

Enrique Anderson Imbert

THE GRIMOIRE
(El Grimorio)

(If you are looking for a particular story in this book, you can find it by using Control f, and then filling in the title of the story.)

Part I

PROLOGUE

I started to publish short stories at the age of seventeen. The first was “The Evil of Juan Rovsk,”—in 1927, in a newspaper of La Plata, where I was living at the time. When I returned to Buenos Aires, I used to publish stories in La Nación, beginning in 1930, and then, by 1940, in Sur and other magazines. Now I have touched them up and put them together in “The Grimoire.”

Actually this title corresponds to only one story, but I would like to think that the entire collection is related to it. In the Middle Ages a Grimoire was a book about magic. There is something of this in stories that, with creative effort, eliminate the physical world, play around with space and time, and from chaos create a new universe. When the material of a story is real, some spells can still change things or, in reverse, unmake them with a surprising final effect.

The series, which extends from “Peter the Lightweight,” (El Leve Pedro) to “Events” (Casos), has a short historical bibliography. Lune de Cendre (Buenos Aires, La Vanguardia, 1933), together with the texts of “The Ash Moon,” (Luna de Ceniza) and the translation of Manoel Gahisto, had just appeared in La Revue Argentine in Paris. Daniel Devoto edited that story for me, along with three others, in El Mentir de las Estrellas (Buenos Aires, El Ángel Gulab, 1940); and all of them finally formed part of The Proofs of Chaos (Las Pruebas del Caos) La Plata, Yerba Buena, 1946.

The rest of the series from “The Grimoire” (El Grimorio) to “More Events” (Mas Casos) is now published in book form for the first time. They are stories from different dates, between 1930 and 1960.

Would it be wrong for me to say that my fantasies were ahead of the times, that my literary sources are from the English library in my home, that my vision of life—from solipsism to existentialism—was formulated thanks to what I read in the old Korn, that my prose took shape thanks to the verbal style of Pedro Henríquez Ureña, that my artistic strategies of narrating began as exercises I learned from the humble O. Henry, and the not so humble Chesterton, that since the number of plots is limited, the similarity to older stories is inevitable and, therefore, the only originality that really matters is that of poetic intuition?

Buenos Aires, 1961.

E. A. I.

THE LIGHTWEIGHT PEDRO (El leve Pedro)

For two months there was talk of dying. The doctor was complaining that this was a new illness, that there was no cure for it, and that he didn't know what to do... Luckily, the patient began to get better, all by himself. He hadn't lost his good humor, and his ordinary natural calmness. He was too weak, and that was all. But when he was able to get up after several weeks of convalescence, he felt weightless.

"You know," he said to his wife, "I'm feeling all right but, strangely, my body seems sort of... absent. I feel as if my membranes are coming off, leaving my soul naked."

"You're still recovering," his wife responded.

"Perhaps."

He continued recovering. He walked around the house, he fed the chickens and the pigs, he gave a coat of green paint to the noisy bird house and was even able to chop wood and take it in a wheelbarrow to the shed. But as the days went by, Pedro's flesh lost its density. Something very strange was excavating, undermining, and emptying his body. He felt an extraordinary weightlessness. It was the weightlessness of a spark, of a bubble, or a balloon. It took no effort to jump easily over a gate, to climb the stairs five at a time, or to leap up and pick an apple.

"You have improved so much," his wife said, "that you seem like an acrobatic child."

One morning Pedro became frightened. Until then his agility had worried him, but all things happen according to God's will. It was extraordinary, but without trying to he was converting the steps of a normal human being into an eager, rapid race across the farm. It was extraordinary, but not miraculous. What was miraculous happened that morning.

He went out into the paddock very early. He walked carefully, because he knew that if he didn't, he would start bouncing through the corral. He rolled up his sleeves, he picked up a log, he raised the axe, and made the first blow. Then, driven back by the impulse of his first chop, Pedro started flying through the air. Still holding onto the axe, he rose up to the level of the rooftop and then slowly began falling, like the down of a thistle. His wife came out when Pedro had finished descending and, as pale as death, he grabbed hold of a large log.

"Hebe, I almost fell into the sky!"

"Nonsense. You can't fall into the sky. Nobody falls into the sky. What happened to you?"

Pedro explained to his wife what had happened and, without showing any sign of being surprised, she scolded him:

"This is what comes from your trying to be an acrobat. I already warned you about that. One of these days you are going to break your neck with one of your pirouettes."

"No, no! This is different," Pedro insisted. "I slipped. The sky is a precipice, Hebe."

Pedro let go of the log he was holding onto, and took a firm hold of his wife. While he continued to hold her, the two of them walked back into the house.

"Come on now," said Hebe, who felt that her body was stuck to her husband like that of some very young animal that was eager to run off in a dizzying gallop. "Let go of me, you're dragging me! Go ahead and take a few steps, and see if you are going to fly."

“Did you see, did you see? Something horrible is threatening me, Hebe. A little slip and the ascent begins.”

That afternoon, as Pedro was lounging on the patio reading a newspaper, he began to laugh convulsively. With the propulsion of this happy exploit, he suddenly flew upward, like a feather pushed by the wind. His laughter became terror, and Hebe hurried to help him when she heard her husband shouting. She managed to catch hold of his pants and pulled him back to the ground. She no longer had any doubt. Hebe filled his pockets with stones and pieces of lead, and those weights gave his body enough solidity to cross the verandah and climb the stairs to his room. The trouble began when Hebe removed the stones and the lead. Pedro began quivering above the sheets, he held onto the side of the bed, and cautioned:

“Careful, Hebe! We are going to have to do this slowly, because I don’t want to sleep on the ceiling.”

“Tomorrow we will call the doctor.”

“If I can just stay quiet, nothing will happen to me. It’s only when I am too active that I become airborne.”

After taking many precautions, he was finally able to lie down on the bed and feel safe.

“Do you feel like you are going to lift up?”

“No, I don’t think so.” They said goodnight, and Hebe turned off the light.

The next morning when she opened her eyes, Hebe saw Pedro sleeping soundly with his face pressed against the ceiling. He looked like a helium balloon that had escaped from the hands of a child.

“Pedro, Pedro,” she shouted, terrified.

After that Pedro woke up, pained by the length of time he had spent pressed against the ceiling. What a fright! He tried to jump in reverse, to fall from above. But he seemed to be stuck to the ceiling like Hebe was stuck to the floor.

“We are going to have to put a rope around my leg and tie me to the wardrobe, until we can call the doctor and see what is wrong.”

Hebe looked for a ladder and a rope, which she tied to his foot and then began to pull as hard as she could. The body attached to the ceiling began to descend like a slow moving dirigible. Finally, it landed.

Just then, a gust of wind came through the door and caught Pedro’s weightless body, blowing him out through the open window. It happened in a second. Hebe let out a cry, and the rope slipped out of her hands. When she ran to the window, her husband was already disappearing, rising through the morning air like a balloon that escaped on the day of a fiesta, climbing into the infinite. He became a small dot, and then nothing

THE DETERMINISTIC ELVES (Los Duendes Deterministas)

Alicia has climbed up the paths on the mountain and now the jungle has trapped her in an empty hollow. Her disturbed eyes show that she is anxious. She does not seem to be tired, even though she has travelled a long way. Her violet dress that has been torn by brambles is so luminous that, when she moves, she looks like a ballerina lit by a spotlight, as the sun filters through breaks in the foliage.

Alicia

Isn't there an elf somewhere around here?

There is a rustling sound, and a young boy comes out of the thicket. He is holding a knife in his hand, while sharpening the end of a branch.

Boy:

Yes, I am.

Alicia:

You? You are no elf.

Boy:

As you like.

He walks away, still working on the branch. She follows him up the side of the mountain.

Alicia:

Hello Elves! Isn't there at least one elf, just one who can hear me?

The voice of the elf:

I hear you. What do you want?

Alicia:

Come here. *(The boy appears.)* You again?

Boy:

You called me.

Alicia:

Not you. I called an elf.

Boy:

That is what I am.

Alicia:

You? Get out of here. *(Shouting)* Hello, elves, elves! *(The boy starts to walk away. She watches him carefully.)* Listen, can you do a miracle?

Boy:

A miracle?

Alicia:

Yes. Elves are supposed to do miracles, something impossible that suddenly becomes possible. I don't know... Could you, for example... paint something in the air?

Boy:

If I use the garden hose, I can paint you a rainbow in the air.

Alicia:

Bah! You're no elf. Not even a student of physics.

She walks away. The boy watches her intently while she—with a small waist, rounded hips, and bare legs—climbs on up the hill.

Boy:

And what if I perform a miracle for you?

Alicia:

Well, let's see.

Boy:

A miracle... just a small one, all right?

Alicia:

Let's see.

Boy:

But you will have to keep it secret as long as you live.

Alicia:

I promise.

The boy looks all around and, assured that they are alone, he snaps his fingers and a deer appears, filled with water, trembling and transparent. As it walks not even a drop spills off him. One hears the music of a rippling liquid. It has coral antlers, and a medusa is swimming in the water of its body. It breaks the small branches of the bushes—a green dust falls to the bottom of the bowl of its belly, next to the sand and the algae—and it calmly walks away through the thicket.

Alicia:

Oh, how beautiful! I guess you really are an elf.

Boy:

Remember! You promised not to tell anyone.

Alicia:

What are you afraid of?

Boy:

Elves aren't supposed to do magic.

Alicia:

That can't be true! If you are elves, it's to do magic!

Boy:

That was before. I am the son of the King of the Elves, and I know what I am saying.

Alicia:

(Inspecting him.) You don't seem like an elf. You seem like a boy from my country. You dress the same way... When you saw me, did you think I was an elf?

Boy:

No. *(Smiling.)* You are very nervous, and your eyes are shining brightly. Now the elves are serious and calm. How did you happen to come here?

Alicia:

I don't know. I wanted to do something that no one had ever thought of. So, doing everything in reverse, I arrived at this forest. Now it seems that I am in the country of the elves.

Boy:

Yes, true. Soon you will see my father, since his Court is about to meet here.

Alicia:

Here?

Boy:

It's a tradition. This is where Otl, the Adam of the elves, lived. No one knows why he appeared. Perhaps he was bored with solitude. Anyway, he performed the first miracle: from his own being came brand new elves. The miracle was so violent that Otl was left

without strength, and all that kept him alive was the desire to smile at his new-born children who looked at him without understanding, through eyes that were not yet quite awake. You need to know that elves get older with each act of magic. The more demanding it is, the less life we still have. Before, there were elves that suddenly died because they gave themselves the pleasure of meddling with the stars. The elf that doesn't do magic lives longer. So for health reasons, it's best not to do magic. As I told you, this is the place where, in honor of Otl, my father's Court is going to meet. But don't think that our country is as wild as this mountain. No! We have cities that are just as marvelous as yours.

Alicia:

How do you know that?

Boy:

That's what they told me.

Alicia:

Who forbade you to do magic?

Boy:

My father. When he was a child they sent him to study with men, and he returned when it was time for him to rule. They say that at first it was very difficult for him. He had difficulty adapting, because the customs of the elves upset him. Of course, in those days the elves lived freely. The air, and everything else, was agitated by the violent effect of elf magic that was constantly moving and changing everything. That was when my father decided to promote the stable virtues of human customs. The elves' magic was primitive, chaotic, vulgar, and facile, contrary to the noble example of human uniformity, which was always the same, regular in its habits, with ideals of social organization based on the geometry of an ant hill. Little by little, the things he preached were converted into a political movement. There was some resistance and opposition, but he made converts and soon supporters of an orderly life were more numerous than rebels. He established a new order. Since then, the elves do not do magic.

Alicia:

And how do you live then?

Boy:

More or less like you. Humans are now our measuring stick: magic is not something a man could do, and therefore, neither should elves because magic is immoral. We study your customs carefully, your books, your technologies, and we follow your example in everything. But it's not easy for us. Imagine constructing stairs and then having to climb them, like you, taking one stair at a time when, with only one movement of our legs, we could ascend to the highest tower! That, beside the fact that we don't have any need to live in towers. But in the end, we grew accustomed to it. Now my father sends the least

imaginative elves to live among you, and when they return he gives them important functions. I haven't gone because I am not very intelligent. It is very difficult for me to imitate you. (*The sound of a bugle is heard. After that, marching feet.*) Ah, here comes my father, the King! Come, I will introduce you.

Alicia:

Wait, wait!

Alicia drags the boy away, and together they hide behind some bushes. Soldiers dressed in red with multicolored banners pass by. A band marches in, playing music. The King and the Queen, holding hands, enter with great pomp, escorted by their courtiers. Their majesty is disturbed when they have to look for a place to sit on the rugged surface of the rocks. It is easy to see that the Queen does not find the uneven surface comfortable to sit on. The band finishes playing. Silence. Once again, a bugle plays. Several soldiers enter leading shackled prisoners. An official in a black toga explains to the King the crime that has been committed.

King:

(*To the elf prisoners.*) Does neither persuasion nor punishment convince you to accept our ideal of conduct? Why do you not follow our example? Look at me. Look at these nobles and learned gentlemen. We have all renounced the privileges of magic. At any time one can predict our future, because we have committed ourselves to the idea that all we do must be based on predetermined causes. But if you persist in doing magic, who could tell what role you played yesterday, or the figure you will choose tomorrow? Who can trust in an elf who does not behave logically? So let's see; what have you done?

The first prisoner:

I didn't think they would spy on me. I was alone (at least that's what I thought), I was by myself on the mountain top. Not even a cloud. The dense blue of the morning had enveloped my naked body; and with every breath it also bathed me inside with warm waves. I felt like a fish at the bottom of this ocean of air, an ocean as old as life that does not care about an elf. Then I thought about other inhabited oceans; I thought about the water, and the fish that live there, as enclosed by water as much as I am enclosed by the air. And as I thought about fish, my mouth turned to water, and I couldn't resist the temptation. I created a cloud with fish swimming in warm oil and caught the biggest one.

Murmurs in the Court.

King:

And you're not even ashamed! Couldn't you have put off your hunger and come down the mountain and bought a fishing pole and a hook so you could go to the river and, after a while, come back with your catch to invite your family once it was cooked?

The first prisoner:

Yes, but these days the rivers have hardly any fish, and sometimes not even water. You would have to travel a long way, without really needing to. And the fish from that cloud was *so* delicious!

King:

Blockhead! Have you ever seen your King, or your Lords, abandon something because it took effort? Soldiers, take away this elf. And make sure that he is obliged to use a fishing pole to fish until next spring. And You?

The second prisoner:

I like the feeling of love that I invent. I walk alone on the road and I invent a woman in each place I see. With grapes, I make buxom women for my love making. With a flowering peach tree, I invent rosy women who do whatever I want.

King:

Have you ever thought what it would be like if all of us did what you have done? We would be just like before. There would be no marriages, and no more families.

The second prisoner:

(Astonished.) Yes, but from my invented loves, real children have been born, children that are as beautiful as you could imagine!

King:

But they are not legitimate children. When a man finds a woman who already exists, he takes a chance when he makes a family, and all the rest. But that way, the children know who their eight great-grandparents were.

The second prisoner:

Even though the man doesn't know who his woman is?

King:

Take him away. And see that he marries a widow. And you?

The third prisoner:

I'm not very smart. I don't even know who I am. The other day, I put my hand on my mustache and realized it wasn't a mustache, but a whale. Then I understood that I was

the sea. Sometimes I don't understand what is required of me, or what I should do. They have put shackles on me. Isn't that funny? We all know that shackles are no good on the hands of an elf. Any one of us can do what I do.

And without effort he takes off the shackles and tosses them in the air. However, they don't fall, because the third prisoner wiggles his fingers and the shackles dance around to the rhythm of the happy sound of music. The King is furious and he shouts: "Enough, enough!" However, nothing changes, and he covers his eyes until the music stops.

King:

How dare you, you idiot! In the presence of your King? (*Sighing sadly.*) Take him out and behead him.

Alicia rushes out. The King's son follows, trying to stop her.

Alicia:

No, no, you can't do that. You can't behead an elf, because he is an elf.

King:

Nonsense. Men behead other men, even though they are men. Who are you anyway? Who is she, son?

Boy:

She has come from the country where men live, Papa.

King:

(Speaking timidly, flattered by the presence of a creature he considers his superior.)
Oh! Then, welcome!

Alicia:

You are very kind, but I have seen the sort of justice you have been administering. Why don't you leave these poor elves in peace? Why do you have to be so cruel when it is not necessary?

King:

My child, we are trying to do the best we can. You haven't seen anything yet. You have just come to our country. When you get to know it, you will recognize the arts, the institutions, the laws, and the customs of men. We have copied all of them. If it seems cruel to you, it is because we are trying so hard to defend our ideal.

Alicia:

But is it possible you can't see that elves are much superior to men? If only men could do miracles! All of us would like to live a life that is at least as free as the one we can imagine. Ah, if men could only be like elves! And you, who are elves and are already more free and independent than we are... you want to be like men?

King:

You are calling chaos freedom. We elves are elemental creatures, like the dust that dances in the rays of the sun; we are capricious and anarchical.

Alicia:

God uses life to create souls that are free... capricious and anarchical, like you say.

King:

If God creates something, it has to be some modest work of pottery, and not an infinite disintegration. That way the world has some value, at least something worth considering. Your spiritualistic philosophers upset God by talking about what they call "Free will." Free will, Bah! Free will is only the clay of the first days of creation. Are we going to be satisfied with that? No, we have to bring together all the different forms of clay and heat them over a slow fire. Remember: God, the First Potter.

Alicia:

(Looking at him fixedly.) Yes, I think I am beginning to understand you. You want everything, even life, to be just like when the stone falls. Meanwhile, all those who live are prisoners, trapped behind the bars of that accursed prison, behind the predetermined bars of cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect!

King:

Listen to what I am going to tell you. The life that is produced by cause and effect is not a prison; it is a refuge, a temple, a work of art, the light of the eyes of God. When you speak of freedom, you think that God is pleased by your spirituality. Nothing of the sort. If God was really interested in what you call freedom, elves would be his favorites, and I am telling you that He ignores us! We do not suit Him. He is only interested in the material creations of his pottery. Glaciers, winds, storms, volcanos, and the sea; these agents of erosion are the fingers of God. Your religions try to get His attention, flattering Him with songs and sacrifices; but the only sacrifice that pleases Him is when life calms down and sinks into the stillness of matter. When I went to study in your universities, they taught me that everything was established on the basis of numerical relationships. This remarkable idea dazzled me. I was ashamed of my magic, like an indecent secret. I never told anyone that I was an elf. And to disguise it, I stumbled on the stairs, I wore

dark glasses, and I spoke in an unimaginative way. I knew that what they were teaching me was not true; I could have easily transformed the books about the regularity of nature into a multitude of green dragons, and the professors who taught me this metaphysics into a dance of colored chalks. But I understood that this philosophy was prophetic. A nature that obeys laws is only the smallest part of chaos, it is the outline of the face of a gigantic piece of sculpture that is still not finished. But God intends to finish it. The ideal of a normalized universe will some day be realized. I resolved then to oblige the elves to commit a kind of total suicide, in order to relieve the universe of such indeterminacy and capriciousness. In this way we would be converted into men, since we could not reenter the bosom of our father Otl.

Alicia:

And why don't you convert yourselves into caterpillars so that you could grow wings during your torpor?

King:

We'll get to that. For now, it is easier for us to behave like men. After that, we will be like a Buddhist in nirvana who languishes by the side of the road like a shrunken tortoise, like a mushroom, like a stone. And who knows, perhaps we might be able to tone down our consciousness and remain in the darkness. (*Standing up and reciting.*)

Fortunate is the tree that is scarcely sensitive,
and even more the hard stone, because it no longer feels,
since there is no greater pain than that of being alive,
nor greater grief than that of conscious life.

Alicia:

(*Agitated*) Men will never agree to this type of madness. We live because we want to be free.

King:

The vanity of men. You think freedom waits for you at the end of the road because you were free when you began your journey; you are converting your limitations into a virtue, your laziness into morality. Man *is* free. The elf is more free. The atom is still freer. Is it your idea to abandon yourself to your impulses and wallow in the mud of a blind universe where each particle is free and distinct? I am proposing a heroic conduct; that elves behave like men, and men behave like a crystal, and a crystal like a formula.

Alicia:

(*She takes the boy by his hand.*) Let's leave this place! Let's go where you are able to create a deer out of living water!

King:

Stop! You can't take away my son that way. Are you thinking of marrying him? He is my son. How would you be able to live?

Alicia:

Oh, it is easy to live with an elf! He would be the best prestidigitator ever. In theaters it will be easy for him to pretend to know how to do magic tricks. He will be an acrobat, a ventriloquist, an illusionist, a hypnotist, and a gambler. He will steal. All that as long as the scruples you have given him last. And when he is no longer ashamed of being an elf, how happy we will be! Let's go, let's go! Ah, if I could only do miracles like you. The only miracle I can do is this one. *(With her foot she draws a furrow in the ground. Then, imperious like a witch, she exclaims:)* Right here, on this little line made by my foot, every day and night the light will have to come down and shine on it, like it or not! As long as this line lasts, the light will have to come down and obey it! *(She laughs, and takes the boy's hand again.)* Let's go, let's go! You can teach me to do real miracles!

Boy:

(Who has been looking at her lovingly, enraptured, and not listening to the discussion.) I am going with you. You have large, moist dark eyes. When you are sleeping at night, I want to rest my hands on your black hair. Let's go. Goodbye, Mother! Father, goodbye! I am an elf.

There is a ripple in the air, and a gigantic dragonfly appears. It climbs up the wall and disappears.

The third prisoner:

I am not very smart, but I understand that. The King's son wants to be an elf, not a man. They have deceived us! If we are with men, our magic will have a great advantage. Let's get out of here!

A soldier:

Wait for me. I'm going too. I never thought it was right to invent crimes, and then have to repress them.

The prisoner and the soldier dance like dervishes, they become a whirlwind, and then disappear.

A voice:

Let's all go to the land of men!

Other voices:

Let's go, let's go!

Music fills the jungle. The elves throw away their weapons and their batons that fly through the thickets of the forest. Some elves rise through the air like birds, or angels in a picture, or mischievous jugglers. Others climb onto the rocks, and assuming the perfect posture of swimmers, they dive and disappear into the ground. There are a few that begin to glow like a Bengal light. After this orgiastic metamorphosis, the music stops and the King and the Queen remain by themselves.

Queen:

Do you want to stay here all by yourself? Come on, dear, let's go. Your metaphysics have failed. After all is said and done, it is worth more to be an elf.

She takes off her crown, her jewels, and her cloak, and begins to disappear in the twilight. By now there is hardly any daylight coming through the branches.

King:

(Sadly) You go on if you like. I will stay here.

The Voice of the Queen:

Come on, come on.

King:

(With his head between his hands.) I can't. Now, I am really a man.

THE GHOST
(El Fantasma)

He realized he had just died when he saw his body, as if it were not his own but that of a double, collapsed on a chair it had knocked over when it fell. The body and the chair were lying on the rug in the middle of the room.

Is this all that happens when you die?

What a disappointment! He had always wanted to find out what the transition to the other world was like, and it turned out that there wasn't any other world! There was the same opaqueness of the walls, the same distance between the furniture, the same sound of rain on the roof... And it was especially disappointing to see the objects that had always seemed so friendly now appearing so indifferent to his death! The lamp was still lit, his

hat was still on the hat stand... Everything was just the same. Except for the chair that was knocked over, and his own body that was staring at the ceiling.

He got closer and looked at his body, like before he had looked at himself in a mirror. How it had aged! And there it was, wrapped in old, worn out flesh!

“If I could raise the eyelids, perhaps the blue light of my eyes would give the body a little more dignity,” he thought.

Because without his eyes, those chubby cheeks and wrinkles, the hairy openings in his nose, and the yellow teeth biting his bloodless lip, were revealing the abhorrent condition of a dead body.

“Now when I know that on the other side there is no heaven or hell, I come back to my humble home.”

And feeling optimistic, he went up to his body—an empty cage—wanting to enter it and bring it back to life.

It should have been so easy! But he wasn't able to. He wasn't able to, because at that moment the door opened and his wife entered the room, alarmed because of the noise she heard when his body and the chair had fallen.

“Don't come in!” he shouted, but without a voice.

But it was too late. The woman threw herself over her husband, and when she realized he was dead, she cried and cried.

“Stop, stop! You've spoiled everything,” he shouted, but without a voice.

What bad luck! Why hadn't he thought of locking the door during this experience? Now he couldn't resuscitate himself; he was dead, definitely dead. What terrible luck!

He looked at his wife who had almost fainted on top of his body, with his nose sticking out between strands of her hair. His three daughters came running in as though they were fighting over a piece of candy; they stopped quickly, and then approached slowly and started crying. He also began to cry, seeing himself there on the floor, because he now knew that being dead is like being alive, but alone, completely alone.

Sadly he went out of the room.

Where should he go?

He no longer had any hope of supernatural life. No. There was no mystery. And he began to walk down the stairs, with great sadness.

He stopped on the landing. He realized that even though he was dead he was still able to move as though he had arms and legs. He was still looking from the level where he would have, if he had physical eyes. Pure habit! He decided to try to explore his new situation, so he started to fly around through the air. The only thing he could not do was to pass through solid bodies; they were just as opaque and impassable as always. He bumped against them. He didn't feel any pain when he did that, but he could not pass through them. Doors, windows, hallways, all the passages that are open to men, continued to affect the direction of his movements, limiting his freedom. He could manage to slip through a keyhole, but with great difficulty. He wasn't some sort of sound wave that could pass through anything; he could only penetrate the cracks that people could see through with their eyes. Was he now only about the size of the pupil of an eye? Just the same, he still felt like when he was alive—invisible, yes—but not incorporeal. He didn't try to fly around any more, and he went back to the normal height of a man. He still had the memory of his former body, of the postures he had adopted, and the exact

location of his skin, his hair, and his arms and legs. He imagined that his entire body was still there, and he took the position where his eyes would normally be.

He spent that night at the side of his body, together with his wife. His friends also came and he was able to hear their conversations. He saw everything that happened up to the moment when the clods of earth fell lugubriously over the coffin and covered it.

He had always had a domestic servant, and there was no one else except his wife, and his daughters. He therefore was not tempted to enter the belly of a whale, or explore the great anthill. He preferred to sit in his old chair and enjoy the life of his family.

He finally became resigned to the fact that he was never going to be able to make them aware of his presence. It was enough to see that his wife occasionally raised her eyes to look at his portrait that was hanging on the wall.

Sometimes he regretted not being able to meet up with some other dead person so he could exchange impressions. But he was not bored. He accompanied his wife wherever she went, and went to the movies with his daughters.

That winter his wife fell sick, and he wished that she would die. He had the hope that, once she was dead, her soul would come and be with him once again. His wife did die, but, unfortunately, her soul was as invisible for him as it was for her daughters.

Then one day, for the first time since he had died, he began to wonder if there really wasn't another world; and, if so, what if it was full the shadows of absent parents, forgotten friends, and busybodies who were spending eternity spying on their orphans?

Thinking about that, he shuddered with disgust, as if he had put his hand into a cave full of worms. Souls, hundreds of forgotten souls, swarming on top of each other, blind to each other, but with their crafty eyes fixed on the life of their children!

He was never able to forget that possibility entirely, but in time he was usually able to ignore it. What else could he do?

His sister-in-law had taken in the orphans, and with her they began to feel at home again. And the years passed. He saw his daughters, unmarried, pass away one after the other. So the light of his family, which in others was still burning, was now completely dark in his. But he knew that, in the invisibility of death, his family continued to exist, that all of them would know that they were still together in the same house, still holding on to their sister-in-law, like a shipwrecked person holds on to the the last floating log.

Then the sister-in-law also died. He approached the coffin where they were keeping watch over her, he looked at her face that was about to disappear and he sobbed, now completely alone! There was no longer anyone in the world of the living to attract all of them with their love. There was no longer any possibility for them to be together at any place in the universe. There was no longer any hope. There, around the lighted candles, must be the souls of his wife and his daughters. He told them goodbye, knowing they could not hear him, and he went out into the patio and flew up into the night.

BLACKOUT IN NEW YORK (Oscurecimiento en Nueva York)

What a flight from Buenos Aires to New York! (On the airplane were the words "Pan American Airways." Since it was 1943, it should have also had the word "War.")

As the first day ended the great bird looked for its nest. Then, the next morning, it entered the air again and calmly flew through the clear blue sky.

On the third night they told him: "We're almost there."

When they said this, Eduardo looked out of the window. The entire city was dark, like a scattered cluster of extinguished embers.

They were preparing to land. He had some feelings of emotion, of fear, of strangeness, of impatience.

New York! Another world. It seemed impossible. It had all been so unexpected, so sudden, so accidental! An invitation to attend a meeting of writers he had never heard of and knew nothing about. One cable that said, "Come." Then his, "I'm leaving." All in no time. And immediately, like an act of prestidigitation: one, two, and three, New York! Only it wasn't the illuminated New York he had expected, but the darkened New York of 1943. "War!" "A Blackout!"

The airport. A ride in an automobile. The hotel. Now another flight, in an elevator. On the thirtieth floor—curious, one for each year of his life—was his room. He looked out of the window. How strange, how strange! The city was silent, wrapped in shadows like the damned, as if no one were living there, except him, a Foreigner. In the sky that rose up like an immense mirror, the stars seemed like reflections of another city, like another distant southern city for which Eduardo already felt nostalgic. The sky, a mirror! A sky of glass! He laughed at this thought like a child, and like a child he thought that something so fragile could break easily. With the blow of a stone it would be shattered, making the fake stars fall, and behind it a large, disapproving eye would appear.

In the beginning Eduardo didn't suspect anything. Not even when, after he went to bed, he received a letter.

He had trouble deciphering the long, sharp scribbles, like the rapid beats of a heart: "Finally, you have arrived! Why don't we meet tomorrow in the Empire State Building? At five on the dot. *Cecily*."

"Cecily? Who could that be? And how had she known he would be there?"

He went to sleep. The next day at five o'clock Eduardo was waiting at the top of the Empire State Building.

No one was there.

So he waited for the Cecily of his message, looking out from the railing at the other towers of the city.

"I am here on the highest tower in the world," he said to himself. And immediately he thought: "But it could rise even higher. Those gigantic stalks that sprout in the dampness would continue growing. The wind would rock them gently. They would bend over, and their tops would brush against each other..."

Then, someone touched his shoulder and drew him back from the railing.

It was an eager woman who looked at him lovingly, and kissed him.

Eduardo stepped back with astonishment. She wasn't pretty, but her confidence in herself was shining around her like the halo of invisible beauty.

She embraced him, her long hair covering his eyes, and then she hugged him again.

Perhaps (it occurred to him suddenly, frightening him) she was crazy... But, little by little, her face began to remind him... But remind him of whom?

The memory didn't come to him...

She murmured into his ear: "What joy, Elf!"

Then, when he heard her call him “Elf,” the image, that a moment ago was hidden in darkness, rose up in a dense wave and almost touched him. But the wave, untouched, sank down again, with the secret still inside it... Before it could vanish completely, he closed his eyes and turned around, leaving the woman at his back; he leaned on the railing, he held his breath, he shut off all thoughts that could distract him, he stopped thinking, and he waited to see if that dark wave would rise up again. It finally did rise up again on the edge of his mind, and then it opened without any more mysteries.

He recognized her. There, in Buenos Aires, how long ago?... thirteen years? They used to go out together. She used to call him “Elf.” He no longer remembered why... She was somewhat in love with him. Then, she disappeared, and he never heard from her after that. He supposed she had married. Or died. And now he met her again, here in New York! It seemed like some unreal comedy act. The skyscrapers could serve as backdrops; they were backdrops of cardboard standing against the leaden curtain of the afternoon. Someone had written the parts they both had to play. Like an older actress, the Cecily of New York had made him remember the younger Cecily, of Buenos Aires.

What should he do? What should he say to her?

Without turning around, he said half-heartedly:

“So we meet again in New York!”

And behind his back he heard:

“Here we *had* to meet again.”

“Had to?” Why “had to”?

He kept leaning on the railing for a few moments longer, looking at the river, the park, and the hills. Surprised not to hear her answer, he turned around. She had disappeared! He rushed around the four sides of the lookout? (how round the sky is!) and searched through the interior rooms, to no avail. “Where could she have gone?” He went down to the city that now was chaotic. He made his way through the crowds of people and wandered through the streets of the labyrinth. He always had to watch where he was going to avoid being jostled. They squeezed against him and bumped into him. Like paddles of a washing machine with spurts of soapy water, in front, and in back of him; and he, Eduardo, caught in the swirling foam—each face, a bubble—like a dirty rag. Swarms of soldiers, sailors, and aviators accompanied by women, came in front of him, broke apart, and then joined again behind him, as they carried on singing. What different people. Full of energy with rapid discharges (blacks and whites: coals and copper wires of an electric battery). He couldn’t even understand their language. What did that lady say to the frightened child she was carrying in her arms after taking a look at him, Eduardo? Perhaps, “Don’t be afraid, that man is a ghost. He doesn’t really exist.” And Eduardo kept on walking murmuring “I’m sorry,” “Excuse me,” “Pardon me,” with a timid desire to exist like a real person.

Suddenly, at the intersection of Broadway and 42nd Street, he had the impression that he was no longer alone, and that his left arm was being being tapped by the insistent touch of another person. He turned around and saw Cecily who was accompanying him (who knew for how long?) with the calmness of having always been at his side.

“Hi,” Eduardo said, with the surprise of someone who had been struck by lightning.

And she disappeared like a flash of lightning.

He stopped and tried to look over people’s heads, but was bumped into and jostled from side to side. He had to keep moving, now alone again, alone and preoccupied.

He returned to the hotel.

That night, it must have been midnight, his telephone rang, and when he answered it, he recognized the voice of Cecily passing through the air as lovingly as if she were about to come and caress him. She said:

“I need you, Elf. I am waiting for you alone, I need you now.”

And she gave him an address, on a blind alley off Mac Dougal Street.

He had no curiosity, and no desire. On the contrary, he felt like avoiding her. But he had to go out into the freezing wind, and he went through the city to Greenwich Village where he found the alley with the house. He rang the bell. (In one of the rooms of the house someone was strangling the throat of a violin that was screeching.)

The door opened, and when he entered he saw Cecily, smiling. The red bathrobe she was wearing gleamed under the fluorescent light.

They looked at each other without saying anything. After a moment she loosened the straps, let her robe fall, and stood there smooth and white.

Eduardo stepped back, displeased by her nakedness. A lifeless nakedness, an artificial nakedness; a fake skin painted over the figure of an invisible woman hidden underneath, condemned to non-existence. And her eyes, sky blue and as weak as the fluorescence of the light, that also seemed false. If he were able to scrub her with a sponge of lavender water, her nakedness would vanish, and he would be alone in a room smelling of lavender.

Cecily raised her shoulder suggestively, as though inviting him to come to her.

Nothing. Eduardo felt no desire. Not even a sensation of pleasure, nor the slightest warming of his blood, and especially no anticipation of what he might be able to do with that naked woman. Nothing. All his glands were on strike, all of his body parts were uninhabited and insensitive. Like someone who had forgotten his umbrella in the train station, he had forgotten his sexual desire somewhere out there under the Southern Cross. And was he, Eduardo, actually lifeless, without initiative? Was he frigid? What is going on? What’s happening to him? Ah, perhaps the body of Cecily was not speaking to his own body, simply because neither of them was real. He felt fleshless, flaccid, broken up into little pieces, as phantasmagoric as Cecily, as tenuous as a dream that someone was dreaming. “My God!” he sobbed fearfully.

And he threw himself out the door and fled into the alley that now enclosed his body, the houses, the pavement, and the morning light, like the vein of a single piece of skin. “My God, my God,” he sobbed again, and then he drunkenly embraced a lamppost on the corner of the street.

He looked up. The skyscrapers spread apart and left a large open space between their roofs. In this opening some large black birds were flying next to each other, and through the spaces between their feathers he could see the skin of the night, smooth like an eyelid, and rounded like a sleeping woman. “Dear God, do I exist?” he stammered. Everything seemed so dead, and so unborn! And this coldness that made him shiver, where was it coming from?

Freezing, exhausted, feeling half dead, he returned to his hotel and tumbled into bed. Then he heard something sounding like a voice, when he was about to fall asleep:

“Tomorrow, at noon, at the Statue of Liberty.”

He aroused with alarm, not knowing why. “Why such a fright, where am I supposed to go?” And he recalled the voice of Cecily. “To hell with Cecily!” He went to bed again.

He tried hard to settle down and go to sleep, but he still felt Cecily calling to him from a distance. "I won't go, I won't go." He sat on the edge of the bed with his feet on the floor. "Now let's see: what is it that has happened to me? I don't want to go, but..."

It wasn't fascination that pulled a somnambulist from his bed and made him travel over the rooftops on the rays of the moon. It wasn't the quiet docility of someone who was hypnotized. He no longer existed, that was all. Now he was just a thought inside some unknown head. And what about this reality, and the infinite number of revolving doors that he had to push every time he went from one minute to another? Ah, the demiurge that was dreaming him was also dreaming these revolving doors! He was also dreaming the eventuality and the necessity. His anxiety, his coldness, and his insomnia, were all a dream. And who can it be that is dreaming me? Cecily? Yes, Cecily. But not the Cecily of the letter, the Empire State Building, the telephone call, and the alley in Greenwich Village. No, no. That Cecily was also a dream. The Cecily he had seen was actually a simulacrum, a being that was empty and false. No. The one who was dreaming him was the other Cecily who was real, external, and powerful. There was one Cecily who was real, and one who was chimerical. The real one had to be the one who fell in love with him in Buenos Aires thirteen years ago. Perhaps she moved to the United States; perhaps she happened to read the article in the *New York Times* where he was invited to the meeting of writers. That night when she went to bed she dreamed, and he was caught in her dream. He had landed in New York in Cecily's dream. And when the real Cecily was dreaming, she created a "double" that was the Cecily he had seen in the dream. Both of them, two simulacrums looking at each other, eye to eye.

"So now what should I do? I don't want to go, but..."

He finally gave in to the power the real Cecily had over him. He stood up and walked out the door toward the ocean where Cecily was dreaming he would go.

Feeling like an idea, or a number without a real body, he traveled by boat toward the Statue of Liberty that he could make out in the distance: a standing figure that was barely visible through the mist. And as he got closer and closer the figure gradually became the body of a woman with a raised torch. The appearance of a goddess, a noble figure, with strong arms...

He arrived at the island and got out of the boat. He felt a sudden shrinking, as though he had become an insect at the foot of a lamp. And with his eyes always fixed on the solemn face of the statue, he approached the pedestal. The whole statue was hollow! He entered through a door and began to go up.

Stairway after stairway, after stairway... An empty shell, full of cobwebs. One came to an end, and another started, like a spiraling nightmare. The folds of bronze of the mantel, the wide projection of each wrinkle, the rivets, the interior of the arms; so many nooks for bats! And he continued climbing up the spiral steps that turned around and around in the hollow interior, higher and higher, first in the torso, then in the shoulders, and finally!, in the rounded head. Then still higher to the tiara circling her forehead, a tiara that, from outside, looked like it was covered with diamonds, but from inside, like glass windows where one could look out at the gloomy midday sky which was veiled, or like the eyes of a dying person who could no longer see the sun. He was not able to see New York, only the gray of the ocean, and the gray of the clouds.

Then he heard a voice, a voice that rattled his nerves:

"Elf!"

He descended a few steps and in one of the folds inside the statue, he saw Cecily sliding, and like a tightrope-walker she crossed on thin wires over an abyss.

“Listen,” Eduardo shouted from the stairway. “It’s time to end this once and for all. Enough already. Am I maybe some gigolo from a fantasy?”

Cecily’s face was almost transparent, the eyes were missing. Eduardo was afraid that she might fall off the metal precipice, and he softened his tone:

“Don’t you understand that all of this is absurd? You are... (he hesitated). While you and I are trapped in this shell, the real Cecily, the dreamer, is stretched out on her bed, visualizing this scene now, dreaming that she is you, and dreaming that I am going to kiss you. But I will not kiss you, I definitely will not kiss you.”

He rushed down the stairs, leaving the unreal Cecily up there. When he reached the bottom, he got back into the boat. The boat turned around, and he was heading back toward the city.

By now the fog was partially cleared, and it began to snow a little. The distant skyline was still lost in the mist. The boat floated like a buoy, inside of a larger buoy of snow.

As he got closer, New York gradually became visible. He walked over the snow, his tracks disturbing the innocent whiteness. He understood that the white light meant that it was about dawn, and this light from somewhere was filtering through the eyelashes of the real Cecily; and that he, and the entire island of New York, had begun to vanish. Cecily, his hated master, was waking up and her eyelids were opening.

Eduardo raised his hands to the sky and, like a bump in the road, offered himself to the heavy snow. Everything merged into a pure whiteness. Eduardo, and the snow... There were no longer any outlines, not even a shadow, in the final enlightening of the eyes that had just opened.

THE MAN AND THE AIR (El Aire y el Hombre)

As lunch came to an end, everyone was laughing. The children’s eyes shone with eagerness when the servant brought in the dessert.

“Good,” Diego exclaimed, stretching out his hands to receive it.

All of a sudden, he looked at his finger with surprise.

On the tip of his little finger an opening appeared that spread rapidly. One after the other, pieces of his finger rose up and floated around the father, who looked at them, seeming to be amused by the fact that he was now without a finger. Not even a bit of pain, or a drop of blood. A moment after that, the little finger appeared like the wax image of an amputation. Soon the voracity of the air started devouring his other fingers.

Then, the father extended the stump of his wrist into the pudding.

“Oh, Papa!” Carlitos scolded him, “you made a hole in our custard.”

The custard was full of holes as if someone had stuck their hand into it.

However, there were no fingers there, not even a hand. His shirtsleeve now looked like an empty tube.

“You can divide the pudding yourselves,” the mother told the children and followed her husband to the bedroom.

Although Diego’s arms had disappeared by this time, and on his sides he couldn’t feel his finger bones or his forearms, something invisible was removing his tie and his shirt, so that they came off and fell to the floor.

He looked at his naked chest in the mirror. And now the erosion was making cavities in his torso that spread from one side to the other. Then, when the rest of his clothing came off and fell on the floor, Diego and his wife saw how the air was rapidly inundating other parts of his body. Fierce floods penetrated his flesh and devoured the remaining little islands.

By now the children were banging on the door. The smallest one had started to cry.

“Let them in,” Diego said, and his voice sounded quite calm.

When they entered, his children saw the head of their father suspended in the air, like a globe of light.

“Hello,” he said to them with affection.

But out of his smile came a transparent wave that went back in through his eye and was rapidly emptying his head. Then, there was nothing.

The woman, tense and motionless, kept looking at the air.

“Diego,” she called him, speaking in a low voice.

After that she stepped forward with open arms, moving them from one side to the other through the air, like someone who is dredging the river in search of a corpse.

ALEJO ZARO GETS LOST IN TIME

The streets of Tucumán were as white as a skeleton under the sun when Alejo Zaro set off in his car for Santiago del Estero.

He left the houses behind and continued driving in the warm air of the highway.

Under the bleak light of December, the dry empty fields faded away in the distance; only the quebracho tree could be seen in the retreating countryside, and for a moment it stood out, green and full of life, above the thistles.

He thought he must be about half way through his journey (he was already feeling hot and thirsty!), so when he saw an adobe house through the trees, he stopped the car next to the fence and entered the patio to ask for a drink of water.

Seated on a log, an old man was hunched over as he looked at the ground. When Zaro went to talk to him, the old man raised his head, asking casually, as if he were continuing a previous conversation:

“How many summers have passed since 99?”

Zaro looked at him with surprise, but he answered:

“1899... forty one years.”

“Aha. You hadn’t been born yet, right?”

“No, but soon after that. I was born in 1900.”

“I am going on sixty five.”

The old man looked like he was speaking from the bottom of a well, and also his mouth was covered with moisture in the space between his mustaches. He continued to speak as though Zaro were an old friend, and they had just gotten together for a chat:

“In that year, on a day like today, there was a fandango here.”

“Oh yes?” Zaro said courteously.

“I danced with my dove, zamba after zamba, until the doctor arrived. He greeted me with a mocking smile, and took away my little girl. He danced one zamba with her, then an escondido, and then another zamba, and the time went by... Meanwhile, I was just standing there watching. The doctor became a rooster while he was dancing and, while he did that, he rose over my dove brushing, her with his wings. I was becoming annoyed. ‘If I may, Doctor,’ I said to him; and I tried to dance with her. ‘Don’t try to rush things,’ he told me; ‘your mother also tried to rush things too much when she gave birth to you.’ I put up with it, and I waited. But the doctor went too far, and he took advantage of a pause in order to grope her. I went into the house in order to look for a knife, and I came out and invited him to come out here and fight me. He refused, and for good measure, he slapped my face. Then, right after that I killed him.”

The old man had spoken quite calmly. He lowered his head to pick up a stick, and used it to try and kill an ant.

Zaro made an effort to look at his face, to see if he could discover some reason for his craziness.

“Come, friend, I am going to show you something,” the old man added. He got up and went into the farmhouse. Zaro followed him.

While the old man was bending over a chest, Zaro took a look at the room and then stared with fascination at a cacuy, a stuffed bird, that looked like it was weeping.

But then, as if someone had suddenly removed a plug from his ears, outside the house he heard the sound of music filled with an uproar. Rather than someone opening his ears, it was as if someone had uncorked a bottle with a secret reality that was now pouring out, capturing him, and intoxicating him. Dazed, he turned around and discovered a young man who was bending over a chest with a knife in his hand, who then stood up staring right at him. His had a different face, and his eyes looked ready to kill.

Zaro, backed up. “Hey, watch out!” The man moved toward him with vacant eyes. And when Zaro stretched out his arms and tried to stop him, as if he were made of mist (or as if Zaro didn’t exist), the boy walked right through his body and came out the other side, heading toward the door.

Not knowing what to do, Zaro followed him, and outside he saw people dancing a fandango; it was as if his eyes and his ears were suddenly opened for the first time so that he could see and hear the raucous crowd. The man (with Zaro following him like a somnambulist) went directly to the first dancer. Something angered the dancer, and he responded with a slap; he jumped back with a frightened expression, and raised his hands to grab the knife with which the man was still stabbing him.

There were shouts, and people gathered around the place where the pool of blood was spreading. A mulatto with an impassive face continued dancing the vidala until it ended. After that he approached respectfully.

Finally, the patio was empty, and Zaro was more alone than before.

Why wasn’t he more upset by the moans of the dying man, or the misfortune of the young man who was trembling and vomiting as the mulatto helped him walk away? He

didn't feel like these two were brothers, fellowmen, or real men. They looked strange, as if seen through an aura of fever, clear and precise, as if he were looking at them through a magnifying glass, dense like the images of a dream, haunting like the delirium of someone who was drunk. A secret reality had been uncovered. A piece of eternity had arisen from somewhere and caught him, trapping him in one of its bubbles, along with the farmhouse, the people, and a dead man bleeding on the ground.

He looked around. A wagon with its sides rising up, locust trees without their green color which was lost in the darkness, and necks of horses looking out of the corral, were some of the elements of this limbo.

He went out into the deserted road and, without knowing where to go, started walking and walking, not recognizing anything that he saw, feeling bewildered.

He had only lived through those moments of the dancing, and the assassination. His memory was like an empty bucket that was now beginning to fill. But he felt like the heart that was beating in his chest was someone else's, as if his body had experienced slow enlargements, and diminutions. He had the memory of a life which he was part of, from which he was now banished; and the sensation of a miracle in a blind universe.

Thorn bushes, thickets, and cacti covered the desert. In the middle of that flattened landscape he felt enormous, and he raised his hands to touch the top of the sphere that enclosed him. He had a feeling that, on the other side of this confined air, maybe his true fellow men were living happily, but he had no indication of their existence other than the fear of solitude, and a need to hear the voices that were speaking in another life.

The afternoon, which before had seemed so empty, was now inflated by the sound of locusts making their music. And Zaro, who felt himself imprisoned in this vibrant bubble of air, kept walking toward the twilight, hoping that, at one moment or the other, the tension in this sphere would explode and that, finally, he would be able to re-enter the world he considered his own.

THE PRODIGAL SON (El Hijo Pródigo)

A man had two sons, and the youngest of them...
Saint Luke, 15

The sunset was so brilliant that, even on the distant hills, you could see the sharp outline of the rocks. On one side, a house. A rich house with three stories: on the top floor there was a room for religious services, with a window looking toward the Temple of Jerusalem. Near by one could hear singing, some clapping, and the sound of cymbals coming from a dance on the other side of the house. Coming down the road rapidly is Daniel, the oldest son. He stops in front of the gate and calls to a servant, who just then is crossing the patio carrying a skin of wine.

Daniel

Hey, what's happening?

Servant

(Without stopping, and with a big smile on his face; very pleased by the news he has, but reluctant to give it.) Why, don't you know?

Daniel

When I was coming down the road, the wind was carrying the sound of a celebration. I never thought it would be my own house... Come on, tell me! Why are you laughing like a fool?

Servant

(In an explosion of happiness.) Your brother has returned! *(He keeps on walking happily toward the house. When he is about to enter, he adds:)* Your father has killed the fatted calf! He is wild with the happiness of having him home safely. *(He enters.)*

Daniel, not moving, murmurs a few words silently. Finally, he turns around. He is about to leave, when his father comes out, astonished.

Father

Aren't you coming in, Daniel? You have just heard the news that your brother is back, and you're not coming in?

Daniel

Let me go, father. You wouldn't understand. *(He tries to leave.)*

Father

Wait! Aren't you happy? Come on, come in... It's five years since Joseph left us. He took his share of the money with him, and you should see how he is now! He wasted it all... He has come back defeated, and ill....

Daniel

(Alarmed.) He's ill?

Joseph comes out of the house and takes a few steps toward his father and his brother, but on hearing a few words, decides to wait and listen.

Father

He has changed a great deal, and it makes me sad to see him. But I recognized him immediately, even from a distance. I ran to him and gave him a kiss... "I am no longer

your son,” he said. Then, I took his arm and brought him in, I called the servants, and ordered them to prepare this celebration; I saw to it that he was dressed in the best clothes, and I put a ring on his hand.

Daniel

(Patting him on the shoulder, affectionately.) And you killed the fatted calf. To me, who has always obeyed you, you have never given even a kid to enjoy with my friends, but you have given him all these things.

Father

Son, you have always been with me, and all of my things are yours. But your poor brother! He was dead and he has now revived: should we not give him a celebration to show how happy we are?

Daniel

Of course. I was just kidding! But there is something you would not understand, Father. I cannot come in now. Let me walk around outside for a while. I’ll return later, when you are all asleep. *(He tries to leave.)*

Joseph

Don’t go yet, Daniel.

Daniel is startled; then, he grabs his brother by the arm, he looks at him for a long time, and then he embraces him, deeply moved.

Daniel

Forgive me.

Joseph

(Smiling.) It’s all right, I understand.

Father

Yes, good... Like always...

They are silent for a while. The father embraces them, and wants to take them into the house.

Joseph

Father, leave us alone for a while, please... Daniel, let’s both of us take a walk, like you were saying. *(To his father.)* Just a short walk, and then we’ll be back with you .

The father goes back inside. The two brothers start walking in silence.

Joseph

Do you realize, Daniel, why I have returned? Don't think that it was because of the hunger that shows on my face.

Daniel

Yes, I know it. You are proud. You would never come to ask for compassion.

Joseph

You are proud, Daniel, You still haven't forgiven me.

Daniel

I don't have anything to forgive you for.

Joseph

You see? You still haven't forgiven me. Yes. I offended you. You are the older brother. You feel that you have all the rights. You were going to ask for your share of the wealth and leave home. Your wish was to travel and spend your money, like one uses the gifts of a lucky charm.

Daniel

I felt like a woolen ball that was made by the hands of a woman and then left in the bedroom. I wanted to develop myself to see what I could do, I wanted to go more places and see what I could see with my soul hanging on a thread.

Joseph

You want to go face to face with life, to enjoy it, to challenge it, as free as a king, and as strong as a bull. You told me about all your projects. And when you told me, you had a big smile on your face.

Daniel

And how your eyes glowed when you listened to me!

Joseph

But one of us had to stay here.

Daniel

Yes, that was our agreement, and it was supposed to be our plan. But then one day I found myself tied to the house like a woman. You had unloaded on me all of the responsibility.

Joseph

Yes, it was my little betrayal. Will you forgive me for it?

Daniel

Like I said, I have nothing to forgive you for. You had more courage than I did. You made the decision before me. You were in the right. While I blabbered and blabbered like an idiot, you arranged your things and made your getaway before dawn. (*Somberly.*) And besides, Esther was also involved.

Joseph

(*Speaking very softly.*) Ah... Esther...

Daniel

(*With bitterness.*) It was very generous on your part. We both loved her. You went away and left her for me. It was almost a gift.

Joseph

Don't say that, Daniel. We were like two brothers and sister.

Daniel

(*Sharply.*) No, you know that's not true. When you were gone, everything was quite easy for me. I negotiated with her father. Then, the night after our marriage, I took her home, surrounded by bridesmaids, by candles, and hymns. I was the one who stayed in my corner, the one who did not dare to leave. I had a nice home, and the open arms of a wife!

Joseph

You are resentful of me, Daniel...

Daniel

No. I envy you. That's all. I envy you. When they told me you had returned, I felt a great sense of shame that was stronger than the joy of seeing you again. I didn't feel like

I had the strength to see you again. I felt resentful of you, for the way you had changed your outlook, for all the things you have seen. Resentful, but even more, admiration; and also ashamed of myself, here stuck to the skirts of Esther. I was afraid of not being able to control my envy, of being unjust, only because I envied you...

Joseph

Even though you knew that I had come back hungry, ragged, and sick?

Daniel

What do I care about that? I look at your body and it makes me envious of all the things it has done. Far away from here, always with something new... And all the things you must have seen! Do you think I don't realize that you are the one who is truly rich? You have come back enriched by all your adventures.

Joseph

Yes, adventures... *(They walk in silence.)* I'm feeling tired, Daniel; do you suppose we could sit down here on the grass?

It is now getting dark. The light is slipping behind the mountains like a bird. One can see its feathers: blue and green... And among the first trembling stars that appear, there is also a bird: a rapturous golden bird. The earth modestly offers the sky only a fig tree, and two men lying down.

Joseph

I am not well, and it is difficult for me to walk. But it's not because of my sickness that I have come. Neither sickness, nor hunger. Let's let our poor father think that it is only his help and his forgiveness I need. You really should be able to understand me. As I traveled around the world, I spent the last of my money, but I didn't care. I worked at many different jobs. Sometimes, while I was feeding someone else's pigs, I longed for the carob beans they were eating. "How many servants in my father's house have plenty to eat?, and here I am perishing with hunger," I thought. But I kept on. I was not going to give up because of that. I wanted to keep on moving, searching for the unknown, for things that were always out of sight. I wandered constantly, making a mess of my life, carrying it on my back and always to something new, like a tabernacle. I knew that all that traveling with the tabernacle of skin and bones would end with it falling to pieces so that it collapsed somewhere along the way. I knew that I would eventually find myself starting again in some place that was unknown to me. An unknown place; unknown, and never seen nor expected.

Daniel

(Shaken.) An unknown place...

Joseph

And I kept on searching, sometimes falling into violent and disgusting sinfulness, or praying for days and days of fasting and immobility. Never giving up, and never turning back. That was my only virtue. So I kept on moving forward, bumping into whatever tried to stop me, breaking through and getting inside, really inside, in order to keep on moving... And all that, for what? Yes, Daniel! For what, for what? Now here I am broken, crushed, and flattened. And do you know why I have come back? I have come to recover the illusion of being a man, of being Joseph, of being a real person, of having been born in a place where people will weep when I die... Because I no longer feel like myself; you know?; I no longer feel like a man, just barely a shadow of shadow, and I can't go on like that, I can't go on putting up with such madness...

Daniel

Joseph! What has happened to you, Joseph?

Joseph

(Disturbed, and in a state of disorientation.) Everything is so silent, so stagnant, so confused and dead! Every man you see is also dead. He lives like a corpse. He walks like a corpse. What you see around you is only the curve inside the tomb in which we are all buried. Mud. What seems to be our life is only a splash in the mud. A splash in the mud, and nothing more. Only Elohim is alive. But He doesn't know anything about us, and He travels around, moving from one star to another. Who knows if Elohim will also fall into this tomb and rot along with the rest of us and be surrounded by the same weeds, the same worms, the same roots, and then lime, until finally He and the rest of us are equal! I can't go on like this, brother. Help me! I want to be a man again. No, not a man, but a child! I need to go back to my infancy and be surrounded by our home like a warm cloak. And not question things. To be a remarkable child, like you.

Daniel

Like me?

Joseph

A remarkable child, always surrounded by others, and so pampered, so looked after, that you will not doubt for a moment that you really are you. Isn't it true that when you go to bed you wake up with the same woman you went to sleep with? If you go out to the patio, isn't it true that right away a dog comes up to you wagging his tail and sees you as his master? Isn't it true that when you look at yourself you see the mark of things you have already done and accomplished, and that you come and and go, always the same? How can you ever doubt yourself, that you are who you are, that your land is separated from the rest, or that the world is strong and rich in thousands and thousands of so many different things that we would never be able to count them all? And there you are in the

center of it all, isn't that right? Of course! It's only natural that you are in the center! Ah, Daniel, it is that illusion that I have come to recover.

Daniel

But that's the way a man is. I don't see why being like that is the same as being a remarkable child.

Joseph

Because in that child there is an abundance of faith in himself, and in the things that you possess and I have lost. (*He pauses.*) Mother used to call me "Joseph" in such a way that it seemed like there was no other Joseph, anywhere. And she gave me gifts that were like fingers of light that reached out to me from afar. So I grew up, almost without realizing it, next to the tree, and the brother, and the wear and tear on the family... Always speaking to the same person made it very easy to be assured that I would feel secure. I existed in full color, replete, strong, and robust, with the hard profile of a chunk of pink marble. That's the way I was as a child, and the way I continued feeling as long as the child lived in me. But, when the child I carried inside me died... Ah, Daniel, if I could just go back and be that child... If I could just once more get drunk with the joy of childhood! This return of mine, Daniel, I wish it could be a return to somewhere even farther back, a return to the time when mother was alive, when I had no doubts, and the world was made for me.

Daniel

You have more of that child than you think. You are the same child as always, still without maturity. Pampered, and easily frightened. Now I can see that your travels have not changed you. Life has given you some blows, that's all. You seem like a child that has swellings and bruises.

Joseph

(*He comes out of a deep silence.*) What do you call maturity?

Daniel

(*Pointing to the old fig tree.*) That over there.

Joseph

Maturity? I see the bark and the size... Yes... It is old, broad, and fruitful. But years are not maturity. Maturity is something else. Somewhere out beyond Shushan I have seen a forest of fig trees. The air seemed green and solid because of so many branches. Nevertheless, that entire large forest came out of a single network of roots; the entire forest, although it might not seem like it, was only one fig tree. And the smallest fig

belonged, not to a single tree, but to all of them together. But the fig trees didn't know that. Each fig tree believed that it was separate from the rest. Old fig trees, but not mature ones. I would consider mature, not the man who feels strong, accomplished, and definite within his bark, but rather that other poor fellow who is terrified by the discovery that he is not he, and that all men are a single man.

Daniel

Yes of course, who doesn't know that! We are a big family. Ever since Adam, men have been engendered by men.

Joseph

Now listen carefully; what I am saying is that we are something more than a family. The men of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, all of them, all of us, are a single man. Do you understand me? A man made of other little disseminated men, a picture too large to fit within the scope of our eyes. Have you noticed how a gust of wind blows a mountain of dirt so that each grain of dust floats for a moment, separated from the others? Have you seen when a wave in the ocean breaks, how the little drops are splattered in the air? So you, I, and everyone else, are little grains of dust, or drops of water. We all belong to something greater. But people don't realize that. People believe in their own skin, just like they believe in death. They seem like limits. "Beyond that," they say, "is the abyss." "Between one man and his neighbor," they say, "there is only air and space." But no! The air is interwoven with tiny invisible bonds, like in a grand conversation. I don't know how, but the pain that we are feeling comes to us from a very old sore that has opened in a place in our body that is too far away for us to see. This single man has an outline within which we are only dots. The outline of a cloud of dust, or a wave in the ocean. But if that is what he has, no one has been able to see it. Perhaps, with each thing he does each one of us is, for a moment, part of the outline of that single man. The highest level of our deeds is part of the skin that encloses us all. We cannot go outside that skin. We are each just one example of this man, a single example of an enormous dragon that is moving by itself, heartbroken, that raises his head with innumerable eyes and always looks out at a star-covered sky. That was my first discovery.

Daniel

Oh, there were others?

Joseph

Yes. There were others more disturbing. That we are unproductive, for example.

Daniel

With all the things we have invented? How can you say that we are unproductive? Look at the hammer, the mills, the irrigation ditches...

Joseph

I have never seen anything that we really have invented; all the tools and apparatus do nothing more than extend our body, in the image and likeness of our body. All the experiments do nothing more than cut out a piece of the fabric of nature and place it over our shoulders like a cloak.

Daniel

Frankly, I don't know what you expect from men...

Joseph

I don't expect anything! That's what I am trying to tell you; that you can't expect anything from men. All of the men who have spoken since time immemorial, all the men who continue speaking in the future, are really reciting a soliloquy, a monologue, that keeps on bouncing back like an echo, so that man only hears himself. It is all vanity. What do you want? To leave a good recollection in the men that follow you? That's easy. A slug also keeps on leaving an impression in its silvery wake. If you want glory, just shout at yourself what you want to hear. You are all of humanity, curled up over itself, with a single ear glued to a single mouth, always listening to the same loud voice. It keeps on shouting what you want to hear. Even when all men in the chorus of a single voice, start chanting "We are the chosen people of Elohim!", this is nothing more than vanity. We are only convincing ourselves.

Daniel

I don't believe you. We *are* the chosen. From clay, yes, but from a chosen clay, and formed by Him. For that reason we no longer stay within ourselves. We are momentum, and abundance. Everything interests us, we search after everything.

Joseph

You really believe that we are interested in things? Bah! We play with them, like a child plays with his rag doll; it is always the same voice that asks, and replies. From time to time, we are pleased when we dig up some treasure... A big surprise! Haven't we perhaps just buried it there in this same place? But the true voice of each thing, the real treasure hidden behind the thing, ah, that doesn't ever worry us. We never even suspect that maybe there is neither a voice nor a treasure, and that the world is a sterile, salty desert, with no exit.

Daniel

Where do you have your eyes, Joseph? Can't you see that each thing is consistent and beautiful under the sun, and that we are the lords of a realm that is greater than us? The cluster of grapes on a vine, the breasts of a beloved; the myrrh, the cinnamon and saffron;

the soft eyes of an antelope, and the journey of a stork; an ivory pin, a gold coin, a silver sword, and the polished bronze women use to see their face; a ruby, an amethyst that protects us from a nightmare, an olive, the cedar and the palm; the rain and the flame; the honey, a melon and spikenard, aren't they all real, solid, and beautiful? And a thorn, and a flea, and a cloud of dust, and a jackal, and lightening, and the plagues, don't they show us that our life is not a dream, but a blessing that we all enjoy absolutely? The world is dangerous, the world sometimes threatens us, and resists us, and that is why our difficult victories are so important to us. Doesn't it amaze you that each object comes from afar, greeted and admired by all who see it; or, if it is harmful, we treat it with the caution that it deserves? Doesn't it amaze you that everything moves like a dance, like an army?

Joseph

It doesn't seem to me that things move so harmoniously. On the contrary. Each thing has its own path; in this you are right. But this path is capricious, and each thing only travels it once. More than being attracted by the open paths before them, things leave behind a trail. And if we could see with one glance all the trails that things leave behind, we would see the most terrible disorder. Only because our vision is short-sighted, does it seem that the paths are connected and orderly. What does it have to do with the secret path that a bee travels from nothing, in order to become a bee, or with the secret path that the flower travels from nothing, to be a flower, although the bee sucks from the flower? Even the man who seems to know so much, what does he know more than the few things he remembers? And he always remembers the same things; a little from the past, a little from the things he sees around him. In short, his own path that is different from the path of all of the things that he sees. And Elohim also has His own path, which has nothing to do with ours.

Daniel

What makes you think you know that?

Joseph

That was another of my discoveries. (*He pauses.*) More than the mystery of man, I am concerned about the mystery of things, not because I think they are animated and I would like to hear their voices, but precisely because knowing they are inanimate, knowing they are silent, gives me the vain desire to also be a thing. To forget my desire to transcend, and to rest in my body, to sleep in my body, to be a thing. I would like to strip myself of my own soul and remain alongside of things, inert, in a relationship of one piece of rubble to another. I knew that what dazzled and left me blind to things, were the sparks of my soul. My soul frustrated me and weighed on me. I carried it inside me like a sapphire that had incrustated me so that it covered my true self. As a child you did that once with a cricket, do you remember? You stuck a flax flower on the back of a cricket, and it went hopping away looking luxurious, blue, and wounded. And I, with the sapphire stuck to me—the jewel of my soul—I could feel how it was hurting me, and was festering in my open wound. I wanted to yank out my soul and break it into little pieces,

even though I knew I would die, in order to free myself from that sapphire where all the blue of the sky was reflected.

Daniel

You are sick!

Joseph

Crazy? Yes. That's what everyone says. But one never knows. That's what they call sickness. But maybe, thanks to sickness, we are actually able to see. And I was able to see when that terrible night came.

Daniel

That terrible night?

Joseph

The night when I broke my soul and everything went dark and I became a thing, a poor little thing, until the next morning. It was in the middle of the desert, and the round ball of the sun—so bright that it was amazing not to be able to see it, even with your eyes closed—seemed to set for the last time in a dusty, quiet, end of the world. I was almost exhausted, and I lay down on a dune. Everything was immense, desolate and silent, but in the undulations there was something light and ephemeral, like some game that was half done. Then, suddenly, I was stunned and insignificant, because I was certain that Elohim was somewhere near me, and I felt belittled. Of all the air that was motionless above me, like some great absurdity resting over the desert, I was only timidly breathing my small part. “Elohim could breathe in all of this air in one breath!” I thought to myself. “Maybe the worlds enter and go out of Him, like gentle breaths of air.” And I sobbed, having the feeling that Elohim was passing by my side, not feeling sorry for me, because he didn't see me. There I was, a crude and repulsive parody of divinity! Yes, men do have some brilliance, the brilliance of a pond at night, a pond that is touched by the reflection of an indifferent sky. That is all! But how vain we still are! We believe we are touched by Him, that we are like Him... That evening, when I thought Elohim was moving away through the twilight like a huge, apathetic fish, full of Himself, and not caring about anything else, I knew the helplessness of mankind. “What a tiny thing I am!” I thought. I felt like taking off my clothes made from the skin of other animals, because I was ashamed of hiding my animal nakedness. And even my animal flesh seemed to me like the bulge of a scar that was never healed; as if my eyes were a wound and my body, the oozing of that scar. “What am I, what am I?” I said. “Nothing. Scarcely a hole that wants to keep on existing, an empty hole that is being filled with light and sound. I am a creation of the air I am breathing, a creation of the water I drink. I am like a dream of nature that can only dream through the nervous fragility of man. I am as though this nature had given itself a long, undulating, and almost separate nerve, with a restless eye on the end. And for what? In order to see that, above and beyond all other beings, it is

Elohim who ignores us, like we ignore an insect that lives under a stone. And while Elohim was moving away without seeing me, following His own path, I felt scrawny and useless, like a grain of sand. To try and describe all that with words would be like imitating silence with a blast of trumpets. I couldn't do that. I can only tell you that the human shell, of which I was a small fragment, contracted violently over itself until it closed up, and I peeled off like a tiny scale. I fell off, and I ceased to be a man. It was like paralysis. I still have the memory of that night, like the lost soul of a person who commits suicide still remembers the last taste of poison; or perhaps like our father Adam remembers the clay, when he feels his flesh... But believe me, with only that vague memory, I have learned that the one man of which we are all part is also not separate from the rest. He is caught and enclosed in a mass in which nothing is distinct from anything else. As long as we are men, we cannot see the nonentity of our being; but that time when I fell into the black hole, I pushed (I don't know where) in order to open a breach and live, and I realized that what I pushed against was also myself. I was here and there, do you see? Torn apart, and separate... Ah no, I can see you don't understand me! All this occurred outside the human self, inside another thing for which there is no word. It was like the huge belly of a beast that had gobbled me up. But I was also the viscera of that beast, I was the beast and its food, and the sea where it swims, as well as the sky that drops the rain, and the coast that is seen in the distance. And I was motionless because there was something that kept me from moving, and this something was myself. I don't know, I don't know! I would never be able to explain it. It was like an immersion in myself, so deep that I arrived at the common depth that all things share. The things, from above, from outside, and from the side of the extremities, were all cut off from their root, yet seen from below all things were the same thing, all things were merged in the darkness of a single globe where they are men, but still without being men. Man is a man only in his own eyes.

Joseph places his head between his hands and rises to his feet. After his final words he carries his madness like a black sun. He paces agitatedly. His figure stands out for a moment in the half-light. After a moment he throws himself on the grass again and remains silent. Daniel is also silent. Everything else is also silent around them. Finally, Joseph begins to speak again, tired and calm.

Joseph

It was my final discovery. The next morning I recovered my senses, and I knew the thing I had struggled against the night before was not Elohim. It was something greater than Him, something pure, chaotic, arbitrary, indistinct, worn out, paralytic, and stupid... Elohim is like us, a creature, only He is a creature greater than us, the greatest of all. Like us, he is locked inside Himself, wanting to get out, powerful but helpless, holy but impure, like a blind man walking furiously with his cane, always in search of a guide who will not desert him. We ought to worship Him, but also feel sorry for Him. He is also lonely. God is less stupid than the stupid Supreme Being, but He is also less powerful. God is more powerful than man, but His existence is as lost in chaos as ours.

Silence. Night has now fallen.

Daniel

(After a while he murmurs) What a poor thing you are, brother!

There is another lengthy pause. After a while, Esther comes out of the house with a lamp in her hand, looking for them. Only her illuminated feet are visible. Only her voice reveals who it is, as well as the concern that must show on her face.

Esther

Daniel! We were worried about you. *(She shines the light on them; Daniel is still seated; Joseph is stretched out, looking up at the sky with open arms.)*

Daniel

He has fallen asleep!

Esther

Yes, he is so tired... He looks like a child...

Daniel

A child whose body is swollen after being struck so many blows.

Esther

Do you think we could carry him inside, without waking him up?

Daniel

Of course! He weighs practically nothing. *(He picks him up like a baby.)*

Esther

(Maternally) Oh, be careful now!

THE ASH MOON

All night long the mountain wind had been carrying ashes from the volcano. It was raining steadily over the entire countryside. I imagined it flying through the mountains, brushing the rivers, and going wild in the empty Pampa. It got to Buenos Aires a little

before dawn. When the sun finally came out, the air was opaque and dense, like a cloud during the winter.

I took a turn around the garden that had become gloomy and faded, and lamented that I had no one to whom I could say: "Look at what a strange thing this is!" The ashes continued to fall slowly and abundantly, like a tired deluge. You could see the flakes falling, one after the other. On the ones that were closest, their profile stood out as they were about to land on the ground. They were falling all over me and mixing with the darkness of my clothes like artificial fire during the night; or they slid like an avalanche into the white valleys of my hands. Their imprints covered me with a soft carpet that was even more sensitive than the beats of a heart filled with love.

In the middle of November, a snowy landscape! Roofs, gardens, streets were fading into hazy mists. The colors were weak, without the strength to shout, "I am red," "I am green." And how strange that there was no coldness, or the crunching sound of frost, nor a cloud of steamy breath. A winter landscape during the spring, and the sun, bright and magnificent, would still be shining somewhere beyond the gray curtain that had covered the city. A sparrow that was able to make its way through that grayness would be able to spread its wings in the glorious warmth of the sun. But looking from down here on the ground, the sky was a sky that was dying.

"If a hurricane were to come," I thought, "if something were blowing from up high, all this ashy dust would scatter away, leaving the city bright and shining.

But nothing was blowing, and the streets were still covered with a blanket of dust. And more than the streets, the buildings were trapped inside an immense cloud that had dropped down. And everything looked like a dream, because the whiteness of the ashes was a ghostly whiteness, and the city was floating, empty, somewhere outside of space and time. In this wintry landscape, why was there no smoke coming from the chimneys, or people traveling? Oh, my God! And the afternoon was wearing away. The nocturnal shadows were beginning to come out of their nests, to creep around objects, and slip through the space in between them. Once they merged together, they flung themselves over the world and covered it.

The poor night, without any silver or gold, then climbed onto the roofs, bending over like a beggar. Not a single glow in the entire city. I was walking murkily, like the water, the window panes, and everything that was transparent, since my soul was tinged with the color of the murky air. And all this continued for some time, until all of a sudden, the streets were flooded with rounded brightness. It was the full moon which had finally won passage through some openings in the sky, the full moon that had risen like a round balloon, a magic moon, because it was blue, not bluish but blue, the luminous and total blue of an early morning in winter. And the moon rose up and kept rising, until it remained suspended in the highest part of the sky like a new morning, like a stream of water in which the morning was able to see itself. What a morning moon this was! The bright light of the sun was reflecting off of its mountains. If the moon were a man, it would wake up with its face to the sky, gazing at the blue depths, and then exclaim: "What a beautiful morning!"

But here on the ground a gloomy night had fallen, under which I was walking without even the single kiss of a star on my forehead. The night was silent without substance, and the blue spilling out of the moon was the blueness of death. Yes, of death, since the planet was suffering, and something awful had just happened to the poor little Earth that

was so beautiful, with its continents and its lush equator, quite happy with its Argentina, with its tides, with its diligent humanity. Now it was rotating with fear, becoming more and more white, while freezing to death.

On the surface of the earth was a shroud of ashes... On the city, a deathly calm... And the feeling of peace was like that of glass about to be shattered, of a heart about to stop beating, when everything rises, struggles, and flies, and in a crucial moment stops, because its end has come. But then I felt in myself the desperate defiance of things that refuse to die, the thirst of moss, the anxiety of the eyes of a cricket, the torment of a nature that has been condemned. I understood that it was necessary to do something, and soon! I was the only one who could act for everyone else. Now! Or everything would be carried away by the planet in its dizzying return to the beginning, when the world was inert and lifeless. Something had to be done right away! I began to shout. And how I shouted! My shout reached all the way to the top of the desolate universe, it sank its violent claws into the enormity, and into the tiny corners, and it wandered from one side to the other, whipping the dying world like one whips babies who are born without crying. Then, the stars knew they were in the right place, so the planets that were about to stop resumed their proper course, and the sphere that had already stopped began to follow its path once more. And after my shout had accomplished all this, it lifted as high as the oceans on the day when they first rose up, and the shout traveled on into the most remote confines of creation, its rosy tongues shaking with exhaustion. My shout had been so terrifying that nothing was moving except for a few forgotten prisoners who were peeing on the walls with fear; and it was so supernatural that no one could really hear it, except for some ants, millions of which emerged and began running with fear. After this, people came out into the streets at the first light of dawn, looking unconcerned, as if nothing had happened. They passed by my side like shadows. And they didn't greet me because they didn't know about my shout. Only one seemed to know, and he didn't say anything. He studied my face and turned his head several times to look back at me, as he was walking away, and then was lost in the darkness.

The Grimoire - End of Part I