Short Stories from Around the World

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The Bet

By Anton Chekhov (Russia)

IT WAS a dark autumn night. The old banker was walking up and down his study and remembering how, fifteen years before, he had given a party one autumn evening. There had been many clever men there, and there had been interesting conversations. Among other things they had talked of capital punishment. The majority of the guests, among whom were many journalists and intellectual men, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that form of punishment out of date, immoral, and unsuitable for Christian States. In the opinion of some of them the death penalty ought to be replaced everywhere by imprisonment for life.

"I don't agree with you," said their host the banker. "I have not tried either the death penalty or imprisonment for life, but if one may judge a priori, the death penalty is more moral and more humane than imprisonment for life. Capital punishment kills a man at once, but lifelong imprisonment kills him slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, he who kills you in a few minutes or he who drags the life out of you in the course of many years?"

"Both are equally immoral," observed one of the guests, "for they both have the same object -- to take away life. The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to."

Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five-and-twenty. When he was asked his opinion, he said:

"The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would certainly choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all."

A lively discussion arose. The banker, who was younger and more nervous in those days, was suddenly carried away by excitement; he struck the table with his fist and shouted at the young man:

"It's not true! I'll bet you two millions you wouldn't stay in solitary confinement for five years."

"If you mean that in earnest," said the young man, "I'll take the bet, but I would stay not five but fifteen years."

"Fifteen? Done!" cried the banker. "Gentlemen, I stake two millions!"

"Agreed! You stake your millions and I stake my freedom!" said the young man.

And this wild, senseless bet was carried out! The banker, spoilt and frivolous, with millions beyond his reckoning, was delighted at the bet. At supper he made fun of the young man, and said:

"Think better of it, young man, while there is still time. To me two millions are a trifle, but you are losing three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you won't stay longer. Don't forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary confinement is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The thought that you have the right to step out in liberty at any moment will poison your whole existence in prison. I am sorry for you."

And now the banker, walking to and fro, remembered all this, and asked himself: "What was the object of that bet? What is the good of that man's losing fifteen years of his life and my throwing away two millions? Can it prove that the death penalty is better or worse than imprisonment for life? No, no. It was all nonsensical and meaningless. On my part it was the caprice of a pampered man, and on his part simple greed for money. . . ."

Then he remembered what followed that evening. It was decided that the young man should spend the years of his captivity under the strictest supervision in one of the lodges in the banker's garden. It was agreed that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument and books, and was allowed to write letters, to drink wine, and to smoke. By the terms of the agreement, the only relations he could have with the outer world were by a little window made purposely for that object. He might have anything he wanted -- books, music, wine, and so on -- in any quantity he desired by writing an order, but could only receive them through the window. The agreement provided for every detail and every trifle that would make his imprisonment strictly solitary, and bound the young man to stay there _exactly_ fifteen years, beginning from twelve o'clock of November 14, 1870, and ending at twelve o'clock of

November 14, 1885. The slightest attempt on his part to break the conditions, if only two minutes before the end, released the banker from the obligation to pay him two millions..

For the first year of his confinement, as far as one could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds of the piano could be heard continually day and night from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no one. And tobacco spoilt the air of his room. In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on.

In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies -- so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

"My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!" The prisoner's desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.

II

The old banker remembered all this, and thought:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock he will regain his freedom. By our agreement I ought to pay him two millions. If I do pay him, it is all over with me: I shall be utterly ruined."

Fifteen years before, his millions had been beyond his reckoning; now he was afraid to ask himself which were greater, his debts or his assets. Desperate gambling on the Stock Exchange, wild speculation and the excitability whic h he could not get over even in advancing years, had by degrees led to the decline of his fortune and the proud, fearless, self-confident millionaire had become a banker of middling rank, trembling at every rise and fall in his investments. "Cursed bet!" muttered the old man, clutching his head in despair "Why didn't the man die? He is only forty now. He will take my last penny from me, he will marry, will enjoy life, will gamble on the Exchange; while I shall look at him with envy like a beggar, and hear from him every day the same sentence: 'I am indebted to you for the happiness of my life, let me help you!' No, it is too much! The one means of being saved from bankruptcy and disgrace is the death of that man!"

It struck three o'clock, the banker listened; everyone was asleep in the house and nothing could be heard outside but the rustling of the chilled trees. Trying to make no noise, he took from a fireproof safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his overcoat, and went out of the house.

It was dark and cold in the garden. Rain was falling. A damp cutting wind was racing about the garden, howling and giving the trees no rest. The banker strained his eyes, but could see neither the earth nor the white statues, nor the lodge, nor the trees. Going to the spot where the lodge stood, he twice called the watchman. No answer followed. Evidently the watchman had sought shelter from the weather, and was now asleep somewhere either in the kitchen or in the greenhouse.

"If I had the pluck to carry out my intention," thought the old man, "Suspicion would fall first upon the watchman."

He felt in the darkness for the steps and the door, and went into the entry of the lodge. Then he groped his way into a little passage and lighted a match. There was not a soul there. There was a bedstead with no bedding on it, and in the corner there was a dark cast-iron stove. The seals on the door leading to the prisoner's rooms were intact.

When the match went out the old man, trembling with emotion, peeped through the little window. A candle was burning dimly in the prisoner's room. He was sitting at the table. Nothing could be seen but his back, the hair on his head, and his hands. Open books were lying on the table, on the two easy-chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once stir. Fifteen years' imprisonment had taught him to sit still. The banker tapped at the window with his finger, and the prisoner made no movement whatever in response. Then the banker cautiously broke the seals off the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty lock gave a grating sound and the door creaked. The banker expected to hear at once footsteps and a cry of astonishment, but three minutes passed and it was as quiet as ever in the room. He made up his mind to go in.

At the table a man unlike ordinary people was sitting motionless. He was a skeleton with the skin drawn tight over his bones, with long curls like a woman's and a shaggy beard. His face was yellow with an earthy tint in it, his cheeks were hollow, his back long and narrow, and the hand on which his shaggy head was propped was so thin and delicate that it was dreadful to look at it. His hair was already streaked with silver, and seeing his emaciated, aged-looking face, no one would have believed that he was only forty. He was asleep. . . . In front of his bowed head there lay on the table a sheet of paper on which there was something written in fine handwriting.

"Poor creature!" thought the banker, "he is asleep and most likely dreaming of the millions. And I have only to take this half-dead man, throw him on the bed, stifle him a little with the pillow, and the most conscientious expert would find no sign of a violent death. But let us first read what he has written here. . . ."

The banker took the page from the table and read as follows:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock I regain my freedom and the right to associate with other men, but before I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

"For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women. . . . Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm-clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God. . . . In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms. . . .

"Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know that I am wiser than all of you.

"And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth as though you were no more than mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity, your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or freeze together with the earthly globe.

"You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for beauty. You would marvel if, owing to strange events of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth. I don't want to understand you.

"To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go out from here five hours before the time fixed, and so break the compact. . . ."

When the banker had read this he laid the page on the table, kissed the strange man on the head, and went out of the lodge, weeping. At no other time, even when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had he felt so great a contempt for himself. When he got home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion kept him for hours from sleeping.

Next morning the watchmen ran in with pale faces, and told him they had seen the man who lived in the lodge climb out of the window into the garden, go to the gate, and disappear. The banker went at once with the servants to the lodge and made sure of the flight of his prisoner. To avoid arousing unnecessary talk, he took from the table the writing in which the millions were renounced, and when he got home locked it up in the fireproof safe.

The Piece of String

by Guy de Maupassant (France)

It was market-day, and from all the country round Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the town. The men walked slowly, throwing the whole body forward at every step of their long, crooked legs. They were deformed from pushing the plough which makes the left- shoulder higher, and bends their figures side-ways; from reaping the grain, when they have to spread their legs so as to keep on their feet. Their starched blue blouses, glossy as though varnished, ornamented at collar and cuffs with a little embroidered design and blown out around their bony bodies, looked very much like balloons about to soar, whence issued two arms and two feet.

Some of these fellows dragged a cow or a calf at the end of a rope. And just behind the animal followed their wives beating it over the back with a leaf-covered branch to hasten its pace, and carrying large baskets out of which protruded the heads of chickens or ducks. These women walked more quickly and energetically than the men, with their erect, dried-up figures, adorned with scanty little shawls pinned over their flat bosoms, and their heads wrapped round with a white cloth, enclosing the hair and surmounted by a cap.

Now a char-a-banc passed by, jogging along behind a nag and shaking up strangely the two men on the seat, and the woman at the bottom of the cart who held fast to its sides to lessen the hard jolting.

In the market-place at Goderville was a great crowd, a mingled multitude of men and beasts. The horns of cattle, the high, long-napped hats of wealthy peasants, the headdresses of the women came to the surface of that sea. And the sharp, shrill, barking voices made a continuous, wild din, while above it occasionally rose a huge burst of laughter from the sturdy lungs of a merry peasant or a prolonged bellow from a cow tied fast to the wall of a house.

It all smelled of the stable, of milk, of hay and of perspiration, giving off that half-human, half-animal odor which is peculiar to country folks.

Maitre Hauchecorne, of Breaute, had just arrived at Goderville and was making his way toward the square when he perceived on the ground a little piece of string. Maitre Hauchecorne, economical as are all true Normans, reflected that everything was worth picking up which could be of any use, and he stooped down, but painfully, because he suffered from rheumatism. He took the bit of thin string from the ground and was carefully preparing to roll it up when he saw Maitre Malandain, the harness maker, on his doorstep staring at him. They had once had a quarrel about a halter, and they had borne each other malice ever since. Maitre Hauchecorne was overcome with a sort of shame at being seen by his enemy picking up a bit of string in the road. He quickly hid it beneath his blouse and then slipped it into his breeches, pocket, then pretended to be still looking for something on the ground which he did not discover and finally went off toward the market-place, his head bent forward and his body almost doubled in two by rheumatic pains.

He was at once lost in the crowd, which kept moving about slowly and noisily as it chaffered and bargained. The peasants examined the cows, went off, came back, always in doubt for fear of being cheated, never quite daring to decide, looking the seller square in the eye in the effort to discover the tricks of the man and the defect in the beast.

The women, having placed their great baskets at their feet, had taken out the poultry, which lay upon the ground, their legs tied together, with terrified eyes and scarlet combs.

They listened to propositions, maintaining their prices in a decided manner with an impassive face or perhaps deciding to accept the smaller price offered, suddenly calling out to the customer who was starting to go away:

"All right, I'll let you have them, Mait' Anthime."

Then, little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived at a distance poured into the inns.

At Jourdain's the great room was filled with eaters, just as the vast court was filled with vehicles of every sort--wagons, gigs, chars-a- bancs, tilburies, innumerable vehicles which have no name, yellow with mud, misshapen, pieced together, raising their shafts to heaven like two arms, or it may be with their nose on the ground and their rear in the air.

Just opposite to where the diners were at table the huge fireplace, with its bright flame, gave out a burning heat on the backs of those who sat at the right. Three spits were turning, loaded with chickens, with pigeons and with joints of mutton, and a delectable odor of roast meat and of gravy flowing over crisp brown skin arose from the hearth, kindled merriment, caused mouths to water.

All the aristocracy of the plough were eating there at Mait' Jourdain's, the innkeeper's, a dealer in horses also and a sharp fellow who had made a great deal of money in his day.

The dishes were passed round, were emptied, as were the jugs of yellow cider. Every one told of his affairs, of his purchases and his sales. They exchanged news about the crops. The weather was good for greens, but too wet for grain.

Suddenly the drum began to beat in the courtyard before the house. Every one, except some of the most indifferent, was on their feet at once and ran to the door, to the windows, their mouths full and napkins in their hand.

When the public crier had finished his tattoo he called forth in a jerky voice, pausing in the wrong places:

"Be it known to the inhabitants of Goderville and in general to all persons present at the market that there has been lost this morning on the Beuzeville road, between nine and ten o'clock, a black leather pocketbook containing five hundred francs and business papers. You are requested to return it to the mayor's office at once or to Maitre Fortune Houlbreque, of Manneville. There will be twenty francs reward."

Then the man went away. They heard once more at a distance the dull beating of the drum and the faint voice of the crier. Then they all began to talk of this incident, reckoning up the chances which Maitre Houlbreque had of finding or of not finding his pocketbook again.

The meal went on. They were finishing their coffee when the corporal of gendarmes appeared on the threshold.

He asked:

"Is Maitre Hauchecorne, of Breaute, here?"

Maitre Hauchecorne, seated at the other end of the table answered:

"Here I am, here I am."

And he followed the corporal.

The mayor was waiting for him, seated in an armchair. He was the notary of the place, a tall, grave man of pompous speech.

"Maitre Hauchecorne," said he, "this morning on the Beuzeville road, you were seen to pick up the pocketbook lost by Maitre Houlbreque, of Manneville."

The countryman looked at the mayor in amazement frightened already at this suspicion which rested on him, he knew not why.

"I--I picked up that pocketbook?"

"Yes, YOU."

"I swear I don't even know anything about it."

"You were seen."

"[illegible]"

"M. Malandain, the harness-maker."

Then the old man remembered, understood, and, reddening with anger, said:

"Ah! he saw me, did he, the rascal? He saw me picking up this string here, M'sieu le Maire."

And fumbling at the bottom of his pocket, he pulled out of it the little end of string.

But the mayor incredulously shook his head:

"You will not make me believe, Maitre Hauchecorne, that M. Malandain, who is a man whose word can be relied on, has mistaken this string for a pocketbook."

The peasant, furious, raised his hand and spat on the ground beside him as if to attest his good faith, repeating:

"For all that, it is God's truth, M'sieu le Maire. There! On my soul's salvation, I repeat it."

The mayor continued:

"After you picked up the object in question, you even looked about for some time in the mud to see if a piece of money had not dropped out of it."

The good man was choking with indignation and fear.

"How can they tell--how can they tell such lies as that to slander an honest man! How can they?"

His protestations were in vain; he was not believed.

He was confronted with M. Malandain, who repeated and sustained his testimony. They railed at one another for an hour. At his own request Maitre Hauchecorne was searched. Nothing was found on him.

At last the mayor, much perplexed, sent him away, warning him that he would inform the public prosecutor and ask for orders.

The news had spread. When he left the mayor's office the old man was surrounded, interrogated with a curiosity which was serious or mocking, as the case might be, but into which no indignation entered. And he began to tell the story of the string. They did not believe him. They laughed.

He passed on, buttonholed by every one, himself buttonholing his acquaintances, beginning over and over again his tale and his protestations, showing his pockets turned inside out to prove that he had nothing in them.

They said to him:

"You old rogue!"

He grew more and more angry, feverish, in despair at not being believed, and kept on telling his story.

The night came. It was time to go home. He left with three of his neighbors, to whom he pointed out the place where he had picked up the string, and all the way he talked of his adventure.

That evening he made the round of the village of Breaute for the purpose of telling every one. He met only unbelievers.

He brooded over it all night long.

The next day, about one in the afternoon, Marius Paumelle, a farm hand of Maitre Breton, the market gardener at Ymauville, returned the pocketbook and its contents to Maitre Holbreque, of Manneville.

This man said, indeed, that he had found it on the road, but not knowing how to read, he had carried it home and given it to his master.

The news spread to the environs. Maitre Hauchecorne was informed. He started off at once and began to relate his story with the denoument. He was triumphant.

"What grieved me," said he, "was not the thing itself, do you understand, but it was being accused of lying. Nothing does you so much harm as being in disgrace for lying."

All day he talked of his adventure. He told it on the roads to the people who passed, at the cabaret to the people who drank and next Sunday when they came out of church. He even stopped strangers to tell them about it. He was easy now, and yet something worried him without his knowing exactly what it was. People had a joking manner while they listened. They did not seem convinced. He seemed to feel their remarks behind his back.

On Tuesday of the following week he went to market at Goderville, prompted solely by the need of telling his story.

Malandain, standing on his doorstep, began to laugh as he saw him pass. Why?

He accosted a farmer of Criquetot, who did not let hire finish, and giving him a punch in the pit of the stomach cried in his face: "Oh, you great rogue!" Then he turned his heel upon him.

Maitre Hauchecorne remained speechless and grew more and more uneasy. Why had they called him "great rogue"?

When seated at table in Jourdain's tavern he began again to explain the whole affair.

A horse dealer of Montivilliers shouted at him:

"Get out, get out, you old scamp! I know all about your old string."

Hauchecorne stammered:

"But since they found it again, the pocketbook!"

But the other continued:

"Hold your tongue, daddy; there's one who finds it and there's another who returns it. And no one the wiser."

The farmer was speechless. He understood at last. They accused him of having had the pocketbook brought back by an accomplice, by a confederate.

He tried to protest. The whole table began to laugh.

He could not finish his dinner, and went away amid a chorus of jeers.

He went home indignant, choking with rage, with confusion, the more cast down since with his Norman craftiness he was, perhaps, capable of having done what they accused him of and even of boasting of it as a good trick. He was dimly conscious that it was impossible to prove his innocence, his craftiness being so well known. He felt himself struck to the heart by the injustice of the suspicion.

He began anew to tell his tale, lengthening his recital every day, each day adding new proofs, more energetic declarations and more sacred oaths, which he thought of, which he prepared in his hours of solitude, for his mind was entirely occupied with the story of the string. The more he denied it, the more artful his arguments, the less he was believed.

"Those are liars proofs," they said behind his back.

He felt this. It preyed upon him and he exhausted himself in useless efforts.

He was visibly wasting away.

Jokers would make him tell the story of "the piece of string" to amuse them, just as you make a soldier who has been on a campaign tell his story of the battle. His mind kept growing weaker and about the end of December he took to his bed.

He passed away early in January, and, in the ravings of death agony, he protested his innocence, repeating:

"A little bit of string--a little bit of string. See, here it is, M'sieu le Maire."

Like the Sun

By R. K. Narayan (India)

Truth, Sekhar reflected, is like the sun. I suppose no human being can ever look it straight in the face without blinking or being dazed. He realized that, morning till night, the essence of human relationships consisted in tempering truth so that it might not shock. This day he set apart as unique day – at least one day in a year we must give and take absolute Truth whatever may happen. Otherwise life is not worth living. The day ahead seemed to him full of possibilities. He told no one of his experiment. It was a quiet resolve, a secret past between him and eternity.

The very first test came while his wife served him his morning meal. He showed hesitation over a tit-bit, which she had thought was her culinary masterpiece. She asked, "Why, isn't it good?" At other times he would have said, considering her feelings in the matter, "I feel full-up, that's all." But today he said, "It isn't good. I'm unable to swallow it." He saw her wince and said to himself, "Can't be helped. Truth is like the sun."

His next trial was in the common room when one of his colleagues came up and said, "Did you hear of the death of so and so? Don't you think it a pity?" "No," Sekhar answered. "He was such a fine man…" the other began. But Sekhar cut him short with: "Far from it. He always struck me as a mean and selfish brute."

During the last period when he was teaching geography for Form A, Sekhar received a note from the headmaster: "Please see me before you go home." Sekhar said to himself: It must be about these horrible test papers. A hundred papers in the boys' scrawls; he had shirked this work for weeks, feeling all the time as if a sword were hanging over his head.

The bell rang and the boys burst out of the class. Sekhar paused for a moment outside the headmaster's room to button up his coat; that was another subject the headmaster always sermonized about. He stepped in with a very polite "Good evening, sir."

The headmaster looked up at him in a very friendly manner and asked, "Are you free this evening?"

Sekhar replied, "Just some outing which I have promised the children at home…"

"Well, you can take them out another day. Come home with me now."

"Oh… yes, sir, certainly…" And then he added timidly, "Anything special, sir?"

"Yes," replied the headmaster, smiling to himself… "You didn't know my weakness for music?"

"Oh, yes, sir…"

"I've been learning and practicing secretly, and now I want you to hear me this evening. I've engaged a drummer and a violinist to accompany me- this is the first time I'm doing it full-dress and I want your opinion. I know it will be valuable."

Sekhar's taste in music was well known. He was one of the most dreaded music critics in the town. But he never anticipated his musical inclinations would lead him to this trail… "Rather a surprise for you isn't it?" asked the headmaster. "I've spent a fortune on it behind doors…" They started for the headmaster's house. "God hasn't given me a child, but at least let him not deny me of the consolation of music," the headmaster said, pathetically, as they walked. He incessantly chattered about how music: how he began one day out of sheer boredom; how his teacher at first laughed at him, and then gave him hope; how his ambition in life was to forget himself in music.

At home the headmaster proved very ingratiating. He sat Sekhar on a red silk carpet, set before him several dishes of delicacies, and fussed over him as if he were a son-in-law of the house. He even said, "Well, you must listen with a free mind. Don't worry about these test papers." He added humorously, "I will give you a week's time."

"Make it ten days, sir," Sekhar pleaded.

"All right, granted," the headmaster said generously. Sekhar felt really relieved now- he would attack them at the rate of ten a day and get rid of the nuisance.

The headmaster lighted incense sticks. 'Just to create the right atmosphere." He explained. A drummer and a violinist, already seated on a Rangoon mat, were waiting for him. The headmaster sat down

between them like a professional at a concert, cleared his throat, and began an alapana, and paused to ask, "Isn't it good Kalyani?" Sekhar pretended not to have heard the question. The headmaster went on to sing a full song composed by Thyagaraja and followed it by two more. All the time the headmaster was singing, Sekhar went on commenting within himself, 'He croaks like a dozen frogs. He is bellowing like a buffalo. Now he sounds like loose window shutters in a storm.'

The incense sticks burnt low. Sekhar's head throbbed with the medley of sounds that had assailed his ear-drums for a couple of hours now. He felt half stupefied. The headmaster had gone nearly hoarse, when he paused to ask, "Shall I go on?" Sekhar felt greatest pity for him. But he felt he could not help it. No judge delivering a sentence felt more pained and helpless. Sekhar noticed that the headmaster's wife peeped in from the kitchen, with eager curiosity. The drummer and the violinist put away their burdens with an air of relief. The headmaster removed his spectacles, mopped his brow, and asked, "Now, come out with your opinion."

"Can't I give it tomorrow, sir?" Sekhar asked tentatively.

"No. I want it immediately- your frank opinion. Was it good?"

"No, sir..." Sekhar replied.

"Oh! ...Is there any use continuing my lessons?"

"Absolutely none, sir..." Sekhar said with his voice trembling. He felt very unhappy that he could not speak more soothingly. Truth, he reflected, required as much strength to give as to receive.

All the way home he felt worried. He felt that his official life was not going to be smooth sailing hereafter. There were questions of increment and confirmation and so on, all depending upon the headmaster's goodwill. All kinds of worries seemed to be in store for him... Did not Harischandra lose his throne, wife, child, because he would speak nothing less than the absolute Truth whatever happened?

At home his wife served him with a sullen face. He knew she was still angry with him for his remark of the morning. Two casualties for today, Sekhar said to himself. If I practice it for a week, I don't think I shall have a single friend left.

He received a call from the headmaster in his classroom next day. He went up apprehensively.

"Your suggestion was useful. I have paid off the music master. No one would tell me the truth about my music all these days. Why such antics at my age! Thank you. By the way, what about those test papers?"

"You gave me ten days, sir, for correcting them."

"Oh, I've reconsidered it. I must positively have them here tomorrow..." A hundred papers in a day! That meant all night's sitting up! "Give me a couple of days, sir..."

"No. I must have them tomorrow morning. And remember, every paper must be thoroughly scrutinized."

"Yes, sir," Sekhar said, feeling that sitting up all night with a hundred test papers was a small price to pay for the luxury of practicing truth.

Emma Zunz

By Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina)

While returning from the textile factory of Tarbuch and Loewenthal on the fourteenth of January, 1922, Emma Zunz found at the back of the entrance hall a letter dated in Brazil by which she knew her father had died. The seal and the envelope fooled her at first; then she became discomfited by the unknown handwriting. Nine or ten scribbled lines sought to fill up the page; Emma read that Señor Maier had ingested a strong dose of veronal by mistake and died on the third of the current month in the hospital in Bagé. The letter was signed by a companion from her father's boarding house, a certain Fein O'Fain of the Rio Grande, who could not have known that he was addressing the daughter of the deceased.

Emma let the paper fall. Her first sentiment was indisposition in her stomach and knees; then she felt blind guilt, unreality, cold, fear; then she wanted it to be the next day already. She understood right afterward that this wish was useless because her father's death was the only thing that had happened in the world and that would keep happening without end. She retrieved the paper and went to her room. She furtively guarded it in a drawer, as if, otherwise, it would meet other ends. She had already started to see them loom; perhaps she was already as she would be.

In the growing darkness, Emma cried until the end of the day of the suicide of Manuel Maier, who was Emanuel Zunz in the old, happy days. She remembered summer vacations on a small farm near Gualeguay, remembered (tried to remember) her mother, remembered the house in Lanús that they auctioned off, remembered the yellow lozenge panes of a window, remembered the prison sentence and the opprobrium, remembered the anonymous letters with the newspaper clipping on "the cashier's embezzlement," remembered (but this actually she never forgot) that her father, that last night, had sworn to her that the thief was Loewenthal. Loewenthal, Aaron Loewenthal, previously the factory manager and now one of the owners. Emma had guarded this secret since 1916. She had revealed it to no one, not even to her best friend, Elsa Urstein. Perhaps she was evading profane incredulity; perhaps she believed that her secret was a link between her and her absent father. Loewenthal did not know that she knew; from this small fact Emma derived a feeling of power.

That night she did not sleep; and when the first light outlined the window's rectangle, her plan had already been perfected. She got that day, which to her seemed interminable, to be like the others. In the factory, there were rumors of a strike; as always, Emma declared herself to be against all violence. At six o'clock, she finished work and went with Elsa to a women's club which had a gym and swimming pool. They signed in; she had to spell and repeat her name and surname and pretend to enjoy the vulgar jokes which accompanied the review. With Elsa and with the younger of the Kronfusses, she talked about which cinema they would go to on Sunday afternoon. Then they spoke about boyfriends, with no one expecting Emma to speak. She was going to be nineteen in April, but men still inspired almost pathological terror in her ... On returning, she made some tapioca soup and vegetables, ate early, went to bed and forced herself to sleep. In this laborious and trivial way, Friday the fifteenth, the eve of the events, passed.

On Saturday, impatience woke her up. Impatience, not inquietude, and the sole relief of being on that day, at an end. She no longer had to plot and imagine: within a few hours, the simplicity of the events took over. She read in La Prensa that the Nordstjärnan of Malmö was setting sail tonight from pier three; she phoned Loewenthal, insinuated that she desired to communicate (without the others' knowing about it) something about the strike, and promised to pass by the office at nightfall. Her voice was trembling; the trembling suited an informer. No other memorable event occurred that morning. Emma worked until twelve and fixed the details of a Sunday walk with Elsa and Perla Kronfuss. After having lunch, she lay down and, eyes closed, recapitulated the plan she had plotted. She thought that the last stage would be less horrible than the first and would doubtless provide the taste of victory and justice. Suddenly, alarmed, she got up and ran over to the drawer of the dresser. She opened it; under the picture of Milton Sills, where she had left it the night before, was the letter from Fain. No one could have seen it. She began to read it and ripped it up.

To relate with certain reality the events of that evening would be difficult and perhaps not right. One attribute of the infernal is its unreality, an attribute that at once mitigates and aggravates its terrors. How could one make an action credible when one did not believe who did it? How can one recuperate this brief chaos which, today, the memory of Emma Zunz repudiates and confounds? Emma lived by Almagro, on

Liniers street; it is evident to us that she went to the port that evening. Maybe in the infamous Paseo de Julio she saw herself multiplied in mirrors, revealed by lights, and undressed by hungry eyes; but it is more reasonable to conjecture that at first she strayed inadvertently towards the indifferent arcade ... She entered two or three bars and saw the routine and manners of other women. Finally she spoke to the men from the Nordstjärnan. She was afraid that one man, very young, would fill her with tenderness, so she opted for another, coarse and perhaps shorter than she was, for whom the pureness of the horror would not be mitigated. The man led her to a doorway, then a turbid entrance hall, then a steep staircase, then a small room (which had a window with lozenge panes identical to those in the house in Lanús), then to a door which was locked. The grave events were outside of time; and for that reason, the immediate past remains cut from the future; and for that reason, the parts that form the events do not seem consecutive.

At what time apart from this time, in what perplexing disorder of unconnected and atrocious sensations did Emma think but once of the death that motivated her sacrifice? I am of the belief that she thought about it one time, and at this moment endangered her desperate proposition. She thought (she could not but think) that her father had done the horrible thing to her mother which they were now doing to her. She thought with faint astonishment and immediately took refuge in her vertigo. The man, a Swede or a Finn, did not speak Spanish; he was a tool for Emma as she was for him, but she was serving joy and he justice.

Once she was alone, Emma did not immediately open her eyes. On the lamp table was the money the man had left. Emma got to her feet and ripped up the money as she had ripped up the letter. Ripping up money is an impiety, like throwing out bread; Emma repented as soon as she did it. An act of arrogance and on that day ... Fear got lost in her body's sadness, in her disgust. Her disgust and her sadness were paralyzing her, but Emma rose slowly and proceeded to get dressed. No bright colors remained in the room; the last dusk was becoming worse. Emma managed to leave without anyone's notice; at the corner, she boarded a train on the Lacroze line which was heading west. Following her plan, she chose the seat all the way at the front so that they could not see her face. Perhaps it consoled her to affirm, in the insipid hustle and bustle of the streets, that what happened had not contaminated matters. She traveled through deteriorating and opaque neighborhoods at once seen and forgotten and got off at one of the turnings of Warnes. Paradoxically, her fatigue came to be a strength since it forced her to concentrate on the details of the affair and conceal its background and its end.

Aaron Loewenthal was, according to everybody, a serious and reliable man; but his few intimates knew him as greedy. He lived upstairs in the factory, alone. It was set up in a run–down area for fear of thieves; he kept a large dog in the factory's courtyard and in the drawer of his desk, which nobody knew, a revolver. Last year he had cried with much decorum over his wife's unexpected death (a Gauss who bore a good dowry!), but money was his true passion. To his personal embarrassment, he was less talented at making it than keeping it. He was very religious, believing himself to have a secret pact with the Lord which excused him from acting good in exchange for orations and prayers. Bald, corpulent, in mourning garb, with steamed–up glasses and a blond beard, he stood by the window expecting the confidential report of worker Zunz.

He saw her push the gate (which he had left half–open on purpose) and cross the dark courtyard. He saw her give a small start when the still–fastened dog barked. Emma's lips were moving like those of someone praying in a low voice; tired, they repeated the sentence which Señor Loewenthal would hear before dying.

Things did not happen the way Emma Zunz had foreseen them. Since yesterday's early morning she had dreamt of many things, holding the firm revolver, forcing that miserable man to confess his miserable guilt, and explaining that intrepid stratagem that would allow Divine Justice to triumph over the justice of men (not by fear but by being an instrument of Justice, she did not wish to be punished). One bullet in the middle of the chest would then seal Loewenthal's fate. But the events did not occur thus.

Before Aaron Loewenthal, more than the urgency of avenging her father, Emma felt the urgency of punishing the outrage she had suffered because of him. She could not but kill him after this meticulous disgrace. Nor did she have the time to spare for theatrics. Seated and shy, she asked Loewenthal for forgiveness and invoked (as an informer) the obligations of loyalty, mentioned certain names, said she understood others and cut herself off as if fear had won out. She managed to make Loewenthal leave for a cup of water. When he, incredulous but indulgent of such a fuss, returned from the dining room, Emma had

already taken the heavy revolver from the drawer. She squeezed the trigger twice. His considerable body collapsed as if the explosions and the smoke had ripped him up; a vase of water broke; his face showed both fear and anger; the face's mouth insulted her in Spanish and in Yiddish. The bad words did not cease; Emma had to fire another time. In the courtyard, the tethered dog broke out in barking, and an effusion of sudden blood remained on the obscene lips and stained his beard and clothes. Emma began the accusation she had prepared ("I have avenged my father and they will not be able to punish me..."), but she did not finish because Señor Loewenthal was dead. She never knew whether he was able to understand.

The mounting barks reminded her, however, that she could not rest. She disarranged the couch, unbuttoned the cadaver's jacket, removed his bespattered glasses and left them on top of the file cabinet. Then she took the phone and repeated what she would repeat so many times, with these and other words: Something unbelievable has happened ... Señor Loewenthal made me come by with the strike as a pretext ... He took advantage of me and I killed him.

As it were, the story was unbelievable, but it prevailed upon everyone because it was substantially true. Emma Zunz's tone was real, her decency was real, her hate was real. And the outrage which she had suffered was also real: only the circumstances, the time, and one or two names were false.

No Dogs Bark

By Juan Rulfo (Mexico)

"You up there, Ignacio! Don't you hear something or see a light somewhere?"

"I can't see a thing."

"We ought to be near now."

"Yes, but I can't hear a thing."

"Look hard. Poor Ignacio."

The long black shadow of the men kept moving up and down, climbing over rocks, diminishing and increasing as it advanced along the edge of the arroyo. It was a single reeling shadow.

The moon came out of the earth like a round flare.

"We should be getting to that town, Ignacio. Your ears are uncovered, so try to see if you can't hear dogs barking. Remember they told us Tonaya was right behind the mountain. And we left the mountain hours ago. Remember, Ignacio?"

"Yes, but I don't see a sign of anything."

"I'm getting tired."

"Put me down."

The old man backed up to a thick wall and shifted his load but didn't let it down from his shoulders. Though his legs were buckling on him, he didn't want to sit down, because then he would be unable to lift his son's body, which they had helped to sling on his back hours ago. He had carried him all this way.

"How do you feel?"

"Bad."

Ignacio didn't talk much. Less and less all the time. Now and then he seemed to sleep. At times he seemed to be cold. He trembled. When the trembling seized him, his feet dug into his father's flanks like spurs. Then his hands, clasped around his father's neck, clutched at the head and shook it as if it were a rattle.

The father gritted his teeth so he wouldn't bite his tongue, and when the shaking was over he asked, "Does it hurt a lot?"

"Some," Ignacio answered.

First Ignacio had said, "Put me down here-- Leave me here-- You go on alone. I'll catch up with you tomorrow, or as soon as I get a little better." He'd said this some fifty times. Now he didn't say it.

There was the moon. Facing them. A large red moon that filled their eyes with light and stretched and darkened its shadow over the earth.

"I can't see where I'm going any more," the father said. No answer.

The son up there was illumined by the moon. His face, discolored, bloodless, reflected the opaque light. And he here below.

"Did you hear me, Ignacio? I tell you I can't see you very well."

No answer.

[illegible]

"This is no road. They told us Tonaya was behind the hill. We've passed the hill. And you can't see Tonaya, or hear any sound that would tell us it is close. Why won't you tell me what you see up there, Ignacio?"

"Put me down, Father."

"Do you feel bad?"

"Yes."

"I'll get you to Tonaya. There I'll find somebody to take care of you. They say there's a doctor in the town. I'll take you to him. I've already carried you for hours, and I'm not going to leave you lying here now for somebody to finish off."

He staggered a little. He took two or three steps to the side, then straightened up again.

"I'll get you to Tonaya."

"Let me down."

His voice was faint, scarcely a murmur. "I want to sleep a little."

"Sleep up there. After all, I've got a good hold on you."

The moon was rising, almost blue, in a clear sky. Now the old man's face, drenched with sweat, was flooded with light. He lowered his eyes so he wouldn't have to look straight ahead, since he couldn't bend his head, tightly gripped in his son's hands.

"I'm not doing all this for you. I'm doing it for your dead mother. Because you were her son. That's why I'm doing it. She would've haunted me if I'd left you lying where I found you and hadn't picked you up and carried you to be cured as I'm doing. She's the one who gives me courage, not you. From the first you've caused me nothing but trouble, humiliation, and shame."

He sweated as he talked. But the night wind dried his sweat. And over the dry sweat, he sweated again.

"I'll break my back, but I'll get to Tonaya with you, so they can ease those wounds you got. I'm sure as soon as you feel well you'll go back to your bad ways. But that doesn't matter to me any more. As long as you go far away, where I won't hear anything more of you. As long as you do that--Because as far as I'm concerned, you aren't my son any more. I've cursed the blood you got from me. My part of it I've cursed. I said, 'Let the blood I gave him rot in his kidneys: I said it when I heard you'd taken to the roads, robbing and killing people--Good people. My old friend Tranquilino, for instance. The one who baptized you. The one who gave you your name. Even he had the bad luck to run into you. From that time on I said, 'That one cannot be my son.'

"See if you can't see something now. Or hear something. You'll have to do it from up there because I feel deaf."

"I don't see anything."

"Too bad for you, Ignacio."

"I'm thirsty."

"You'll have to stand it. We must be near now. Because it's now very late at night they must've turned out the lights in the town. But at least you should hear dogs barking. Try to bear."

"Give me some water."

"There's no water here. Just stones. You'll have to stand it. Even if there was water, I wouldn't let you down to drink. There's nobody to help me lift you up again, and I can't do it alone."

"I'm awfully thirsty and sleepy."

"I remember when you were born. You were that way then. You woke up hungry and ate and went back to sleep. Your mother had to give you water, because you'd finished all her milk. You couldn't be filled up. And you were always mad and yelling. I never thought that in time this madness would go to your head. But it did. Your mother, may she rest in peace, wanted you to grow up strong. She thought when you grew up you'd look after her. She only had you. The other child she tried to give birth to killed her. And you would've killed her again, if she'd lived till now."

The man on his back stopped gouging with his knees. His feet began to swing loosely from side to side. And it seemed to the father that Ignacio's head, up there, was shaking as if he were sobbing.

On his hair he felt thick drops fall.

"Are you crying, Ignacio? The memory of your mother makes you cry, doesn't it? But you never did anything for her. You always repaid us badly. Somehow your body got filled with evil instead of affection. And now you see? They've wounded it. What happened to your friends? They were all killed. Only they didn't have anybody. They might well have said, 'We have nobody to be concerned about.' But you, Ignacio?"

At last, the town. He saw roofs shining in the moonlight. He felt his son's weight crushing him as the back of his knees buckled in a final effort. When he reached the first dwelling, he leaned against the wall by the sidewalk. He slipped the body off, dangling, as if it had been wrenched from him.

With difficulty he unpried his son's fingers from around his neck. When he was free, he heard the dogs barking everywhere. "And you didn't hear them, Ignacio?" he said. "You didn't even help me listen."

Metonymy, or The Husband's Revenge

RACHEL DE QUEIROZ born 1910 BRAZIL

METONYMY. I LEARNED the word in 1930 and shall never forget it. I had just published my first novel. A literary critic had scolded me because my hero went out into the night "chest unbuttoned."

"What deplorable nonsense!" wrote this eminently sensible gentleman. "Why does she not say what she means? Obviously, it was his shirt that was unbuttoned, not his chest."

I accepted his rebuke[1] with humility, indeed with shame. But my illustrious Latin professor, Dr. Matos Peixoto,[2] came to my rescue. He said that what I had written was perfectly correct; that I had used a respectable figure of speech known as metonymy; and that this figure consisted in the use of one word for another word associated with it—for example, a word representing a cause instead of the effect, or representing the container when the content is intended. The classic instance, he told me, is "the sparkling cup"; in reality, not the cup but the wine in it is sparkling.

The professor and I wrote a letter, which was published in the newspaper where the review had appeared. It put my unjust critic in his place. I hope he learned a lesson. I know I did. Ever since, I have been using metonymy—my only bond with classical rhetoric.[3]

Moreover, I have devoted some thought to it, and I have concluded that metonymy may be more than a figure of speech. There is, I believe, such a thing as practical or applied metonymy. Let me give a crude example, drawn from my own experience. A certain lady of my acquaintance suddenly moved out of the boardinghouse where she had been living for years and became a mortal enemy of the woman who owned it. I asked her why. We both knew that the woman was a kindly soul; she had given my friend injections when she needed them, had often loaned her a hot water bottle, and had always waited on her when she had her little heart attacks. My friend replied: "It's the telephone in the hall. I hate her for it. Half the time when I answered it, the call was a hoax or joke of some sort."

"But the owner of the boardinghouse didn't perpetrate these hoaxes. She wasn't responsible for them."

"No. But whose telephone was it?"

I know another case of applied metonymy, a more disastrous one, for it involved a crime. It happened in a city of the interior, which I shall not name for fear that someone may recognize the parties and revive the scandal. I shall narrate the crime but conceal the criminal.

Well, in this city of the interior there lived a man. He was not old, but he was spent, which is worse than being old. In his youth he had suffered from beriberi.[4] His legs were weak, his chest was tired and asthmatic, his skin was yellowish, and his eyes were rheumy. He was, however, a man of property; he owned the house in which he lived and the one next to it, in which he had set up a grocery store. Therefore, although so unattractive personally, he was able to find himself a wife. In all justice

1. **rebuke** (ri byo͞ok′): sharp scolding or reprimand.
2. **Matos Peixoto** (mä′ tôs pā zhô′ tô).
3. **rhetoric** (ret′ ər ik): the art of using words effectively in speaking or writing.
4. **beriberi** (ber′ ē ber′ ē): a disease caused by poor diet that results in nerve disorders and sometimes swelling of the body.

to him, he did not tempt fate by marrying a beauty. Instead, he married a poor, emaciated girl who worked in a men's clothing factory. By her face one would have thought that she had consumption.[5] So our friend felt safe. He did not foresee the effects of good nutrition and a healthful life on a woman's appearance. The girl no longer spent eight hours a day at a sewing table. She was the mistress of her house. She ate well: fresh meat, cucumber salad, pork fat with beans and manioc[6] mush, all kinds of sweets, and oranges, which her husband bought by the gross for his customers. The effects were like magic. Her body filled out, especially in the best places. She even seemed to grow taller. And her face—what a change! I may have forgotten to mention that her features, in themselves, were good to begin with. Moreover, money enabled her to embellish her natural advantages with art; she began to wear make-up, to wave her hair, and to dress well.

Lovely, attractive, she now found her sickly, prematurely old husband a burden and a bore. Each evening, as soon as the store was closed, he dined, mostly on milk (he could not stomach meat), took his newspaper, and rested on his chaise longue[7] until time to go to bed. He did not care for movies or for soccer or for radio. He did not even show much interest in love. Just a sort of tepid, tasteless cohabitation.

And then Fate intervened: it produced a sergeant.

Granted, it was unjust for a young wife, after being reconditioned at her husband's expense, to employ her charms against the aforesaid husband. Unjust; but, then, this world thrives on injustice, doesn't it? The sergeant—I shall not say whether he was in the army, the air force, the marines, or the fusiliers,[8] for I still mean to conceal the identities of the parties—the sergeant was muscular, young, ingratiating, with a manly, commanding voice and a healthy spring in his walk. He looked gloriously martial in his high-buttoned uniform.

One day, when the lady was in charge of the counter (while her husband lunched), the sergeant came in. Exactly what happened and what did not happen is hard to say. It seems that the sergeant asked for a pack of cigarettes. Then he wanted a little vermouth. Finally he asked permission to listen to the sports broadcast on the radio next to the counter. Maybe it was just an excuse to remain there awhile. In any case, the girl said it would be all right. It is hard to refuse a favor to a sergeant, especially a sergeant like this one. It appears that the sergeant asked nothing more that day. At most, he and the girl exchanged expressive glances and a few agreeable words, murmured so softly that the customers, always alert for something to gossip about, could not hear them.

Three times more the husband lunched while his wife chatted with the sergeant in the store. The flirtation progressed. Then the husband fell ill with a grippe,[9] and the two others went far beyond flirtation. How and where they met, no one was able to discover. The important thing is that they were lovers and that they loved with a forbidden love, like Tristan and Isolde or Paolo and Francesca.[10]

5. **consumption** (kən sump′ shən): tuberculosis.

6. **manioc** (man′ ē äk′): a tropical plant with edible roots.

7. **chaise longue** (shāz′ lôŋ′): a couchlike chair with support for the back and a seat long enough to support a person's outstretched legs.

8. **fusiliers** (fyo͞o′ zi lirz′): special regiment of soldiers.

9. **grippe** (grip): the flu.

10. **Tristan and Isolde or Paolo and Francesca** (tris′ tən, i sōl′ də, pä′ ô lô, frän ches′ kä): two legendary pairs of lovers. (See "Chevrefoil," page 656, and *The Inferno*, page 468.)

Then Fate, which does not like illicit[11] love and generally punishes those who engage in it, transferred the sergeant to another part of the country.

It is said that only those who love can really know the pain of separation. The girl cried so much that her eyes grew red and swollen. She lost her appetite. Beneath her rouge could be seen the consumptive complexion of earlier times. And these symptoms aroused her husband's suspicion, although, curiously, he had never suspected anything when the love affair was flourishing and everything was wine and roses.

He began to observe her carefully. He scrutinized her in her periods of silence. He listened to her sighs and to the things she murmured in her sleep. He snooped around and found a postcard and a book, both with a man's name in the same handwriting. He found the insignia of the sergeant's regiment and concluded that the object of his wife's murmurs, sighs, and silences was not only a man but a soldier. Finally he made the supreme discovery: that they had indeed betrayed him. For he discovered the love letters, bearing airmail stamps, a distant postmark, and the sergeant's name. They left no reasonable doubt.

For five months the poor fellow twisted the poisoned dagger of jealousy inside his own thin, sickly chest. Like a boy who discovers a bird's nest and, hiding nearby, watches the eggs increasing in number every day, so the husband, using a duplicate key to the wood chest where his wife put her valuables, watched the increase in the number of letters concealed there. He had given her the chest during their honeymoon, saying, "Keep your secrets here." And the ungrateful girl had obeyed him.

Every day at the fateful hour of lunch, she replaced her husband at the counter. But he was not interested in eating. He ran to her room, pulled out a drawer in her bureau, removed the chest from under a lot of panties, slips, and such, took the little key out of his pocket, opened the chest, and anxiously read the new letter. If there was no new letter, he reread the one dated August 21; it was so full of realism that it sounded like dialogue from a French movie. Then he put everything away and hurried to the kitchen, where he swallowed a few spoonfuls of broth and gnawed at a piece of bread. It was almost impossible to swallow with the passion of those two thieves sticking in his throat.

When the poor man's heart had become utterly saturated with jealousy and hatred, he took a revolver and a box of bullets from the counter drawer; they had been left, years before, by a customer as security for a debt which had never been paid. He loaded the revolver.

One bright morning at exactly ten o'clock, when the store was full of customers, he excused himself and went through the doorway that connected the store with his home. In a few seconds the customers heard the noise of a row, a woman's scream, and three shots. On the sidewalk in front of the shopkeeper's house they saw his wife on her knees, still screaming, and him, with the revolver in his trembling hand, trying to raise her. The front door of the house was open. Through it, they saw a man's legs, wearing khaki trousers and boots. He was lying face down, with his head and torso in the parlor, not visible from the street.

The husband was the first to speak. Raising his eyes from his wife, he looked at the terror-stricken people and spotted among them his favorite customer. He took a few steps, stood in the doorway, and said:

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11. illicit [illegible] improper.

"You may call the police."

At the police station he explained that he was a deceived husband. The police chief remarked, "Isn't this a little unusual? Ordinarily you kill your wives. They're weaker than their lovers."

The man was deeply offended.

"No," he protested. "I would be utterly incapable of killing my wife. She is all that I have in the world. She is refined, pretty, and hard-working. She helps me in the store, she understands bookkeeping, she writes the letters to the wholesalers. She is the only person who knows how to prepare my food. Why should I want to kill my wife?"

"I see," said the chief of police. "So you killed her lover."

The man shook his head.

"Wrong again. The sergeant—her lover—was transferred to a place far from here. I discovered the affair only after he had gone. By reading his letters. They tell the whole story. I know one of them by heart, the worst of them. . . ."

The police chief did not understand. He said nothing and waited for the husband to continue, which he presently did:

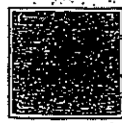
"Those letters! If they were alive, I would kill them, one by one. They were shameful to read—almost like a book. I thought of taking an airplane trip. I thought of killing some other sergeant here, so that they would all learn a lesson not to fool around with another man's wife. But I was afraid of the rest of the regiment; you know how these military men stick together. Still, I had to do something. Otherwise I would have gone crazy. I couldn't get those letters out of my head. Even on days when none arrived, I felt terrible, worse than my wife. I had to put an end to it, didn't I? So today, at last, I did it. I waited till the regular time and, when I saw the wretch appear on the other side of the street, I went into the house, hid behind a door, and lay there waiting for him."

"The lover?" asked the police chief stupidly.

"No, of course not. I told you I didn't kill her lover. It was those letters. The sergeant sent them—but *he* delivered them. Almost every day, there he was at the door, smiling, with the vile envelope in his hand. I pointed the revolver and fired three times. He didn't say a word; he just fell. No, Chief, it wasn't her lover. It was the mailman."

Death of a Tsotsi

Alan Paton

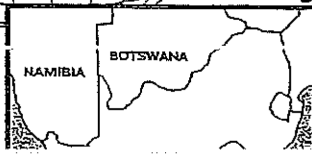
braham Moletisane was his name, but no one ever called him anything but Spike. He was a true child of the city, gay, careless, plausible; but for all that he was easy to manage and anxious to please. He was clean though flashy in his private dress. The khaki shirts and shorts of the reformatory were too drab for him, and he had a red scarf and yellow handkerchief which he arranged to peep out of his shirt pocket. He also had a pair of black and white shoes and a small but highly colored feather in his cap. Now the use of private clothes, except after the day's work, was forbidden; but he wore the red scarf on all occasions, saying, with an earnest expression that changed into an **enigmatic** smile if you looked too long at him, that his throat was sore. That was a great habit of his, to look away when you talked to him, and to smile at some unseen thing.

He passed through the first stages of the reformatory very successfully. He had two distinct sets of visitors, one his hard-working mother and his younger sister, and the other a group of flashy young men from the city. His mother and the young men never came together, and I think he arranged it so. While we did not welcome his second set of visitors, we did not forbid them so long as they behaved themselves; it was better for us to know about them than otherwise.

About the Author

Before becoming a novelist, Alan Paton was a teacher of math, physics, and English. He later became a principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory in Johannesburg, South Africa, and was responsible for many reforms that affected the lives of young people.

Born in 1903, Paton vigorously opposed his country's racist apartheid system. After World War II, Paton toured reformatories in Europe and the United States and was inspired to write the novel that brought him world fame—*Cry, the Beloved Country*. The book was an international success. Paton spoke out against apartheid until his death in 1988.



One day his mother and sister brought a friend, Elizabeth, who was a quiet and clean-looking person like themselves. Spike told me that his mother wished him to marry this girl, but that the girl was very independent, and refused to hear of it unless he reformed and gave up the company of the *tsotsis*.

"And what do you say, Spike?"

He would not look at me, but tilted his head up and surveyed the ceiling, smiling hard at it, and dropping his eyes but not his head to take an occasional glance at me. I did not know exactly what was in his mind, but it was clear to me that he was beginning to feel confidence in the reformatory.

"It doesn't help to say to her, just O.K., O.K.," he said. "She wants it done before everybody, as the Principal gives the first freedom."

"What do you mean, before everybody?"

"Before my family and hers."

"And are you willing?"

Spike smiled harder than ever at the ceiling, as though at some secret but delicious joy. Whether it was that he was savoring the delight of deciding his future, I do not know. Or whether he was savoring the delight of keeping guessing two whole families and the reformatory, I do not know either.

He was suddenly serious. "If I promise her, I'll keep it," he said. "But I won't be forced."

"No one's forcing you," I said.

He lowered his head and looked at me, as though I did not understand the ways of women.

Although Spike was regarded as a weak character, he met all the temptations of increasing physical freedom very successfully. He went to the free hostels, and after some months there he received the special privilege of special weekend leave to go home. He swaggered out, and he swaggered back, punctual to the minute. How he timed it I do not know, for he had no watch; but in

all the months that he had the privilege, he was never late.

It was just after he had received his first special leave that one of his city friends was sent to the reformatory also. The friend's name was Walter, and within a week of his arrival he and Spike had a fight, and both were sent to me. Walter alleged that Spike had hit him first, and Spike did not deny it.

"Why did you hit him, Spike?"

"He insulted me, *meneer.*"

"How?"

At length he came out with it.

"He said I was reformed."

We could not help laughing at that, not much of course, for it was clear to me that Spike did not understand our laughter, and that he accepted it only because he knew we were well-disposed towards him.

"If I said you were reformed, Spike," I said, "would you be insulted?"

"No, meneer."

"Then why did he insult you?"

He thought that it was a difficult question. Then he said, "He did not mean anything good, meneer. He meant I was back to being a child."

"You are not," I said. "You are going forward to being a man."

He was **mollified** by that, and I warned him not to fight again. He accepted my rebuke, but he said to me, "This fellow is out to make trouble for me. He says I must go back to the *tsotsis* when I come out."

I said to Walter, "Did you say that?"

Walter was hurt to the depths and said, "No, *meneer.*"

When they had gone I sent for de Villiers whose job it is to know every home in Johannesburg that has a boy at the reformatory. It was not an uncommon story, of a decent widow left with a son and daughter. She had managed to control the daughter, but not the son, and Spike had got in with a gang of *tsotsis;* as a result of one of their exploits he had found himself in court, but had not betrayed his friends. Then he had gone to the reformatory, which apart from anything it did itself, had enabled his mother to regain her hold on him, so that he had now decided to forsake the *tsotsis,* to get a job through de Villiers, and to marry the girl Elizabeth and live with her in his mother's house.

A week later Spike came to see me again.

"The Principal must forbid these friends of Walter to visit the reformatory," he said.

He said I was reformed.

"Why, Spike?"

"They're planning trouble for me, meneer."

The boy was no longer smiling, but looked troubled, and I sat considering his request. I called in de Villiers, and we discussed it in **Afrikaans**, which Spike understood. But we were talking a rather **high Afrikaans** for him, and his eyes went from one face to the other, trying to follow what we said. If I forbade these boys to visit the reformatory, what help would that be to Spike? Would their resentment against him be any the less? Would they forget it because they did not see him? Might this not be a further cause for resentment against him? After all, one cannot remake the world; one can do all one can in a reformatory, but when the time comes, one has to take away one's hands. It was true that de Villiers would look after him, but such supervision had its defined limits. As I looked at the boy's troubled face, I also was full of trouble for him; for he had of his choice bound himself with chains, and now, when he wanted of his choice to put them off, he found it was not so easy to do. He looked at us intently, and I could see that he felt excluded, and wished to be brought in again.

"Did you understand what we said, Spike?"

"Not everything, meneer."

enigmatic—mysterious

tsotsis—hoodlums

meneer—sir

mollified—soothed

Afrikaans—language developed and spoken in the Republic of South Africa

high Afrikaans—complex and literary form of the language used by the more educated

asperity—harshness

morosé—gloomy

"I am worried about one thing," I said. "Which is better for you, to forbid these boys, or not to forbid them?"

"To forbid them," he said.

"They might say," I said, "Now he'll pay for this."

"The Principal does not understand," he said. "My time is almost finished at the reformatory. I don't want trouble before I leave."

"I'm not worried about trouble here," I said. "I'm worried about trouble outside."

He looked at me anxiously, as though I had not fully grasped the matter.

"I'm not worried about here," I said with asperity. "I can look after you here. If someone tries to make trouble, do you think I can't find the truth?"

He did not wish to doubt my ability, but he remained anxious.

"You still want me to forbid them?" I asked.

"Yes, meneer."

"Mr. de Villiers," I said, "find out all you can about these boys. Then let me know."

"And then," I said to Spike, "I'll talk to you about forbidding them."

"They're a tough lot," de Villiers told me later. "No parental control. In fact they have left home and are living with George, the head of the gang. George's mother is quite without hope for her son, but she's old now and depends on him. He gives her money, and she sees nothing, hears nothing, says nothing. She cooks for them."

"And they won't allow Spike to leave the gang?" I asked.

"I couldn't prove that, but it's a funny business. The reason why they don't want to let Spike go is because he has the brains and the courage. He makes the plans and they all obey him on the job. But off the job he's nobody. Off the job they all listen to George."

"Did you see George?"

"I saw George," he said, "and I reckon he's a bad fellow. He's morose and sullen, and physically bigger than Spike."

"If you got in his way," he added emphatically, "he'd wipe you out—like that."

We both sat there rather gloomy about Spike's future.

"Spike's the best of the lot," he said. "It's tragic that he ever got in with them. Now that he wants to get out . . . well . . ."

He left his sentence unfinished.

"Let's see him," I said.

"We've seen these friends of Walter's," I said to Spike, "and we don't like them very much. But whether it will help to forbid their visits, I truly do not know. But I am willing to do what you say."

"The Principal must forbid them," he said at once.

So I forbade them. They listened to me in silence, neither humble nor insolent, not affronted nor surprised; they put up no pleas or protests. George said, "Good, sir," and one by

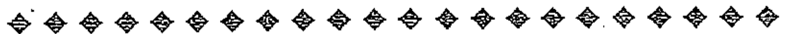
> For he had of his choice bound himself with chains, and now, when he wanted of his choice to put them off, he found it was not so easy to do.

When a boy finally leaves the reformatory, he is usually elated, and does not hide his

FOCUS ON... SOCIAL STUDIES

Of South Africa's 42 million people, approximately 76 percent are black; 13 percent are white; 8.5 percent are "colored," or of mixed race; and 2.5 percent are Asian. In spite of that imbalance, the white population has generally been dominant. Since 1948 the system of apartheid, or "apartness," has maintained privileges for whites and strict segregation among all four of the population groups. It was only in 1994, after a long period of chaos and conflict, that significant change occurred. The first elections open to all citizens were held, and the people chose Nelson Mandela as the first president of the new democratic government.

Look in newspapers or news magazines for articles about other countries that have recently undergone upheaval. What issues are at the root of the upheaval? Can you see similarities among any of the conflicts? Keep track of the progress of several countries in a Current Trends newsletter for a history or social issues class.



high spirits. He comes to the office for a final conversation, and goes off like one who has brought off an extraordinary coup. But Spike was subdued.

"Spike," I said privately, with only de Villiers there, "are you afraid?"

He looked down at the floor and said, "I'm not afraid," as though his fear were private also, and would neither be lessened nor made greater by confession.

He was duly married and de Villiers and I made him a present of a watch so that he could always be on time for his work. He had a good job in a factory in Industria, and worked magnificently; he saved money, and spent surprisingly little on clothes. But he had none of his old gaiety and attractive carelessness. He came home promptly, and once home, never stirred out.

It was summer when he was released, and with the approach of winter he asked if de Villiers would not see the manager of the factory, and arrange for him to leave half an hour earlier, so that he could reach his home before dark. But the manager said it was impossible, as Spike was on the kind of job that would come to a standstill if one man left earlier. De Villiers waited for him after work and he could see that the boy was profoundly depressed.

coup—pronounced koo; a sudden, brilliant overturn or upset

"Have they said anything to you?" de Villiers asked him.

The boy would not answer for a long time, and at last he said with a finality that was meant to stop further discussion, "They'll get me." He was devoid of hope, and did not wish to talk about it, like a man who has a great pain and does not wish to discuss it, but prefers to suffer it alone and silent. This hopelessness had affected his wife and mother and sister, so that all of them sat darkly and heavily. And de Villiers noted that there were new bars on every door and window. So he left darkly and heavily too, and Spike went with him to the little gate.

And Spike asked him, "Can I carry a knife?"

It was a hard question and the difficulty of it angered de Villiers, so that he said harshly, "How can I say that you can carry a knife?"

"You," said Spike, "my mother, my sister, Elizabeth."

impassively—giving no sign of emotion

adders—poisonous African snakes

He looked at de Villiers.

"I obey you all," he said, and went back into the house.

So still more darkly and heavily de Villiers went back to the reformatory, and sitting in my office, communicated his mood to me. We decided that he would visit Spike more often than he visited any other boy. This he did, and he even went to the length of calling frequently at the factory at five o'clock, and taking Spike home. He tried to cheer and encourage the boy, but the dark heavy mood could not be shifted.

One day Spike said to him, "I tell you, sir, you all did your best for me."

The next day he was stabbed to death just by the little gate.

We lived in the shadow of a great danger, and were powerless against it.

In spite of my inside knowledge, Spike's death so shocked me that I could do no work. I sat in my office, hopeless and defeated. Then I sent for the boy Walter.

"I sent for you," I said, "to tell you that Spike is dead."

He had no answer to make. Nothing showed in his face to tell whether he cared whether Spike were alive or dead. He stood there **impassively**, obedient and respectful, ready to go or ready to stand there for ever.

"He's dead," I said angrily. "He was killed. Don't you care?"

"I care," he said.

He would have cared very deeply, had I pressed him. He surveyed me unwinkingly, ready to comply with my slightest request. Between him and me there was an unbridgeable chasm; so far as I know there was nothing in the world, not one hurt or grievance or jest or sorrow, that could have stirred us both together.

Therefore I let him go.

De Villiers and I went to the funeral, and spoke words of sympathy to Spike's mother and wife and sister. But the words fell like dead things to the ground, for something deeper than sorrow was there. We were all of us, white and black, rich and poor, learned and untutored, bowed down by a knowledge that we lived in the shadow of a great danger, and were powerless against it. It was no place for a white person to pose in any mantle of power or authority; for this death gave the lie to both of them.

And this death would go on too, for nothing less than the reform of a society would bring it to an end. It was the menace of the socially frustrated, strangers to mercy, striking like **adders** for the dark reasons of ancient minds, at any who crossed their paths. ❖

Mussoco

OSCAR RIBAS 1909–1961 ANGOLA

IN THE MORNING, as soon as she was inside the house, Mussoco triumphantly announced:

"Hey, Auntie, I'm in luck! I've found lots of money!"—and she showed her a small parcel.

"Shh, don't shout, someone might hear you outside! Let's go into the room," advised her aunt, who, sitting on a small stool, was calmly cleaning her teeth with a piece of coal and some salt.

Grandmother, who was sweeping the yard, also with a coal and salt in her mouth, hurried up to them when she overheard what they were talking about.

"What? What's this?" she asked curiously.

"I've had bad luck . . . I was caught

. . . in a snare . . . for partridges! . . ."

A dove could be heard cooing in the next hut.

Finally, the doors were closed; the three women sat down on the iron bedstead and, with beating hearts, nervously counted and recounted the money. Two hundred and ten escudos![1] That's something! The Lord is generous, he does not forget his sinners!

"Now keep your trap shut. You haven't seen anything, you hear? With this kind of money, daughter, you could buy a house and have a good life," advised the grandmother.

"No, Grannie! What do I want a house for? We'll buy nice fabrics and expensive jewelry. . . . and a hand-turned sewing machine, if there's enough money . . ."

"Of course, you can buy something for yourself . . . But our hovel's a hovel, there's no other word for it . . . Don't be a fool!" objected her aunt.

"A house! Nice clothes, yes! Can't I even handle my own money, then?"

Her head was spinning; she got up quickly and took a few quick paces round the room in order to shake off at least some of the feeling of joy that had overwhelmed her.

Two emotions were warring within her—self-respect and fear.

Smiling, the grandmother clapped her hands and then snapped her fingers:

"You see! Money makes people lose their heads!"

"Dance, daughter, dance; your patron saints have been kind to you . . . ," added her aunt jokingly.

A little time passed and one of the women neighbors began wailing all over the district:

"Who's found 210 escudos? Whoever's found them ought to give them back, because I've lost them. Come on! Who's found the money? People, you work too, you know what a hard life it is for the poor, so don't hide my money from me! I've lost 210 escudos. Who's found them? For God's sake, let me have them back! If someone has a heart of stone, then his grave shall be of stone. Listen, folks, I appeal to you all!"

On hearing her neighbor's wails, Mussoco decided to return the money to its rightful owner. Two emotions were warring within her—self-respect and fear. It was one thing when you didn't know who the money belonged to, but now . . . knowing whose it was! No! And a neighbor too!

"Listen, Auntie. I'm going to give the money back to Donana. D'you hear what she's saying? If someone has a heart of stone, that person shall have a stone grave!" continued the girl agitatedly.

Auntie replied cunningly with an impassive face:

"What d'you mean return it? You didn't steal the money, did you? You found it on the street. That means it's yours. What are you scared of, then?"

"Don't turn down your own happiness! Finding isn't stealing. If somebody finds some-

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1. **two hundred and ten escudos** (es kōō′ dōs): about $460.

thing, it's been found, there's nothing bad can come of that. Don't be a fool!" said the old woman in support of the aunt.

At the sight of the wretched Donana, her clothes in disarray, proclaiming her grief to the world at large, all the people felt sorry for her. So much money! Poor woman! But who had picked it up? No, they hadn't found anything. They weren't bloodsuckers. But how could anyone resist such a plea? Keep that money when the owner was in such distress over it? How cold-hearted could you get? No one could be guilty of such a crime; everybody knew how hard life was.

"Donana, where did you lose your money?" asked the passersby as they gathered round her.

The unhappy woman repeated, as if by clockwork:

"I don't know, my dears. This morning, as usual, I left for Quanza to pay for the tobacco and find some work. I got as far as Alta station . . . and . . . horrors! My God! I suddenly realized the money was gone! I went home as fast as I could and looked over every inch of the road. When I got home, I turned everything upside down like crazy. I hunted through the trunks, the drawers, the clothes. Not a sign anywhere! I felt in all the nooks and crannies. Even in the mattress. But I still couldn't find it." She groaned. "All that work, all that hunger and fear in the forest, and all I went [illegible] cus-tomers—and what for? To lose everything I worked so hard to earn! Oi!" and she wrung her hands in despair. "I've already shouted it all over Ingombota.[2] I've shouted it in Bungo, too. I've shouted it in Maianga.[3] I've shouted it out at the fish and meat market as well. I'm done in! I've screamed my head off everywhere! Oi-oi-oi! I'm worn out! But nobody's turned up with the money—no one!"

"Ai-ai-ai! Who picked up the money, and why hasn't it been returned! Listen to the woman weeping, she's in agony, and they can't even give back what isn't theirs! Well, well! What mean folks there are in this world! Taking something that doesn't belong to them!"

"Yours, yours, yours, but it'll turn against you!" recited a little gray bird with a white breast, lightly hopping from branch to branch in a mulberry tree.

The days dragged on in wearisome tension. All the poor of Luanda, as if personally hit by the disaster, sympathized deeply with Donana in her grief. After all, how could the inhabitants, who were all in equally dire straits,[4] react calmly to such unheard-of meanness? They all knew how hard it was to earn money; they tasted the bitter bread of work, they slept badly at night, and so they were not indifferent to someone else's misfortune. No, a thousand times no! They would never do such a thing; the poor always help the poor! Washing or cooking in the houses of the masters, haggling in the streets or busy in their own hovels, they had never found life easy. At work they had to listen to the insults and abuse of their masters, obey their whims, deprive themselves of everything to satisfy them. And in their own homes, they had more than their share of worry and suffering. And God alone knew how many times they had to work themselves to the bone in order to earn some money and fill their bellies just once!

A warning that had traveled round the whole city was again heard in every spot, [illegible] as an anguished complaint this time, but as an evil, fuming threat:

"I've prayed. I've screamed about the money I've lost, but nobody's answered. Listen, listen carefully and don't say afterwards that I'm a witch: I'm going to have spells cast. You hear me? I'm going to have spells cast! So don't

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2. **Ingombota** (iŋ gôm bô′ tə).
3. **Maianga** (mī äŋ′ gə).
4. **dire straits** (dīr strāts): very serious [illegible]

complain about it afterwards . . . Whoever took that money is going to die. Whoever washes that corpse shall die. Whoever cuts its hair shall die. Whoever dresses it shall die. Whoever goes to bury it shall die. And whoever says, 'Woe is me!' shall also die!"

"Get away with you!" muttered the women in fright, although they understood deep down inside what was behind this hysterical outburst.

Others, in the grip of the same superstition, added with a bitter sneer:

"It's going to go badly for whoever took someone else's money."

Mothers, some with small children slung behind them with a strip of cloth, promised themselves to check the children's hidey-holes carefully. Sometimes, as is known, children could find money (why not?) and spend it on all kinds of sweets and toys.

"A child is kindred to a lunatic," babbled one old crone, thereby strengthening the mothers in their decision.

Chiming in the evening air that was lit by the glittering rays of the evening sun, the bells of Carmo church solemnly announced that an infant had been admitted to the holy faith. A little urchin, indifferent to the woman who was spreading such horror around, chanted something of his own to the music of the bells.

In the meantime, the premonition[5] of death was already spreading round and sowing the horror of disaster everywhere. Lord, who had found that money? Begone, evil! Begone, evil! Where are you, heart of stone? Why don't you own up?

More terrified than anybody, Mussoco was no longer able to contain her growing sense of panic, in spite of her family's reassurances. Her neighbor's curses, which had disturbed their hut many times before, rang insistently in her ears: "All you people who work, who know the sufferings of the poor, don't hide what I'm looking for!" A decline of spirits gradually took over from the initial exultation. The fine fabrics, the beautiful and expensive jewelry, the pleasures—all had fallen into a bottomless pit. She again spoke to her aunt and grandmother about returning the money. But both of them said: "No, no; don't be a fool." And again, as before, they talked her out of it. But now, under the stress of those curses, she ought to give up the money she had found, whether they liked the idea or not.

"Auntie!" she began meaningfully, "Have you heard what Donana's been saying?"

"Of course. Let her go and cast as many spells as she wants. Let her!"

"All that talk about spells . . . Well, she isn't joking! . . ." said Mussoco uneasily.

But the old woman, unwilling to lose their unexpected wealth and irritated by the girl's stubborn petty-mindedness, declared:

"You see! You too, now! Is the money burning your hands? Ignore that nonsense. It's all to put the wind up folks. I wasn't born yesterday, you know!"

"But Grandma . . ."

"Take no notice! And don't be such a nuisance! All that fear over nothing! If we'd stolen the money, then you could expect trouble. But you only picked it up in the street . . ."

"It's all just her talk! She's lying, she doesn't mean to do anything! So she'll go and have spells cast, only where? Don't give up the money, your luck's in! A fine one you are!" she added, smacking her lips. "If she found that money, d'you think she'd hand it back?" added her aunt heatedly, lifting up her left eyelid with her index finger.

Morally crushed again, Mussoco weakly gave in to her former reasoning. Poor girl! Inwardly, this behavior tormented her, consumed her with fire. Cursed be the moment when she had found that money! Just so that

5. **premonition** (prem′ ə nish′ ən): a feeling, in advance of the event, that something is going to happen.

she could be tormented like this? Was the money burning her hands? her grandmother had asked. Yes, it was burning all right, only not her hands, but her heart; it was burning her whole life up all the time. "I'm going to have spells cast! D'you hear? I'm going to have spells cast!" Oh, how that voice was torturing her! Oh, these cruel relatives, these cruel friends! The proverb was right: "Honey outside, ice within!"

"I've wept, I've screamed about the money I lost, but nobody's answered. Listen, listen carefully and don't say afterwards that I'm a witch: I'm going to have spells cast! D'you hear! I'm going to have spells cast! So don't complain about it afterwards . . . Whoever washes that corpse shall die. Whoever trims its nails shall die. Whoever dresses it shall die. Whoever goes to bury it shall die! Whoever says, 'Woe is me!' shall also die." So Donana went about, hurling curses everywhere.

That evening, perhaps because of what she had been through during the day, Mussoco felt a decision forming within her: she would return the money to its owner. Elated, she went out. Why tell her aunt and her grandmother first? No, they would only interfere.

Hiding the money in her clothes, she walked with uncertain steps through the dusk that was filled with the sound of people talking and the chirping of the cicadas. Her neighbor's hut was quite near, but, as if in obedience to some unconscious impulse, her legs took her in the opposite direction. Calming down and [illegible] she argued with herself: Give her the money now? Yes, but how are you going to explain what happened? Won't you be ashamed to hand it over after so many days have gone by?

While lost in thought, she suddenly realized with astonishment that she was standing at the door of Donana's hut. Should she go in or not? And under what pretext?[6] Yes, what pretext, indeed? Could she bring herself to do this? No, she certainly could not!

It was not her family but her timidity that got the better of her this time. She was ashamed, deeply ashamed! That damned money was destroying her peace of mind.

And so Donana appealed and threatened. But with no result. In spite of everything, the money had not been found. There was only one thing left now—vengeance to the death! Should she meekly tolerate her loss so that some coldhearted stranger should enjoy what she had achieved at the cost of such labor and self-sacrifice? No, it must never happen! Whoever it might be, that person must have heard her prayers. Yes, must have heard; for her cries had attracted attention everywhere. Everybody had noticed. For eight days on end her voice had rung out over all the districts in the city, even among the whining of the beggars and the shrieks of the insane. She had sworn to have spells cast, and now she was going to do just that. Pity? For whom? Had the person who found her money taken pity on her in her grief? To the heart of stone, a grave of stone!

To call up irremediable[7] evil, Donana went to Ambriz. In those parts, as rumor had it, she would find the best witchdoctors. With the help of the *jimbambi*,[8] they would quickly dispatch the culprit to the other world. Yes, and in no time at all.

"I have come to talk to the elders and their ancestors. I want you to bring down the evil spirits on whoever found the money I lost. Use your powers so that the elders and their ancestors will act quickly," said Donana to [illegible] the witchdoctors.

She went into the witchdoctor's cage that was stood about with idols and all the para-

6. pretext (prē′ tekst): an excuse.

7. irremediable (ir′ ri mē′ dē ə bəl): not capable of being corrected or remedied.

8. *jimbambi* (zhim bäm′ bi): evil spirits.

phernalia of witchcraft, knelt down, struck the ground with the flat of her hands and through her tears uttered oaths and appeals for revenge.

"To you, Honji and Vunji, Muene-Congo[9] and the Lord, Lord Almighty, I appeal for justice. For eight days I have wept, cried out everywhere about the money I lost, but no one has answered at all. Those who could see merely looked at me, those who could hear merely listened. O elders and your forefathers, if whoever found my money is far away and did not hear my appeals, let nothing bad happen to him; but if he heard and did not answer, I want you to rip him apart as with a knife, the way they cut up meat into pieces at the market. Let that person die who found the money and anyone who helps in spending it. And let that person die who washes the corpse, who trims its nails, who cuts its hair, who dresses it, or who says, 'Woe is me.' May all die—all, all, all, because all heard me and no one opened his heart!"

Drawing sound out of a dusty goat's horn, the witchdoctor sent that curse out into space—first to the east, then to the west, and then repeated it before blowing on the horn.

"And now beware of the dead! Mind where you go, and don't say 'Woe is me!' Remember your words—the *jimbambi* are no laughing matter," the witchdoctor warned Donana.

At last! What joy! Soon, soon, when the rains come, the curse will begin to act. And the villain will never make fun of her; will the heart of stone fall into a stone grave? Is she a witch? No. How could they call her so? Didn't she warn everyone of her intentions? And who had confessed? No one. No, she had not acted like a witch: a witch doesn't warn you but brings death out of envy. But she was not consumed by envy. The gods could see that she had not brought death on anyone; it had been sought. It had been sought by the culprit who had ignored her pleas. Now let that person reap the fruits.

Mussoco had been feeling ill for several days. In spite of treatment at home, the sickness did not pass off: she had a constant temperature, fever and stomach cramps, and she kept spitting blood.

"Perhaps we ought to fetch the witchdoctor," suggested her grandmother quietly during the night's vigil; she was already worried about Donana's curse.

> ***Guide for Interpretation***
>
> Consider the extent of the curse, which includes whoever found Donana's money and any person remotely connected with her loss. In one sense, the curse simply reveals the depth of Donana's rage. In a larger sense, the curse seems central to the message of the story. As you continue your reading, think about what the curse might symbolize.

The aunt yawned uneasily and nodded her head in agreement. She had been troubled by vague gnawings of conscience ever since the day when the confounded illness had begun. Although she was in sympathy with the grandmother, she did not want to admit her feelings: some sort of shame, cowardice, a morbid inadequacy spoke in her, making her wait for the tragic denouement. Yes, tragic, for she had already recognized the workings of the curse.

The local healer appeared next morning. But nothing, absolutely nothing could dispel the illness. According to *mumzamba*, the supernatural prophecy, if the accursed witchcraft entered a house, it would surely empty it in a very short space of time. And all because of money, money found in the street and hidden from the owner.

"Lord, I'm so young to die! And all because of the money I never even used," sighed Mussoco as she faded slowly away.

That night, a thunderstorm raged. The aunt and the grandmother, faced with the ghastly truth, loudly gave voice to their repentance:

"Lord, Mussoco! What wrong have we done

9. Muene-Congo (mwe′ ne kôŋ′ gō).

to you to make you leave us like this? Oi-oi-oi, our poor little girl! Who will we have left now?"

Their agitated neighbor hurried in on hearing the noise.

"Izabel, Sule! What's happened? What's the matter?" asked the bewildered Donana, not suspecting the truth.

"We don't know how it happened ourselves, dear neighbor! Our little girl's been sick for eight days . . . and she's gone!" they said, pointing to the dead girl who was lying on the bed with a fixed expression of despair on her face.

Another eight days passed, and again the whole district was thrown into a turmoil.

"Have you heard? Donana is dead!"

"Dead?"

"It's the truth! And they say there was a red cock on her drain!"

"A red cock? That's a devil!"

"True, that's a devil. Of course, it's all because of witchcraft . . . What else would make the rain fall when the evening mist was descending?"

"Yes, she went to Ambriz because of that money . . ."

"She went to have spells cast . . . She wanted the *jimbambi* to find the culprit . . ."

"There you are! She wanted to bewitch someone and she came under the spell herself . . ."

"But what rain it was!"

"The *jimbambi* are like that . . . They only come with the rain or the wind: they're not like other spells . . ."

it was banging away. I even trembled, brother!"

"When you hear a noise like that, it's beating its wings. In the forest, if he and she sit down and you don't make way for them, hey presto, you're done for, Mama mia! They look like a cock and a hen, but they run like partridges."

"I know, I know. They sometimes even los a few scales—that's their feathers . . ."

"Yesterday they saw the devil on the drain of the dead woman's hut. I don't know whether it was him or her . . ."

"That was a real disaster! But why cast spells like that? All she did in the end was bewitc herself . . ."

"That's what comes of witchcraft . . . If she had gone to church and prayed to St. Antony then whoever took the money would have been found . . . And the owner wouldn't have died . . ."

"It's fate, really . . ."

A few days later:

"Have you heard? Izabel's died!"

"There you are! The niece died the other day, and the aunt dies today. What a catastrophe!"

"Yes, it never rains but it pours!"

"The funny thing is that the people who were at the funerals of Mussoco and Donana were taken so ill that they passed away."

"God forgive me, but I've already heard was Mussoco who picked up the money."

"Really?"

"I don't know, but they gossip such a lot round here. Anyway, other sinners like ourselves are saying she was the one who found the money. Poor thing, she wanted to give back to the owner, but her aunt and grandmother talked her out of it."

"Oh Lord! Those old women too! Why other folks' money?"

"They were friends . . ."

they? Friendship outside and emptiness within?"

"Our old men were right: 'We know the face but we don't know the heart.' But I'm sorry for the poor girl, dying so young. She was such a nice person. And the aunt, now . . ."

"The lord forgive me, she's no longer wi

us. But why make her out to have been kind-hearted? Our mothers are also saying a thing or two! They were so stubborn, the aunt and the grandmother, that the poor child died, and Donana too."

"As for Donana, I've had enough of her. She didn't know how to cast spells. Why did she drag in other folks who had nothing to do with that money? Whoever washes the corpse shall die. Whoever goes to the funeral shall die. Whoever says 'Woe is me!' To hell with it all!"

> *Guide for Interpretation*
>
> The curse would suggest that the community is somehow involved in the misdeed. Think about the role of the community as you continue reading this story.

"More's already been done than she wanted. But anger means something too. A person weeps and shouts and nothing happens. It wasn't easy for her either. Let's drop all this. We'd have done the same!"

But death continued on its way.

"Have you heard the bad news? They're dying in the street now!"

"Impossible! Who's the unlucky one?"

"Didn't you know? Katarina!"

"Ai-ai-ai! Poor woman! Where?"

"In Cabino, near the railway. The poor thing was on the way to see the healer."

"Fancy that! We're still walking about, but we're already dying."

"That's the truth, my dear. The flesh is still alive, but the soul is already dead."

So it went on, with fever, stomach cramps, and the spitting of blood—the locals died one after another and the black terror crept deeper and deeper into their souls. As was said in the curse, when they went to the funeral, they paid with their lives for defying the taboo. Frightened friends, in spite of their natural solidarity, tried not to show up on such occasions. Even the parents, when struck by misfortune, did not carry out their sacred duty of tending the sick.

To climax it all, a new and terrible item of news started doing the rounds: to shake off the curse, Mussoco's family, already much thinned down, were scattering that accursed money about in the streets! How dangerous for the children! Even though they'd been warned, how would they be able to resist such a temptation? And if the whole sum . . . But no, they were scattering it about piecemeal, an escudo here, an escudo there. What a diabolical temptation! Damned money! Many innocent people had already died because of it; the Lord alone knew how many more were going to.

"Mind you don't pick up any money off the street! D'you hear? It's bewitched! Look how people are dying!" mothers warned their children.

But death continued to lay people low. The vengeful curse took its inexorable[10] course: "Whoever washes the corpse shall die! Whoever trims its nails shall die! Whoever cuts its hair shall die! Whoever dresses it shall die! Whoever goes to bury it shall die. Whoever says: 'Woe is me!' shall also die." Salvation? Where was it to be sought? Before that abyss, the healer admitted that he was powerless to help—the curse was such a terrible one. Falling from the clouds, it entered the flesh of those who ignored the warnings, and it secretly compelled them to obey the dread command: "Die!"

"It's an epidemic," declared the doctors.

But you can't fool the people, and along with the healers, the people protested:

"Rubbish. What epidemic? It's the bad *jimbambi*!"

"The whites! What do they know anyway?" say the blacks contemptuously.

"True! Witchcraft doesn't get at them! . . ."

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10. **inexorable** (in eks' ə rə bəl): not to be stopped by any means.

"It's like that accident at Xamavo Market . . ."

"True! They say the roof fell in because of a high wind . . ."

"A high-wind? It fell in because of the *jimbambi* . . ."

And those deaths, like the tragic year of 1921, for which various explanations were found, are still fresh in the memories of Luanda's inhabitants, not in terms of scientific conclusions, but in terms of the dogmas of their beliefs.

As the Night the Day

ABIOSEH NICOL born 1924 SIERRA LEONE

KOJO[1] AND Bandele[2] walked slowly across the hot, green lawn, holding their science manuals with moist fingers. In the distance they could hear the junior school collecting in the hall of the main school building, for singing practice. Nearer, but still far enough, their classmates were strolling toward them. The two reached the science block and entered it. It was a low building set apart from the rest of the high school, which sprawled on the hillside of the African savanna. The laboratory was a longish room, and at one end they saw Basu,[3] another boy, looking out of the window, his back turned to them. Mr. Abu,[4] the ferocious laboratory attendant, was not about. The rows of multicolored bottles looked inviting. A Bunsen burner soughed loudly in the heavy, weary heat. Where the tip of the light-blue triangle of flame ended, a shimmering plastic transparency started. One could see the restless hot air moving in the minute tornado. The two African boys watched it, interestedly, holding hands.

"They say it is hotter inside the flame than on its surface," Kojo said, doubtfully. "I wonder how they know."

"I think you mean the opposite; let's try it ourselves," Bandele answered.

"How?"

"Let's take the temperature inside."

"All right, here is a thermometer. You do it."

"It says ninety degrees now. I shall take the temperature of the outer flame first, then you can take the inner yellow one."

Bandele held the thermometer gently forward to the flame, and Kojo craned to see. The thin thread of quicksilver shot upward within the stem of the instrument with swift malevolence,[5] and there was a slight crack. The stem had broken. On the bench the small bulbous drops of mercury which had spilled from it shivered with glinting, playful malice and shuddered down to the cement floor, dashing themselves into a thousand shining pieces, some of which coalesced again and shook gaily as if with silent laughter.

"Oh my God!" whispered Kojo hoarsely.

"Shut up!" Bandele said, imperiously, in a low voice.

Bandele swept the few drops on the bench into his cupped hand and threw the blob of mercury down the sink. He swept those on the floor under an adjoining cupboard with his bare feet. Then, picking up the broken halves of the thermometer, he tiptoed to the waste bin and dropped them in. He tiptoed back to Kojo, who was standing petrified by the blackboard.

"See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," he whispered to Kojo.

It all took place in a few seconds. Then the rest of the class started pouring in, chattering and pushing each other. Basu, who had been at the end of the room with his back turned to them all the time, now turned round and limped laboriously across to join the class, his eyes screwed up as they always were.

The class ranged itself loosely in a semicircle around the demonstration platform. They

1. **Kojo** (kō′ jō).
2. **Bandele** (bän de′ le).
3. **Basu** (ba′ sōō).
4. **Abu** (ä′ bōō).
5. **malevolence** (mə lev′ ə ləns): hostility; spite.

were dressed in the school uniform of white shirt and khaki shorts. Their official age was around sixteen, although, in fact, it ranged from Kojo's fifteen years to one or two boys of twenty-one.

Mr. Abu, the laboratory attendant, came in from the adjoining store and briskly cleaned the blackboard. He was a retired African sergeant from the Army Medical Corps and was feared by the boys. If he caught any of them in any petty thieving, he offered them the choice of a hard smack on the bottom or of being reported to the science masters. Most boys chose the former, as they knew the matter would end there, with no protracted[6] interviews, moral recrimination,[7] and an entry in the conduct book.

The science master stepped in and stood on his small platform. A tall, thin, dignified Negro, with graying hair and silver-rimmed spectacles badly fitting on his broad nose and always slipping down, making him look avuncular.[8] "Vernier"[9] was his nickname, as he insisted on exact measurement and exact speech "as fine as a vernier scale," he would say, which measured, of course, things in thousandths of a millimeter. Vernier set the experiments for the day and demonstrated them, then retired behind the *Church Times*, which he read seriously in between walking quickly down the aisles of lab benches, advising boys. It was a simple heat experiment to show that a dark surface gave out more heat by radiation than a bright surface.

During the class, Vernier was called away to the telephone and Abu was not about, having retired to the lavatory for a smoke. As soon as a posted sentinel announced that he was out of sight, minor pandemonium broke out. Some of the boys raided the store. The wealthier ones swiped rubber tubing to make catapults and to repair bicycles and [illegible] to chemicals for developing photographic films. The poorer boys were in deadlier earnest and took only things of strict commercial interest which could be sold easily in the market. They emptied stuff into bottles in their pockets. Soda for making soap, magnesium sulphate for opening medicine, salt for cooking, liquid paraffin for women's hairdressing, and fine yellow iodoform powder much in demand for sprinkling on sores. Kojo protested mildly against all this. "Oh, shut up!" a few boys said. Sorie,[10] a huge boy who always wore a fez[11] indoors and who, rumor said, had already fathered a child, commanded respect and some leadership in the class. He was sipping his favorite mixture of diluted alcohol and bicarbonate—which he called "gin and fizz"—from a beaker. "Look here, Kojo, you are getting out of hand. What do you think our parents pay taxes and school fees for? For us to enjoy—or to buy a new car every year for Simpson?" The other boys laughed. Simpson was the European headmaster, feared by the small boys, adored by the boys in the middle school, and liked, in a critical fashion, with reservations, by some of the senior boys and African masters. He had a passion for new motorcars, buying one yearly.

"Come to think of it," Sorie continued to Kojo, "you must take something yourself; then we'll know we are safe." "Yes, you must," the other boys insisted. Kojo gave in and, unwillingly, took a little nitrate for some gunpowder experiments which he was carrying out at home.

"Someone!" the lookout called.

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6. **protracted** (prō trak' təd): drawn out; prolonged.
7. **recrimination** (ri krim' ə nā' shən): the act of answering an accuser by accusing him or her in return.
8. **avuncular** (ə vuŋ' kyo͞o lər): of or like an uncle.
9. **Vernier** (vʉr' nē ər).

11. **fez**: a man's brimless hat, shaped like a cone, with a flat top and a black tassel.

The boys dispersed in a moment. Sorie swilled out his mouth at the sink with some water. Mr. Abu, the lab attendant, entered and observed the innocent collective expression of the class. He glared round suspiciously and sniffed the air. It was a physics experiment, but the place smelled chemical. However, Vernier came in then. After asking if anyone was in difficulty, and finding that no one could momentarily think up anything, he retired to his chair and settled down to an article on Christian reunion, adjusting his spectacles and thoughtfully sucking an empty tooth socket.

Toward the end of the period, the class collected around Vernier and gave in their results, which were then discussed. One of the more political boys asked Vernier: if dark surfaces gave out more heat, was that why they all had black faces in West Africa? A few boys giggled. Basu looked down and tapped his clubfoot embarrassedly on the floor. Vernier was used to questions of this sort from the senior boys. He never committed himself, as he was getting near retirement and his pension, and became more guarded each year. He sometimes even feared that Simpson had spies among the boys.

"That may be so, although the opposite might be more convenient."

Everything in science had a loophole, the boys thought, and said so to Vernier.

"Ah! That is what is called research," he replied, enigmatically.[12]

Sorie asked a question. Last time, they had been shown that an electric spark with hydrogen and oxygen atoms formed water. Why was not that method used to provide water in town at the height of the dry season when there was an acute water shortage?

"It would be too expensive," Vernier replied, shortly. He disliked Sorie, not because of his different religion, but because he thought that Sorie was a bad influence and also asked ridiculous questions.

Sorie persisted. There was plenty of water during the rainy season. It could be split by lightning to hydrogen and oxygen in October and the gases compressed and stored, then changed back to water in March during the shortage. There was a faint ripple of applause from Sorie's admirers.

"It is an impracticable idea," Vernier snapped.

The class dispersed and started walking back across the hot grass. Kojo and Bandele heaved sighs of relief and joined Sorie's crowd, which was always the largest.

"Science is a bit of a swindle," Sorie was saying. "I do not for a moment think that Vernier believes any of it himself," he continued, "because, if he does, why is he always reading religious books?"

"Come back, all of you, come back!" Mr. Abu's stentorian[13] voice rang out, across to them.

They wavered and stopped. Kojo kept walking on in a blind panic.

"Stop," Bandele hissed across. "You fool." He stopped, turned, and joined the returning crowd, closely followed by Bandele. Abu joined Vernier on the platform. The loose semicircle of boys faced them.

"Mr. Abu just found this in the waste bin," Vernier announced, gray with anger. He held up the two broken halves of the thermometer. "It must be due to someone from this class, as the number of thermometers was checked before being put out."

A little wind gusted in through the window and blew the silence heavily this way and that.

"Who?"

No one answered. Vernier looked round and waited.

"Since no one has owned up, I am afraid I shall have to detain you for an hour after school as punishment," said Vernier.

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12. **enigmatically** (e′ nig mat′ ə kal ē): mysteriously.

13. **stentorian** (sten tôr′ ē ən): very loud.

There was a murmur of dismay and anger. An important soccer house-match was scheduled for that afternoon. Some boys put their hands up and said that they had to play in the match.

"I don't care," Vernier shouted. He felt, in any case, that too much time was devoted to games and not enough to work.

He left Mr. Abu in charge and went off to fetch his things from the main building.

"We shall play 'Bible and Key,'" Abu announced as soon as Vernier had left. Kojo had been afraid of this, and new beads of perspiration sprang from his troubled brow. All the boys knew the details. It was a method of finding out a culprit by divination. A large door key was placed between the leaves of a Bible at the New Testament passage where Ananias and Sapphira[14] were struck dead before the Apostles for lying and the Bible suspended by two bits of string tied to both ends of the key. The combination was held up by someone, and the names of all present were called out in turn. When that of the sinner was called, the Bible was expected to turn round and round violently and fall.

Now Abu asked for a Bible. Someone produced a copy. He opened the first page and then shook his head and handed it back. "This won't do," he said. "It's a Revised Version; only the genuine Word of God will give us the answer."

An Authorized King James Version was then produced, and he was satisfied. Soon he had the contraption fixed up. He looked round the semicircle, from Sorie at one end, through the others, to Bandele, Basu, and Kojo at the other, near the door.

"You seem to have an honest face," he said to Kojo. "Come and hold it." Kojo took the ends of the string gingerly with both hands, trembling slightly.

Abu moved over to the low window and stood at attention, his sharp profile outlined against the red hibiscus flowers, the green trees, and the molten sky. The boys watched anxiously. A black-bodied lizard scurried up a wall and started nodding its pink head with grave impartiality.

Abu fixed his ageing, bloodshot eyes on the suspended Bible. He spoke hoarsely and slowly:

"Oh, Bible, Bible, on a key,
Kindly tell it unto me,
By swinging slowly round and true,
To whom this sinful act is due. . . ."

He turned to the boys and barked out their names in a parade-ground voice, beginning with Sorie and working his way round, looking at the Bible after each name.

To Kojo, trembling and shivering as if ice-cold water had been thrown over him, it seemed as if he had lost all power and that some gigantic being stood behind him holding up his tired, aching elbows. It seemed to him as if the key and Bible had taken on a life of their own, and he watched with fascination the whole combination moving slowly, jerkily, and rhythmically in short arcs as if it had acquired a heartbeat.

"Ayo Sogbenri, Sonnir Kargbo, Oji Ndebu." Abu was coming to the end now. "Tommy Longe, Ajayi Cole, Bandele Fagb . . ."[15]

Kojo dropped the Bible. "I am tired," he said, in a small scream. "I am tired."

"Yes, he is," Abu agreed, "but we are almost finished; only Bandele and Basu are left."

"Pick up that book, Kojo, and hold it up again." Bandele's voice whipped through the

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14. **Ananias and Sapphira** (an′ ə nī′ əs; sə fī′ rə): husband and wife who fell dead when Peter rebuked them for withholding from the apostles a part of the proceeds from a sale of their land.

15. **Ayo Sogbenri . . . Fagb** (ä′ yô sôg ben′ rē; sôn′ nēr kärg′ bô; ō′ jē nde′ bʊʊ; lôŋ ge; ä jä′ yē kōl; fägb).

air with cold fury. It sobered Kojo, and he picked it up.

"Will you continue, please, with my name, Mr. Abu?" Bandele asked, turning to the window.

"Go back to your place quickly, Kojo," Abu said. "Vernier is coming. He might be vexed. He is a strongly religious man and so does not believe in the Bible-and-Key ceremony."

Kojo slipped back with sick relief, just before Vernier entered.

In the distance the rest of the school was assembling for closing prayers. The class sat and stood around the blackboard and demonstration bench in attitudes of exasperation, resignation, and self-righteous indignation. Kojo's heart was beating so loudly that he was surprised no one else heard it.

"Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide . . ."[16]

The closing hymn floated across to them, interrupting the still afternoon.

Kojo got up. He felt now that he must speak the truth, or life would be intolerable ever afterward. Bandele got up swiftly before him. In fact, several things seemed to happen all at the same time. The rest of the class stirred. Vernier looked up from a book review which he had started reading. A butterfly, with black and gold wings, flew in and sat on the edge of the blackboard, flapping its wings quietly and waiting too.

"Basu was here first before any of the class," Bandele said firmly.

Everyone turned to Basu, who cleared his throat.

"I was just going to say so myself, sir," Basu replied to Vernier's inquiring glance.

"Pity you had no thought of it before," Vernier said, dryly. "What were you doing here?"

"I missed the previous class, so I came straight to the lab and waited. I was over there by the window, trying to look at the blue sky. I did not break the thermometer, sir."

A few boys tittered. Some looked away. The others muttered. Basu's breath always smelt of onions, but although he could play no games, some boys liked him and were kind to him in a tolerant way.

"Well, if you did not, someone did. We shall continue with the detention."

Vernier noticed Abu standing by. "You need not stay, Mr. Abu," he said to him. "I shall close up. In fact, come with me now and I shall let you out through the back gate."

He went out with Abu.

When he had left, Sorie turned to Basu and asked mildly:

"You are sure you did not break it?"

"No, I didn't."

"He did it," someone shouted.

"But what about the Bible-and-Key?" Basu protested. "It did not finish. Look at him." He pointed to Bandele.

"I was quite willing for it to go on," said Bandele. "You were the only one left."

Someone threw a book at Basu and said, "Confess!"

Basu backed on to a wall. "To God, I shall call the police if anyone strikes me," he cried fiercely.

"He thinks he can buy the police," a voice called.

"That proves it," someone shouted from the back.

"Yes, he must have done it," the others said, and they started throwing books at Basu. Sorie waved his arm for them to stop, but they did not. Books, corks, boxes of matches rained on Basu. He bent his head

16. **Once to . . . decide:** The words of the hymn are from "Present Crisis," a poem by the American poet James Russell Lowell (1819–1891). The theme of the poem is that a person must stand up for self or country when the need arises.

and shielded his face with his bent arm.

"I did not do it, I swear I did not do it. Stop it, you fellows," he moaned over and over again. A small cut had appeared on his temple and he was bleeding. Kojo sat quietly for a while. Then a curious hum started to pass through him, and his hands began to tremble, his armpits to feel curiously wetter. He turned round and picked up a book and flung it with desperate force at Basu, and then another. He felt somehow that there was an awful swelling of guilt which he could only shed by punishing himself through hurting someone. Anger and rage against everything different seized him, because if everything and everyone had been the same, somehow he felt nothing would have been wrong and they would all have been happy. He was carried away now by a torrent which swirled and pounded. He felt that somehow Basu was in the wrong, must be in the wrong, and if he hurt him hard enough, he would convince the others and therefore himself that he had not broken the thermometer and that he had never done anything wrong. He groped for something bulky enough to throw, and picked up the Bible.

"Stop it," Vernier shouted through the open doorway. "Stop it, you hooligans, you beasts."

They all became quiet and shamefacedly put down what they were going to throw. Basu was crying quietly and hopelessly, his thin body shaking.

"Go home, all of you, go home. I am ashamed of you." His black face shone with anger. "You are an utter disgrace to your nation and to your race."

They crept away, quietly, uneasily, avoiding each other's eyes, like people caught in a secret passion.

Vernier went to the first aid cupboard and started dressing Basu's wounds.

Kojo and Bandele came back and hid behind the door, listening. Bandele insisted that they should.

Vernier put Basu's bandaged head against his waistcoat and dried the boy's tears with his handkerchief, gently patting his shaking shoulders.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if I had done it, sir," he mumbled, snuggling his head against Vernier, "but I did not do it. I swear to God I did not."

"Hush, hush," said Vernier comfortingly.

"Now they will hate me even more," he moaned.

"Hush, hush."

"I don't mind the wounds so much; they will heal."

"Hush, hush."

"They've missed the football match and now they will never talk to me again; oh-ee, oh-ee, why have I been so punished?"

"As you grow older," Vernier advised, "you must learn that men are punished not always for what they do, but often for what people think they will do or for what they are. Remember that and you will find it easier to forgive them. 'To thine own self be true!'" Vernier ended with a flourish, holding up his clenched fist in a mock dramatic gesture, quoting from the Shakespeare examination setbook for the year and declaiming to the dripping taps and empty benches and still afternoon, to make Basu laugh.

Basu dried his eyes and smiled wanly and replied: "'And it shall follow as the night the day.' *Hamlet*, Act One, Scene Three, Polonius to Laertes."[17]

"There's a good chap. First Class Grade One. I shall give you a lift home."

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17. **And it shall . . . the day:** The complete passage in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which Polonius (pə lō' [illegible] above all—to thine own self be true,/And it must follow, as the night the day,/Thou can'st not then be false to any man." In other words, be honest with yourself and you will be honest with others.

Kojo and Bandele walked down the red laterite road together, Kojo dispiritedly kicking stones into the gutter.

"The fuss they made over a silly old thermometer," Bandele began.

"I don't know, old man, I don't know," Kojo said impatiently.

They had both been shaken by the scene in the empty lab. A thin, invisible wall of hostility and mistrust was slowly rising between them.

"Basu did not do it, of course," Bandele said.

Kojo stopped dead in his tracks: "Of course he did not do it," he shouted; "we did it."

"No need to shout, old man. After all, it was your idea."

"It wasn't," Kojo said furiously. "You suggested we try it."

"Well, you started the argument. Don't be childish." They tramped on silently, raising small clouds of dust with their bare feet.

"I should not take it too much to heart," Bandele continued. "That chap Basu's father hoards foodstuff like rice and palm oil until there is a shortage and then sells them at high prices. The police are watching him."

"What has that got to do with it?" Kojo asked.

"Don't you see, Basu might quite easily have broken that thermometer. I bet he has done things before that we have all been punished for." Bandele was emphatic.

They walked on steadily down the main road of the town, past the Syrian and Lebanese shops crammed with knickknacks and rolls of cloth, past a large Indian shop with dull red carpets and brass trays displayed in its windows, carefully stepping aside in the narrow road as the British officials sped by in cars to their hill-station bungalows for lunch and siesta.

Kojo reached home at last. He washed his feet and ate his main meal for the day. He sat about heavily and restlessly for some hours. Night soon fell with its usual swiftness, at six and he finished his homework early and went to bed. Lying in bed he rehearsed again what he was determined to do the next day. He would go up to Vernier:

"Sir," he would begin, "I wish to speak with you privately."

"Can it wait?" Vernier would ask.

"No, sir," he would say firmly, "as a matter of fact, it is rather urgent."

Vernier would take him to an empty classroom and say, "What is troubling you, Kojo Ananse?"[18]

"I wish to make a confession, sir. I broke the thermometer yesterday." He had decided he would not name Bandele; it was up to the latter to decide whether he would lead a pure life.

Vernier would adjust his slipping glasses up his nose and think. Then he would say:

"This is a serious matter, Kojo. You realize you should have confessed yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, I am very sorry."

"You have done great harm, but better late than never. You will, of course, apologize in front of the class and particularly to Basu, who has shown himself a finer chap than all of you."

"I shall do so, sir."

"Why have you come to me now to apologize? Were you hoping that I would simply forgive you?"

"I was hoping you would, sir. I was hoping you would show your forgiveness by beating me."

Vernier would pull his glasses up his nose again. He would move his tongue inside his mouth reflectively. "I think you are right. Do you feel you deserve six strokes or nine?"

"Nine, sir."

"Bend over!"

Kojo had decided he would not cry because he was almost a man.

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18. Ananse (ä nän′ sē).

Whack! Whack!

Lying in bed in the dark thinking about it as it would happen tomorrow, he clenched his teeth and tensed his buttocks in imaginary pain.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Suddenly, in his little room, under his thin cotton sheet, he began to cry. Because he felt the sharp, lancing pain already cutting into him. Because of Basu and Simpson and the thermometer. For all the things he wanted to do and be which would never happen. For all the good men they had told them about—Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and George Washington, who never told a lie. For Florence Nightingale[19] and David Livingstone.[20] For Kagawa,[21] the Japanese man, for Gandhi,[22] and for Kwegyir Aggrey,[23] the African. Oh-ee, oh-ee. Because he knew he would never be as straight and strong and true as the school song said they should be. He saw, for the first time, what this thing would be like, becoming a man. He touched the edge of an inconsolable eternal grief. Oh-ee, oh-ee; always, he felt, always I shall be a disgrace to the nation and the race.

His mother passed by his bedroom door, slowly dragging her slippered feet as she always did. He pushed his face into his wet pillow to stifle his sobs, but she had heard him. She came in and switched on the light.

"What is the matter with you, my son?"

He pushed his face farther into his pillow.

"Nothing," he said, muffled and choking.

"You have been looking like a sick fowl all afternoon," she continued.

She advanced and put the back of her moist, cool fingers against the side of his neck.

"You have got fever," she exclaimed. "I'll get [illegible] from the kitchen."

When she had gone out, Kojo dried his tears and turned the dry side of the pillow up. His mother reappeared with a thermometer in one hand and some quinine mixture in the other.

"Oh, take it away, take it away," he shouted, pointing to her right hand and shutting his eyes tightly.

"All right, all right," she said, slipping the thermometer into her bosom.

He is a queer boy, she thought, with pride and a little fear as she watched him drink the clear, bitter fluid.

She then stood by him and held his head against her broad thigh as he sat up on the low bed, and she stroked his face. She knew he had been crying but did not ask him why, because she was sure he would not tell her. She knew he was learning, first slowly and now quickly, and she would soon cease to be his mother and be only one of the womenfolk in the family. Such a short time, she thought, when they are really yours and tell you everything. She sighed and slowly eased his sleeping head down gently.

The next day Kojo got to school early and set to things briskly. He told Bandele that he was going to confess but would not name him. He half hoped he would join him. But Bandele had said, threateningly, that he had better not mention his name, let him go and be a Boy Scout on his own. The sneer strengthened him, and he went off to the lab. He met Mr. Abu and asked for Vernier. Abu said Vernier was busy and what was the matter, anyhow.

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19. **Florence Nightingale** (1820–1910): English nurse regarded as the founder of modern nursing.

20. **David Livingstone** (1813–1873): Scottish missionary and explorer in Africa.

21. **Kagawa** (kä′ gä wä′) (1888–1960): Japanese pacifist, social reformer, and Christian evangelist.

[illegible] ist leader who preached nonviolence.

23. **Kwegyir Aggrey** (kweg′ yēr äg′ grā) (1875–1927): West African educator and orator.

"I broke the thermometer yesterday," Kojo said in a businesslike manner.

Abu put down the glassware he was carrying.

"Well, I never!" he said. "What do you think you will gain by this?"

"I broke it," Kojo repeated.

"Basu broke it," Abu said impatiently. "Sorie got him to confess, and Basu himself came here this morning and told the science master and myself that he knew now that he had knocked the thermometer by mistake when he came in early yesterday afternoon. He had not turned round to look, but he had definitely heard a tinkle as he walked by. Someone must have picked it up and put it in the waste bin. The whole matter is settled, the palaver finished."

He tapped a barometer on the wall and squinting, read the pressure. He turned again to Kojo.

"I should normally have expected him to say so yesterday and save you boys missing the game. But there you are," he added, shrugging and trying to look reasonable, "you cannot hope for too much from a Syrian boy."

I couldn't refrain from lau[illegible]ing. They still loved each other. They were only short of money.

Ren Jia and Hai Ping stoo[illegible] face-to-face. Ren Jia fixed her eyes full of worry and fear on Hai Pin[illegible] Hai Ping said something to her, which I couldn't hear distinctly, pro[illegible]bly to set her mind at ease. To tell the truth, apart from his being h[illegible]ndsome, there was nothing to give her cause to doubt him. It was no[illegible]asy for Hai Ping to endure the jealousy of his plain, narrowminded w[illegible]. If he didn't love her, then why did he suffer so? Yet she was too [illegible]dous to keep his love to herself. She simply wouldn't share even a[illegible]ny bit.

Xiao Ji and Lian Zhu ha[illegible]n't appeared yet, and the cause was obvious. They had so often [illegible]en apart before and now they were to be separated again. Xiao Ji w[illegible] unable to find himself a comfortable job. How long would they hav[illegible] to write letters to each other?

All of a sudden, I felt very [illegible]appy. At least A'ping and I were always together. I turned to look at A[illegible]ing. He held my hands tightly, as usual they were as cold as ice. H[illegible]put my hands into his deep overcoat pocket. It was very warm bec[illegible]use he had put a hot water bottle in it. What a silly, dear fellow!

The bus arrived. After we [illegible]d all stowed our luggage on the racks and sat down, I noticed th[illegible] apple-green light was still shining in Xiuwen's home, pale in the d[illegible]m. Huang Jian was gazing at me from the window. Before he would [illegible] anything, I smiled at him.

The bus was carefully driv[illegible]n out of the gate. Our small courtyard was not so poor after all.

Transl[illegible]d by Hu Zhihui

Wang An-yi

Between Themselves

Bicycles sounding their bells shuttled in and out of the lane, a two-way lane used as a thoroughfare. It was lined with smart modern houses, but at one end people had built many shacks. None of these had gas installed, so firewood crackled and smoke belched as they lit their stoves. A boy seated in front of one smoky stove was eating pot stickers. First he ate the pastry, keeping back the meat stuffing. He put those pitifully small meatballs in the bottom of a large bowl, then ate them one by one.

'Did you never eat meat in your last life?' swore Grandad. Grandad was eating a big bowl of thick gruel.

The boy chomped the meat stuffing.

'That child chomps like a pig,' said Granny, across the way. She was lighting her stove, her tattered fan wafting up wreaths of black smoke.

'I've not stinted him of meat. The wretch must have starved to death in his last life!' Grandad angrily rapped his chopsticks on the back of the boy's head.

Ducking, the boy chomped more loudly.

'Damn it! The meat stuffing in these dumplings has shrunk to a piddling speck.' Grandad picked one up from his grandson's bowl, then dropped it back in disgust.

A woman on a small-wheeled bike rode out from the lane and shot through the smoke. He spat at her, his gob of spittle landing on her back carrier. He was expert in spitting far and accurately.

Soon all the meat stuffing was gone. The boy got up, put his

satchel on his head and raced off. In his hurry he trod on Granny's foot. She screeched, 'Are you blind, young devil!'

Grandad chimed in. 'Drop dead, you wretch!'

By now the boy was out of sight. His school was just around the corner, close enough for him to run home in the ten minutes' break to gobble a ball of cold rice.

Satchel on his head, he dashed forward as he made a hooting noise with his mouth, like an automobile horn. He trod on someone's heel so that his shoe came off, knocked over a child, fell over himself, got up again, rubbed his knees, and sprinted on. When he reached the school gate two of his classmates stopped him to see if he had brought a handkerchief. He produced one, grimy and black but neatly folded. After some hesitation they let him pass, as it undoubtedly was a handkerchief.

Having run his blockade, he dashed on, knocking right into someone else who staggered without falling over. Shouts went up near by.

'Wang Qiangxin's bumped into Teacher Zhang. Bumped into a teacher!'

He pulled up.

Still stunned. Teacher Zhang turned to smile at him. 'Never mind, it wasn't deliberate.'

At that, as if reprieved, he ran on.

'Wang Qiangxin, say "sorry". Hurry up and say "sorry"!' shouted the children behind him.

Teacher Zhang stood steady to adjust his glasses and straighten the books in his hands, then went on his way.

'Good morning, Teacher Zhang!' two girls greeted him.

'Good morning,' he answered rather awkwardly.

'Good morning, Teacher Zhang.'

'Good morning.'

He nodded repeatedly all the way to the staffroom. When the bell

rang, footsteps thudded and pandemonium broke loose, then the playground quieted down. With a sigh of relief he produced from his bag an unwrapped loaf he had bought in the grain shop, poured himself some boiled water, and started to eat. His class wasn't till the second period.

'Your breakfast?' a colleague asked.

'That's right,' he answered, gulping down a mouthful.

'You really rough it,' remarked another colleague.

'Hmm,' he mumbled, his mouth full.

'Thick gruel makes the best breakfast, I think,' someone else commented.

'Hmm.' He gave up eating, wrapped the remaining half of his loaf in a piece of paper, and put it back in his bag.

The sun lit up the level playground where the gym teacher was drawing lines with white chalk. These lines and the white stripes on his track suit gleamed in the sunlight. A sparrow was hopping along. From one classroom came the sound of children reciting a lesson in unison. They were dragging it out, knowing it by heart.

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The bell rang. Pandemonium. Children poured out from every classroom, converged in the playground, then surged out of the school gate.

Picking up his books and box of chalk Teacher Zhang went back to the staffroom where Teacher Tao, the teacher in charge of Form Four, was lecturing Wang Qiangxin.

'Stand here and think seriously about your behaviour in class today.' With that she went off to the canteen with her bowl and chopsticks. Wang Qiangxin, left in front of her desk, kept shifting from his left foot to his right, from his right foot to his left. He scratched himself, sticking his hand up his back beneath his jacket or down his collar to scratch. He couldn't keep still for a second.

Zhang opened his drawer and took out his bowl. As he passed Wang Qiangxin he heard the boy's stomach rumble. He stopped and lowered his head to ask, 'Are you hungry?'

Wang Qiangxin said nothing, and simply grinned at him.

'Were you rowdy again in class?'

The boy smiled and said nothing, hanging his head sheepishly.

'Can't you keep quiet?'

The boy smiled awkwardly, fidgeting all the time.

Zhang went back to get the half loaf of bread from his bag and offered it to the boy.

Wang Qiangxin eyed it as if afraid to take it, but finally he took it. He bit off big mouthfuls and chomped them, looking vigilantly around.

A wizened, bent old man stumped in, his shoulders hunched helplessly forward, his arms unwillingly thrust up behind, as if doing an exercise to radio music.

'So the young devil's been kept in again!'

'You must be his grandfather,' the teacher guessed.

'What's the young devil done this time?'

'Own up, Wang Qiangxin,' said Zhang.

'In our Chinese class I fidgeted and talked,' he mumbled with crumbs on his cheeks, his head tucked in defensively.

'Damn you!' The old man slapped his head.

Zhang had grabbed the old man's hand in dismay. But the old fellow, proving stronger than the teacher, pulled his hand up so that they both hit the boy.

'This won't do. This is no way to treat him.'

Having worked off steam with a few whacks, the old fellow told the teacher, 'All right, now that I've whacked him, let him go home for his meal.'

That put Zhang on the spot. This wasn't for him to decide. He wished he had left before to keep out of trouble.

'If he makes a row again, Teacher, you must beat hi . You can beat him to death and I won't hold it against you.'

'What an idea! It's better to reason with him.'

'Well, I'll take the young devil back; you teachers a very busy.'

'Go along,' was all Zhang could say.

The old man dragged his grandson off. Zhang pi ed up his bowl and chopsticks and left the staffroom. At the door c he canteen he met Teacher Tao. He passed her, then decided to t back and tell her, 'Wang Qiangxin's grandfather has taken him hon '

'Taken him home?' Her bulging myop c eyes st ed through her glasses.

'That's right.' He hung his head guiltily.

'You gave permission?'

'His grandfather came . . .'

'I wanted to talk to his grandfather.'

'I . . .'

'Fine, so you came to his rescue. You're playing e hero – I don't want to play the villain. I wash my hands of him. 1 take him over.' She went off in a huff.

With a sigh of exasperation, he stomped out the canteen, his appetite gone.

Meanwhile Wang Qiangxin was wolfing down is meal. Granny, across the way, looked up from the basin of cloth she was washing and saw the boy eating, and heard him chomping a y.

'Isn't it disgusting the way that child eats,' sh aid to her neighbour, Maomei, who was sitting on a stool knitting.

'His face is disgusting, too,' agreed Maomei. 'H ears are too small and his eyebrows and the corners of his mouth urn down as if he were crying.'

'That's right. That child cried nonstop from t day he was born. Cried his mother to death. Then, strange to say, he opped crying.'

'Doesn't even cry when his grandad beats him up.'

Wang Qiangxin was full now. He put down his bowl. Lifting the lid from the wok, he scooped out some rice crust and munched it.

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Bikes passed in both directions, their bells ringing. Cars came and went, their horns honking.

Teacher Zhang rushed to the bus holding a pancake and fritter, and managed to squeeze onto a bus. The door shut, catching the back of his jacket.

'Comrade, my jacket's caught in the door,' he said.

'Please buy tickets or show your monthly ticket,' the conductor called over the microphone, drowning his voice.

He kept quiet. At least his bottom hadn't been pinched.

'If you're not getting off, comrade, let's change places,' suggested a woman, squeezing up to him.

He tried to move forward but failed, his jacket caught fast. He apologized. 'I'll get down first at the next stop.'

The woman moved onto the step above him, her white neck just opposite his face. Her wide-open collar showed an angora sweater, and under the round, woolly collar of this lurked a sparkling golden necklace. His heart palpitating, he turned his head to avoid staring at her.

There was a sudden commotion. One of the passengers had lost a purse.

'Hand it over at once, whoever took it!' yelled the conductor. 'Otherwise we'll drive to the police station.'

'Give it back quick! Give it back quick! We don't want to be late to work!' other passengers shouted.

'Look on the floor, everyone, to see if a wallet's been dropped.'

They jostled one another, looking on the floor.

His heart beating faster than ever, he broke into a sweat and his

face turned pale. He forced a smile, a most inappropriate smile. The glance the woman threw at him made his heart contract. Sweat trickled down his neck.

'It's all right, I've found it,' someone called out, stooping to pick up the purse. The others pressed forward.

'Look and see if anything's missing.'

Nothing was missing.

He relaxed. The woman glanced curiously at him again. The door opened and he nearly fell out. She got off the bus and looked closely at him again before going off.

Reaching school, he saw Wang Qiangxin at the gate. He called, 'Wang Qiangxin, I've something to say to you.'

The boy stopped and started scratching himself, first reaching under his collar then up his back.

'Can't you keep quiet in class?'

The boy said nothing, smiling cryptically.

'Do you have to make such a noise?'

Still smiling, he sniffed hard, as if to sniff everything up into his head.

'Yesterday when I let you go home for lunch, your teacher was angry with me.' Zhang had to tell him this frankly.

He looked up as if puzzled.

'If you go on misbehaving, you'll make it awkward for me.' This said, Zhang casually stroked the boy's head and then walked on.

Someone in the staffroom told him, 'The head wants to see you. Wants you at once.'

'The head wants me?' His heart missed a beat. Forgetting to put down his things, he hurried to the head's office.

'Ah, Teacher Zhang, please take a seat.' This politeness reassured him to some extent.

'Did you want me for something, Head?' He perched on the edge of the seat.

The head opened a drawer and took out a sheet of stiff paper, which he handed to him. 'First read that.'

It was an official letter from the unit in which his father had worked twenty years ago, stating clearly in black and white that his father, who had been labelled a Rightist in 1957, had now been cleared. He stared blankly at this document, unable to work up any sense of elation. To him, his father was a stranger who had long ago left home and died of oedema on a farm in Yancheng. His father's colleagues had told him, 'Your old man was quite different from you. If he'd been like you he wouldn't have got into trouble.' And from his childhood onward, in school, in the street, wherever he went, people pointed at him behind his back and said, 'His old man . . .'

'His old man . . .'

'His old man . . .'

'Congratulations.' The head, who doubled as Party secretary, sprang up to shake his hand. Zhang hastily stood up but staggered, not standing firm till the head had sat down again. 'We're going to remove from your dossier all the material on your father. I hope you'll buck up and work hard, without letting this weigh on your mind.'

'Of course, that's ancient history now,' he replied.

'It's past and done with; let's look ahead,' the head urged.

He went back to the staffroom to pour a cup of tea. Not till he sat down did he realize that his underclothes were all wet. The bell rang, followed by what sounded like the galloping of a cavalry. In a flash, the empty playground was full of children. Girls skipped over ropes or rubber-band chains, boys dashed here and there helter-skelter. Teacher Tao came in, her face grim. His heart thumped; he stopped drinking tea. Without so much as looking at him, she went straight to her desk and sat down without a word. Not daring to question her, he watched from a distance as he sipped his tea. When he finished he got up to go to the toilet. Seeing Wang Qiangxin dashing about, his head covered with sweat, he called him to halt.

'Wang Qiangxin, did you make a row again class?'

'No!' The boy looked up in surprise, the roop of his eyebrows more obvious.

'Teacher Tao is angry,' he whispered.

'Not with me. She praised me in class.'

'What did she say?' Zhang suspected tha he boy had mistaken sarcasm for praise.

'Teacher Tao pointed at me and told Zhar Ming, "Even he's kept quiet, but you're making a row."' He was s ttering, gulping back spittle, his front and back teeth, above and b ow, so jagged that his mouth seemed full of teeth. He looked so lud ous one couldn't help but pity him.

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Zhang overslept. As soon as he opened his e he saw from his old-fashioned chiming clock that it was already s en. Having no time to buy breakfast, he ran to catch his bus. When reached the school, it was empty. He asked the janitor why and dis vered that it was only half-past six – his clock was a good hour fast. As he put his things in the staffroom, he felt a sudden craving fo lumpling soup, so he hurried to a small restaurant next to the sch l. It was crowded with customers, some concentrating on eating, so e bored with waiting, and these inevitably stared at him.

He stood at a loss in the doorway, not w ting to shove his way in or to withdraw. Tentatively taking a few kward steps in search of an empty seat, he felt more eyes on hi , so he beat a hasty retreat.

A few more steps took him to a stall selli pancakes and fritters, where two fair-sized lines had formed, one t buy bamboo counters, the other to exchange these for fritters. As w only right, he went to the back of the line for counters and took fr his wallet some small change and grain tickets.

'Teacher Zhang!' someone called.

Looking up, he saw Wang Qiangxin in the line, two counters clutched in one hand and one chopstick in the other to pick up fritters. He had nearly reached the wok.

'Teacher Zhang get your counters, quick.'

Zhang nodded at him with a smile, though knowing that this was easier said than done.

Wang Qiangxin, standing in the line, clamped his chopstick between his lips then rotated it so that it rattled against his teeth.

'Take the chopstick out of your mouth, Wang Qiangxin, or it'll hurt your throat,' Zhang felt constrained to warn him.

The boy did as told, repeating, 'Buy your counters, quick, Teacher Zhang.'

There were still three people ahead of Zhang in the line.

Wang Qiangxin reached the stall. He slowly handed his counters to the girl selling fritters, but didn't reach out to take them, just staring at the specks of oil on them.

'Take them, quick!' the girl urged.

'Too hot,' he said, procrastinating.

'Not after all this time,' snapped someone behind.

'I'm small, afraid of hot things,' he replied brashly, then called to Zhang again, 'Hurry up!'

'You can't buy for other people,' those behind objected, squeezing him out of the line. Only then did Zhang realize why the boy had been stalling. He said with feeling, 'I'll take my turn; there aren't too many people.'

'Have one of mine, Teacher Zhang, I'll line up again.'

'No, no.'

Wang Qiangxin thrust a fritter at him, smearing his jacket with oil. Zhang had to take it and wrap it in a pancake. Walking off, he turned back and saw the boy lining up again while eating. His method was to bite one end of the fritter and hold it in his mouth, pulling it farther

in after each bite. The fritter disappeared slowly, as if swallowed whole.

During the break the door of the staffroom burst open and two girls helped in a third, who was crying. A group of boys behind marched Wang Qiangxin straight up to Teacher Tao's desk. These boys had pushed over the girl, then fallen on top of her. Now she couldn't raise her arm, which was badly hurt. Teacher Tao had no time to investigate. Instead she took the girl straight to hospital, coming back at noon to announce that her arm had been broken, the bone splintered.

After school that afternoon, Teacher Tao called those boys to the staffroom to find out what had happened. Since Wang Qiangxin was one of them and Zhang suspected that he was involved, he sat somewhat apart to listen intently.

'Why did you knock her over?'

'We didn't mean to.'

'Why were you pushing and shoving?'

'Just for fun.'

'What fun is there in that? Was it a game? Who started it?' Tao's voice was stern.

'Wang Xin shoved me.' Zhang Ming was the first informer.

'Zhu Yan shoved me,' said Wang Xin.

'Feng Gang shoved me,' said Zhu Yan.

'Luo Hong shoved me,' said Feng Gang.

'Meng Xiaofeng shoved me,' said Luo Hong.

'Wang Qiangxin shoved me,' said Meng Xiaofeng.

'Zhang Ming shoved me,' said Wang Qiangxin.

So they had come full circle. Teacher Tao had to laugh.

'But who started it?' This was as impossible to find out as what first put the earth into orbit. So the hospital expenses had to be divided among them. Teacher Tao paid one share as she was in charge of that class and responsible for it.

'Go home and tell your parents, understand? When the time comes I'll give you the receipts to take back and show them. Off you go!'

Once outside the staffroom the boys raced off, slinging their satchels about and teasing one another.

Zhang followed them out and stopped Wang Qiangxin.

'So you've landed in trouble again. You had me on tenterhooks.'

The boy grinned, very thick-skinned.

'Can't you stop making trouble?'

He just smiled.

'Your grandad will wallop you again.'

Still he smiled.

'Can you pay the medical fees?'

That wiped the smile off his face.

'Shall I help you explain to your grandad?'

'No use. Anyway we can't pay.'

'Why not?'

'Yesterday he went to ask my dad for money, but Dad gave him very little. Grandad came back cursing.'

'How can your dad act that way?'

'His wife's a terror. And he's in a bad position, so he has to do as she says.' This was said most phlegmatically.

'What a know-it-all you are!' Zhang frowned.

'What's strange about that?' He smiled enigmatically.

'If you really haven't the money, I'll pay your share for you.'

'Honestly?' His drooping eyebrows went up incredulously.

'Honestly. As long as you're told, and stop making trouble.'

'All right.' Agreeing readily, he started off, as if afraid the teacher might change his mind. He turned back abruptly to say, 'Want to eat mutton hot pot, Teacher?'

'Why ask?'

'I can queue up for the tally for you. I often go in the morning for a

tally, then make forty cents by selli[illegible] it in the afternoon to someone who couldn't get one. I wo[illegible]'t charge [illegible]u anything.'

'Living on my own I don't eat mu[illegible]n hot pot,' said Zhang.

After school Wang Qiangxin's grand[illegible]l tugged him back there by one ear, and in the other hand held a [illegible]le for hanging up clothes. The boy, his head on one side, took sho[illegible] rapid steps to keep up with the old man. He knew that if he strugg[illegible]l it would be the worse for him. The old man, who knew Teacher Zh[illegible]g, went straight up to him.

'Teacher, help me beat this youn[illegible]devil. With one foot in the grave I can't beat him hard; you must hel[illegible]ne.' He bawled this out, panting. All the teachers in the staffroom tur[illegible]l to stare.

'What's happened? Do take a seat[illegible]hang felt embarrassed.

'I'm at my last gasp, can't move. [illegible]hen I told him to wash the rice, the young devil refused. Dashed o[illegible] with me chasing behind. I'll do him in!' He struck out with the p[illegible]. The boy jumped over it as if jumping over a skip rope.

'Come here, Wang Qiangxin,' or[illegible]ed Zhang. 'Hurry up and apologize to your grandad. Say you're sor[illegible]

'Sorry,' muttered the boy, inching [illegible]rward.

'What farting use is it to say sor[illegible] Help me wallop him, Teacher. I won't hold it against you if you kill [illegible]m.' The old man thrust his pole into Zhang's hand. Zhang took it, no[illegible]nowing what to do with it.

'All right then, Grandad, he's [illegible]nowledged his mistake. Wang Qiangxin say "I was wrong!"' Zha[illegible]s voice rang out as if he were pleased with himself.

'I was wrong,' the boy droned, lik[illegible] mosquito.

'See, he's owned up honestly. L[illegible] him off this time. If he does it again I promise to help you teach [illegible]a good lesson.' At last he saw the old man and boy out and cam[illegible]back for his things. A colleague said, 'Wang Qiangxin seems to listen [illegible] you, Old Zhang.'

'Oh no,' he disclaimed.

'He behaves like your son.'

'Oh no.' Despite these modest rejoinders, he felt pleased. On leaving the school it occurred to him to call on the boy's grandad since he was ill. He went for a stroll, bought a bottle of royal jelly tonic, then headed for their lane.

Wang Qiangxin, holding a big bowl of noodles, had squeezed into a neighbour's doorway to watch a fight. Zhang called the boy out and went into his home with him.

Their place was a wooden shack built against the brick wall of a house. The old man was eating noodles too, with pickles. In the boy's bowl, apart from pickles, was chopped pork.

'Wang Qiangxin, why can't you show your grandfather more respect? He's so good to you.' Zhang felt touched.

'From some sin in my last life, I owe him a debt I can never pay off in this one,' replied the boy.

That shocked Zhang into silence.

Another row had started outside. Unable to sit still, the boy sprang up and rushed out.

'That damned little devil lost his mother when he was three. I've brought him up. I've no money, but I'm better than a stepmother. Only I'm afraid I'm not long for this world.'

'That's no way to talk, Mr Wang, you're still hale and hearty.'

'Once I close my eyes and pop off, he'll have a thin time.'

'It won't be so bad; everybody will help out.'

The old fellow, glancing sideways at Zhang, grunted. 'Some time back I started saving up for him. With money there's no need to be afraid.'

'Not necessarily.'

'I've muddled along all my life on the Shanghai Bund, thirty years in the old society and thirty years in the new. I've come to see that men are like fish, money like water. A fish out of water is done for.'

Zhang had to keep silent. He knew the old man was wrong, but couldn't think how to refute him. If he thought of a good refutation he'd still have to find the right metaphor for it.

When the row outside stopped, Wang Qiangxin came back to announce, 'Our group leader has come.'

'I must go.' Zhang stood up.

'See your teacher off.'

The boy followed Zhang out. A small crowd had gathered around the opposite gate.

'What's the quarrel about?'

'Maomei and her brother keep squabbling. He blames her for not having a job. But that's not her fault.'

'No, that's not her fault,' agreed Zhang.

They walked to the main road together.

'Now go back.'

'Doesn't matter.' he walked on with the teacher.

'You must behave better in class, Wang Qiangxin, eh?'

'Hmm.'

'And outside school too, eh?'

'Hmm.'

They walked for a stretch in silence.

'Why don't you get married, Teacher Zhang?'

'Eh!' Zhang turned to look at him in surprise.

'Has no one introduced you to anyone?'

Zhang's cheeks burned: he was speechless.

'Actually, you ought to marry Maomei.'

'What's that!' Zhang was staggered. His head reeled.

'Actually Maomei's not bad except that she has no work. And her bottom's too big.'

'How can you talk like that!' His face turned as red as a lantern.

'Why not? Have I said anything wrong?' The boy sounded surprised and looked with concern at his teacher.

'Aren't you too small to meddle with such matters.'

'It's you I'm thinking of. Though Maomei has no job, she's young. You wouldn't lose out.'

'You mind your own business.'

'I'm thinking of Maomei too.'

'She doesn't want you butting in either. Just mind your own business.'

They walked another stretch in silence.

'Wang Qiangxin, you really must behave better in school, eh?'

'Hmm.'

'And out of school too, eh?'

'Hmm.'

The streetlights cast their shadows on the ground one long, one short.

•

When school ended, the gym teacher took Wang Qiangxin to Teacher Zhang and said, 'Teach this boy a lesson. He kicked up such a rumpus in my class that he spoiled it for everyone.'

'Wang Qiangxin, what have you been up to this time?'

The boy said nothing and just smiled.

The gym teacher went on, 'When it was time to line up, he wouldn't stand up straight but flopped this way and that. Leaned against a classmate or flopped onto the ground, as if all his bones were broken.'

'Is that right, Wang Qiangxin?' asked Zhang.

He smiled and said nothing.

'See, this boy won't sit properly or stand properly. Won't listen to anyone, except you, Teacher Zhang!'

Wang Qiangxin, indeed, wasn't standing properly. One of his legs was straight, the other bent, one of his shoulders was higher than the other; his neck and head were askew, his eyebrows crooked and his eyes screwed up.

'Wang Qiangxin, stand properly,' snapped Zhang.

The boy shifted to the other foot, ll with one leg straight, the other bent, one shoulder higher th the other. He had simply switched around.

'Wang Qiangxin, don't you know ow to stand?' asked Zhang patiently.

He shook his head; whether stubbor or sheepishly wasn't clear.

'Is the boy going through some p iological phase that he's so hard to cope with?' said the gym teache

'Stand properly, Wang Qiangxin,' Zha was losing patience.

Still the boy slouched, squinting at hi as if playing a game with him.

'Wang Qiangxin, stand properly.' Zha was really angry.

'I won't,' he had the impudence to say

Zhang raised his hand and slapped hi ace.

Everyone was flabbergasted. The n teacher grabbed Zhang's arm. 'You mustn't beat a schoolchild, Te her Zhang.'

The boy suddenly started bawling. 'Y hit me, you hit me. Bugger you.'

Zhang stared in a daze at Wang C ngxin, his mind a blank. It struck him that the character for 'so with its two 'eyes' was a perfect picture of sobbing.

The boy walked sobbing to the door d no one stopped him. They watched him leave the staffroom, then rned their heads to look at Teacher Zhang.

Zhang was thinking distractedly of th character 'sob'.

Before long an old man in the postur f a setting-up exercise came in and bore down on Zhang.

'Bugger you, you hit my grandson! ow can teachers hit school children? This is the new society. You'r ot a teacher in an old-style private school, able to cuss and beat kids henever you please. Bugger you!'

• Chinese character 哭

The other teachers managed to stop the old man from butting Zhang's chest. Zhang, sweating and dazed, could only bow with clasped hands.

'I'm going to find your boss, your headmaster!' yelled the old man.

'I'll go with you.' Zhang had found his tongue at last.

They went together to the headmaster's office. There, Zhang apologized to the old man before the head.

The next day, Zhang went to Teacher Tao's Fourth Form and apologized to Wang Qiangxin before the whole class.

The third day, in a meeting of the staff trade union, he made a self-examination and accepted the criticism of his colleagues.

The fourth day, Zhang called on the head in his home to relinquish the promotion for which he was due.

The fifth day, the head withdrew a report to the Education Bureau recommending outstanding teachers.

The sixth day was Sunday.

The seventh day was Monday.

The eighth day was Tuesday.

The ninth day, when Zhang was going from his classroom to the staffroom, Wang Qiangxin rushed up, his head sweating, his red scarf back to front as if he were wearing a bib. Three or four metres from the teacher he stopped abruptly.

Zhang stopped too.

Wang Qiangxin looked at him.

Zhang looked at the boy.

Neither said a word.

Zhang turned and walked off.

Wang Qiangxin veered and walked off.

Both were rather flurried.

Translated by Gladys Yang

The Pearl

YUKIO MISHIMA 1925–1970 JAPAN

DECEMBER 10 WAS Mrs. Sasaki's[1] birthday, but since it was Mrs. Sasaki's wish to celebrate the occasion with the minimum of fuss, she had invited to her house for afternoon tea only her closest friends. Assembled were Mesdames Yamamoto, Matsumura, Azuma, and Kasuga[2] —all four being forty-three years of age, exact contemporaries of their hostess.

These ladies were thus members, as it were, of a Keep-Our-Ages-Secret Society and could be trusted implicitly[3] not to divulge to outsiders the number of candles on today's cake. In inviting to her birthday party only guests of this nature, Mrs. Sasaki was showing her customary prudence.

On this occasion Mrs. Sasaki wore a pearl ring. Diamonds at an all-female gathering had not seemed in the best of taste. Furthermore, pearls better matched the color of the dress she was wearing on this particular day.

Shortly after the party had begun, Mrs. Sasaki was moving across for one last inspection of the cake when the pearl in her ring, already a little loose, finally fell from its socket. It seemed a most inauspicious event for this happy occasion, but it would have been no less embarrassing to have everyone aware of the misfortune, so Mrs. Sasaki simply left the pearl close by the rim of the large cake dish and resolved to do something about it later. Around the cake were set out the plates, forks, and paper napkins for herself and the four guests. It now occurred to Mrs. Sasaki that she had no wish to be seen wearing a ring with no stone while cutting the cake, and accordingly she removed the ring from her finger and very deftly, without turning around, slipped it into a recess in the wall behind her back.

Amid the general excitement of the exchange of gossip, and Mrs. Sasaki's surprise and pleasure at the thoughtful presents brought by her guests, the matter of the pearl was very quickly forgotten. Before long it was time for the customary ceremony of lighting and extinguishing the candles on the cake. Everyone crowded excitedly about the table, lending a hand in the not untroublesome task of lighting forty-three candles.

Mrs. Sasaki, with her limited lung capacity, could hardly be expected to blow out all that number at one puff, and her appearance of utter helplessness gave rise to a great deal of hilarious comment.

The procedure followed in serving the cake was that, after the first bold cut, Mrs. Sasaki carved for each guest individually a slice of whatever thickness was requested and transferred this to a small plate, which the guest then carried back with her to her own seat. With everyone stretching out hands at the same time, the crush and confusion around the table was considerable.

On top of the cake was a floral design executed in pink icing and liberally interspersed with small silver balls. These were silver-painted crystals of sugar—a common enough decoration on birthday cakes. In the struggle to secure helpings, moreover, flakes of icing, crumbs of cake, and a number of these silver balls came to be scattered all over the white tablecloth. Some of the guests gathered these stray particles between their fingers and put them on their plates. Others popped them straight into their mouths.

In time all returned to their seats and ate their portions of cake at their leisure, laughing. It was not a homemade cake, having been

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1. Sasaki (sä sä' kē).
2. **Mesdames Yamamoto, Matsumura, Azuma, and Kasuga** (mā dăm', yā mä mô' tô, mät sōō mōō' rä, ä' zoo mä, kä' soo gä): *Mesdames* is the plural form of the French title for a married woman, *Madame*, equivalent to *Mrs.*
3. **implicitly** (im plis' it lē): absolutely; unquestioningly.

ordered by Mrs. Sasaki from a certain high-class confectioner's, but the guests were unanimous in praising its excellence.

Mrs. Sasaki was bathed in happiness. But suddenly, with a tinge of anxiety, she recalled the pearl she had abandoned on the table, and rising from her chair as casually as she could, she moved across to look for it. At the spot where she was sure she had left it, the pearl was no longer to be seen.

Mrs. Sasaki abhorred losing things. At once and without thinking, right in the middle of the party, she became wholly engrossed in her search, and the tension in her manner was so obvious that it attracted everyone's attention.

"Is there something the matter?" someone asked.

"No, not at all, just a moment. . . ."

Mrs. Sasaki's reply was ambiguous, but before she had time to decide to return to her chair, first one, then another, and finally every one of her guests had risen and was turning back the tablecloth or groping about on the floor.

Mrs. Azuma, seeing this commotion, felt that the whole thing was just too deplorable for words. She was incensed[4] at a hostess who could create such an impossible situation over the loss of a solitary pearl.

Mrs. Azuma resolved to offer herself as a sacrifice and to save the day. With a heroic smile she declared: "That's it then! It must have been a pearl I ate just now! A silver ball dropped on the tablecloth when I was given my cake, and I just picked it up and swallowed it without thinking. It *did* seem to stick in my throat a little. Had it been a diamond, now, I would naturally return it—by an operation, if necessary—but as it's a pearl, I must simply beg your forgiveness."

This announcement at once resolved the company's anxieties, and it was felt, above all, that it had saved the hostess from an embarrassing predicament. No one made any attempt to investigate the truth or falsity of Mrs. Azuma's confession. Mrs. Sasaki took one of the remaining silver balls and put it in her mouth.

"Mm," she said. "Certainly tastes like a pearl, this one!"

Thus, this small incident, too, was cast into the crucible of good-humored teasing, and there—amid general laughter—it melted away.

When the party was over, Mrs. Azuma drove off in her two-seater sportscar, taking with her in the other seat her close friend and neighbor Mrs. Kasuga. Before two minutes had passed, Mrs. Azuma said, "Own up! It was you who swallowed the pearl, wasn't it? I covered up for you and took the blame on myself."

This unceremonious manner of speaking concealed deep affection, but however friendly the intention may have been, to Mrs. Kasuga a wrongful accusation was a wrongful accusation. She had no recollection whatsoever of having swallowed a pearl in mistake for a sugar ball. She was—as Mrs. Azuma too must surely know—fastidious in her eating habits, and if she so much as detected a single hair in her food, whatever she happened to be eating at the time immediately stuck in her gullet.

"Oh, really now!" protested the timid Mrs. Kasuga in a small voice, her eyes studying Mrs. Azuma's face in some puzzlement. "I just couldn't do a thing like that!"

"It's no good pretending. The moment I saw that green look on your face, I knew."

The little disturbance at the party had seemed closed by Mrs. Azuma's frank confession, but even now it had left behind it this strange awkwardness. Mrs. Kasuga, wondering how best to demonstrate her innocence, was at the same time seized by the fantasy that a solitary pearl was lodged somewhere in her

4. **incensed** (in sensd'): extremely angered.

intestines. It was unlikely, of course, that she should mistakenly swallow a pearl for a sugar ball, but in all that confusion of talk and laughter, one had to admit that it was at least a possibility. Though she thought back over the events of the party again and again, no moment in which she might have inserted a pearl into her mouth came to mind—but after all, if it was an unconscious act, one would not expect to remember it.

Mrs. Kasuga blushed deeply as her imagination chanced upon one further aspect of the matter. It had occurred to her that when one accepted a pearl into one's system, it almost certainly—its luster a trifle dimmed, perhaps, by gastric juices—reemerged intact within a day or two.

And with this thought the design of Mrs. Azuma, too, seemed to have become transparently clear. Undoubtedly Mrs. Azuma had viewed this same prospect with embarrassment and shame and had therefore cast her responsibility onto another, making it appear that she had considerately taken the blame to protect a friend.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Yamamoto and Mrs. Matsumura, whose homes lay in a similar direction, were returning together in a taxi. Soon after the taxi had started, Mrs. Matsumura opened her handbag to make a few adjustments to her make-up. She remembered that she had done nothing to her face since all that commotion at the party.

As she was removing the powder compact, her attention was caught by a sudden dull gleam as something tumbled to the bottom of the bag. Groping about with the tips of her fingers, Mrs. Matsumura retrieved the object and saw to her amazement that it was a pearl.

Mrs. Matsumura stifled an exclamation of surprise. Recently her relationship with Mrs. Yamamoto had been far from cordial, and she [illegible] a discovery with such awkward implications for herself.

Fortunately, Mrs. Yamamoto was gazing out the window and did not appear to have noticed her companion's momentary start of surprise.

Caught off balance by this sudden turn of events, Mrs. Matsumura did not pause to consider how the pearl had found its way into her bag but immediately became a prisoner of her own private brand of school-captain morality. It was unlikely—she thought—that she would do a thing like this, even in a moment of abstraction. But since, by some chance, the object had found its way into her handbag, the proper course was to return it at once. If she failed to do so, it would weigh heavily upon her conscience. The fact that it was a pearl, too—an article you could call neither all that expensive nor yet all that cheap—only made her position more ambiguous.

At any rate, she was determined that her companion, Mrs. Yamamoto, should know nothing of this incomprehensible development—especially when the affair had been so nicely rounded off, thanks to the selflessness of Mrs. Azuma. Mrs. Matsumura felt she could remain in the taxi not a moment longer, and on the pretext of remembering a promise to visit a sick relative on her way back, she made the driver set her down at once, in the middle of a quiet residential district.

Mrs. Yamamoto, left alone in the taxi, was a little surprised that her practical joke should have moved Mrs. Matsumura to such abrupt action. Having watched Mrs. Matsumura's reflection in the window just now, she had clearly seen her draw the pearl from her bag.

At the party Mrs. Yamamoto had been the very first to receive a slice of cake. Adding to her plate a silver ball which had spilled onto the table, she had returned to her seat—again before any of the others—and there had noticed that the silver ball was a pearl. At this discovery she had at once conceived a mali-

cious plan. While all the others were preoccupied with the cake, she had quickly slipped the pearl into the handbag left on the next chair by that insufferable hypocrite Mrs. Matsumura.

Stranded in the middle of a residential district where there was little prospect of a taxi, Mrs. Matsumura fretfully gave her mind to a number of reflections on her position.

First, no matter how necessary it might be for the relief of her own conscience, it would be a shame, indeed, when people had gone to such lengths to settle the affair satisfactorily, to go and stir up things all over again; and it would be even worse if in the process—because of the inexplicable nature of the circumstances—she were to direct unjust suspicions upon herself.

Secondly—notwithstanding these considerations—if she did not make haste to return the pearl now, she would forfeit her opportunity forever. Left till tomorrow (at the thought Mrs. Matsumura blushed), the returned pearl would be an object of rather disgusting speculation and doubt. Concerning this possibility, Mrs. Azuma herself had dropped a hint.

It was at this point that there occurred to Mrs. Matsumura, greatly to her joy, a master scheme which would both salve her conscience and at the same time involve no risk of exposing her character to any unjust suspicion. Quickening her step, she emerged at length onto a comparatively busy thoroughfare, where she hailed a taxi and told the driver to take her quickly to a certain celebrated pearl shop on the Ginza. There she took the pearl from her bag and showed it to the attendant, asking to see a pearl of slightly larger size and clearly superior quality. Having made her purchase, she proceeded once more, by taxi, to Mrs. Sasaki's house.

Mrs. Matsumura's plan was to present this newly purchased pearl to Mrs. Sasaki, saying she had found it in her jacket pocket. Mrs. Sasaki would accept it and later attempt to fit it into the ring. However, being a pearl of a different size, it would not fit into the ring, and Mrs. Sasaki—puzzled—would try to return it to Mrs. Matsumura, but Mrs. Matsumura would refuse to have it returned. Thereupon Mrs. Sasaki would have no choice but to reflect as follows: The woman has behaved in this way in order to protect someone else. Such being the case, it is perhaps safest simply to accept the pearl and forget the matter. Mrs. Matsumura has doubtless observed one of the three ladies in the act of stealing the pearl. But at least, of my four guests, I can now be sure that Mrs. Matsumura, if no one else, is completely without guilt. Whoever heard of a thief stealing something and then replacing it with a similar article of greater value?

By this device Mrs. Matsumura proposed to escape forever the infamy of suspicion and equally—by a small outlay of cash—the pricks of an uneasy conscience.

To return to the other ladies. After reaching home, Mrs. Kasuga continued to feel painfully upset by Mrs. Azuma's cruel teasing. To clear herself of even a ridiculous charge like this—she knew—she must act before tomorrow or it would be too late. That is to say, in order to offer positive proof that she had not eaten the pearl, it was above all necessary for the pearl itself to be somehow produced. And, briefly, if she could show the pearl to Mrs. Azuma immediately, her innocence on the gastronomic count (if not on any other) would be firmly established. But if she waited until tomorrow, even though she managed to produce the pearl, the shameful and hardly mentionable suspicion would inevitably have intervened.

The normally timid Mrs. Kasuga, inspired with the courage of impetuous action, burst from the house to which she had so recently returned, sped to a pearl shop in the Ginza, and selected and bought a pearl which, to her

eye, seemed of roughly the same size as those silver balls on the cake. She then telephoned Mrs. Azuma. On returning home, she explained, she had discovered in the folds of the bow of her sash the pearl which Mrs. Sasaki had lost, but since she felt too ashamed to return it by herself, she wondered if Mrs. Azuma would be so kind as to go with her, as soon as possible. Inwardly Mrs. Azuma considered the story a little unlikely, but since it was the request of a good friend, she agreed to go.

Mrs. Sasaki accepted the pearl brought to her by Mrs. Matsumura and, puzzled at its failure to fit the ring, fell obligingly into that very train of thought for which Mrs. Matsumura had prayed; but it was a surprise to her when Mrs. Kasuga arrived about an hour later, accompanied by Mrs. Azuma, and returned another pearl.

Mrs. Sasaki hovered perilously on the brink of discussing Mrs. Matsumura's prior visit but checked herself at the last moment and accepted the second pearl as unconcernedly as she could. She felt sure that this one at any rate would fit, and as soon as the two visitors had taken their leave, she hurried to try it in the ring. But it was too small and wobbled loosely in the socket. At this discovery Mrs. Sasaki was not so much surprised as dumbfounded.

On the way back in the car, both ladies found it impossible to guess what the other might be thinking, and though normally relaxed and loquacious[5] in each other's company, they now lapsed into a long silence.

Mrs. Azuma, who believed she could do nothing without her own full knowledge, knew for certain that she had not swallowed the pearl herself. It was simply to save everyone from embarrassment that she had cast shame aside and made that declaration at the party—more particularly, it was to save the situation for her friend, who had been fidgeting about and looking conspicuously guilty. But what was she to think now? Beneath the peculiarity of Mrs. Kasuga's whole attitude, and beneath this elaborate procedure of having herself accompany her as she returned the pearl, she sensed that there lay something much deeper. Could it be that Mrs. Azuma's intuition had touched upon a weakness in her friend's make-up which it was forbidden to touch upon and that by thus driving her friend into a corner, she had transformed an unconscious, impulsive kleptomania into a deep mental derangement beyond all cure?

Mrs. Kasuga, for her part, still retained the suspicion that Mrs. Azuma had genuinely swallowed the pearl and that her confession at the party had been the truth. If that was so, it had been unforgivable of Mrs. Azuma, when everything was smoothly settled, to tease her so cruelly on the way back from the party, shifting the guilt onto herself. As a result, timid creature that she was, she had been panic-striken and, besides spending good money, had felt obliged to act out that little play—and was it not exceedingly ill-natured of Mrs. Azuma that even after all this, she still refused to confess it was she who had eaten the pearl? And if Mrs. Azuma's innocence was all pretense, she herself—acting her part so painstakingly—must appear in Mrs. Azuma's eyes as the most ridiculous of third-rate comedians.

To return to Mrs. Matsumura: That lady, on her way back from obliging Mrs. Sasaki to accept the pearl, was feeling now more at ease in her mind and had the notion to make a leisurely reinvestigation, detail by detail, of the events of the recent incident. When going to collect her portion of the cake, she had most certainly left her handbag on the chair. Then,

5. loquacious (lō kwā' shəs): talkative, especially in a fluently expressive way.

while eating the cake, she had made liberal use of the paper napkin—so there could have been no necessity to take a handkerchief from her bag. The more she thought about it, the less she could remember having opened her bag until she touched up her face in the taxi on the way home. How was it, then, that a pearl had rolled into a handbag which was always shut?

She realized now how stupid she had been not to have remarked this simple fact before, instead of flying into a panic at the mere sight of the pearl. Having progressed this far, Mrs. Matsumura was struck by an amazing thought. Someone must purposely have placed the pearl in her bag in order to incriminate her. And of the four guests at the party, the only one who would do such a thing was, without doubt, the detestable Mrs. Yamamoto. Her eyes glinting with rage, Mrs. Matsumura hurried toward the house of Mrs. Yamamoto.

From her first glimpse of Mrs. Matsumura standing in the doorway, Mrs. Yamamoto knew at once what had brought her. She had already prepared her line of defense.

However, Mrs. Matsumura's cross-examination was unexpectedly severe, and from the start it was clear that she would accept no evasions.

"It was you, I know. No one but you could do such a thing," began Mrs. Matsumura, deductively.

"Why choose me? What proof have you? If you can say a thing like that to my face, I suppose you've come with pretty conclusive proof, have you?" Mrs. Yamamoto was at first icily composed.

To this Mrs. Matsumura replied that Mrs. Azuma, having so nobly taken the blame on herself, clearly stood in an incompatible relationship with mean and despicable behavior of this nature; and as for Mrs. Kasuga, she was much too weak-kneed for such dangerous work; and that left only one person—herself.

Mrs. Yamamoto kept silent, her mouth shut tight like a clamshell. On the table before her gleamed the pearl which Mrs. Matsumura had set there. In the excitement she had not even had time to raise a teaspoon, and the Ceylon tea she had so thoughtfully provided was beginning to get cold.

"I had no idea that you hated me so." As she said this, Mrs. Yamamoto dabbed at the corners of her eyes, but it was plain that Mrs. Matsumura's resolve not to be deceived by tears was as firm as ever.

"Well, then," Mrs. Yamamoto continued, "I shall say what I had thought I must never say. I shall mention no names, but one of the guests . . . "

"By that, I suppose, you can only mean Mrs. Azuma or Mrs. Kasuga?"

"Please, I beg at least that you allow me to omit the name. As I say, one of the guests had just opened your bag and was dropping something inside when I happened to glance in her direction. You can imagine my amazement! Even if I had felt *able* to warn you, there would have been no chance. My heart just throbbed and throbbed, and on the way back in the taxi—oh, how awful not to be able to speak even then! If we had been good friends, of course, I could have told you quite frankly, but since I knew of your apparent dislike for me . . ."

"I see. You have been very considerate, I'm sure. Which means, doesn't it, that you have now cleverly shifted the blame onto Mrs. Azuma and Mrs. Kasuga?"

"Shifted the blame! Oh, how can I get you to understand my feelings? I only wanted to avoid hurting anyone."

"Quite. But you didn't mind hurting me, did you? You might at least have mentioned this in the taxi."

"And if you had been frank with me when you found the pearl in your bag, I would probably have told you, at that moment, everything I had seen—but no, you chose to leave the

axi at once, without saying a word!"

For the first time, as she listened to this, Mrs. Matsumura was at a loss for a reply.

"Well, then. Can I get you to understand? I wanted no one to be hurt."

Mrs. Matsumura was filled with an even more intense rage.

"If you are going to tell a string of lies like that," she said, "I must ask you to repeat them, tonight if you wish, in my presence, before Mrs. Azuma and Mrs. Kasuga."

At this Mrs. Yamamoto started to weep.

"And thanks to you," she sobbed reprovingly, "all my efforts to avoid hurting anyone will have come to nothing."

It was a new experience for Mrs. Matsumura to see Mrs. Yamamoto crying, and though she kept reminding herself not to be taken in by tears, she could not altogether dismiss the feeling that perhaps somewhere, since nothing in this affair could be proved, there might be a <u>modicum</u>[6] of truth even in the assertions of Mrs. Yamamoto.

In the first place—to be a little more objective—if one accepted Mrs. Yamamoto's story as true, then her reluctance to disclose the name of the guilty party, whom she had observed in the very act, argued some refinement of character. And just as one could not say for sure that the gentle and seemingly timid Mrs. Kasuga would never be moved to an act of malice, so even the undoubtedly bad feeling between Mrs. Yamamoto and herself could, by one way of looking at things, be taken as actually [illegible] Mrs. Yamamoto's guilt. For if she was to do a thing like this, with their relationship as it was, Mrs. Yamamoto would be the first to come under suspicion.

"We have differences in our natures," Mrs. Yamamoto continued tearfully, "and I cannot deny that there are things about yourself which I dislike. But for all that, it is really too bad that you should suspect me of such a petty trick to get the better of you. . . . Still, on thinking it over, to submit quietly to your accusations might well be the course most consistent with what I have felt in this matter all along. In this way I alone shall bear the guilt, and no other will be hurt."

After this pathetic pronouncement, Mrs. Yamamoto lowered her face to the table and abandoned herself to uncontrolled weeping.

Watching her, Mrs. Matsumura came, by degrees, to reflect upon the impulsiveness of her own behavior. Detesting Mrs. Yamamoto as she had, there had been times in her <u>castigation</u>[7] of that lady when she had allowed herself to be blinded by emotion.

When Mrs. Yamamoto raised her head again after this prolonged bout of weeping, the look of resolution on her face, somehow remote and pure, was apparent even to her visitor. Mrs. Matsumura, a little frightened, drew herself upright in her chair.

"This thing should never have been. When it is gone, everything will be as before." Speaking in riddles, Mrs. Yamamoto pushed back her disheveled hair and fixed a terrible, yet hauntingly beautiful, gaze upon the top of the table. In an instant she had snatched up the pearl from before her and, with a gesture of no ordinary resolve, tossed it into her mouth. Raising her cup by the handle, her little finger elegantly extended, she washed the pearl down her throat with one gulp of cold Ceylon tea.

Mrs. Matsumura [illegible] nation. The affair was over before she had time to protest. This was the first time in her life she had seen a person swallow a pearl, and there was in Mrs. Yamamoto's manner some-

6. **modicum** (mäd' i kəm): a small amount.

7. **castigation** (kas' ti gā' shən): the act of punishing or scolding severely, especially by criticizing publicly.

thing of that desperate finality one might expect to see in a person who had just drunk poison.

However, heroic though the action was, it was above all a touching incident, and not only did Mrs. Matsumura find her anger vanished into thin air, but so impressed was she by Mrs. Yamamoto's simplicity and purity that she could only think of that lady as a saint. And now Mrs. Matsumura's eyes too began to fill with tears, and she took Mrs. Yamamoto by the hand.

"Please forgive me, please forgive me," she said. "It was wrong of me."

For a while they wept together, holding each other's hands and vowing to each other that henceforth they would be the firmest of friends.

When Mrs. Sasaki heard rumors that the relationship between Mrs. Yamamoto and Mrs. Matsumura, which had been so strained, had suddenly improved, and that Mrs. Azuma and Mrs. Kasuga, who had been such good friends, had suddenly fallen out, she was at a loss to understand the reasons and contented herself with the reflection that nothing was impossible in this world.

However, being a woman of no strong scruples, Mrs. Sasaki requested a jeweler to refashion her ring and to produce a design into which two new pearls could be set, one large and one small, and this she wore quite openly, without further mishap.

Soon she had completely forgotten the small commotion on her birthday, and when anyone asked her age, she would give the same untruthful answers as ever.

Don't You Have Any Donkeys In Your Country?

by Mehmed Nusret Nesin (Aziz Nesin)

Aziz Nesin is a popular literary voice in modern Turkey. Born in 1915 into a poor family, he made his name as a writer of wry folklore much of it mocking the establishment's exploitation of the lower classes. His work has survived censure and even imprisonment and gives voice to the inequalities and injustices he sees around him.

He came in shaking his head from side to side, holding his hand to his face as though he had the toothache. He kept alternately slapping his hand to his face and saying, "Damn it, I've been disgraced. I've been disgraced."

Notwithstanding, he was a very well bred man. I was quite surprised that he would start flagellating himself, saying, "Damn it, I've been disgraced," the minute he walked in the door, before he even greeted me.

"Please come in," I said. "Make yourself at home, please sit down."

"I'm disgraced. I'm disgraced."

"How are you?"

"How do you think I am? Is there anything else I can be? I'm disgraced, that's all there is to it, damn it all."

I thought he had suffered a disaster, maybe a misfortune concerning his family.

"I feel like crawling into a hole. I'm not worth two paras, two paras."

"Why? What happened to you?"

"I don't know what more could happen. They sold a man a broken down, mangy donkey for two thousand five hundred liras."

I drew back and peered into his face. Was he crazy perhaps?

Frankly, I was scared. I said, as an excuse for calling my wife, "Would you like a coffee?"

"Forget the coffee," he said. "Is an unshod, broken down donkey worth two thousand five hundred liras?"

"Not having dealt in donkeys, I wouldn't know."

"My friend, I'm not a donkey trader myself either but I know that a donkey isn't worth two thousand five hundred liras."

"Are you upset?"

"You bet I am. If I'm not upset, who will be? Did you ever see a donkey that was worth two thousand five hundred liras?"

"It's been a little over twenty years since I've seen a donkey."

"What I asked you was if a donkey was worth two thousand five hundred liras."

"I don't know what to say. Maybe if he is a donkey that does tricks, he might be worth that much."

"What tricks, my dear sir? This is just a plain donkey. Look, it can't get up and make a speech; it's just a plain old donkey. And it's mangy and worn out, on top of everything else. They sold him to the man for two thousand five hundred liras and the worst of it all, do you know, was that I got him to buy it."

"No! How did all this happen?"

"That's what I came to tell you about. Istanbul University sent me with my wife to America. You know I stayed in America one year."

"I know."

"I met a professor in America and we became friends. He was a lot of help to me. He was very kind.

the Turks very much. In one of his letters he wrote me that a friend of his was coming to Turkey and this friend was an expert in antique rugs, that he was coming to Turkey to research a book on rugs and asked whether I would assist his friend."

"I wrote back that if his friend the Rug Expert came to Turkey during the university vacation, I would be glad to help him as much as I could. Because the Rug Expert was going to India and Iran to research and coming on to Turkey later, it would be a suitable time for me."

"The Rug Expert came in July. He had my address and phone number from my American professor friend. One day he phoned me from his hotel and I went to the hotel. He was a shrewd fellow. He was an American of German extraction and he probably had some Jewish background too. Perhaps he had been a German Jew and become an American later on."

"He had brought four big trunks and showed off his antiques. They were very ancient rugs, flat weaves and pieces of saddle bags. He seemed very happy with the pieces he had collected. He told me that they were an enormous treasure. In fact, there was a piece of an old carpet only three inches wide and five or ten inches long that he told me was worth at least thirty thousand dollars but he bragged that he had bought it from an Iranian peasant for one dollar. On top of that, when the poor Iranian peasant took the dinar equivalent of a dollar in his hand he was dumbfounded and uttered prayers of thanksgiving."

"I asked why that old piece of carpet was worth so much money. 'Because,' he said, 'there are eighty knots per cubic centimeter in this rug. It's a masterpiece.' He went on explaining about carpets with a truly sensual longing. Up till now there was only one carpet in the world with as much as one hundred knots per cubic centimeter and it was in I-don't-know which museum and was a wall carpet."

"He showed me a felt piece. 'I got this for fifty cents,' he said and chuckled slyly in his delight. 'This felt rug will be worth at least five thousand dollars,' he said."

"How do you buy these valuable objects so cheap?" I asked him.

"I've been in this business for forty years," he said. "I have my own methods."

Then he told me tactics that made my mouth fall open in amazement. He had published three books on rugs, in addition, he owned one of the finest rug collections in the world.

We started out on a tour of Anatolia. We traveled from province to province and from district to district. He took colored photographs and continually made notes of the rugs in the mosques that he though were valuable. He bought old saddlebags, rugs, felt weaves and flat weaves from a few people. According to what he told me, what he was buying was worthless compared to what he had bought in India, Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan. "There *are* some very valuable Turkish rugs but you don't run across them," he said.

We came to a place where they had an archaeological dig. One American and one German archaeological team had each pitched a camp about five or ten kilometers distant from one another and were excavating. They were turning the earth up and had scattered the hills and mountains this way and that like a sheep's wool. They had made flour of the hills and had ground the soil up into powder.

The area they were excavating was about the size of a small town. They had pitched a number of tents. Here lie several civilizations, dating from the tenth century BC to the present day, one on top of another, beneath the soil. Not one, but several cities, palaces, tombs and so on, emerged from beneath the earth.

Because it was such an interesting place, cars full of tourists interested in history and archeology were continually coming and going. You ran into five to ten tourists every couple of kilometers.

Peasants had gathered around the excavation and were selling the tourists the historical and archaeological valuable pieces of pottery that they had dug up. The tourists were just scrambling to buy them. Even the village children had lined up alongside the road and were selling rings, stones with inscriptions and pieces of broken vases that they had dug up for the tourists. Tiny bare footed boys and girls were running after the tourists, all screaming, "*Van dalir, tuu dalir.*"

I thought that since I had come all the way here, I might as well buy myself a souvenir. There was a blond girl who looked only ten years old who had the handle of a vase in her hand and a boy with a blue stone in the shape of a man's head. I thought that the blue stone might be the stone belonging to a ring.

"How much do you want for those, my child?" I said.

The little girl wanted forty liras for the vase handle and the boy wanted fifteen liras for the blue stone in the shape of a head. Now not because I didn't know what they were but just to buy them cheap, I said, "They are too expensive."

The boy and girl started to argue like grownups. They certainly weren't expensive. Their father had dug for days and found them five meters under the ground.

I was about to buy them but my American Rug Expert friend, after telling me that they had neither historical nor archaeological value, said that the situation was the same in every place he had traveled in the East. "It is exactly the same there. The peasants, men, women and children, stop the tourists in the road every place where there are digs that attract tourists. They pass off anything they can get their hands on for an antique."

These sly peasants faked the ancient artifacts so cleverly they even fooled famous archaeologists and swindled them by selling them stuff at high prices. They even sold the shaven carcass of a sheepdog to an American tourist as the mummy of a king. But the imitations that these peasant counterfeiters made were not things to be sneezed at. They were works of great skill and accomplishment, for example the tiny blue stone in the shape of a man's head that I saw in the hand of the child a little while earlier. It's not easy to make things like that.

We were riding in the jeep we had rented. The weather was very hot. We saw a couple of poplars and a well beside the road. We were going to eat our lunch in the shade. An elderly peasant was stretched out, dozing in the shade of the poplars and a donkey was grazing a little beyond the peasant.

We greeted the peasant and starting talking. I was translating into English for the American what the peasant said.

"What do you grow the most of in these villages around here?" I asked.

"Not a thing," he said. "We used to farm. We grew grain but since they started this digging, it's been twenty years I reckon, the peasants have gotten lazy and now they don't sow anything."

The American said, "It's the same in the other places."

I asked the old man, "Well, how do the peasants get by?"

"Since it's been the style to dig up broken pottery and pieces of stones and such like, the peasants have left their work and they sell whatever they find by digging up the excavation to all those foreigners that pour in."

The American said, "It's the same as in other places."

"Our people here are real lowdown types," the peasant said. "They have sold all our country's treasures to the foreigners. They found such stone columns and tombs that if they could learn their value and sell them, they could found ten more Turkeys . . . and who are these foreigners we're talking about? They're all of them thieves. They have continually pilfered these antiques that are dug up and smuggled them out. They have built enormous cities in their own countries with the stuff they've stolen. Some of them dug them up and stole them themselves and some of them swindled the peasants out of what they had dug up."

The American said, "It's the same other places."

"Now," he said, "there's not a piece of filth left under the ground to dig up and if there is, it's of no account. The government has woken up now and doesn't let anybody get their hands on anything. If these foreigners steal anything, they steal it from the government because the government is supposed to be selling these things at their right price."

The American said, "Yes, that's the way it is other places."

"So how do the peasants get by now?"

"Well, there's six villages hereabouts. If you go in their houses you won't see so much as a piece of cloth or a glass or a pitcher or a jug. Everybody's house is as empty as last year's bird nest."

"Why?"

"Why do you think? They've sold them to the tourists. There's not a splinter of wood left in their houses. Anything they had, they made into antiques and sold. They buried them in the ground, made them rust and turned them into crumbly antiques. Our people's morals have really gone bad, mister. Yesterday, I caught a little boy trying to steal the beads from my donkey's harness. Once he got his hands on them he would bury them in the ground, you see, and then he was going to dig them up and pass them off for antiques. The girls of an age to get married and living at home have all turned into antique makers. If they get their hands on a piece of stone the size of your finger, they carve and chip it and turn out a piece of art you wouldn't believe. They make medals and ancient money out of donkey shoes."

The American said, "I told you so. It's exactly the same in other places."

I asked the old peasant, "How do you get by? What do you do?"

"I trade in donkeys," he said.

When he said this he drew some water from the well and gave it to his donkey to drink in the trough attached to the well. While the donkey was drinking, the American jumped up and went over to the donkey. The peasant and I were talking.

"Can you make a living in this donkey business?"

"Praise Allah, I have made a living for five years in this business, thank God."

"It all depends on the donkey."

"How long does it take you to sell a donkey?"

"It depends. Sometimes a donkey doesn't sell for three to five months. Sometimes you sell five donkeys in one day."

The American walked over to me. He was very excited.

"Good grief," he said, "do you see that piece of carpet on that donkey?"

The peasant didn't understand because we were talking English.

There was an old, ragged, muddy saddlecloth on the donkey's back.

"You mean that dirty cloth?" I said.

"Oh my goodness," he said, "it's a wonder, a masterpiece. I've been studying that carpet ever since you two started to talk. The colors, the design are amazing and the workmanship is fabulous. It has exactly one hundred and twenty knots per cubic centimeter. Nothing like that has been seen in the world before, it's priceless."

"Do you want to buy it?" I said.

"Yes," he said, "but I don't want the peasant to know that I'm buying the carpet. I know these people here. If you try to buy their old, worn sandals they want a world of money because they think that they are valuable and antiques. What they plan to make off the deal isn't the issue. They are never satisfied however much money you offer them. They keep on raising the price. That's why we don't want to let on to the peasant."

About then the old peasant said, "What is that heathen jabbering about? You two are going 'gobble, gobble, gobble'."

"Nothing," I said, "he just likes it a lot here."

"What is there to like here? There's nothing but naked chalk cliffs."

The American said, "I told you that I had methods for buying cheap, didn't I? Well now I'm going to use one of those methods."

"What?"

"I'm not going to act as though I'm interested in the carpet. I'm going to buy the donkey. Naturally, since the peasant doesn't know the value of the carpet, he is going to leave the old cloth on the donkey's back when we buy it. Then we'll take the carpet and let the donkey loose a little way down the road. Now, will you tell the peasant that I want to buy the donkey?"

I said to the peasant, "Didn't you want to sell the donkey?"

"Yep, I was going to sell the donkey," he said.

"For instance, how much would you sell this donkey for?"

"Depends on who the buyer is."

"Suppose we were to buy it?"

He laughed.

"Are you having fun with me? What would gentlemen the likes of you do with a donkey?"

"What do you care, man? We want to buy this donkey. What will you sell it for?"

"I told you, didn't I. It depends on the buyer. Is it you that's going to buy it or this heathen?"

"He is."

"What nationality is that guy?"

"American."

"Humh, he's not a foreigner, we can reckon he's one of us. Look here, this donkey is really old and broken down. Tell him this donkey is no good to him."

I told the American.

"Oh good, that means he's going to sell it cheap," he said.

"He doesn't care whether it's old or not."

"It would be a shame to do an American like that. He'll go home and say the Turks swindled him."

I told the American this.

"The Turkish peasants are a very innocent, very honest people," he said. "Anywhere else they would have sold it to me right away. Since he's such a good hearted fellow, I will pay him a lot of money."

I said to the peasant, "The American agrees."

"Yes, but sir," he said, "this donkey will die on the road before it gets to America and anyway this donkey has terrible mange. He's nasty with mange from head to tail."

"What do you care, my friend? The man wants him."

"Allah, Allah. Look, this isn't a female even to be of any use. What is he going to do with this old, mangy donkey?"

"What business is it of yours? Just think about the money. What do you want for this donkey?"

"I'm really curious," the peasant said. "Just ask this American efendi: 'don't they have any donkeys at all in his country?'"

"He's asking, 'Don't you have any donkeys in your country?'"

The American answered after thinking a little, "Tell him we do but we don't have any like this."

I told the peasant.

"Hummh, so he doesn't like American donkeys but he does Turkish donkeys. Well, what can I do? It's not my fault. I told him everything that was wrong with the donkey. I am not about to hurt the feelings of somebody who's come all the way from abroad because of a mangy donkey. I'll sell it."

"How much?"

"For you, ten thousand."

"What? Are you crazy? The finest Arab thoroughbred only brings two or three thousand liras."

"So then what d'you want with the donkey? Let him buy the finest thoroughbred."

When I told the American that the man wanted ten thousand liras, he said, "Didn't I tell you? That's the way these people are. They want lots of money because they think it's valuable. What if we had tried to buy the carpet? He'd have wanted a hundred thousand liras then. I could offer him ten thousand liras for the donkey but then he would want fifty thousand when I started to pay him. That's why you have to bargain firmly with them."

I said to the peasant, "Tell the truth. What did you pay for this donkey?"

"I don't tell lies, he said. "Look, I've just washed myself to pray and I'm not about to tell a lie. I bought this donkey for five liras to skin to make sandals with. He's going to die any day not and I'll skin him then. He's not good for anything else."

"Come on, play fair! How can you try to sell a donkey that you paid five liras for for ten thousand liras?"

"Son, I'm not trying to sell it, it's you who are trying to buy. I said it was old and the man said that was all right. I said that it had the mange, he accepted that. I said that it wasn't a female and he still wanted it. I said it wouldn't live another day and he still said 'good.' Oh, I almost forgot . . . the donkey is lame. Its right leg limps."

"It doesn't matter."

"You see, there's something valuable, something marvelous about this donkey that I don't understand. Otherwise why would this American infidel try to buy a mangy, old jackass and lame too? Isn't that right? Ten thousand, I won't take any less for it!"

I said to the American, "He won't go down any farther. Shall we give him the ten thousand?"

We haggled for two hours. Several times we acted as though we had given up and walked away. He paid no attention. We walked back to him

"I knew you'd come back," he said.

"Who wouldn't know it, my boy? You're come across such a bargain of a donkey that you are certainly not going to walk away from it."

I told the driver of the jeep to take the jeep and wait for us a little distance down the road. We were going to let the donkey loose and climb into the jeep.

Anyway, sir, after bickering and bargaining we settled on two thousand five hundred liras. We counted the money out into his hand and the peasant took the saddle cloth and put it on his shoulder and put the donkey's reins in our hands.

"Well, then, use it in good health," he said.

Then he added, "I probably sold my broken down, mangy donkey too cheap but never mind. Use it in good health."

The American was staring at the piece of carpet in the peasant's hand. What were we going to do now?

"My God," he said, "don't let on anything. We'll lead the donkey off a little ways and then come back here. We'll say, 'Oh my goodness, the donkey's back will get cold. Give us the cloth and we'll cover it up.' Be careful that the man doesn't understand that what we are really after is the piece of carpet."

We took the donkey's lead and walked off. I say we walked off just as a manner of speaking because we had a hard time walking. The American pushed from behind and I pulled from in front but the donkey wouldn't budge. The old donkey didn't have the strength to move. If we could only get the carpet away from the peasant, we could have left the donkey and taken off.

We had gone about twenty or thirty paces, pushing and shoving the donkey, when we heard the voice of the peasant calling after us, "Stop, stop, you forgot the donkey's thing."

Oh, if you had only seen how happy the man was that the cloth was following us on its own. The man came running over the hilltop.

"Hey there," he said. "What are you going to tie this donkey to when you get it to America? You didn't even think. You don't buy a donkey without a stake. I can see you're greenhorns."

And we took the iron donkey stake with the ring on the end from his hand.

The American said to me, "Come on, now's the moment to ask for the carpet. But for goodness sake [illegible]

I said to the peasant, "This donkey is very sickly. It would be a shame if he caught cold. You had an old cloth on the donkey. Give us the dirty cloth and we'll put it on its back."

"Oh, no," he said. "I can't give the cloth to you. You bought the donkey from me, not the cloth."

"Yes, we bought the donkey. Now let's put the cloth on it. Anyway, it's old and dirty and it's not worth a *para*."

"Yes, it's old and dirty and it's not worth one *para* but I can't give it to you."

"Why?"

"I can't give it to you, Mister. It's an heirloom from my father, that cloth. It's an heirloom handed down from my ancestors and forefathers. I can't give it to you."

I said to the American, "He says that it's an heirloom handed down from his forefathers."

"Ask him what it's good for," he said.

"What good is this dirty piece of cloth to you?" I asked him.

The peasant suddenly became serious, "What do you mean, 'What good is it to me'? I'm going to buy another mangy donkey and put it on his back. If it is my *kismet*, I'll find somebody else interested and, with Allah's assistance, I'll sell it to him too. This cloth has brought me luck, I'm telling you. I gave you the stake for free too. Did I say anything about that?"

"Oh, come on now, let us buy the cloth for a few piasters and cover the animal."

"Now you've done it! Then how will I sell my donkeys? I've been selling worn out, mangy donkeys for five years now thanks to this cloth. Goodby to you now. Use it in good health."

I was afraid the American was going to have a heart attack. I took him by the arm.

After a few steps, the peasant shouted from a distance,

"If you are going to let that donkey loose, please don't take him a far ways off, so you won't wear yourselves out."

We let the donkey loose there, on the spot and walked back to the jeep.

The American Rug Expert said, "Now *this* is something that doesn't go on anywhere else. It's never happened to me before. Everything is the same as elsewhere here, but this is a different sort of a ploy."

We got into the jeep. He still had the stake in his hand. He couldn't throw it away.

"What are you going to do with that iron stake?" I said.

"I am going to add this stake to my rug collection as a souvenir," he said. "This stake is valuable. We got it cheap at two thousand five hundred."

"You see? I'm disgraced before the world. Shame on me."

He kept on repeating, "I'm disgraced" over and over again and kept slapping his forehead with his hand.