
PHOTOCOPIES
JOHN BERGER

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

For
WOLFRAM SCHÜTTE
at the Frankfurter Rundschau
who was the godfather and first editor
of these Photocopies

Contents

1. A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree
2. Woman with a Dog on Her Lap
3. Passenger to Omagh
4. A Man Wearing a Lacoste Sweater
5. An Old Woman with a Pram
6. A Young Woman with Hand to Her Chin
7. A Man in One-Piece Leathers and a Crash Helmet Stands Very Still
8. Two Dogs Under a Rock
9. A House Designed by Le Corbusier
10. A Woman on a Bicycle
11. A Man Begging in the Métro
12. Sheets of Paper Laid on the Grass
13. Psalm 139: ‘... you know me when I sit and when I rise ...’
14. Street Theatre
15. A Bunch of Flowers in a Glass
16. Two Recumbent Male Figures Wrestling on a Sidewalk
17. A Man Holding Up a Horse’s Bridle
18. Island of Sifnos
19. A Painting of an Electric Light Bulb
20. A Girl Like Antigone
21. A Friend Talking
22. Two Men Beside a Cow’s Head
23. A Man Baring His Chest
24. A House in the Sabine Mountains
25. Two Cats in a Basket
26. A Young Woman Wearing a Chapka
27. Men and Women Sitting at a Table and Eating
28. Room 19
29. Subcomandante Insurgente

A Note on the Author

By the Same Author

Also Available by John Berger



A Woman and Man Standing by a Plum Tree

At seven in the evening a yellow car pulled up by the house. The yellow of a French post van. But the car had Spanish plates. On its bonnet were stuck pieces of Scotch tape. Painted yellow. Not quite the same yellow. The car, however, was parked where nobody had ever parked a car. It was a possible place. It didn't obstruct there. But nobody had seen the place before.

The driver wore jeans and a dusty black shirt with white buttons. She had come from Galicia.

I had seen her once previously in my life. For five minutes in Madrid. I was giving a public reading there, and, afterwards, this woman, about thirty years old, came and handed me a roll of brown paper. It is a present for you. I unrolled it and saw a drawing. She earned her living, she said, restoring frescos in churches. When something is covered in plaster and you put it under water, the white washed off, and its usual colour comes back. But often when it dries again, it looks a little whitish. It can even happen to your fingernails. When the woman said she restored frescos, I thought I saw a little of this whitishness on her clothes, on the backs of her hands. Before I could ask her anything more she had disappeared.

Later I looked at her drawing. It had something to do with the world of fishes. I wanted to thank her, but I hadn't caught her name and the signature on the drawing was hard to decipher. The first name began with M and the second, I thought, with C.

Now this unknown restorer of frescos had arrived unexpectedly. I discovered her name. We talked of this and that: of Galicia, peasants, Paul Klee, the Documenta exhibition in Kassel. It seems we talked of nothing. If she came, it wasn't really to talk.

She came like one of her drawings about the world of fishes, or perhaps about the world of animals. She lives with animals. Certain animals. She knows their secrets, which are not secrets to them, but secrets from us. I doubt whether she chose the animals she lives with; they, I guess, chose her. Which would be normal, for it is they who live in her. Inhabit her. They were sitting invisibly inside her at the table.

She lives with them as she lives with her own kidneys, her own oesophagus, her own gall bladder. If she were dissected on an operating table, her animals would no longer be there – just as when the timber of a forest is felled, the wood-cutters never find boars or foxes or woodpeckers.

They come and go, her animals, and she's aware of each departure, and each new arrival. They produce irritations, they provoke impulses and, especially, they show her tricks, theirs. The tricks perform themselves in her, under her skin. This is what I thought as we looked at each other across the table.

What animals? If she was asked, *they* would never let her reply. All animals except man are cautious. So they would never allow a catalogue. And she respects their animal caution. She even imitates it – I could see this as I watched her fingers.

She sat there drinking her coffee in her black shirt. Her hair was freshly washed, but probably she had not been to a coiffeur for years. In another life but with the same physical presence, she might have looked after (or stolen) horses – a figure disappearing on the edge of a wood, riding one horse and leading another. She was thin and sinewy like those who live close to horses. But in her present

life she made mysterious drawings on home-made paper, she restored frescos and the animals which were closest to her were no longer of the Equidae family.

This time it was perhaps the Mustelidae family. The *belette* with her black tail, or the ermine sharp, timid, who leads where you've never been! Animals who live, not play, hide-and-seek, and who can bite two ears at the same time, because so swift, whose bellies are white and prized by judges, and who have learnt from the snake to undulate their bodies as they accelerate, dip, curve, disappear.

We ate supper. Outside it started to rain, hard. We insisted she stayed the night. I showed her where she could wash and sleep. She stopped before a drawing framed on the wall in the kitchen and gazed at it. She didn't look intently. She just gazed at this drawing of figures with some writing around them. The writing was a quotation from the Eumenides about the Furies demanding vengeance, and another from the Gospel of St John: '... my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'

She didn't say anything or make any sign. Her face was turned away. Simply her body announced how she was familiar with these words. Her body made no movement. No gesture. Just a withdrawal which might be mistaken for insolence.

All that night it rained.

The next morning she said she must be on her way to Kessel. Before she left, could she take a photograph?

We were drinking coffee in the kitchen.

You saw my camera? she asked.

No.

You didn't notice it last night?

She nodded to where her haversack was, on the floor near the door. Beside her haversack was a box which I had indeed noticed because of its silver colour. About the size of a mechanic's tool box. In places it had been repaired with black sealing tape. I hadn't asked myself what she carried in it. Maybe paints. Or apples. Or sandals and sun-tan lotion.

Like the original camera, she said, like the first! And she handed me the box. It weighed nothing. Its sides were made of plywood.

There's not enough light here, she said, let's go outside.

We went out to the plum trees where there's a table in the grass and there she looked up at the still cloudy sky. Between two minutes and three, she calculated out loud, and placed the box carefully on the edge of the table. In the centre of one of its long sides there was a white rectangular plaster, like you put over a small blister or burn. This plaster was framed by black tape.

With her cautious fingers she pulled off the white plaster to reveal an aperture, a hole. Then she took my hand.

The two of us stood there facing the camera. We moved of course, but not more than the plum trees did in the wind. Minutes passed. Whilst we stood there, we reflected the light, and what we reflected went through the black hole into the dark box.

It'll be of us, she said, and we waited expectantly.

Woman With a Dog on Her Lap

When it comes to my imagination, Angeline – as might be expected of her – is obstinate and independent. Try as I do, I cannot imagine her as a young woman. And try as I do, I cannot really accept that she's now dead, that she's been dead for three years.

She keeps on watching me. I always amused her, the more so when I wasn't trying to, and now that she's dead she laughs out loud – even if silently! She knew she was going to play this trick, of course. It belonged to one of her secret plans, which she used to work out when she couldn't sleep at night and when, the following morning, she had to tell a lie in order to communicate the enormity of the night she'd passed through. The lie was that she hadn't once closed her eyes.

When she took off her glasses, her eyes were no longer hard but full of wonder, and so it's difficult to explain why I could never imagine her young. Once she had a swollen knee and she asked me to rub some pomade on to it: her knees and thighs were as soft as a young bride's. When she undid her plait her white hair was abundant and fell down to her shoulder-blades. On the rare occasions when I kissed her – to wish her a Happy New Year, for example – she always pulled both of us into a corner, so that we should not be seen. Yet despite these things, I could not imagine her young.

I suppose the explanation was her mourning. When you put on black – and she wore black for thirty years – you put youth behind you for ever. I remember a man on a bicycle saying when the traffic had to stop to let a wedding cortège pass: the sign of the newlywed is a young woman at an open window with a duvet in her arms, and the sign of widowhood is an old woman alone chopping firewood with an axe.

Angeline was happy more often than she cared to admit. Coming back from the forest loaded with dead wood to chop, she was happy. In principle, she tried not to laugh in public: it was not appropriate to the black she wore. Covertly, she was happy when she made someone else laugh. And she had a gift of repartee which was inimitable. Her tactic was to cut, as with a knife, what she had just heard and then to make a bow with it. He's got billy-goat shit in his pockets, she said of Giscard d'Estaing on the screen. Every morning, except on Sundays, I used to hear the postman laughing in her kitchen for ten minutes. Sometimes with me she would let herself laugh. *Jésu, Marie, et Joseph, comment tu es bête* she would say.

She was in mourning for her husband but more for her son, who had been killed in a road accident when he was in his early twenties. Her suffering then – and she clasped this suffering thirty years because it was all that was left of her son which she could clasp – gave her a sense of solidarity with anybody else who was suffering. She visited the sick. She visited the bereaved. Her suffering soured the suffering of others so that they could stand side by side.

On several occasions she asked me how to send cash to the television to buy food to send to the country she had seen the night before where people were starving.

At the same time she had a deep feeling for luxury. She owned three goats, she needed to count her money, and she lived in a space of no more than fifty square metres, but she could imagine luxury. This was why her most loving insult was *feignant* – which means idle. Her dog and her goats were *feignant*. And she said I risked to be so. When Angeline was young, idleness in the village was the

summit of luxury.

~~Her dog was called Mickey after the Mouse. Small, black, noisy and silly. A dog who never grew up. She swore at him. She locked him out. When he was sick he hid under the stove which she polished twice a week. But when he was bitten by another dog she nursed him on her lap as Calypso nursed Odysseus.~~

And Angeline waited until this morning to play the trick on me.

Certain villages appear to have come into being haphazardly – like dice thrown across a table. The reason for other villages is more obvious: they were built where two valleys meet, or where a river narrows. Yet others look as though they were the result of a sleight of hand, as if, from the beginning, from the very choice of their site, they had the pretension to show something off. As if the village were built from *flair*! Our village is of this last kind.

It looks happier than it is. The church has a fine steeple. The cemetery is like a balcony above the town. The *Mairie* with its *tricolore* stands back from and above the road – almost with the stance of a château. The two cafés – including the *Républicain Lyre* – have steps leading up to them. And on the hillside behind, the farms are arranged like loges in a gigantic green theatre.

I was thinking about this as I approached the village this morning in the winter sunlight. A lot had changed recently, but from a distance in the winter sunlight, it might still be the village it was at the beginning of the century. And suddenly this morning I saw it like that. It was different from the thousand other times I'd seen it. It was full of mysterious promises.

I knew I would be married in its church, I knew that my children would go to its school, that my husband would take the mare each spring on March the 14th to be blessed by the *Curé*. It was at that moment I heard her silent laughter. It was she who had been looking at the village, not I, and she had made me see it through her eyes. And she was laughing because she had made me see it through her eyes when young.

Passenger to Omagh

There's a painting by Jack Yeats which shows a woman bare-back rider, a rider of the *haute école* with her thoroughbred horse, and she's talking to a clown who sits hunched up on a box near the entrance to the Big Top. It's entitled: *That Grand Conversation Was Under the Rose*.

When Jack Yeats was very old, I spent an evening with him in Dublin. An unforgettable evening of stories and whiskey. I didn't ask him then because I didn't know I would need it, but thirty years later (he'd be 125 years old today) I fancy he'd agree if I borrowed his title for the duration of a bus ride.

Out of season between Dublin and Derry there are two buses a day. The road crosses the right shoulder of Ireland. In December, when we took the bus, there was a small rain and the stone walls and the cattle in the irregular fields were drenched. Snug in our seats, we were sucking peppermint and reading yesterday's newspapers from Paris. She got on at Castleblaney. Carrying a plastic carrier bag, she walked down the aisle and took one of the empty seats.

I noticed her on account of her face and its unusual expression. She reminded me, not of an animal but of some picture of one. Perhaps of the lion who became the companion of Mark, the Evangelist. Sometimes this lion has an expression on his face which, at the same time, is smiling, wounded and a little mocking.

The bus moves off. She hears us talking in French and, after a while, she turns and asks:

Where are you from?

She is squat and short so she has to lean out over the aisle in order to see us round the back of her seat.

You weren't born here, she goes on, you're strangers.

Her eyes are unexpectedly light and they are blue.

So you're going to Deny, she continues, and I'm going to Omagh. Are you on holiday?

We're working in Derry with some actors.

I'm going to be in a play too! Why don't you come and sit beside me?

She moves so that the seat beside her is free. I sit beside her and she tells me her name is Kathleen and I ask her what play she's in.

A Christmas Carol. My first role, when I was very small, was the infant Jesus. Two years back I was the Lady Macbeth I played.

Very different, I say, very different. So you want to be an actress?

It was probably then that she calculated that I was a little stupid.

I'm going to be a hairdresser.

In Omagh?

No, I'm at school in Omagh. I've been home for the weekend. I'm sixteen. Were you taking me for being older?

A little.

It happens.

You have brothers and sisters?

We're five but we have different fathers. Now Mum lives with Bill. He's younger than she is and she's pregnant.

Is the baby due soon?

In April. I get on with Bill, he's easy. I'm pregnant as well.

I see.

Mine is for the month of May.

You'll both have your babies in the same hospital?

Yes, we will. We like the nurses there. And who knows, they may have got the dates wrong, we could overlap.

Mum and you?

Yes.

And the father, the father of yours?

He didn't want the baby. Get rid of it! he told me. I wouldn't hear of it. I want our baby and I'm keeping it! So he left. Now he's living with my oldest girlfriend.

Not very loyal, I say.

Ach! He's only seventeen, poor kid. And I have the baby, I'm happy. I want to have lots of children. Shall I be showing you the birthday card I bought for my sister?

She finds an envelope in the carrier bag and hands it to me.

She'll be furious I haven't bought her a present, my sister. I wanted to get her a book. Maybe the latest by Roddy Doyle. But I didn't have the money, so she'll just have to smile at my card, won't she? Go on, open it!

On the card is a picture of a white rose and underneath it the written words: To Deirdre with love from Kathleen.

She stays at home, my sister. She's ten years older than me and she doesn't go out at all. She's written a book.

I offer Kathleen a peppermint.

She looks with her bright eyes from under her lowered eyelids. Would it be bothering you if I smoked?

I point towards her belly.

She lays her hand on my arm to reassure me. I know, she says, I'm going to stop at the end of the week. The heroine of my sister's book is called Annie. She gets raped and becomes pregnant. The man, who is old enough to be her father, throws her downstairs hoping she'll miscarry. She lies there and pretends to be dead and when he bends over her, she grasps him – you can guess where – and pulls and pulls until he's howling. At this moment one of his mates comes in through the front door and the two of them decide –

Is this what happened to Deirdre? I ask.

What in the name of God makes you say that? No, no. Her father, he wasn't my father as I told you. He interfered with her when she was little – but that's all, nothing more. The tragedy for Deirdre is she's deaf. She can't hear a thing. She's stone deaf.

She was born like that?

A car accident ... I was in California at the time.

California?

We're having a grand talk, aren't we? she says.

You remember where you were in California?

A place called Lodi, fifty miles north of Oakland. You'll be in Derry by one.

She holds up the birthday card of the rose for us both to look at again.

This afternoon I'll be washing my hair, now do you think I might allow it to grow longer?

You could.

No, she says, and tucks the card into the net pocket of the seat in front, long hair is too hot in the summer. What's your favourite colour for roses?

Rose, I think.

I want you to be at ease. I've taken you away from your friends and maybe they don't like it. You don't have to stay, Johnny.

She fingers the birthday card.

Well, at school I share a room with Sheila. She's pregnant too. So we have an arrangement, one day I do everything for her and the next she does everything for me. Today it's her turn to look after me. So I'll wash my hair and then I'll see what's on the telly and then I'll learn my lines. I'm playing the Spirit of Christmas Past.

At this moment she pats her tummy. Her hand is plump with bitten fingernails.

Next year I won't be playing, I think. I'll have my baby to look after. Would you like to hear my first lines?

Go on.

'Bear but a touch of my hand there' – she places her hand near my heart – 'and you shall be upheld in more than this. Now your lip is trembling ... and what is that upon your cheek? ... these are but shadows of the things that have been ...'

The bus stops at the gate of a cottage on a lonely road and an old couple get off, helping each other with their shopping. Behind the gate their dog is trying to jump over it.

For ten minutes neither Kathleen nor I speak.

I'm deaf too, she says eventually.

Come on, I say.

Not like Deirdre, I'm only deaf in one ear and you're sitting on the good side. In fact, I have a hearing-aid and I don't use it.

Another car accident?

No. It was a Friday night one year ago and I was pissed out of my mind and I got knocked down by a lorry. It broke my arm too.

She rolls up the sleeves of her cardigan and shows me a red weal by her shoulder.

If it's a boy, I'll call him Kevin and if she's a girl, Sara.

They didn't tell you, when they did the scan, whether it's a boy or a girl?

I didn't want to know, she says. I prefer mysteries. Do you like the names Kevin and Sara?

The bus stops twice in Omagh and at the second stop Kathleen gets to her feet, takes the birthday card of the rose from the net pocket of the seat and walks down the aisle without a word.

I watch her climbing a steep path towards a building which could be a school. She looks weighed down.

Sheila! she'll tell her girlfriend, I met a stranger on the bus and I spun him the tallest stories ever!

Did he believe you?

And Kathleen will nod her smiling and wounded and slightly mocking head.

A Man Wearing a Lacoste Sweater

He was the last to enter the room. He was lean, tallish and in his mid-forties. He wore glasses and you immediately noticed his eyes. They were unusual because their look was both penetrating and sensitive. A man, you said to yourself, who calculated in millimetres. As he shook our hands, his smile of welcome revealed the same sense of precision concerning feelings. He knew the exact difference between acknowledgement and gratitude and between gratitude and delight. He smiled at us with a smile of acknowledgement. The circumstances of our meeting prevented him from adding more. Please make yourselves at home.

We sat down, around the table. The room had no window. The other two prisoners were younger than he, one from Reunion Island and the second from Marseille. We introduced ourselves and began reading out loud the story we'd chosen.

The aim of incarceration is to reduce all exchanges with the world to a minimum. And this has a profound effect on voices. Ours, as we read, were unlike prisoners' voices. Our voices were volatile – like swallows in flight seen through a window. Maybe our voices were more interesting than the story we were reading.

Noises in a prison echo like sounds do in the hold of a ship. There's nothing to absorb or clothe them. Like prisoners, noises there have no privacy. So most of the time you shut off your hearing unless you choose to listen. If you so choose, then you listen sharply. The three men listened to our voices.

Over by the door of the room, the screw, who was leaning against the wall, read a comic. He had no need of voices. On the ring, chained to his belt, was a key to every door.

It was a love story we were reading. A story of passion, crime, interrogations, dream, death, forgiveness. Set in a faraway metropolis.

The boy from Reunion Island sat hunched up, frowning. The Marseillais leant back and looked as if he was alone, driving a car to the metropolis. On the sweater of the man with glasses, I suddenly noticed the Lacoste green crocodile trademark. A man of discernment. As we read, he nodded, as if acknowledgement was perhaps turning into gratitude.

In prison the imagination is caught by a form of genius which is seldom discussed or honoured outside. Every prisoner's imagination allots to this genius its particular value and place, but all imaginations identify with it. This is the genius required for escape, the genius of those few who make it 'over the hill'.

From the drawing-boards on which the penitentiary buildings were designed, for the most part a century ago, to the newly installed video cameras, from the metal landings outside the cell doors to the electronic alarm systems, from the obsessive suspicion of most of the screws to the Clausewitzian training of the Prison Directors, everything had been conceived and is run to make escape unthinkable. Day and night are systematically punctuated by routine or sadistic reminders of this unthinkability. Yet there are those who persist in thinking about it all the while. Of those, there are a few who try to translate thought into action. And of those few, a handful who – miraculously – succeed.

When a prisoner succeeds and makes it 'over the hill', those who remain inside dream and talk

about the exploit as they would talk about a masterpiece. And masterpiece it is. An achievement which in its imagination, ingenuity, discipline, persistence, planning and concentration, can compare with the bronze doors of the Sacristy in Florence by Donatello or Thelonius Monk playing *Epistrophy*.

By the entrance to the prison main-block, before the cage and the metallurgical detector, there was an office with a dozen video screens, monitored by a Dickless Tracey. She could bring in camera after camera as she chose, and she watched all day. Men exercising, men sleeping, men working, men grabbing, men shitting, men smoking, men waiting, men telling stories. She glanced at them all. Near to her telephone there was an alarm bell. Every few minutes she checked what they were doing; what she couldn't know was what was being said.

Like every story told in prison, ours also offered a means of momentary escape. Insofar as one listened, one flew over the hill ...

In the story we were reading, there was not only plot, suspense, dialogue, there was also everything which was normal, which belonged to waking up in everyday life out there, and which did not exist here. In the room without a window the story was a reminder of mountains, of silence, of dancing, of choosing which street to walk down, of privacy and its special gift which is intimacy, of deciding for oneself what to eat and when, of opening a window without a thought, of taking a train or a bath, of doors which nobody could see through ...

The next time we paused, the man with glasses, his hands in the air like birds in flight, said: Very neat. And beautifully imagined. Really neat.

We went on with the story and the story went on reminding the three men. Before we reached the end, the screw interrupted us and held up his wrist watch as if he thought we might not understand what prison time was. It was over.

Thank you for the story, said the boy from Reunion.

The man with the glasses came over to me. He wanted more than ever to be a host. He spoke in a soft voice, as if he were somewhere else, by a garden gate, for example: I hope to see you again sometime ... perhaps in another prison?

I nodded.

The warder took the three men down the corridor. The man with glasses and the Lacoste sweatshirt turned round and made a vague sign with his hand.

An Old Woman With a Pram

Near Oxford Circus, London. In the nineties. Difficult to judge her age, probably around forty-five. Her belongings were in a shopping chariot, lifted from a supermarket. She wheeled it along the pavement, her face slightly inclined, as if it were a pram and she were looking at a baby. Her belongings in the chariot were in plastic bags. She wore a scarf round her head and a fur hat – what the Russians call a chapka. Much of its fur had fallen out. She also wore trousers, a padded jacket and an imitation-fur coat, the colour of dust. From a distance you might think she was clothed like an Eskimo. Except for her feet. She was wearing a pair of American-style sneakers. She found them in a dustbin on New Cavendish Street, which is near Hallam Street where my mother once lived when she was alive.

In the London underground stations a number of platform benches have recently been replaced by a new piece of public furniture. A kind of perch – which allows waiting passengers to take the weight off their feet and thus lean back a little. Its notable advantage is that no tramp can lie down on it to sleep. At night when the woman with the chapka lies down on a piece of cardboard which she places on the station asphalt, she doesn't take off her white shoes but just loosens the laces so they don't pinch her feet, which swell up at night like my mother's did.

Now it is midday and she is walking towards a pedestrian precinct behind Oxford Circus where hundreds of pigeons gather. As soon as the pigeons perceive the woman with the chapka they waddle on their feet, or fly over the paving stones towards her. From her chariot she takes a black plastic bag of stale bread, thrown out by a restaurant in Mortimer Street, and breaking up the bread with her hands, she flings fistfuls of breadcrumbs into the air.

Several pigeons perch on her arms, a few hang, fluttering, in the air above her head, but most wait on the ground to peck up the crumbs as they fall. From time to time, absent-mindedly, the woman puts a scrap of bread into her own mouth.

During my childhood we had a stone birdbath in the back garden of our house and during one hard winter my mother – who must have been about the age of this woman at that time – strode every morning through the deep snow between the silver birch trees to put out toast on the frozen water. Like Maeterlinck, my mother believed birds carried messages from the dead. The tramp woman, holding a bird in her hands, is shooing the others away by tossing her head and prodding with her elbows into the air. The bird held against her breast has lost some of its feathers and its round head, little smaller than a ping-pong ball, is half bald. It has refused the bread she offered. Still holding the pigeon against her coat, she searches in another one of her plastic bags and finds a baby's bottle with teat and a little milk in it. She expresses a few drops into the pigeon's beak, which she manages to hold open.

Each day, before coming to Oxford Circus, she prepares the bald pigeon's bottle and each day, after feeding the rest of the flock, she gives the bald one its milk.

A crowd of shoppers from Oxford Street now stop to watch the woman with the chapka.

They can't see through the walls, can they? the homeless woman says to the bald bird. If they want to stare at the garden, let 'em!

Mummy!

A Young Woman with Hand to Her Chin

When she entered a room full of people she had an almost Byzantine arrogance, like the Empress Theodora of Ravenna. She knew very well that, for such as her, self-defence began with the exclusion of any possibility of taking a liberty. And she made this exclusion unmistakably clear by both her expression and poise.

I say ‘such as her’ because she was a musician, she was an *émigré*, and the way a long, heavy skirt hung from her hips when she danced was biblical – it reminded you of generations of women without end.

She had been brought up by her grandmother, a country woman from the Ukraine. From her she had learnt how to kill chickens, feed geese and look after her own excited parents – her father was a concert cellist, her mother a pianist.

Under the tutelage of the grandmother she had acquired the confidence of an elder by the time she was twelve. Her first lover appeared when she was thirteen.

She could tell stories for a month. She had her own and her grandmother’s fund to draw from. Funny, true, untrue. The stories all revealed how the world is made up of people who, like birds during a harsh winter, need to be fed in some way or another. Some were crows. Some were finches. When she told them she hunched herself up like an old woman peeling potatoes to cook in the soup. Her laugh – and she only laughed when you did – was light and silvery.

Concentrated on Beethoven’s one-from-last piano sonata, she flushed as she played it and sweated like a farm girl. I will never again be able to separate the pathos of that sonata from the smell, like drying grass, of her sweat.

Once I started a drawing of her, just after she had been practising. The piano was still open and she was sitting nearby. I screwed up my eyes and I waited. The impulse of a drawing comes from the hand rather than the eyes. Perhaps from the right arm, as with a marksman. Sometimes I think everything is a question of aim. Even playing Opus 110.

Her left eye sometimes wanders, to become a fraction displaced. At that moment this slight asymmetry was the most precious thing I could see. If I could only touch it, place it, with my stub of charcoal without giving it a name ...

She of course knew I was drawing her. She was sending something out to meet my aim. If what she sent out didn’t miss my aim but touched it, there was a chance of a good drawing.

I’ve never known what likeness consists of in a portrait. One can see whether it’s there or not, but it remains a mystery. For instance, photos never have a ‘likeness’. The question isn’t even asked about a photo. Likeness has little to do with features or proportions. Maybe it’s what a drawing receives, two aims touch like the tips of two fingers.

Gradually the drawn head on the paper did draw closer to hers. Yet now I knew it would never be close enough, for, as can happen when drawing, I had come to love her, to love everything about her and no drawing, however good, can be more than a trace.

Sitting there, she told me a joke about the villagers in some country who were so mean that, when they went to bed, they stopped the clocks in their houses because that way the clocks would last

longer!

I began to sense that the evolution of the drawing of her corresponded with another evolution. Each mark or correction I made on the paper was like something bequeathed to her before she was born. The drawing was dredging time. And its traces were, like chromosomes, hereditary ones.

I elect you as my other father, she said at exactly that moment.

I drew the hand holding the chin.

Finally, there was a kind of portrait, most of it rubbed out, which looked to me to be finished, so I handed it to her.

At first she glanced at it like the Empress Theodora. Then, as she studied it, she became completely herself and only twenty-one years old.

Can I take it? she asked.

Yes, Anyishka.

Two days later she returned to Odessa with her portrait, and I kept this photocopy.

A Man in One-Piece Leathers and a Crash Helmet Stands Very Still

The British privateer team, Phase One Endurance, riding a Kawasaki TT1, won the 24-hour endurance race at Liège earlier this year. And their first pilot Simon Buckmaster is at the moment placed third according to points, in the World Endurance Championship. Tonight he could move up to first place. His co-pilots are Steve Manley and Roger Bennett.

It's the fourth hour of the Bol d'Or. Manley is racing, and Bennett is waiting in the pit to relieve him. It will be the second time since the start that Bennett will be out there, aiming, climbing over, tearing. Phase One is in seventh place at the moment. It's hot and so he has undone his one-piece leathers and is stripped to the waist. Out of respect nobody talks to him – any more than one would talk to a man praying.

To risk everything you have to withdraw from every contact. And if the solitude out there is not going to unnerve you, you have to slip into it early. He sprays water on to his torso and sits. He rotates his head to ease the neck muscles and the hypothalamus which controls saliva and all the adrenaline for which there's no pit to refuel in.

He holds himself apart. The track with its thirteen bends and two zigzags is inscribed in his mind and in his arms like a cord with which you tie and untie knots. He shakes his legs as if shaking off dust. Twenty-six times each lap, whilst cornering, he'll slide his loins over the saddle, knee reaching towards the asphalt. Nobody talks to him.

A pilot friend enters and wordlessly, carefully, bandages Bennett's palms with tape to stop blistering. When the friend has gone, he takes the tape off and rebandages his hands. (I think of Glenn Gould wearing woollen mittens and playing Bach on a piano.) He slips plugs into his ears. Pulls on his helmet. Helmeted, at this moment, it is as if you have already left.

The mechanics place their hydraulic-jack in position, arrange two wheels ready for changing and check the petrol dump-tank. In the pit lane Bennett, helmeted, squats down on his heels in a riding position, his body anticipating the contours of the machine to be mounted. The No. 5, which will be his when he drives himself. Please God.

On the paddock side of the pits, up against the wire netting to keep the public out, a young woman with a small child in her arms, says: Look at Daddy! The little girl looks and doesn't react.

Manley drives in. Says one sentence to Bennett. At that hand-over frontier between pilots only the utterly essential is communicated. Bennett is away.

Manley comes out of his helmet. The little girl says: Daddy! His face is red, his long hair damp with sweat. Around his eyes there is the temporary disfigurement of any endurance pilot after twenty-five laps: as though the skin has been pulled back from the cheekbones and the eyelids no longer protect the eyes. He comes over to the wire and, pulling off his gloves, gives them to his daughter to play with.

The white leather over his left shoulder has been roughed and grazed. A few months back, he broke his collar-bone in a fall. Tenderly he touches the wire by his wife's face and begins to talk.

Afterwards when they come in, they have to talk because they have to come back out of the helmet. He talks, and later he follows his wife to take an improvised shower.

Buckmaster is preparing to go out there for the third time. He is alone. Bennett has been overtaken by a Ducati but there are already rumours that the Ducatis won't hold the pace. Buckmaster puts on his helmet and stands very still, waiting, small, a shearwater looking out to sea from a cliff edge.

The whine of Bennett coming in. Twenty seconds later the whine of Buckmaster leaving. Nightfall.

In their marquee the mother of all the Phase One team is cooking supper with a sauce bolognese for pasta. The news comes over the loudspeakers of a double spill – involving the Suzuki No. 3, the favourite in first place, and their own No. 5.

What happened? Nobody is sure. A racing accident. Here is one described by Sophocles around the year 450 BC:

At each turn of the lap, Orestes reined in his inner trace-horse and gave the outer its head, so skilfully that his hub just cleared the post by a hair's breadth every time; and so the poor fellow had safely rounded every lap but one without mishap to himself or his chariot. But at the last he misjudged the turn, slacked his left rein before the horse was safely round the bend, and so fouled the post. The hub was smashed across, and he was hurled over the rail ...

Come out alive from a crash there – it's a bad place, one of the mechanics in the marquee says, you're doing 240 km an hour, alive you're lucky.

Graziano, the Suzuki pilot, is pushing his bike back to the pits. No. 5 has abandoned the race. Simon Buckmaster has not moved from the rail against which he was thrown.

A little later the surgeons at the hospital were unable to repair his severed leg; they had to amputate it below the knee.

Two Dogs Under a Rock

I've known Tonio longer than any of my other friends. Almost half a century. Last year after we'd been unloading hay, and, hot and thirsty, were drinking cider with coffee, he began a story.

I've seen Antonin the shepherd cry twice. He was married. He didn't see much of his wife. Shepherds are like soldiers in this way. She died, and he wept when he told me about her death. The second time I saw Antonin weep – well, I'll tell you.

The two men were in the valley of El Requenco, just north of Madrid. They never met elsewhere. On a large-scale ordnance map of the area you can find a building marked on the southern slope of the valley and beneath the little square are printed the words 'Casa Tonio'. Tonio took three years to build it. It's not really a house, more like a cabin. Perched at an altitude of 1,000 metres on the mountainside of broken boulders and ilex trees, perched like a leaning tomb or like a man sitting at the corner of a table. When Tonio gets out of his Fiat van lower down the slope and starts the slow climb up to his cabin he walks exactly like a St Jérôme. He has hermit legs, long, thin, with inexplicably rounded knees, such as all hermits had. Around the cabin there is a dry-stone wall 4 metres high forming a kind of corral which was built long ago to protect an apiary. Every year in May a lorry loaded with hives came along the dust road and men carried the hives to place them in the corral. For two months the bees made honey there. Otherwise, it is a place only for sheep, goats and lizards.

In May the gilo's in flower, says Tonio. The gilo is an ugly shrub but its white blossoms are everywhere like snow. Like manna from heaven.

Since he has had his pension, Tonio draws a lot in El Requenco. He draws the smashed rocks, the ilex, the sparse turf, the dry beds of torrents. Large black drawings in which he fits everything together as if the coiled surface of the earth at El Requenco were the shell of an immense and ancient tortoise. High above in the sky vultures circle. As he draws, he can hear their faint cries. Cries which imitate a man if to encourage the last moans of some animal victim.

In El Requenco, bovinds need shepherds. Antonin is short and square. On his feet he wears sandals cut out of old lorry tyres. Tyres which have been driven through a lot of goat shit. Antonin never learns to read and has his own way of speaking.

By 'the great waters', he refers to the torrential rain provoked by frequent thunderstorms. He wears a black hat with the same pride as Solomon wore a crown. After days alone in the valley with his herds the 'Casa Tonio' is, for Antonin when he spots it, like a photograph in a frame: a solemn reminder of otherwise forgotten occasions.

Both men alone in the valley defend themselves fiercely against encroaching intimacy. To smoke a cigarette sitting on one of the terraces where the hives used to stand, to drink a glass of water which they recount what they've seen on the mountainside during the last week, nothing more. And often when they sit, looking down the valley, they swear.

One day Antonin came by when Tonio was preparing a meal: potatoes with bacon. Tonio invited the shepherd to join him. The idea came to him without any reflection. He pronounced the invitation as if recounting a simple fact, like: last night I saw the badger. Antonin indicated his acceptance by taking off his hat and lowering his head. Tonio made a sign to suggest that the two dogs should stand

outside.

When, however, the shepherd crossed the threshold into the single, unique room of the *cas* something unforeseen by either of the two men occurred. One knew his way about blindfolded and the other did not. Tonio laid plates on the table, placed knives, forks and glasses beside them, fetched a flask of black wine, brought out the bread. Antonin leant back in his chair, speaking a sentence or two from time to time, talking of torrents, corrals, of names which were unfamiliar to Tonio, but mostly he sat there silent, smiling, like a man having his hair cut in a café on a Sunday morning.

Tonio cut up tomatoes and trickled olive oil over them. The dogs outside found a place in the shade beneath a rock. When both men were at last seated, Antonin poured wine into their glasses. Otherwise it was Tonio who served his guest.

They ate with gusto. Sometimes they'd lean back to talk. When they finished eating they went on drinking the black wine. Through the window, the valley in the afternoon heat looked as cruel as ever. Finally, Antonin put on his hat and, after fumbling for ten minutes in his pocket, he drew out a 1,000 peseta note which he slipped discreetly on to the table.

You can't do that! Tonio remonstrated. You can't! It was my pleasure.

No man before in my life has ever served me at table, declared Antonin. It was like a great restaurant.

Pick it up! shouted Tonio. You are spitting on my pleasure.

Shit ... began Antonin.

The other, with a shaking hand, held out the note across the table. Antonin hid the money in his pocket, took off his hat, and then he stood there, his two arms a little apart from his square body. Between the fingers of his left hand he held an unlit cigarette, with his right he held a hat. He stood there motionless in the cabin and down his cheeks rolled tears.

Seeing Antonin, Tonio began to weep himself. Neither hid anything. The dogs watched and waited their master with his back to the door and the other man on his feet as if turned to salt. For many minutes neither man moved. Then they slowly raised their arms and embraced.

A House Designed by Le Corbusier

André is waiting to leave his house in the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt. He has always carried this house around in his head as an image of home; and for the last twenty-five years he has actually lived in it. The house, however, belongs to somebody else, a question of American lawyers.

Another *etán!* André declares. Perhaps the last, my one hundredth and twenty-fourth! *Etán* means 'transfer' in Russian. It was the word prisoners used in the Gulag when they were moved from one camp to another. Transfers were what the zeks dreaded most, yet they were frequent. The unknown seemed more threatening than the known, even when the latter was intolerable. The body, already exhausted, often found it fatally hard to adapt to different conditions. And with each transfer the little sticks of one's identity were scattered or broken and had to be reassembled or mended.

At first André resisted the notice to quit the house in Boulogne-Billancourt and barricaded himself in. Near the heavy metal gate, which gives on to the street, he kept a short-handled Russian spade. With an instrument like this, he said, I've seen quite a few beheaded.

For years he resisted. Then he changed his mind. Today he reckons that, if they find him there when they come, they will destroy everything they can lay their hands on out of spite. None of it is worth selling. You could get nothing for it, he says, but to me these bits and pieces are eloquent. He winks with one of his astute, almond-shaped eyes.

A removal needs to be planned like an escape, he insists, no detail, however small, is unimportant. Every day he packs papers, bits of cloth, books, drawings, letters, newspaper cuttings, spare parts – God knows what, a plastic bottle for olive oil in the form of a Greek vase which once amused his mother – into cardboard boxes which he numbers. Like this he hopes to escape with everything before the transfer.

Previously he escaped eight times. And this was a fabulous record in Kolyma. From Boulogne-Billancourt it will be the ninth time. Once on the other side of the wire, he says, it's not tourism you think about! He'll be moving into a single room, measuring 5 metres by 3, on a fifth floor.

The house he has to leave was designed by Le Corbusier in 1923 for Berthe, André's mother, and his stepfather, a sculptor. With its studio wall of murky glass and the crumbling concrete of its floor, roof, it looks today more like an abandoned garage from which the petrol pumps were long since taken away! Nevertheless, it's a question of American lawyers.

There is a double portrait of André's mother and stepfather painted by Modigliani in 1917: Berthe, who came from Moscow, is on the right and Jacques Lipchitz on the left. Sometimes I think I can see in the placing of Berthe's almond eyes a certain resemblance to André.

A stranger, judging by appearances, could mistake André for a Renault salesman who retired last year. At seventy-eight he is remarkably spry, wiry and young for his age.

Inside the house there is a spiral staircase leading to the living quarters. The first room which gives off it is a bedroom, made to measure for André when he was a boy. Over the bed now hangs a painting which depicts a *Steppenwolf* in the snow. My portrait, jokes André, nodding towards the wolf.

So it's my last transfer and it makes me think of my first. Before I knew what transfers meant? I was fourteen. I caught the train from the Gare du Nord, accompanied by Lounatcharski, the People

Minister of Education! Mother had arranged this. When the train was leaving Berlin, the Minister's mistress suddenly remembered she hadn't bought all the underwear she meant to buy – ah! the secret world! – so she stood up, I was there in the same compartment, and she pulled down the chain for an emergency stop. The train jerked to a halt. And the men played cards till she came back with her shopping ... Thirty-one years later when I had been rehabilitated and Lounatcharski was dead, I saw her on my return to Moscow, an old woman in a black dress.

After Berlin, Warsaw, Brest Litovsk, and Minsk, I arrived in Moscow on the morning of the tenth anniversary. November the 7th, 1927.

I went straight to the Red Square to watch the military march past, and to see my father for the first time in my life. He was on the podium in his general's uniform taking the salute! I stared up at him but the temperature was -28 and I could think of nothing except how cold I was. I was dressed as if I was going to the Lycée in Paris – my light suit with plus fours, a fashionable white raincoat with dark amber buttons and a pair of shoes with thick, spongy rubber soles. I was conspicuous and I was frozen to death.

Some officers behind the podium noticed me and took pity. At that time I didn't much speak Russian. One of them approached my father and, whispering, asked him what should be done. Wrap him up in a tarpaulin and deliver him to my house! he ordered. And this is what happened. They rolled me into an army-issue tarpaulin, dumped me in a side-car and pushed me through the front door. My stepmother thought I was a new carpet! Eventually she thought she heard the carpet murmuring! So afterwards I moved out of their house. For two years I was a vagabond and by the winter of '30 I was already an enemy of the people. My father the General was executed in '37.

Around the house in Boulogne-Billancourt there are many blocks of uncarved stone and marble. Lipchitz left for America in 1940 and never returned. By the back door there's usually a blue enamel plate brimming over with cat biscuits. For the birds, explains André, they nibble them ... you see the cherry tree? It grew by itself one year after Mother died. When she was alive she had a habit of spitting out cherry stones from the living-room window. She particularly liked the Morello cherry.

In 1946 when the war was over, Berthe insisted upon leaving New York and coming back to the house in Paris: Somewhere my son's alive, I feel it, she said, and when he's released he'll go to the house in Boulogne-Billancourt to find me, and if I'm not there when he arrives, we'll never meet again on this earth.

She came back alone, and she had to wait fourteen years for André to return and to sleep again in the room made to his measure when he was a boy. By that time he was forty-five, he had spent twenty-seven years in the Gulag and he had been transferred one hundred and twenty-four times.

The son looked after the mother till she died. In Paris he earned his living selling life-insurance policies.

One of the first things he did on his return was to put a tennis ball into a net bag and hang it on the tree, 20 centimetres from the ground. It was for his mother's cats to play with. It is still hanging there.

Packing one of the cardboard boxes, he finds a water-colour, pauses and holds it out at arm's length. It's better than I thought when I did it, he says, do you want it? The water-colour shows an alpine chalet in summertime. Around the chalet stand stooks of hay. It was clearly done, like a child's painting, from imagination, not on the spot. Yes, I'd like it.

I'll sign it, he says, and on the reverse side of the paper, in large loose script, he writes: 'My dear John – in recollection of my marvellous August holidays, 1905, spent in your mountain chalet with André.'

As he writes he bites his lip to stop himself laughing out loud and spoiling the joke. In 1905 none of us had been born and none of us had been transferred even once.

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