in the afternoon, he dies.

In the Piazza Quirinal in Rome, there is one spot, unknown even to the initiated after the nineteenth century, from which, under a full moon, the statues of the Dioscuri can be seen to move, fighting against their horses as they rear back.

At Amalfi, where the seacoast ends, there's a jetty which stretches out into the sea and night. Out beyond the last lighthouse, you can hear a dog bark.

A man is squeezing toothpaste onto his brush, all of a sudden he sees the tiny figure of a woman lying on her back, coral sort of, or a breadcrumb that's been painted.

Opening the door of the wardrobe to take out a shirt, an old almanac falls out which comes apart immediately, pages falling out and crumbling, and covers the white linen with millions of dirty paper butterflies.

There was a story about this traveling salesman whose left wrist began to hurt him, just under his wrist watch. When he removed the watch, blood spurted out. The wound showed the imprints of very tiny teeth.

The doctor finishes his examination and his conclusions are very reassuring to us. His cordial and somber voice precedes the medicines, prescriptions for which he is writing out at the moment, seated behind his desk. Every once in a while he raises his head and smiles, to cheer us up. We don't have a thing to worry about, we'll be better inside of a week. We sit at ease in our easy chair, happy, and look idly and distractedly about the room. In the shadowed area beneath the desk, suddenly we see the doctor's legs. The trousers are pulled up to just above the knees and he's wearing women's stockings.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND THREE FAMOUS PAINTINGS

Sacred Love and Profane Love

by Titian

This hateful painting depicts a wake on the banks of the Jordan. In only a very few instances has the obtuseness of a painter been able to refer more contemptibly to mankind's hope for a Messiah *who is radiant by his absence*; missing from the canvas which is the world, he shines horribly in the obscene yawn of the marble tomb, while the angel commissioned to announce the resurrection of his dreadful executed flesh waits patiently for the signs to be fulfilled. It will be unnecessary to explain that the angel is the nude figure prostituting herself in her marvelous plumpness, and disguised as Mary Magdalen, mockery of mockeries, at the moment when the true Mary Magdalen is coming along the road (where, on the other hand, swells the venomous blasphemy of two rabbits).

The child putting his hand into the tomb is Luther, or maybe the Devil. Of the clothed figure it has been said that she represents Glory about to announce that all human ambition fits into a washbowl; but she's badly painted and reminds one of artificial flowers or a lightning flash like a soft sponge-rubber baseball bat.

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Lady of the Unicorn by Raphael

Saint-Simon thought he saw in this portrait a confession of heresy. The unicorn, the narwhal, the obscene pearl in the locket that pretends to be a pear, and the gaze of Maddalena Strozzi fixed dreadfully upon a point where lascivious poses or a flagellation scene might be taking place: here Raphael Sanzio lied his most terrible truth.

The passionate green color in the face of the figure was frequently attributed to gangrene or to the *spring solstice*. The unicorn, a phallic animal, would have infected her: in her body rest all the sins of the world. Then they realized that they had only to remove the overlayers painted by three irritated enemies of Raphael: Carlos Hog, Vincent Grosjean (known as "The Marble"), and Rubens the Elder. The first overpainting was green, the second green, and the third white. It is not difficult to observe here the triple symbol of the deadly nighthawk; the wings conjoined to its dead body they confused with the rose leaves. How often Maddalena Strozzi cut a white rose and felt it squeak between her fingers, twisting and moaning weakly like a tiny mandrake or one of those lizards that sing like lyres when you show them a mirror. But it was already too late and the deadly nighthawk had pricked her. Raphael knew it and sensed she was dying. To paint her truly, then, he added the unicorn, symbol of chastity who will take water from a virgin's hand, sheep and narwhal at once. But he painted the deadly night-

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moth in her image, and the unicorn kills his mistress, digs into her superb breast its horn working with lust; it reiterates the process of all principles. What this woman holds in her hands is the mysterious cup from which we have all drunk unknowingly, thirst that we have slaked with other mouths, that red and foamy wine from which come the stars, the worms, and railroad stations.

Portrait of Henry VIII of England
by Holbein

In this canvas people have wanted to see an elephant hunt, a map of Russia, the constellation Lyra, a portrait of the Pope disguised as Henry VIII, a storm over the Sargasso Sea, or the golden polyp which thrives in the latitudes south of Java and which, under the influence of lemon, sneezes delicately and succumbs with a tiny whiff.

Each of these interpretations takes exact account of the general configurations of the painting, whether they are seen from the position in which it is hung or head downwards or held sideways. The differences can be narrowed to the details; the center remains which is GOLD, the number SEVEN, the OYSTER observable in the hat-and-string-tie sections, with the PEARL-head (center irradiating from the pearls on the jacket or central territory) and the general SHOUT absolutely green which bursts forth from the aggregate whole.

Experience simply going to Rome and laying your hand against the king's heart, and you understand the origin

of the sea. Even less difficult is to approach it with a lit candle held at the level of the eyes; it will then be seen that *that is not a face* and that the moon, blinded by simultaneity, races across a background of Catherine wheels and tiny transparent ball bearings decapitated in the remembrances in hagiographies. He is not mistaken who sees in this stormy petrification a combat between leopards. But also there are reluctant ivory daggers, pages who languish from boredom in long galleries, and a tortuous dialogue between leprosy and the halberds. The man's kingdom is a page out of the great chronicle, but he does not know this and toys peevishly with gloves and fawns. This man looking at you comes back from hell; step away from the canvas and you will see him smile a bit at a time, because he is empty, he is a windbag, dry hands hold him up from behind; like a playing-card figure, when you begin to pick him up the castle and everything totters. And his maxim is this: "There is no third dimension, the earth is flat and man drags his belly on the earth. Hallelujah!" It might be the Devil who is saying these words, and maybe you believe them because they are spoken to you by a king.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO COMB THE HAIR

There's something like a bone wing from which extends a series of parallels, and the comb isn't the bone but the gaps which penetrate space. The tresses will enter and leave this comb of air with a firm melody, a set design. The lavish play of disarray goes on toward sleep, toward love, toward the wind in the streets, toward rain. Medusa's serpents grow above a superbly handsome face. Comb of swords, a terrifying harvest! But turtle-shell as well, when it's Faustina, bronze gone green for the daughters of Knossos, ivory for Sakuntala, baby-bone for Melisande. Plows furrowing the centuries whose crop will be a perfume, a lariat, a crown; like rolling triremes, those combs of the sea.

So. The man will comb his hair without a mirror, working his open hand through it. The woman will make her reflection into a tower or treetop, whatever peak, where the lines of storm and the blue mark of the broody kingfisher can be found. She'll know how to stem sweetly that flow from tenuous high tides, how to light the fire of remembrance without smoke. To comb the hair will be to

take auguries for the rising day, give shape to the lover's secret thought, instruct from the blood the son not yet born.

When it comes to children, let the air comb them.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DISSECT A GROUND OWL

Small ground owls range themselves on posts along the
road

Little old lady ground owls, like wisdom, come out of the
sea

Small young ground owls are like the weather! there it
comes, there it comes

No one stuffs a small owl without a red lantern
Without a red robe in a black room
Without a wardrobe where scratchy wreaths screak
mildly

In the Argentine countryside the little owls await the
hour

Like the Creoles and the Indians they wait without hope
Ranged on posts along the road watching the cars pass
A Buick a Ford a Pontiac a Plymouth a Cadillac
In which the taxidermists ride with their wives and
children

Without a red robe in a black room
Without a wardrobe where scratchy wreaths screak
mildly

No one stuffs an owl without a red lantern
Without a red robe in a black room

To dissect lions
You need lightning
For little owls you need
Forget-
fulness.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO KILL ANTS IN ROME

Ants, it is said, will eat Rome. They scurry between the flagstones: O she-wolf, what highway of precious stones slices your throat? On every side waters flow from the fountains, the living slate, the tremulous cameos that mumble history, dynasties, and commemorations in the dead of night. One would have to find the heart that makes the fountains leap in order to stave off the ants, and in this city of swollen blood bristling with cornucopias like a blind man's hands, organize a salvation ritual so that the future file down its teeth on the mountains, drag itself off gently and weakly, completely without ants.

First we shall prospect for the sites of the fountains, which is simple, because on the colored maps the fountains also have jets and cascades in sky blue, you only have to locate them precisely and put a circle around them with a blue pencil, not a red one, for a good map of Rome is red as Rome is red. The blue pencil on Rome's red will mark a violet circle around every fountain, and now we are sure we have all of them and that we know the foliage of the waters.

More difficult, more withdrawn and concealed, is the business of drilling through the dark stone under which the veins of mercury run, to take into account by dint of patience the code of all the fountains, and to keep a loving vigil near the imperial vessels on nights when the moon is bright, until after so much green murmuring, so much quavering like flowers, the directions begin to come clear, the confluences, *the other streets*, the living ones. And to track them down without sleeping, with hazel rods shaped in a fork, triangular, with two verges in each hand, one held only loosely between the fingers, but all this invisible to the carabinieri and the amicably suspicious population: go by way of the Quirinal, climb to the Campidoglio, run shouting through the Pincio, land with a motionless apparition like a ball of fire on the orderly walks of the Piazza della Essedra, this is how to extract from the ground's silent metals the catalogue of subterranean rivers. And ask help of no one. Ever.

Afterwards, you will see it gradually, how, in this flayed marble hand, the veins wander leisurely and sonorous, for the pleasure of the waters, for the artifice of the play, until coming closer little by little, they join in the confluence, interweave, swell into arteries, spill out their continuities into the central square where the drum of liquid glass throbs, the root of the pale crowns of trees, the abstruse horse. And then we shall know where it is, in which water table of calcified vaults, between the minuscule skeletons of lemurs, the heart of the water hammers out its time.

It takes some trouble to find out, but it will be found out. Then we'll kill the ants that lust after the fountains, we'll

burn out the tunnels these monstrous miners have devised in order to draw close to the secret life of Rome. We shall kill the ants by arriving before them at the central fountain. And we'll leave by the night train fleeing the vengeful demons, vaguely happy, hobnobbing with soldiers and nuns.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO CLIMB A STAIRCASE

No one will have failed to observe that frequently the floor bends in such a way that one part rises at a right angle to the plane formed by the floor and then the following section arranges itself parallel to the flatness, so as to provide a step to a new perpendicular, a process which is repeated in a spiral or in a broken line to highly variable elevations. Ducking down and placing the left hand on one of the vertical parts and the right hand upon the corresponding horizontal, one is in momentary possession of a step or stair. Each one of these steps, formed as we have seen by two elements, is situated somewhat higher and further than the one prior, a principle which gives the idea of a staircase, while whatever other combination, producing perhaps more beautiful or picturesque shapes, would be incapable of translating one from the ground floor to the first floor.

You tackle a stairway face on, for if you try it backwards or sideways, it ends up being particularly uncomfortable. The natural stance consists of holding oneself upright, arms hanging easily at the sides, head erect but not so

much so that the eyes no longer see the steps immediately above, while one tramps up, breathing lightly and with regularity. To climb a staircase one begins by lifting that part of the body located below and to the right, usually encased in leather or deerskin, and which, with a few exceptions, fits exactly on the stair. Said part set down on the first step (to abbreviate we shall call it "the foot"), one draws up the equivalent part on the left side (also called "foot" but not to be confused with "the foot" cited above), and lifting this other part to the level of "the foot," makes it continue along until it is set in place on the second step, at which point the foot will rest, and "the foot" will rest on the first. (The first steps are always the most difficult, until you acquire the necessary coordination. The coincidence of names between the foot and "the foot" makes the explanation more difficult. Be especially careful not to raise, at the same time, the foot and "the foot.")

Having arrived by this method at the second step, it's easy enough to repeat the movements alternately, until one reaches the top of the staircase. One gets off it easily, with a light tap of the heel to fix it in place, to make sure it will not move until one is ready to come down.

PREAMBLE TO THE INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO WIND A WATCH

Think of this: When they present you with a watch they are gifting you with a tiny flowering hell, a wreath of roses, a dungeon of air. They aren't simply wishing the watch on you, and many more, and we hope it will last you, it's a good brand, Swiss, seventeen rubies; they aren't just giving you this minute stonecutter which will bind you by the wrist and walk along with you. They are giving you—they don't know it, it's terrible that they don't know it—they are gifting you with a new, fragile, and precarious piece of yourself, something that's yours but not a part of your body, that you have to strap to your body like your belt, like a tiny, furious bit of something hanging onto your wrist. They gift you with the job of having to wind it every day, an obligation to wind it, so that it goes on being a watch; they gift you with the obsession of looking into jewelry-shop windows to check the exact time, check the radio announcer, check the telephone service. They give you the gift of fear, someone will steal it from you, it'll fall on the street and get broken. They give you the gift of your trademark and the assurance that it's a trademark better than the others,

they gift you with the impulse to compare your watch with other watches. They aren't giving you a watch, you are the gift, they're giving you yourself for the watch's birthday.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO WIND A WATCH

Death stands there in the background, but don't be afraid. Hold the watch down with one hand, take the stem in two fingers, and rotate it smoothly. Now another installment of time opens, trees spread their leaves, boats run races, like a fan time continues filling with itself, and from that burgeon the air, the breezes of earth, the shadow of a woman, the sweet smell of bread.

What did you expect, what more do you want? Quickly strap it to your wrist, let it tick away in freedom, imitate it greedily. Fear will rust all the rubies, everything that could happen to it and was forgotten is about to corrode the watch's veins, cankering the cold blood and its tiny rubies. And death is there in the background, we must run to arrive beforehand and understand it's already unimportant.