

Reading Literature

“Reading is approaching something that is about to be, and no one yet knows what it will be.”

—Italo Calvino

“Reading a book is like re-writing it for yourself. You bring to a novel, anything you read, all your experience of the world. You bring your history and you read it in your own terms.”

—Angela Carter

“One must be an inventor to read well.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



HS 305: Reading Literature (2019)

Course Description

The second half of this course is designed to continue the task of introducing students to the study of literature. As the first half has done, it will explore an array of literary texts, concepts, and interpretive approaches.

As we proceed to read the prescribed texts, the emphasis will be on active and responsive reading.

As you engage with these pieces, you will find that there is often more than one way of interpreting a text. But this does not mean that anything goes or that any reading is as good as another.

This course will introduce you to the following modes of enquiry:

- What is “close reading” and how can we undertake a close reading of texts?
- How can we analyze the structure and language of a text? How do literary concepts help in this enterprise?
- How can we recognize the textual/generic features of a text?
- What is the project of the text you read?
- How does literature shape and gets shaped by textual traditions, culture, society, and politics?

We shall also try to consider broader questions such as

- What are the uses of literature?
- Why study literature?
- What counts as literature?

We will be reading multiple genres comprising fiction and creative nonfiction.

You will find an underlying theme that runs through all these texts: the idea of **“reading.”** Thus, we will not only read these texts, but will also explore how these texts thematize the idea of reading.

By the end of this course, you would have had some exposure to reading literature and some sense of how to ‘read’ a literary text. More

ambitiously, the course hopes that you will have become incurably addicted to the adventure of reading.

(Much of conceptualization of the course and the articulation of the course description is credited to Prof. Sharmila)

Content

Unit 1: Reading Signs

Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Science of Deduction” [Chapter 2 from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and Chapter 1 from Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of the Four* (1890)]

Umberto Eco, “First Day” [Chapter 1 from the novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980)]

Susan Gaskell, “Trifles” [A one-act play (1916)]

Unit 2: Re-reading

A. S. Byatt, “The Story of the Eldest Princess” [From *The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye: Five Fairy Stories* (2001)]

Suniti Namjoshi, “The Princess” [From *Feminist Fables* (1993)]

Nadine Gordimer, “Once Upon a Time” [From *Jump and Other Stories* (1991)]

Unit 3: Easy Reading/Difficult Reading

Ania Walwicz “Wogs” (1982)

Narendra Jadhav, “Chhotu: Looking Back” [A chapter from the memoir *Outcaste* (2002)]

Saadat Hasan Manto, “Sorry” and “Jelly” and/or “Dog of Tetwal”
[From the collection *Siyah Hashiye— Black Margins* (1952)]

Mahmoud Darwish, “The House of Casualty” and “The Mosquito”
[From *A River Dies of Thirst: Diaries* (2009)]

Eavan Boland, “That the Science of Cartography Is Limited” [From the poetry collection *In a Time of Violence* (1994)]

NOTE:

- 1) You must come to class having read the text.
- 2) Print this document. Use it for active reading: underline or highlight, write marginalia including word meanings and references you need to look up. **Bring it to every class.**
- 3) Cell-phones and other electronic devices must be in silent mode and be kept out of sight. Laptops cannot be used in class either.

Evaluation:

Course Grade

	Duration	Percentage weight of the Course grade
End Sem Exam	3 hours	40%
In Sem work (Quiz)		10%

Instructor Details

Prof. Paulomi Chakraborty

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If you want to talk to me, after a class is the best time, but meeting me outside is also possible by prior appointment.

Email: paulomichakra@iitb.ac.in (allow response time of 2 working days in general)

Umberto Eco ♦ THE NAME OF THE ROSE

UMBERTO ECO

The Name of the Rose

"A brilliantly conceived adventure into another time, an intelligent and complex novel, a lively and well-plotted mystery."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

THE DAZZLING BESTSELLER



"INTRIGUING. ... Mr. Eco's elaborate tale works so well. Imagination carries the day."

—*New York Times*

Umberto Eco ♦ THE NAME OF THE ROSE

“A PUZZLING, SCARY DETECTIVE STORY ... a picture of the dark side of 14th century monasticism ... rich in philosophical and theological arguments ... demanding ... gripping ... (not) easily forgotten.”

—*Wall Street Journal*

“A KIND OF NOVEL THAT CHANGES OUR MIND, replaces our reality with its own. We live in a new world ... a time of multiple popes and multiple anti-Christ, a time when a man would trade sexual favors for a book, when the papal palace in Avignon displayed ‘crucifixes where Christ is nailed by a single hand while the other touches a purse hanging from his belt, to indicate that he authorizes the use of money for religious ends. ...’ The plot is as neat as Conan Doyle or Christie. ... We accept the tale as Eco submits it, ‘for sheer narrative pleasure’: ‘For it is a tale of books, not of everyday worries.’”

—*Los Angeles Times*

“A LONG, RICH, MULTILAYERED NOVEL about murder, dogma, heresy and the pursuit of knowledge, both sacred and profane, in 14th century Italy. And he has given us that rare gift, a truly popular novel that has been accepted by critics as well. ... The mystery in itself is intriguing, but the real pleasure is in the richness of context and character. Eco has written a novel that celebrates imagination and skepticism, faint but important lights in dark times. He also makes it clear that such qualities are needed just as much now, in our own times.”

—*Philadelphia Inquirer*

“SPLENDID ... AN EXCITING DETECTIVE STORY, a colorful evocation of medieval life and a lively morality tale on fanaticism, books and the search for truth ... Eco is a superb practitioner of the art of creating character, dialogue, setting and plot. And for all its erudition, the book moves with the pace of a thriller.”

—*Newsday*

“PRODIGIOUS NECROMANCY. ... An alchemical marriage of murder mystery and Christian mystery. It conveys remarkably the desperation of a dying culture, while at the same time touching on perennial issues of love, religion, scholarship and politics.”

—*Washington Post Book World*

“A MASTERWORK by a scholar who knows how to play ... dazzling ... delightful ... masterfull.”

—*Houston Chronicle*

“A BRILLIANTLY CONCEIVED ADVENTURE into another time, an intelligent and complex novel and a lively and well-plotted mystery.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“A PAGE-TURNER ABOUT IDEAS. ... A brilliant match of method and material, *The Name of the Rose* is that rarest of literary blossoms.”

—*Pittsburgh Press*

“AMAZINGLY COMPLEX, RICHLY TEXTURED AND UNAPOLOGETICALLY INTELLIGENT ... ambitious, creative, thought provoking. Like the best books from any age, it opens up a new world and helps us understand our old one—and ourselves—a little better.”

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Umberto Eco ♦ THE NAME OF THE ROSE

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

UMBERTO ECO

*Translated from the Italian by
William Weaver*

A Warner Communications Company

Umberto Eco ♦ THE NAME OF THE ROSE

WARNER BOOKS EDITION

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109

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NATURALLY, A MANUSCRIPT

FIRST DAY

PRIME

In which the foot of the abbey is reached, and William demonstrates his great acumen.

It was a beautiful morning at the end of November. During the night it had snowed, but only a little, and the earth was covered with a cool blanket no more than three fingers high. In the darkness, immediately after lauds, we heard Mass in a village in the valley. Then we set off toward the mountain, as the sun first appeared.

While we toiled up the steep path that wound around the mountain, I saw the abbey. I was amazed, not by the walls that girded it on every side, similar to others to be seen in all the Christian world, but by the bulk of what I later learned was the Aedificium. This was an octagonal construction that from a distance seemed a tetragon (a perfect form, which expresses the sturdiness and impregnability of the City of God), whose southern sides stood on the plateau of the abbey, while the northern ones seemed to grow from the steep side of the mountain, a sheer drop, to which they were bound. I might say that from below, at certain points, the cliff seemed to extend, reaching up toward the heavens, with the rock's same colors and material, which at a certain point became keep and tower (work of giants who had great familiarity with earth and sky). Three rows of windows proclaimed the triune rhythm of its elevation, so that what was physically squared on the earth was spiritually triangular in the sky. As we came closer, we realized that the quadrangular form included, at each of its corners, a heptagonal tower, five sides of which were visible on the outside—four of the eight sides, then, of the greater octagon producing four minor heptagons, which from the outside appeared as pentagons. And thus anyone can see the admirable concord of so many holy numbers, each revealing a subtle spiritual significance. Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; seven, the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In its bulk and in its form, the Aedificium resembled Castel Ursino or Castel del Monte, which I was to see later in the south of the Italian peninsula, but its inaccessible position made it more awesome than those, and capable of inspiring fear in the traveler who approached it gradually. And it was fortunate that, since it was a very clear winter morning, I did not first see the building as it appears on stormy days.

I will not say, in any case, that it prompted feelings of jollity. I felt fear, and a subtle uneasiness. God knows these were not phantoms of my immature spirit, and I was rightly interpreting indubitable omens inscribed in the stone the day that the giants began their work, and before the deluded determination of the monks dared consecrate the building to the preservation of the divine word.

As our little mules strove up the last curve of the mountain, where the main path divided into three, producing two side paths, my master stopped for a while, to look around: at the sides of the road, at the road itself, and above the road, where, for a brief stretch, a series of evergreen pines formed a natural roof, white with snow.

“A rich abbey,” he said. “The abbot likes a great display on public occasions.”

Accustomed as I was to hear him make the most unusual declarations, I did not question him. This was also because, after another bit of road, we heard some noises, and at the next turn an agitated band of monks and servants appeared. One of them, seeing us, came toward us with great cordiality. "Welcome, sir," he said, "and do not be surprised if I can guess who you are, because we have been advised of your visit. I am Remigio of Varagine, the cellarer of the monastery. And if you, as I believe, are Brother William of Baskerville, the abbot must be informed. You"—he commanded one of his party—"go up and tell them that our visitor is about to come inside the walls."

"I thank you, Brother Cellarer," my master replied politely, "and I appreciate your courtesy all the more since, in order to greet me, you have interrupted your search. But don't worry. The horse came this way and took the path to the right. He will not get far, because he will have to stop when he reaches the dungheap. He is too intelligent to plunge down that precipitous slope. ..."

"When did you see him?" the cellarer asked.

"We haven't seen him at all, have we, Adso?" William said, turning toward me with an amused look. "But if you are hunting for Brunellus, the horse can only be where I have said."

The cellarer hesitated. He looked at William, then at the path, and finally asked, "Brunellus? How did you know?"

"Come, come," William said, "it is obvious you are hunting for Brunellus, the abbot's favorite horse, fifteen hands, the fastest in your stables, with a dark coat, a full tail, small round hoofs, but a very steady gait; small head, sharp ears, big eyes. He went to the right, as I said, but you should hurry, in any case."

The cellarer hesitated for a moment longer, then gestured to his men and rushed off along the path to the right, while our mules resumed their climb. My curiosity aroused, I was about to question William, but he motioned me to wait: in fact, a few minutes later we heard cries of rejoicing, and at the turn of the path, monks and servants reappeared, leading the horse by its halter. They passed by us, all glancing at us with some amazement, then preceded us toward the abbey. I believe William also slowed the pace of his mount to give them time to tell what had happened. I had already realized that my master, in every respect a man of the highest virtue, succumbed to the vice of vanity when it was a matter of demonstrating his acumen; and having learned to appreciate his gifts as a subtle diplomatist, I understood that he wanted to reach his destination preceded by a firm reputation as a man of knowledge.

"And now tell me"—in the end I could not restrain myself—"how did you manage to know?"

"My good Adso," my master said, "during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognize the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book. Alanus de Insulis said that

*omnis mundi creatura
quasi liber et pictura
nobis est in speulum*

and he was thinking of the endless array of symbols with which God, through His creatures, speaks to us of the eternal life. But the universe is even more talkative than Alanus thought, and it speaks not only of the ultimate things (which it does always in an obscure fashion) but also of closer things, and then it speaks quite clearly. I am almost embarrassed to repeat to you what you should know. At the crossroads, on the still-fresh snow, a horse's hoofprints stood out very neatly, heading for the path to our left. Neatly spaced, those marks said that the hoof was small and round, and the gallop quite regular—and so I deduced the nature of the horse, and the fact that it was not running wildly like a crazed animal. At the point where the pines formed a natural roof, some twigs had been freshly broken off at a height of five feet. One of the blackberry bushes where the animal must have

turned to take the path to his right, proudly switching his handsome tail, still held some long black horsehairs in its brambles. ... You will not say, finally, that you do not know that path leads to the dungheap, because as we passed the lower curve we saw the spill of waste down the sheer cliff below the great east tower, staining the snow; and from the situation of the crossroads, the path could only lead in that direction."

"Yes," I said, "but what about the small head, the sharp ears, the big eyes ...?"

"I am not sure he has those features, but no doubt the monks firmly believe he does. As Isidore of Seville said, the beauty of a horse requires 'that the head be small, siccum prope pelle ossibus adhaerente, short and pointed ears, big eyes, flaring nostrils, erect neck, thick mane and tail, round and solid hoofs.' If the horse whose passing I inferred had not really been the finest of the stables, stableboys would have been out chasing him, but instead, the cellarer in person had undertaken the search. And a monk who considers a horse excellent, whatever his natural forms, can only see him as the auctoritates have described him, especially if"—and here he smiled slyly in my direction—"the describer is a learned Benedictine."

"All right," I said, "but why Brunellus?"

"May the Holy Ghost sharpen your mind, son!" my master exclaimed. "What other name could he possibly have? Why, even the great Buridan, who is about to become rector in Paris, when he wants to use a horse in one of his logical examples, always calls it Brunellus."

This was my master's way. He not only knew how to read the great book of nature, but also knew the way monks read the books of Scripture, and how they thought through them. A gift that, as we shall see, was to prove useful to him in the days to follow. His explanation, moreover, seemed to me at that point so obvious that my humiliation at not having discovered it by myself was surpassed only by my pride at now being a sharer in it, and I was almost congratulating myself on my insight. Such is the power of the truth that, like good, it is its own propagator. And praised be the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ for this splendid revelation I was granted.

But resume your course, O my story, for this aging monk is lingering too long over marginalia. Tell, rather, how we arrived at the great gate of the abbey, and on the threshold stood the abbot, beside whom two novices held a golden basin filled with water. When we had dismounted, he washed William's hands, then embraced him, kissing him on the mouth and giving him a holy welcome.

"Thank you, Abo," William said. "It is a great joy for me to set foot in Your Magnificence's monastery, whose fame has traveled beyond these mountains. I come as a pilgrim in the name of our Lord, and as such you have honored me. But I come also in the name of our lord on this earth, as the letter I now give you will tell you, and in his name also I thank you for your welcome."

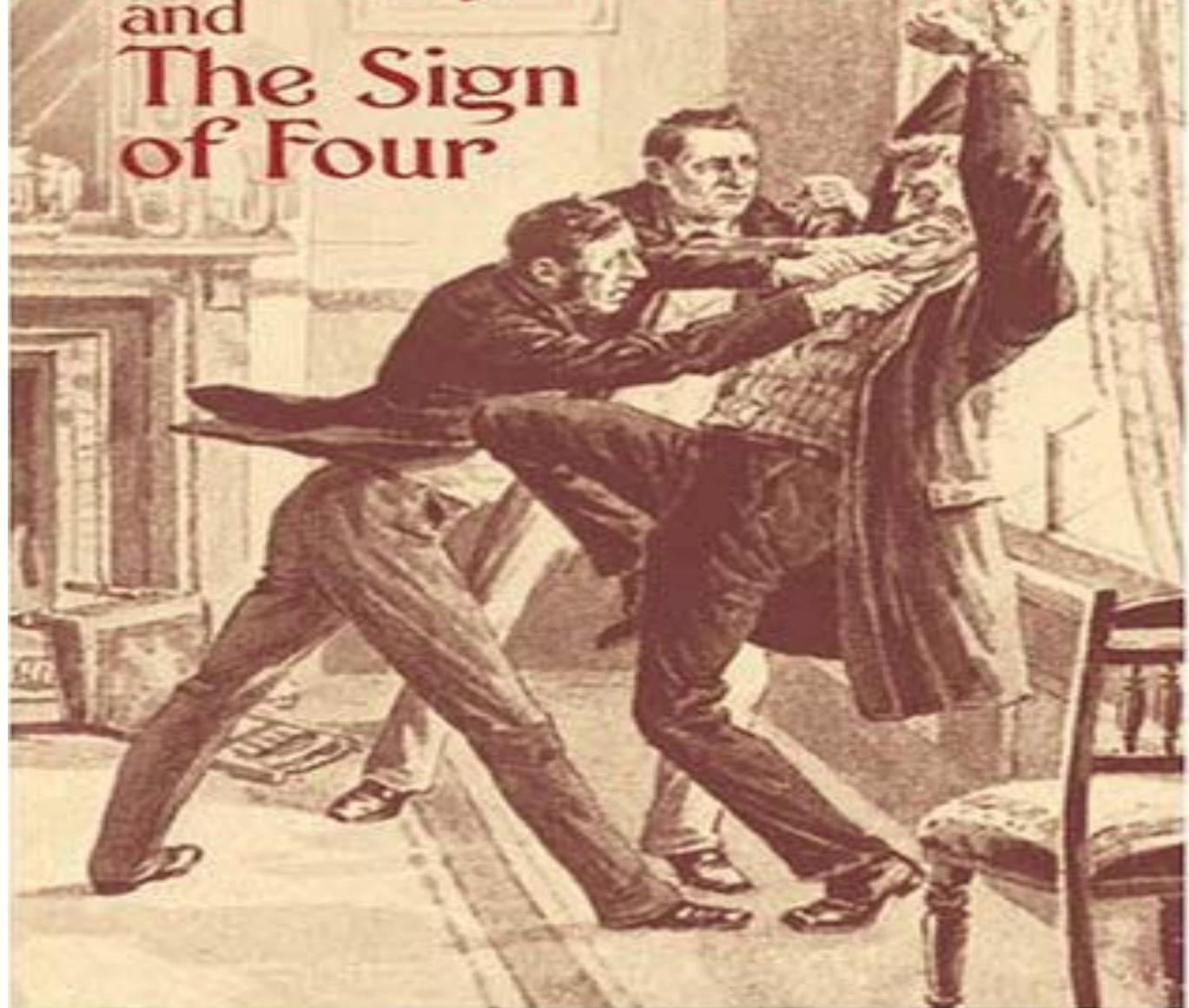
The abbot accepted the letter with the imperial seals and replied that William's arrival had in any event been preceded by other missives from his brothers (it is difficult, I said to myself with a certain pride, to take a Benedictine abbot by surprise); then he asked the cellarer to take us to our lodgings, as the grooms led our mules away. The abbot was looking forward to visiting us later, when we were refreshed, and we entered the great courtyard where the abbey buildings extended all about the gentle plain that blunted in a soft bowl—or alp—the peak of the mountain.

I shall have occasion to discuss the layout of the abbey more than once, and in greater detail. After the gate (which was the only opening in the outer walls) a tree-lined avenue led to the abbatial church. To the left of the avenue there stretched a vast area of vegetable gardens and, as I later learned, the botanical garden, around the two buildings of the balneary and the infirmary and herbarium, following the curve of the walls. Behind, to the left of the church, rose the Aedificium, separated from the church by a yard scattered with graves. The north door of the church faced the south tower of the Aedificium, which offered, frontally, its west tower to the arriving visitor's eyes;

then, to the left, the building joined the walls and seemed to plunge, from its towers, toward the abyss, over which the north tower, seen obliquely, projected. To the right of the church there were some buildings, sheltering in its lee, and others around the cloister: the dormitory, no doubt, the abbot's house, and the pilgrims' hospice, where we were heading. We reached it after crossing a handsome flower garden. On the right side, beyond a broad lawn, along the south walls and continuing eastward behind the church, a series of peasants' quarters, stables, mills, oil presses, granaries, and cellars, and what seemed to me to be the novices' house. The regular terrain, only slightly rolling, had allowed the ancient builders of that holy place to respect the rules of orientation, better than Honorius Augustoduniensis or Guillaume Durant could have demanded. From the position of the sun at that hour of the day, I noticed that the main church door opened perfectly westward, so choir and altar were facing east; and the good morning sun, in rising, could directly wake the monks in the dormitory and the animals in the stables. I never saw an abbey more beautiful or better oriented, even though subsequently I saw St. Gall, and Cluny, and Fontenay, and others still, perhaps larger but less well proportioned. Unlike the others, this one was remarkable for the exceptional size of the Aedificium. I did not possess the experience of a master builder, but I immediately realized it was much older than the buildings surrounding it. Perhaps it had originated for some other purposes, and the abbey's compound had been laid out around it at a later time, but in such a way that the orientation of the huge building should conform with that of the church, and the church's with its. For architecture, among all the arts, is the one that most boldly tries to reproduce in its rhythm the order of the universe, which the ancients called "kosmos," that is to say ornate, since it is like a great animal on whom there shine the perfection and the proportion of all its members. And praised be our Creator, who has decreed all things, in their number, weight, and measure.

DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
A Study in Scarlet
and
**The Sign
of Four**



Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Science of Deduction”

[Chapter II from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)]

CHAPTER II. THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION.

WE met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, [5](#) Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bed-rooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments.

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

He was not studying medicine. He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford's opinion upon that point. Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. Desultory readers are seldom

remarkable for the exactness of their learning. No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilized human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it.

"You appear to be astonished," he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. "Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it."

"To forget it!"

"You see," he explained, "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones."

"But the Solar System!" I protested.

"What the deuce is it to me?" he interrupted impatiently; "you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work."

I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him. I enumerated in my own mind all the various points upon which he had shown me that he was exceptionally well-informed. I even took a pencil and jotted them down. I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. It ran in this way—

SHERLOCK HOLMES—his limits.

1. Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.
2. Philosophy.—Nil.
3. Astronomy.—Nil.
4. Politics.—Feeble.
5. Botany.—Variable. Well up in belladonna,
opium, and poisons generally.

- Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. Geology.—Practical, but limited.
 Tells at a glance different soils
 from each other. After walks has
 shown me splashes upon his trousers,
 and told me by their colour and
 consistence in what part of London
 he had received them.
7. Chemistry.—Profound.
8. Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Sensational Literature.—Immense. He appears
 to know every detail of every horror
 perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

When I had got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. "If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all," I said to myself, "I may as well give up the attempt at once."

I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. There was one little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slip-shod elderly woman. On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. When any of these nondescript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bed-room. He always apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. "I have to use this room as a place of business," he said, "and these people are my clients." Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. The

landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

Its somewhat ambitious title was "The Book of Life," and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

"From a drop of water," said the writer, "a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs—by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable."

"What ineffable twaddle!" I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table, "I never read such rubbish in my life."

"What is it?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"Why, this article," I said, pointing at it with my egg spoon as I sat down to my breakfast. "I see that you have read it since you have marked it. I don't deny that it is smartly written. It irritates me though. It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair lounging who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical. I should like to see him clapped down in a third class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. I would lay a thousand to one against him."

"You would lose your money," Sherlock Holmes remarked calmly. "As for the article I wrote it myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical are really extremely practical—so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese."

"And how?" I asked involuntarily.

"Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first. Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here."

"And these other people?"

"They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee."

"But do you mean to say," I said, "that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?"

"Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes. You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn, are invaluable to me in practical work. Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan."

"You were told, no doubt."

"Nothing of the sort. I *knew* you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, 'Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.' The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished."

"It is simple enough as you explain it," I said, smiling. "You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories."

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. "No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin," he observed. "Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior

fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine."

"Have you read Gaboriau's works?" I asked. "Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?"

Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. "Lecoq was a miserable bungler," he said, in an angry voice; "he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid."

I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. "This fellow may be very clever," I said to myself, "but he is certainly very conceited."

"There are no crimes and no criminals in these days," he said, querulously. "What is the use of having brains in our profession. I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. And what is the result? There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villainy with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it."

I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation. I thought it best to change the topic.

"I wonder what that fellow is looking for?" I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

"You mean the retired sergeant of Marines," said Sherlock Holmes.

"Brag and bounce!" thought I to myself. "He knows that I cannot verify his guess."

The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stair.

"For Mr. Sherlock Holmes," he said, stepping into the room and handing my friend the letter.

Here was an opportunity of taking the conceit out of him. He little thought of this when he made that random shot. "May I ask, my lad," I said, in the blandest voice, "what your trade may be?"

"Commissionnaire, sir," he said, gruffly. "Uniform away for repairs."

"And you were?" I asked, with a slightly malicious glance at my companion.

"A sergeant, sir, Royal Marine Light Infantry, sir. No answer? Right, sir."

He clicked his heels together, raised his hand in a salute, and was gone.

**Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Science of Deduction" [Chapter I from
The Sign of the Four (1890)]**

Chapter I

The Science of Deduction

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantel-piece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would care to take anything approaching to a liberty. His great powers, his masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing him.

Yet upon that afternoon, whether it was the Beaune which I had taken with my lunch, or the additional exasperation produced by the extreme deliberation of his manner, I suddenly felt that I could hold out no longer.

"Which is it to-day?" I asked,—"morphine or cocaine?"

He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened. "It is cocaine," he said,—"a seven-per-cent. solution. Would you care to try it?"

"No, indeed," I answered, brusquely. "My constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet. I cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it."

He smiled at my vehemence. "Perhaps you are right, Watson," he said. "I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment."

"But consider!" I said, earnestly. "Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable."

He did not seem offended. On the contrary, he put his finger-tips together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who has a relish for conversation.

"My mind," he said, "rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of

existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession,—or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world."

"The only unofficial detective?" I said, raising my eyebrows.

"The only unofficial consulting detective," he answered. "I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion. I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward. But you have yourself had some experience of my methods of work in the Jefferson Hope case."

"Yes, indeed," said I, cordially. "I was never so struck by anything in my life. I even embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of 'A Study in Scarlet.'"

He shook his head sadly. "I glanced over it," said he. "Honestly, I cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."

"But the romance was there," I remonstrated. "I could not tamper with the facts."

"Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it."

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of the weather.

"My practice has extended recently to the Continent," said Holmes, after a while, filling up his old brier-root pipe. "I was consulted last week by Francois Le Villard, who, as you probably know, has come rather to the front lately in the French detective service. He has all the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher developments of his art. The case was concerned with a will, and possessed some features of interest. I was able to refer him to two parallel cases, the one at Riga in 1857, and the other at St. Louis in 1871, which have suggested to him the true solution. Here is the letter which I had this morning acknowledging my assistance." He tossed over, as he spoke, a crumpled sheet of foreign notepaper. I glanced my eyes down it, catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray "magnifiques," "coup-de-maitres," and "tours-de-force," all testifying to the ardent admiration of the Frenchman.

"He speaks as a pupil to his master," said I.

"Oh, he rates my assistance too highly," said Sherlock Holmes, lightly. "He has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of the three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge; and that may come in time. He is now translating my small works into French."

"Your works?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" he cried, laughing. "Yes, I have been guilty of several monographs. They are all upon technical subjects. Here, for example, is one 'Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos.' In it I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar-, cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with colored plates illustrating the difference in the ash. It is a point which is continually turning up in criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a clue. If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder has been done by a man who was smoking an Indian lunkah, it obviously narrows your field of search. To the trained eye there is as much difference between the black ash of a Trichinopoly and the white fluff of bird's-eye as there is between a cabbage and a potato."

"You have an extraordinary genius for minutiae," I remarked.

"I appreciate their importance. Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a preserver of impresses. Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the hands of slaters, sailors, corkcutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective,—especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals. But I weary you with my hobby."

"Not at all," I answered, earnestly. "It is of the greatest interest to me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing your practical application of it. But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other."

"Why, hardly," he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his arm-chair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. "For example, observation shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street Post-Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when there you dispatched a telegram."

"Right!" said I. "Right on both points! But I confess that I don't see how you arrived at it. It was a sudden impulse upon my part, and I have mentioned it to no one."

"It is simplicity itself," he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,—"so absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep. Just opposite the Seymour Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighborhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction."

"How, then, did you deduce the telegram?"

"Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of post-cards. What could you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth."

"In this case it certainly is so," I replied, after a little thought. "The thing, however, is, as you say, of the simplest. Would you think me impertinent if I were to put your theories to a more severe test?"

"On the contrary," he answered, "it would prevent me from taking a second dose of cocaine. I should be delighted to look into any problem which you might submit to me."

"I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?"

I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he occasionally assumed. He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. I could hardly keep from smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and handed it back.

"There are hardly any data," he remarked. "The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts."

"You are right," I answered. "It was cleaned before being sent to me." In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover his failure. What data could he expect from an uncleaned watch?

"Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren," he observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes. "Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to your elder brother, who inherited it from your father."

"That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?"

"Quite so. The W. suggests your own name. The date of the watch is nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so it was made for the last generation. Jewelry usually descends to the eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father. Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. It has, therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother."

"Right, so far," said I. "Anything else?"

"He was a man of untidy habits,—very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather."

I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with considerable bitterness in my heart.

"This is unworthy of you, Holmes," I said. "I could not have believed that you would have descended to this. You have made inquiries into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that you have read all this from his old watch! It is unkind, and, to speak plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it."

"My dear doctor," said he, kindly, "pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch."

"Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? They are absolutely correct in every particular."

"Ah, that is good luck. I could only say what was the balance of probability. I did not at all expect to be so accurate."

"But it was not mere guess-work?"

"No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit,—destructive to the logical faculty. What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend. For example, I began by stating that your brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that watch-case you notice that it is not only dinted in two places, but it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. Surely it is no great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so cavalierly must be a careless man. Neither is it a very far-fetched inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty well provided for in other respects."

I nodded, to show that I followed his reasoning.

"It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin-point upon the inside of the case. It is more handy than a label, as there is no risk of the number being lost or transposed. There are no less than four such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case. Inference,—that your brother was often at low water. Secondary inference,—that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. Finally, I ask you to look at the inner plate, which contains the key-hole. Look at the thousands of scratches all round the hole,—marks where the key has slipped. What sober man's key could have scored those grooves? But you will never see a drunkard's watch without them. He winds it at night, and he leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. Where is the mystery in all this?"

"It is as clear as daylight," I answered. "I regret the injustice which I did you. I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. May I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?"

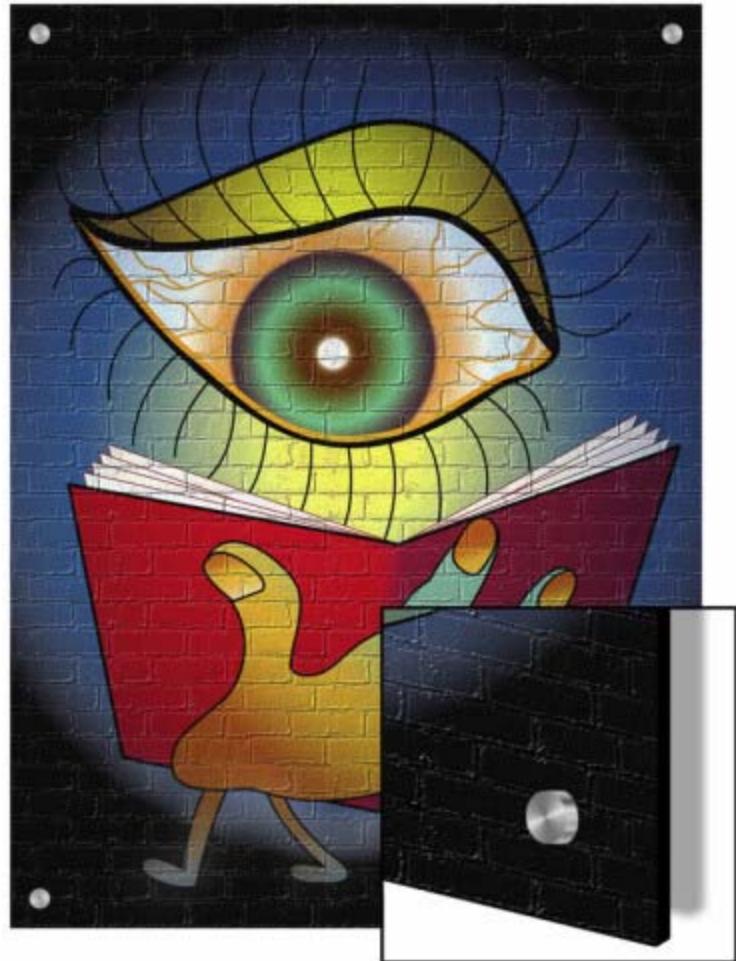
"None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the

yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-colored houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth."

I had opened my mouth to reply to this tirade, when with a crisp knock our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

"A young lady for you, sir," she said, addressing my companion.

"Miss Mary Morstan," he read. "Hum! I have no recollection of the name. Ask the young lady to step up, Mrs. Hudson. Don't go, doctor. I should prefer that you remain."



"A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based... . "

— Michel Foucault

Defamiliarization isn't about tricking the reader into misperceptions; instead, it's about demonstrating the inadequacy of our correct perceptions when they have become habituated or "automatic."

-- Andrew Seal

Trifles

(1916) *Susan Glaspell*

Scene: The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order--unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the breadbox, a dish towel on the table--other signs of uncompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens, and the Sheriff comes in, followed by the county Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the county Attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women--the Sheriff's Wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly and stand close together near the door.

COUNTY ATTORNEY (rubbing his hands). This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS. PETERS (after taking a step forward). I'm not--cold.

SHERIFF (unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to the beginning of official business). Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF (looking about). It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night, I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us--no use getting pneumonia with a big case on; but I told him not to touch anything except the stove--and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF. Oh--yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy--I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today, and as long as I went over everything here myself-

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE. Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place; and as I got here, I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before, and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet--I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house

and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE. I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. so I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, "Come in." I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door--this door (indicating the door by which the two women are still standing), and there in that rocker-- (pointing to it) sat Mrs. Wright. (They all look at the rocker.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY. What--was she doing?

HALE. She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of--pleatin' it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And how did she--look?

HALE. Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How do you mean--queer?

HALE. Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE. Why, I don't think she minded--one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said, "Is it?"--and went on kind of pleatin' at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she--laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "'Cause he's dead," says she. "Dead?" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why--where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs--like that (himself pointing to the room above). I got up, with the idea of going up there. I talked from there to here--then I says, "Why, what did he die of?" "He died of a rope around his neck," says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might--need help. We went upstairs, and there he was lying'--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point in all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE. Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. I looked...(Stops, his face twitches.)...but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, "No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything." So we went back downstairs. She was still sitting that same way. "Has anybody been notified?" I asked. "No," says she, unconcerned. "Who did this, Mrs. Wright?" said Harry. He said it business-like--and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. "I don't know," she says. "You don't know?" says Harry. "No," says she, "Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?" says Harry. "Yes," says she, "but I was on the inside." "Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him, and you didn't wake up?" says Harry. "I didn't wake up," she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, "I sleep sound." Harry was going to ask her more questions, but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner.

HALE. she moved from that chair to this over here... (Pointing to a small chair in the corner)...and just sat there with her hand held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me--scared.

(The County Attorney, who has had his notebook out, makes a note.) I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. (looking around). I guess we'll go upstairs first--and then out to the barn and around there. (To the Sheriff). You're convinced that there was nothing important here--nothing that would point to any motive?

SHERIFF. Nothing here but kitchen things.

(The County Attorney, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Here's a nice mess.

(The women draw nearer.)

MRS. PETERS (to the other woman). Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. (To the Lawyer). She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

(The two women move a little closer together.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY (with the gallantry of a young politician). And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? (The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes dipperful of water from the pail and, pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller towel, turns it for a cleaner place.) Dirty towels! (Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink.) Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE (stiffly). There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. To be sure. And yet... (With a little bow to her.) ...I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. (He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.)

MRS. HALE. Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS. HALE (shaking her head.) I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house--it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS. HALE. I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then--

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes--?

MRS. HALE (looking about.) It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No--it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS. HALE. No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now. (He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.)

SHERIFF. I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mr. Henderson.

(The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.)

MRS. HALE. I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticizing. (She arranges the pans under sink which the Lawyer had shoved out of place.)

MRS. PETERS. Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS. HALE. Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. (Gives the roller towel a pull.) Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS. PETERS. (who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted on end of a towel that covers a pan). She had bread set. (Stands still.)

MRS. HALE (eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the breadbox, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it.)she was going to put this in there. (Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things.) It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. (Gets up on the chair and looks.) I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes--here; (Holding it toward the window.) This is cherries, too. (Looking again.) I declare I believe that's the only one. (Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside.) She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

(She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room, front table. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair, which she has touched, rocks back and forth.)

MRS. PETERS. Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back.] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them. (They go into the other room; reappear, Mrs. Peters carrying a dress and skirt, Mrs. Hale following with a pair of shoes.)

MRS. PETERS. My, it's cold in there. (She puts the cloth on the big table, and hurries to the stove.)

MRS HALE (examining the skirt). Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was MInnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that--oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take?

MRS. PETERS. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. (Opens stair door and looks.) Yes, here it is. (Quickly shuts door leading upstairs..)

MRS. HALE (abruptly moving toward her.) Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Do you think she did it?

MRS. PETERS (in a frightened voice.) Oh, I don't know.

MRS. HALE. Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS. PETERS (starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice.) Mrs. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in speech, and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS. HALE. Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS. PETERS. No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a --funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS. HALE. That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS. PETERS. Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger or--sudden feeling.

MRS. HALE (who is standing by the table). Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. (she puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at the table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy.) It's wiped here. (Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.) Wonder how they are finding things upstairs? I hope she had it a little more there. You know, it seems kind of

sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS. PETERS. But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

MRS. HALE. I s'pose 'tis. (Unbuttoning her coat.) Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. You won't feel them when you go out. (Mrs. Peters takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at the back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.)

MRS. PETERS. She was piecing a quilt. (She brings the large sewing basket, and they look at the bright pieces.)

MRS. HALE. It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt or just knot it? (Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters, followed by Hale and the County Attorney.)

SHERIFF. They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it. (The men laugh, the women look abashed.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY (rubbing his hands over the stove). Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up. (The men go outside.)

MRS. HALE (resentfully). I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. (She sits down at the big table, smoothing out a block with decision.) I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS. PETERS. (apologetically). Of course they've got awful important things on their minds. (Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table.)

MRS. HALE (examining another block.) Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about! (After she has said this, they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant Mrs. Hale has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.)

MRS. PETERS. Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE (mildly). Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. (Threading a needle). Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS. PETERS. (nervously). I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS. HALE. I'll just finish up this end. (Suddenly stopping and leaning forward.) Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Yes, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS. PETERS. Oh--I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. (Mrs. Hale starts to say something looks at Mrs. Peters, then goes on sewing.) Well, I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. (Putting apron and other things together.) I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS. HALE. In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS. PETERS. (looking in cupboard). Why, here's a birdcage. (Holds it up.) Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

MRS. HALE. Why, I don't know whether she did or not--I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS. PETERS. (glancing around). Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why should she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it?

MRS. HALE. I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS. PETERS. No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats--being afraid of them. My cat got in her room, and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS. HALE. My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS. PETERS. (examining the cage). Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS. HALE. (looking, too.) Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS. PETERS. Why, yes. (she brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.)

MRS. HALE. I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS. PETERS. But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome of me sitting here alone.

MRS. HALE. It would, wouldn't it? (Dropping her sewing). But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes she was here. I-- (Looking around the room.)--wish I had.

MRS. PETERS. But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale---your house and your children.

MRS. HALE. I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful--and that's why I ought to have come. I--I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow, and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now--(Shakes her head.)

MRS. PETERS. Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until--something comes up.

MRS. HALE. Not having children makes less work--but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS. HALE. Yes--good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him. (Shivers.) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. (Pauses, her eye falling on the cage.) I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS. PETERS. I don't know, unless it got sick and died. (She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again; both women watch it.)

MRS.> HALE. She--come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself--real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and--fluttery. How--she--did--change. (Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things.) Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS. PETERS. Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possible be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here--and her things. (They look in the sewing basket.)

MRS. HALE. Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it (Brings out a fancy box.) What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. (Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose.) Why-- (Mrs. Peters bend nearer, then turns her face away.) There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS. PETERS. Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS. HALE (lifting the silk.) Oh, Mrs. Peters--it's-- (Mrs. Peters bend closer.)

MRS. PETERS. It's the bird.

MRS. HALE (jumping up.) But, Mrs. Peters--look at it. Its neck! Look at its neck! It's all-other side to.

MRS. PETERS. Somebody--wrung--its neck.

(Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension of horror. Steps are heard outside. Mrs. Hale slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter Sheriff and County Attorney. Mrs. Peters rises.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY (as one turning from serious thing to little pleasantries). Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS. PETERS. We think she was going to--knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. (Seeing the birdcage.) Has the bird flown?

MRS. HALE (putting more quilt pieces over the box.) We think the--cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY (preoccupied). Is there a cat?

(Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters.

) MRS. PETERS. Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY (to Sheriff Peters, continuing an interrupted conversation.) No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. (They start upstairs.) It would have to have been someone who knew just the--

(Mrs. Peters sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now, it is the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they cannot help saying it.) MRS. HALE. She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS. PETERS. (in a whisper). When I was a girl--my kitten--there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes--and before I could get there--(Covers her face an instant.) If they hadn't held me back, I would have-- (Catches herself, looks upstairs, where steps are heard, falters weakly.)--hurt him.

MRS. HALE (with a slow look around her.) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. (Pause.) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird--a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS. PETERS (moving uneasily). We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS. HALE. I knew John Wright.

MRS. PETERS. It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS. HALE. His neck, Choked the life out of him.

(Her hand goes out and rests on the birdcage.) MRS. PETERS (with a rising voice). We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS. HALE (her own feeling not interrupted.) If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful--still, after the bird was still.

MRS. PETERS (something within her speaking). I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died--after he was two years old, and me with no other then--

MRS. HALE (moving). How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for evidence?

MRS. PETERS. I know what stillness is. (Pulling herself back). The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale. MRS. HALE (not as if answering that). I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. (A look around the room). Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS. Peters (looking upstairs). We mustn't--take on.

MRS. HALE. I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be--for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things--it's all just a different kind of the same thing. (Brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.) If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She--she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS. PETERS (takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice). My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a--dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with--with--wouldn't they laugh!

(The men are heard coming downstairs.) MRS. HALE (under her breath). Maybe they would--maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show--something to make a story about--a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it.

(The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door.)

HALE. Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY. I'm going to stay here awhile by myself (To the Sheriff). You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF. Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

(The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.) COUNTY ATTORNEY. Oh I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked up. (Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.) No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

MRS. PETERS. Not--just that way.

SHERIFF (chuckling). Married to the law. (Moves toward the other room.) I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY (scoffingly). Oh, windows!

SHERIFF. We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

(Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes take a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take the bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY (facetiously). Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies!

MRS. HALE (her hand against her pocket). We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson.

Susan Keating Glaspell (July 1, 1876 – July 27, 1948) An American Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, actress, director, and bestselling novelist. As one of the founders of the Playwright's Theatre, also known as the Provincetown Players, Susan Glaspell led a revolution in American theater. Between 1916 and 1922, the Provincetown Players produced new plays by young playwrights.

Anyone who says they have only one life to live must not know how to read a book.
~Author Unknown



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The Story of the Eldest Princess



The Lady with the Rooks, Edward Calvert, 1829

The Story of the Eldest Princess

Once upon a time, in a kingdom between the sea and the mountains, between the forest and the desert, there lived a King and Queen with three daughters. Their eldest daughter was pale and quiet, the second daughter was brown and active, and the third was one of those Sabbath daughters who are bonny and bright and good and gay, of whom everything and nothing was expected.

When the eldest Princess was born, the sky was a speedwell blue, covered with very large, lazy, sheep-curly white clouds. When the second Princess was born, there were grey and creamy mares' tails streaming at great speed across the blue. And when the third Princess was born, the sky was a perfectly clear pane of sky-blue, with not a cloud to be seen, so that you might think the blue was spangled with sun-gold, though this was an illusion.

By the time they were young women, things had changed greatly. When they were infants, there were a series of stormy sunsets tinged with sea-green, and seaweed-green. Later there were, as well as the sunsets, dawns, where the sky was mackerel-puckered and underwater-dappled with lime-green and bottle-green and other greens too, malachite and jade. And when they were moody girls the green colours flecked and streaked the blue and the grey all day long, ranging from bronze-greens through emerald to palest opal-greens, with hints of fire. In the early days the people stood in the streets and fields with their mouths open, and said oh, and ah, in tones of admiration and wonder. Then one day a small girl said to her mother that there had been no blue at all for three days now, and she wanted to see blue again. And her mother told her to be sensible and patient and it would blow over, and in about a month the sky was blue, or mostly blue, but only for few days, and streaked, ominously, the people now felt, with aquamarine. And the blue days were further and further apart, and the greens were more and more varied, until a time when it became quite clear that the fundamental colour of the sky was no longer what they still called sky-blue, but a new sky-green, a pale flat green somewhere between the colours which had once been apple and grass and fern. But of course apple and grass and fern looked very different against this new light, and something very odd and dimming happened to lemons and oranges, and something more savage and hectic to poppies and pomegranates and ripe chillies.

The people, who had at first been entranced, became restive, and, as people will, blamed the King and Queen for the disappearance of the blue sky. They sent deputations to ask for its return, and they met and muttered in angry knots in the Palace Square. The royal couple consulted each other, and assured each other that they were blameless of greening, but they were uneasy, as it is deep in human

nature to suppose human beings, oneself or others, to be responsible for whatever happens. So they consulted the chief ministers, the priests, and a representative sample of generals, witches and wizards. The ministers said nothing could be done, though a contingency-fund might usefully be set up for when a course of action became clear. The priests counselled patience and self-denial, as a general sanative measure, abstention from lentils, and the consumption of more lettuce. The generals supposed it might help to attack their neighbour to the East, since it was useful to have someone else to blame, and the marches and battles would distract the people.

The witches and wizards on the whole favoured a Quest. One rather powerful and generally taciturn wizard, who had interfered very little, but always successfully, in affairs of State, came out of his cavern, and said that someone must be sent along the Road through the Forest across the Desert and into the Mountains, to fetch back the single silver bird and her nest of ash-branches. The bird, he added, was kept in the walled garden of the Old Man of the Mountains, where she sipped from the crystal fountain of life, and was guarded by a thicket of thorns – poisonous thorns – and an interlaced ring of venomous fiery snakes. He believed that advice could be sought along the way about how to elude their vigilance, but the only advice he could give was to keep to the Road, and stray neither in the Forest, nor in the Desert, nor in the rocky paths, and always to be courteous. Then he went back to his cavern.

The King and Queen called together the Council of State, which consisted of themselves, their daughters, the chief minister and an old duchess, to decide what to do. The minister advised the Quest, since that was a positive action, which would please the people, and not disrupt the state. The second Princess said she would go of course, and the old duchess went to sleep. The King said he thought it should be done in an orderly manner, and he rather believed that the eldest Princess should go, since she was the first, and could best remember the blue sky. Quite why that mattered so much, no one knew, but it seemed to, and the eldest Princess said she was quite happy to set out that day, if that was what the council believed was the right thing to do.

So she set out. They gave her a sword, and an inexhaustible water-bottle someone had brought back from another Quest, and a package of bread and quails' eggs and lettuce and pomegranates, which did not last very long. They all gathered at the city gate to wish her well, and a trumpeter blew a clear, silver sound into the emptiness ahead, and a minister produced a map of the Road, with one or two sketchy patches, especially in the Desert, where its undeviating track tended to be swallowed by sandstorms.

The eldest Princess travelled quickly enough along the Road. Once or twice she thought she saw an old woman ahead of her, but this figure vanished at certain bends and slopes of the path, and did not reappear for some time, and then only briefly, so that it was never clear to the Princess whether there was one, or a succession of old women. In any case, if they were indeed, or she was indeed, an

old woman, or old women, she or they were always very far ahead, and travelling extremely fast.

The Forest stretched along the Road. Pale green glades along its edges, deeper rides, and dark tangled patches beyond these. The Princess could hear, but not see, birds calling and clattering and croaking in the trees. And occasional butterflies sailed briefly out of the glades towards the Road, busy small scarlet ones, lazily swooping midnight-blue ones, and once, a hand-sized transparent one, a shimmering film of wings with two golden eyes in the centre of the lower wing. This creature hovered over the Road, and seemed to follow the Princess for several minutes, but without ever crossing some invisible barrier between Forest and Road. When it dipped and turned back into the dappled light of the trees the Princess wanted to go after it, to walk on the grass and moss, and knew she must not. She felt a little hungry by now, although she had the inexhaustible water-bottle.

She began to think. She was by nature a reading, not a travelling princess. This meant both that she enjoyed her new striding solitude in the fresh air, and that she had read a great many stories in her spare time, including several stories about princes and princesses who set out on Quests. What they all had in common, she thought to herself, was a pattern in which the two elder sisters, or brothers, set out very confidently, failed in one way or another, and were turned to stone, or imprisoned in vaults, or cast into magic sleep, until rescued by the third royal person, who did everything well, restored the first and the second, and fulfilled the Quest.

She thought she would not like to waste seven years of her brief life as a statue or prisoner if it could be avoided.

She thought that of course she could be vigilant, and very courteous to all passers-by – most elder princesses' failings were failings of courtesy or over-confidence.

There was nobody on the Road to whom she could be courteous, except the old woman, or women, bundling along from time to time a long way ahead.

She thought, I am in a pattern I know, and I suspect I have no power to break it, and I am going to meet a test and fail it, and spend seven years as a stone.

This distressed her so much that she sat down on a convenient large stone at the side of the road and began to weep.

The stone seemed to speak to her in a thin, creaking, dry sort of voice. 'Let me out,' it said. 'I cannot get out.' It sounded irritable and angry.

The Princess jumped up. 'Who are you?' she cried. 'Where are you?'

'I am trapped under this stone,' buzzed the voice. 'I cannot get out. Roll away the stone.'

The Princess put her hands gingerly to the stone and pushed. Pinned underneath it, in a hollow of the ground was a very large and dusty scorpion, waving angry pincers, and somewhat crushed in the tail.

'Did you speak?'

‘Indeed I did. I was screaming. It took you an age to hear me. Your predecessor on this Road sat down just here rather heavily when I was cooling myself in this good crack, and pinched my tail, as you see.’

‘I am glad to have been able to help,’ said the Princess, keeping a safe distance.

The Scorpion did not answer, as it was trying to raise itself and move forwards. It seemed to move with pain, arching its body and collapsing again, buzzing crossly to itself.

‘Can I help?’ asked the Princess.

‘I do not suppose you are skilled in healing wounds such as mine. You could lift me to the edge of the Forest where I might be in the path of someone who can heal me, if she ever passes this way again. I suppose you are tearing blindly along the Road, like all the rest.’

‘I am on a Quest, to find the single silver bird in her nest of ash-branches.’

‘You could put me on a large dock-leaf, and get on your way, then. I expect you are in a hurry.’

The Princess looked about for a dock-leaf, wondering whether this irascible creature was her first test, which she was about to fail. She wiped up another tear, and plucked a particularly tough leaf, that was growing conveniently in reach of the Road.

‘Good,’ said the fierce little beast, rearing up and waving its legs. ‘Quick now, I dislike this hole extremely. Why have you been crying?’

‘Because I am not the princess who succeeds, but one of the two who fail and I don’t see any way out. You won’t force me to be discourteous to you, though I have remarked that your own manners are far from perfect, in that you have yet to thank me for moving the stone, and you order me here and there without saying “please”, or considering that humans don’t like picking up scorpions.’

She pushed the leaf towards it as she spoke, and assisted it on to it with a twig, as delicately as she could, though it wriggled and snapped furiously as she did. She put it down in the grass at the edge of the Forest.

‘Most scorpions,’ it observed, ‘have better things to do than sting at random. If creatures like you stamp on us, then of course we retaliate. Also, if we find ourselves boxed in and afraid. But mostly we have better things to do.’ It appeared to reflect for a moment. ‘If our tails are not crushed,’ it added on a dejected note.

‘Who is it,’ the Princess enquired courteously, ‘who you think can help you?’

‘Oh, she is a very wise woman, who lives at the other side of the Forest. She would know what to do, but she rarely leaves home and why should she? She has everything she might want, where she is. If you were going that way, of course, you could carry me a little, until I am recovered. But you are rushing headlong along the Road. Good-bye.’

The Princess was rushing nowhere; she was standing very still and thinking. She said:

‘I know that story too. I carry you, and ask you, but will you not sting me? And you say, no, it is not in my interest to sting you. And when we are going along,

you sting me, although we shall both suffer. And I ask, why did you do that? And you answer – it is my nature.'

'You are a very learned young woman, and if we were travelling together you could no doubt tell me many instructive stories. I might also point out that I cannot sting you – my sting is disabled by the accident to my tail. You may still find me repugnant. Your species usually does. And in any case, you are going along this road, deviating neither to right nor left. Good-bye.'

The Princess looked at the Scorpion. Under the dust it was a glistening blue-black, with long arms, fine legs and complex segments like a jet necklace. Its claws made a crescent before its head. It was not possible to meet its eye, which was disconcerting.

'I think you are very handsome.'

'Of course I am. I am quick and elegant and versatile and delightfully intricate. I am surprised, however, that you can see it.'

The Princess listened only distractedly to this last remark. She was thinking hard. She said, mostly to herself:

'I could just walk out of this inconvenient story and go my own way. I could just leave the Road and look for my own adventures in the Forest. It would make no difference to the Quest. I should have failed if I left the Road and then the next could set off. Unless of course I got turned into stone for leaving the Road.'

'I shouldn't think so,' said the Scorpion. 'And you could be very helpful to me, if you chose, and I know quite a few stories too, and helping other creatures is always a good idea, according to them.'

The Princess looked into the Forest. Under the green sky its green branches swayed and rustled in a beckoning way. Its mossy floor was soft and tempting after the dust and grit of the Road. The Princess bent down and lifted up the Scorpion on its leaf and put it carefully into the basket which had contained her food. Then, with a little rebellious skip and jump, she left the Road, and set out into the trees. The Scorpion said she should go south-west, and that if she was hungry it knew where there was a thicket of brambles with early blackberries and a tree-trunk with some mushrooms, so they went in search of those, and the Princess made her mouth black without quite assuaging her hunger.

They travelled on, and they travelled on, in a green-arched shade, with the butterflies crowding round the Princess's head and resting on her hair and shoulders. Then they came to a shady clearing, full of grassy stumps and old dry roots, beneath one of which the Princess's keen eye detected a kind of struggling and turbulence in the sand. She stopped to see what it was, and heard a little throaty voice huskily repeating:

'Water. Oh, please, water, if you can hear me, water.'

Something encrusted with sand was crawling and flopping over the wiry roots, four helpless legs and a fat little belly. The Princess got down on her knees, ignoring the angry hissing of the Scorpion. Two liquid black eyes peered at her out of the sandy knobs, and a wide mouth opened tremulously and croaked 'Water' at her. The Princess brought out her inexhaustible water-bottle and

dropped drops into the mouth and washed away the crust of sand, revealing a large and warty green and golden toad, with an unusual fleshy crest on its head. It puffed out its throat and held up its little fingers and toes to the stream of water. As the sand flowed away, it could be seen that there was a large bloody gash on the toad's head.

'Oh, you are hurt,' cried the Princess.

'I was caught,' said the Toad, 'by a Man who had been told that I carry a jewel of great value in my head. So he decided to cut it out. But that is only a story, of course, a human story told by creatures who like sticking coloured stones on their heads and skins, and all I am is flesh and blood. Fortunately for me, my skin is mildly poisonous to Men, so his fingers began to itch and puff up, and I was able to wriggle so hard that he dropped me and lost me. But I do not think that I have the strength to make my way back to the person who could heal me.'

'We are travelling in her direction,' said the Scorpion. 'You may travel with us if you care to. You could travel in this Princess's luncheon-basket, which is empty.'

'I will come gladly,' said the Toad. 'But she must not suppose I shall turn into a handsome Prince, or any such nonsense. I am a handsome Toad, or would be, if I had not been hacked at. A handsome Toad is what I shall remain.'

The Princess helped it, with a stick, to hop into her lunch-basket, and continued on through the Forest, in the direction indicated by the Scorpion. They went deeper and darker into the trees, and began to lose sense of there being paths leading anywhere. The Princess was a little tired, but the creatures kept urging her on, to go on as far as possible before night fell. In the growing gloom she almost put her foot on what looked like a ball of thread, blowing out in the roots of some thorny bushes.

The Princess stopped and bent down. Something was hopelessly entangled in fine black cotton, dragging itself and the knots that trapped it along in the dust. She knelt on the Forest floor and peered, and saw that it was a giant insect, with its legs and its wing-cases and its belly pulled apart by the snarled threads. The Princess, palace-bred, had never seen such a beast.

'It is a Cockroach,' observed the Scorpion. 'I thought cockroaches were too clever and tough to get into this sort of mess.'

'Those threads are a trap set by the Fowler for singing birds,' observed the Toad. 'But he has only caught a giant Cockroach.'

The Princess disentangled some of the trailing ends, but some of the knots cut into the very substance of the creature, and she feared to damage it further. It settled stoically in the dust and let her move it. It did not speak. The Princess said:

'You had better come with us. We appear to be travelling towards someone who can heal you.'

The Cockroach gave a little shudder. The Princess picked it up, and placed it in the basket with the Scorpion and the Toad, who moved away from it fastidiously. It sat, inert, in its cocoon of black thread and said nothing.

They travelled in this way for several days, deeper into the Forest. The creatures told the Princess where to find a variety of nuts, and herbs, and berries, and wild mushrooms she would never have found for herself. Once, a long way off, they heard what seemed to be a merry human whistling, mixed with bird cries. The Princess was disposed to turn in its direction, but the Scorpion said that the whistler was the Fowler, and his calls were designed to entice unwary birds to fly into his invisible nets and to choke there. The Princess, although she was not a bird, was filled with unreasoning fear at this picture, and followed the Scorpion's instructions to creep away, deeper into the thornbushes. On another occasion, again at a distance, she heard the high, throaty sound of a horn, which reminded her of the hunting-parties in the Royal Parks, when the young courtiers would bring down deer and hares and flying fowl with their arrows, and the pretty maidens would clap their hands and exclaim. Again she thought of turning in the direction of the sound, and again, the creatures dissuaded her. For the poor Toad, when he heard the note of the horn, went sludge-grey with fear, and began to quake in the basket.

'That is the Hunter,' he said, 'who cut at my crest with his bunting-knife, who travels through the wood with cold corpses of birds and beasts strung together and cast over his shoulder, who will aim at a bright eye in a bush for pure fun, and quench it in blood. You must keep away from him.' So the Princess plunged deeper still into the thornbushes, though they were tugging at her hair and ripping her dress and scratching her pretty arms and neck.

And one day at noon the Princess heard a loud, clear voice, singing in a clearing, and, peering through a thornbush, saw a tall, brown-skinned man, naked to the waist, with black curly hair, leaning on a long axe, and singing:

Come live with me and be my love
And share my house and share my bed
And you may sing from dawn to dark
And chum the cream and bake the bread
And lie at night in my strong arms Beneath a
soft goosefeather spread.

The Princess was about to come out of hiding – he had such a cheery smile, and such handsome shoulders – when a dry little voice in her basket, a voice like curling wood-shavings rustling, added these lines:

And you may scour and sweep and scrub
With bleeding hands and arms like lead
And I will beat your back, and drive
My knotty fists against your head
And sing again to other girls
To take your place, when you are dead.

'Did you speak?' the Princess asked the Cockroach in a whisper. And it rustled back:

'I have lived in his house, which is a filthy place and full of empty beer-casks and broken bottles. He has five young wives buried in the garden, whom he attacked in his drunken rage. He doesn't kill them, he weeps drunken tears for them, but they lose their will to live. Keep away from the Woodcutter, if you value your life.'

The Princess found this hard to believe of the Woodcutter, who seemed so lively and wholesome. She even thought that it was in the creatures' interest to prevent her from lingering with other humans, but nevertheless their warning spoke to something in her that wanted to travel onwards, so she crept quietly away again, and the Woodcutter never knew she had heard his song, or seen him standing there, looking so handsome, leaning on his axe.

They went on, and they went on, deeper into the Forest, and the Princess began to hunger most terribly for bread and butter, touched perhaps by the Woodcutter's song. The berries she ate tasted more and more watery and were harder and harder to find as the Forest grew denser. The Cockroach seemed inanimate, perhaps exhausted by its effort at speech. The Princess felt bound to hurry, in case its life was in danger, and the other creatures complained from time to time of her clumsiness. Then, one evening, at the moment when the sky was taking on its deepest version of the pine-green that had succeeded dark indigo, the Scorpion begged her to stop and settle down for the night, for its tail ached intolerably. And the Toad added its croaking voice, and begged for more water to be poured over it. The Princess stopped and washed the Toad, and arranged a new leaf for the Scorpion, and said:

'Sometimes I think we shall wander like this, apparently going somewhere, in fact going nowhere, for the rest of our days.'

'In which case,' rasped the Scorpion, 'mine will not be very long, I fear.'

'I have tried to help,' said the Princess. 'But perhaps I should never have left the Road.'

And then the flaky voice was heard again.

'If you go on, and turn left, and turn left again, you will see. If you go on now.'

So the Princess took up the basket, and put her sandals back on her swollen feet, and went on, and left, and left again. And she saw, through the bushes, a dancing light, very yellow, very warm. And she went on, and saw, at a great distance, at the end of a path knotted with roots and spattered with sharp stones, a window between branches, in which a candle burned steadily. And although she had never in her cosseted life travelled far in the dark, she knew she was seeing, with a huge sense of hope, and warmth and relief, and a minor frisson of fear, what countless benighted travellers had seen before her – though against midnight-blue, not midnight-green – and she felt at one with all those lost homecomers and shelter-seekers.

'It is not the Woodcutter's cottage?' she asked the Cockroach. And it answered, sighing, 'No, no, it is the Last House, it is where we are going.'

And the Princess went on, running, and stumbling, and hopping, and scurrying, and by and by reached the little house, which was made of mossy stone, with a slate roof over low eaves and a solid wooden door above a white step. There was a good crisp smell of woodsmoke from the chimney. The Princess was suddenly afraid – she had got used to solitude and contriving and going on – but she knocked quickly, and waited.

The door was opened by an old woman, dressed in a serviceable grey dress, with a sharp face covered with intricate fine lines like a spider's web woven of her history, which was both resolute, thoughtful, and smiling. She had sharp green eyes under hooded, purple lids, and a plaited crown of wonderful shining hair, iron-grey, silver and bright white woven together. When she opened the door the Princess almost fainted for the wonderful smell of baking bread that came out, mingled with other delicious smells, baked apples with cinnamon, strawberry tart, just-burned sugar.

'We have been waiting for you,' said the Old Woman. 'We put the candle in the window for you every night for the last week.'

She took the Princess's basket, and led her in. There was a good log fire in the chimney, with a bed of scarlet ash, and there was a long white wooden table, and there were chairs painted in dark bright colours, and everywhere there were eyes, catching the light, blinking and shining. Eyes on the mantelpiece, in the clock, behind the plates on the shelves, jet-black eyes, glass-green eyes, huge yellow eyes, amber eyes, even rose-pink eyes. And what the Princess had taken to be an intricate coloured carpet rustled and moved and shone with eyes, and revealed itself to be a mass of shifting creatures, snakes and grasshoppers, beetles and bumblebees, mice and voles and owlets and bats, a weasel and a few praying mantises. There were larger creatures too – cats and rats and badgers and kittens and a white goat. There was a low, peaceful, lively squeaking and scratching of tiny voices, welcoming and exclaiming. In one comer was a spindle and in another was a loom, and the old lady had just put aside a complicated shawl she was crocheting from a rainbow-coloured basket of scraps of wool.

'One of you needs food,' said the Old Woman, 'and three of you need healing.'

So the Princess sat down to good soup, and fresh bread, and fruit tart with clotted cream and a mug of sharp cider, and the Old Woman put the creatures on the table, and healed them in her way. Her way was to make them tell the story of their hurts, and as they told, she applied ointments and drops with tiny feathery brushes and little bone pins, uncurling and splinting the Scorpion's tail as it rasped out the tale of its injuries, swabbing and stitching the Toad's wounded head with what looked like cobweb threads, and unknotting the threads that entwined the cockroach with almost invisible hooks and tweezers. Then she asked the Princess for her story, which the Princess told as best she could, living again the moment when she realised she was doomed to fail, imitating the Scorpion's rasp, and the Toad's croaking gulp, and the husky whisper of the Cockroach. She brought the dangers of the Forest into the warm fireside, and all the creatures shuddered at the thought of the Hunter's arrow, the Fowler's snare and the Woodman's axe. And

the Princess, telling the story, felt pure pleasure in getting it right, making it just so, finding the right word, and even – she went so far – the right gesture to throw shadow-branches and shadow-figures across the flickering firelight and the yellow pool of candlelight on the wall. And when she had finished there was all kinds of applause, harmonious wing-scraping, and claw-tapping, and rustling and chirruping.

‘You are a born storyteller,’ said the old lady. ‘You had the sense to see you were caught in a story, and the sense to see that you could change it to another one. And the special wisdom to recognise that you are under a curse – which is also a blessing – which makes the story more interesting to you than the things that make it up. There are young women who would never have listened to the creatures’ tales about the Woodman, but insisted on finding out for themselves. And maybe they would have been wise and maybe they would have been foolish: that is their story. But you listened to the Cockroach and stepped aside and came here, where we collect stories and spin stories and mend what we can and investigate what we can’t, and live quietly without striving to change the world. We have no story of our own here, we are free, as old women are free, who don’t have to worry about princes or kingdoms, but dance alone and take an interest in the creatures.’

‘But – ’ said the Princess, and stopped.

‘But?’

‘But the sky is still green and I have failed, and I told the story to suit myself.’

‘The green is a very beautiful colour, or a very beautiful range of colours, I think,’ said the old lady. ‘Here, it gives us pleasure. We write songs about greenness and make tapestries with skies of every possible green. It adds to the beauty of the newt and the lizard. The Cockroach finds it restful. Why should things be as they always were?’

The Princess did not know, but felt unhappy. And the creatures crowded round to console her, and persuade her to live quietly in the little house, which was what she wanted to do, for she felt she had come home to where she was free. But she was worried about the sky and the other princesses. Then the Cockroach chirped to the old lady:

‘Tell us the rest of the story, tell us the end of the story, of the story the Princess left.’

He was feeling decidedly better already, his segments were eased, and he could bend almost voluptuously.

‘Well,’ said the old lady, ‘this is the story of the eldest Princess. But, as you percipiently observe, you can’t have the story of the eldest, without the stories of the next two, so I will tell you those stories, or possible stories, for many things may and do happen, stories change themselves, and these stories are not histories and have not happened. So you may believe my brief stories about the middle one and the youngest or not, as you choose.’

‘I always believe stories whilst they are being told,’ said the Cockroach.

‘You are a wise creature,’ said the Old Woman. ‘That is what stories are for. And after, we shall see what we shall see.’ So she told.

The brief story of the second Princess

When the second Princess realised that the first was not returning, she too set out, and met identical problems and pleasures, and sat down on the same stone, and realised that she was caught in the same story. But being a determined young woman she decided to outwit the story, and went on, and after many adventures was able to snatch the single silver bird in her nest of branches and return in triumph to her father’s palace. And the old wizard told her that she must light the branches and burn the bird, and although she felt very uneasy about this she was determined to do as she should, so she lit the fire. And the nest and the bird were consumed, and a new glorious bird flew up from the conflagration, and swept the sky with its flaming tail, and everything was blue, as it had once been. And the Princess became Queen when her parents died, and ruled the people wisely, although they grumbled incessantly because they missed the variety of soft and sharp greens they had once been able to see.

The brief story of the third Princess

As for the third Princess, when the bird flamed across the sky, she went into the orchard and thought, I have no need to go on a Quest. I have nothing I must do, I can do what I like. I have no story. And she felt giddy with the empty space around her, a not entirely pleasant feeling. And a frisky little wind got up and ruffled her hair and her petticoats and blew bits of blossom all over the blue sky. And the Princess had the idea that she was tossed and blown like the petals of the cherry-trees. Then she saw an old woman, with a basket, at the gate of the orchard. So she walked towards her and when she got there, the Old Woman told her, straight out,

‘You are unhappy because you have nothing to do.’

So the Princess saw that this was a wise old woman, and answered politely that this was indeed the case.

‘I might help,’ said the Old Woman. ‘Or I might not. You may look in my basket.’

In the basket were a magic glass which would show the Princess her true love, wherever he was, whatever he was doing, and a magic loom, that made tapestries that would live on the walls of the palace chambers as though they were thickets of singing birds, and Forest rides leading to the edge of vision.

‘Or I could give you a thread,’ said the Old Woman, as the Princess hesitated, for she did not want to see her true love, not yet, not just yet, he was the end of stories not begun, and she did not want to make magic Forests, she wanted to see real ones. So she watched the old lady pick up from the grass the end of what appeared to be one of those long, trailing gossamer threads left by baby spiders

travelling on the air in the early dawn. But it was as strong as linen thread, and as fine as silk, and when the Old Woman gave it a little tug it tugged tight and could be seen to run away, out of the orchard, over the meadow, into the woods and out of sight.

‘You gather it in,’ said the Old Woman, ‘and see where it takes you.’

The thread glittered and twisted, and the Princess began to roll it neatly in, and took a few steps along it, and gathered it, and rolled it into a ball, and followed it, out of the orchard, across the meadow, and into the woods, and . . . but that is another story.

‘Tell me one thing,’ said the eldest Princess to the Old Woman, when they had all applauded her story. The moon shone in an emerald sky, and all the creatures drowsed and rustled. ‘Tell me one thing. Was that you, ahead of me in the road, in such a hurry?’

‘There is always an old woman ahead of you on a journey, and there is always an old woman behind you too, and they are not always the same, and may be fearful or kindly, dangerous or delightful, as the road shifts, and you speed along it. Certainly I was ahead of you, and behind you too, but not only I, and not only as I am now.’

‘I am happy to be here with you as you are now.’

‘Then that is a good place to go to sleep, and stop telling stories until the morning, which will bring its own changes.’

So they went to bed, and slept until the sun streaked the apple-green horizon with grassy-golden light.

“Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.”

--Adrienne Rich



“To read is to wander through an imposed system”

--Michel de Certeau

The Princess



And so it was settled that she was a genuine princess. They had brought the equipment: seven thick mattresses stuffed with eiderdown, a magnificent bed, and a small green pea, which was placed with some care under the mattresses. They made up the bed and the princess lay down, but she couldn't sleep because of the green pea. The proof was conclusive. The pea was removed, and the royal parents embraced their daughter. She was very beautiful and exceptionally charming, and, of course, her sensitivity was such that it was absolutely amazing. If anyone cried, she would suffer so much that no one was allowed to cry in the palace. If anyone was hurt, she would take to her bed and be ill for weeks. In consequence, no one who was hurt was admitted within. Sickness sickened her, and she could not bear to see anything that was in the least bit ugly. Only good-looking people and those in good health were allowed to be seen. The king, her father, and the queen, her mother, did their best for her, and the people of the city were quite proud of her—she being a princess and the genuine thing; but it soon became obvious that her skin was such that she was allergic to everything. Cotton was too coarse and silks too heavy. The king levied taxes and all the people were made to work hard at spinning and weaving. They worked very hard and grew very tired, but it wasn't any use, and finally, the princess caught a cold and died of it.

Nadine Gordimer
Once upon a Time

Someone has written to ask me to contribute to an anthology of stories for children. I reply that I don't write children's stories; and he writes back that at a recent congress/book fair/seminar a certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children. I think of sending a postcard saying I don't accept that I "ought" to write anything.

And then last night I woke up—or rather was awakened without knowing what had roused me.

A voice in the echo-chamber of the subconscious?

A sound.

A creaking of the kind made by the weight carried by one foot after another along a wooden floor. I listened. I felt the apertures of my ears distend with concentration. Again: the creaking. I was waiting for it; waiting to hear if it indicated that feet were moving from room to room, coming up the passage—to my door. I have no burglar bars, no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as people who do take these precautions, and my windowpanes are thin as rime, could shatter like a wineglass. A woman was murdered (how do they put it) in broad daylight in a house two blocks away, last year, and the fierce dogs who guarded an old widower and his collection of antique clocks were strangled before he was knifed by a casual laborer he had dismissed without pay.

I was staring at the door, making it out in my mind rather than seeing it, in the dark. I lay quite still—a victim already—the arrhythmia of my heart was fleeing, knocking this way and that against its body-cage. How finely tuned the senses are, just out of rest, sleep! I could never listen intently as that in the distractions of the day, I was reading every faintest sound, identifying and classifying its possible threat.

But I learned that I was to be neither threatened nor spared. There was no human weight pressing on the boards, the creaking was a buckling, an epicenter of stress. I was in it. The house that surrounds me while I sleep is built on undermined ground; far beneath my bed, the floor, the house's foundations, the stopes and passages of gold mines have hollowed the rock, and when some face trembles, detaches and falls, three thousand feet below, the whole house shifts slightly, bringing uneasy strain to the balance and counterbalance of brick, cement, wood and glass that hold it as a structure around me. The misbeats of my heart tailed off like the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xylophones made by the Chopi and Tsonga¹ migrant miners who might have been down there, under me in the earth at that moment. The stope where the fall was could have been disused, dripping water from its ruptured veins; or men might now be interred there in the most profound of tombs.

I couldn't find a position in which my mind would let go of my body—release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story, a bedtime story.

In a house, in a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after. They had a little boy, and they loved him very much. They had a cat and a dog that the little boy loved very much. They had a car and a caravan trailer for holidays, and a swimming-pool which was fenced so that the little boy and his playmates would not fall in and drown. They had a housemaid who was absolutely trustworthy and an itinerant gardener who was highly recommended by the neighbors. For when they began to live happily ever after they were warned, by that wise old witch, the husband's mother, not to take on anyone off the street. They were inscribed in a medical benefit society, their pet dog was licensed, they were insured against fire, flood damage and theft, and subscribed to the local Neighborhood Watch, which supplied them with a plaque for their gates lettered YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED over the silhouette of a would-be intruder. He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist.

It was not possible to insure the house, the swimming pool or the car against riot damage. There were riots, but these were outside the city, where people of another color were quartered. These people were not allowed into the suburb except as reliable

¹ Chopi and Tsonga: two peoples from Mozambique, northeast of South Africa

housemaids and gardeners, so there was nothing to fear, the husband told the wife. Yet she was afraid that some day such people might come up the street and tear off the plaque YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED and open the gates and stream in... Nonsense, my dear, said the husband, there are police and soldiers and tear-gas and guns to keep them away. But to please her—for he loved her very much and buses were being burned, cars stoned, and schoolchildren shot by the police in those quarters out of sight and hearing of the suburb—he had electronically controlled gates fitted. Anyone who pulled off the sign YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED and tried to open the gates would have to announce his intentions by pressing a button and speaking into a receiver relayed to the house. The little boy was fascinated by the device and used it as a walkie-talkie in cops and robbers play with his small friends.

The riots were suppressed, but there were many burglaries in the suburb and somebody's trusted housemaid was tied up and shut in a cupboard by thieves while she was in charge of her employers' house. The trusted housemaid of the man and wife and little boy was so upset by this misfortune befalling a friend left, as she herself often was, with responsibility for the possessions of the man and his wife and the little boy that she implored her employers to have burglar bars attached to the doors and windows of the house, and an alarm system installed. The wife said, She is right, let us take heed of her advice. So from every window and door in the house where they were living happily ever after they now saw the trees and sky through bars, and when the little boy's pet cat tried to climb in by the fanlight to keep him company in his little bed at night, as it customarily had done, it set off the alarm keening through the house.

The alarm was often answered—it seemed—by other burglar alarms, in other houses, that had been triggered by pet cats or nibbling mice. The alarms called to one another across the gardens in shrills and bleats and wails that everyone soon became accustomed to, so that the din roused the inhabitants of the suburb no more than the croak of frogs and musical grating of cicadas' legs. Under cover of the electronic harpies' discourse intruders sawed the iron bars and broke into homes, taking away hi-fi equipment, television sets, cassette players, cameras and radios, jewelry and clothing, and sometimes were hungry enough to devour everything in the refrigerator or paused audaciously to drink the whiskey in the cabinets or patio bars. Insurance companies paid no compensation for single malt², a loss made keener by the property owner's knowledge that the thieves wouldn't even have been able to appreciate what it was they were drinking.

Then the time came when many of the people who were not trusted housemaids and gardeners hung about the suburb because they were unemployed. Some importuned for a job: weeding or painting a roof; anything, baas³, madam. But the man and his wife remembered the warning about taking on anyone off the street. Some drank liquor and fouled the street with discarded bottles. Some begged, waiting for the man or his wife to drive the car out of the electronically operated gates. They sat about with their feet in the gutters, under the jacaranda trees that made a green tunnel of the street—for it was a beautiful suburb, spoilt only by their presence—and sometimes they fell asleep lying right before the gates in the midday sun. The wife could never see anyone go hungry. She sent the trusted housemaid out with bread and tea, but the trusted housemaid said these were loafers and tsotsis⁴, who would come and tie her and shut her in a cupboard. The husband said, She's right. Take heed of her advice. You only encourage them with your bread and tea. They are looking for their chance . . . And he brought the little boy's tricycle from the garden into the house every night, because if the house was surely secure, once locked and with the alarm set, someone might still be able to climb over the wall or the electronically closed gates into the garden.

You are right, said the wife, then the wall should be higher. And the wise old witch, the husband's mother, paid for the extra bricks as her Christmas present to her son and his wife—the little boy got a Space Man outfit and a book of fairy tales.

But every week there were more reports of intrusion: in broad daylight and the dead of night, in the early hours of the morning, and even in the lovely summer twilight—a certain family was

² Single malt: an expensive Scotch whiskey

³ baas: boss

⁴ tsotsis: hooligans

at dinner while the bedrooms were being ransacked upstairs. The man and his wife, talking of the latest armed robbery in the suburb, were distracted by the sight of the little boy's pet cat effortlessly arriving over the seven-foot wall, descending first with a rapid bracing of extended forepaws down on the sheer vertical surface, and then a graceful launch, landing with swishing tail within the property. The whitewashed wall was marked with the cat's comings and goings; and on the street side of the wall there were larger red-earth smudges that could have been made by the kind of broken running shoes, seen on the feet of unemployed loiterers, that had no innocent destination.

When the man and wife and little boy took the pet dog for its walk round the neighborhood streets they no longer paused to admire this show of roses or that perfect lawn; these were hidden behind an array of different varieties of security fences, walls and devices. The man, wife, little boy and dog passed a remarkable choice: there was the low-cost option of pieces of broken glass embedded in cement along the top of walls, there were iron grilles ending in lance-points, there were attempts at reconciling the aesthetics of prison architecture with the Spanish Villa style (spikes painted pink) and with the plaster urns of neoclassical facades (twelve-inch pikes finned like zigzags of lightning and painted pure white). Some walls had a small board affixed, giving the name and telephone number of the firm responsible for the installation of the devices. While the little boy and the pet dog raced ahead, the husband and wife found themselves comparing the possible effectiveness of each style against its appearance; and after several weeks when they paused before this barricade or that without needing to speak, both came out with the conclusion that only one was worth considering. It was the ugliest but the most honest in its suggestion of the pure concentration-camp style, no frills, all evident efficacy. Placed the length of walls, it consisted of a continuous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jagged blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting entangled in its fangs. There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh. The wife shuddered to look at it. You're right, said the husband, anyone would think twice... And they took heed of the advice on a small board fixed to the wall: Consult DRAGON'S TEETH The People For Total Security.

Next day a gang of workmen came and stretched the razor-bladed coils all round the walls of the house where the husband and wife and little boy and pet dog and cat were living happily ever after. The sunlight flashed and slashed, off the serrations, the cornice of razor thorns encircled the home, shining. The husband said, Never mind. It will weather. The wife said, You're wrong. They guarantee it's rust-proof. And she waited until the little boy had run off to play before she said, I hope the cat will take heed... The husband said, Don't worry, my dear, cats always look before they leap. And it was true that from that day on the cat slept in the little boy's bed and kept to the garden, never risking a try at breaching security.

One evening, the mother read the little boy to sleep with a fairy story from the book the wise old witch had given him at Christmas. Next day he pretended to be the Prince who braves the terrible thicket of thorns to enter the palace and kiss the Sleeping Beauty back to life: he dragged a ladder to the wall, the shining coiled tunnel was just wide enough for his little body to creep in, and with the first fixing of its razor-teeth in his knees and hands and head he screamed and struggled deeper into its tangle. The trusted housemaid and the itinerant gardener, whose "day" it was, came running, the first to see and to scream with him, and the itinerant gardener tore his hands trying to get at the little boy. Then the man and his wife burst wildly into the garden and for some reason (the cat, probably) the alarm set up wailing against the screams while the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers, and they carried it—the man, the wife, the hysterical trusted housemaid and the weeping gardener—into the house.

ONCE UPON A TIME First published in 1989. Nadine Gordimer was born in 1923 in a small town near Johannesburg, South Africa, and graduated from the University of Witwatersrand. She has taught at several American universities, but continues to reside in her native country. A prolific writer, Gordimer has published more than twenty books of fiction (novels and short story collections). In addition to England's prestigious Booker Prize for Fiction, she received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991.

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margins

MANTO



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Katha has planted a tree to replace the wood used in the making of this book.

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would not hear her. The sound was muffled. As a further precaution, the father covered the girl with a thick, coarse sheet.

After some time, the sound of a calf was heard mooing in the distance. The cow pricked up her ears. She became restless and began to run up and down mooing loudly in response. They tried in vain to calm the cow down.

Having heard all the noise, the enemies closed in. Light from their burning torches flashed in the distance.

The wife snapped at her husband, "Damn it! Who asked you to bring this wretched beast along?"

Humility

The moving train was forcibly brought to a halt. Those who belonged to the other religion were dragged out and killed with swords or bullets. The rest of the passengers were treated to halva, fruits and milk.

Before the train continued on, the chief organizer of the hospitality addressed the passengers, "Bhaiyon aur Behnon! We found out about this train's arrival rather late. That's why, even though we wanted to, we weren't able to treat you in a more befitting manner."

Sorry

The knife slashed his stomach all the way to his navel.

His pyjama cord was severed.

Words of regret escaped the knifewielder's tongue, "Tsch, tsch, tsch ... I've made a mistake!"

Jelly

At six in the morning the vendor who sold ice on a pushcart was stabbed to death near the petrol pump.

His corpse lay on the road till seven. Drops of water from the melting ice trickled down on it.

At quarter past seven, the police hauled the corpse away. The ice and blood remained on the road.

A tanga passed by. The child noticed the patch of fresh, congealed blood glistening on the road. His mouth began to water. He tugged at his mother's sleeve and pointed at it, "Look Mummy, jelly!"

What's the Difference

I placed my knife on his jugular vein and ran it slowly across his neck, slaughtering him in the halal manner prescribed by Islam.

"What have you done?"

"Why?"

"Why did you kill him that way?"

"I enjoy it that way."

"To hell with your enjoyment. You should have just hacked his neck off with a single blow, the way they do in jhatka. Like this."

And the one who had slaughtered in the prescribed manner was himself slaughtered in the jhatka way.

Black Margins has been translated from "Siyah Hashiyé," originally published by Maktaba Jadeed, Lahore, 1952.

The Dog of Tetwal

The two sides had not budged from their positions for several days now. Occasional bursts of fire—about ten or twelve rounds in a day—were to be heard, but never the sound of human shrieks.

The weather was pleasant; the wind wafted across, spreading the scent of wildflowers. Oblivious to the battle on the peaks and slopes, nature was immersed in its necessary work—the birds chirped as before, the flowers continued to bloom, and lazy honey-bearing bees sleepily sipped nectar in the old, time-honoured way.

Each time a shot echoed in the hills, the chirping birds would cry out in alarm and fly up, as though someone had struck a wrong note on an instrument and shocked their hearing.

September-end was meeting the beginning of October in roseate hue. It seemed that winter and summer were negotiating peace with one another. Thin, light clouds like fluffed-up cotton sailed in the blue sky, as if out on an excursion in their white shikaras.

For several days now, the soldiers on both sides of the mountain had been restless, as no decisive action was taking place. Lying in their positions, they would get bored and then attempt to recite sh'ers to one another. If no one listened, they would hum to themselves. They remained lying on their stomachs or backs on the rocky ground, and when the order came, let off a round or two.

The two sides were entrenched in rather safe positions. The high-velocity bullets crashed against the shields of stone and fell to the ground. The two mountains on which the forces were ranged were of about the same height. Between them was a green valley—a rivulet wriggling like a fat snake on its chest.

There was no danger of air raids. Neither side possessed artillery. Therefore, fires would be lit without fear or danger, and smoke from fires on each side would rise and mingle in the air. At night, it was absolutely quiet. The soldiers on each side could hear bursts of laughter from the other. Once in a while, entering into this spirit, a soldier would begin to sing, and his voice would awaken the silence of the night. The echoes would then

reverberate, and it would seem that the mountains were repeating what they had just heard.

One round of tea had just been taken. The pine coals in the stone chulhas had grown cold. The sky was clear. There was a chill in the air. The wind had ceased to carry the scent of flowers, as though they had shut up their vial of perfume for the night. However, the sweat of the pines, their resin, left an odour in the air that was not wholly unpleasant.

The soldiers slept wrapped in their blankets, but in such a way that in a single movement they could arise, ready for battle.

Jamadar Harnam Singh was on guard. When his Rascope watch showed that it was two o'clock, he woke Ganda Singh and told him to take station. He wanted to sleep, but when he lay down, he found sleep a distant proposition, as distant as the stars in the sky. Jamadar Harnam Singh lay on his back and, gazing up at the stars, began to hum:

*Bring me a pair of shoes, studded with stars
Studded with stars
O Harnam Singh
O Yaara
Even if you have to sell your buffalo.*

Harnam Singh saw star-studded shoes scattered all over the sky, all a-twinkle.

*I will bring you shoes, studded with stars
Studded with stars
O Harnam Kaur
O Lady, even if I have to sell my buffalo.*

He smiled as the song came to an end, and realizing that he would not be able to sleep, he rose and woke up everybody else. The thought of his beloved had made him restless. He wished for some nonsensical chatter that would recreate the mood of the beloved in the song.

The soldiers did begin to talk, but in a desultory fashion. Banta Singh, the youngest and the one with the best voice, went and sat on one side. The rest, though yawning all the while, kept gossiping about trivial but entertaining matters. After a while, Banta Singh suddenly began singing "Heer" in a melancholic voice.

*Heer said, The jogi lied; no one placates a hurt lover.
I have found no one—grown weary, looking
for the one who calls back the departed lover.
A falcon has lost the crane to the crow—see, does it remain silent or weep?
Happy talk and stories to entertain the world are not for the suffering one.*

After a pause, he began singing Ranjha's reply to Heer's words:

*The falcon that lost the crane to the crow has, thank God, been annihilated.
His condition is like the fakir who gave away his all, and was left with nothing.
Be contented, feel the pain less and God will be your witness.
Renouncing the world and donning the garb of sorrow, Saiyed Waris has
become Waris Shah.*

Just as abruptly as Banta Singh had begun to sing, he fell silent. It appeared as if the soil-tinted mountains also had taken on the mantle of grief.

After a while, Jamadar Harnam Singh let out a mighty oath at an imaginary object, then lay down. Suddenly, in the melancholy stillness of the last quarter of the night, the barking of a dog began to resound. Everyone was startled. The sound did not come from too far off. Jamadar Harnam Singh sat up and said, "From where has this barking one come?"

The dog barked again. Now the sound was much closer. After a few moments, there was a rustling in the bushes.

Banta Singh rose and moved towards the bushes. When he returned, he had with him a stray dog, its tail wagging.

He smiled. "Jamadar sahab, when I asked him, he said, I am Chapad Jhunjhun."

Everyone laughed. Jamadar Harnam Singh addressed the dog affectionately. "Come here, Chapad Jhunjhun."

The dog approached Harnam Singh, wagging its tail. It began sniffing the stones on the ground in the belief that some food had been thrown there.

Jamadar Harnam Singh reached into his bag, took out a biscuit, and threw it in the dog's direction. The dog sniffed at the biscuit and opened its mouth. But Harnam Singh leapt at it and picked it up. "Wait...He could be a Pakistani."

Everybody laughed at this. Banta Singh came forward, stroked the dog on its back, and said to Jamadar Harnam Singh, "No, Jamadar sahab, Chapad Jhunjhun is a Hindustani."

Jamadar Harnam Singh laughed and, looking at the dog, said, "Oye, show me the identification!"

The dog wagged its tail.

Harnam Singh laughed heartily. "This is no identification...All dogs wag their tails."

Banta Singh caught the dog by its trembling tail. "The poor thing is a refugee!"

Jamadar Harnam Singh threw down the biscuit, and the dog immediately pounced on it.

Digging up the ground with the heel of his boot, one of the soldiers said, "Now, even dogs will have to be either Hindustani or Pakistani!"

The Jamadar took out another biscuit from his bag and threw it towards the dog. "Like the Pakistanis, Pakistani dogs will be shot."

"Hindustan Zindabad!" Another soldier loudly raised the slogan.

The dog, which had just begun to move forward to pick up the biscuit, suddenly grew frightened and backed off with its tail between its legs.

Harnam Singh laughed. "Why do you fear our slogan, Chapad Jhunjhun?... Eat... Here, take another biscuit!" And so saying, he took another biscuit out and threw it.

The soldiers talked on, and soon it was morning.

In the blink of an eye, just as when one presses a button and the electricity generates light, the sun's rays flooded the mountainous region of Tetwal.

The battle had been raging in that area for some time. Dozens of lives of soldiers would be lost for each mountain, and even then the hold of either side was tenuous. If they held the area today, tomorrow their enemies did; the following day, they recaptured it, and the day after that, their enemies did so.

Jamadar Harnam Singh picked up his binoculars and surveyed the surrounding area. Smoke was rising from the mountain in front. This meant that a fire was being stoked there too, tea was being readied, and the thought of breakfast was on the mind; undoubtedly, the other side could see smoke rising from Jamadar Harnam Singh's camp.

At breakfast, each soldier gave a little to the dog, which ate it with gusto. Everyone was taking a keen interest in the dog, as if all wanted to make it a friend. Its arrival had brought with it an element of cheerfulness. From time to time, each one would affectionately address it as Chapad Jhunjhun and cuddle it.

On the other side, in the Pakistani camp, Subedar Himmat Khan was twirling his impressive moustache—which had many a story in its past—and was carefully studying the map of Tetwal. With him sat the wireless operator, who was taking orders from the Platoon Commander for Subedar Himmat Khan. At some distance, Bashir, leaning against a rock, was holding his gun and softly humming:

*Where did you spend the night,
my love. Where did you spend...*

As Bashir swung into the mood and raised his pitch, he heard Subedar Himmat Khan's stern admonition. "Oye, where were you last night?"

When Bashir's inquiring gaze shifted towards Himmat Khan, he saw him looking elsewhere.

"Tell me, oye!..."

Bashir turned to see what Himmat was looking at.

The same stray dog, which, a few days earlier, had come to their camp like an uninvited guest and stayed on, was back, sitting a little distance away.

Bashir smiled and, turning to the dog, began:

*Where did you spend the night,
my love. Where did you...*

The dog began wagging its tail vigorously, sweeping the rocky ground around him.

Subedar Himmat Khan picked up a pebble and threw it at the dog. "Saala knows nothing except how to wag his tail."

All of a sudden Bashir looked carefully at the dog. "What's this around his neck?" He started walking towards the dog, but even before he reached it, another soldier took off the rope tied around its neck. A piece of cardboard with something written on it was strung to it. Subedar Himmat Khan took the piece of cardboard and asked the soldiers, "Does any one of you know how to read this?"

Bashir came forward, picked up the cardboard piece, and said, "Yes, I can read a bit." With great difficulty he spelled out "Cha-p-Chapad-Jhun-Jhun...Chapad Jhunjhun...What's this?"

Subedar Himmat Khan twirled his legendary long moustache vigorously. "It must be some word, some..." Then he asked, "Bashir, is there anything else written there?..."

Bashir, immersed in deciphering the writing, replied, "Yes, there is. This is a Hindustani dog."

Subedar Himmat Khan began thinking aloud. "What does this mean? What was it you read?...Chapad?..."

Bashir then answered, "Chapad Jhunjhun!"

One soldier said as if with great knowledge, "Whatever the matter is, it lies here."

Subedar Himmat Khan thought this appropriate. "Yes, it does seem so!"

Bashir read the text inscribed on the cardboard once more. "Chapad Jhunjhun. This is a Hindustani dog."

Subedar Himmat Khan took up the wireless set and, placing the headphones firmly over his ears, personally spoke to the Platoon Commander about the dog—that it had first come to them and stayed for several days, and then one night, it disappeared from their midst. Now that it had returned, there was a rope tied around its neck with a cardboard piece strung on it, on which was written—and this message he repeated three or four times to the Platoon Commander—"Chapad Jhunjhun. This is a Hindustani dog." But they too could not come to any conclusion.

Bashir sat on one side with the dog, speaking lovingly and harshly by turns, and asked it where it had disappeared for the night and who had tied the rope and the cardboard around its neck. But he did not get the answer he desired. When questioned, the dog would just wag its tail in response. Finally, in anger, Bashir caught it and gave it a violent shake. The dog whined in pain.

Having spoken on the wireless set, Subedar Himmat Khan contemplated the map of Tetwal for some time. He then rose in a decisive manner. Tearing off the top of a cigarette packet, he handed it to Bashir. "Here, Bashir, scribble on this in the same creepy-crawly Gurmukhi as they have."

Bashir took the piece of the cigarette packet and asked, "What should I write, Subedar sahab?"

Subedar Himmat Khan twirled his moustache and reflected. "Write... Just write." He took out a pencil from his pocket. Giving it to Bashir, he asked, "What should we write?"

Bashir passed the pencil tip between his lips and began thinking. Suddenly, in a contemplative, questioning tone he asked, "Sapar Sunsun?..." Then, satisfied, he said in a determined way, "OK, the answer to 'Chapad Jhunjhun' can only be 'Sapar Sunsun.' They will remember their mothers, these Sikhras!" Bashir put the pencil to the top of the cigarette pack. "Sapar Sunsun."

"One hundred percent...Write Sa-pa-r-Sunsun!" Subedar Khan laughed loudly. "And write further, 'This is a Pakistani dog!'"

Subedar Himmat Khan took the cardboard piece from Bashir's hand, made a hole in it with the pencil, and, after stringing the rope through it, moved towards the dog. "Take this to your offspring!"

All the soldiers laughed at this.

Subedar Himmat Khan tied the rope around the dog's neck. The dog kept wagging its tail all the while. The Subedar then gave it something to eat and, in a didactic manner, said, "Look, friend, don't commit treachery...Remember, the punishment for a traitor is death."

The dog kept wagging its tail...After it had eaten its fill, Subedar Himmat Khan picked up the rope, led it towards the sole trail on the hill, and said, "Go, deliver our letter to our enemies...But make sure you come back. This is the command of your officer, understand?"

The dog, still wagging its tail, began walking ever so slowly along the trail that took a winding route into the lap of the mountains.

Subedar Himmat Khan took up his gun and fired once into the air.

The shot and its echo were heard on the other side, at the Hindustani camp, but they could not fathom its meaning.

For some reason, Jamadar Harnam Singh had been grumpy that day, and the sound of the shot made him even more irritable. He gave the order to fire. Consequently, for the next half hour a futile rain of bullets poured

from each side. Eventually sated by the diversion, Jamadar Harnam Singh called a halt to the firing and began combing his beard with greater ferocity. Having done that, he methodically bundled his hair into a net and asked Banta Singh, "Oye, Banta Singh, tell me: where has Chapad Jhunjhun gone? The ghee didn't go down well with the dog."

Banta Singh missed the implication of the idiom and said, "But we didn't feed him any ghee."

Jamadar Harnam Singh laughed boisterously. "Oye, ill-read lout, there is no use talking to you."

Meanwhile, the soldier on watch, who was scanning the horizon with his binoculars, suddenly shouted, "There, he's coming!"

Everybody looked up.

Jamadar Harnam Singh asked, "What was the name again?"

The soldier on duty said, "Chapad Jhunjhun...Who else!"

"Chapad Jhunjhun?" Jamadar Harnam Singh got up. "What is he doing?"

The soldier answered, "He's coming."

Jamadar Harnam Singh took the binoculars from the soldier and began looking around. "He's coming our way. The rope is tied around his neck... but he's coming from there...the enemy camp..." He let out a great oath at the dog's mother, raised the gun, aimed, and fired.

The shot was off its mark. The bullet hit a short distance away from the dog, causing stones to fly up, and buried itself in the ground. The dog, fearful, stopped.

On the other side, Subedar Himmat Khan saw through the binoculars that the dog was standing on the path. Another shot, and the dog started running the opposite way. It ran with its tail between its legs towards Subedar Himmat Khan's camp.

Himmat Khan called out loudly, "The brave are never afraid...Go back!" And he fired a shot to scare the dog.

The dog stopped again.

From the other side, Jamadar Harnam Singh fired his gun. The bullet whizzed by, past the dog's ear.

The dog jumped and flapped its ears violently.

From his position, Subedar Himmat Khan fired his second shot, which buried itself near the front paws of the dog.

Frightened out of its wits, it ran about—sometimes in one direction, sometimes the other.

Its fear gave both Subedar Himmat Khan and Jamadar Harnam Singh a great deal of pleasure, and they began guffawing.

When the dog began running in his direction, Jamadar Harnam Singh, in a state of great fury, uttered a terrible oath, took careful aim, and fired.

The bullet struck the dog in the leg, and its cry pierced the sky.

The dog changed its direction and, limping, began running towards Subedar Himmat Khan's camp.

Now the shot came from this side—just to scare it. While firing, Himmat Khan shouted, "The brave pay no attention to wounds! Put your life on the line...Go back!"

Terrified, the dog turned the other way. One of its legs had become useless. On three legs it had just about managed to drag itself a few steps in the other direction when Jamadar Harnam Singh aimed and fired. The dog fell dead on the spot.

Subedar Himmat Khan expressed regret. "Tch tch...the poor thing became a martyr!"

Jamadar Harnam Singh took the warm barrel of the gun in his hand and said, "He died a dog's death."

Translation from Urdu by Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint

body vague as sponge, and
below the knees, adrift
as slush, at one with.

15

On *terra firma, Australis*
don't ask me how I got out, Eddy,
and, Bruce, this isn't a suicide note,
Heaven forbid! No sailing
to Byzantium, either. Indeed,
thankful just to have survived then
around an edge of consciousness,
new faces, fellow Australian.

20

And a country woman asking:
'Where y' from?'
Her husband stands up tall
by their four-wheel drive,
looks me up and down:
(Jesus! What on earth!)
And so, uncertain, 'Perth',
I said, from down under.

25

30

(1986)

Ania Walwicz
WOGS

they're not us | they're them | they're them | they are else what you don't know /
what you don't know what they think | they got their own ways | they stick
together you don't know what they're up to you never know with them
you just don't know with them no we didn't ask them to come here they
come and they come there is enough people here already now they crowd
us wogs they give me winter colds they take my jobs they take us they use
us they come here to make their money then they go away they take us
they rip us off landlords they rise rent they take us they work too hard
they take us they use us bosses we work in their factory rich wogs in wog
cars rich jews in rich cars they take us they work so hard we are relaxed
they get too much they own us they take my jobs away from me wogs they
don't look like you or me they look strange they are strange they don't
belong here they are different different skin colour hair they just don't
look right they take us they land on us there isn't enough space for us now
they come they work for less they can work in worse they take anything
they work too hard they want from us we have to look after our own here
not them let them go back where they come from to their own they're
everywhere they get everywhere you can't speak to them why don't you
learn to speak english properly they are not like you or me they're not the
same as everybody they change us is your child educated by an australian?
is it? do you know if? you don't know what they think you don't know
what they can do here they change us they paint their houses blue green
have you seen blue houses who ever heard of that they live too many

together they're too noisy they chatter you don't know what they say they smell funny there's something funny about them strange not like you or me i don't want to see asian tram conductors they are not us not us they're them they're else what you don't know them nobody knows them they stick together they look after one another they don't care about us they're everywhere they're everywhere every day there's more of them we work in their factories they escape here we don't have to take them in this is our home they come we didn't ask them they spoil us they take us for what they can get they're not like us they behave different they're rude they act if they own the place they look wrong too dark too squat too short all wrong ugly too fat women go to fat dark skin monkeys i want to be with my own kind people like me exactly like me they stick out you can't miss them they're everywhere they shout they're noisy they're dirty they put vegetables in their front gardens they eat garlic they shouldn't have come here in the first place they're strangers i want to be with my own kind with my brothers with people like i am there's too many of them here already you don't know how to talk to them they're not clean they annoy me funny names luigi they got their own ways they don't do as you do they're aliens they look wrong they use us they take us they take us for what they can get from us then they go away they're greedy they take our space they not us not our kind they after what they can get they stick together i don't know what they say they don't fit in they dress wrong flashy they don't know our ways they breed and breed they take what little we got what is ours what belongs to us they take ours and ours they're not us

(1982)

OUTCASTE
A Memoir

Narendra Jadhav

VIKING

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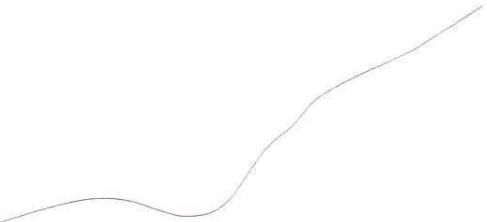
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To

The vision of my blind Grandma
The genius of my Father who never went to school
And

Sonu, my Mother, who killed her hunger, only to keep us alive
And

All those anonymous men and women
Everywhere in the world
Who stood up for Human Rights



CHHOTU: LOOKING BACK

22 December 1997

An unusual crowd had gathered at the Mumbai International Airport that evening. I was among them, yes, but I felt strangely aloof and detached. A numbness gripped me, and I stood uncomprehending, a mere automaton, thinking that it was all happening to someone else.

The airport buzzed with routine activity. Amid a sea of loved ones gathered to bid adieu, countless waves of fleeting emotions erupted. I sensed that a part of me had already taken off, and was riding high over my desolate emotions. Another part of me was very much there, a social mask firmly in place. People were shaking my hand, congratulating me, wishing me good luck. I was on my way to Washington, D.C. to join the International Monetary Fund. I turned from group to group, a smile glued to my face, going through the motions of small talk that failed to register in my mind.

A trembling old woman was wailing hysterically, trying to break out of the grasp of two men holding her back.

'Let go . . . call Dhurva . . . *Arre*, at least let me be with my son for a few minutes. He's going beyond the seven seas . . . I'm an old woman dying . . . with one foot in the grave . . .,' she wailed. She was old, but also very determined, and with a jerk, she broke free and came to me.

'Bai . . .,' I called out, rushing to my mother, and bent to touch her feet, seeking her blessings. As was her wont, she harshly yelled at me, 'I will never understand your reasons for leaving all that you worked so hard for. What are you going searching for now . . . across the seven seas that you couldn't find here? You have two square meals and more than you can ever put in your belly . . . and still you want more . . . what more do you want?' she pleaded incoherently.

'You have been like this ever since you were a child . . . always searching,' she said. 'Never happy with what you had. Look at me . . . I am not going to live forever, you know . . . and what use will be your tears tomorrow . . . you will not even be here to shed tears on my dead body . . .'

She started howling now, 'Your old man died and left me . . . and now you are leaving me, Dhurva . . . why are you doing this?'

How could I explain to her? As I groped unsuccessfully for words, I too began to wonder why I was leaving my people behind. Why was I taking off for a country, which, though promising for my career, lacked the warmth and bonding of my own flesh and blood? As I searched for words to convince my mother to let me go, I could find none . . . every word that came to my mind seemed hollow.

*

As I was holding my mother, the memory of my father surfaced effortlessly. It had been eight years since my father's death. Bai had kept his memory alive within her, in the only way that she knew—by cursing him for leaving her alone. As for me, he was always there, never uttering a word of appreciation. I didn't need words. His moisture-laden twinkling eyes said it all. I could move mountains for that look and the feeling it gave me.

My heart was heavy with the memory of Dada, my father. Dada's only education was what he received from life itself, yet he was literate beyond imagination. I remembered the time I started getting decent grades in school. Visitors to our house would ask me, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' Normally, I would give them some bored answer. But once, my eldest brother, Janu, asked me the same question. In all honesty, I replied, 'I want to be a writer.' He pulled a face and murmured, 'You are really hopeless! You are going to be a penniless beggar. Have you seen any writer making a good living?' Driven to tears, dejected, I stood on the veranda. I felt a hand on my shoulder but refused to look, thinking my brother had come to pacify me, but it was my father who had pulled me close.

'Look here, son,' he said, 'folks will tell you, be a doctor, be an engineer, or be a barrister . . . but you must never listen to anybody. Be what you think is the right thing to be. Even I will not tell you to be this or that,' he continued in the soft tone he always used when he said something important.

'All I have to say to you is this . . . Reach the top in whatever you do. You want to be a thief? No problem, but then, be so good at it that the world will salute you. The world should look at you and say, Oh, what a thief! What a crafty mind!' I could not hide a smile,

and even Dada broke into a toothless grin. 'Never be content with less, you get me?' he said, his eyes gleaming.

Gradually, I grasped the homespun philosophy of my illiterate father. Over the years, this message unconsciously seeped into my consciousness. It found a permanent place in the recesses of my mind and became the singular driving force behind my ambition.

I remembered an incident following my return from America, a doctorate in hand. I spent hours on research. My mother, who had raised six children in acute poverty, prodded me endlessly to sit back and relax. After all, she said, I had plenty to eat and drink so what was I worried about, and why was I working so hard? One day she nagged mercilessly and my father shouted an obscenity at her, later explaining that getting an academic degree is like getting a driving license. You get a license, and you keep on driving . . . you don't just sit on it!

I have never stopped wondering where Dada got his wisdom. Even today, I can't find a better metaphor for the doctoral degree.

*

One of my brothers reminded me that my flight would shortly be announced. I was gripped by fear, wondering if this would be the last time I saw my mother. I closed my eyes, shutting out the world as I felt her drawing me close to her with the frailty of a child. I had an inexplicable urge to sob. I felt her soothing hand stroke my back as I fought a losing battle with tears. As rapidly as she had pulled me to her, she pushed me away, sensing that her Dhurva was being carried away by torrential feelings.

Roused from my daze, I became conscious of my people waiting to say a few parting words. My brothers were there; so were my sisters-in-law with the third generation of Jadhavs in various age groups. Then there were my two sisters with their families. Several relatives and family friends were also there. All of them were sad at the separation, and looking at them, even my wife Vasundhara had tears in her eyes though she was going to join me in Washington, D.C. with our two children, shortly.

Dressed in their frayed and yellowed traditional garb, some of my relatives looked sorely out of place in the grossly over-decorated airport lounge. An effortless pirouette took place in my mind and

before I knew it, the English-speaking professional from the Reserve Bank of India had given way to the native Dhurva. I became the earthy guy-next-door mouthing sentences generously punctuated with slang, in Marathi, my native language.

'These people, raw, down-to-earth, unpolished, are the ones to whom I belong,' I thought. Born in the confines of poverty, illiteracy and ignorance they were at different stages of their struggle in life. 'But they are my people,' I thought, with a sense of belonging, as they looked at me with awe. In their eyes, I had managed, through hard work and perseverance, to climb out of the morass of untouchability, illiteracy and backwardness.

My flight was announced. Another round of handshakes, hugs and parting words, and I firmly disentangled myself from the crowd and started walking towards the security check. As I walked away, the last misty impressions that I carried with me were of my frail mother and her trembling half-raised palm, bidding goodbye.

*

There is no better place or time to be philosophical than when you are airborne. Suspended between heaven and earth, introspection becomes inevitable. The plane may be travelling at supersonic speed but the mind travels faster than light—seemingly without a sense of direction—but almost always, with a definite purpose.

I thought of the friends and acquaintances who had come to see me off. All of them, without exception, had referred to my lowly caste.

An old man from my village had unabashedly called me, 'Damu Mahar's son', with rustic ignorance. Others too had made their point, but in a more subtle and sophisticated manner. Some others, the high-born, had praised me for making it big *despite* coming from a lowly caste.

The most ironic was my high-caste schoolteacher's remark made while bidding me farewell. This teacher used to publicly refer to me as the 'government's son-in-law' because my tuition had been waived. Once when I had outperformed all others in Sanskrit—supposedly the divine language, and an exclusive preserve of the high castes for centuries—this same teacher had said that he was beginning to lose faith in the education system!

Why? Why can't they let me be? Why can't they accept me for what I am? For the millionth time I asked myself why they couldn't judge me on where I stood? Why did they always have to judge me on the basis of my origins?

The words of Kabir, a fifteenth-century saint poet, often ring in my mind:

*I stood knocking at the doorsteps of heaven as I died . . .
‘Who are you . . .?’ I was asked.
‘My entire existence on earth could not tell me who I was . . .
And that is what I have come to ask you . . .’
Who am I?*

The bottom line always stood out: I was a mere Mahar, a Dalit, a Harijan, and a Scheduled Caste, belonging to the lowest stratum of society. It was as if I was tainted with a singular blemish—a tragic flaw—inherited through birth. No matter what I did, where I went, or what success I achieved, I would always be looked upon as a Mahar, an untouchable . . . albeit one who had achieved success. It was as if being a Mahar was an apology for a human being!

Yes, I do come from the Mahar caste.

Yes, my father was an illiterate lowly employee doing menial jobs to earn a square meal for the family.

Yes, my forefathers were untouchables.

Yes, my forefathers were required to wear clay pots around their necks to keep their spit from polluting the ground, and brooms were tied to their rumps to obliterate their footprints as they walked.

Yes, as village servants, my forefathers were mercilessly forced to run . . . human pilots, foaming at the mouth under the scorching sun, to herald the carriages of government officials.

So what?

Have I not reclaimed my dignity through my achievements?

Why should the caste into which I was born count *now*?

*

I am often asked, 'Now that you have reached a high position, do you ever face unpleasant experiences because of your caste?'

It is an unfortunate truth of our society that whatever heights a

man might scale, his caste is never cast off; it remains an inseparable part of his identity. His caste always remains a cause for scorn or contempt. Only the *type* of humiliation changes.

When I was living in a Mumbai suburb, a well-educated neighbour stopped me to say, 'That south Indian gentleman is all praise for you these days.'

'Any special reason why? I don't even know him well,' I replied.

'Apparently, you gave him a lift in your car one day. He said we, the high-born, seem to have become uncivilized. But look at Jadhav, though he is a Dalit, he is so civilized!'

Does that mean that only certain castes have the right to civilized, humane behaviour? I had been on my way to drop my daughter, Apoorva, to school, when I saw the gentleman walking his granddaughter to school. Her uniform indicated that she went to the same school. I did not think twice about offering them a lift. It was common courtesy. How did caste come into it? But apparently, courtesy is discounted at the hands of a Dalit.

One of my colleagues often discusses philosophy with me. I suspect he considers himself quite an intellectual. Once he was telling me about some holy man he respects. Fulsome in his praise, he told me, 'You must meet him once. Swamiji is so wise, so broad-minded that he will speak candidly and discuss philosophical issues *even* with a "low caste" person like you. You must meet him!' This Swami might be an enlightened man, but it is more likely that he has achieved his present status by being born into a particular caste, into a particular family. Why should I consider myself honoured if he treats me as an equal?

There are many so-called Dalits like me, who have successfully cast off the shackles placed on them by the caste system. This is the magic wrought by Babasaheb and the education that he put within our reach. Of course, that doesn't guarantee us cooperation or appreciation from others. So often we encounter people who think themselves cultured (and are often well-intentioned), who remain imprisoned by the stereotypes of the caste system. When will this slavery to convention and prejudice change?

*

The plane was flying over majestic, mountainous terrain. I could

sense the eyes of my father looking at me from the window and I felt my eyes moisten with a strange longing to be with him.

I remembered I had a photograph with me. I pulled out the old, yellowing, palm-sized portrait. It was wrinkled and its corners were bent. Yet, the expressions of the two people therein were intact. Bai and Dada looked back at me from the picture. The struggles of their fight for survival had marked their faces, specially Bai's. Dada wore a stoic expression, and looked completely at ease. There . . . I could spot the proud upturn of his face that seemed ready to take on any difficulty. But Bai looked stiff and uncomfortable, with a far-off expression in her eyes. This picture had beautifully captured the reality of their existence together.

I remembered being possessed by similar thoughts when, seventeen years ago, I was on a flight to America for my doctoral studies. I was then a recipient of a national scholarship from the Government of India.

My father's face floated in front of me. I remembered how he had wept, back then. His only words to me were that our ancestors had never even crossed the boundaries of our little village in India . . . and today, his son was all set to cross the seven seas!

'I have got everything, I am ready to die now,' he had said.

Not long ago, my forefathers were condemned to the lowest forms of human existence. I shuddered as I remembered the reality back then, when they simply could not reach out and touch anyone—they were untouchables.

And here I was—going abroad to join the IMF and, in effect, representing my country.

What had made the difference?

Without fail the image of my guru, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, came to my mind. I mentally saluted him and felt a wave of gratitude well up for Dada who had taken Babasaheb's words to heart . . .

*

I wondered, how would it have been if Dada were alive today . . . what would he have thought?

My father would surely have wondered, in turn, what Babasaheb Ambedkar would have thought of my achievement. Then, inevitably, I thought of the incident etched indelibly in our minds.

The chairman of the trust and the head priest hugged me in welcome. I was suddenly gripped by confusion and was in a daze. This could not be happening to me, could it? Was fate playing tricks? Was it being cruel and vindictive, or was it being acquisitive? He

How could the God who had given them life, be polluted by their
every presence? "What irony," I thought, "I who am supposed to be
the lowest rung of the caste system, am now almost at the top of the
ladder of social success. At last, I thought with smug satisfaction, I
have arrived!"

This meant a lot to me—although I hated admitting it, even to myself. This was the temple reserved for caste Hindus, which not so long ago would have been polluted by the mere shadow of an outcaste. Yet, traditionally, the untouchables, who looked upon Vitoba as their savior, thronged there. They had sinned in past lives, they were told, and were therefore ordained to suffer disgrace and dishonor in this life. As penance for their sins, they would be at the mercy of the touchables. Their only hope, they believed, was Vitoba, whose divine powers could rescue them from the painful cycle of birth-life-death.

The entire management committee of the temple trust had gathered to await my arrival. I was a VIP performing ritual worship and temple authorities have never failed to recognize power. However, as my chauffeur-driven car approached the temple, I became a bundle of nerves, and my palms grew sticky with sweat. I was after all an untouchable—I belonged to a caste that was denied entry into any temple. Even the shadow of an untouchable was not supposed to fall on the temple. And that day, there I was . . . being escorted with all possible honour to enter the temple of Vitoba—the ultimate seat of Hindu temporal power.

Will I ever be able to free myself from the bondage of my caste? This recurring question awoke me from my first visit to the shrine of Vitoba at the famous temple in Pandharpur.

The untouchedables by Dr Ambedkar. Dada would come home electrified by Babasaheb's thinking, and talked about it to us every day. We were so influenced by Dr Ambedkar's persona that we subconsciously designed our future in his footsteps.

Outcaste: A Memoir 211

As a participant and an observer in the social movement, my father was the veritable symbol of a new spark of self-respect ignited among

What would I have become without that eventful day, when I was so impressed with Dr Ambedkar's story? Though I had not understood much, I had by then a faint inkling of the fact that something was different about my family, compared to all those who lived in our community. All I had picked up on that day was the fact that I had to go to school and become like Dr Ambedkar . . . carry a briefcase like him . . . and drive a car like him.

Dr Ambedkar then got into his chauffeur-driven Studiebaker, to be whisked away. Reeling from the shock of what had happened, Dada remained silent all the way home. Once there, he gathered all the kids in the neighbourhood to tell them the story. Excited, they vied with each other to sit close to our father. They could not understand what was wrong with Dada . . . he was as if in a trance, under stress. The story of Dr Ambedkar and how he had gone abroad to tell us the story of Dr Ambedkar and how he had gone abroad to a foreign university to get the highest degrees there. I was awed by names.

After the speech was over, Dada clutched my brothers' shoulders and shoved them past everyone towards Dr Ambedkar. They were terrified . . . but Dr Ambedkar patted my brothers on the back, and asked my father, 'Are these your sons, Damu? Send them to school . . . Give them a good education . . . They will surely rise to make big changes in society.'

It was the first time that my brothers Janu and Dina had seen Babasheb Ambedkar. Dada had taken them to a protest rally of Mahars, led by him. They were terrified of the mob chanting slogans against the segregation of low castes. Jostled and pushed around, the children felt suffocated from time to time and out fatter pushed people away, making room for them, wading through the human sea. Young Dina clutched Dada's hand, and repeatedly whined that he wanted to go home.

Suddenly, they came upon a man in a blue suit, a tie, and wearing a hat. They were amazed to see the man, who stood apart from the crowd, exuding self-confidence. There was a hush as Dr Ambedkar began speaking.

alone knows . . . I thought. For HE had sanctioned the caste hierarchy . . . had he not? I had suffered, with countless others, the most inhuman social organization imaginable.

Have the times changed? I wondered . . . or is the caste system dying under its own oppressive weight?

No, the caste system is so deeply ingrained that change can, at best, be cosmetic. Caste now assumes various hues and disguises. It has become subtle and sophisticated, stinging from unsuspected quarters.

The caste system was disposed by God and not by mortals. It has such a powerful sanction behind it that no laws, no reform movements, and no revolutions will ever change it completely. It is so deeply imbedded in our social conscience, so securely implanted, that even HE has no choice, no ability, and no power to mend it.

I could not understand my purpose, my function, in the bigger scheme of things. Was I the exception that proved the rule? The thought defeated me as I entered the temple.

Bickering priests were vying to catch my attention. Each one wanted to be the one to help me perform the puja. They were the proxy middlemen who would help me chant the ritualistic mantras. The very temple that had shunned and turned away countless untouchable devotees, pining to catch one glimpse of Vithoba, was today all geared to honour me, an untouchable!

To my surprise, tears welled up in my eyes, and began streaming down my face. I found myself weeping. It was hard to control my tears or to wipe them away. I could not understand what was happening to me . . . I could not recall the last time something had driven me to tears.

Realization that I did not belong there flooded my mind . . . I was the unwanted, unworthy untouchable. I was transported to another era. Fear gripped me . . . I could be thrown out of the temple . . . whipped for violating time-honoured social customs.

I fished out a wad of crisp hundred rupee notes from my pocket and began handing them out to the priests, pressing them into their outstretched, imploring, touchable palms. They swooped upon me like eager hawks.

This sudden impulse puzzled me. Was this the only way I could buy my way into the temple? Buy some touchability?

In the sanctum sanctorum, I was as if transported into another

lifetime, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries. I went through the motions of the puja, mechanically. All I wanted was to be left alone, to face Vithoba and look Him in the eye. It was the first time that I had ever visited a temple and yet to my astonishment, I felt a sense of *déjà vu*.

Tears continued to fall from my eyes. I felt humbled by this experience. There was no logic, no sense, to what was happening to me. I, who was always in control, was suddenly helpless, uncomprehending.

Perhaps, I reasoned, these were tears of happiness over my achievement. This time, however, the achievement was of a different kind. I had done it. I had crossed the caste lines. I had beaten the system. The high-caste priests were themselves obsequiously leading me to do puja! I had made the quantum leap from the lowest rung to the top. Was it that? Perhaps . . . but may be not. What were my tears about?

It was then that a tall boulder right outside the temple came into focus. Before I knew what I was doing, I had left the priests and rushed toward the boulder. I hugged it hard, prostrated before it and clasped it, its ragged edges bruising my palms, as startled onlookers stood agast.

This boulder was the boundary beyond which the untouchables were not allowed to step. Before my misty eyes marched a parade of all my untouchable forefathers. I was imagining their plight—a long journey on foot over high mountains to reach this place.

Feet blistered, throats parched, fasting on empty stomachs, singing His glory, they would carry the saints' devotional writings in a heavily decorated palanquin resting on their shoulders. For here was Vithoba, their saviour. But once they reached the temple precincts, the touchable God was out of bounds for them—they were the lowly outcasts, the untouchables!

The devotees, who were co-travellers in sunshine and rain, would clearly separate like oil and water once they reached the temple precincts. The touchables could enter the temple. The untouchables only had the boulder. Their boulder, that stood rugged and alone, confronted by the magnificent splendour of the temple a few feet away. The boulder became their makeshift Vithoba—crude, buffeted by the elements, like they were, quite unlike the richly clad, bejewelled idol of the touchable God within.

I hugged the boulder with all my might, and a sigh escaped me. Like my ancestors before me, I clutched it tight, trying to understand what they had endured. I suddenly realized for whom I wept.

I felt a weight lifting off my shoulders, followed by a sense of deep tranquility. I felt strangely at peace. The spirit of God is all-pervasive, I thought . . . it is omnipresent . . . to be found even in the smallest atom of the universe. The ornate idol and the rugged boulder are one, images of the same universal spirit. I no longer felt agitated by constant reminders of my so-called low caste.

If others look down on me in their belief that my caste is low, it is *their* problem, not mine. I certainly don't need to torment myself over it. I pity *them*, for they are the victims of their own obsolete prejudices. My mind was racing with a million different answers. Dignity, after all, rests in the mind and heart . . . and soul. I have to reclaim it not from outside, but from within. And for that, I must cut off the albatross of the caste system from my soul, once and for all . . .

My untouchable forefathers, who were condemned to the lowest forms of human existence, lived on through me. My struggle for achievement then, is a kind of penance for their struggles. It came to me that I was able to 'see clearer,' because I stood upon their shoulders. My purpose in life was to extend and further my father's vision. I was indeed standing on the shoulders of generations of my people, getting a better, wider view of life. I could dream of a better future, look far into the distance, reach for the horizon itself, something they could not allow themselves to do.

I now realized how stooped were the shoulders upon which I stood. They were bent by the tremendous weight of cruelty and torture inflicted by society for hundreds of years. In a fraction of a second, I got a glimpse into myself as the next runner in the relay race, bearing the torch for freedom and achievement, and running . . .

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MAHMOUD DARWISH

A River Dies of Thirst

Journals



Translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham

archipelago books

The House of Casualty

In one minute the entire life of a house is ended. The house as casualty is also mass murder, even if it is empty of its inhabitants. A mass grave of raw materials intended to build a structure with meaning, or a poem with no importance in time of war. The house as casualty is the severance of things from their relationships and from the names of feelings, and from the need of tragedy to direct its eloquence at seeing into the life of the object. In every object there is a being in pain – a memory of fingers, of a smell, an image. And houses are killed just like their inhabitants. And the memory of objects is killed: stone, wood, glass, iron, cement are scattered in broken fragments like living beings. And cotton, silk, linen, papers, books are torn to pieces like proscribed words. Plates, spoons, toys, records, taps, pipes, door handles, fridges, washing machines, flower vases, jars of olives and pickles, tinned food all break just like their owners. Salt, sugar, spices, boxes of matches, pills, contraceptives, antidepressants, strings of garlic, onions, tomatoes, dried okra, rice and lentils are crushed to pieces just like their owners. Rent agreements, marriage documents, birth certificates, water and electricity bills, identity cards, passports, love letters are torn to shreds like their owners' hearts. Photographs, toothbrushes, combs, cosmetics, shoes, underwear, sheets, towels fly in every direction like family secrets broadcast aloud in the devastation. All these things are a memory of the people who no longer have them and of the objects that no longer have the people—destroyed in a minute. Our things die like us, but they aren't buried with us.

The Mosquito

The mosquito, and I don't know what the masculine form of the word is in Arabic, is more destructive than slander. Not content with sucking your blood, it forces you into a fruitless battle. It only visits in darkness like al-Mutanabbi's fever.¹ It buzzes and hums like a warplane which you don't hear until it has hit its target: your blood. You switch on the light to see it and it disappears into some secret corner of the room, then settles on the wall—safe, peaceful, as it has surrendered. You try to kill it with one of your shoes, but it dodges you and escapes and reappears with an air of malicious satisfaction. You curse it loudly but it pays no heed. You negotiate a truce with it in a friendly voice: 'Sleep so that I can sleep!' You think you've convinced it and switch off the light and go to sleep. But having sucked most of your blood it starts humming again, threatening to a new attack. And forces you into a subsidiary battle with your perspiration. You turn on the light again and resist the two of them, the mosquito and the sweat, by reading. But the mosquito lands on the page you are reading, and you say happily to yourself: 'It's fallen into the trap.' And you snap the book shut: 'I've killed it ... I've killed it!' And when you open the book, to glory in your victory, there's no sign of the mosquito or the words. Your book is blank. The mosquito, and I don't what the masculine form of the word is in Arabic, is not a metaphor, an allusion or a play on words. It's an insect which likes your blood and can smell it from twenty miles away. There's only one way you can bargain with it to make a truce: by changing your blood group.

¹ In February 960 the poet al-Mutanabbi developed while in Egypt a fever that left him delirious after each nightly attack, beginning with fever and rigors, and ending with copious sweating. "He compares the fever to a coy maiden who will visit him under cover of darkness" (Browne EG. *Arabian medicine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921:30-1).

That the Science of Cartography Is Limited

—and not simply by the fact that this shading of forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam, the gloom of cypresses, is what I wish to prove.

When you and I were first in love we drove to the borders of Connacht and entered a wood there.

Look down you said: this was once a famine road.

I looked down at ivy and the scutch grass rough-cast stone had disappeared into as you told me in the second winter of their ordeal, in

1847, when the crop had failed twice, Relief Committees gave the starving Irish such roads to build.

Where they died, there the road ended

and ends still and when I take down the map of this island, it is never so I can say here is the masterful, the apt rendering of the spherical as flat, nor an ingenious design which persuades a curve into a plane, but to tell myself again that

the line which says woodland and cries hunger and gives out among sweet pine and cypress, and finds no horizon

will not be there.

Eavan Boland