THE COMPLETE STORIES OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

Introduction by Kathryn Davis

"This definitive collection of Carrington's fiction is a treasure and a gift to the world. A stunning achievement." —Jeff VanderMeer

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First Edition
ISBN: 978-0-9973666-4-8
Ebook ISBN: 978-0-9973666-5-5

Art on cover:
Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1937-38. Oil on canvas. 25 9/16 × 32 in.
The Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Collection, 2002 (2002.456.1)
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Image source: Art Resource, NY

The publisher wishes to thank Meghan Lamb

Design and composition by Danielle Dutton
Printed on permanent, durable, acid-free recycled paper in the United States of America

Dorothy, a publishing project
St. Louis, MO

DOROTHYPROJECT.COM

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Translations from the French by Kathrine Talbot
Translations from the Spanish by Anthony Kerrigan

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INTRODUCTION

"Everything happened after I was born." So declared Leonora Carrington—that most magnificent of creatures, composed of equal parts giantess and egg, hyena and horse, "beautiful, a blinding white all over, with four legs as fine as needles, and a mane which fell around her long face like water"—in refusing to answer a question about her family history. "I don't think in terms of explanation," she elaborated. "I was all, all was in me; I rejoiced at seeing my eyes become miraculously solar systems, kindled by their own light…"

Her habit of refusal of the world she was born into began early and she kept at it her whole life long. Like the steadfastly defiant daughter in "Jemima and the Wolf"—who rejects the doll that is a gift from her mother, saying "Isn't it enough that the world is full of ugly human beings without making copies of them?"—Leonora refused to behave the way a young girl is supposed to behave, getting herself expelled from two Catholic boarding schools in short order. "I had an allergy to collaboration," she said, as meanwhile she addressed herself to the task of learning how to levitate. I like to imagine her drifting through the vast echoey passageways of Crookhey Hall, the "lavatory gothic" mansion she lived in until she was ten, her feet hovering just inches above the ground and her dark Celtic hair spreading wildly around her small white face as she passed through room after room after room, all the while not knowing what she would come upon next or what hole she might fall into, including the one that brought her at last (by way of a French farmhouse and a Spanish sanatorium) to the equally implausible "house of the Sphinx" in Mexico City where she spent the last sixty years of her life, painting and sculpting and writing and cooking up magical potions in the kitchen.

She was born on April 6, 1917, in Lancashire, England—the same day the United States declared war on Germany, setting in motion events that

would later have a profound effect on her life. “The only person present at my birth,” she once confided to a cousin, “was our dear and faithful old fox-terrier, Boozy … My mother was away at the time.” Leonora’s father was a textile magnate and principal shareholder in Imperial Chemicals; he appears in her paintings as Lord Candlestick, presiding in his sleek phallic way over “banquets, bazaars, meetings, symposiums, discussions, board meetings, race meetings, and simple meatings where meat was eaten.” From the outset Leonora gravitated toward her Irish mother and her Irish nanny, both of whom satisfied her appetite for tales driven by the marvelous. A changeling baby becomes a black dog, a glowing bar of iron, a sack of wool. A little girl walks through a looking glass. Fairies steal the souls of the dead and change them into butterflies. A man who is also a salmon ends up caught, roasted, and eaten by the Queen of Ireland.

In Leonora’s stories things are always eating other things or being eaten, forewarned about getting “roasted in hot fat, stuffed with parsley and onions,” the cooking utensils “half full of what look[s] like green food” but is “a fluffy growth of fungi,” a hoard of carnivorous white rabbits all the while masticating chunks of meat before they are, themselves, made into stew. Nothing is what it seems to be in these stories, a philosophy Leonora applied in her own kitchen, where she was always more alchemist than chef, mixing tapioca with squid ink and serving it as caviar, snipping hair from the head of a despised sleeping guest and cooking it into the next morning’s omelet.

Following her failure with the nuns, Leonora briefly attended Miss Penrose’s Academy of Art in Florence, was expelled from a Parisian finishing school, was presented at the court of George V, attended a coming-out ball at the Ritz, and ended up studying art in London with Amédée Ozenfant. It was he who introduced her to the classic rules of perspective she used to great effect when creating the eerie interior spaces that haunt her paintings; he also was instrumental in arranging her introduction to Max Ernst, about whose *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale* she once said: “You know how when something really touches you, it feels like burning, a burning inside.”

Leonora was nineteen, Max was forty-six and on his second marriage; he prevented her beer bottle from rolling off the table with his finger. Leonora was the *femme enfant* every male Surrealist dreamed of having for his very

own, the woman-child whose naïve soul might provide a conduit to the unconscious. They ran off together, first to Paris and from there to the farmhouse in southern France where they lived for two idyllic years, painting and writing and tending the grape vines and having lots of sex. In 1940 the Germans crossed the Maginot Line and the idyll came to an end. Max was arrested; convicted as a "degenerate artist," he was interned in a prison camp. Leonora lost her mind. The world "jammed," to use the term she employs in *Down Below*, her novel set in the asylum where she eventually ended up and where she was subjected to a violent treatment system involving Cardiazol, a drug that mimicked the effects of shock therapy.

It's impossible not to read Leonora's life story as one of her own stories, events in both instances governed by the same uncanny operation of cause and effect. "A box of Tabu powder with a lid, half gray and half black, meant eclipse, complex, vanity, taboo, love," says the narrator of *Down Below*, making an arrangement of the objects she's been allowed to bring with her to Bedlam. "My nail buff, shaped like a boat, evoked for me a journey into the Unknown, and also the talisman protecting that journey: the song '*El barco velero*.' My little mirror was to win over the Whole. As for my Tangee lipstick, I have but a vague memory of its significance …"

In the end it was her Irish nanny who came to the rescue, whisking her away in a submarine, though the submarine may have been a warship and the nanny may have been Leonora's cousin—accounts of this event vary. In any case, eventually Leonora slipped out the backdoor of a restaurant in Lisbon to avoid being sent to yet another asylum, this one in South Africa. Despite her deep aversion to bullfighting she married Renato Leduc, a retired bullfighter, in order to get to New York, then moved with him to Mexico City, where the two of them amicably divorced. It was in Mexico City that she met and married Chiki Weisz, a Hungarian resistance photographer, and together they had two sons. Even though Leonora described Mexico as "a familiar swimming pool with sharks in it," she lived there for the rest of her long and remarkably productive life. I think it's safe to say her Irish soul (as well as her British tea and her French lingerie) were brought along to keep her company.

There are writers who describe the unfamiliar (flensing blubber, for example) and manage to make it feel familiar; there are writers who

describe the ordinary (a day in Dublin) and manage to make it new. It's a function of the marvelous to be able to do two things at once, to put together two things that seem to be in conflict to create something astonishing. In "The Debutante" Leonora tells the story of a young girl not unlike herself who is forced to endure the dread prospect of a coming-out ball until her friend, who also happens to be a hyena, agrees to go in her place. Of course the minute the hyena opens her mouth and says "I don't know how to dance, but at least I could make small talk" you know you're no longer in a world ruled by routine social obligation but in a fairy tale world in which a hyena is able to don a gown, wear gloves to cover her paws, and walk around on her hind legs in order to accustom herself to wearing high-heeled shoes. The catch is that in a fairy tale, you'd know it's not a real hyena, whereas in Leonora Carrington's stories the hyenas are always real.

Gentle reader! Rampaging reader, heartbroken reader, ravenous reader! The world Leonora Carrington refused all those many years ago will never go away, with its pointless rules and cruelties. Unspeakable things are going to happen to you but they will happen in a world where a hyena's rank smell at table will prove to change everything.

Or, as Leonora herself wrote as a coda to one of her stories:

Even though you won't believe me
my story is beautiful
And the serpent that sang it
Sang it from out of the well.

KATHRYN DAVIS

THE COMPLETE STORIES OF LEONORA CARRINGTON

THE DEBUTANTE

When I was a debutante, I often went to the zoo. I went so often that I knew the animals better than I knew the girls of my own age. Indeed it was in order to get away from people that I found myself at the zoo every day. The animal I got to know best was a young hyena. She knew me too. She was very intelligent. I taught her French, and she, in return, taught me her language. In this way we passed many pleasant hours.

My mother was arranging a ball in my honour on the first of May. During this time I was in a state of great distress for whole nights. I've always detested balls, especially when they are given in my honour.

On the morning of the first of May 1934, very early, I went to visit the hyena.

"What a bloody nuisance," I said to her. "I've got to go to my ball tonight."

"You're very lucky" she said. "I'd love to go. I don't know how to dance, but at least I could make small talk."

"There'll be a great many different things to eat," I told her. "I've seen truckloads of food delivered to our house."

"And you're complaining," replied the hyena, disgusted. "Just think of me, I eat once a day, and you can't imagine what a heap of bloody rubbish I'm given."

I had an audacious idea, and I almost laughed. "All you have to do is go instead of me!"

"We don't resemble each other enough, otherwise I'd gladly go," said the hyena rather sadly.

"Listen," I said. "No one sees too well in the evening light. If you disguise yourself, nobody will notice you in the crowd. Besides, we're practically the same size. You're my only friend, I beg you to do this for me."

She thought this over, and I knew that she really wanted to accept.

"Done," she said all of a sudden.

There weren't many keepers about, it was so early in the morning. I opened the cage quickly, and in a very few moments we were out in the street. I hailed a taxi; at home, everybody was still in bed. In my room I brought out the dress I was to wear that evening. It was a little long, and the hyena found it difficult to walk in my high-heeled shoes. I found some gloves to hide her hands, which were too hairy to look like mine. By the time the sun was shining into my room, she was able to make her way around the room several times, walking more or less upright. We were so busy that my mother almost opened the door to say good morning before the hyena had hidden under my bed.

"There's a bad smell in your room," my mother said, opening the window. "You must have a scented bath before tonight, with my new bath salts."

"Certainly," I said.

She didn't stay long. I think the smell was too much for her.

"Don't be late for breakfast," she said and left the room.

The greatest difficulty was to find a way of disguising the hyena's face. We spent hours and hours looking for a way, but she always rejected my suggestions. At last she said, "I think I've found the answer. Have you got a maid?"

"Yes," I said, puzzled.

"There you are then. Ring for your maid, and when she comes in we'll pounce upon her and tear off her face. I'll wear her face tonight instead of mine."

"It's not practical," I said. "She'll probably die if she hasn't got a face. Somebody will certainly find the corpse, and we'll be put in prison."

"I'm hungry enough to eat her," the hyena replied.

"And the bones?"

"As well," she said. "So, it's on?"

"Only if you promise to kill her before tearing off her face. It'll hurt too much otherwise."

"All right. It's all the same to me."

Not without a certain amount of nervousness I rang for Mary, my maid. I certainly wouldn't have done it if I didn't hate having to go to a ball so

much. When Mary came in I turned to the wall so as not to see. I must admit it didn't take long. A brief cry, and it was over. While the hyena was eating, I looked out the window. A few minutes later she said, "I can't eat any more. Her two feet are left over still, but if you have a little bag, I'll eat them later in the day."

"You'll find a bag embroidered with fleurs-de-lis in the cupboard. Empty out the handkerchiefs you'll find inside, and take it." She did as I suggested. Then she said, "Turn round now and look how beautiful I am."

In front of the mirror, the hyena was admiring herself in Mary's face. She had nibbled very neatly all around the face so that what was left was exactly what was needed.

"You've certainly done that very well," I said.

Towards evening, when the hyena was all dressed up, she declared, "I really feel in tip-top form. I have a feeling that I shall be a great success this evening."

When we had heard the music from downstairs for quite some time, I said to her, "Go on down now, and remember, don't stand next to my mother. She's bound to realize that it isn't me. Apart from her I don't know anybody. Best of luck." I kissed her as I left her, but she did smell very strong.

Night fell. Tired by the day's emotions, I took a book and sat down by the open window, giving myself up to peace and quiet. I remember that I was reading *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. About an hour later, I noticed the first signs of trouble. A bat flew in at the window, uttering little cries. I am terribly afraid of bats. I hid behind a chair, my teeth chattering. I had hardly gone down on my knees when the sound of beating wings was overcome by a great noise at my door. My mother entered, pale with rage.

"We'd just sat down at the table," she said, "when that thing sitting in your place got up and shouted, 'So I smell a bit strong, what? Well, I don't eat cakes!' Whereupon it tore off its face and ate it. And with one great bound, it disappeared through the window."

(1937–38)

THE OVAL LADY

A very tall thin lady was standing at the window. The window was very high and very thin too. The lady's face was pale and sad. She didn't move, and nothing moved in the window except the pheasant feather in her hair. My eyes kept being drawn to the quivering feather: it was so restless in the window, where nothing was moving!

This was the seventh time I had passed in front of this window. The sad lady hadn't stirred; in spite of the cold that evening, I stopped. Perhaps the furniture in the room was as long and thin as the lady and the window. Perhaps the cat, if there were a cat, would also conform to their elegant proportions. I wanted to know, I was devoured by curiosity, an irresistible desire took hold of me to enter the house, simply to find out.

Before I knew exactly what I was doing, I had reached the entrance hall. The door closed quietly behind me, and for the first time in my life I found myself inside a stately home. It was overwhelming. For a start, there was such a distinguished silence that I hardly dared to breathe. Then there was the incredible elegance of the furniture and the trinkets. Every chair was at least twice as tall as an ordinary chair, and very much narrower. For these aristocrats, even plates were oval, not round like ordinary people's. The drawing room, where the sad lady was standing, was adorned with a fireplace, and there was a table laid with teacups and cakes. Near the fire, a teapot waited quietly to be poured.

Seen from the back, the lady seemed even taller. She was at least ten feet tall. The problem was how to speak to her. Begin with the weather, and how bad it was? Too banal. Talk of poetry? But what poetry?

"Madam, do you like poetry?"

"No, I hate poetry," she answered in a voice stifled with boredom, without turning to me.

"Have a cup of tea, it will make you feel better."

"I don't drink, I don't eat. It's a protest against my father, the bastard."

After a quarter of an hour's silence she turned around, and I was astonished by her youth. She was perhaps sixteen years old.

"You're very tall for your age, Miss. When I was sixteen I wasn't half as tall as you."

"I don't care. Anyway, give me some tea, but don't tell anyone. Perhaps I'll also have one of those cakes, but whatever you do, remember not to say anything."

She ate with an absolutely amazing appetite. When she got to the twentieth cake she said, "Even if I die of hunger, he'll never win. I can see the funeral procession now, with four big black horses, gleaming. They're walking slowly, my little coffin, white in a drift of red roses. And people weeping, weeping…"

She began to weep.

"Look at the little corpse of beautiful Lucretia. And you know, once you're dead, there's nothing very much one can do. I'd like to starve myself to death just to annoy him. What a pig."

With these words she slowly left the room. I followed her.

When we reached the third floor, we went into an enormous nursery where hundreds of dilapidated and broken toys lay all over the place. Lucretia went up to a wooden horse. In spite of its great age—certainly not much less than a hundred years—it was frozen in a gallop.

"Tartar is my favourite," she said, stroking the horse's muzzle. "He loathes my father."

Tartar rocked himself gracefully on his rockers, and I wondered to myself how he could move by himself. Lucretia looked at him thoughtfully, clasping her hands together.

"He'll travel a very long way like that," she said. "And when he comes back he'll tell me something interesting."

Looking out of doors, I noticed that it was snowing. It was very cold, but Lucretia didn't notice it. A slight sound at the window attracted her attention.

"It's Matilda," she said. "I ought to have left the window open. Anyway, it's stifling in here." With that she broke the windowpanes, and in came the snow with a magpie, which flew around the room three times.

“Matilda talks like this. It’s ten years since I split her tongue in two. What a beautiful creature.”

“Beautiful crrrreature,” screeched Matilda in a witch’s voice. “Beeeautiful crrrreature.”

Matilda went and perched on Tartar’s head. The horse was still galloping gently. He was covered in snow.

“Did you come to play with us?” enquired Lucretia. “I’m glad, because I get very bored here. Let’s make believe that we’re all horses. I’ll turn myself into a horse; with some snow, it’ll be more convincing. You be a horse, too, Matilda.”

“Horse, horse, horse,” yelled Matilda, dancing hysterically on Tartar’s head. Lucretia threw herself into the snow, which was already deep, and rolled in it, shouting, “We are all horses!”

When she emerged, the effect was extraordinary. If I hadn’t known that it was Lucretia, I would have sworn that it was a horse. She was beautiful, a blinding white all over, with four legs as fine as needles, and a mane which fell around her long face like water. She laughed with joy and danced madly around in the snow.

“Gallop, gallop, Tartar, but I shall go faster than you.”

Tartar didn’t change speed, but his eyes sparkled. One could only see his eyes, for he was covered in snow. Matilda cawed and struck her head against the walls. As for me, I danced a sort of polka so as not to die of cold.

Suddenly I noticed that the door was open, and that an old woman stood framed in the doorway. She had been there perhaps for a long time without my noticing her. She looked at Lucretia with a nasty stare.

“*Stop at once*,” she cried, suddenly trembling with fury. “What’s all this? Eh, my young ladies? Lucretia, you know this game has been strictly forbidden by your father. This ridiculous game. You aren’t a child anymore.”

Lucretia danced on, flinging out her four legs dangerously near the old woman; her laughter was piercing.

“*Stop, Lucretia!*”

Lucretia’s voice became shriller and shriller. She was doubled up with laughter.

“All right,” said the old woman. “So you won’t obey me, young lady? All right, you’ll regret it. I’m going to take you to your father.”

One of her hands was hidden behind her back, but with astonishing speed for someone so old, she jumped on Lucretia’s back and forced a bit between her teeth. Lucretia leapt into the air, neighing with rage, but the old woman held on. After that she caught each of us, me by my hair and Matilda by her head, and all four of us were hurled into a frenzied dance. In the corridor, Lucretia kicked out everywhere and smashed pictures and chairs and china. The old woman clung to her back like a limpet to a rock. I was covered in cuts and bruises, and thought Matilda must be dead, for she was fluttering sadly in the old woman’s hand like a rag.

We arrived in the dining room in a veritable orgy of noise. Sitting at the end of a long table an old gentleman, looking more like a geometric figure than anything else, was finishing his meal. All at once complete silence fell in the room. Lucretia looked at her father with swollen eyes.

“So you’re starting up your old tricks again,” he said, cracking a hazelnut. “Mademoiselle de la Rochefroide did well to bring you here. It’s exactly three years and three days since I forbade you to play at horses. This is the seventh time that I have had to punish you, and you are no doubt aware that in our family, seven is the last number. I’m afraid, my dear Lucretia, that this time I shall have to punish you pretty severely.”

The girl who had taken the appearance of a horse did not move, but her nostrils quivered.

“What I’m going to do is purely for your own good, my dear.” His voice was very gentle. “You’re too old to play with Tartar. Tartar is for children. I am going to burn him myself, until there’s nothing left of him.”

Lucretia gave a terrible cry and fell to her knees.

“Not that, Papa, not that.”

The old man smiled with great sweetness and cracked another hazelnut.

“It’s the seventh time, my dear.”

The tears ran from Lucretia’s great horse’s eyes and carved two channels in her cheeks of snow. She turned such a dazzling white that she shone like a star.

“Have pity, Papa, have pity. Don’t burn Tartar.”

Her shrill voice grew thinner and thinner, and she was soon kneeling in a pool of water. I was afraid that she was going to melt away.

“Mademoiselle de la Rochefroide, take Miss Lucretia outside,” said her father, and the old woman took the poor creature, who had become all thin and trembling, out of the room.

I don’t think he had noticed I was there. I hid behind the door and heard the old man go up to the nursery. A little later I stopped my ears with my fingers, for the most frightful neighing sounded from above, as if an animal were suffering extreme torture.

(1937–38)

THE ROYAL SUMMONS

I had received a royal summons to pay a call on the sovereigns of my country.

The invitation was made of lace, framing embossed letters of gold. There were also roses and swallows.

I went to fetch my car, but my chauffeur, who has no practical sense at all, had just buried it.

"I did it to grow mushrooms," he told me. "There's no better way of growing mushrooms."

"Brady," I said to him, "you're a complete idiot. You have ruined my car."

So, since my car was indeed completely out of action, I was obliged to hire a horse and cart.

When I arrived at the palace, I was told by an impassive servant, dressed in red and gold, "The queen went mad yesterday. She's in her bath."

"How terrible," I exclaimed. "How did it happen?"

"It's the heat."

"May I see her all the same?" I didn't like the idea of my long journey being wasted.

"Yes," the servant replied. "You may see her anyway."

We passed down corridors decorated in imitation marble, admirably done, through rooms with Greek bas-reliefs and Medici ceilings and wax fruit everywhere.

The queen was in her bath when I went in; I noticed that she was bathing in goat's milk.

"Come on in," she said. "You see I use only live sponges. It's healthier."

The sponges were swimming about all over the place in the milk, and she had trouble catching them. A servant, armed with long-handled tongs, helped her from time to time.

“I’ll soon be through with my bath,” the queen said. “I have a proposal to put to you. I would like you to see the government instead of me today, I’m too tired myself. They’re all idiots, so you won’t find it difficult.”

“All right,” I said.

The government chamber was at the other end of the palace. The ministers were sitting at a long and very shiny table.

As the representative of the queen, I sat in the seat at the end. The Prime Minister rose and struck the table with a gavel. The table broke in two. Some servants came in with another table. The Prime Minister swapped the first gavel for another, made of rubber. He struck the table again and began to speak. “Madame Deputy of the Queen, ministers, friends. Our dearly beloved sovereign went mad yesterday, and so we need another. But first we must assassinate the old queen.”

The ministers murmured amongst themselves for a while. Presently, the oldest minister rose to his feet and addressed the assembly. “That being the case, we must forthwith make a plan. Not only must we make a plan, but we must come to a decision. We must choose who is to be the assassin.”

All hands were immediately raised. I didn’t quite know what to do as the deputy of Her Majesty.

Perplexed, the Prime Minister looked over the company.

“We can’t all do it,” he said. “But I’ve a very good idea. We’ll play a game of draughts, and the winner has the right to assassinate the queen.” He turned to me and asked, “Do you play, Miss?”

I was filled with embarrassment. I had no desire to assassinate the queen, and I foresaw that serious consequences might follow. On the other hand I had never been any good at all at draughts. So I saw no danger, and I accepted.

“I don’t mind,” I said.

“So, it’s understood,” said the Prime Minister. “This is what the winner will do: take the queen for a stroll in the Royal Menagerie. When you reach the lions (second cage on the left), push her in. I shall tell the keeper not to feed the lions until tomorrow.”

The queen called me to her office. She was watering the flowers woven in the carpet.

“Well, did it go all right?” she asked.

"Yes, it went very well," I answered, confused.

"Would you like some soup?"

"You're too kind," I said.

"It's mock beef tea. I make it myself," the queen said. "There's nothing in it but potatoes."

While we were eating the broth, an orchestra played popular and classical tunes. The queen loved music to distraction.

The meal over, the queen left to have a rest. I for my part went to join in the game of draughts on the terrace. I was nervous, but I've inherited sporting instincts from my father. I had given my word to be there, and so there I would be.

The enormous terrace looked impressive. In front of the garden, darkened by the twilight and the cypress trees, the ministers were assembled. There were twenty little tables. Each had two chairs with thin, fragile legs. When he saw me arrive, the Prime Minister called out, "Take your places," and everybody rushed to the tables and began to play ferociously.

We played all night without stopping. The only sounds that interrupted the game were an occasional furious bellow from one minister or another. Towards dawn, the blast of a trumpet abruptly called an end to the game. A voice, coming from I don't know where, cried, "She has won. She's the only person who didn't cheat."

I was rooted to the ground with horror.

"Who? Me?" I said.

"Yes, you," the voice replied, and I noticed that it was the tallest cypress speaking.

I'm going to escape, I thought, and began to run in the direction of the avenue. But the cypress tore itself out of the earth by the roots, scattering dirt in all directions, and began to follow me. It's so much larger than me, I thought and stopped. The cypress stopped too. All its branches were shaking horribly—it was probably quite a while since it had last run.

"I accept," I said, and the cypress returned slowly to its hole.

I found the queen lying in her great bed.

"I want to invite you to come for a stroll in the menagerie," I said, feeling pretty uncomfortable.

“But it’s too early,” she replied. “It isn’t five o’clock yet. I never get up before ten.”

“It’s lovely out,” I added.

“Oh, all right, if you insist.”

We went down into the silent garden. Dawn is the time when nothing breathes, the hour of silence. Everything is transfixed, only the light moves. I sang a bit to cheer myself up. I was chilled to the bone. The queen, in the meantime, was telling me that she fed all her horses on jam.

“It stops them from being vicious,” she said.

She ought to have given the lions some jam, I thought to myself.

A long avenue, lined on both sides with fruit trees, led to the menagerie. From time to time a heavy fruit fell to the ground, Plop.

“Head colds are easily cured, if one just has the confidence,” the queen said. “I myself always take beef morsels marinated in olive oil. I put them in my nose. Next day the cold’s gone. Or else, treated in the same way, cold noodles in liver juice, preferably calves’ liver. It’s a miracle how it dispels the heaviness in one’s head.”

She’ll never have a head cold again, I thought.

“But bronchitis is more complicated. I nearly saved my poor husband from his last attack of bronchitis by knitting him a waistcoat. But it wasn’t altogether successful.”

We were drawing closer and closer to the menagerie. I could already hear the animals stirring in their morning slumbers. I would have liked to turn back, but I was afraid of the cypress and what it might be able to do with its hairy black branches. The more strongly I smelled the lion, the more loudly I sang, to give myself courage.

(1937–38)

A MAN IN LOVE

Walking down a narrow street one evening, I stole a melon. The fruit seller, who was lurking behind his fruit, caught me by the arm.

"Miss, I've been waiting for a chance like this for forty years. For forty years I've hidden behind this pile of oranges in the hope that somebody might pinch some fruit. And the reason for that is this: I want to talk, I want to tell my story. If you don't listen, I'll hand you over to the police."

"I'm listening," I told him.

He took me by the arm and dragged me into the depths of his shop amongst the fruit and vegetables. We went through a door at the back and reached a room where there was a bed in which lay a woman, motionless and probably dead. It seemed to me that she must have been there a long time, for the bed was overgrown with grass.

"I water her every day," the greengrocer said thoughtfully. "For forty years I've been quite unable to tell whether she is alive or dead. She hasn't moved or spoken or eaten during that time. But, and this is the strange thing, she remains warm. If you don't believe me, look."

Whereupon he lifted a corner of the bed cover and I saw a large number of eggs and some newly hatched chicks.

"You see," he said. "That's where I hatch my eggs. I sell fresh eggs too."

We sat down on opposite sides of the bed, and the greengrocer began to tell his tale.

"I love her so much, believe me, I've always loved her. She was so sweet. She had nimble little white feet. Would you like to see them?"

"No," I replied.

"Anyway," he continued with a deep sigh, "she was so beautiful! I had fair hair. But she, she had magnificent black hair. We both of us have white hair now. Her father was an extraordinary man. He had a big house in the country. He was a collector of lamb cutlets. The way we met was this. I

have this special little gift. It's that I can dehydrate meat just by looking at it. Mr. Pushfoot (that was his name) heard about me. He asked me to come to his house to dehydrate his cutlets, so that they shouldn't rot. Agnes was his daughter. We immediately fell in love.

"We went away together in a boat on the Seine. I was rowing. Agnes said, 'I love you so much I live only for you.' And I used the same words to reply to her. I believe it's my love that keeps her so warm to this day. No doubt she is dead, but the warmth remains.

"Next year," he went on with a faraway look in his eyes, "next year I shall plant some tomatoes. I'd be surprised if they didn't do very well in there …

"Night fell. I didn't know where we could pass our wedding night. Agnes had become so pale, so pale from exhaustion. At last, just as we left Paris behind, I saw a café beside the river. I moored the boat, and we walked up to the dark and sinister terrace. There were two wolves and a fox prowling around us. Nobody else …

"I knocked. I knocked on the door, but it remained closed on a terrible silence.

"' Agnes is tired. Agnes is very tired,' I shouted with all my might.

"Finally an old crone hung out of the window and said, 'I don't know a thing. It's the fox who's the landlord here. Let me sleep. You're getting on my nerves.'

"Agnes began to cry. There was nothing I could do but speak to the fox. 'Have you any beds?' I asked him several times. He didn't reply. He couldn't speak. Then the crone's head, now even older than before, came down slowly from the window, at the end of a piece of string.

"' Speak to the wolves. I'm not in charge here. Please let me sleep.'

"I understood that the crone was mad, and that there was no sense in going on. Agnes was still weeping. I walked around the house several times and in the end managed to open a window through which we entered. We found ourselves in a high-ceilinged kitchen, where there was a large stove, glowing red with fire. Some vegetables were cooking themselves, jumping around in boiling water; this game delighted them. We ate well and afterwards lay down to sleep on the floor. I held Agnes in my arms. We didn't sleep a wink. There were all sorts of things in that terrible kitchen. A great number of rats sat on the threshold of their holes and sang with shrill,

disagreeable little voices. Foul smells spread and dispersed one after the other, and there were strange draughts. I think it was the draughts that finished off my poor Agnes. She was never herself again. From that day on she spoke less and less …"

At that, the owner of the fruit shop was so blinded by his tears that I was able to make my escape with my melon.

(1937–38)

UNCLE SAM CARRINGTON

Whenever Uncle Sam Carrington saw the full moon he couldn't stop laughing. A sunset had the same effect on Aunt Edgeworth. Between them they caused my poor mother a great deal of suffering, for she had a certain social reputation to keep up.

When I was eight I was considered the most serious member of the family. My mother confided in me. She told me that it was a crying shame that she wasn't invited anywhere, that Lady Cholmendley-Bottom cut her when they passed in the street. I was grief stricken.

Uncle Sam Carrington and Aunt Edgeworth lived at home. They lived on the first floor. So it was impossible to hide our sad state of affairs. For days I wondered how I could deliver my family from this disgrace. In the end I couldn't stand the tension and my mother's tears, they upset me too much. I decided to find a solution by myself.

One evening, when the sun had turned a brilliant red, and Aunt Edgeworth was giggling in a particularly outrageous manner, I took a pot of jam and a fishing hook and set off. I sang, "Come into the garden, Maud, / For the black bat, night, has flown," to frighten the bats away. My father used to sing that when he didn't go to church, or else he sang a song called "It Cost Me Seven and Six Pence." He sang both with equal feeling.

All right, I thought to myself, the journey has begun. The night will surely bring a solution. If I keep count of the trees until I reach the place I'm going to, I shan't get lost. I'll remember the number of trees on the return journey.

But I'd forgotten that I could only count to ten, and even then I made mistakes. In a very short time I'd counted to ten several times, and I'd gone completely astray. Trees surrounded me on all sides. "I'm in a forest," I said, and I was right.

The full moon shone brightly between the trees, so I was able to see, a few yards in front of me, the origins of a distressing noise. It was two cabbages having a terrible fight. They were tearing each other's leaves off with such ferocity that soon there was nothing but torn leaves everywhere and no cabbages.

"Never mind," I told myself. "It's only a nightmare." But then I remembered suddenly that I'd never gone to bed that night, and so it couldn't possibly be a nightmare. "That's awful."

Thereupon I left the corpses and went on my way. Walking along I met a friend. It was the horse who, years later, was to play an important part in my life.

"Hello," he said. "Are you looking for something?" I explained to him the purpose of my late-night expedition.

"I can see that this is a very complicated matter from a social point of view," he said. "There are two ladies living near here who deal with such matters. Their aim is the extermination of family shame. They're expert at it. I'll take you to them if you like."

The Misses Cunningham-Jones lived in a house discretely surrounded by wild plants and underclothes of bygone times. They were in the garden, playing a game of draughts. The horse stuck his head between the legs of a pair of 1890 bloomers and addressed the Misses Cunningham-Jones.

"Show your friend in," said the lady sitting on the right, speaking with a very distinguished accent. "In the interest of respectability, we are always ready to come to the rescue." The other lady inclined her head graciously. She was wearing an immense hat decorated with a great collection of horticultural specimens.

"Young lady," she said, offering me a Louis Quinze chair, "does your family descend from our dear departed Duke of Wellington? Or from Sir Walter Scott, that noble aristocrat of pure literature?"

I felt a bit embarrassed. There were no aristocrats in my family. She saw my hesitation and said with the most charming smile, "My dear child, you must realize that here we deal only with the affairs of the oldest and most noble families of England."

I had an inspiration, and my face lit up. "In our dining room at home …"

The horse kicked me hard in the backside. "Never mention anything as vulgar as food," he whispered.

Fortunately the ladies were slightly deaf. I immediately corrected myself. “In our drawing room,” I continued, confused, “there is a table on which, we are told, a duchess forgot her lorgnette in 1700.”

“In that case,” one of the ladies said, “we can perhaps settle the matter. Of course, we shall have to set a rather high fee.”

“Wait here for a few minutes, then we’ll give you what you need. While you are waiting, you may look at the pictures in this book. It is instructive and interesting. No library is complete without it: my sister and I have always lived by its admirable example.”

The book was called *The Secrets of the Flowers of Refinement, or The Vulgarity of Food*.

When the two ladies had gone, the horse said, “Do you know how to walk without making a sound?”

“Certainly,” I replied.

“Let’s go and see the ladies at work,” he said. “Come. But if you value your life, don’t make the slightest noise.”

The ladies were in their kitchen garden. It was behind their house and was surrounded by a high brick wall. I climbed on the horse’s back, and a pretty astonishing sight met my eyes: the Misses Cunningham-Jones, each armed with a huge whip, were whipping the vegetables on all sides, shouting, “One’s got to suffer to go to Heaven. Those who do not wear corsets will never get there.”

The vegetables, for their part, were fighting amongst themselves, and the larger ones threw the smaller ones at the ladies with cries of hate.

“It’s always like this,” said the horse in a low voice. “The vegetables have to suffer for the sake of society. You’ll see that they’ll soon catch one for you, and that it’ll die for the cause.”

The vegetables didn’t look keen to die an honorable death, but the ladies were stronger. Soon two carrots and a courgette fell into their hands.

“Quick,” said the horse, “let’s go back.”

We had hardly got back and were sitting once more in front of *The Vulgarity of Food* when the two ladies returned, looking just about as poised as before. They gave me a parcel which contained the vegetables, and in return I paid them with the pot of jam and the fishing hook.

(1937–38)

THE HOUSE OF FEAR

One day toward half past midday, as I was walking in a certain neighborhood, I met a horse who stopped me.

"Come with me," he said, bending his head towards a street that was dark and narrow. "I've something I particularly want to show you."

"I haven't the time," I replied, but nevertheless I followed him. We came to a door on which he knocked with his left hoof. The door opened. We went in, I thought I'd be late for lunch.

There were a number of creatures in ecclesiastical dress. "Do go upstairs," they told me. "There you'll see our beautiful inlaid floor. It is completely made of turquoise, and the tiles are stuck together with gold."

Surprised by such a welcome, I nodded my head and made a sign to the horse to show me this treasure. The staircase had enormously high steps, but we went up without difficulty, the horse and I.

"You know, it isn't really as beautiful as all that," he told me in a low voice. "But one's got to make a living, hasn't one?"

All of a sudden we saw the turquoise paving which covered the floor of a large, empty room. In fact the tiles were well fitted together with gold, and the blue was dazzling. I gazed at it politely, the horse thoughtfully:

"Well, you see, I'm really bored by this job. I only do it for the money. I don't really belong in these surroundings. I'll show you, next time there's a party."

After due reflection, I said to myself that it's easy to see that this horse isn't just an ordinary horse. Having reached this conclusion, I felt I should get to know him better.

"I'll certainly come to your party. I'm beginning to think I rather like you."

"You yourself are an improvement on the usual run of customers," he replied. "I'm very good at telling the difference between ordinary people

and those with a certain understanding. I've got the gift of immediately getting right inside a person's soul."

I smiled anxiously. "And when is the party?"

"It's this evening. Put on some warm clothes."

That was odd, for outside the sun was shining brightly.

Going down the stairs at the far end of the room, I noticed with surprise that the horse managed much better than I. The ecclesiastics had disappeared, and I left without anyone seeing me go.

"At nine o'clock," the horse said. "I'll call for you at nine. Be sure to let the concierge know."

On my way home I thought to myself that I ought to have asked the horse to dinner.

Never mind, I thought. I bought some lettuce and some potatoes for my supper. When I got home I lit a little fire to prepare my meal. I had a cup of tea, thought about my day and mostly about the horse whom, though I'd only known him a short time, I called my friend. I have few friends and am glad to have a horse for a friend. After the meal I smoked a cigarette and mused on the luxury it would be to go out, instead of talking to myself and boring myself to death with the same endless stories I'm forever telling myself. I am a very boring person, despite my enormous intelligence and distinguished appearance, and nobody knows this better than I. I've often told myself that if only I were given the opportunity, I'd perhaps become the centre of intellectual society. But by dint of talking to myself so much, I tend to repeat the same things all the time. But what can you expect? I'm a recluse.

It was in the course of these reflections that my friend the horse knocked on my door, with such force that I was afraid the neighbours would complain.

"I'm coming" I called out.

In the darkness I didn't see which direction we were taking. I ran beside him, clinging to his mane for support. Soon I noticed that in front of us, behind us, and on all sides in the open country were more and more horses. They were staring straight ahead and each carried some green stuff in its mouth. They were hurrying, the noise of their hooves shook the earth. The cold became intense.

"This party takes place every year," the horse said.

“It doesn’t look as if they were enjoying themselves much,” I said.

“We’re visiting the Castle of Fear. She’s the mistress of the house.”

The castle stood ahead of us, and he explained that it was built of stones that held the cold of winter.

“Inside it’s even colder,” he said, and when we got into the courtyard I realized that he was telling the truth. The horses all shivered, and their teeth chattered like castanets. I had the impression that all the horses in the world had come to this party. Each one with bulging eyes, fixed straight ahead, and each one with foam frozen around its lips. I didn’t dare speak, I was too terrified.

Following one another in single file, we reached a great hall decorated with mushrooms and other fruits of the night. The horses all sat down on their hindquarters, their forelegs rigid. They looked about without moving their heads, just showing the whites of their eyes. I was very much afraid. In front of us, reclining in the Roman fashion on a very large bed, lay the mistress of the house—Fear. She looked slightly like a horse, but was much uglier. Her dressing gown was made of live bats sewn together by their wings: the way they fluttered, one would have thought they didn’t much like it.

“My friends,” she said, weeping and trembling. “For three hundred and sixty-five days I’ve been thinking of the best way to entertain you this night. Supper will be as usual, and everyone is entitled to three portions. But apart from that I have thought up a new game which I think is particularly original, for I’ve spent a lot of time perfecting it. I hope with all my heart that all of you will experience the same joy in playing this game as I have found in devising it.”

A deep silence followed her words. Then she continued.

“I shall now give you all the details. I shall supervise the game myself, and I shall be the umpire and decide who wins.

“You must all count backward from a hundred and ten to five as quickly as possible while thinking of your own fate and weeping for those who have gone before you. You must simultaneously beat time to the tune of ‘The Volga Boatmen’ with your left foreleg, ‘The Marseillaise’ with your right foreleg, and ‘Where Have You Gone, My Last Rose of Summer’ with your two back legs. I had some further details, but I’ve left them out to simplify

the game. Now let us begin. And don't forget that, though I can't see all over the hall at once, the Good Lord sees everything."

I don't know whether it was the terrible cold that excited such enthusiasm, the fact is that the horses began to beat the floor with their hooves as if they wanted to descend to the depths of the earth. I stayed where I was, hoping she wouldn't see me, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that she could see me very well with her great eye (she had only one eye, but it was six times bigger than an ordinary eye). It went on like this for twenty-five minutes, but …

(1937–38)

AS THEY RODE ALONG THE EDGE

As they rode along the edge, the brambles drew back their thorns like cats retracting their claws.

This was something to see: fifty black cats and as many yellow ones, and then her, and one couldn't really be altogether sure that she was a human being. Her smell alone threw doubt on it—a mixture of spices and game, the stables, fur and grasses.

Riding a wheel, she took the worst roads, between precipices, across trees. Someone who's never travelled on a wheel would think it difficult, but she was used to it.

Her name was Virginia Fur, she had a mane of hair yards long and enormous hands with dirty nails; yet the citizens of the mountain respected her and she too always showed a deference for their customs. True, the people up there were plants, animals, birds; otherwise things wouldn't have been the same. Of course, she had to put up with being insulted by the cats at times, but she insulted them back just as loudly and in the same language. She, Virginia Fur, lived in a village long abandoned by human beings. Her house had holes all over, holes she'd pierced for the fig tree that grew in the kitchen.

Apart from the garage for the wheel, all the rooms were occupied by cats; there were fourteen in all.

Every night she went out on her wheel to hunt; whatever their respect, the mountain beasts didn't let themselves be killed as easily as all that, so several days per week she was forced to live on lost sheepdog, and occasionally mutton or child, though this last was rare since no one ever came there.

It was one night in autumn when she found to her surprise that she was being followed by footsteps heavier than those of an animal; the footsteps came rapidly.

The sickening smell of a human entered her nostrils; she pushed her wheel as hard as she could, to no avail. She stopped when her pursuer was beside her.

"I am Saint Alexander," he said. "Get down, Virginia Fur, I want to talk to you."

Who could this individual be who dared address her so familiarly? An individual, furthermore, of a rare filthiness, there in his monk's habit. The cats kept a contemptuous distance.

"I want to ask you to enter the Church," he went on. "I hope to win your soul."

"My soul?" replied Virginia. "I sold it a long time ago for a kilo of truffles. Go ask Igname the Boar for it."

He considered this across the whole length of his greenish face. Finally he said with a cunning smile, "I have a pretty little church not far from here. It's a marvel of location, and what comfort! My friend! Every night there are apparitions and you really have to see the graveyard, really, it's a dream! There's a view of the surrounding mountains for a hundred miles and more. Come with me, Virginia." He continued in a tender voice. "I promise you, on the head of the little baby Jesus, that you'll have a beautiful spot in my graveyard, right next to the statue of the Holy Virgin. (And believe me that's the very best place.) I'll conduct your funeral rites myself. Imagine, funeral rites celebrated by the great Saint Alexander!"

The cats growled impatiently, but Virginia was thinking it over. She'd heard there was good dinnerware in churches, some of it made of gold, and the rest would always have its uses. She alerted the cats in their language, and told the saint, "Sir, what you're telling me interests me to a certain degree, but it is against my principles to interrupt the hunt. If I come with you, I shall have to dine with you, and so shall the hundred cats of course."

He looked at the cats with a certain amount of apprehension, then nodded his head in agreement.

"To bring you to the path of True Light," he murmured, "I shall arrange a miracle. But understand that I am poor, very, very poor. I eat only once a week, and this solitary meal is sheep's droppings."

The cats set off without enthusiasm.

About a hundred yards from the Church of Saint Alexander there was what he called "my garden of the little Flowers of Mortification." This

consisted of a number of lugubrious instruments half buried in the earth: chairs made of wire ("I sit in them when they're white-hot and stay there until they cool off"); enormous, smiling mouths with pointed, poisonous teeth; underwear of reinforced concrete full of scorpions and adders; cushions made of millions of black mice biting one another—when the blessed buttocks were elsewhere.

Saint Alexander showed off his garden one object at a time, with a certain pride. "Little Theresa never thought of underwear of reinforced concrete," he said. "In fact I can't at the moment think of anybody who had the idea. But then, we can't all be geniuses."

The entrance of the church was lined with statues of Saint Alexander at various periods of his life. There were some of Jesus Christ, too, but much smaller. The interior of the church was very comfortable: velvet cushions in ash pink, bibles of real silver, and *My Unblemished Life, or The Rosaries of the Soul of Saint Alexander* by himself, this in a binding of peacock blue jewels. Amber bas-reliefs on the walls gave intimate details of the life of the saint in childhood.

"Gather yourselves," said Saint Alexander, and the hundred cats sat down on a hundred ash pink cushions.

Virginia remained standing and examined the church with interest. She sniffed the altar, which exuded a vaguely familiar smell, though she couldn't remember where she had smelled it.

Saint Alexander mounted the pulpit and explained that he was going to perform a miracle: everyone hoped he was talking about food.

He took a bottle of water and sprinkled drops everywhere.

Snow of purity,

he began in a very low voice,

Pillar of virtue
Sun of beauty
Perfume …

He continued in this vein until a cloud flowed from the altar, a cloud like sour milk. Soon the cloud took the shape of a fat lamb with baneful eyes. Immediately Saint Alexander cried out, more and more loudly, and the lamb floated up to the ceiling.

"Lamb of God, dearly beloved Jesus, pray for the poor sinners," cried the saint. But his voice had reached its maximum strength and broke. The lamb, which had become enormous, burst and fell to the ground in four pieces. At this moment the cats, who had watched the miracle without moving, threw themselves on the lamb in one great bound. It was their first meal of the day.

They soon finished off the lamb. Saint Alexander was lost in a cloud of dust, all that was left of the odour of sanctity. A weak, remote voice hissed, "Jesus has spilled his blood, Jesus is dead, Saint Alexander will avenge himself."

Virginia took this opportunity to fill her bag with holy plates, and left the church with the hundred cats behind her.

The wheel crossed the woods at a hissing speed. Bats and moths were imprisoned in Virginia's hair; she gestured to the beasts with her strange hands that the hunt was over; she opened her mouth and a blind nightingale flew in: she swallowed it and sang in the nightingale's voice: "Little Jesus is dead, and we've had a fine dinner."

A wild boar lived near Virginia's house. This boar had a single eye in the middle of his forehead, surrounded by black curls. His hindquarters were covered with a thick russet fur, and his back with very tough bristles. Virginia was acquainted with this animal and did not kill it, since it knew where the truffles were hiding.

The boar was called Igname, and he was very pleased with his beauty. He enjoyed decorating himself with fruits, leaves, plants. He made himself necklaces of little animals and insects, which he killed solely to make himself look elegant, since he ate nothing but truffles.

Every evening when the moon was shining, he went to the lake to admire himself in the water. It was here, one evening, while bathing in the moonlight, that Igname decided to take Virginia as his mistress. He admired most her fruity smell and her long hair, always full of nocturnal animals. He

decided she was very beautiful and probably a virgin. Igname rolled in the mud luxuriously, thinking of Virginia's charms.

"She has every reason for taking me. Am I not the finest animal in all the forest?"

When he had finished his moon-and-mud bath, he got up to find the most sumptuous outfit in which to ask Virginia for her love.

No animal or bird ever looked so splendid as did Igname in his attire of love. Attached to his curly head was a young nightjar. This bird with its hairy beak and surprised eyes beat its wings and looked constantly for prey amongst the creatures that come out only at the full moon. A wig of squirrels' tails and fruit hung around Igname's ears, pierced for the occasion by two little pikes he had found dead on the lakeshore. His hoofs were dyed red by the blood of a rabbit he had crushed while galloping, and his active body was enveloped by a purple cape which had mysteriously emerged out of the forest. (He hid his russet buttocks, as he did not want to show all his beauty at one go.)

He walked slowly and with great dignity. The grasshoppers fell silent with admiration. As he was passing under an oak tree, Igname saw a rosary hanging down amongst the leaves. He knew there must be a body attached to this rosary, and he heard a shrill and mocking laugh from above.

Any other time, thought Igname, and he'd be laughing on the other side of his face, and he continued on his way without turning his head.

Igname arrived at Virginia's house. She was sitting on her heels in front of a stewpot which trembled on the fire, making little musical noises. The cats were sitting motionless in every corner of the kitchen, staring at the stewpot.

When Virginia saw Igname she jumped on the table.

"You look impressive coming out the forest," she breathed, dazzled by his beauty.

Igname's eye became pale and brilliant; the nightjar sent up its thin cry, almost too high to be heard by the ear. Igname advanced and sat down beside the fire on his russet backside.

"Do you recognize my garments of love?" said Igname gravely. "Do you know, Virginia, that I am wearing them for you? Do you realize that the nightjar's claws are thrust deep into my skull? It's for you, I love you. I

double up with laughter when I see the night, for my body is exploding with love. Answer me, Virginia, will this night belong to us?"

He faltered, since he had prepared his speech only to this point. Virginia, trembling, spat hard into the fire, a curse on the words of love. She was afraid of Igname's beauty. Then she spat into the stewpot and put her lips into the boiling liquid and swallowed a big mouthful. With a savage cry she brought her head back out of the pot; she jumped around Igname, tearing her hair out by the roots; Igname stood up, and together they danced a dance of ecstasy. The cats caterwauled and stuck their claws into one another's necks, and then threw themselves in a mass onto Igname and Virginia, who disappeared under a mountain of cats. Where they made love.

Hunters came seldom to the mountains, but one morning Virginia Fur saw two humans with guns. She hid herself in a bramble bush, and the human beings passed near without noticing her smell. She was terrified by their ugliness and clumsy movements. Abusing them under her breath, she returned home to warn Igname. He wasn't there.

She went out again on her wheel, accompanied by the hundred cats.

In the forest Virginia learned that there had been several deaths. Flocks of birds and groups of wild beasts were having funeral feasts. Full of anguish, they filled their stomachs and cursed the hunters.

Virginia went looking for her lover, but found neither track nor scent of him.

Towards dawn she heard from a badger that Igname was dead: he had been murdered along with a thousand birds, forty hares, and as many deer.

The badger, sitting on a tree trunk, told the story:

"The hunters, who you noticed, passed close to the Church of Saint Alexander. The saint was sitting in his concrete underwear. He saw them coming, he was praying aloud. The hunters asked him news of game.

"I am the Protector of the Little Animals of God," he answered. "But inside my church is a box of alms for the poor. If you put something in it, it's just possible the good Lord will show you the lake where every evening a big wild boar can be found."

After having a good look to see how much the hunters had put into the box, Saint Alexander led them to the lake.

Igname was looking deeply at himself in the water. The hunters fired, and the dogs finished him off. They put Igname into a big sack and said, “This one will do for the bistro in Glane, we’ll get at least a hundred francs.”

Virginia returned home, followed by the cats. There, in the kitchen, she gave birth to seven little boars. Out of sentiment she kept the one most like Igname, and boiled the others for herself and the cats, as a funeral feast.

The wheel, the cats, and Virginia merged with the trees and the wind. Their shadows, black and disquieting, passed with extraordinary speed across the slope of the mountains. They were shouting something; the nightbirds replied: “Wheeeeeeech? Saint Francis? That bore again! Let’s kill him! Isn’t he dead yet? Enough of his damned stupidities. It isn’t him? Who then? Ah, Saint Alexander, ayyyyy! Kill him too, he’s a saint.” And they flew along with the shadows, crying “Killll himmmm! Killll himmmm!”

Soon the earth moved with all the beasts out of their holes crying, “Killll himmmm!”

Ninety thousand horses bounded and broke from their stables to gallop along, beating the earth with their hoofs and neighing, “Killll himmmm, death to foul Alexander!”

Two ladies dressed in black were walking in the snow. One of them talked a lot, the other appeared to have had enough of walking, but wore the icy look of a dutiful lady. The other one, with her pinched, dry face, talked in a crystal clear voice, one of those voices that are so tiresome when one wants to go to sleep in a railway compartment.

“My husband,” she was saying, “loves me very much, you know. My husband is so well-known. He’s such a child, my husband. My husband has his flings, but I leave him totally free, my dear little husband. And yet I am very ill, I shall die soon, in a month I shall be dead.”

“No, no,” the other said, her attention elsewhere. “Aren’t the mountains ravishing in the snow?”

The talkative lady gave a laugh. “Yes, aren’t they? But all I see are the poor people who suffer in these isolated little villages. I feel my heart fill to bursting with love and pity.” She struck her flat chest, and the dutiful lady thought, “There isn’t room for a heart, her bust’s too tight.”

The path climbed suddenly, and at the end of a long lane they saw a convent.

"What a beautiful place to die. I feel so pure with the Sisters of Jesus's Little Smile of Anguish. I know that there, with my prayers, I shall get back the soul of my darling little husband."

Two men came down the path. They were carrying the corpse of a beautiful boar.

"I shall buy the boar and give it to the good sisters," the lady said. "I am very generous, you know. My little husband often scolded me, said I throw money out the window. But won't they be happy, the good sisters?" She gave the hunters some money and they said they'd take the boar to the convent. "I myself eat very little, you know, I am too ill. I am very near to death, very near."

"We're approaching the convent," said the other, with a sigh.

"Kiss me, my dear little Engadine," said the talkative one. "You know I'm nothing but a capricious girl." She offered her companion a shrivelled face. "My little husband always said I was such a child!"

Engadine pretended not to hear, and walked faster. Her companion had a certain nauseating smell of the sick about her that repelled her. She walked faster. The sun was hidden by heavy black clouds. A flock of goats and a billy goat passed close, the buck threatening them with a devil's look.

"They frighten me, these goats, they smell so bad. What a brutish smell!" The buck continued to stare at her.

The road became harder. The mountains darkened into rude animal shapes; in the distance they seemed to hear galloping horses.

They rang the bell at the great portal of the convent; it was opened by a creature that might have come from a lemon, she was so shrivelled and acid. "The Abbot is in the middle of his prayers," she wheezed. "Mother Superior is on her knees. Come, come in the chapel."

They followed her through the corridors, and finally arrived at the chapel. The Abbot had just finished his prayers. The Mother Superior of Jesus's Little Smile of Anguish got up from her knees with difficulty, weighted down by her greyish flesh.

"Poor little girl," whispered the nun. "Come along to the drawing room."

Once there, the enormous woman enveloped the other in a fat, sturdy embrace. Then they talked:

"I've come to die in your convent and win the soul of my dear husband…."

"Board and lodging five hundred francs a month …"

"I'm very ill, very ill…."

"Plenary indulgences are supplementary, a thousand francs."

"My darling little husband will come see me often…."

"Another thousand francs for food, of course."

"I pray morning till night for my little husband."

"A community like ours is very expensive."

They talked like this for several hours.

At half past six an enormous bell rang for the dead and the evening meal, a meal to be taken in rigorous silence. On feast days, Sister Ignatius, headmistress, read aloud. She rang a little bell, and when everybody had something to eat, announced, "This evening is amongst the greatest of occasions for our community; the Great Saint Alexander himself is coming to speak to us in the chapel at seven-thirty. Afterwards we shall have a meal in the great hall to celebrate the occasion."

The eyes of a hundred nuns shone with joy.

"Now," continued Sister Ignatius, "we continue with chapter one thousand nine hundred thirteen of the twentieth volume of the life of Christ as told to children." The light disappeared in a hundred pairs of eyes.

When the chapel was full of nuns, the organ played a grand, sombre hymn for the saint's imperial entrance. In gold and purple and followed by five little boys, he got down on his knees before the altar.

A voice in the choir began to sing. Perhaps it was a hymn, but it went so fast that most of the nuns were two or three lines behind. The effect was odd; the Mother Superior appeared ill at ease; when the saint mounted the pulpit, followed by six fat cats, she was in a sweat.

"Dear sisters, I have come from far to gladden you with the word of God."

It seemed as if the altar was filling with cats, gold cats and black cats.

"The harshness of life, the temptations of the flesh, the goodness of the good …"

A strong wild smell drifted through the church; raising their eyes, the sisters were horrified to see a large badger climbing tranquilly onto Saint

Alexander's head. He continued, but every now and again made a movement with his hand as if trying to chase something away.

"Beware of sinful thoughts…."

The voice in the choir was still singing, but it scarcely resembled a hymn; Saint Alexander was obliged to shout to make himself heard.

"The good Lord sees your most secret thoughts…." The ceiling was hidden by a million birds of night crying: "Death to foul Alexander…."

He descended the pulpit with as much dignity as he could muster, and went out, followed by the nuns, the cats, the badger, and a million birds of the night.

In the refectory a huge table groaned with platters of game, cakes, and great flagons of wine. The saint sat down in the place of honour at the head of the table and asked the good Lord for permission to eat. The good Lord made no reply, and everybody sat down and attacked with good appetite.

The Mother Superior, sitting on the saint's right, whispered, "Holy Father, you weren't disturbed in your magnificent discourse?"

"Disturbed?" he asked in a surprised voice, though his face was covered in scratches. "Disturbed, how?"

"Oh, nothing," the mother replied, blushing. "There are some flies in the church."

"I notice nothing when I talk to the good Lord," said the lady who'd taken up residence at the convent. "Not even flies."

The two ladies exchanged sour looks.

"That, dear madam, is a noble thought," answered the saint. "Are you familiar with a little poem I wrote in my youth:

In Paris the Pope
In Aix Lord of the House,
But before the good Lord
I'm but a poor mouse.

"It's fresh, and yet so strong at the same time," the lady exclaimed ecstatically. "How I love real poetry."

“There’s more where that came from,” said the saint. “I find the lack of true poets forces me to write.”

Out of the corner of her eye, the Mother Superior saw seven large cats enter the room silently. They sat down beside the saint, curling their tails around themselves. She grew pale. “Your husband, dear child, must be very busy to leave you alone so often?”

“My husband,” the lady replied in a sharp voice, “is very tired. He’s having a rest.”

“Well then,” replied the Mother Superior, “no doubt he’s having it on the Riviera? Remember the temptations of the flesh. If my husband were not Our Lord, if I had instead chosen amongst the poor sinners of this world, I would hardly feel easy with him on the Riviera, especially if I weren’t in the first spring of youth anymore, let’s be frank.”

The lady trembled with rage, and clenched her fingers. “My darling little husband adores me. He does silly things, but we’re made for each other.”

The moment had come for the roast to be carried in, and everyone looked with anticipation at the door that led to the kitchen. Sister Ignatius stood up and blew a long, melancholic note on a small leather trumpet: “The boar!”

The door crashed open and all the beasts of the forest entered crying, “Kill him, kill him.” In the turmoil that followed one could barely make out a human form sitting on a wheel that turned with incredible speed, who shouted with the others: “Kill him!”

(1937-40)

PIGEON, FLY!

"There's somebody on the road. Somebody's coming to see me, someone strange, though I can only see him from afar."

I leaned over my balcony and saw the figure getting rapidly bigger, for it was approaching at great speed. I thought it was a woman, for its long, straight hair fell down upon its horse's mane. The horse was large, with rounded, powerful bones, and it was a strange kind of pink with purple shadows the colour of ripe plums: the colour called roan in England. Of all animals, the horse is the only one who has this rosy colour.

The person on the horse was dressed in a pretty untidy manner that reminded me of the coat of a mountain sheep. On the other hand the colours were rich, almost regal, and a gold shirt was just visible between the strands of loose wool. True the shirt was full of holes and somewhat dirty when examined closely, but the general effect was impressive.

She stopped below my balcony and looked up at me.

"I have a letter which needs an immediate answer."

The voice was a man's voice, and I found myself at a complete loss in making out the person's sex.

"Who are you?" I asked cautiously.

"I am Ferdinand, emissary of Célestin des Airlines-Drues."

The rider's voice, very soft, was unquestionably a man's voice: a scent of heliotrope and vanilla mixed with sweat rose to my nostrils. I leaned down to him and, taking the letter from his hand, used the opportunity to look at his face, half hidden. It was a very white face, the lips painted reddish purple. The horse shook its fat neck.

"Madam," the letter said, "please have the great kindness to help me in my deep distress. In consequence, you will learn something much to your advantage.

"Entrust your honourable person, as well as your canvases, your brushes, and everything you need in your profession of artist to my emissary.

"I beg you, dear lady, to accept my deepest and most sorrowful respect." Signed, "Célestin des Airlines-Drues."

The writing paper was heavily scented with heliotrope and decorated with several gold crowns transfixed by plumes, swords, and olive branches.

I decided to accompany Ferdinand back to his master, since the promises the letter contained interested me very much, though I'd never heard of Célestin des Airlines-Drues.

I was soon sitting on the broad hindquarters of the emissary's horse behind Ferdinand. My luggage was attached to the saddle.

We took the road to the west, a route that crossed some wild country, rich in great dark forests.

It was spring. The grey, heavy sky dropped a tepid rain; the green of the trees and fields was intense. From time to time I dozed, and on several occasions I could easily have fallen from the horse, but I hung on to Ferdinand's woolly clothes. He didn't appear to worry about me, thinking of other things, and singing "The Sighs of the Dying Rose."

Its petals cold against my heart
My hot tears could no warmth impart
To the velvet
Of the soft skin of My Rose
OH MY ROSE.

These last words woke me completely, for he screamed them with excruciating brutality into my left ear.

"Idiot," I shouted, furious.

Ferdinand laughed softly. The horse had come to a halt. We were in a huge courtyard a few hundred yards from a large house. This house, built in dark stone and of ample proportions, was so sad in appearance that I felt a keen desire to turn round and go back home. All the windows were shuttered, there wasn't a wisp of smoke from any of the chimneys, and crows were sitting here and there on the roof.

The courtyard looked as deserted as the house.

I thought that there must be a garden on the other side of the house, for I saw trees and a pale sky through a big wrought iron gate. The gate was strange, the wrought iron showed a gigantic angel sitting in a circle, its head thrown back in an anguished profile. On the right, towards the top of the circle, a little wave of water, also in wrought iron, flowed towards the angel's face.

"Where are we?" I asked. "Have we arrived?"

"We are at Airlines-Drues," Ferdinand answered after a moment's silence.

He looked at the house without turning his head. It seemed to me that he was waiting for somebody, something, or some event. He did not move. The horse stood very still, also looking straight ahead.

Suddenly bells began to ring: I've never in my life heard such a ringing of bells. The drawn-out echo hung all about us in the trees like a metallic liquid. Distraught, the crows on the roof flew off.

I was about to question my companion when a coach drawn by four black horses passed by us with the swiftness of a shadow. The carriage stopped in front of the gate, and I saw that it was a hearse, sumptuously fixed with carvings and flowers. The horses were of the same breed as the herald's, round and sleek, but these were black as muscat grapes.

The door of the house opened and four men came out carrying a coffin.

Ferdinand's horse began to whinny and the black horses replied, turning their heads towards us.

The men carrying the coffin were dressed the same way as Ferdinand, the only difference being the colour of their flowing robes: purple, black, and a very deep crimson. Their faces were very white and made up like Ferdinand's. They all had long heavy hair, badly combed, like wigs of long ago that had lain in an attic for years.

I'd hardly had time to observe all this when Ferdinand gave his horse a tap with his whip and we were plunging at full gallop headlong through an avenue, throwing up earth and stones behind us.

This journey went so quickly that I wasn't even able to look around me. But I had the impression that we were travelling through a forest. In the end, Ferdinand stopped his horse in a clearing surrounded by trees. The

ground was covered by mosses and wildflowers. An armchair stood some yards from us, draped in green and mauve velvet.

"Get down, won't you," Ferdinand said. "Set your easel up in the shade. Are you thirsty?"

I told him I would like a drink of some sort and slid from the back of the horse. Ferdinand offered me a flask containing a very sugary liquid.

"They'll be along soon." He went on looking into the depth of the forest. "The sun will soon set. Put your easel along here, this is where you'll paint the portrait."

While I was busy setting up, Ferdinand took the saddle and bridle from his horse, then lay on the ground, the horse beside him.

The sky became red, yellow, and mauve, and dusk fell. It began to rain, and large raindrops fell on me and my canvas.

"There they are," Ferdinand suddenly called out.

Soon the clearing was full of people. These people, who were veiled, looked more or less like the men who had carried the coffin. They made quite a large circle around me and the armchair. They talked together in low voices, and every now and again one laughed shrilly. There were about forty of them.

Soon a high, clear voice came from behind the circle: "Like this, Gustave. No, no, no, my poor friend, to the left…."

"Who would have thought she was so heavy," another, lower voice answered. "And yet she wasn't fat."

The laughter sounded like bleating sheep, and looking around me, I had the vivid impression I was surrounded by a flock of bizarre sheep dressed for a gloomy ritual.

Part of the circle moved aside, and the four men I had seen previously entered backwards, carrying the coffin.

A tall, narrow individual followed them, speaking in a high, clear voice: "Put her beside the armchair. Have the draperies been scented?"

"Yes, Monsieur des Airlines-Drues, those were your orders."

I looked with interest at the gentleman. I could not see his face, but I could see one of his white hands gesturing like an elephant's trunk. He wore an immense black wig, which fell in stiff curls down to his feet.

"Is the painter here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, she's here."

“Ah, so I see. It is very kind of you, dear lady, to honour us thus. Be welcomed.”

He came close to me and pushed aside the strands of hair hiding his face. It was indeed the face of a sheep, but covered in soft white skin. His black lips were very thin, and strangely mobile. I took his hand with a certain amount of repugnance, for it was too smooth, much too smooth.

“I’ve admired your work so much,” Monsieur des Airlines-Drues murmured. “Do you think you could get a really perfect likeness?” He gestured towards the coffin, which was now open.

Two men took out the corpse of a young woman. She was beautiful and had a mass of silky black hair, but her skin was already phosphorescent, luminous, and vaguely mauve. A rather unpleasant smell wafted towards me. Monsieur des Airlines-Drues, seeing me wrinkle my nose involuntarily, gave me a charming smile of apology.

“It’s so difficult,” he said, “to part with the remains of those one has loved … adored. I was sure I’d have your sympathy in this matter. My wife died two weeks ago, and with this heavy, humid weather we’ve been having …” He finished the sentence by gesturing with one of his beautiful hands.

“In short, esteemed lady, please be forbearing. Now I shall go and leave you to your Art.”

I squeezed the colours from the tubes onto my palette and began to paint the portrait of Madame des Airlines-Drues.

The sheeplike individuals around me began to play pigeon, fly: “Pigeon, fly; Sheep, fly; Angel, fly…”

Dusk seemed to last an interminable time. Night, which had appeared imminent, did not fall, and the dull light in the clearing remained strong enough for me to continue to work. I did not notice until later that the light imprisoned in the circle of trees came from no other source than the body of Madame des Airlines-Drues. The forest was in total darkness. I was completely absorbed in my painting and did not notice that I must have been alone with the dead woman for quite a long time.

I was pleased with the portrait, and I stepped back a few paces to see the whole composition. The face on the canvas was my own.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. Yet as I looked from the model to the portrait there was no denying the truth. The more I looked at the corpse, the more

striking became the resemblance of these pale features. On canvas, the face was unquestionably mine.

"The likeness is extraordinary, my compliments, dear lady."

Monsieur des Airlines-Drues's voice came from behind my left shoulder.

"It's exactly noon now, but one isn't aware of the sun in this forest. Anyway, Art is a magic which makes the hours melt away and even days dissolve into seconds, isn't that so, dear lady? Do you think you'll be able now to finish the portrait without the model? My poor wife, you understand, has been dead three weeks. She must be pining for her well-deserved rest.... It's not often that one has to work three weeks after one's demise."

He laughed a little to underline his joke.

"I can offer you a pleasant and well-lit room at Airlines-Drues. Allow me, dear lady, to take you there in my carriage."

I followed the enormous walking wig like a sleepwalker.

The studio was a big room, with a large cupboard taking up the farthest end. The room had once been luxurious, but the embroidered silk draperies were now torn and dusty, the delicately carved furniture broken, and the gilding had flaked off in places. Several large easels in the shape of swans or mermaids stood about here and there, like the skeletons of other things. Spiders had spun their webs between them, giving the room a fossilized look.

"This is Madame des Airlines-Drues's studio. This is where she died."

I rummaged through the cupboard. A great number of clothes, wigs, and old shoes were jumbled together in great disorder. They all looked like fancy-dress costumes, and some reminded me of the circus.

"She must have played at dress up in her time alone in the studio—it's said she liked acting."

Not the least interesting of my discoveries was a diary bound in green velvet. Her name was on the title page, the handwriting neat but curiously childish.

"Agathe des Airlines-Drues. Please respect this book, its contents are for no other eyes than those of Eleanor. Agathe des Airlines-Drues."

I started to read.

Dear Eleanor,

How you will cry when you read this little book. I'm using patchouli to scent its pages, so that you'll remember me better. Our sharpest memories are of perfumes and smells. How you will cry! Anyway, I shall be glad. I should like you to cry a great deal.

Today is my birthday, and of course yours too. What fun to be the same age. I'd like so much to see you, but since that's not possible, I'll tell you everything in this diary—everything. (My God, if Célestin could hear me!) Marriage, of course, is a dreadful thing—but mine! My mother writes, "I'm knitting some tiny things for you, or rather for somebody very close to you, my darling. For a little being who'll surely make his appearance soon"

Oh, Eleanor, I'll sooner have children by one of the chairs in my studio than by Célestin. Listen! The Wedding Night (!), I lay down in the huge bed draped with acid pink curtains. After more than half an hour the door opened and I saw an apparition: an individual dressed in white feathers, with the wings of an angel. I said to myself "I'm surely going to die, for here is the Angel of Death."

The angel was Célestin.

He threw off his clothes, dropping his gown of feathers to the ground. He was naked. If the feathers were white, his body was blindingly so. I think he must have painted it with some phosphorescent paint, for it shone like the moon. He wore blue stockings with red stripes.

"Am I beautiful?" he asked. "They say I am."

I was too fascinated to reply.

"My dear Agathe," he continued, looking at his reflection in the mirror, "you see you aren't amongst country folk anymore…." (They call me "madam" here.)

He put on his feathers and wings again. I suddenly felt so cold, my teeth began to chatter. And now listen to me carefully, Eleanor. The more I looked at Célestin, the lighter he seemed to me, light as a feather. He began to walk around the room in a strange way. His feet seemed to touch the ground less and less. Then he began to glide through the door into the corridor. I got up and hastened to the door. Célestin vanished into the darkness … his feet weren't touching the ground … I'm absolutely sure of what I'm telling you. His wings beat very slowly … but …

So you see what the start of my marriage was like!

I didn't see Célestin for a week. Furthermore, I saw hardly anybody except an old servant called Gaston. He brought me things to eat, always sweet things. I lived in my studio, and I've lived here ever since. I am so sad, Eleanor, so sad that my body has become transparent, I've shed so many tears. Is it possible to dissolve into water without leaving a trace? I am so often alone that I have struck up a sort of love affair with my mirror image. But Eleanor, here's the worst of it—recently I've found it very difficult to see myself in the mirror. Yes, it's horrible, but it's true. When I look at myself, my face is all hazy. And … I believe … no, I'm sure, that I can see the objects in the room behind me through my body.

Now I'm crying so much I can't see the paper on which I'm writing anymore.

Every day, Eleanor, I lose myself a little more, yet I've never loved my face more. I try to paint my portrait so as to have it near me still, you understand. But … I can't. I elude myself.

And here is another thing: the objects around me are becoming terribly clear and vivid, much more alive than I. You know, Eleanor, I'm afraid … Listen, the chairs in this room are very old, and so is all the rest of the furniture. Last week I saw a little green bud on one of these old chairs, the kind of bud that appears on trees in the spring. And now … how horrible … it has become a leaf … Eleanor!

A few days later:

The room is full of them. All the furniture has sprouted new green growth, many chairs have already got leaves, small, fragile leaves of a tender green. It's ludicrous to see such young leaves growing on such old, dusty furniture.

Célestin came. He didn't notice anything, but he touched my face with those smooth hands of his … much too smooth…. He said, "You will always be a child, Agathe. Look at me. I am terribly young, aren't I?" Then he stopped and laughed. He has a very high-pitched laugh.

"Do you put on performances all by yourself?" he asked.

That isn't true, Eleanor…. I only put on fancy dress to make myself more solid, more substantial … so as not to … guess what I was going to say! …

"Agathe, when you were a little girl, did you ever play pigeon, fly?"

Célestin asked me this strange question while looking into the mirror. I replied that it was a game that very much amused me when I was little.

Now the room was full of bizarre individuals dressed like sheep. But, Eleanor, they were naked…. Their clothes were nothing but fleece. All of them were men made up like whores.

"The lambs of God" Célestin said.

We *sat down at a round table, and about twenty pairs of hands suddenly appeared from between the strands of hair. I noticed their nails were varnished but very dirty. The hands were pale, greyish.*

This was only a moment's impression, for I really had eyes for nothing but Célestin's hands. I swear to you, Eleanor, that his hands were running with moisture … and so smooth, and their colour was strange, like mother-of-pearl. He too was looking at his hands with a secret smile.

"Pigeon, fly!" he cried, and all the hands went up in the air, waving like wings. My hands too were fluttering in the air.

"Sheep, fly!" Célestin called.

The hands trembled on the table but didn't lift.

"Angel, fly!"

So far nobody had made a mistake.

Suddenly Célestin's voice rose in a sharp cry, a terrible cry, "CÉLESTIN, FLY!"

Eleanor, dear Eleanor, his hands …

At this point Agathe's journal suddenly stopped.

I turned to her portrait: the canvas was empty, I didn't dare look for my face in the mirror. I knew what I would see: my hands were so cold!

(1937-40)

THE THREE HUNTERS

I was having a rest in a deep forest. The trees and wild fruit were ripe. It was autumn. I was beginning to fall asleep when a heavy object fell on my stomach. It was a dead rabbit, blood running from its mouth. It was dead of fatigue. I'd hardly freed myself of the rabbit when, with a leap more agile than a stag's, a man landed beside me. He was of medium height, had a red face, and a long white moustache. From his face, I'd have guessed him to be about ninety.

"You're pretty nimble for your age," I said, but then I looked at his clothes. He was wearing a hunting jacket the colour of Damascus rose, a bright green hat with orange plumes, and very long black boots trimmed with summer flowers. He wore no trousers. He looked at the rabbit with interest.

"I was going slowly, to give the poor beast a chance," he said. "But it just didn't know how to run. In the future I'll leave the rabbits to Mcflanagan."

I tried to think of something nice to say to him.

"I like your outfit," I said with a pleasant smile.

"Oh that," he replied. "People with a certain aesthetic appreciation will find that it lacks distinction. But it's only sporting to wear these colours. If the animals see me coming, they have more chance." Then his expression changed. "Is it whisky you've got in that bottle?"

"Yes," I said.

"Oh," he said. "Really?"

"Yes, yes."

"Ah." He sat down beside me and said, staring at the bottle as if hypnotized, "You did say it was whisky?"

"1900."

"A very good year. It's the vintage I prefer."

"Me too."

“Ah.”

“Yes.” By this time I’d guessed that he’d perhaps wanted a little drink. I offered him a drink. He accepted.

“You know, I’ve got an extraordinary cellar. Would you like to taste some of my wines?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Take this path on the left straight on and cross every path you come to. It’s the first manor after the eighteenth crossroads.”

“But aren’t you coming?”

“I can only travel in leaps and bounds,” he replied, disappearing between the trees in leaps five yards long.

I started out. Around midnight I arrived at the manor house. The door was opened by an individual on all fours.

“My brother Mcbologan has been waiting for you since noon. I am Mcflanagan, the Terror of the Forest. Mcbologan is the Curse of the Forest, and Mchooligan is the Abomination of the Forest. Mchooligan is the cook.”

We went into a room a hundred yards long and fifty wide. Mcbologan was sitting at the table in front of six dozen hares, a hundred wild ducks, and nineteen boars.

“Mchooligan,” shouted Mcbologan, “we’re ready to start eating.”

A noise of wind and Mchooligan entered like lightning: he couldn’t stop himself before the other end of the room and hit the wall, and sat at the table bleeding. His brothers looked at him with gloom.

“He can never go slower than that,” said Mcflanagan, still on all fours. Mchooligan was maybe ten years older than Mcbologan, and exhibited the same profound sadness as his brothers. During the meal they all cried hot tears into their plates.

Towards the end of the meal, Mcbologan said, “Mcflanagan ought to have a shave.”

It was the first thing that had been said. An hour later Mcflanagan said, “Why?” and two hours after that Mcbologan said, “Because.” Mchooligan didn’t say anything at all, he was crying too much. Getting on five in the morning, Mcbologan said, “Let’s live it up a bit, shall we? I need some amusement.” And since the others still didn’t say anything, he turned to me. “I’ve got some hunting trophies. Would you like to see them?”

Walking through the long gallery, we arrived in a room well lit by some lamps. There was nothing but sausages. Sausages in aquariums, sausages in cages, sausages hanging on the walls, sausages in sumptuous glass boxes. Nothing but sausages. I may have shown a certain surprise. Mcbologan looked at his sausages.

"That," he said to me, "is the hand of destiny." I stood beside him in deep thought. "One's got to realize that nothing is eternal, that nothing"—he contemplated a landscape of sausages—"nothing is finally stronger than goodness. Since my grandfather Angus Mcfruit's first communion, the family has been in dire straits. Jock Mcfish Mcfruit, my poor father, could walk only on his head. Geraldine, my mother (a saint!), could walk only on her… ah, but, the details are too personal." He shed a few tears.

"Still, don't let's be sentimental. It all began the day of my grandfather's first communion. He was only a lad, he didn't realize the solemnity of the occasion. The evening before this Holy Day, the eve before he was to receive his Lord, he ate a plate of beans. And next morning at church …" Mcbologan hesitated. "It happened that a certain noise escaped him…." He went on looking at the landscape of sausages. I felt him fighting his emotions. "From that day the judgement of the good Lord has been upon us. Whatever trophy we try to preserve becomes a sausage. And we ourselves … well, as you can see."

He turned away with great emotion, and I heard his bounding steps disappear into the manor house.

(1937-40)

MONSIEUR CYRIL DE GUINDRE

On a heavy, balmy spring afternoon, Monsieur Cyril de Guindre was resting elegantly on his ice blue couch. Moving like a tired snake, he was playing with his cat. Despite his age, he was very beautiful.

"His face is that of an albino orchid," said his great friend Thibaut Lastre. "His greedy violet mouth is a poisonous bee-orchid like a lunar insect, and where can you find a rare animal with a coat comparable to his hair?"

Monsieur de Guindre sighed in his halo of perfume, thinking of Thibaut, who was already half an hour late for tea.

The garden was so intensely green that he had to shield his eyes. "Your gaze tires me as much as the garden," he said to his cat. "Shut your eyes."

He didn't notice Thibaut, who had come silently into the room carrying a bouquet of moss roses. Thibaut, who was a great deal younger than Cyril de Guindre, had golden skin like the corpse of a child preserved in an old and excellent liqueur. He wore an elegant dressing gown the colour of trout flesh, and his face, behind the roses, was livid with anger.

"Ah, Thibaut," Cyril said in a weary voice, "whatever have you been doing all afternoon to keep me waiting like this? You know very well that I take tea at five o'clock … as does everyone, indeed … "

Thibaut threw the roses at the cat, which growled and clawed Cyril's thighs, looking across the flowers with malevolent eyes. "Moreover," continued Cyril, disentangling his cat from the roses, "I have an important project that I've been wanting to discuss with you.… But since you seem to prefer nature to my company, I hesitate to tell you what I have in mind."

Thibaut shrugged. "Will you please explain," he retorted, "how it has come about that your garden is infested with nymphs?" His voice hissed with anger.

"Nymphs?" Cyril asked. "Wherever have you been seeing nymphs?" His hand trembled a little as he arranged the lace on his chest.

“I saw a young girl beside the lake,” Thibaut said sharply. “Who is she?”

Cyril reflected for a few moments, his eyes closed, but he did not stop fondling his cat. “Ring for a bottle of champagne, dearest Thibaut, and I’ll explain it to you.”

Thibaut obeyed with bad grace.

“First of all,” said Cyril, when he had a crystal goblet full of champagne in his hand, “first of all tell me, was the girl pretty?”

“I hardly saw her,” replied Thibaut, looking distraught. “Why should it interest you?”

“It interests me, my dearest Thibaut, because that little girl is probably a very close relation of mine. She could even be my daughter.” A painful smile played around Thibaut’s lips, which held a cigarette, and his fingers clawed the arms of his chair.

“Really?”

“Yes. Twenty years ago I committed the indiscretion of taking a woman. Moreover, I married her. She was extremely tiring, an uncivilized creature, painfully lacking in delicacy. Lacking as was her wont, she became pregnant six years after we were married. The grossness of her physique during those nine months made me fall quite ill. I was obliged, my dear Thibaut, to stay in bed for several weeks after her daughter’s birth. I suffered greatly, imagining myself pregnant. Thanks only to the massage administered by Wang To, a Chinese, was I finally put back on my feet.”

“And then?” asked Thibaut in a blank voice.

“And then,” said Cyril, moistening his lips with champagne, “I began to imagine that I had sexual relations with a mermaid who was forever fondling me with her heavy, limp tail, wetting my pink dressing gown … .”

Thibaut stopped him with an irritated movement. “I didn’t ask for the details of your psychological state. I wanted to hear what happened to this domestic idyll.”

“I’m coming to that,” answered Cyril with a sigh. “My wife never regained her normal state of mind. Actually she’s in a sanatorium, a very comfortable one, of course. She suffers from strange hallucinations and an unfortunate simple-mindedness. I haven’t seen her for ten years.”

Thibaut’s face was filled with disgust. He swayed like a drunk. “Charming … Charming …” he murmured between dry lips. “And the girl?”

“I placed her in the good hands of the Purple Sisters of the Convent of the Holy Tomb. These excellent nuns have taken care of her moral and worldly education. The little girl’s name is Panthilde, a whim of her mother’s. Now, darling Thibaut, you know as much about my life as I do myself.”

Thibaut got up, very pale, saying he had to go rest.

“Panthilde,” murmured Cyril de Guindre, “whatever shall I do if you’re ugly? I shall make you disappear gently into the emerald water of my lake, for I can’t endure ugliness. She ought to be fourteen, awkward age.… If only she doesn’t end up looking like her mother. What a disaster! Whatever shall I do with a girl?”

He rang for his servant, a bloated young man who looked like a plump hen cooked in aromatic stock. His name was Dominique, and he had the gestures of a Jesuit.

“Monsieur?” he murmured while arranging the cushions behind Cyril’s head.

“Dominique, my succulent plant, when you were a lay brother at the Jesuits’, did you ever hear of the Purple Sisters of the Convent of the Holy Tomb?”

Dominique looked at the ground with his milky eyes. “There was the Abbot, monsieur, who from time to time went to the good sisters to say mass and hear confessions.”

“Ah, and what did he think of them?”

“Brother Coriolan, who assisted the Abbot with his bath, told me that the Abbot was always jaunty after his visits to the Convent of the Holy Tomb. He always scented himself with bitter almonds on the eve of his visits. May I add that the Abbot knew how to savour the agreeable subtleties of life?”

“Dominique, go and prepare my bath of rose water. This evening I shall make up with peacock green powder. Afterwards, go into the garden and find me the little girl who is playing near the lake.”

Dominique bowed and went out backwards.

“Lay out my angora gown,” added Cyril with closed eyes, “and the Pope’s striped socks.”

The final detail of Cyril de Guindre's toilet were a few drops of opium essence behind his ears. He looked with satisfaction at his reflection in the mirror. He really had beautiful ears, delicate as geranium leaves. He bent towards the mirror and kissed the reflection of his lips, leaving a crimson mark the shape of a bird in flight.

"Precious mummy," he murmured, laughing. "Who knows? Won't you have fun after all?"

Slowly he went down the marble staircase.

Panthilde was standing in the middle of the drawing room. They looked at each other in silence. Cyril saw a little girl of fourteen, dressed like a pupil of a convent school. Her dress was made of stiff black material and had a little white collar at the throat. Her skinny legs were covered in thick black wool. A straw hat hid her face. Her long, black hair was braided into correct plaits: an inch or two more and they would have reached the ground.

After a few moments' silence, Cyril advanced towards her and cautiously took off her hat. He was astonished by her perverse beauty: she resembled him very much.

"Panthilde," he said finally, "don't you recognize your father?"

She threw him a vague glance and shook her head.

"No, monsieur, I don't know you."

"How long have you been staying here?" he asked with an immense effort. He was irritated by a slight smile on Panthilde's lips that disappeared immediately.

"I don't know, monsieur.… It seems to me I've been here some time. I study every day with the Abbot."

Cyril felt so tired that he went to lie down on the couch. He lit a special myrrh-scented cigarette, and soon fell asleep, though he remained vaguely conscious. He had the feeling Panthilde was sitting near his head singing with a child's high-pitched voice,

Daddy don't cry I'll buy
A dolly in a coach one day!

Across a cloud of sleep he saw Panthilde take a little jar from her pocket, dip her lips into its black and sticky contents, and put her face close to his. Her lips were black and gleaming like the back of a beetle. Then he felt himself compelled, quite against his will, to taste her lips. He opened his mouth and moved towards her, but she moved her head out of reach, laughing: he trembled with horror and desire.

"Papa wants Spring," Panthilde said in a mocking voice. "Papa wants Spring. Papa wants Spring."

She began to chant the monotonous rhythm of the words. "Papa wants Spring."

Cyril went to sleep.

He woke up with Thibaut looking at him, Thibaut in a tight suit that fit his body as closely as a second skin.

"Good heavens," Cyril said, "is it already time for dinner?"

Dinner was served, as usual, on the terrace of the weeping willows. Cyril sat opposite Thibaut, across a bronze table in the shape of a poppy, dreaming amongst the scents of the garden and the food. His eyes were tired. Dominique prowled around the table with soft steps, serving delicate dishes, a plump fat chicken with stuffing made of brains and the livers of thrushes, truffles, crushed sweet almonds, rose conserve with a few drops of some divine liqueur. This chicken, which had been marinated—plucked but alive— for three days, had in the end been suffocated in vapours of boiling patchouli: its flesh was as creamy and tender as a fresh mushroom.

A chilled asparagus mousse and creamed oysters were followed by a procession of strange and succulent cakes, all white, yet as varied as the animals in a zoological garden. Cyril and Thibaut tasted each, conversing from time to time while listening to music played by a little boy dressed as an angel.

Thibaut spoke of a suit he intended to have made.

"It will hardly be a suit for going out in," he said, "but rather for the privacy of the boudoir … tea for two.… The trousers are to be made of a rosy beige fur, and very delicately striped in another colour, like the pants of a Persian cat. The shirt will be of a very pale green like the feathers of a dying kingfisher, half hidden by an acid blue jacket, brilliant like the scales of a fish. What do you think of it?"

“Ravishing,” Cyril replied, taking a bite out of some fruit. “But I’d have the shirt made in velvet of a green verging on ochre. A moss green.” He stopped abruptly, putting his hand to his forehead. On the rose-coloured stone wall, the shadows of two horses were fighting with frightful ferocity.

The terrible battle only lasted a few seconds: the shadows faded, and Cyril, very pale, turned his head and saw, behind him, a priest.

“Monsieur the Abbot of Givres,” said Dominique’s voice.

The Abbot’s soutane was grey with dust, and riddled with the depredations of moths. His chin and shaved skull were blue, his face sombre. De Guindre felt overcome by nausea as the Abbot held out a hand he couldn’t refuse to take, a hand long and thin like a woman’s and like the cast skin of a snake.

“My dear Monsieur de Guindre,” said the Abbot in a gentle voice, “what a pleasure to come to know all this at last.” He indicated with a gesture an imaginary circle around him. “My ecclesiastical work has prevented me from meeting you as soon as I would have wished. I have, however, had the great pleasure of being of some little use to Mademoiselle de Guindre in her studies.”

With a smile of charming frankness he took a chair and sat down beside Cyril. He ignored Thibaut.

“This heavy weather,” continued the Abbot, helping himself to a very large piece of vanilla-flavoured anemone cake, “has a narcotic effect on the spirit, don’t you agree, my dear de Guindre? But your delightful garden is a veritable cradle of flowers, and often, when I walk under your flowering almond trees, an animal runs past me on mysterious paths.”

“Often? You often walk in my garden?” asked Cyril in astonishment. “Please forgive my curiosity, but how long have you been a regular visitor to my property?”

“Often!” the Abbot repeated in an ardent tone of voice. “I know every flower, every plant … every tree. You might say that the Abbot de Givres is the house spirit of the de Guindre garden.” He took a branch of honeysuckle from his breast and held it under the nose of Cyril, who smelled it avidly.

His crimson lips became black as they touched the flowers, his face weary and pale with pleasure. Thibaut did not move, but his eyes were dry and fierce. It seemed to him that the new moon descended from the sky and

glided between the leaves of the weeping willows, coming to rest at last on the priest's head, its pointed crescent thrusting into his glittering skull.

Panthilde, who at that moment arrived from the garden, remained at a distance. She looked at the three men, however, with a sombre eye.

"Panthilde," asked the Abbot, looking at Cyril and barely concealing a certain anxiety in his voice. "Are you there? Aren't you playing in the moonlight anymore?" She rolled her eyes angrily. "Come," continued the Abbot. "Come and say good evening to your papa."

Thibaut shuddered and clawed at the table. Panthilde did not move; she breathed heavily while looking at the table in an anguished way.

"That smell," Cyril said in a thick voice. "I feel sick."

He tried to get up, but the Abbot held him firmly by the arm and laughed.

(1937-40)

THE SISTERS

"Drusille," the letter read.

"Drusille, I shall soon be with you. My love is already with you, its wings are faster than my body. When I am away from you, I am only a poor stuffed bird, for you are guardian of my vitals, my heart and my thoughts.

"Drusille, I embrace the south wind because it blows towards you. Drusille, my life! Your voice is more moving than the thunder, your eyes more overwhelming than lightning. Drusille, wonderful Drusille, I love you, I love you, I love you, sitting in the rain, your long and ferocious face close to this letter."

The thunder growled around her, and the wind beat her face with its wet hair. The storm was so terrible that it tore the flowers from their stalks, and bore them in muddy streams towards an unknown fate. The flowers weren't the only victims, for the streams also swept away crushed butterflies, fruit, bees, and small birds.

Drusille, sitting in her garden in the middle of all this havoc, laughed. She laughed a harsh laugh, the letter crushed against her breast. Sitting on her foot, two toads hissed this thought monotonously, "Drusille, my Belzamine; Drusille my Belzamine."

All at once, the sun tore the clouds apart and poured a fierce yellow heat into the wet garden. Drusille got up and went into the house.

The maid, Engadine, was sitting on the floor, her hands full of the vegetables she was preparing for dinner. She looked at her mistress with her shrewd little eyes.

"Prepare the royal apartment," Drusille said. "The king will be here this evening. Hurry and sprinkle the sheets with perfume."

“I already knew all that,” Engadine said. “The letter passed through my hands.”

Drusille kicked her in the stomach.

“Get up, garbage.” The servant rose, her face rigid with pain.

“Jasmine or patchouli?”

“Patchouli for the pillows, jasmine for the sheets, and musk for the purple blankets. Put the lilac dressing gown on the bed with the scarlet pyjamas. Hurry or I’ll smack your face.”

In the kitchen, cakes and enormous tarts were put to the flame and taken from the oven. Pomegranates and melons stuffed with larks filled the kitchen: whole oxen were turning slowly on spits, pheasants, peacocks, and turkeys awaited their turn to be cooked. Chests full of fantastic fruit cluttered up the corridors.

Drusille walked about slowly in this forest of food, tasting a lark or a cake here and there.

In the cellars, the old wooden casks gave up their contents of blood, honey, and wine. Most of the servants were lying about the floor, dead drunk. Drusille took the opportunity to hide a demijohn of honey under her skirt. She went up to the attic. The top of the house was engulfed in a deep silence, rats and bats peopled the spiral staircases. Drusille arrived finally before a door which she opened with a large key attached to a chain around her neck.

“Juniper?” she said. “Are you there?”

“As usual,” answered a voice out of the gloom. “I don’t move.”

“I’ve brought you something to eat. Are you better today?”

“My health is always excellent, sister.”

“You’re ill,” replied Drusille in an irritated voice. “Poor little thing.”

“It’s Thursday, isn’t it?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, it is Thursday.”

“Then I’m allowed a candle. Have you brought me one?”

Drusille hesitated a moment, then she spoke with an effort. “Yes, I’ve brought you a candle. I am good to you.”

Silence.

Drusille lit the candle, illuminating a dirty little attic without windows. Perched on a rod near the ceiling, an extraordinary creature looked at the light with blinded eyes. Her body was white and naked; feathers grew from

her shoulders and round her breasts. Her white arms were neither wings nor arms. A mass of white hair fell around her face, whose flesh was like marble.

"What have you brought me to eat?" she asked, jumping on her perch.

The moment she saw the creature moving, Drusille slammed the door behind her. But Juniper had eyes for nothing but the honey.

"You've got to make it last at least six days," Drusille said.

Juniper ate for some time in silence.

"Drink," she said finally. Drusille held out a glass of water, but Juniper shook her head.

"Not that, not today. I need red…."

Drusille laughed. "No you don't… . Last time you drank red, you bit me. It excites you too much. Water's good for thirst."

"Red," insisted Juniper in a monotonous voice. "Else I'll scream."

With a quick gesture, Drusille brought a knife from between her breasts. She held it to her sister's throat, who jumped on her perch with raucous cries, like a peacock.

A little later Juniper spoke in a tear-choked voice. "I don't mean you harm, I only want a small glass, no more. I'm so thirsty, so thirsty. Dear Drusille, I want only a single drop … and afterwards a look at the beautiful new moon for five minutes. Nobody will see me, nobody, I promise you, I swear it. I'll lie on the roof and look at the moon. I won't go away, I'll come back once I've seen the moon."

Drusille laughed silently. "And then what? Perhaps you'd like me to catch the moon to light up your attic? Listen, Juniper. You're ill, very ill. I only want what's best for you, and if you go out on the roof you'll catch cold, you'll die…."

"If I don't see the moon tonight, I'll be dead tomorrow."

Drusille screamed with rage. "Will you please shut up? Isn't what I do for you enough?"

Suddenly the two sisters heard the noise of a car approaching below. The servants began to shout orders and insult one another.

"I have to go now," announced Drusille, trembling. "Go to sleep."

"Who is it?" Juniper hopped on her perch.

"Mind your own business," replied Drusille.

"Rats, bats, and spiders are my business."

"I've given you socks to knit. Go knit."

Juniper lifted her strange arms as if wanting to fly away. "My hands aren't made for knitting."

"Then knit with your feet." And Drusille left so hastily she forgot to lock the door behind her.

Ex-king Jumart stepped from his old Rolls-Royce. His long, iron grey beard flowed over his green satin coat embroidered with butterflies and the royal monogram. On his superb head he wore an enormous gold wig with rose-coloured shadows, like a cascade of honey. A variety of flowers, growing here and there in his wig, moved in the wind. He held out his hands to Drusille.

"Drusille, my Belzamine."

Drusille trembled with emotion.

"Jumart! Jumart!" She fell into his arms, sobbing and laughing.

"Oh how beautiful you are, Drusille! How I have dreamed of your scent and your kisses." They walked in the garden, their arms entwined.

"I am ruined," Jumart said with a sigh. "My coffers are empty."

Drusille allowed herself a triumphant smile. "Then you'll stay with me! I have had nothing but solitude for too long."

The heavy, murky atmosphere of the garden was rent by a long, raucous cry. Drusille turned pale and murmured, "Oh no, it's impossible."

"What is it, my Belzamine?"

Drusille threw back her head with the laugh of a hyena. "It's the sky," she said. "These yellow clouds weigh so much I was afraid they might fall on our heads! Besides, this stormy weather's giving me a migraine."

"Kiss me," murmured the king tenderly. "I shall eat your migraine."

He noticed that Drusille's face was like the face of a ghost. Frightened, he took her hand in his to reassure himself she was alive.

"Your face is green," he said in a low voice. "There are heavy shadows under your eyes."

"They're the shadows of the leaves," Drusille answered, sweat on her brow. "I'm exhausted by my emotions, it's been three months since I saw you." Then she took him violently by the arm. "Jumart, do you love me? Swear that you are in love with me… swear it quickly."

“You know it well,” Jumart said, surprised. “What is the matter, my Drusille?”

“Do you love me more than all other women? More than all other human beings?”

“Yes, Drusille. And you, do you love me as much?”

“Ah,” Drusille said in a trembling voice, “so much that you will never know how much. My love is deeper than deepest space.”

The king’s attention was distracted by something moving amongst the leaves at the end of the garden. His expression became ecstatic, his eyes glittered.

“What do you see?” cried Drusille suddenly. “Why are you looking down there with that strange expression?”

Abruptly, Jumart came back to himself and said a few words in a dreamy voice. He seemed to be waking up. “The garden is so beautiful, Drusille, I feel as if I were in a dream.”

Drusille was choking. She gave a painful smile. “Or a nightmare—sometimes one confuses the two. Let’s go in, Jumart, the sun has set, and soon dinner will be on the table. We’ll eat on the terrace so that you can enjoy the moonrise. Tonight it will be paler and more beautiful than ever. When I look at the moonlight, I think I’m seeing your beard.”

Jumart sighed. “The twilight is enchanted, bewitched. Let’s stay out awhile. The garden’s suffused in magic. One doesn’t know what beautiful phantom might appear from these purple shadows.”

Drusille’s hands went to her throat, and her voice had a metallic ring. “Let’s go in, I beg you. Night’s going to fall, I’m shivering with cold.”

“Your face is a leaf of such a pale green it must have grown under the light of the new moon. Your eyes are stones found in caves at the centre of the earth. Your eyes are grim.”

Drusille’s voice became acid: “You’re moonstruck. You’ve gone out of your mind. You’re seeing things that aren’t there. Give me your hand and I’ll take you to the house.”

“Bang-bang, who’s the madder of us two?” replied Jumart, twisting his beard. “Don’t preach to me. If my lands and castles are lost, I’m the happiest of men.”

Enchanted with his deep reflections, the king rubbed his hands and did a few dance steps. Drusille looked at the trees and thought the fruit looked

like little corpses. She looked at the sky and saw drowned bodies in the clouds. Her eyes were full of horror. “My head is a bier for my thoughts, my body a coffin.” She walked behind the king with slow steps, her hands clasped in front of her.

A bell rang for dinner.

Engadine came out of the kitchen. She was carrying a suckling pig stuffed with nightingales. She stopped with a cry. In front her an exultant white apparition blocked the way.

“Engadine!”

“What the devil, Miss Juniper …”

“Engadine, how red you are.”

The maid drew back. The apparition approached, bounding.

“I’ve just come from the kitchen,” Engadine said. “It’s hot in the kitchen.”

“And I—I’m all white, Engadine. Do you know why I’m white like a ghost?”

Engadine shook her head without speaking.

“It’s because I never see the light. And now I’m in great need of something, my dear little Engadine.”

“What then? What?” the maid whispered, and she trembled so much that the suckling pig fell to the floor, the platter in a thousand pieces.

“You’re so red … so red.” At these words, Engadine let out a long and terrible siren’s cry. At that moment, Juniper leapt. The two fell to the ground, Juniper on top, mouth pressed to Engadine’s throat.

She sucked, sucked for long minutes, and her body became enormous, luminous, magnificent. Her feathers shone like snow in the sun, her tail sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow. She threw back her head and crowed like a cock. Afterwards she hid the corpse in the drawer of a chest.

“Now for the moon,” she sang, leaping and flying towards the terrace. “Now for the moon!”

Drusille, naked to her breasts, had her arms around Jumart’s neck. The heat of the wine warmed her skin like a flame, she gleamed with sweat. Her hair moved like black vipers, the juice of a pomegranate dripped from her half-open mouth.

Meat, wine, cakes, all half eaten, were heaped around them in extravagant abundance. Huge pots of jam spilled on the floor made a sticky lake around their feet. The carcass of a peacock decorated Jumart's head. His beard was full of sauces, fish heads, crushed fruit. His gown was torn and stained with all sorts of food.

(1939)

CAST DOWN BY SADNESS

Cast down by sadness, I walked far into the mountains where the cypresses grew so pointed one would have taken them for arms, where the brambles had thorns as big as claws. I came to a garden overrun by climbing plants and weeds with strange blooms. Through a large gate I saw a little old woman tending her untidy plants. She was dressed in mauve lace and a large hat from another age. The hat, decorated with peacock feathers, sat askew, and her hair escaped on all sides. I stopped my melancholy walk and asked the little old woman to give me a glass of water, as I was thirsty.

"You may drink," she said coquettishly, putting a flower behind her large ear. "Come into my garden."

With extraordinary agility she leapt towards me and took me by the hand. The garden was full of old sculptures of animals, all more or less dilapidated. Plants of every kind mingled in profusion, growing with tropical splendour. The little old woman jumped right and left picking flowers, which in the end she put around my neck.

"There you are, now you're dressed," she said to me, looking at me with her head to the side. "We don't like people coming in here without being dressed. Personally I take a great deal of care with my toilet, one could even say I was something of a coquette." She hid her face behind a little dirty hand, looking at me through her fingers. "Not bad, what," she murmured. "My coquettishness is quite innocent, and no one can say different." At these words she lifted her long skirt an inch or two, and I saw her tiny feet, in little deerskin boots. "I've been told that I have very beautiful feet, but I beg you not to tell anybody that I let you see…."

"Madam," I said, "innumerable troubles have befallen me, and I am very grateful to you, as you have shown me the most beautiful feet I have ever seen. You have little feet like knife blades."

She flew into my arms and kissed me several times. Then she said with great dignity, “I can see that you are a person of exceptional intelligence. I would like to invite you to stay with me. You will not regret it.”

That’s how I came to know Arabelle Pegase. I shall never forget her black eyes or her feet. She led me to a small lake in the garden and invited me to drink. This lake was surrounded by weeping willows that trailed into the clear water. Arabelle looked at her reflection in the water.

“I have wept so much here,” she said. “I find that my beauty is very touching. For entire nights I have trailed my luxuriant hair in the water and washed my body, telling it ‘You rival the moon, your flesh is more brilliant than its light.’ I said all this to give it pleasure, for my body’s so jealous of the moon. One evening I’ll invite you to meet it.”

Trembling, I looked deeply into the water.

I saw a group of peacocks passing on the other side of the lake. I heard their raucous cries.

“I always wear peacock blue underwear,” continued Arabelle. “Silk, of course, with eyes embroidered all over. The eyes are there for looking—guess at what.”

I shook my head. “I can’t guess,” I said.

She covered her face with her hand once more, blushing like a young girl.

“But … my body!” she said. “They see it morning to night, aren’t they the lucky ones?” I was so disturbed by this question that I couldn’t reply. Arabelle didn’t notice and went on. “I wear a lot of petticoats of all shades of blue and green. And if you saw my knickers, every pair more beautiful than the last. I speak to you as an artist, you understand, simply as an artist. I have a dress made entirely of the heads of cats. It’s very beautiful. If you were to see it … At one time that was just the height of fashion.”

The evening shadows, long and blue, became thicker around us. Arabelle’s face was in a haze like some landscapes on a summer day. Somewhere from the other side of the lake a bell rang.

“Dinner,” said Arabelle, taking me suddenly by the arm. “And I’m not dressed. Let’s hurry, Dominique is going to scold me again.” She dragged me along, talking all the time.

“He’s so sweet, Dominique, but so nervous… . One has to be careful with such sensitive creatures. He’s been praying all afternoon, and now he’s

hungry, and here we are, late. The good Lord help us."

We went along paths overgrown with grass and moss. We found ourselves in front of the house, a large mansion covered in sculptures and terraces descending from it one beyond the other in a stupefying state of confusion.

When Arabelle opened the front door, we found ourselves in a great marble hall, furnished with fruit trees, which grew everywhere. A long table in the middle of the room was set for dinner.

"I'll leave you here for a moment while I change my dress," Arabelle said. "Help yourself to wine and cake while you're waiting." She left me with an enormous carafe of red wine and a quantity of rich cakes. I helped myself to some wine and was looking around tranquilly when I realized I was not alone: a young man was standing beside me, looking at me with hostile eyes. This young man was so pale that I could hardly believe he was alive. He was dressed like a priest, a Jesuit I think, and his cassock was spotted with food and all sorts of filth. His presence made me recoil involuntarily.

"Explain yourself," he said, making the sign of the cross. "I don't like strangers here. Moreover I'm very nervous and it's bad for my health." He poured himself a litre of wine and drank it at a single gulp.

"I don't know what I'm doing here," I replied. "My head feels so heavy I can't think properly, and all I want is to leave immediately."

"You can't go … now," he said. "This isn't the right time."

I was disconcerted to see that big tears were rolling down his cheeks. "I understand you so well," Dominique continued. "Don't think I don't know what you are after in this terrible house; I've even prayed for you all afternoon." He hesitated, his voice choked with pain. "I've wept so much for your poor soul."

At this moment Arabelle Pegase made her appearance, dressed in the most extravagant fashion, with ostrich feathers, lace, and jewels, all slightly dirty and very crumpled. She went up to Dominique, took his ear between her lips, and said, "Don't scold me, Dominique darling, I was making myself beautiful for you," and then it seemed to me that she suddenly noticed my presence, for she quickly withdrew.

"Dominique is my little son," she said. "A mother's heart is so tender."

“The garden is so beautiful now,” she said. “Dominique, darling, I dream of nothing but walking along the lake with you.” Dominique threw her a terrified look. I thought he would faint.

“We are very close in spirit, my son and I,” said Arabelle, turning to me. “And we share a great feeling for poetry, isn’t that so, Dominique, darling son?”

“Yes, mother of my heart,” replied Dominique in a trembling voice.

“Do you remember how when you were a child we played together, and I was as much of a child as you? You remember, Dominiquino?”

“Yes, darling little mother.”

“They were lovely, those days we had together. You hugged me all day long and called me Little Sister.”

I was embarrassed. I wanted to go, but it was impossible.

“When one has an only son,” continued Arabelle, “one thinks and dreams of nothing else.”

By the light of the candles I suddenly saw a young girl standing beside Arabelle. She had come in silently and mysteriously. She was beautiful. Her black dress blended with the shadows around her, and I had the impression that her face was floating in space. When Dominique saw this girl, he was taken with such a fit of trembling one might have thought his bones would fall apart. Suddenly Arabelle seemed very old. The girl looked at mother and son with a fixed expression. They got up, and I followed without knowing why. Finally the girl walked towards the door. We went out into the garden and arrived at the lake, still in silence. I saw the reflection of the moon in the water, but was horrified to see there was no moon in the sky: the moon had been drowned in the water.

“Let us see your beautiful body,” the girl said, addressing Arabelle.

Dominique gave a cry and fell to the ground. Arabelle began to undress. Quickly there was a heap of dirty clothes beside her, but she kept on taking off more with a sort of rage. At last she was completely undressed, and her body was nothing but a skeleton. The girl, arms crossed on her chest, waited.

“Dominique,” she said, “are you alive?”

“He’s alive,” cried the mother. I had the feeling I was at a spectacle that had already been played out a hundred times.

“I am dead,” Dominique said. “Leave me in peace.”

“Is he dead or is he alive?” asked the girl in a sonorous voice.

“Alive,” cried the mother.

“And yet he’s been buried a long time,” replied the girl.

“Come let me kill you,” the old woman shrieked. “Come let me kill you for the hundred and twentieth time.”

The two women threw themselves upon each other and fought savagely. They went into the water administering ferocious blows to each other.

“The moon is immortal,” the girl shouted, with her hands around the old woman’s throat. “You’ve killed the moon, but she doesn’t rot like your son.”

I saw the old woman growing weaker, and she soon disappeared into the water, followed by the girl. With a sigh, Dominique crumbled into a heap of dust. I was alone in a night without light.

(1937-40)

WHITE RABBITS

The time has come that I must tell the events which began in 40 Pest Street. The houses, which were reddish black, looked as if they had issued mysteriously from the fire of London. The house in front of my window, covered with an occasional wisp of creeper, was as black and empty looking as any plague-ridden residence subsequently licked by flames and smoke. This is not the way that I had imagined New York.

It was so hot that I got palpitations when I ventured out into the streets, so I sat and considered the house opposite and occasionally bathed my sweating face.

The light was never very strong in Pest Street. There was always a reminiscence of smoke, which made visibility troubled and hazy—still it was possible to study the house opposite carefully, even precisely. Besides, my eyes have always been excellent.

I spent several days watching for some sort of movement opposite but there was none, and I finally took to undressing quite freely before my open window and doing my breathing exercises optimistically in the thick Pest Street air. This must have made my lungs as black as the houses.

One afternoon I washed my hair and sat out on the diminutive stone crescent which served as a balcony to dry it. I hung my head between my knees and watched a bluebottle suck the dry corpse of a spider between my feet. I looked up through my long hair and saw something black in the sky, ominously quiet for an aeroplane. Parting my hair, I was in time to see a large raven alight on the balcony of the house opposite. It sat on the balustrade and seemed to peer into the empty window. Then it poked its head under its wing, apparently searching for lice. A few minutes later I was not unduly surprised to see the double windows open and admit a woman onto the balcony. She carried a large dish full of bones, which she

emptied onto the floor. With a short appreciative squeak, the raven hopped down and poked about amongst its unpleasant repast.

The woman, who had very long black hair, used her hair to wipe out the dish. Then she looked straight at me and smiled in a friendly fashion. I smiled back and waved a towel. This served to encourage her, for she tossed her head coquettishly and gave me a very elegant salute after the fashion of a queen.

"Do you happen to have any bad meat over there that you don't need?" she called.

"Any what?" I called back, wondering if my ears had deceived me.

"Any stinking meat? Decomposed flesh meat?"

"Not at the moment," I replied, wondering if she was trying to be funny.

"Won't you have any towards the end of the week? If so, I would be very grateful if you would bring it over."

Then she stepped back into the empty window and disappeared. The raven flew away.

My curiosity about the house and its occupant prompted me to buy a large lump of meat the following day. I set it on the balcony on a bit of newspaper and awaited developments. In a comparatively short time the smell was so strong that I was obliged to pursue my daily activities with a strong paper clip on the end of my nose. Occasionally I descended into the street to breathe.

Towards Thursday evening I noticed that the meat was turning colour, so waving aside a flight of rancourous bluebottles, I scooped it into my sponge bag and set out for the house opposite. I noticed, descending the stairs, that the landlady seemed to avoid me.

It took me some time to find the front door of the house opposite. It turned out to be hidden under a cascade of something, giving the impression that nobody had been either in or out of this house for years. The bell was of the old-fashioned kind that you pull, and when I pulled it rather harder than I intended, it came right off in my hand. I gave the door an angry push and it caved inwards, admitting a ghastly smell of putrid meat. The hall, which was almost dark, seemed to be of carved woodwork.

The woman herself came rustling down the stairs, carrying a torch.

"How do you do? How do you do?" she murmured ceremoniously, and I was surprised to notice that she wore an ancient beautiful dress of green

silk. But as she approached me I saw that her skin was dead white and glittered as if speckled with thousands of minute stars.

"Isn't that kind of you?" she went on, taking my arm with her sparkling hand. "Won't my poor little rabbits be pleased?"

We mounted the stairs and my companion walked so carefully that I thought she was frightened.

The top flight of stairs opened into a boudoir decorated with dark baroque furniture and red plush. The floor was littered with gnawed bones and animal skulls.

"It is so seldom that we get a visit." The woman smiled. "So they all scatter off into their little corners."

She uttered a low sweet whistle, and transfixed, I saw about a hundred snow white rabbits emerge cautiously from every nook, their large pink eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the woman.

"Come, pretty ones! Come, pretty ones!" she cooed, diving her hand into my sponge bag and pulling out a handful of rotting meat.

With a sensation of deep disgust, I backed into a corner and saw her throw the carrion amongst the rabbits, who fought like wolves for the meat.

"One becomes very fond of them," the woman went on. "They each have their little ways! You would be surprised how very individual rabbits are."

The rabbits in question were tearing at the meat with their sharp buck teeth.

"We eat them of course occasionally. My husband makes a very tasty stew every Saturday night."

Then a movement in the corner caught my attention and I realized that there was a third person in the room. As the woman's torchlight touched his face I saw he had identical glittering skin, like tinsel on a Christmas tree. He was dressed in a red gown and sat very rigidly with his profile turned towards us. He seemed to be unconscious of our presence or of that of a large white buck rabbit which sat and masticated on a chunk of meat on his knee.

The woman followed my gaze and chuckled. "That is my husband. The boys used to call him Lazarus—"

At the sound of this familiar name, he turned his face towards us and I saw that he wore a bandage over his eyes.

"Ethel?" he enquired in a rather thin voice. "I won't have any visitors here. You know quite well that I have strictly forbidden it."

"Now, Laz, don't start carrying on." Her voice was plaintive. "You can't grudge me a little bit of company. It's twenty-odd years since I've seen a new face. Besides, she's brought meat for the rabbits."

She turned and beckoned me to her side. "You want to stay with us, do you not, my dear?" I was suddenly clutched by fear and I wanted to get out and away from these terrible silver people and the white carnivorous rabbits.

"I think I must be going, it's suppertime—"

The man on the chair gave a shrill peal of laughter, terrifying the rabbit on his knee, which sprang to the floor and disappeared.

The woman thrust her face so near to mine that her sickly breath seemed to anaesthetize me. "Do you not want to stay and become like us? In seven years your skin will be like stars, in seven little years you will have the holy disease of the Bible, leprosy!"

I stumbled and ran, choking with horror; some unholy curiosity made me look over my shoulder as I reached the front door and I saw her waving her hand over the banister, and as she waved it, her fingers fell off and dropped to the ground like shooting stars.

(1941)

WAITING

Two old women were fighting in the street, pinching each other like a pair of angry black lobsters. One or two night-hawkers watched them appreciatively.

Nobody knew how the quarrel had begun.

A young woman on the other side of the street also observed the fight but she was more absorbed in the windows above, which went dark one by one. It was the hour of sleep, and with the extinction of each light the night became longer.

People had given up staring at her, she had been standing there for so long. She was like a familiar ghost, but she was strange looking; her clothes were too long and her hair much too untidy, like those of a person barely saved from drowning. Somebody, a little earlier, had quickened his step and looked away because a winged creature was clinging to her mouth and she had not stirred.

Now the creature had flown away on its own mysterious business, leaving the red on her mouth slightly smudged.

She wondered how it was that the people in the street were not dancing, dancing to the monotonous rhythm in her head. It was loud and dangerous and it made wonderful music.

A tall woman came striding around the corner and stopped near her. On a leash she had two big blonde dogs the same colour as her hair, itself like a separate animal sitting on her head.

The dogs were excited and pulled her over to the young woman.

"What are you doing?" she said. "At this hour … "

She bent down and seemed to address the dogs.

"They have been dancing for hours you know, the hounds … they led me here."

"I am waiting for Fernando."

“And you have no tears left?”

“No, I haven’t any more,” admitted the young woman. “Although I tried pinching my breasts and thinking of death, it was no good. So I came out here.”

The blonde woman took a sheepskin off her arm and wrapped it around the other. “Come,” she said, “you must get free, free to kill and scream, free to tear out his hair and free to run away only to come back laughing.”

“His hair is so long and straight and almost blue, blue grey, I love it so much.”

She relapsed into infatuated silence.

“Be careful; I shall slap you….” said the blonde woman irritably.

“You can’t love anyone until you have drawn blood and dipped in your fingers and enjoyed it.”

They were being pulled along by the big blonde dogs and occasionally dragged zigzagging across the street to another fascinating stink.

“My name,” said the blonde woman, “is Elizabeth … a beautiful name which suits me admirably.”

“Margaret,” said the young woman sadly, “is my name. Margaret.”

“Musical Margaret,” said Elizabeth, giving a loud triumphant laugh, which sent the dogs bounding forward.

“Not yet!” screamed Elizabeth. “Not yet…. But they always obey me in small things, although I am directed in others…. They lead me, my trust is implicit.”

They were pulled into a small square, charming with trees and elegantly windowed houses; the dogs went straight to Number 7. In they went and up a rather bleak marble staircase. Up and up to the highest landing and finally in through a small blue door to a diminutive hall littered with beautifully coloured and rather soiled clothes. Their entrance provoked a flight of large moths, which had been grazing peacefully amongst the more mature fur coats.

Somewhere a musical box played a very old song.

“The past,” said Elizabeth, unleashing the dogs. “The adorable living past. One must wallow, just wallow in it. How can anybody be a person of quality if they wash away their ghosts with common sense?”

She turned on Margaret ferociously and laughed in her face.

“Do you believe,” she went on, “that the past dies?”

"Yes," said Margaret. "Yes, if the present cuts its throat."

"Those little white hands could cut nobody's throat."

Elizabeth laughed so much that she reeled around the room.

"How old is Fernando?" she asked suddenly. "Older than you?"

"Yes," said Margaret, who looked ill. "Fernando is forty-three."

"Forty-three, that makes seven … a beautiful number."

The dogs rolled about voluptuously amongst the silks and furs.

Elizabeth pulled Margaret into the kitchen, where the long-dead stove was littered with cooking utensils or half full of what looked like green food; but Margaret saw that the greenness was a fluffy growth of fungi. Most of the crockery on the floor was covered with the same feathery vegetation.

"We just had dinner," said Elizabeth. "I always cook too much.… You see, I don't like meals, I only eat banquets."

She dipped a spoon into the nearest dish, after having examined it closely.…

"It dropped into the lavatory the other day," she explained, "while I was washing up. Hungry?" she asked.

Margaret said that she was not hungry.

"Then come …" said Elizabeth. "We will talk."

The musical box started to play again and Margaret remembered the tune because Fernando had always hated it. He had once said that he preferred to pour boiling oil into his eardrums than listen to that tune; it was called "I Will Always Come Back."

The third room was a bedroom whose dark strawberry walls were stained with age. The disorder was possibly greater than that in the kitchen and hall and the bed was rumpled and looked as if it was still warm from lovemaking.

Elizabeth stood at the door smiling and looking at the bed, then she bent down and picked up a satin shoe and threw it across the room. Margaret screamed as two mice jumped out of the wrinkled sheets and scuttled down the counterpane with the smooth legless rapidity that terrifies women.

"There has been so much love in here that even the mice come back" said Elizabeth. "It is like the ticking of a clock; you have to listen to hear and then when you listen you can't stop hearing."

"Yes," said Margaret. "Yes, that's right."

She kept wiping her hands on her skirt, they were damp. The two dogs were sitting near the end of the bed, they were listening.

"I always wear cotton wool in my ears," Elizabeth went on. "Otherwise the sounds outside distract me. I am only human, not like them…." She looked at the dogs.

"I cut his toenails myself. And I know every inch of his body and the difference between the smell of his hair and the smell of his skin."

"Who?" whispered Margaret. "Not Fernando?"

"Yes, Fernando," answered Elizabeth. "Who else but Fernando."

(1941)

THE SEVENTH HORSE

A strange-looking creature was hopping about in the midst of a bramble bush. She was caught by her long hair, which was so closely entwined in the brambles that she could move neither backwards nor forwards. She was cursing and hopping till the blood flowed down her body.

"I do not like the look of it," said one of the two ladies who intended to visit the rose garden.

"It might be a young woman … and yet …"

"This is my garden," replied the other, who was as thin and dry as a stick. "And I strongly object to trespassers. I expect it is my poor silly little husband who has let her in. He is such a child you know."

"I've been here for years," shrieked the creature angrily. "But you are too stupid to have seen me."

"Impertinent as well," remarked the first lady, who was called Miss Myrtle. "I think you had better call the gardener, Mildred. I don't think it is quite safe to go so near. The creature seems to have no modesty."

Hevalino tugged angrily at her hair as if she would like to get at Mildred and her companion. The two ladies turned to go, not before they had exchanged a long look of hate with Hevalino.

The spring evening was lengthening before the gardener came to set Hevalino free.

"John," said Hevalino, lying down on the grass, "can you count up to seven? Do you know that I can hate for seventy-seven million years without stopping for rest. Tell those miserable people that they are doomed." She trailed off towards the stable where she lived, muttering as she went: "Seventy-seven, seventy-seven."

There were certain parts of the garden where all the flowers, trees, and plants grew tangled together. Even on the hottest days these places were in blue shadow. There were deserted figures overgrown with moss, still

fountains, and old toys, decapitated and destitute. Nobody went there except Hevalino; she would kneel and eat the short grass and watch a fascinating bird who never moved away from his shadow. He let his shadow glide around him as the day went by and over him when there was a moon. He always sat with his hairy mouth wide open, and moths and little insects would fly in and out.

Hevalino went to see the bird dining the night after she was caught in the brambles. A retinue of six horses accompanied her. They walked seven times around the fat bird in silence.

"Who's there?" said the bird eventually, in a whistling voice.

"It is I, Hevalino, with my six horses."

"You are keeping me awake with your stumping and snorting," came the plaintive reply. "If I cannot sleep I can see neither the past nor the future. I shall waste away if you won't go away and let me sleep."

"They are going to come and kill you," said Hevalino. "You had better keep awake. I heard somebody say you would be roasted in hot fat, stuffed with parsley and onions, and then eaten."

The corpulent bird cast an apprehensive eye on Hevalino, who was watching him closely.

"How do you know?" breathed the bird. "Just tell me that."

"You are much too fat to fly," continued Hevalino relentlessly. "If you tried to fly you'd be like a fat toad doing his death dance."

"How do you know this?" screamed the bird. "They can't know where I am. I've been here for seventy-seven years."

"They don't know yet … not yet." Hevalino had her face close to his open beak; her lips were drawn back and the bird could see her long wolves' teeth.

His fat little body quivered like a jelly.

"What do you want of me?"

Hevalino gave a sort of crooked smile. "Ah, that's better." She and the six horses made a circle around the bird and watched him with their prominent and relentless eyes.

"I want to know exactly what is going on in the house," said she. "And be quick about it." The bird cast a frightened look around him, but the horses had sat down. There was no escape. He became wet with sweat and the feathers clung, draggled, to his fat stomach.

“I cannot say,” he said at last in a strangled voice. “Something terrible will befall us if I say what I can see.”

“Roasted in hot fat and eaten,” said Hevalino.

“You are mad to want to know things that do not concern you … !”

“I am waiting,” said Hevalino. The bird gave a long convulsive shudder and turned his eyes, which had become bulging and sightless, to the east.

“They are at dinner,” he said eventually, and a great black moth flew out of his mouth.

“The table is laid for three people. Mildred and her husband have begun to eat their soup. She is watching him suspiciously. ‘I found something unpleasant in the garden today,’ she says, laying down her spoon; I doubt if she will eat any more now.

“‘What was that?’ asks he. ‘Why do you look so angry?’

“Miss Myrtle has now come into the room. She looks from one to the other. She seems to guess what they are discussing, for she says, ‘Yes, really, Philip, I think you ought to be more careful whom you let into the garden.’

“‘What are you talking about?’ he says angrily. ‘How do you expect me to stop anything if I don’t know what I am stopping?’

“‘It was an unpleasant-looking creature half naked and caught in a bramble bush. I had to turn my eyes away.’

“‘You let this creature free, of course?’

“‘Indeed I did not. I consider it just as well that she was trapped as she was. By the cruel look on her face I should judge she would have done us serious harm.’

“‘What! You left this poor creature trapped in the brambles? Mildred, there are times when you revolt me. I am sick of you pottering around the village and annoying the poor with your religious preamble, and now when you see a poor thing in your own garden you do nothing but shudder with false modesty.’

“Mildred gives a shocked cry and covers her face with a slightly soiled handkerchief. ‘Philip, why do you say such cruel things to me, your wife?’

“Philip, with an expression of resigned annoyance, asks, ‘Try and describe this creature. Is it an animal or a woman?’

“‘I can say no more,’ sobs the wife. ‘After what you have said to me I feel faint.’

‘“ You should be more careful,’ whispers Miss Myrtle. ‘In her delicate condition!’

‘“ What do you mean “delicate condition”?’ asks Philip irritably. ‘I do wish people would say what they mean.’

‘“ Why surely you must know,’ Miss Myrtle simpers. ‘You are going to become a daddy in a short time….’ Philip goes white with rage. ‘I won’t stand these fatuous lies. It is quite impossible that Mildred is pregnant. She has not graced my bed for five whole years, and unless the Holy Ghost is in the house I don’t see how it came about. For Mildred is unpleasantly virtuous, and I cannot imagine her abandoning herself to anybody.’

‘“ Mildred, is this true?’ says Miss Myrtle, trembling with delicious expectation. Mildred shrieks and sobs: ‘He is a liar. I am going to have a darling little baby in three months.’

“Philip flings down his spoon and serviette and gets to his feet. ‘For the seventh time in seven days I shall finish my dinner upstairs,’ says he, and stops for an instant as if his words have awakened some memory. He puts it away from him and shakes his head. ‘All I ask is that you don’t come whining after me,’ he says to his wife and quits the room. She shrieks: ‘Philip, my darling little husband; come back and eat your soup, I promise I won’t be naughty anymore.’

‘“ Too late,’ comes the voice of Philip from the staircase, ‘too late now.’

“He goes slowly up to the top of the house with his eyes looking a long way ahead of him. His face is strained as if in the effort of listening to faraway voices chattering between nightmares and dead reality. He reaches the attic at the top of the house, where he seats himself on an old trunk. I believe the trunk is filled with ancient laces, frilly knickers, and dresses. But they are old and torn; there is a black moth making his dinner on them as Philip sits staring at the window. He considers a stuffed hedgepig on the mantel piece, who looks worn out with suffering. Philip seems to be smothered with the atmosphere of this attic; he flings open the window and gives a long…”

Here the bird paused, and a long sickening neigh rent the night. The six horses leapt to their feet and replied in their piercing voices. Hevalino stood stock-still, with her lips drawn back and her nostrils quivering. “Philip, the friend of the horses…” The six horses thundered off towards the stable, as

if obeying an age-old summons. Hevalino, with a shuddering sigh, followed, her hair streaming behind her.

Philip was at the stable door as they arrived. His face was luminous and as white as snow. He counted seven horses as they galloped by. He caught the seventh by the mane, and leapt onto her back. The mare galloped as if her heart would burst. And all the time Philip was in a great ecstasy of love; he felt he had grown onto the back of this beautiful black mare, and that they were one creature.

At the crack of dawn all the horses were back in their places. And the little wrinkled groom was rubbing off the caked sweat and mud of the night. His creased face smiled wisely as he rubbed his charges with infinite care. He appeared not to notice the master, who stood alone in an empty stall. But he knew he was there.

"How many horses have I?" said Philip at last.

"Six, sir," said the little groom, without ceasing to smile.

That night the corpse of Mildred was found near the stable. One would believe that she had been trampled to death … and yet "They are all as gentle as lambs," said the little groom. If Mildred had been pregnant there was no sign of it as she was stuffed into a respectable black coffin. However nobody could explain the presence of a small misshapen foal that had found its way into the seventh empty stall.

(1941)

THE NEUTRAL MAN

Although I've always promised myself to keep the secret regarding this episode, I've finished up, inevitably, by writing it down. However, since the reputations of certain well-known foreigners are involved, I'm obliged to use false names, though these constitute no real disguise: every reader who is familiar with the customs of the British in tropical countries will have no trouble recognizing every one involved.

I received an invitation asking me to come to a masked ball. Taken aback, I plastered my face thickly with electric green, phosphorescent ointment. On this foundation I scattered tiny imitation diamonds, so that I was dusted with stars like the night sky, nothing more.

Then, rather nervously, I got myself into a public vehicle which took me to the outskirts of the town, to General Epigastro Square. A splendid equestrian monument of this illustrious soldier dominated the square. The artist who had been able to resolve the peculiar problem posed by this monument had embraced a courageously archaic simplicity, limiting himself to a wonderful portrait in the form of a head of the General's horse: the Generalissimo Don Epigastro himself remains sufficiently engraved in the imagination of his devoted public.

Mr. MacFrolick's mansion occupied the entire west side of General Epigastro Square. An Indian servant took me to a large reception room in the baroque style. I found myself amongst a hundred or so guests. The rather charged atmosphere made me realize, in the end, that I was the only person who'd taken the invitation seriously: I was the only guest in disguise.

"It was no doubt your cunning intention," said the master of the house, Mr. MacFrolick, to me, "to impersonate a certain princess of Tibet, mistress of the king, who was dominated by the somber rituals of the Bön, rituals fortunately now lost in the furthest recesses of time. I would hesitate to

relate, in the presence of ladies, the appalling exploits of the Green Princess. Enough to say that she died in mysterious circumstances, circumstances around which various legends still circulate in the Far East. Some claim that the corpse was carried off by bees, and that they have preserved it to this day in the transparent honey of the Flowers of Venus. Others say that the painted coffin did not contain the princess at all, but the corpse of a crane with the face of a woman; yet others maintain that the princess comes back in the shape of a sow."

Mr. MacFrolick stopped abruptly and looked at me hard and with a severe expression. "I shan't say more, madam," he said, "since we are Catholics."

Confused, I abandoned all explanation and hung my head: my feet were bathed in the rain of cold sweat that fell from my forehead. Mr. MacFrolick looked at me with a lifeless expression. He had little bluish eyes and a thick, heavy, snub nose. It was difficult not to notice that this very distinguished man, devout and of impeccable morality, was the human picture of a big white pig. An enormous moustache hung over his fleshy, rather receding chin. Yes, MacFrolick resembled a pig, but a beautiful pig, a devout and distinguished pig. As these dangerous thoughts passed beneath my green face, a young man of Celtic appearance took me by the hand and said, "Come, dear lady, don't torment yourself. We all inevitably show a resemblance to other species of animals. I'm sure you are aware of your own equine appearance. So … don't torment yourself, everything on our planet is pretty mixed up. Do you know Mr. D?"

"No," I said, very confused. "I don't know him."

"D is here this evening," the young man continued. "He is a Magus, and I am his pupil. Look, there he is, near that big blonde dressed in purple satin. Do you see him?"

I saw a man of such neutral appearance that he struck me like a salmon with the head of a sphinx in the middle of a railway station. The extraordinary neutrality of this individual gave me such a disagreeable impression that I staggered to a chair.

"Would you like to meet D?" the young man asked. "He is a very remarkable man."

I was just going to reply when a woman dressed in pale blue taffeta, who wore a very hard expression, took me by the shoulder and pushed me

straight into the gaming room.

"We need a fourth for bridge," she told me. "You play bridge, of course." I didn't at all know how, but kept quiet out of panic. I would have liked to leave, but was too timid, so much so that I began to explain that I could only play with felt cards, because of an allergy in the little finger of my left hand. Outside, the orchestra was playing a waltz which I loathed so much I didn't have the courage to say that I was hungry. A high ecclesiastical dignitary, who sat on my right, drew a pork chop from inside his rich, crimson cummerbund.

"Take it, my daughter," he said to me. "Charity pours forth mercy equally on cats, the poor, and women with green faces."

The chop, which had undoubtedly spent a very long time near the ecclesiastic's stomach, didn't appeal to me, but I took it, intending to bury it in the garden.

When I took the chop outside, I found myself in the darkness, weakly lit by the planet Venus. I was walking near the stagnant basin of a fountain full of stupefied bees, when I found myself face to face with the magician, the neutral man.

"So you're going for a walk," he said in a very contemptuous tone. "It's always the same with the expatriate English, bored to death."

Full of shame, I admitted that I too was English, and the man gave a little sarcastic laugh.

"It's hardly your fault that you're English," he said. "The congenital stupidity of the inhabitants of the British Isles is so embedded in their blood that they themselves aren't conscious of it anymore. The spiritual maladies of the English have become flesh, or rather pork brawn."

Vaguely irritated, I replied that it rained a great deal in England, but that the country had bred the greatest poets in the world. Then, to change the subject: "I've just made the acquaintance of one of your pupils. He told me that you are a magician."

"Actually," said the neutral man, "I'm an instructor in spiritual matters, an initiate if you like. But that poor boy will never get anywhere. You must know, my dear lady, that the esoteric path is hard, bristling with catastrophes. Many are called, few are chosen. I would advise you to confine yourself to your charming female nonsense and forget everything of a superior order."

While he was speaking to me, I was trying to hide the pork chop, for it was oozing horrible blobs of grease between my fingers. I finally managed to put it into my pocket. Relieved, I realized this man would never take me seriously if he knew that I was walking about with a pork chop. And though I feared the neutral man like the plague, I still wished to make a good impression.

"I'd like to learn some of your magic, perhaps study with you. Until now …"

"There is nothing," he told me. "Try to understand what I'm telling you. *There is nothing, absolutely nothing.*"

It was at this point that I felt myself dissolving into an opaque and colourless mass. When I got my breath back, the man had disappeared. I wanted to go home, but I was lost in the garden, which was heavy with the scent of a certain shrub which people here call "it smells at night."

I had been walking along the paths for some time when I arrived at a tower. Through the half-open door I noticed a spiral staircase. Somebody called me from inside the tower, and I went up the stairs, thinking that after all I didn't have a great deal to lose anymore. I was much too stupid to run away like the hare with its triangular teeth.

I thought bitterly, At this moment I'm poorer than a beggar, though the bees have done all they could to warn me. Here I am, having lost a whole year's honey, and Venus in the sky.

At the top of the stairs I found myself in Mr. MacFrolick's private boudoir. He received me amiably, and I couldn't explain to myself this change in attitude. With a gesture full of old-fashioned courtesy, Mr. MacFrolick offered me a china dish (quite fine) on which rested his own moustache. I hesitated to accept the moustache, thinking that perhaps he wanted me to eat it. He's an eccentric, I thought. I quickly made my excuses: "Thank you very much, dear sir," I said, "but I'm not hungry anymore after having eaten the delicious chop the bishop so kindly offered me."

MacFrolick seemed slightly offended.

"Madam," he said, "this moustache is not in any way edible. It is meant as a souvenir of this summer evening, and I thought you might perhaps keep it in a cabinet suitable for such keepsakes. I must add that this

moustache has no magical power, but that its considerable size sets it apart from common objects."

Understanding that I'd made a faux pas, I took the moustache and put it carefully in my pocket, where it immediately stuck to the disgusting pork chop. MacFrolick then pushed me onto the divan, and leaning heavily on my stomach, said in a confidential tone of voice, "Green woman, know that there are different kinds of magic: black magic, white magic, and worst of all, grey magic. It is absolutely essential that you know that amongst us this evening is a dangerous grey magician. His name is D. This man, the vampire of velvet words, is responsible for the murder of many souls, both human and otherwise. After several attempts, D has succeeded in infiltrating this mansion to steal our vital essence."

I found it difficult to suppress a little smile, since for a long time I had been living with a Transylvanian vampire, and my mother-in-law had taught me all the necessary culinary secrets to satisfy the most voracious of such creatures.

MacFrolick leaned more heavily on me and hissed, "It is absolutely crucial that I get rid of D. Unfortunately the Church forbids private assassination. I'm therefore obliged to ask you to come to my assistance. You're a Protestant, aren't you?"

"Not at all," I replied. "I'm not a Christian, Mr. MacFrolick. Besides, I've no wish to kill D, even if I had the chance of doing so before he pulverized me ten times over."

MacFrolick's face filled with rage.

"Leave this house immediately," he screamed. "I don't receive unbelievers in my house, madam. Go away!"

I left as quickly as I could on those stairs, while MacFrolick leaned against his door, insulting me in language that was pretty rich for so pious a man.

There is no proper ending to this story, which I recount here as an ordinary summer incident. There's no ending because the episode is true, because all the people are still alive, and everyone is following his destiny. Everyone, that is, except the ecclesiastic, who drowned tragically in the mansion's swimming pool: it's said he was enticed there by sirens disguised as choirboys.

Mr. MacFrolick never again invited me to his mansion, but I am told that he is in good health.

(early 1950s)

A MEXICAN FAIRY TALE

Once there lived a boy in a place called San Juan. His name was Juan, his job was looking after pigs.

Juan never went to school, none of his family had ever been to school because where they lived there was no school.

One day when Juan took the pigs out to eat some garbage he heard somebody crying. The pigs started to behave in a funny way, because the voice was coming out of a ruin. The pigs tried to see inside the ruin, but weren't tall enough. Juan sat down to think. He thought: This voice makes me feel sad inside my stomach, it feels as if there was an iguana caught inside jumping around trying to escape. I know that this feeling is really the little voice crying in the ruin, I am afraid, the pigs are afraid. However I want to know, so I shall go to the village and see if Don Pedro will lend me his ladder so I can climb over the wall and see who is making such a sad sound.

Off he went to see Don Pedro. He said: "Will you please lend me your ladder?"

Don Pedro said: "No. What for?"

Juan said to himself: I had better invent something, because if I tell him about the voice he might hurt it.

So out loud he said: "Well a long way off behind the Pyramid of the Moon there is a tall fruit tree where there are a lot of big yellow mangoes growing. These mangoes are so fat that they look like gas balloons. The juice they drip is like honey *but* they grow so high up on the tree that it would be impossible to pick them without a tall ladder."

Don Pedro kept looking at Juan and Juan knew he was greedy and lazy so he just stood and looked at his feet. At last Don Pedro said: "All right, you may borrow the ladder but you must bring me twelve of the fattest mangoes to sell in the market. If you do not return by the evening with the

mangoes and the ladder I will thrash you so hard you will swell up as big as the mangoes and you will be *black* and *blue*. So take the ladder and come back quickly."

Don Pedro went back into his house to have lunch and he thought: Mangoes growing up here in the mountains seems very peculiar.

So he sat down and screamed at his wife: "*Bring me little meats and tortillas. All women are fools*."

Don Pedro's family were afraid of him. Don Pedro was terrified of his boss, somebody called Licenciado Gómez, who wore neckties and dark glasses and lived in the town and owned a black motorcar.

During this time Juan was pulling and dragging the long ladder. It was hard work. When Juan arrived at the ruin he fainted with fatigue.

All was quiet, except for the faint grunting of the pigs and the dry sound of a lizard running past.

The sun was beginning to sink when Juan woke up suddenly shouting: *"Ai."* Something was looking down at him, something green, blue, and rusty, glittering like a big myrtle sucker. This bird carried a small bowl of water. Her voice was thin, sweet, and strange. She said: "I am the little granddaughter of the *Great God Mother* who lives in the Pyramid of Venus and I bring you a bowl of life water because you carried the ladder so far to see me when you heard me inside your stomach. This is the right place to listen, in the Stomach."

However

Juan was terrified so he kept on shrieking: *"Ai. Ai. Ai. Ai. Mamá."*

The bird threw the water in Juan's face. A few drops went inside his mouth. He got up feeling better and stood looking at the bird with joy and delight. He was afraid no longer.

All the while her wings moved like an electric fan, so fast that Juan could see through them. She was a bird, a girl, a wind.

The pigs had all fainted by now with utmost fright.

Juan said: "These pigs do nothing but eat and sleep and make more pigs. Then we kill them and make them into little meats which we eat inside tortillas. Sometimes we get very sick from them, especially if they have been dead for a long time."

“You do not understand pigs,” said the bird, whirling. “Pigs have an angel.” Whereupon she whistled like an express train and a small cactus plant rose out of the earth and slid into the bowl which the bird had left at her feet.

She said: “Piu, Piu, Little Servant, cut yourself into bits and feed yourself to the pigs so they become inspired with Pig Angel.”

The cactus called Piu cut himself into little round bits with a knife so sharp and fast that it was impossible to behold.

The morsels of Piu leapt into the mouths of the unconscious pigs, whereupon the pigs disintegrated into little meats roasting in their own heat.

The smell of delicious roasting pork brought drops of saliva into Juan’s mouth. Laughing like a drainpipe the bird took out a telescope and a pair of pincers, picked up the morsels of pig meat, and set them in her small bowl. “Angels must be devoured,” she said, turning from green to blue. Lowering her voice to the dark caves under the earth she called: “Black Mole, Black Mole, Come out and Make the Sauce because Juan is going to eat the Angel, he is hungry and has not eaten since daybreak.”

The new moon appeared.

With a heaving and steaming of the earth, Black Mole poked his starred nose snout out of the ground; then came flat hands and fur, sleek and clean out of so much earth.

“I am blind,” he said, “but I wear a star from the firmament on my nose.”

Now the bird whirred so fast she turned into a rainbow and Juan saw her pour herself into the Pyramid of the Moon in a curve of all colours. He didn’t care because the smell of roasting pigs made food his only desire.

Mole took out all sorts of chiles from the pouch he wore. He took two big stones and ground up the chiles and seeds into pulp, then spat on them and poured them into the bowl with the cooking pig meat.

“I am blind,” said Mole, “but I can lead you through the labyrinth.”

The red ants then came out of the ground carrying grains of corn. Every ant wore a bracelet of green jade on each of her slim legs. A great heap of corn was soon ground up. Mole made tortillas with his flat hands.

All was ready for the feast. Even Saint John’s Day had never seen anything so rich.

“Now eat,” said Mole.

Juan dipped his tortilla into the bowl and ate until he was gorged with food. “I never had so much to eat, never,” he kept saying. His stomach looked like a swollen melon.

All the while Mole stood by saying nothing, but taking stock of all that happened with his nose.

When Juan had finished the last scrap of the fifth pig Mole began to laugh. Juan was so full of food he could not move. He could only stare at Mole and wonder what was so funny.

Mole wore a scabbard under his fur. Quickly he drew out a sharp sword and, swish and shriek, cut up Juan into small pieces just like Piu had sliced himself up to feed the pigs.

The head and hands and feet and guts of young Juan jumped about shrieking. Mole took Juan’s head tenderly in his big hands and said: “Do not be afraid, Juan, this is only a first death, and you will be alive again soon.”

Whereupon he stuck the head on the thorn of a maguey and dived into the hard ground as if it were water.

All was quiet now. The thin new moon was high above the pyramids.

MARÍA

The well was far off. María returned to the hut with a bucket of water. The water kept sloshing over the side of the bucket. Don Pedro, María's father, was shouting: "I shall beat that hairless puppy Juanito. He stole my ladder. I know mangoes don't grow around here. I shall thrash him till he begs for mercy. I shall thrash you all. *Why isn't my dinner ready?"*

Don Pedro yelled again: "She has not come back with the water? I shall beat her. I shall twist her neck like a chicken. You are a no-good woman, your children are no good. *I am master here. I command. I shall kill that thief."*

María was afraid. She had stopped to listen behind a large maguey. Don Pedro was drunk. She thought: He's beating my mother. A thin yellow cat dashed past in terror. The cat is also afraid, if I go back he will beat me, perhaps he will kill me like a chicken.

Quietly María set down the pail of water and walked north towards the Pyramid of the Moon.

It was night. María was afraid, but she was more afraid of her father, Don Pedro. María tried to remember a prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but every time she began *Ave Maria*, something laughed.

A puff of dust arose on the path a few metres ahead. Out of the dust walked a small dog. It was hairless, with a speckled grey skin like a hen.

The dog walked up to her and they looked at each other. There was something distinctive and dignified about the animal. María understood that the dog was an ally. She thought: This dog is an ancient.

The dog turned north, and María followed. They walked and sometimes they ran till they came to the ruin and María was face to face with Juan's decapitated head.

María's heart leapt. Grief struck her and she shed a tear which was hard as a stone and fell heavily to the earth. She picked up the tear and placed it in the mouth of Juan's head.

“Speak,” said María, who was now old and full of wisdom. He spoke, saying: “My body is strewn around like a broken necklace. Pick it up and sew it together again. My head is lonely without my hands and feet. All these are lonely without the rest of my poor body, chopped up like meat stew.”

María picked a thorn off the top of a maguey, made thread out of the sinews of the leaf, and told the maguey: “Pardon me for taking your needle, pardon me for threading the needle with your body, pardon me for love, pardon me for I am what I am, and I do not know what this means.”

All this time Juan’s head was weeping and wailing and complaining: “Ai, Ai, Ai. My poor self, poor me, my poor body. Hurry up, María, and sew me together. Hurry, for if the sun rises and Earth turns away from the firmament I shall never be whole again. Hurry, María, hurry. Ai, Ai, Ai.”

María was busy now and the dog kept fetching pieces of the body and she sewed them together with neat stitches. Now she sewed on the head, and the only thing lacking was the heart. María had made a little door in Juan’s breast to put it inside.

“Dog, Dog, where is Juan’s heart?” The heart was on top of the wall of the ruin. Juan and María set up Don Pedro’s ladder and Juan started to climb, but María said: “Stop, Juan. You cannot reach your own heart, you must let me climb up and get it. Stop.”

But Juan refused to listen and kept on climbing. Just as he was reaching out to get hold of his heart, which was still beating, a black vulture swooped out of the air, snatched the heart in his claws, and flew off towards the Pyramid of the Moon. Juan gave a shriek and fell off the ladder; however María had sewn his body together so well that he was not really hurt.

But Juan had lost his heart.

“My heart. There it was, beating alone on the wall, red and slippery. My beautiful heart. Ah me, ah me,” he cried. “That wicked black bird has ruined me, I am lost.”

“Hush now,” said María. “If you make so much noise the *Nagual* may hear us, with his straw wings and crystal horns. Hush, be quiet, Juan.”

The hairless dog barked twice and started to walk into a cave that had opened up like a mouth. “The earth is alive,” said María, “we must feed ourselves to the earth to find your heart. Come, follow the Esquinclé.”

They looked into the deep mouth of the Earth and were afraid. “We will use the ladder to climb down,” said María. Far below they could hear the dog barking.

As they started to climb down the ladder into the dark earth the first pale light of dawn arose behind the Pyramid of the Sun. The dog barked. María climbed slowly down the ladder and Juan followed. Above them Earth closed her mouth with a smile. The smile is still there, a long crack in the hard clay.

Down below was a passage shaped like a long hollow man. Juan and María walked inside this body holding hands. They knew now that they could not return and must keep on walking. Juan was knocking on the door in his chest crying, “Oh my poor lost heart, oh my stolen heart.”

His wailing ran ahead of them and disappeared. It was a message. After a while a great roar came rumbling back. They stood together, shaking. A flight of stairs with narrow slippery steps led downwards. Below they could see the Red Jaguar that lives under the pyramids. The Big Cat was frightful to behold, but there was no return. They descended the stairs trembling. The Jaguar smelled of rage. He had eaten many hearts, but this was long ago and now he wanted blood.

As they got closer, the Jaguar sharpened his claws on the rock, ready to devour the meat of two tender children.

María felt sad to die so far under the earth. She wept one more tear, which fell into Juan’s open hand. It was hard and sharp. He threw it straight at the eye of the beast and it bounced off. The Jaguar was made of stone.

They walked straight up and touched it, stroking the hard red body and obsidian eyes. They laughed and sat on its back; the stone Jaguar never moved. They played until a voice called: “María. Juan. Juan. Mari.”

A flight of hummingbirds passed, rushing towards the voice.

“The Ancestor is calling us,” said María, listening. “We must go back to Her.”

They crawled under the belly of the stone Jaguar. Mole was standing there, tall and black, holding a silver sword in one of his big hands. In the other hand he held a rope. He bound the two children tightly together and pulled them into the presence of the Great Bird. Bird, Snake, Goddess, there She sat, all the colours of the rainbow and full of little windows with faces

looking out singing the sounds of every thing alive and dead, all this like a swarming of bees, a million movements in one still body.

María and Juan stared at each other till Mole cut the rope that bound them together. They lay on the floor looking up at the Evening Star, shining through a shaft in the roof.

Mole was piling branches of scented wood on a brazier. When this was ready, the Bird Snake Mother shot a tongue of fire out of her mouth and the wood burst into flame. "María," called a million voices, "jump into the fire and take Juan by the hand, he must burn with you so you both shall be one whole person. This is love."

They jumped into the fire and ascended in smoke through the shaft in the roof to join the Evening Star. Juan-Mari, they were one whole being. They will return again to Earth, one Being called Quetzalcoatl.

Juan-Mari keep returning, so this story has no end.

(1970s)

ET IN BELLICUS LUNARUM MEDICALIS

"Russia Donates Team of Trained Rats. Experienced in Operating on People. Due to the Recent Strike of Doctors, the Russian Government Has Graciously Donated a Team of Rats Highly Specialized in All Types of Surgery and General Practise." The news appeared in the Great Metropolitan Newspaper.

Naturally.

And so there was a reunion of State Ministers, Doctors, Bankers, Priests, and other politicians.

It became evident that the idea made them uneasy. The famous Dr. Monopus announced: "This move cannot inspire the necessary confidence in our patients. An operation is too delicate a matter to be undertaken by rats. Moreover, it would not be hygienic." A government minister wearing an English suit stated: "Soviet rats are always sterilized before operating on a patient's body. Besides, if we don't make use of these rats, the Russian Government will be offended."

A disagreeable silence overtook one and all.

Señor Alcaparras, a powerful banker well-known for his democratic attitude, had the courage to break the silence: "Gentlemen," he said with his habitual smiling suavity, "there is no problem here. We will simply donate the rats to the President of the United States, and thus we can please everybody. The Americans, just like the Russians, are very modern."

"I don't believe it is correct to give gifts as a gift," said a priest, Father Podmore, confessor to ladies of good society. "I myself am modern and a complete atheist like all enlightened ecclesiastics, but … even a man as open as I am becomes perturbed by a lack of good manners."

"He's right," said the government minister. "No one wants war against the Russians and the Americans at the same time. They're armed to the teeth, as they say."

“I’m against substituting rats for human beings in the hospitals,” said Dr. Monopus firmly. “Better to make an official donation of the rats to the Psychoanalytical Association.”

The imposing Institute of Semi-Applied Sciences and Other Metaphorical Activities covers several square kilometres in our city and is surrounded by a lovely park with fountains that occasionally spout water. This was the place where the Great Soviet Gift would be presented. There was music, flags, French cooking enveloped in gelatin: the *enchiladas à la Bordelaise* enjoyed special favour.

The physicians themselves presented the wise Rats, amid music and speeches, to the psychoanalysts.

The Head of the Psychoanalytical Association, Dr. Siegfried Laftnalger, received the gift of the Rats in the shadow of the Monument to Semi-Applied and Metaphorical Science. This monument, recognized throughout the world as unique, consists of three heroes and a horse triumphantly penetrating a streptococcus culture.

Standing under the monument, Dr. Laftnalger received the gift with bowed head, murmuring, *“Ai Chingao,”* vowing revenge against his enemy Dr. Monopus.

Following the banquet the psychoanalysts gathered at a secret place in the hills of Las Lomas to contemplate the Soviet Bequest. “I don’t wish to speak against a medical colleague,” said Dr. Laftnalger, “but Monopus is a goat. Now how are we to use these rats in analysis?”

“It’s an insult,” said Dr. Von Garza, “an open declaration of hostility and aggression, a palpable rejection.”

“Transference from patient to rat will present unprecedented difficulties,” said Dr. Zodiac Pérez, an ugly man who thought a lot about transference. “One cannot conceive any practical use for these animals in dealing with recalcitrant neuroses. We should not forget that patients, too, are human beings.”

“Hear, hear!” cried several doctors who spoke good English.

“Should we charge the same rates for sessions with rats, or only half?” said Dr. Benito Wurst, who had a problem of insecurity as well as a *tic nerveux* and six children who ate a lot.

No one knew the answer. At length Dr. Laftnalger said: “Quatch!” and then, with a slight smile, added, “We’d be better off to give the rats to the gynaecologists.” Some laughter followed this gloomy joke.

The quandary thickened. After various sessions in the luxurious bronze mansion on the slopes of Las Lomas—all bronze, marble, ivory, and decorated with bisons—the psychoanalysts decided to kidnap Dr. Monopus and force him to take back the rats to work in the operating theatres of hospitals. Meanwhile, the rats were eating vitamins and taking orderly exercise in an electronic corral.

In the end, it was Dr. Zodiac Pérez, disguised as a lass from Daxara, who was chosen to abduct Dr. Monopus, who was removed to a secret hiding place in the elegant basement of the Psychoanalytical Mansion.... He was to be kept there until he agreed to take back the rats once and for all.

As a prisoner, Dr. Monopus displayed surprising resistance to the psychological ingenuity used against him. He denied all responsibility for the rats. “Though they are adept at bookkeeping, they are not, I believe, trustworthy and have no sense of responsibility,” he admitted after a triple electro-shock procedure and a treatment of subliminal persuasion over several nights. “I don’t want rats in the operating theatre. Period.”

The prisoner’s diet consisted of strawberry-flavoured cornmeal gruel, without milk, and he grew thin. The fourth week of captivity was coming to an end when Dr. Laftnalger sighed and said: “There’s nothing for it, we’ll have to sacrifice both Monopus and the rats at the same time. We’ll deposit the bodies in an anteroom of the Ministry of the Interior so that the affair will come to public attention. We’ll let it be known that Monopus killed the rats and then committed suicide because he was a counterspy. Everything has a solution.”

“Hear, hear!” cried those who spoke English. The rest feigned discreet coughs.

They thought of mixing poison into the strawberry-flavoured cornmeal, which tasted bad anyway. “Let’s not make him suffer too much. Let’s use something quick. Quatch!”

“Hear, hear!”

In the meanwhile a shipment of arms was received at the border to capture the rats and send them on to the Pentagon by helicopter for military purposes. “Who knows,” said an American general, “they might be sent by

submarine." A civil war would have ensued, if it had not been for a fortuitous incident. In the bathroom of the basement of the Psychoanalytical Mansion the toilet got plugged up.

How?

The prisoner, Dr. Monopus, infuriated by his lack of liberty, had begun to throw all kinds of objects belonging to the analysts into the toilet bowl: watches, ties, shoes, and the complete works of Erich Fromm. It was soon obstructed. *The Art of Loving* blocked the exit from the main pipeline.

They called the plumber. Señor Jasón Malvavisco, licensed plumber, arrived with his helpers. "You'd have to use dynamite," he told Dr. Monopus, who now desired to use the facilities.

"Such a solution won't do," said the doctor. "After all, I'm locked up in here."

Señor Jasón Malvavisco was an amiable man, full of good humour, and he offered the doctor a cigarette. "Are you a professional?" he asked Monopus.

"I'm a doctor."

"Well, in a certain sense I'm a doctor, too," said Jasón. "My friends call me Doctor, inasmuch as I'm responsible for the intestinal system of the subterranean tubes of the city."

"Very interesting," said Monopus, "but I don't think dynamiting the patient falls within the limits of professional ethics."

The plumber bowed to this logic. His own principles were well established. "In that case, there's going to be a big stink. There's no way …"

At this point the Soviet Rats themselves appeared on the scene, trying out a new dance step, the Paso Doble Pancreas, a new therapy based on manipulating the digestive system by eating bricks instead of meat (thus also saving money).

Jasón was well informed on the psychological customs of the rats, and he knew how to communicate with them through symptomatic idiom.

"They're ready," he finally told Dr. Monopus. "They say that to fix the toilet all they need are some pliers and a simple ladder."

The Soviet Rats disappeared quickly down the underground tubing. They never came back. They never appeared again in daylight or by the light of the moon.

The toilet, however, was unblocked.

As regards the psychoanalysts, they decided to wear uniforms of black velvet studded with buttons. Laftnalger announced: “We, too, have our dignity and our own organization. In spite of everything, psychology lives in the flesh. And without flesh we would have no patients. Thus, even a bone that talks is worth more than a rat that thinks.”

Amen …

Even though you won’t believe me
my story is beautiful
And the serpent that sang it
Sang it from out of the well.

(early 1960s)

MY FLANNEL KNICKERS

Thousands of people know my flannel knickers, and though I know this may seem flirtatious, it is not. I am a saint.

The "Sainthood," I may say, was actually forced upon me. If anyone would like to avoid becoming holy, they should immediately read this entire story.

I live on an island. This island was bestowed upon me by the government when I left prison. It is not a desert island, it is a traffic island in the middle of a busy boulevard, and motors thunder past on all sides day and night.

So …

The flannel knickers are well known. They are hung at midday on a wire from the red green and yellow automatic lights. I wash them every day, and they have to dry in the sun.

Apart from the flannel knickers, I wear a gentleman's tweed jacket for golfing. It was given to me, and the gym shoes. No socks. Many people recoil from my undistinguished appearance, but if they have been told about me (mainly in the Tourist's Guide), they make a pilgrimage, which is quite easy.

Now I must trace the peculiar events that brought me to this condition. Once I was a great beauty and attended all sorts of cocktail-drinking, prize-giving-and-taking, artistic demonstrations and other casually hazardous gatherings organized for the purpose of people wasting other people's time. I was always in demand and my beautiful face would hang suspended over fashionable garments, smiling continually. An ardent heart, however, beat under the fashionable costumes, and this very ardent heart was like an open tap pouring quantities of hot water over anybody who asked. This wasteful process soon took its toll on my beautiful smiling face. My teeth fell out. The original structure of the face became blurred, and then began to fall away from the bones in small, ever-increasing folds. I sat and watched the

process with a mixture of slighted vanity and acute depression. I was, I thought, solidly installed in my lunar plexus, within clouds of sensitive vapour.

If I happened to smile at my face in the mirror, I could objectively observe the fact that I had only three teeth left and these were beginning to decay.

Consequently

I went to the dentist. Not only did he cure the three remaining teeth but he also presented me with a set of false teeth, cunningly mounted on a pink plastic chassis. When I had paid a sufficiently large quantity of my diminishing wealth, the teeth were mine and I took them home and put them into my mouth.

The Face seemed to regain some of its absolutely-irresistible-attraction, although the folds were of course still there. From the lunar plexus I arose like a hungry trout and was caught fast on the sharp barbed hook that hangs inside all once-very-beautiful faces.

A thin magnetic mist formed between myself, the face, and clear perception. This is what I saw in the mist. "Well, well. I really was beginning to petrify in that old lunar plexus. This must be me, this beautiful, smiling fully toothed creature. There I was, sitting in the dark bloodstream like a mummified foetus with no love at all. Here I am, back in the rich world, where I can palpitate again, jump up and down in the nice warm swimming pool of outflowing emotion, the more bathers the merrier. I Shall Be Enriched."

All these disastrous thoughts were multiplied and reflected in the magnetic mist. I stepped in, wearing my face, now back in the old enigmatic smile which had always turned sour in the past.

No sooner trapped than done.

Smiling horribly, I returned to the jungle of faces, each ravenously trying to eat each other.

Here I might explain the process that actually takes place in this sort of jungle. Each face is provided with greater or smaller mouths, armed with different kinds of sometimes natural teeth. (Anybody over forty and toothless should be sensible enough to be quietly knitting an original new body, instead of wasting the cosmic wool.) These teeth bar the way to a

gaping throat, which disgorges whatever it swallows back into the foetid atmosphere.

The bodies over which these faces are suspended serve as ballast to the faces. As a rule they are carefully covered with colours and shapes in current "fashion." This "fashion" is a devouring idea launched by another face snapping with insatiable hunger for money and notoriety. The bodies, in constant misery and supplication, are generally ignored and only used for ambulation of the face. As I said, for ballast.

Once, however, that I bared my new teeth, I realized that something had gone wrong. For after a very short period of enigmatic smiling, the smile became quite stiff and fixed, while the face slipped away from its bonish mooring, leaving me clutching desperately to a soft grey mask over a barely animated body.

The strange part of the affair now reveals itself. The jungle faces, instead of recoiling in horror from what I already knew to be a sad sight, approached me and started to beg me for something which I thought I had not got.

Puzzled, I consulted my friend, a Greek.

He said: "They think you have woven a complete face and body and are in constant possession of excess amounts of cosmic wool. Even if this is not so, the very fact that you know about the wool makes them determined to steal it."

"I have wasted practically the entire fleece," I told him. "And if anybody steals from me now I shall die and disintegrate totally."

"Three-dimensional life," said the Greek, "is formed by attitude. Since by their attitude they expect you to have quantities of wool, you are three-dimensionally forced to 'Sainthood,' which means you must spin your body and teach the faces how to spin theirs."

The compassionate words of the Greek filled me with fear. I am a face myself. The quickest way of retiring from social Face-eating competition occurred to me when I attacked a policeman with my strong steel umbrella. I was quickly put into prison, where I spent months of health-giving meditation and compulsive exercise.

My exemplary conduct in prison moved the Head Wardress to an excess of bounty, and that is how the Government presented me with the island,

after a small and distinguished ceremony in a remote corner of the Protestant Cemetery.

So here I am on the island with all sizes of mechanical artifacts whizzing by in every conceivable direction, even overhead.

Here I sit.

(1950s)

THE HAPPY CORPSE STORY

White girl dappled mare
the stags and the ferns in the wood.
Tuft of black hair caught on a thorn
She went by so fast
Now she is gone.

The young man, dressed in purple and gold with a blond wig and carrying a jukebox, threw a tantrum and fell on the mossy knoll in a passionate fit of weeping.

"She never returned," he cried.

"Sentimentality is a form of fatigue," said the Happy Corpse, greyish, swinging to and fro on the gnarled elm, like a wasps' nest.

"Nevertheless," shrieked the youth, "I must seek her, because I am in love."

The Happy Corpse laughed. "You mean your secret thread got wound around a galloping damsel. The thinness of it being pulled is a sinful waste and woeful want."

The young man's wig fell off, showing a skull covered with black bristles.

"However," continued the Happy Corpse, "if you catch hold of me and ride on my back, I may help you to find this woman."

"Whoop!" yelped the youth and grabbed at the corpse, which fell into ashes and appeared on the other side of a brandleberry bush.

"Not so fast."

Around and around the brandleberry bush they ran, and as the young man got nearer and nearer the corpse got thicker and thicker, till the youth leapt

on its back; whereupon the Happy Corpse stamped its foot and away they ran.

Thorns grabbed at the pair as they hurried through the wood. Great Scot, a nasty black-and-white terrier, ran constantly at the corpse's heels, snapping. This mangy creature lurked the haunts where Happy Corpses abide, since one can hardly say live in this case. The dog smelled as bad as the corpse; it was practically impossible to tell one from the other. They just looked different.

Being full of holes and dents, the corpse could talk out of any part of its body. "Now," said the corpse through the back of its head, "I shall tell you a story." The youth heaved a groan like a death rattle. He felt too preoccupied to listen. Nevertheless the story began. Think of listening to a story told straight into your face out of a hole in the back of the head with bad breath: surely this must have troubled the delicate sensibility of the young man. However, what can't be cured must be endured.

"The story," said the Happy Corpse, "is all about my father." As they unraveled themselves from the tendrils of some poison ivy, the story continued: "My father was a man so utterly and exactly like everybody else that he was forced to wear a large badge on his coat in case he was mistaken for anybody. Any body, if you see what I mean. He was obliged to make constant efforts to make himself present to the attention of others. This was very tiring, and he never slept, because of the constant banquets, bazaars, meetings, symposiums, discussions, board meetings, race meetings, and simple meatings where meat was eaten. He could never stay in one place for more than a minute at a time because if he did not appear to be constantly busy he was afraid somebody might think he was not urgently needed elsewhere. So he never got to know anybody. It is quite impossible to be truly busy and actually ever be with anybody because business means that wherever you are you are leaving immediately for some other place. Relatively young, the poor man turned himself into a human wreckage."

A thing like a great black rag flew past heavily, saying, "Hands up, Infidel."

"What was that?" asked the youth, alarmed. The Happy Corpse smiled through the hole in its head. "That was Dick Turpin, once a Highwayman, always a ghost. He is going to the Fantomat."

"The Fantomat?"

“Yes, the Fantomat is an automatic Fantomator. There are a lot of them, chainwise, as we get nearer and nearer to Hell.”

Terrified by now, the youth became blue around the lips and was too alarmed to reply.

“As I was saying about my father,” continued the Corpse, “He eventually became an executive for a firm. This meant that he actually executed persons with showers of legal documents proving that they owed him quantities of money which they did not have. ‘Firm’ actually means the manufacture of useless objects which people are foolish enough to buy. The firmer the firm the more senseless talk is needed to prevent anyone noticing the unsafe structure of the business. Sometimes these firms actually sell nothing at all for a lot of money, like ‘Life Insurance,’ a pretense that it is a soothing and useful event to have a violent and painful death.”

“What happened to your father?” asked the youth, mostly to listen to his own voice for comfort during the increasing horror of the journey. Now the woods kept fluctuating with apparitions: beasts, garbage cans overflowing with decomposed entities, leaves chasing each other chaotically, so that no shape was ever constant; grass behaving like animated spaghetti, and a number of nameless vacuums, causing events that were always unhappy or catastrophic.

“My father died of a heart attack during a telephone conversation, and then of course he went to Hell. Now he is in Telephone Hell, where everyone has these apparatuses constantly glued to their lips or ears. This causes great anguish. My father will be with his Telephone for nine hundred and ninety-nine billion aeons before he gets rid of it. Afterwards he might even become a saint. Before actually maturing into a real Entity, everybody goes to Hell first, and if they are not too careful, afterwards they must begin all over again.”

“You mean that your father is actually in Hell?” asked the youth. “And why do you never mention your mother?”

Here the Corpse almost paused. The trees were scarcer, so that a stretch of desert was visible in the distance.

“My mother committed suicide from boredom. My father was so busy that she had nobody to talk to. So she ate and ate and then shut herself into the refrigerator and half froze and half suffocated to death. She also went to

Hell, but in the refrigerator, eating constantly. I composed a poem to her memory. It goes like this:

When Father's Face was hard to bear
Mother got into the Frigidaire,
Father, said I, I'm so unhappé
Mother is completely frappé.

Tears were now streaming down the face of the young man. "The whole story is quite dreadful. And really much worse, because my own poor mother also committed suicide. She shot herself with a machine gun."

The Happy Corpse stopped suddenly, throwing the youth to the ground, saying: "You silly boy, do you suppose I don't know that? I am your mother. How would I ever have carried you so near to Hell had I been another, a stranger?"

"Mummy?" said the youth, trembling violently. "Forgive me."

"You always used to eat strawberry-jam sandwiches for tea."

They were both lost for a moment in memories of the strawberry-jam sandwiches. After a while the Happy Corpse said: "Now you had better return, since you forgot the white girl on the dappled horse, as those on their way to Hell forget.

"Now you must remember, and in order to remember you must return again, alone."

So that the boy should find his way back, she tied his leg to Great Scot, the terrier, with a long black hair. Off they went, and one can only hope they found their way back. The Happy Corpse dissolved into ashes and, laughing heartily, returned to the tree.

(1971)

HOW TO START A PHARMACEUTICALS BUSINESS

I picked the site for the picnic with trepidation. The occasion was a solemn one for me because of the distinguished quality of my guests: the well-known noble of the highest Mexican society, Lord Popocatepetl, and his closest friend, the Viscount Federal District. I had devoted great thought to choosing the most adequate place to enjoy the company of these two gentlemen and, given the high price of even vulgar restaurants, I finally decided to invite them to a beautiful old cemetery close to the ruins of the Latin American Tower.

Once the monarchy had been well established in Mexico, King Chapultepec von Smith the Second (son of Atzcapotzalco Guggenheim) promulgated the law definitely prohibiting all instruments of speech transmission of a nonanimal nature (whether radios, telephones, televisions, walkie-talkies, microphones, etc. etc.). Our civilization thereupon rapidly advanced toward a Golden Age in which pleasurable silence has made every street a garden and every home a centre for peaceful, if not always intellectual, thought.

It is now customary for the most distinguished members of society to hold picnics in the very centre of the city. Games like chess, snakes and ladders, and ludo have become peaceful national pastimes. It is said that in the old days the masses killed bulls for pleasure. It is not known how they did this exactly, but it can be assumed that they used firearms or some such artefacts in common use in those dark and barbarous times.

Ever since the edict issued by the Black King of the North, New York the First, an edict titled the Law of De-Electrification of the Americas, it has been unclear how those powerful electrical forces were once used, forces we now make use of only in our rituals.

But I see that I am wandering from my story. It was on a hazy day in the month of May that I made my way to the Saint George Light and Power

Cemetery in my modest one-mule sled, loaded with my choice foods: not only tins of Norwegian enchiladas from Japan, but six bottles of the rare old Indian drink called cocacola, bottled at the source.

The cemetery was shrouded in a veil of mystery in the early-morning light: its closely packed tombstones gleamed white on the side the rains washed them, black on their shady side. In the middle of this spiderweb of narrow alleys was a tavern, the Fat Swallow, to which those visiting this city of the dead repaired for the comfort of strong drink. The place had apparently been some sort of church in the old days at the end of the Christian Era: that is, a place where melancholy rites were celebrated and believers gathered to hear discourses from a priest while they contemplated their God (now dead), a poor man nailed in an awful way to a wooden construction and languishing in apparent agony. An interesting example of the psychology of our ancestors, that they should have adored such a sinister image!

Seeking a site for our picnic, I made my way slowly to a comparatively open space where two men were digging a hole. They told me they were unearthing the remains of the distinguished Lady Haughty Corner, who had only recently died in the course of her studies of the customs of the underground "Home Office," or Ministry of the Interior. Her widely known thesis, *Prayers of the Twentieth Century*, deals with the mystifying discoveries made by archaeologists when they opened up the famous Home Office Building.

"The cemetery is for the exclusive use of ladies," said the taller of the two diggers. They asked if I would lie down in the hole to help measure its size.

The humid ground was not as inhospitable as might be supposed. I even felt a certain languor and sleepiness as I made myself comfortable in Lady Haughty Corner's grave. The men went about taking their measurements with great care. When their work was done they helped me out and, as I was taking my leave of them, I discerned my two guests approaching through the mist: Lord Popocatepetl and the Viscount Federal District.

I picked up my basket and went to encounter my distinguished friends. We soon found a tranquil spot. Lord Popocatepetl recounted the latest developments of his rheumatism. "Ever since the beginning of the year, on account of the humidity, the lower half of my spine had been prey to

spasms. I've consulted Dr. Major-Magician, who assured me aches and pains are purely psychological, and advised me to wear pants lined with monkey skin, tanned in pulque. So far I've felt no relief."

"Quack!" responded Federal District. "Rheumatism is caused by disturbances in the equinox. The grey fluids flow with sephilococcus."

"There are such things as antirheumatoid collars, you know," I said. "I've been using one only recently, the very best. Of my own manufacture, by the way. They cost only two fermented cheeses. Manufacturer's price, for you."

As we chatted in this manner a man wearing a white suit approached us. He hesitated a moment before addressing me: "Señora Carrington?"

"Yes," I answered, somewhat surprised that a stranger should know who I was. The man handed me a packet some ten inches by thirty in size. "It's the National Lottery prize. You won it with the number XXXccc. I congratulate you, Señora Carrington."

After thanking him, I opened the packet carefully. He disappeared into the shadows with a little bird's laugh, which I did not like.

We soon discovered that the packet contained an India rubber casket, fit for a very small child.

"What practical use this prize may serve escapes me," said Federal District. Popocatepetl, however, examined it carefully through his lorgnette and announced: "It could serve very well as a table for our picnic lunch." True enough: it would be a good idea to keep our picnic off the humid ground of the cemetery.

While we ate, however, we became more and more conscious of a disagreeable odour emanating from the diminutive casket. We had scarcely finished eating when my companions tendered their excuses and made off, leaving me with the picnic leftovers and the India rubber casket. On the outskirts of our sad savage town, I was overcome by a feeling of profound melancholy, though I fought it off by stuffing a large amount of jasmine essence up my nose. Fear kept me from opening my prize packet. I simply went on staring at it for a long time. I felt an uncertainty and a degree of anxiety that seemed to emanate from the ancient graves of the cemetery itself. It was as if the anguish was not properly mine, but something from out of that distant twentieth century of dread repute.

I don't know how long I was prey to these sensations. But suddenly I heard again the same tiny bird's laugh and, looking around, I could make

out the white silhouette of the person who'd handed me the India rubber casket. His face was so shrouded in haze I couldn't make out his features, but his voice sounded right beside my ear: "Go ahead and open it. Why hold back?"

With no will of their own, my hands lifted the rubber cover embellished with lily-of-the-valley designs—only to find another box made of that ancient substance that once used to be called plastic. I would have liked to desist in my task, but continued to obey the voice of the white individual and, with a dexterity of their own, my hands succeeded in opening the rose-coloured box. What I saw caused me to stare with a mixture of wonder and fear. It was a human corpse more or less the size of a toothbrush. The homunculus boasted an enormous mustache. It was marvelously preserved, probably by some method known once to the inhabitants of the Amazon jungle. I realized that this little body had been larger in real life, but still not as large as the average man today. My eyes were drawn to an inscription on the inner side of the cover: "Joseph Stalin. A.D. 1948. Received on the occasion of her birthday by Queen Elizabeth the Second of England, who sent it as a Christmas present to Dwight Eisenhower, USA, who sent it to the National Museum of Mexico in commemoration of Saint Light and Power, canonized in 1958 by the Vatican. *Quia Nobis Solis Artem per nos solo investigatam tradimus et non aliis*." Had this doll perhaps been a contemporary of Saint Rasputin, a noble at the court of the Tsar of Russia? With growing excitement I examined the letters of the inscription preceding the name of that Eisenhower. Another Russian perhaps? Doubtless the letters USA had been correctly translated by Haughty Corner in her thesis as "United Self-Annihilation." Just as USSR stood for (according to the same authority) "United Solo Sepulchre Regression." Perhaps this is a phrase from the ritual of the Catholic Church or something of that sort? I could not understand the Latin phrase very well, of course, but I surmised that it had something to do with the desiccated mannikin. Who knows but that he might have been a dwarf who served as court fool?

While these romantic notions were passing through my mind, the man in white approached closer and said: "Nowadays all initiates are aware of the dark ages when the world was empty and could not count on the gods. Divine spirits manifested themselves on earth only after the unmentionable catastrophe filled the entire planet with horror. This relic from those ill-

fated times possesses medicinal value too. Ground into a powder with a few drops of marigold oil, and some royal poinciana seeds, it yields a valuable salve for the treatment of Depression No. 20. It is also useful in certain exercises of light levitation. We all know that Western medicine includes a branch of benign poisons, good for curing certain pathological conditions."

He proceeded to pluck one of the long hairs from the moustache of the mannikin and place it delicately in my mouth. I noted a sardine taste that made me shiver: twentieth-century druggists promoted odd practises. I suddenly felt invaded as if by a divine light that whispered: "Aspirin was like this." I fainted.

When I came to the man in white had disappeared, and I was left with the homunculus of the Tsar in the India rubber casket.

It's scarcely necessary to add that the tiny mannikin allowed me to found what today is the leading pharmaceutical establishment in the entire city. Naturally imitations and falsifications abound, but the authentic "Apostalin" is one of the country's leading exports. It is useful in the treatment of

Whooping cough
Syphilis
Grippe
Childbearing and other convulsions.

Though not exactly rich, I enjoy ease and tranquility, everything I need, and whatever is required for an agreeable and distinguished life.

(early 1960s)

MY MOTHER IS A COW

Our family is modest, my mother is a cow. Or rather, my mother is a cow-faced fan. Who is she? And does she also live behind her fan-self? A face before a face before a … who am I to say? We ask, here, who are you? She laughs, but receives offerings of a kind. We call her Holy One if we know her. But we are very few.

Our small sanctuaries are empty, containing only my Mother's horned face. Each of us gives what we have to offer. The offerings are returned to human beings as small truths, great truths, medium truths, or quite often as lies and fibs. It all depends on what we do with them. The offerings in the first place are quite devious: tears and honey, shrieks and tobacco, burning resin, chocolate, white nights.

Red ochre, whitewash, and soot.

My purpose, however, is to tell how I went to question her and what she replied. This is what happened.

For years I have been a prisoner of the people of the set now called the Watchers. These great hypnotists have no idols, their magic is powerful and their appetite insatiable. They thrive on misery, but have great delicacy in choosing their victims. They evoke compassion but have none themselves. They possess unlimited knowledge but have no understanding, and this gives them the power of absolute, concentrated hate.

And so,

When I was captured they called me Sin. They had forgotten that Sin was the name of a Goddess they had murdered.

Sometimes I remembered, sometimes I forgot. I suffered intensely.

This suffering produced a particular sort of food for them, which I mistook for a vitamin. I thought that if I gave enough they would stop picking at my lunar plexus and be satisfied, and perhaps richer?

This of course was not so. I became progressively sicker.

I called my Mother's horned image and asked if she wished my death, and if not, to provide a cure.

She said her disused sanctuary should be consecrated again, but the doors should be closed, the new entrance spiral. Spiral, she said, like the umbilical ladder out of the human body; this, she added, is very holy. As long as the doors are closed you will be safe and I shall not leave you, she said.

I did exactly what I had been told. The Watchers allowed the consecration after I paid six gallons of salted blood.

A sailor from Ulysses' ship, who had been a hero, was also a captive of the Watchers. They had made him a chartered accountant, but his memory was unimpaired. He remembered how my aunt had turned him into a pig for a joke, how her daughters the Sirens had wanted to make love to him because the dolphins seemed impotent compared to the beautiful sailor. He was still angry, although wars, at that time, were close enough to nature for enemies to love each other. So we became friends under the hungry observation of the Watchers. This sailor remembered our small, empty sanctuaries from the past. Never, never open the doors, he said, or you will be in danger. He had my welfare in mind.

His own small sanctuary was hermetically sealed, but the price had very nearly cost him his life; I had paid only six gallons of salted blood.

This is just how things stood when a certain combination of stars produced events where the presence of the Gods became directly discernible to certain human beings: those who took part in the dance, and others.

I took part and got bitten in the stomach by a man-eating shark disguised as Harlequin.

Every mistake we make in these dances must be turned into a question, otherwise they are fatal to our human condition.

The sailor who was watching the dance from the bar was horrified at my clumsy gavort and told me that at least my leg would get broken. He refused to join the dance. It had happened all too often, he said. I believed he was ashamed for me, since from the very first he had seen the Harlequin as a shark.

I could only tell him it was not a real shark. I don't know if the sailor understood me as I kept leaving the gavorting herd to tell him the following: that the ways of my horned mother were strange. Since she had

chosen to make me dance again, I could not do otherwise. “The more ignorant we are the closer we participate. But I have asked questions before, and so I know I am dancing.”

The sailor said: “Leave now, or you will probably break your neck.”

I went on dancing in my grotesque disguise, but not before I told him: “I am lonely and miserable but I am wearing my last skin. Since you are almost face to face with the Gods do not abandon me.” In human language, this is called love.

Then I danced again on my burning feet, which became heavier and heavier until I was prancing like a cart horse on bleeding stumps.

Then I made a wrong turn in the dance and the Watchers, dressed in executioner purple, stepped quietly into the whirling mob and put me in solitary confinement on a diet of putrefied shark meat.

After I made my false step I presented myself to the Horned Goddess. Her sanctuary was desecrated, the doors wide open, the floor covered with shark droppings, the hallows strewn around in chaos.

My misery was so bitter that I was unable to handle the sacred broom. I stayed all night in the sanctuary, crying bitterly and imploring the presence of my Mother, who had withdrawn.

Here I sit, Holy One, in all my abandoned misery. Let me disintegrate in this most horrible suffering.

Still the Goddess was absent.

I cried and threatened and pleaded and tried to dash my brains out on the wall. Only at sunrise did I remember that I had asked no question. So I washed my hideously decomposed face and presented myself once more before the Horned Image.

Why am I human? I asked.

Now the Goddess has no mouth, no tongue, no vocal cords. Her presence defies description but is absolute. Therefore I must pretend the following communication was in human speech.

This was her reply: To be one human creature is to be a legion of mannequins. These mannequins can become animated according to the choice of the individual creature. He or she may have as many mannequins as they please. When the creature steps into the mannequin he immediately believes it to be real and alive and as long as he believes this he is trapped inside the dead image, which moves in ever-increasing circles away from

Great Nature. Every individual gives names to his mannequins and nearly all these names begin with "I am" and are followed by a long stream of lies.

I asked: What is the use of these mannequins, Holy One?

The Goddess said: Human beings could never communicate with each other if there were no mannequins, they could only unite in lovemaking or fighting in their bodies of flesh, blood, and bone. Through the mannequins they can talk to each other, hypnotize each other, dominate each other, and in fact indulge in all the titillating activities, including suffering, happiness, esthetic enjoyment, self-importance, politics and football, etc.

And I asked her: What is suffering?

And she replied: Suffering is the death or disintegration of one or more of these mannequins. However, the more dead mannequins a creature leaves behind, the nearer she or he comes to leaving the human condition forever. The only trouble is that when a being is obliged to abandon the invented presence of a disoccupied mannequin, he or she is quite often busy again building bigger and better mannequins to live in.

Then all mannequins are vampires?

The Goddess said: Mannequins are like the Great Cabalistic Pentagon called Death impregnated with life, which whirls eternally through the twelve houses.

How can I leave the circle, Holy One?

When you die, you step out of the circle.

How can I step out of the circle with no feet? I asked. The Goddess was pleased with such a malicious question, and her laughter was like rain on the roof of my head. You must knit yourself a body with spider yarn, she said.

Of course I had realized this long ago, but had been woefully wasting my yarn on more and more mannequins.

So bit by bit I pulled back the strands and now as I sit, I am spinning again, as the Greek sailor predicted.

Here I sit in the ziggurat, knowing that I danced because that was the only way of killing another mannequin whose name was "I am still rather attractive and I will die if I don't get some human love. Everybody needs to be loved no matter how old they are. Besides, if I dance fast enough I might even become liberated from the Watchers."

The Horned Goddess, contrary to all expectation, arose again with the sun.

But why am I human, Holy One? What have I done to deserve this?

Human means written in flesh, the word is pain and pain and pain again —

Who was The Witch of Nazareth?

A Hieroglyph written in Blood which makes sense if the story starts with the Crucifixion and is read progressively backwards—The Christ-man was stripped of his father on the cross.

Then there is no learning?

There is none. Understanding is only that which is written in living, primary matter. The primary shadowless beings are letters that make words you can't read. Their condition is constant suffering because they're naked and skinless. Their bloodstream is without defence.

Who are they?

Those who no longer pretend to know who they are.

(mid-1950s)

THE SAND CAMEL

Two boys, A and B, lived in the forest with Old Grandmother. Old Grandmother was always dressed in black, like an umbrella, and she had a little round head, red like an apple. Her soap and her pajamas were also black, her favourite colour. A and B went to play in the forest with the white sand. They made a camel. When the camel was finished it had a lively look. A and B said: “The camel is alive, it’s got a nasty look.”

It was true, but the rain fell and the camel dissolved in a stream of sand. “Good,” said Grandmother, “I didn’t like that camel because of the way he looked.”

But for the next camel A and B mixed a bit of butter in the sand. The eyes of this one were worse than before. The camel stayed whole in the rain. “If we do something magic it will get up,” said B. That would have been useful, because he didn’t have a dog. So the crow came down from the tree and said: “Me, I know the magic thing that has to be done for the camel.” He scratched a few letters on the forehead of the camel with his claw, and the camel got up with a sinister smile. He walked. He went to the house.

“It’s that he’s afraid of the rain,” said the crow.

“Grandmother will not be pleased if the camel goes inside, she’s cooking chestnuts,” said A. The boys hid behind a tree, because they knew that Grandmother would be angry if the camel went into the kitchen. They were right. She was furious. Soon they saw the camel return with the head of Grandmother in his mouth. She was upside down and looked like an umbrella. “He’s afraid of the humidity,” said the crow.

The jam was burning in the kitchen. A and B went to the house to look after it.

“It would be nice to eat some chips,” said A and B after a week of eating chestnut jam, but the camel walked slowly around the wood, holding

Grandmother like an umbrella. He never let go of her. The crow saw everything. “You owe me the jewels of Grandmother,” said the crow and took a big trunk of jewels from the house. “One has to use them.” He hung all Grandmother’s jewels on the tree, and one must recognize that it looked very, very nice.

MR. GREGORY'S FLY

Once there was a man with a big black moustache. His name was Mr. Gregory (the man and the moustache had the same name). Since his youth Mr. Gregory was bothered by a fly that used to enter his mouth when he spoke, and when somebody spoke to him, the fly would fly out of his ear. "This fly annoys me," said Mr. Gregory to his wife, and she answered, "I understand, and it looks ugly. You ought to consult a doctor." However no doctor was able to cure Mr. Gregory of his fly. Although he went to see several doctors, they always said that they had never heard of this disease.

One day Mr. Gregory went to see another doctor, but he got the wrong address and by mistake went to see a midwife. She was a wise woman and she knew a lot of other things besides childbirthing.

"Ahh, the fly, I know about that," said the wise woman when Mr. Gregory said, "Pardon, I thought I was going to see Dr. Fontin," and the fly, as usual, flew into his mouth.

"Me, I know how to cure your fly," said the wise woman.

"Enchanted, Madam," answered Mr. Gregory.

So the wise woman offered him a chair, saying, "Yes, I know how to cure the fly. But it's going to be expensive, like three-quarters of your wealth."

Mr. Gregory jumped a bit, then he said, "All right." He wrote the following letter:

> I give my house to the wise woman [the house was not his]. I give my wife [he wanted to get rid of her anyhow] ten shillings [he didn't have them] and a cow [this in fact was a ferocious bull].
>
> George Lawrence Gregory [This was his real name.]

The wise woman knew quite well that Mr. Gregory was telling lies in the letter, but she didn't say anything, she just took the letter and spat on the ground. Then she gave some pills to Mr. Gregory and she said: "Take two after every meal in a tea made of little drops of mustard in noodle water. That's it."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Gregory, and he left content. Later Mr. Gregory took the pills in the tea made of little drops of mustard in noodle water, according to the instructions of the wise woman. Next day the fly had totally disappeared, but Mr. Gregory had become navy blue with red zip fasteners over his orifices.

"It's worse than the fly," said his wife, but Mr. Gregory didn't say much because he knew that he had cheated the wise woman. I deserved it, he thought. If I only had that little fly again, I'd be happy. But he was still navy blue with red zip fasteners and stayed like that till the end of his days, and this was very ugly, especially when he was naked in his bath.

JEMIMA AND THE WOLF

The governess went into the big drawing room. She lowered her weak, colourless eyes under the gaze of her mistress who was working at her embroidery, sticking the cloth as if she wanted to hurt it.

"You may sit down," she said. "I want to talk to you for a few minutes, Mademoiselle Bleuserbes."

The governess sat down in a tall chair, embroidered with gazelles and birds.

"You have now been in my service for three years. You are an educated and intelligent woman, you are honest, and you control your emotions. You mustn't think that these qualities have escaped my notice. On the contrary, I am very observant, even if I don't interfere with your work."

She gave the governess a cold look.

"But … I don't suppose you realize that I'm not satisfied with the effect all your efforts have had on my daughter."

"Madam," said the governess in a voice as colourless as her eyes, "your daughter is a very difficult child."

"I wouldn't be paying you so much for teaching her if she wasn't difficult," the lady said drily.

The governess blushed.

"Besides, a little girl of thirteen can't possibly make such an enormous amount of work. Now, I want to know certain things, and I insist on receiving precise answers."

The governess's lips turned blue.

"Yes, Madam," she said in a very low voice.

"I gave my daughter a doll a week ago. Was she pleased?"

A heavy silence reigned for some moments.

"No, Madam."

The lady looked at her embroidery with stony eyes.

"All right, what did she say. Tell me please her words exactly."

"Your daughter, Madam, said, 'Isn't it enough that the world is full of ugly human beings without making copies of them?' Then she took the doll by the legs and broke her head against a rock."

"Tell me, Mademoiselle Bleuserbes, does this conduct seem natural to you in a little girl of good family?"

"No, Madam."

"And you're responsible for this little girl and for her conduct. I shall give you a few more months to prove that you can make a normal little girl of her. Otherwise … "

Mademoiselle Bleuserbes silently clenched her hands on her scrawny chest.

"Where is my daughter at the moment?"

"She is in the garden, Madam."

"And what is she doing in the garden?"

"She is looking for something."

"Please be good enough to tell my daughter that I want to see her immediately."

The governess hastened from the room. Soon after she returned with her charge: a girl very tall for her age.

"You may go, Mademoiselle," the mother said. "Come here, Jemima."

As the girl came forward, her mother could see her eyes sparkling through her hair.

"Push back the hair from your face and look at yourself in the mirror."

Jemima shrugged her shoulders and looked at herself in the mirror, without great interest.

"Whom do you see in the mirror?"

"Myself."

"All right, tell me if you think you're beautiful."

"More than most people."

"Right, you are quite good looking, and you could become a very beautiful woman. But if you continue to behave in this ridiculous way … "

They looked at each other without speaking. The expression on the mother's face was very cold.

"Why do you want to be different from other little girls your age?"

Jemima suppressed a smile. "I don't understand, Mother."

“You understand me very well, Jemima. Why do you want to hurt your mother who loves you like her own flesh?”

Jemima closed her mouth into a cold, hard line.

“Your mother who does everything for you, and to whom you owe eternal gratitude. Your mother whom you’ll never ever replace, your mother who only wants the best for you.”

The girl spat on the beautiful carpet and disappeared so quickly that she was gone by the time her mother realized what she had done. She was stunned and put her hands to her forehead.

“Ferdinand,” the mother murmured, “what did you do to me when you gave me that she-devil?”

Outdoors, the girl hid herself in the branches of a great tree. There, in the green shade, she gave way to a fit of laughter. The tears ran down her cheeks, and she thought she’d choke on her own uncontrollable mirth. She came to, shaking, her face wet with tears and sweat. She saw her father Ferdinand walking in the garden with a man she didn’t know. It seemed to her that this man had the head of a wolf. Intrigued, she bent forward to see better. “It’s the changing shadows that produce the impression,” she said to herself. “But I’m sure he’s got the head of a wolf. He’s devilishly beautiful, damn it, more beautiful than other men.”

They walked towards her while they talked, and she saw with regret that he had a human head and not a wolf’s head after all. But she continued to listen and look at the man with interest. With his untidy grey hair and thin face, he really did look more like an animal than a man; close-up, his yellow eyes had a hunted look. His clothes were very correct.

“There’s a strange disease that’s attacked my hens,” Ferdinand said, and stretched out on the grass near Jemima’s tree. “My chickens have an illness that makes them lose their heads.”

His companion threw him a questioning look.

“I suspect a fox is making mischief for me. That animal is the most perverse in the world. I’ve put my most ferocious dog to guard the henhouse, but in spite of this, every morning another chicken succumbs. I’ve even left a servant there all night with a gun. That gave the fox second thoughts, and he didn’t come for some time. Now that there’s nobody there except the dogs, he’s started up again, and there are decapitated hens and roosters every morning.”

The wolf-man thought about this for a few moments. Jemima looked at his face anxiously: “What will he say, what will he say, the wolf-man?”

“I know a lot about the habits of animals,” he said finally. “Perhaps I could see a few of the poor chicken corpses? I’m surprised nobody heard the dogs bark. A fox has a very strong smell….” It seemed to Jemima, pale and trembling in the shadow of the leaves, that the wolf-man was looking straight into her eyes, although she thought she couldn’t be seen.

“You can study them as much as you like during your stay here, my dear Ambrose.”

“You’re too kind, Ferdinand, dear friend. But your house, and especially your garden, inspire laziness rather than study.”

He had an expressionless voice, as if he’d only just learned to speak, as if he were pronouncing words to learn them rather than to make sense. The human language is strange on his lips, Jemima thought.

Soon after, the two men got up and went off towards the house. Jemima climbed down from her tree and went towards an old shed nobody but she used. She entered through a hole in the wall. Inside, a great number of objects threw distorted shadows on the ground at her feet. Fifty or so different kinds of poultry ornamented the walls, all more or less successfully treated with some crude preservative. Each head had lost its tongue, and these now rested in a bottle filled with a liquid. Jemima shook the bottle lovingly, and saw that a dozen or so of the tongues had sprouted little white roots.

In a dark corner of the hut something moved. Jemima began to speak. “Yes, we’ll soon be having supper. There’s something very good today. We’ve got a tart dough made by the cook, flies and wasps caught by me. I hope everybody’s going to like it.”

She took a red tablecloth and spread it on the ground, then brought a large tart out of an iron box. From an innermost recess she brought out a cage which she opened, and a very large bat jumped heavily onto the tablecloth. She was very fat, and seven little bats were suckling at her seven nipples. Jemima whistled on two fingers, and three black cats jumped in at the window. Everybody began to eat.

“The flies taste good today,” Jemima said with her mouth full. “I fed them myself with sugar, cream and well-rotted meat. It gives them a taste

fruity and delicate. We shall drink some wine since today is a holiday for us."

The wine came out of the same box as the tart. *Chateau des Fines Roches, 1929*. All the animals drank from the same bowl as Jemima; they liked the wine very much. She took a musical instrument and made some melancholy but wild music.

"Dance, Jemima, dance," Jemima sang. "Dance, you heavy and beautiful creature."

The bat jumped up and down on the tablecloth, with her seven little ones still hanging from her nipples. She beat her wings, and seemed to be in a delirium of joy. The three cats sat looking on immobile, with only their tails moving in rhythm like snakes; the setting sun shone through the hole in the wall, throwing a patch of light on the ground, and suddenly a shadow appeared in the patch of light, perhaps the shadow of a wolf's head, but when Jemima turned, there was nobody there. The cats jumped out of the window with long cries. Soon Jemima heard her governess calling her in the garden. She left the shed by the hole, murmuring imprecations against all old whores of dirty governesses on earth and everywhere else as well. As she was passing a group of trees already stirring with nocturnal inhabitants, lots of little insects got caught by their wings in her hair and she ate them, spitting out their scaly feet.

"Where have you been, Jemima?" the governess asked. "You're late for supper. Tell me, where were you?"

"Nowhere," Jemima said.

Mademoiselle Bleuserbes sighed.

"Go and change your dress and wash your hands and face. Hurry up, please."

Jemima went upstairs to her room, which had been hers since she was born. All her toys, books and clothes were here, and this was also where she had her meals. Her supper was already on the table: a cup of milk, some biscuits and fruit. She looked at the food with a contemptuous smile, poured the milk into a flowerpot, and ignored the biscuits. Then she dressed with great care. Mademoiselle Bleuserbes was astonished to see her pupil so tidy and carefully dressed. They went down to the drawing room where Ferdinand and Wolf (that was what Jemima called him) were having supper.

Amelia, her mother, a little apart from the men, was arranging flowers. Ferdinand kissed Jemima and presented her to Wolf.

"This is Jemima. I want you to meet Ambrose Barbary. He's asked me to send for you so that you should make his acquaintance."

Jemima's hands were shaking and damp, her face burned when she looked into the wild eyes of Wolf.

"Ambrose Barbary can tell you a lot of interesting things about the wild animals you like so much. He has studied their habits closely and is a very cultivated man."

Wolf smiled, displaying his pointed teeth.

"I'm afraid Jemima isn't yet ready to talk with cultivated people," said Amelia with a sour smile. "I'm afraid Mr. Barbary will find our daughter very ignorant."

Jemima turned a quick look full of hatred on her mother, but she was studying her flower arrangement. Wolf broke into a fierce laugh.

"I can't believe that your daughter is ignorant. She has such very bright eyes. Come, Jemima, and drink a little from my glass to show that we are friends."

Jemima drank, looking at her mother in triumph.

"I have a present for you, little girl," Wolf continued. "But I don't want you to look at it right away. Open the parcel when you're in bed. I know that little girls love presents."

He looked very closely at Jemima as he was speaking.

"Here it is. It isn't a very big parcel, but I think you're going to like it."

Jemima took the parcel in her hands and felt something soft, something hard. She was burning with curiosity.

"Tomorrow you can tell me whether you like my present," Wolf said. "We'll go for a little walk together before breakfast. You get up early, don't you?"

"At six o'clock."

"I'll be waiting for you near the large cypress on the lawn at six-thirty."

"It's time for bed, Jemima," said her mother.

And Jemima went off to her room. When she was alone, she hurriedly opened the parcel … and let out a stifled cry. What she held in her hand was the head of a rooster, its eyes fixed in death. This was no ordinary rooster. Jemima had never seen such a bird. It was five times larger than any other

rooster, and white, completely white. Even its comb and beak were white. Jemima bent her head and kissed it three times. “Oh creature from countries I long to see, beautiful creature, incomparable rooster.” She remained thus a long time looking at the rooster in her hands. It was almost midnight before she went to bed, the rooster’s head pressed tight to her heart. All night she had nightmares in which Wolf’s head appeared, but attached now to a long, grey, furry body. Sometimes he was a wolf, sometimes a fox or other animal, sometimes the body of all animals mixed with his own.

At four o’clock Jemima jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The moon was still floating in the sky. She saw a shadow gliding hither and thither in the garden. She recognized it though it changed into plant, bird, animal, man. She went silently down into the garden with the rooster’s head in her nightgown and followed the shadow without being noticed, making sure no trace of her scent traveled ahead of her. She knew she was following Wolf, but couldn’t distinguish the precise form of his body. When she saw it in the moonlight, she saw a man. He was walking about aimlessly. From time to time he bent down and picked some plant which he ate immediately. Suddenly he stopped, and Jemima saw the vegetation around him move like live arms. He was talking with the plants, and they replied with gestures. Jemima sighed, and Wolf discovered her.

“Was it curiosity that led you here?” Wolf asked.

“I wanted to be with you. I followed you. You’re so beautiful.”

Wolf came close to her and touched her hair.

“As harsh as bramble thorns,” he murmured. “There are claws hidden in your hair.”

“Thorns and claws,” Jemima said in a neutral voice.

“Did you notice I was being followed by shadows?”

“They’ve gone.”

“They’re dangerous shadows for us. For you …”

“I don’t understand any of that. Tell me what you were eating just now.”

“Plants. If I eat enough of them, my skin will turn green. Then I shall be even more beautiful, and you’ll throw yourself at me.”

Jemima touched his face with her fingertips. His skin was very smooth. She had the feeling that his face was changing colour while they talked. Then the sun came up, yellow like the eye of a tiger. The nocturnal animals shivered in the new light and went to hide themselves. Jemima looked about

her in great surprise. Everything had changed in a few seconds, and she was alone. The last picture she had of Wolf was like a whiplash. She felt sure that he'd been covered in fur glowing in all colours of the sky. He'd disappeared so totally into the vegetation that she thought she'd seen leaves right through his body, that he himself had then been changed into a plant.

She wept with despair. She noticed she was wearing nothing but a nightgown, so crumpled it hardly covered her body. Her feet were bare and covered in earth. She had never experienced such acute loneliness, and the tears that flowed into the corners of her mouth tasted bitter like poisonous plants. She wiped her face with her hair and went back into the house. There she washed her feet to get rid of the traces of her strange expedition. But her feet had changed. She bent down to see better and to satisfy herself that a metamorphosis had really occurred. Fine, soft fur had grown between her toes, a fur that stopped on the instep where she found little hairs barely visible to the naked eye. With gaping mouth she looked at her two feet and murmured, "I'm of the same blood. Will I be as beautiful as he? I have to take care of this beautiful fur so that it grows more. What wonderful changes will I see in just a few days?" She laughed and cried gently for a long time without lifting her eyes from her feet.

The whole day the sun beat down hard on the garden. Jemima did not leave her room. She hid her three treasures from curious eyes—her two feet and the rooster's head. Her governess went in from time to time, but Jemima said nothing to her efforts at conversation.

Mademoiselle Bleuserbes was very disturbed by her pupil's new capriciousness. She burned with curiosity and tried to make her pupil speak.

"Are you ill? Why are you looking out of the window all the time? You might as well go out and play in the garden. Answer me immediately, Jemima, are you ill?"

But the girl said nothing, keeping a scornful silence.

"If you don't have the courtesy to reply when I speak to you, you won't have any jam at teatime."

Jemima burst out laughing. The governess left the room in a rage.

Jemima continued her long vigil by the window, trying to catch sight of the wolf. Every shadow that moved in the garden made her tremble. She hoped to see his face once more, even from afar.

By the time the sun set she was desperate. She went into the garden and walked left and right, circled the house looking in every window, asked the trees and stones. “Where is he? Where is he?” Finally she ran into the forest, hoping to find him there. The brambles tore at her legs, but she didn’t even notice. When night fell she approached the house again, meeting a servant who cried out at the sight of her bloody face and her crazed look.

“Where’s the gentleman who stayed here last night?” she called in a hoarse voice. “Answer me immediately, I’ve got to know.”

The servant shook her head. “Goodness, Miss, I don’t know….” She wanted to run off, but Jemima took her by the arm, pressing her nails into her skin until the girl cried out with pain.

“Somebody left a while back … a tall man with grey hair, but please let me go, you’re hurting me….” Jemima’s face suddenly looked like a death’s head.

“Gone? Gone?”

“With his luggage. Now let me go in peace.”

Jemima didn’t see her any more, she wanted nothing. She only felt the blood running from her mouth. She was alone. Heavy, black shadows floated in front of her and were lost on the road to the mountains. Looking the other way towards the house, she saw her mother combing her hair. She looked on indifferently at the flabby, blurred body like a fat cloud.

“Cow,” murmured Jemima, “what a cow.” Then she sighed and began to follow the line of trees until she was stopped by a blast of wind so icy that she began to sob with pain. At that moment she heard quick footsteps behind her, and a wolf dashed by near her legs with a cry like the voice of the wind.

“This is the right road,” she thought, and she made her way right through the wind, which swept behind her. Higher up, snow came down heavily, and Jemima cried icy tears. She found herself in a forest with trees more enormous than cathedrals. The clouds trailing amongst the branches were entwined together into black knots. Birds fell dead to the ground, and even the rocks bled torrents of ice. Jemima put her hands in her hair and found that it had become hard as wood and resonated like a primitive musical instrument. Several emaciated animals passed, ignoring her.

She decided to climb a tree to look around. Once at the staggering height of the top branches, she could see a great distance. There was nothing but miles of forest and a gigantic castle. The towers of this castle stuck out above the highest trees and seemed to have been built up on a mountain. She looked at it for a long time, until she suddenly noticed a little hand near her own. The little hand horrified her, and she didn't dare move. Somebody at her shoulder laughed, and she knew it came from the owner of the hand. Trembling, she turned her head slowly and saw a little boy or little girl; it was impossible to guess to which sex this pale, fragile being belonged. It must be mad to look at me like that, Jemima thought, and fear grabbed her by the throat.

"That's my father's castle," the child said. "I am Mimoo, his darling little boy, and I give you permission to look at my father's castle."

"You're a boy, are you?" Jemima said, trying to move away from the disagreeable smell of his body.

"As you like. I can see you aren't very intelligent, but that doesn't matter. It's too much to ask for intelligence and company all at once. How old are you?"

"I'm thirteen. And you?"

The little boy burst out into a laugh, which was strangled by a nasty cough.

"Thirteen?" he exclaimed. "Thirteen. You must be a giant. Maybe that's why you're so stupid. It's known all giants are stupid. I'm twenty today. You're allowed to kiss me."

"I don't want to."

Mimoo's face came close. "You're wrong. Don't you think I'm handsome?"

Jemima examined his little girl's face and found it pretty, but repulsive.

"Perhaps I do and perhaps I don't. But I don't want you to touch me."

"Mummy and I look very young for our age, we're proud of our delicate beauty. Daddy isn't like us. He's ugly like everybody who lives around here. He's as ugly as you, like an animal. We on the other hand, I mean mother and I, look like angels. I'm glad not to look like my father."

Jemima clenched her hands on her chest where her heart beat wildly.

"How is your father? Tell me quickly, or I'll throw you into the forest."

Mimoo looked at her in slight surprise.

“How brutal you are! But one’s always got to be tolerant of inferior animals. My father is like all animals of the forest, no more. A fox, a wolf, a cat, an eagle, a stag, a horse, a rooster … anyway, you get on my nerves.”

“Take me to your father’s castle. I’m very cold, and I haven’t eaten since yesterday.”

“You’ll be even colder up there. And anyway, it’s more fun here.”

“I want to go to your father’s castle, and if you don’t want to come with me I’ll kill you first and then go by myself.”

Mimoo laughed softly. “Tell me your name and promise to play the games I play and I’ll take you there.”

“Jemima,” said Jemima impatiently. “And I promise. Let’s go quickly or I’ll die of cold.”

They both climbed down the tree, and Jemima felt as if she were descending into a cave in the middle of the earth. At the foot of the tree stood a bicycle made of wood, like the first bicycles ever made, with a huge wheel in front and a tiny wheel behind. It was only now that she realized that Mimoo was dressed in a flimsy nightdress, and that his feet were bare. He jumped on his bicycle and took Jemima’s hand, dragging her along behind him. The bicycle went slowly, jumping from side to side. The forest was frozen in a deathly silence. Since being with Mimoo, she hadn’t seen a single living creature except for a hyena walking behind them sniffing the air.

“Are you afraid of that hyena,” she asked. “Why are you looking at it with such bulging eyes?”

“If I went to sleep it’d eat me. That’s why it is following us,” he said with a light laugh. “I don’t fancy being put into its dirty stomach.”

“Hyenas only eat rotten meat,” Jemima said.

“You’re a complete idiot,” Mimoo said. “Idiot, idiot,” he sang. “She’s an idiot, she’s blind, the poor child.” And he almost fell off his bicycle, he was laughing so much.

“His smell … it’s the smell of … meat, of rotting meat…” she thought, but decided to say nothing.

As they approached the castle, the cold became even more intense, but Mimoo didn’t seem to notice. His little face, as white as snow, wore a peaceful expression. Large lamps lit up the bridge that spanned the moat of the castle. Jemima, who had thought that Mimoo’s long curly hair was

blond, now saw that his hair was white and sparse like the hair of an old woman. This blur of hair floated about his face like smoke from a cigarette. Then, in the light of the lamps, she noticed his hands: shriveled like the paws of a monkey, with nails bitten to the quick.

They entered the courtyard of the castle by a vast gate and then went into the castle itself. Here nothing moved, and there was no living being anywhere. Even the furniture looked withered. Jemima put her hand on a chair and was horrified to see it crumble to dust before her eyes. She stood still, her hands pressed to her throat to smother a cry. She thought she would go mad with terror. Mimoo looked at her with interest, and a little smile played about his lips.

"We'll go play in the garden," he said. "Remember, you promised."

The garden was in the middle of the castle. A big crow was tapping the earth with its beak. Jemima went to look and saw a flat stone that carried the following inscription,

Our darling little Mimoo. Died 10 June 1900.

She turned on Mimoo with a cry of rage.

"Corpse, you dirty corpse!"

Now she understood everything, and the crow flew around Mimoo's head with hungry cries. Jemima started to run through the huge castle and was soon lost in a labyrinth of rooms like enormous coffins. The rooms were empty and endless, one after another, and enclosed a suffocating cold. Finally, worn out with fatigue, she lay down on an enormous stone and read the words carved on it in deep gothic letters,

Here lies Ambrose Barbary and his wife Lucind. Wolf, dear Master, do not walk too often in the footsteps of the living.

NOTE ON THE PUBLICATION

The grouping (but not always the ordering) of these stories is based on the volumes in which most of them made their original U.S. appearance: *The House of Fear: Notes from Down Below* and *The Seventh Horse and Other Tales*, both published by E.P. Dutton in 1988 (edited by Marina Warner and Paul De Angelis). The approximate dates of composition listed at the end of each story are taken from the textual notes to these two volumes, and were established in collaboration with the author herself. The final three stories appear here in publication for the first time.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

The following stories were translated from the French by Kathrine Talbot with Marina Warner: “The Debutante,” “The Oval Lady,” “The Royal Summons,” “A Man in Love,” “Uncle Sam Carrington,” and “The House of Fear.”

The following stories were translated from the French by Kathrine Talbot: “As They Rode Along the Edge,” “Pigeon, Fly!,” “The Three Hunters,” “Monsieur Cyril de Guindre,” “The Sisters,” “Cast Down by Sadness,” and “The Neutral Man.”

The following stories were translated from the Spanish by Anthony Kerrigan: *“Et in bellicus lunarum medicalis”* and “How to Start a Pharmaceuticals Business.”

LEONORA CARRINGTON was a key figure in the Surrealist movement and an artist of remarkable individuality. She was born in 1917 to a wealthy English family, later lived in France with fellow Surrealist Max Ernst, and eventually fled Europe, first for New York City and then for Mexico, where she died in 2011. Throughout her long career, Carrington published novels, stories, and plays, in addition to making paintings, sculptures, and tapestries.

KATHRYN DAVIS is the author of seven novels, the most recent of which is *Duplex*. She has received a Kafka Prize for fiction by an American woman, both the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award and the Katherine Anne Porter Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 2006, she won the Lannan Foundation Literary Award. She is the senior fiction writer on the faculty of The Writing Program at Washington University in St. Louis.

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