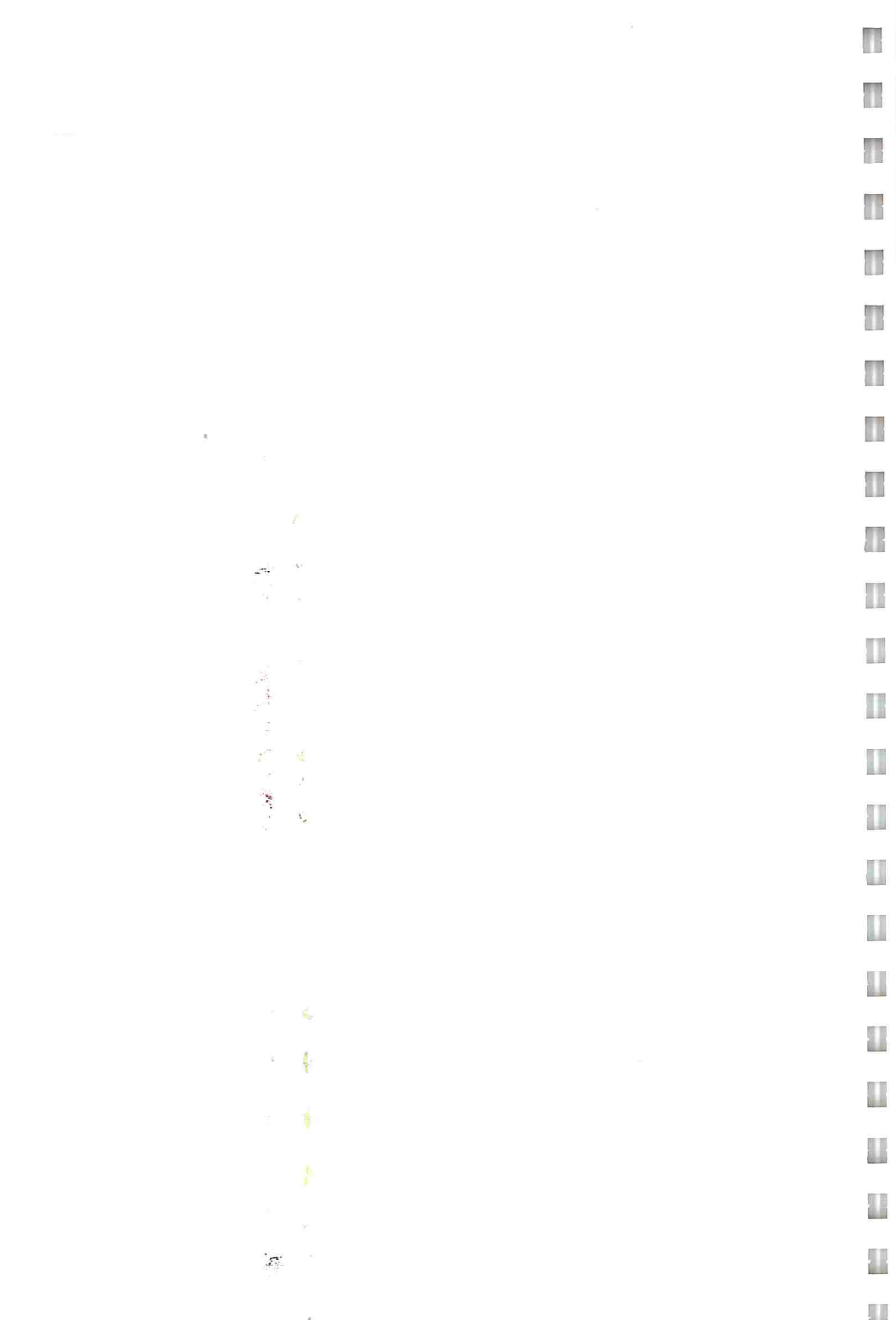




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THE COLOUR OF WOMEN by Ruud Lohman

A WRITERS WORKSHOP GREENBIRD BOOK



THE COLOUR OF WOMEN

Ruud Lohman



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**THE
COLOUR
OF WOMEN
&
other stories**

RUUD LOHMAN



A
Writers Workshop
Book

RUUD LOHMAN



Ruud (Rudolf Thomas Maria) Lohman (The Netherlands 1937) was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1963. After his M. D. Pastoral Theology (Nijmegen University 1967) he was appointed Director of the Institute for Social Studies and Community Development in Bhopal, Central India. Travelling widely through India he explored various types of Yoga. Especially the then just inaugurated City of Dawn, Auroville, near Pondicherry, based on the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, caught his imagination. After one more year of research among the sufis, pirs and faqirs in Pakistan, he cut with his past and settled definitively in Auroville in 1971. He has been working on the central building of the emerging city, the Matrimandir, ever since, mainly as a steel worker. He has written several books (in Dutch) about his experiences in yoga and in Auroville, as well as many essays and articles (in English). In 1986 his *A House for the Third Millennium, Essays on Matrimandir*, was published from Bombay. The present work is his first attempt at fiction.

CONTENTS

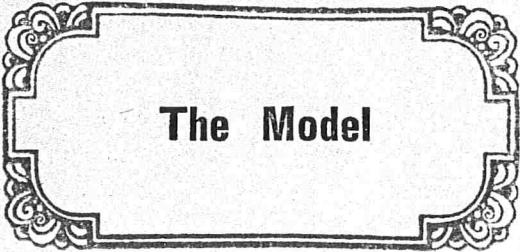


The Model /	9
The Art of Deathlessness /	16
Time-Warp /	24
Fatal Love /	31
The Colour of Women /	41
His Own Grandfather /	50
Shifting Frames /	64
Lion /	69
Brothers /	76
Clementine /	82
Akhnaton /	92
The Art of Dying /	100

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The exigencies of Gutenberg-era hand-composing and hand-printing lead to unavoidable printers's gremlins, for which contrition is expressed :

page 53 line 24 : for *densily* read *densely*
page 81 line 4 : for *r main* read *remain*



The Model

"After all, everybody is a nude—underneath," I thought as I was undressing in front of my friends. We were a group of six free-time artists doing art for fun's sake and we felt the need to try some live figure-drawing whereby we would take turns in modelling for each other. Today was my turn. I had been looking forward to it with mixed feelings. Undressing and being stared at for a long time, even by friends—particularly by friends—is a bizarre experience in which you don't know how to relate to your own body. It is both embarrassing and utterly natural. It's always hard to keep the body-thing and the sex-thing separate, they are so close together, and with a tiny switch one can change into the other. For the inexperienced male model it is difficult to avoid an erection; it took all my mental effort to channel the stress into non-physical directions. The first ten minutes were especially tough for me.

Then something interesting happened. You must not move at all and there you sit, immobile, naked, exposed, just a body, the reduction of a person into form and volume, light and shade. Suddenly I shot away from my body and was outside it; it was as if all the rest of my person were disengaged, not needed and therefore free—the staring eyes were concerned only with my physicality, the rest of me was left untouched and thus free to go its own way. Strange, this purely physical experience of sitting there, so still and exposed, became at that point almost a spiritual experience of pure mind, maybe even pure soul which was given a holiday from its

daily envelope. I had given my body to my friends and it became like a corpse, for them to deal with. I, the big Me, wasn't involved, they couldn't draw that I, it wasn't needed and so I floated away. It was very pleasant, intimate, it felt tremendously light as you feel in sleep when you pass through the intermediate realms where you can fly and bounce yourself off the walls and the ceiling. I was having great fun and I noticed that I was so far away from my own body that I no longer even felt the slight cramps which arose from my forced immobility. My body was so much objectivised away from me that I was wondering if I could still make it move from where I was. I tried to lift a finger. Nothing happened, I was too far away, on the other side of a screen. In the midst of my joy of freedom I felt a sudden panic at being cut off from myself and all things physical and I jumped forward, straight through one of the easels, and crept back in my body, only to notice that right away an erection was developing. The only way to prevent that embarrassment was to leave my body again, this time with the knowledge that I could move in and out of it at will and so need not panic.

After a while I became accustomed to my bodiless state and could turn my attention to my friends. I looked over their shoulders, or rather straight through them, at their endeavours. They were all as if in trance, drawing away, verifying lines and shadings against the model (me, I realised with some difficulty), erasing, changing, adjusting. It was quite amusing to see them working on me and I would have liked to join them but I had no hands with which to hold a pencil, being just a consciousness afloat. I flitted from and through board to board and compared their renderings one with the other and then with my own nude body over there. All of a sudden I blinked and, again figuratively, swallowed a lump in my mental throat: I realised with a start that I wasn't seeing

with my physical eyes but with my consciousness and that I was no longer looking at the outside of their works but at the inside, and now I realised what they were doing to me. It came as a big shock when I saw that Helen, soft, sweet, Helen, the darling of the crowd, the binding factor of our group of amateur-artists, was drawing not me but something awful of herself, projected onto and into my body. It was a black cloud which I looked at and could not at first give it a name. It was something ugly and low, eating away her energy as well as mine, and then a word entered into my being : "greed". And then I saw it. It was indeed pure and unadulterated greed which stared at me from Helen's rendering of my body. Strange, it was a good drawing, very much like me, and still, its soul was made up of greed, an exact correspondence to what I felt Helen was radiating. I would never have realised, nor even dreamt of accusing Helen of greed when I was in my body. You only see what you want to see, the nice side, only what is presented to you and what you choose to tune in to. Now a mask was pulled off and I looked at her and at her drawing and at my body and I understood how she had filled my empty form with a piece of her own soul, and a messy piece of it at that.

Quickly I willed myself to Andrew's side and once again rubbed my psychic eyes. It was my body, my shell, yes, but not me, not at all ; he had filled me up to the brim with himself, with his "I", rather his Ego, and a great, fat, horrible EGO it was. I looked at the drawing and I looked at Andrew, and I saw he had drawn himself, exactly himself, making use of my bareness. His ego jumped out of it, exactly as it jumped out of him ; never really noticed, just a nice man who had lots of community feeling and was even working in the social line. Ego, ego, ego, it shouted at me so strongly that I had to withdraw quickly to the other side of the room, where I could look

through Yvonne at her drawing. Now I smiled, for though I had not known it in my physical state, still somehow I had known. She had grasped me right in my physical, in my manliness, in my sex, and thrown it onto her board. It was me, all right, but packed with her not-so-hidden drives. Oh, if only it were love ! I knew she had an eye on me, but I didn't know it was so destructive. She had gobbled me up, limb by limb, my total nudeness in every detail and more, so much more than I could ever have contained in myself. In my spiritually enforced honesty I could not fail to notice that it came straight from her, from her eroticism, her desire and longing, her very deeply hidden frustration. I could see it all, see it emanating straight from her whole body, passing through her hand and the charcoal into my nakedness, me a welcome prey for this devouring animal. At first I felt amused, then shaken, and I had to restrain myself from rushing back into my body to cover up my nudity.

I was curious now to see Arnold's, for after all he is my closest friend. We have known each other for a life-time, gone to various schools together and courted the same women. We still see each other daily but of course we never relate in this undressed state. Well, the first thing I remarked upon was that it wasn't really a naked body that he was drawing. A nude, yes, but not naked. It was rather a very total person who happened to have nothing on. I couldn't really describe it to myself at first and I looked at (or rather through), no, *into* Arnold for a while, and then I saw what he was doing ; he was drawing his big brother, his idol, his . . . what's the word ?—his patron-saint maybe ; almost his godfather. Clearly he was idealising me. I was surprised for I had always believed ours was a relationship of equals, but here he was revealing an image of me which even in my proudest moments I could never have attributed to myself—someone pure and strong, adult, whole

and, psychologically, healthy. I felt like embracing him and telling him, "My boy . . ." but I couldn't get through, being too unphysical. I looked at it for a long time, wondering how I would relate to him after this.

Deep in thought I was spiritually pacing up and down when I felt something pulling at me. I was taken aback for a moment, having been convinced that I was invisible, untouchable. I looked or rather felt around and then I realised it was Agnes who was aware of me, more of the spirit-me than the body-me. When I saw her drawing it was clear for here again was a nude body, but much more. She had looked inside and met and rendered my other self, the one I was now experiencing uncovered and unadorned. I gazed at it intently and felt an identity between the being on the board and the one whom I now regarded as myself. Suddenly she turned around and looked straight into my invisible eyes. She knows, I thought, she has followed the process, she is aware. In great tension I returned her gaze and then became aware that a momentous choice had to be made, this very moment. It is strange how you know certain things in this state which would normally take you months or years to learn. I knew that if she became frightened now, something would break, but if she could smile then we would become one forever. I knew it with great intensity, with a sort of . . . eternal certitude, no other word for it. The waiting was an extension of time which became unbearable for me, and apparently for her, too. Then . . . she smiled, and our inner beings embraced and melted. When she turned back to her board I saw tears in her eyes and looking at my own big barren body far away I thought I saw something glistening there as well. I wanted to rush back into it, put it back on, get up and repeat that embrace in the physical, and dashed towards it, only to be caught half-way in a sort of a cobweb, a mesh of forces which prevented me from reaching myself.

I couldn't explain it, nothing tangible, nothing visible, but powerful enough to entangle me away from my body.

Just when I was fighting to suppress the panic which threatened to engulf me I heard Arnold say, "OK. looks like we're ready, Alan. You can get up now. You must be stiff. A perfect model you were, absolutely immobile for such a long time"; to which all the others enthusiastically agreed until Helen exclaimed, "Alan, Alan." They all looked at my body. It didn't move. I looked too. I couldn't get there. It was absolutely immobile, its stare fixed on some far region, unblinking. They all came to stand around my body, leaving me in the middle of the room to my entanglement.

"Don't touch him," I heard Arnold saying, "it may be dangerous," and then he began to whisper in my body's ear: "Alan, Alan, wake up, please Alan, wake up." Nothing moved, of course, for I couldn't get there, however much I wanted. I was chained by invisible threads.

They fell quiet, not knowing what to do, and I too didn't know where to turn. The obvious thing of course was to find out what it was that was holding me back, but in such a crisis situation the obvious is not always apparent.

It was clear and simple once I studied it. The answer lay in the drawings; each one of the five drawings on the easels had consumed, masticated and swallowed a piece of the real me, and I was chained to those parts of my being which had been taken away from me. I was glued to the drawing boards and unable to reintegrate the scattered elements.

"Let's apply artificial respiration," I heard the romantic Helen say.

"No, no, he is breathing normally," answered Yvonne, "we should rather carry him to a bed somewhere."

"Don't touch him," Agnes whispered authoritatively, "don't touch him at all, don't you see that he is not in his

body, that it's just an empty shell . . ."

"Impossible," laughed Helen, unbelieving, "then where did he go ? For a walk ?"

"No, he is right here in the room," said Agnes sternly, "probably unable to make it back into his body," and she turned away from my nude body and faced the empty room. They all stared with large uncomprehending eyes, not seeing anything. Only Agnes saw at least something. "Stay here, all of you !" she whispered in the same authoritative tone and came towards me, stopping right in front of the entanglement that was left of me. Looking into her I saw that indeed she understood something, but not having the use of a mouth no sound emerged. She was inaccessible. Now I got really scared, and terribly lonely, stuck in this unreachable dimension. For a moment everything was still and then an impulse entered into me from somewhere and with an inaudible roar which shook my very foundation I leapt on and into Agnes and grabbing her hands and feet from inside and without asking her permission, I used her voice and commanded, "Tear up your drawings ! Quick, burn them !" They all hesitated for a moment, staring at Agnes who had spoken in such an unusual, masculine voice, but then they followed her example. They rushed to their boards, ripped off their drawings and tore them to shreds and then held them to a match. In the same moment I stepped out of Agnes and felt my own personalities flow back towards me from the flames. As a single whole I could go back and enter my body.

"Thank you, friends, really thank you. That was a narrow escape. And now I have a wonderful announcement to make." Walking over to to Agnes I embraced her, two beings melting once more. Friends, meet my bride . . . !" I said with joy and pride, to which she only replied, "In which case you'd better get dressed for now, darling."

The Art Of Deathlessness

My brother Johannes is a seeker.

I remember when we were children how he was always on the lookout for the improbable, the hidden, the far-out, was always seeing secrets everywhere and went on believing even after being shown that Santa Claus was actually Uncle Fred.

Looking back on our childhood now I would say that his life was built on myths, he breathed archetypes and was born for the Quest. While the rest of us children played our ordinary games he was digging up secret treasures under the apple tree, uprooting quite a few shrubs in the process, or organising Round Table societies and Holy Grail searches.

When one day a friend of his was expelled from school, he even staged a children's Crusade and succeeded in getting his friend readmitted.

When a magician once came to visit our school he pestered the man so persistently that he managed to get some tricks out of him which he went on to improve upon and show wherever he went. His cupboards were full of outlandish, secret and magic robes and paraphernalia—long pointed hats, magic wands, philosopher's stones and treasure-boxes.

No surprise then that his curriculum consisted of subjects such as archeology, comparative, mythology, comparative religion, cultural anthropology which all came under his private heading of "philosophy". No

surprise either that he couldn't find what he was looking for in these subjects, and so he turned his eyes to the past, and to the East.

He read and studied all things Celtic and then he disappeared for several months into our cellar where he turned to alchemy. Strange odours, eerie vapours, minor explosions and sudden flashes of bright lights accompanied his quest for the Stone or the Elixir. When he turned gold into lead but could not transmute it back he turned to Zen and sat straight-backed for hours and days up in our attic, dreaming of zazen, koans and the Great Void.

Not that he was crazy ; not at all. He was actually very sane and not anti-social either. He talked openly about his quest and we could even laugh about it with him. "I just landed on the wrong planet", he would say. He was always on the look-out for companions, but since nobody could understand his question, the answers he provided didn't seem relevant.

For months he was seen walking around in the garden in slow motion, expecting Vipassana to show him the way out of whatever needed an exit. When he began to do Yoga, we knew the day was fast approaching when he would pick up his rucksack and set off on his way.

The first letter we received was postmarked Istanbul and related his visit to Mount Athos. Thereafter he wrote long accounts of the whirling dervishes and the great souls he met on his way. From Iran we got of course many stories about the Sufi masters but in Pakistan he found his teacher. Long enthusiastic letters followed : he had become a faqir, had joined a "tariqa", an order, and his Pir, Baba Tualli, was like "God the Father Himself".

After a gap of several months we received a letter from Rishikesh in the Indian Himalayas, where his Swami

made him perform the 133 asanas and all the pranayamas, mudras, kriyas, the whole show; all afire, he wrote about the headstand and its benefits, and one warm passage I remember about his favourite breathing exercise, the Lom Bilom. "I am getting close to it now," he wrote, but so had he been doing from Turkey, Iran and Pakistan as well.

His quest led him into the snowy slopes of the Himalayas where he settled down in some old cave. Here apparently he found enlightenment, for he wrote afterwards from Delhi: "The problem is death, and therefore life!" Not bad, after eighteen years of searching over half the globe.

My father and I often talked about him and more and more we came to feel that in fact his whole life had been a struggle with death, an attempt to conquer it or evade it, to come to terms with it. Maybe at bottom it was the fear of death or the search for life everlasting, from the time he dug beneath our apple-tree to the time he dug himself into the Himalayan snows—to avert grave-digging.

From then on death became the central theme of his letters, and his quest to escape from it the thread woven through it all.

We were wondering what guru, pir, swami or father-figure he would come up with after the already impressive list to whom he had submitted himself.

The letter which proved to be a turning point in his approach was twenty-three pages long. In short, he had met "him", in South-India, in the middle of Tamil Nadu, "the ancient and secret land", he wrote, in Coimbatore district, and he was ... four-hundred years old! Fully alive, alert, aware ...

A long account followed about the greatness of Tamil Nadu and its "arts", sixty in number, actually a mixture of arts and sciences, wherein architecture stands next

to and on a par with palmistry and where an intricate knowledge of the planets is interwoven with medicine, the science of herbs and the art of determining the sex of an unborn elephant. A delectable world in which he felt totally at home.

The four-hundred year old sage placed him on the super-ancient track of what he called the "Siddhas", a medical tradition typical for Tamil Nadu and thoroughly interwoven, at least in some of its branches, with... alchemy. We laughed upon reading this and remembered the strange smells and gases drifting up from our cellar. He also referred to his first love but hastened to add that Tamil Nadu may well be the birthplace of alchemy, kept alive in the tradition of the Siddhas, a proposition which even somebody big like Mircea Eliade confirms.

"Why should I die? Death can be averted," said the man of four centuries, and with this we knew he had finally arrived. "The art of deathlessness", he called his discovery and from his letters we could feel his joy and certitude of home-coming.

He had met "the real philosophers" and was now about to begin his study of the "real philosophy", finally, after all the superficialities proclaimed in its name. "The real philosopher," he told us, "is the one who is in possession of a philosopher's stone for the purpose of converting this material body into an ethereal one." He even quoted Paracelsus who must have said, "Medicine without the stone is vulgar."

Judging from his letters it seems linked that he had up with some incredible tradition, though from a distance it looks too good to be true. From the Tamil literature, he wrote, it is clear that numerous immortals have been and are in existence. Eighteen of them in particular are known, but there is another school of nine who have ninety million followers. That seems a tall claim. Even if there are just one or two of them it's already something

to write home about. You never know with Johannes and his letters where facts end and imagination takes over. He never bothered much about that, as if in his archetypal world those questions are simply not relevant. "Paracelsus," he assures us, "is still alive among us, even today," but he fails to mention whether he has met him.

He now becomes a disciple of one of the disciples of one of the immortals, one Dr. Ramayah, who puts him severely to the test. He had first to learn the Tamil language, because most of the tradition is found in Tamil books; then he had to learn everything about Indian herbs and medicine, about the 4,448 diseases which beset the human frame, the 108 Upanishads, the four arcana, the five bodies, the seven . . . the list went on and on over the months and the years and we were wondering where it would all lead.

After five or six years of this a new theme emerged. He was apparently ready for the great initiation and his letters became even more archaic and archetypal. He was now approaching the Sword in the Stone, even the Stone itself, and his language became poetic in its references to the Elixir, the Golden Flower, the Electrum, the Arcana, Sol et Luna, the Water of Life, the White Sun, Lili, Tincture, in short, the Philosopher's Stone, the ever sought for Lapis Philosophorum.

That's apparently what he was digging for under our apple-tree, experimenting with in our cellars, meditating upon in our attic, freezing for in the eternal snows, running after all his life. One would imagine that after centuries of mystification the philosopher's stone is quite something and not so easy to come by. But now he writes that it's the simplest thing in the world, that "it's found everywhere, in the towns, villages, forests", and quoting from one of his sources he says, "even the wicked see it but brush it aside."

His present guru Dr. Ramayah has gotten it, so he

writes proudly, and is taking it with wonderful results, real rejuvenation is going on right in front of my brother's very eyes ; but whether he has got it himself and is taking it he doesn't say.

He keeps enthusiastically praising it and quotes extensively from his Tamil sources, which he is kind enough to translate for us. A little flower : "God is something that is not perceptible, but here is an object that can be seen and cooked into an Elixir. It has been created by God for the philosophers and he has blessed it with great power to confer immortality. The Moon and the Sun (Sol et Luna) as the philosophers call it are on this earth." Even though it's so common that the entire cost comes down to a few paise, still, he writes, it's kept secret. Why ? we wonder with him. Well, he writes, "Man wants the Elixir not for attaining immortality, but for immortality minus the "t".

While my brother was off conquering death in South India death began to conquer my father. As his condition became worse and worse I had to telegraph Johannes : "Father critical, rush home." My father clung to his consciousness in a last desire to meet Johannes again, but faded away while he was still somewhere over the Balkans.

It was a sad moment when I had to guide my brother into the room where our father was about to breathe his last. We cried together and prayed together—though I have no idea to what God or Guru Johannes prayed, but when I wanted to take him out of the room he refused. He sat down in one of his yoga-positions and remained immobile for a very long time. I didn't want to leave him there, and so I stayed on, trying to keep awake. When everyone else had left Johannes got up, awakening as if from a deep trance. He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a tiny bottle. When he approached father

with it, I caught him by the sleeve.

"Johannes!" I cried.

"The Elixir..." he whispered, "the Philosopher's Stone!"

"You have no right!"

"No, no right, but maybe a duty!"

He took my father's hand in his and listened for his faint pulse. Then he looked at me, he looked and looked and I saw unknown regions opening, regions of suffering but of peace and space and time as well, and I had nothing to offer in return. "Yes," was all I could say, even if I had meant to say "No".

Carefully he unscrewed the little bottle and with the utmost reverence he took out one or two grains, which he placed between my father's lips. We watched them slowly dissolving and we sat down again and waited, hour after hour, Johannes in his trance-position, me shifting about and becoming stiff and bored. He repeated the grain-ceremony several times during the night.

Father's breathing became slower and slower and more and more faint all the time, so that finally I called the doctor.

One great sigh, his last, emerged from my father's exhausted body. "I'm sorry," was all the doctor could say.

When the body had been prepared, Johannes moved back into the room and resumed his lotus-posture, refusing to budge, refusing to believe. I don't know what magic formulas or secret mantras were exchanged between my father's spirit and the real philosopher-son but outwardly he gave no sign of either concern or doubt, nor of defeat nor even of sadness. He was peace and quietude incarnated and if I had always admired him before, now I was truly impressed. He gave me a lot of strength and support in the process.

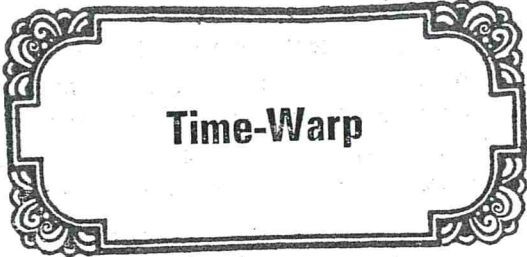
The time for the funeral came and Johannes was still sitting there, communing with death or life or his gurus or God knows what. When they asked for permission to remove the dead body, Johannes categorically refused and requested, rather begged, for one more day with such force that the entire funeral had to be postponed.

"I hope you know what you're doing," I said to him.

"He is not ready, not yet," he answered simply.

We sat on there, into another night, Johannes and me. Just after midnight my brother stood up, approached the bed, and took my father's hands in his own. I was surprised to note there was no stiffness.

I could feel a bond growing between them which surprised me even more, and feeling excluded from some great and immanent event I pushed myself into the magic circle. Johannes took my hands as well and with our six hands intermingling we were one being, alive, beyond death and life. It was so powerful that I wasn't even surprised any more when my father opened his eyes and I felt the warmth flowing back into his hands.



Time-Warp

You've never heard the word "osmosis", and then you come across it three times in one day. Or you're reading a book about Alexander the Great and the same week you find a reference to him in the dictionary, in a newspaper article, his name pops up in a conversation and in a library catalogue—these are the strange laws of attractions which nobody can explain. In the same way, I met the old man simultaneously with the research project I was doing on time, and especially on time-warps. I had been going to the library daily and after a few hours of playing hide and seek with the elusive concept of time and time warps, I needed to go out and relax in the park opposite the library. The bench I usually occupied was in a quiet corner of the park and I often shared it with an old man who sat there, apparently doing nothing. In the beginning he didn't strike me as being anybody special or worth talking to or knowing, rather the opposite, since I needed some psychological space to straighten out the brain-warps which the research project caused me.

But about a month back we entered into our inevitable conversation. At first we spoke about nothing in particular, then we began on politics and the world news and slowly some literature and culture crept in. Nothing spectacular. It only showed that the old man was well-educated, well-informed and well-read. I came to know a few things about him, but looking back on those times only very few in fact. There was one interesting aspect to his sitting there, which he explained to me in the second week of our conversations.

"You know, we have in our Indian tradition the various states of life. First you are a student, during which period you lay the groundwork for what you have to know, to do and to be. Then you become a householder and you live out the knowledge you have acquired and pay your debt to society. In the third stage you retire into the forest to work out in a certain seclusion the truth of your spirit. In the final stage of life you are free to throw off every remaining tie and wander through the world with an utter detachment from all forms of social life, preparing your soul for eternity. I have done all that. I have become a recluse and a wanderer and even invented one more step and I renounced all of those states to become . . . yes, what am I, nothing, I just sit here and look, and talk, and reflect and . . . nothing, just like that."

I found this quite fascinating, because apparently the old man was not just sitting there waiting for death, or just being pensioned off, but he was sitting there, how to say, almost creatively.

"How would you call your fifth state, after student, householder, recluse and free wanderer?" I asked him the next day, for somehow it intrigued me.

"Maybe student again . . ." he reflected. "Just to close off the circle. Back to the origin."

"Student of what?"

"Well, for instance, of time . . ." he suggested and I jumped up and faced him, thinking he was playing a joke on me. I was sure I had never told him the subject of my research project, so I realised it must have been a coincidence. Then I admitted that I was studying exactly the same subject, but that surely our methods were vastly different. Then to make things worse, he matter-of-factly said that his real interest was not actually time but time-warps. When he saw me jump even higher he smiled and said :

"Well, actualiy I am looking at time, but since you were going to mention time-warps in the next few days anyhow I had already begun to take an interest in the subject . . ."

With this my own brain got such a warp that for a good twenty minutes I was unable to say anything. I just looked at the flowering trees and at time and its convolutions, and at the chuckling old man who had just produced a jewel of a time-warp. He didn't say a word either, just sat there, smiling, looking at . . . what?

"What . . . ?" I meditated aloud.

"Now !" he said.

"Now what ?"

"Just now ! Not before or after, only now. Time is only now, one big Now with many small nows. What you're going to tell me next week is already contained in the big Now. So, where's the surprise ?"

"But then how can time get warped ?"

"It doesn't, it's our brain that's warped. Time is as straight and simple and one-pointed in the Great Now as space is in the Great Here !"

"But then, where is yesterday or tomorrow ?"

"Here and now."

"Nonsense, some things haven't happened yet, other things are already past."

"Nonsense, it's all there. But stop talking about it, stop studying it, just look, just sit and look, then it will come to you."

For an active mind like mine that is of course not possible, even if I could believe that it would have served some purpose. And so I continued my studies of time and time-warps, but I also went on meeting the old man who didn't mention time any more. The next day we talked about politics and the world situation in general and once again I was struck by the old man's knowledge which he apparently gained without reading any newspapers or

magazines. I asked him how he did it.

"I follow the larger movements within which things are inevitable. The newspapers only run after the events, always some or many hours behind. Why not run ahead of them? It's more enlightening."

I didn't know very well what he meant by "running ahead of events", but he cut short my mental meandering by telling me the shocking news that the Pope had been assassinated. During the course of one of his many journeys someone had tried again and this time had succeeded. I was surprised that the old man knew already while I hadn't even heard it or read it, but I was also deeply shocked by the ugliness of the world scene and the victimisation of the Great and the Pure. I wanted to be alone with the news and told him so, and I went for a long walk. On my way back I stopped to buy a newspaper so as to read about the terrible event in greater detail, but to my great surprise the paper carried no mention of the event. Then I rushed home and turned on the radio, listening avidly to all the news broadcasts I could find. There was not a word about it. Then my shock turned into anger at the old man who had obviously been playing with me for some or other cruel or mischievous reason. I went back to the park to vent my anger on him, but he wasn't there.

Next morning, still lying in bed, I was listening to the early news broadcast and there it was: the Pope has been assassinated, just two hours earlier! Now my shock was doubled; yesterday's shock which I had only partly worked through still lingering and the new shock of yet another time-warp created by the old man in the park. All of a sudden his words came back to me, and now they were crystal clear: "Why not run ahead of the events, it's more enlightening!" Crystal-clear; yes, but no less mysterious.

I decided that in terms of my research project the old

man was a much more enlightening prospect than the dry boring books which philosophise about time but don't *do* anything about it. After all, the old man was making time-warps happen. So, that day I didn't bother with the library but went straight to our bench in the park and there we sat throughout the day, sometimes talking, but mostly silent. "Look at it," he had said, but I didn't know where to look and the only thing I discovered about time was that it runs very slowly sometimes, especially when you have nothing with which to occupy your mind. When I commented on this he said, "And what does that show you?"

"That time is really a very dull and boring thing."

"Nonsense. We want to be mentally active in order to run away from time. We're always so busy coating so many layers of philosophical and mental paints and varnishes overtime that we don't see its own beautiful grain any more. Just look at it and enjoy it!"

But the more I looked, the more it eluded me and bored and upset me and that's of course why I couldn't see it. But I had decided to go on looking and he encouraged me. "Now!" he kept repeating, and at one time when I had once more set up a whole complicated argument in my mind about time and past and future and time-warps, and—within myself, I am absolutely sure of it—I formulated the question, "but then, when there is cause and effect, time must be a spreading in before and after", he interrupted my train of thoughts with the very gentle question, "And what if the effects come before the causes?"

"How could that be?" I wondered.

"It can't because they are simultaneous," he chuckled.

It went on for days like that, me fighting and reasoning, he smiling and breaking down all my constructions. At one point I was fed up and just let myself

float on the timeless ocean, not fighting back, just floating along. It caused me some fear, for I didn't feel any handholds or supports and I wanted to step out of it, until I heard his enthusiastic "Ah . . . !", and then I knew I had caught a thread of something. I noticed that from that moment on he looked at me with different eyes, or maybe it was only me who was able to see something of his real look. But we became much closer, at least in my awareness, as if now we were doing the same thing. "Hold on, hold on," he would say when again I caught something of the larger thing, and those few words encouraged me tremendously. After one or two weeks I noticed I had given up fighting and sometimes had even begun to enjoy it, just sitting there next to the old man and looking at . . . what ?

"What . . . ?" he asked aloud.

"Now !" I said.

"Now what ?"

"Just now ! Not before or after, only now . . ."

"Ahhh," he smiled and I could have embraced and kissed him then and there, I mean, here and now. But we continued sitting in silence, looking now at the same thing. It wasn't shocking or exciting, rather it was peaceful, large, silent, joyful.

"John the Twenty-Fourth . . ." I said, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, from some awareness beyond awareness. He knew it, too.

"Yes, the new Pope. An American !" he added.

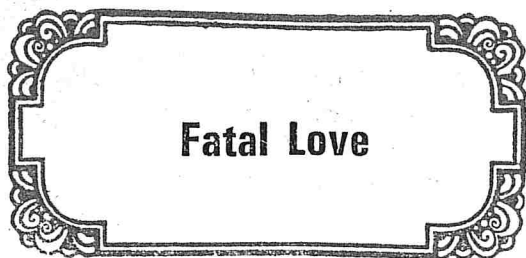
That was yesterday. This morning I rushed to the newspaper stand to see if my intuition was confirmed. It wasn't there yet, for the Cardinals were still in conclave in Rome and no white cloud had emerged from the chimney yet to tell the world of its decision. My very own first papal time-warp, I realised, and it gave me a bit of an eerie feeling to know things before a hundred

purpled princes did. "Now!" I whispered to myself, but in that same moment, leafing through the newspaper and scanning the columns with half a glance I got the biggest shock of my life: "Sudden death of old man in park", I read and then the description of how (the first time I come to learn his name) Professor Ilango had expired, probably from heart failure, at the age of 79. It was unmistakably my old man and, shuddering almost weeping, I read the short news item which told of his academic career, of how he had resigned his post to take up the life of the wandering monk and how later on he had resigned even from that and had been seen for several years sitting on a bench in the park, where he collapsed last night.

Trembling from head to foot I grabbed the newspaper and rushed out the door, straight to the park just to be there, to feel him close, to continue something, to . . . I don't know what, but I couldn't help feeling resentment at his having abandoned me just at the point where I felt I had got hold of the tail of something. Absorbed in my thoughts and feelings I entered the park and headed straight for "our" bench. I was almost there when I got the second biggest shock in my life. I dropped the newspaper and rushed forward and fell at his feet, embracing his knees.

"Professor Ilango . . ." I whispered after a long silent moment, "Master . . ."

"Yes . . ." he said and I still don't know whether his sigh was a chuckle or his chuckle a sigh. "Yes," he repeated. "Now, only now . . .", and while I was still holding his legs with my head in his lap, I felt him bending over me as if in a loving embrace, his head on my shoulder, his arms around me. We sat there for a long time, until I realised that he was becoming cold and stiff.



Fatal Love

This was the day that Jonathan must die.

For months I had been growing towards this decision and for the last few weeks I had been preparing for his demise.

The day had come and I felt firm and well-established in my deepest feelings. There was no other way and I must be the agent of his destiny—and ours.

It was a splendid day, too bright for death. My wife and daughter had planned to spend the afternoon at the beach with our next-door friends. I feigned heavy workload—what with exams coming up and all that.

From behind the curtain of my study I watched my wife Patricia getting into the car, impatiently honking the horn and looking at Robert and Eileen's house. Finally our daughter Sylvie came out intertwined with their son Jonathan. Then Robert and Eileen emerged too, and with all the equipment required for an outing at the beach securely stowed away, they took off.

I stood there for a while longer, looking back into those strangely exciting periods of my life I spent among the so-called primitive tribes of South Asia, researching their rites, investigating their beliefs, customs, behaviour and, especially, their magic. My dreamy eyes looked for the thesis I wrote on the subject, a heavy volume on the rather vague science of anthropology. I let the weird atmospheres of those jungles revive in me, tasting once again the illogical, the irrational juices which flow through the veins of those peoples. I had learned to tune in to

them so well that their feelings and tastes had seeped through into my thesis. Even now I could recall them at will, and I began doing just that.

It was a different consciousness in which causes and effects obtain another sequence, the effects not seldom coming before or independent of the causes ; in which acts performed on one level of reality work out on a level several degrees removed.

Throwing off my professor-of-anthropology-mask as well as my decent middle-aged happily-married persona, I became one with the tribes and felt a few of those ancient pagan juices flowing in at least some of my veins. I turned away from the curtains and suddenly got very busy, transforming my study into a battleground of archetypal forces. A black cloth on the ground ; candles and incense ; a bucket into which I poured seawater, collected in bottles over the last few weeks and carefully hidded away ; skilfully calligraphed occult mantras which only a few of their priests and two or three anthropologists are able to read.

I felt quite relaxed now. The tensions and emotions about this desperate act had played themselves out over the last few weeks and were now exhausted.

Only the cool, even cold, deliberate act remained. My main apprehension at this point concerned the rites themselves. Though I had studied them, written and lectured abundantly about them, I had never put them into practice. The mechanisms of the change-over from a coolly observing scientist to a hotly participating magician were partly conscious but for the larger part were beyond reach, and I wasn't sure how effectively the transition would be accomplished. In short, I knew the power of the rites but could only guess about the extent of my own power.

I sat down crosslegged in the exact centre of the black cloth, the bucket of seawater in front of me. I

checked the relative positions of the candles, the incense, the mantras and the other tools of my craft. They looked all right. Then I made an internal check of my various moods and dispositions: my will needed strengthening, my apprehension weakening, my intentions redirecting. All this done, a strange strong peace descended over me and the magic square, as if everything had become alive and breathed deeply and intensely.

With a ritual gesture I took from my pocket a recent photograph of Jonathan. Whispering the first mantra I took it between the thumbs and little fingers of both my hands and dipped it into the bucket—three mantra-lengths in, six lengths out. In great concentration I continued for about twenty minutes. After a little rest I reversed the timings on the rhythm of the second mantra. The immersion was now getting more intense. So was the atmosphere in the room and my own concentration. Sweat poured down my body and I felt as soaked in salt as was the fast fading photograph. My consciousness moved in dark and deep spaces in close contact with those magic artists of the jungles and deserts—a consciousness of an age-old composition, normally to be obtained only through long initiation, in my case through observation, research, study. Would that be sufficiently powerful? It had never been put to the test. In this respect I had an almost scientific interest in the performance.

I was oblivious to my ordinary surroundings. I was living and breathing in far-off realms and aeons. The magic black square had become the world—a world of power, power of healing and destruction, of life or . . . death. I was dealing in death, agent of destiny, but in this setting it was but natural, my obvious role.

I heard the breath of things about me then, with that same inner ear I heard the breath of Jonathan, now becoming more irregular, sometimes rasping, and I knew, with sad inner satisfaction, that my power was being

established. It was now a question of continuing in the same deep concentration: a disturbance could be as fatal to my rites as success would be fatal to Jonathan.

My own breath moved somewhere in between the quiet breathing of the implements about me and the rasping of Jonathan. Then I slowly grew aware of another rhythm of breathing criss-crossing the carefully conducted orchestra of aspirations. A different presence had entered the magic world, a presence out of tune with it, disturbing its structures and moods. I intensified my concentration in the hope to neutralise that out-of-place presence. I recited my mantra in a louder voice hoping to block out the other influence. I felt I was failing, I couldn't stand up to it. I frantically reaffirmed the confines of the weird world I had built up around me.

As a wave sweeps away a carefully executed drawing on a sandy beach, so my world collapsed when, like a deep knoll in the dark silence of the night, my name was pronounced: "...Simon..." A yell, a command, a question.

My wife.

She stood right behind me, had been standing there for some time. I had felt but not recognised her vibration.

A war ensued between two mutually exclusive, alien worlds with the spaces of my soul for a battleground. An enormous hue and din built up, a pressure, a frantic search for sanity, a persistent threat of madness. The personality looks for readjustments, trying to accommodate the best of both and failing, slipping away.

I found a way out, an easy one; I ran away from both and cried.

I let the picture fall into the bucket and crouched there weeping, shattered, looking at my ridiculous operation in shame. Like being caught in the most flagrant crime against humanity.

Patricia, a rather enormous, tough, but basically very

sensitive woman, was caught in a similar conflict of worlds and the planes and parts of her being were in turmoil about how to handle this situation.

She solved it by doing various things at once : retrieving the soaked photograph of Jonathan from the bucket, throwing the mantras in the water instead, blowing out the candles and with her free arm embracing me, leaning over me and enveloping me with her bulk—creating a maternal world more archaic even than the magical one I was so forcefully expelled from.

The initial dialogue took place in inner realms, finding expression only in her loud heartbeats against my ear, my sobs and her sighs, my helpless gestures and her hands stroking my head, my back, my arms.

It may have taken as much as twenty minutes before I was able to get up, take the bucket of seawater and dump it out the window. Then I picked up my abominable black cloth and threw it like a piece of dirt in a corner.

"I didn't know you hated him that much," she finally said.

I looked up at her in surprise. She doesn't understand a thing, I realised. "This is how fatally much I love him," I tried, but knew it didn't sound right. "I love him, you understand !" I stressed once more.

"It looks like you were well on your way to kill him ! Whatever little I understand of your research in black magic and its killing power, this looks a lot like it. Don't I remember a photograph in one of your books precisely resembling this setting ? Even on the beach I became aware of something dark, menacing, and spontaneously I came running to you for help, the only expert in blackness I know of, little expecting that you were the originator of it . . ."

"I can't explain," I simply said, still pulled between my different worlds. Nervously I walked back and forth in my study, picking up things at random, looking at

various objects intensely without really seeing them. "It goes back, a long time . . . It's very complex. . . . I'm not supposed to talk . . ." I explored various entrances but they all fell flat.

Patricia didn't know either where to start asking questions. There were too many loose ends. Finally she started talking at random, just uttering words in the hope to come across the right ones.

"Jonathan and Sylvie are the most wonderful young couple in the world. Of course they want to be together, of course they want to get married, they have grown up together, they have been destined for each other, all their lives, and they know it and everyone knows it. The only one who doesn't agree is you !" It didn't come as an accusation, it rather was a big question, a big "Why ?"

"Yes," was my only soft and weak reply.

"We have been friends with Robert and Eileen for how many years now ? Twenty, twenty-five ? And you for even longer, long before our marriage and theirs. We know Jonathan from his birth and have seen him growing up, playing with Sylvie when she was a baby. He was her big brother, later her friend, now her lover. Why not ? Can you think of a better son-in-law ?"

"No," I stuttered.

"Everyone has been very surprised at your obstinate refusal to give your agreement to their marriage. Why, why, why ?"

Hundreds of times during the last few years, the same discussion, the same "Why", and I couldn't give my strong and well-based reason, founded as it was in a long past and in deep secrecy. Now, in this setting, on this sunny day, having been found out in my desperate act, her insistent question had a new edge to it.

"Were you really trying to make him drown ?" she asked, unbelieving.

"Yes."

"I did feel something awful on the beach, something threatening, trying to get in between all of us. Robert and Eileen were not as aware of it as I was, but I saw them unconsciously keeping a sharp eye on Jonathan. He is a good swimmer but . . ." her voice trailed off.

I still couldn't say anything, there were just too many things to say and I wasn't supposed to, not allowed to. It became very tight in my chest and head, they felt like expanding, then again contracting. I knew I had to let off steam or I would boil over and go mad—or had I already?

When Patricia tried to find a new opening I reached the bursting point. Against my reasonable will I jumped off my seat and knelt in front of her, looking her straight in the eyes and I all but shouted:

"Why, why, why? For several years now. Why? You don't know why? Have you no eyes to see? Have you never looked at Jonathan and Sylvie closely? Why, why? Because . . ." and now I really shouted it straight in her face, ". . . because he is my son!"

"Simon!" she jumped up and took me by the shoulders. "It is not true! You would have told me! Simon! . . . Simon, are you all right?"

"No, of course I'm not all right. I've just broken an unbreakable vow of secrecy, an absolute promise . . . How can I be all right?" and tears came back to my eyes. My legs felt so weak I could hardly stand any more and I felt myself trembling. Full of concern she guided me to the couch and helped me to lie down. "All this is too much for right now; I can't handle it, I don't know what you are saying. I only know you must lie down and come to yourself. Then you can tell me everything. But first I'll make you, and myself, a strong cup of coffee."

With that she left the room.

The smell of coffee brewing suddenly brought a large chunk of normality back to me. I sat up, looked about me and refound parts of my more usual self. I pulled

myself up by her sanity and walked straight to the kitchen where I embraced her from behind. She let me, pulling her arms free to continue the ritual of coffee making, at this instant a sacred act of white magic.

"I swore holy vows to Eileen and Robert never, never to reveal what took place early in their married life," I whispered straight into her ear, still holding her tightly. When she half turned for the cups I saw big tears glistening in her eyes. "Your son!" she sighed. "And I never knew, never suspected, never saw!"

Each with a steaming cup in our hands, we went back to my study.

"No, not in here," she said with a slight shudder, "come to the living room."

"Now you've found me out I owe it to you." She didn't say a word, just looked at me with big moist eyes, enormous pools in which I let myself drown.

"Only after their marriage they found out that he was impotent. As their best friend, and a bachelor at that, they invited me along on a holiday and there they beseeched me to perform the sacred act in his stead, of course under a never to be broken vow of silence.

"It was never mentioned again, not by any of us. Of course Jonathan doesn't know it either." I looked deep down into my coffee cup as if to find there the impulse to continue. Suddenly I looked up at her and threw it out: "How can I allow my daughter to get married to my son!"

I saw worlds of comprehension pass through her eyes. Many loose ends suddenly came together. She remained silent, as if in deep concentration. Finally, from far down, came her hesitant voice:

"There must be another way... Did you have to go to this extreme? Killing him! Killing your own son!" I saw the struggle between anger and compassion in her face. Compassion won. "This desperate act... Oh,

Simon . . ." Suddenly she put her hands on mine. "I hope I stopped you in time, I hope your black power got thwarted, I hope Jonathan is all right . . . You know your own power, the extent of it ?"

"No," I answered immediately. "I never tried, this is the first time. And no, there is no other way. For several years now I went through all possibilities, and believe me I went through hell."

"You must have talked it over with Robert at least ?"

"Don't think I didn't try."

"Didn't he release you from your vow ?"

"I tried very carefully : 'Hasn't the time come to talk about it ?' I asked him 'Talk about what ? There's nothing to talk about,' Robert answered curtly, and quickly changed the subject. It doesn't exist for them, it is as if nothing ever happened, Jonathan is their son and that's the extent of it. Maybe it shouldn't exist for me either : but how could I help watching my son growing up, right next door ? Can you see the pain I went through because he did not know me, because I could not know him as my son, even though he calls me 'Dad' ? And then they fell in love, my beautiful children ! Can you imagine my misery, through all these years, and how I have searched for a way out ? But finally I accepted the terrible fact that there is only one way : Jonathan must die. Why would they listen to me, a dry, old-fashioned scholarly father, when their love was so obvious to everybody ? What reason could I give ? None ! Or should I just let it happen, just not say anything ? That might be Robert's way, but it will never be mine. The step from my theory of research to its execution was a gigantic one, but once I discovered from my own books the way to go about it, I couldn't stop myself. There is no other way out." I sighed deeply, still looking into Patricia's contemplative eyes.

"Now that we can search together I'm sure we'll

come up with something. The first thing now is to undo the damage you may have caused through your black art. Is there a counter magic or . . . ?"

"None that I know of."

"Then for God's sake let's pray, or rather, we may not be so good at that, let's just concentrate deeply and try to emit positive vibrations of love, pure love, hoping they may get to them in time . . ."

Reaching over the table she put her hands into mine, and there we sat for quite a while in profound silence, tuning in to our two beloved children, loving each other, loving them, trying to delve from our depths and heights the gold of pure love.

A strange shudder built up from below my feet. Sensitive as we were at that moment, we both felt a similar sensation. Stealthily it crept up in us and reached our linked hands at the same moment. It became a major moment of horror, mere horror, then it passed.

Holding my hands still firmer she whispered, "Too late . . . It has come about . . ." Her tears matched mine and our silence was torn by strong emotions flowing back and forth through our hands.

"My boy, my Jonathan, forgive me . . ." I wept half-aloud, desperate, abhorring myself.

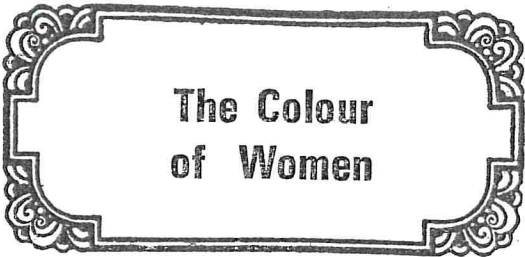
Steps came running along the pebble path, the kitchen door was thrown open and into our living room bounced . . . Jonathan. He burst in upon our silence :

"Dad, Mom, oh . . ." he covered his sweating face with his hands. "A big black wave suddenly came and carried her off. I . . . I really couldn't help it, I swear I couldn't do a thing. I . . . Oh, Dad . . ." And crying he fell on his knees at my feet and dropped his head in my lap.

"Oh, Dad, forgive me . . . I really . . ."

"Did Sylvie . . . ?" Patricia swallowed.

"Yes, yes," he sobbed. "Yes, she drowned . . ."



The Colour of Women

"Do you want me or do you just need me ?"

"Want you ? No, I don't think I want you, but I need you on two counts. I need someone who can listen to my crazy story and I need someone who can add something new to it. And if I want you ? That's what I want to find out, but that again is why I need you."

Francis was happy to discover that he could talk to her so freely, without the usual shyness he felt with members of the opposite sex. They hadn't touched yet, they were walking at a safe distance from each other just like long-married couples.

"And what about you ?" he asked in an attempt to remain hidden a bit longer.

"Me ? I don't know. Something about the way you always reacted to me when I came to your library. Whenever I asked for a book you seemed to get totally disoriented and you intrigued me. I began to think that I was throwing you off balance, that I touched upon a sensitive point in you. And then I began to watch you. And what I saw pleased me. Until you hesitantly made it clear that you wanted to meet me, and so here we are !"

"Yes, you do disorient me, you and women like you. But . . . not because you touch upon a sensitive point in me but rather on an insensitive point. Well, that's part of my story."

"My story, my crazy story ! You keep referring to your story as if you were something different from the

rest of us mortals. Come out with your story, you make me curious."

"Am I different? That's what I need you for, to find out. I don't know, I only know I feel and see things which are apparently unusual and that things which are for others apparently usual are for me... like blind spots, almost literally blind spots."

He had never been in as feminine a place as hers. Rose walls, pink curtains, deep reds splashed all over the room, in the middle of which was a huge bed on prominent display. Actually, the whole apartment was organised around the enormous bed as if a major part of her life were spent on (or in) it.

"This is where I live, dream, sleep, read, make love, am lonely, cry, pray, eat, work. I love my bed, it is the throne from which I rule my life. Come, don't hesitate, sit down, no, here on the bed, don't be shy." A small step for most men, but a large one for Francis, though one in the direction of which he had been vaguely aiming.

"Now, here we are, just the two of us, nobody to disturb us, nobody to interrupt. Here you can open up if you want, tell your crazy story, be yourself, just your own naked self." Those last words startled him and he slightly blushed, but then he saw that she had not meant them literally. She smiled and took his hands in hers. "You are tight, my friend. Come now, relax, that's what you seem to need more than anything else. Why don't you just be your naked self, even literally. Nothing to be afraid of."

"No, no, please slow down, I'm... I'm not used to this. Give me some time," he pleaded, and then he just laid down and closed his eyes.

"I see colours," he began, "I see books, I see people, vibrations, waves, and I am scared and confused; but the worst is that sometimes I don't see colours and

vibrations and that confuses me even more. Do you follow me?"

"I have not the slightest idea what you are talking about," she admitted in all honesty, while considering where she should be. Sitting up she felt like a psychiatrist, but to lie down, next to him, would make her the over-anxious woman. Not being on the bed felt too motherly, and being right where he was too fast. She decided on movement, and now she began to walk around the room, toying with a bottle here, rearranging a picture stand there, fiddling around and making homey sounds. That would give him some space.

"How did you first notice it—this, whatever it is?" she began professionally, giving him a handhold.

"When Mr. O'Sullivan entered. I happened to be standing with a book in my hand and then I felt something I cannot describe. It was wonderful, a feeling of things being totally right, of some absolute attunement, as if several clocks with different rhythms had suddenly and simultaneously struck the same hour. The book and the man felt one and same thing, you can say they had colour. I was absolutely certain the man was going to ask for precisely that book and when he did, it shook me down to my very foundations. It kept me busy for several days and nights as I tried to understand what had happened."

"And where did that get you?"

"Nowhere, at that point. I decided to put it out of my mind as just my imagination. But then a child came in and I knew not only that he would ask for a comic book, but also exactly which one, and before the boy opened his mouth I was holding it in my hand. The boy didn't even notice he hadn't yet asked for it, that was part of the attunement. It was just what he wanted, so why bother! I tried to push away that experience too, but it kept repeating itself."

"But it sounds wonderful ! Why would you try to push it away ? It sounds just great to me."

"There are several drawbacks. First of all, I'm just a librarian handing out books, talking to people about them, from 8 to 5. Now, when these feelings and experiences began to crop up, it wasn't just a job anymore, it became a life-style, the most important part of my life in which I began to learn things I would never have dreamt possible. You see, I like books and I think I like people as well. I was standing between the two, establishing links between a person and the books he reads. Now it was beginning to become something else. The large empty space between the unknown client and the unknown books began to assume a colour, a warmth, a depth. My job was no longer to pull out books on demand, but became rather a play of living threads, of colourful strings, of warm vibrations, of harmonies between the living people of the town and the equally living people inhabiting the books. I became a dancer, dancing to some strange music caused by vibrations of identity and recognition. And . . . slowly I am becoming quite infallible."

Lilian had stopped fiddling around and automatically sat down on the bed, staring at him with large, shiny eyes. "But . . . but that's just marvellous. And how kind of you to share all this with me."

Francis now opened his eyes too and they looked at each other in a new way, like people sharing a great danger, or some exciting discovery.

"Just marvellous," she repeated, "but why would it scare or confuse you, you should be grateful for such a gift !"

"You think so ?" he asked timidly. "But don't you realise what it means, that something is taking over my job. It is not me doing it, it is something in me or beyond me, using me all the time. That's part of what scares

me. The someone or something living and acting and dancing in me. For basically, as you see, I am an ordinary, rather plain, not a highly educated fellow, and I have the feeling I am playing with realities far beyond my grasp."

"Why fight it? Why not surrender yourself to whom ever plays with you and dances through you and knows in you!"

"Then where am I, what will remain of me?"

"But that's what surrender means: giving up your own little self and joining that something in you."

She began to feel what had really brought him to her. Something was tight in him, stuck in his heart and limbs and she might have to do some defrosting with a bit of normal, human, feminine warmth. It was a working hypothesis which she immediately put to the test by lying down beside him and holding both his hands in her own. He didn't react much, either negatively or positively, so she didn't learn anything from it. He remained silent for a long time.

"Those colours! Do you know that books all have a colour? Each and every book has a definite colour. I don't mean the cover or the binding, I mean the book itself, its vibration, its message, its nature, its people, its story... There are absolutely yellow books, pure yellow ones, and there are all the shapes from yellow to white, and there are orange and green and blue books, and crimson ones and purple, all the ranges and hues of colour you can think of. Very vaguely at first, I began to see these colours, and then they became more and more clear. Can you imagine what it's like to be living all day long with ten thousands of those books... 'Colour' is just a way of saying, how to express it? Colour is like music, a different translation of a similar vibration. Sometimes I just feel the book. There are hard books and soft books, square ones and round ones, beautiful

and ugly ones, even slimy books. Some are velvety, others are like granite. A whole world . . . oh, often it is too much for me." Involuntarily he drew closer to her, as if finding in her a shelter against the onslaught of his experiences. She didn't know what to say anymore, whether to encourage him or to try and bring him back to a more normal functioning. She felt like taking him in her arms and rocking him like a child. All she could do to show she was with him was to put her arms around him.

"Yes, books have colour, but . . . so do people. For that I was even less prepared. It was nothing definite at first, but one day when an elderly gentleman entered he appeared slightly bluish to me. I knew then he was going to ask for one of the 'blue' books, but it all was still too vague to know exactly which one. Now I am trained, or it's cleared or . . . I don't know, more sensitive maybe and I see shades and hues of people as clearly as those of books. Therefore, finding the right book has now become so easy that I have to be careful all the time not to let my clients see that I already have their books on the desk before they have even asked for them."

"Why wouldn't you?"

Francis raised himself up and resting on one elbow he looked at her, surprise in his eyes. "But, but wouldn't they find me crazy, or even dangerous? My boss wouldn't let me continue for a minute if he knew what world I am living in all the time . . ."

"I would say rather that you have become the perfect librarian, conducting the orchestra of books. Any other library would be jealous . . ."

"Anything out of the ordinary frightens people. Oh no, it is my absolute secret, and now it's yours too!"

"It must be beautiful and frightening at the same time. All those colours. Coloured people? People with blue and orange and white and green vibrations . . .

By the way, what colour do I have ? . . ."

Plop ! Francis let himself fall back and closed his eyes once more. Lilian saw how the colour drained from his face until it was grey. Had she said the wrong thing ? "Francis," she sighed and put her hand on his chest.

He stroked her hair and then, with a faint smile, he said :

"Ah, there you are, you've said it . . . That's the real mystery of it all. You know what ? It doesn't work with women . . . Surprising, no ? Frightening, no ? Strange, no ?"

"You mean to say that women have no colour, that you don't feel or perceive anything when a woman comes in ?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say, but don't ask me anything further. I don't understand it. Is it that women have no colour, or is it that I am closed to the feminine world ?"

Francis was no more alone with his experiences and problems, for now the two of them were looking at one and the same phenomenon. He had pulled her into his world—albeit by a negation : she embodied his deep conflict. Both were silent for a long time, lying close together and holding hands.

"Is it you or is it me, I mean us, women ?" she repeated his question. "Are you blocked in this respect, frustrated, unconnected with the feminine part of your soul, or are women colourless ? No !" She couldn't accept that. "Have you known any women in your life ?"

"My mother died early, my only sister got married when I was a boy. I am afraid that's about all."

"Doesn't that explain something ! You've never shared a part of your life with a woman, not to mention a bed ?"

"No, and I can't say I was ever strongly attracted to them, I am afraid."

"Still you came to me, even though I half invited you. You supplied the other half. Why?"

"Lilian, because . . . you are the worst of all. I mean to say," he hastened to add, "that you must be the most womanly woman in this town; for whenever you enter the library not only do I not see colours or feel vibrations or hear music; but something in the experience turns sour. With other women nothing at all happens, but with you a blank barrier is erected right in the midst of it. I wondered if you didn't hold the key to the secrets of the other half of humanity which remains for me colourless." He smiled, embarrassed, but she encouraged him in his efforts by stroking his hair and giving him the feeling of being totally with him, available body and soul.

"And so I come knocking on your feminine doors, with great trepidation, for I am blank in this respect. Still, my experiences ask for expansion, for reaching out and completing, and they compel me to take this for me incredible step. So, here we are, and I cannot say I'm not enjoying it."

"The 'worst woman in town' . . ." she reflected aloud, "the most womanly woman . . . Is that a compliment? Close your eyes, I'll show you something . . ." In no time she had removed all her clothes and stood in her naked femininity at the foot of the bed. "Open," she commanded.

He sat up with a jolt and exclaimed, "My God, you are purple! You are purple, I see colour. Purple and some white, yes definitely, stronger and stronger. But . . . but you're naked," he abruptly realised and then they both laughed and laughed. He jumped up and embraced her, singing, "You are purple, you are purple," and they danced around the bed and now he was ready to drop his cotton armours too, and she helped him out of one thing and another.

Having opened that first colourful door, others followed and with great powerful strokes he swam the

seven seas of womanhood and dived repeatedly for the lost pearls at the bottom of the sea.

"Lilian," he finally whispered, "it must have been me. Now I know there is colour and music in the other half of mankind, in the other half of me . . . Plenty of colour, so much music . . ." They both laughed and once more embraced.

Next night he came back to her place. Angry. Upset. "What have you done to me !" he shouted as he entered. "Lost, lost, everything lost. The music has stopped, the colours have faded, the vibrations are mute. Back to the ordinary book-boy. What have you done to me ? I demand that you close all your awful dangerous doors on me and let me regain my spoilt experience. Return me my lost treasures !"

He purposely avoided the big bed and sat down on a low divan in front of the huge mirror, his head in his hands. Seeing his reflection reminded her of a sick bird with a broken wing.

"Behind the yellows and blues and oranges I had glimpsed the promise of a golden light beckoning me to go through. Is that door closed for ever now, or does the same golden light shine behind, far behind your purples and reds and pinks ? Where do I go from here ? Try to cancel yesterday's events in an attempt to retrieve my secret sweet music, or delve for the golden purple ? . . ."

"When you would no longer use me," she said, shyly but firmly, "to add one more colour to your alchemic palette but would love me more than you love your own experiences, then you might hear a greater music, find a richer gold."

He looked up, relieved, smiling. "You are right, you are right . . . of course, how right you are. But still . . ." And with a loud cry from a torn heart he jumped up, shattered the big mirror with both fists and ran out the door.

His Own Grandfather

I

The green Ambassador turned south as soon as it cleared the gate of Pallavaram ariport at Madras. Raymond, freshly arrived from Paris, started the usual exclamations right away, "Oh ! Look there . . ." "But see those houses !" "How is it possible, how can people live like that !"—the pleasant confusion of the newcomer to India. His brother Pierre, who had come to fetch him, had seen it a hundred times, for he had been living on the south Indian Coromandel coast for the last twelve years. After a few miles of total absorption in the rural scenery Raymond suddenly turned to Pierre, as if he only then discovered his brother whom he hadn't seen for all of twelve years. In silence they looked at one another. They had always been very close in their youth and were also very similar : now it was apparent how much Paris had moulded the one and Pondicherry the other in quite different directions. Raymond looked of course much paler than his suntanned brother Pierre, but the sun had done other things to Pierre as well,—had warmed him up a bit, cooked his brains and heart and liver and softened him ; whereas Raymond emanated a certain stiffness or rigidity which one finds in people who know only one culture, their own, and who have never been exposed to a vastly different one. Being a psychologist didn't help Raymond very much in his crosscultural adventure, for his science, being so thoroughly western, had moulded him into a certain type from which it is very difficult to

disengage oneself. Pierre, however, a man of two worlds, had acquired a flexibility of outlook which was in large part the result of his marriage to a South Indian girl. Superficially they still looked alike, the same broad forehead and sharp nose, the same hands with almost ridiculously long fingers, a special trademark of the family. Hands don't change much, only what you do with them; the French cannot talk without them, but whereas Raymond underlined his words with his hands, Pierre was bridging gaps with his: "On the one hand," "but on the other . . ." For Raymond there was only one hand, one side.

Up to Chinglepet, the first coffee stop on the three and a half hour journey to Pondicherry, they spoke of the family and old friends, their youth and school and the usual. Only when Pierre had watched Raymond eat *idles*—soft rice cakes—with his fingers, seen him struggling with his chutney and *sambar*, did he feel him sufficiently baptised into the Indian world to come forward with his problem.

In letters to his brother he had of course made it sufficiently clear that Raymond would not be coming just for a holiday, but that a solid piece of work was awaiting him. Between Chingleput and Madurantakam, by which time Raymond had taken in enough of the countryside, of the multicoloured sarees and rickety squeaky bullock carts, brass vessels lined up in front of the wells and clusters of thatched huts, Pierre decided to introduce the task for which he had invited his learned psychologist brother to spend a three-week holiday in the old French colonial town of Pondicherry.

"The basic things you know, of course, and can be said in a few words. I am married to Sundari, the daughter of my old headmaster, Kumar, who had become my close friend. Sundari is wonderful, sweet, loving, a fine wife, and together we have a beautiful child,

also named Kumar, who is just four years old now. So far so good. All sunshine and flowers."

"Congratulations," murmured Raymond, whose love life, even in Paris, hadn't been so smooth. "I hope you realise how lucky you are!"

"I do," Pierre admitted freely. "I am happy, I know I am lucky. But... within that wonderful framework of our little crosscultural family there is a strong sort of cloud, a sort of a problem you probably have not come across in your experience with people and their family problems."

"I bet I have," Raymond quipped. "After all, almost all marriage problems can be reduced to four or five major categories, ever recurring, only the names and faces change."

"I bet you're about to find your sixth category here," Pierre challenged him. "O. K., to sum it up, for it is a long story: my wife Sundari was very much attached to her father, my old headmaster. Sure, agreed, category no. 1: a father complex. You'll have the answer even before I finish my story. But wait! The very night that Sundari gave birth to our child, her father died. That very night, I say: rather I should say, that very minute. Really an extraordinary coincidence! In fact, he had not been feeling well for the last eight or nine months, roughly—or precisely—and that's the question. Sundari had been thoroughly caught up in two simultaneous processes: the slow construction of the new being inside her womb and the equally slow destruction of her father whom she loved with all of her being which was not consumed in the process of being pregnant. I would never have been able to write you about that period in a letter, but what I observed during the months prior to that night of simultaneous birth and death... When the baby kicked, Sundari knew her father had gotten worse and she rushed home

—to her family's home. The bigger she got with child, the more Kumar's weight and strength were reduced. As her time came closer so did his too, and when she gave birth, he died. Good, a fascinating story, isn't it? But listen, here is where the story really begins. From the very moment of our little Kumar's birth until today, this very moment, Sundari thinks that our child is none other than her daddy reincarnated..." With much fervour Pierre had been introducing his story, as if acquainting his old friend and brother Raymond with a little family background which in the light of their mutual past in Paris, was sort of a joke, a light matter which Raymond should be aware of during his holidays. But the last sentence changed the whole mood of the story, and now it suddenly became his own, his private life, his personal grief. He fell silent, sighed deeply, took both Raymond's hands into his own and started crying, real honest warm tears, for the first time in all these beautiful but tense years. Raymond was enough of a psychologist not to say anything, but just hold his hands, being with him, listening to the silence in the car through which Pierre's sobs told him infinitely more than any letter could have done.

It lasted until they entered a more densely populated area.

"Here is Madurantakam, our half way point," Pierre told his brother. "I need a coffee, let's stop at that place where they have these giant *masala dosais*, then you'll see something! Nowhere in France or in the whole of Europe do they have anything that can stand up to our South-Indian delicacy, the *masala dosais*! When our great-grandfathers the Gauls were still hunting wild boars in their forests, the noble people of Tamil Nadu were already eating *masala dosais*, and when our whole western culture has collapsed under its own weight, they will still go on eating them.

Here we are. Driver, coffee stop, please !"

After Madurantakam and past Tindivanam Pierre went on with his story of the two Kumars—who were, or who were not, one—in greater detail, thereby going through the wide range of moods which this identification had called up in him over the years, from deep sadness to fright, amazement, to a lighter, even humorous mood: "How can he be his own grandfather?" or "I refuse to be the father of my father-in-law even though he was my friend." But most of his statements were of a more serious nature and when he related how he had caught sight of Sundari sitting by little Kumar's cradle several times, whispering, "Daddy, Daddy...", he was close to tears again. "The father-complex is stronger than ever, she misses him tremendously, every day, and she continuously transfers her whole set of feelings to our little boy. What kind of a life is that for a child, how can he grow into his own, being always and ever compared, constantly observed for subtle signs, praised when he behaves like 'daddy', like his grandpa... When he pulls out a book from the bookcase she will say, 'Ah! Just the book daddy liked so much, now you see?' or 'He ate only the lady-fingers and didn't touch the other vegetables, just like daddy, now you see?' Whenever I come home from school she has a new story ready. For four years now. Often I feel like screaming or running away but I know I have to stick it out and find a way to shake her out of it, to confront her with the truth. I tell you, I have thought of a thousand ways, tricks, methods, devices, but none of them satisfies me. I even thought of 'spiritism', to call up the spirit of her dead daddy, to show her that he is existing separately, independently from her son. Not only for her sake, but also for Kumar's, who lives in the shadow of his dead grandfather of whom he is supposed to be an exact copy, or even worse. I brought

home books on reincarnation to show her that these things don't work like that, that usually much more time is needed before a soul supposedly reincarnates. Of course, all the facts are against me, especially the incredible coincidence of my father-in-law's slow death over nine long months and little Kumar's nine months' growth . . ."

"And what about Sundari's mother? She is living with you, isn't she?"

"Sundari has found an ally in her mother, whom she has gradually convinced, or maybe Kumar did that. So, I have to fight on that front as well. Such a pity, I hope you understand; because for the rest, it is so beautiful between all of us . . . But for this one crazy, sticky, irrational, old-fashioned cloudy thing between us. Little Kumar is such a wonderful little boy, as you'll soon find out, he behaves just like any other little boy of four years old. Clever, joyful, playful, tricky, full of humour and laughter, only there is about him always that aura of the great question: say, boy, are you you or are you him? . . ."

"And your friends and colleagues?"

"They come in many varieties. Most of them take it pretty lightly and some even jokingly ask, 'How is your little father-in-law?' Some of my closer friends are with me concerned and they keep offering helpful suggestions about ways to break her out of it, everything from gentle persuasion to shock treatments; and there are even a few who believe the story and have been trying for four years now to convince me. But that is of course ridiculous."

"Quite so," Raymond agreed. "And now I see that we are approaching Pondicherry, and here is my question: Where do I come in? What do you expect me to do? Why did you invite me?"

"Well . . . I have tried everything else and I failed

in all respects. But I haven't tried you yet; after all you're supposed to be an expert in this kind of psychological trauma or complexes or whatever you call it. Aren't you one of France's best-known psychologists? And are you not my brother as well? Well, there you are... three weeks holiday on our beautiful Coromandel Coast, free boarding and lodging and whatever you want—plus the solution to my little problem. Take it or leave it! . . .”

“Pfff . . .” a deep sigh from Raymond. “Well . . .” he hesitated. “O. K., but on one condition: that this is the last time you mention it to me. Give me three carefree weeks of holiday and freedom and joy and fun. For the rest . . . leave it to me. All right? After three weeks I'll tell you what I have understood—or not understood.”

II

The green Ambassador headed north towards Madras after clearing the watertank on Pondicherry's West Boulevard. Pierre looked impatiently at Raymond; the hour of truth and knowing had finally struck. Raymond avoided his eyes and kept on looking out the window. For the first time the silence between the two brothers became slightly nervous: they had behaved very normally throughout Raymond's three weeks, holiday and had discussed many subjects animatedly. Now suddenly it became something else, because the great secret subject which had subtly dominated the three weeks but had never been explicitly mentioned between them was finally going to be unveiled.

“Well . . .” Pierre began.

“Well . . .” Raymond answered; he smiled shyly at Pierre and resumed looking out through the window.

“Well, you see . . .” and another five minutes passed

in silence.

"But..." Pierre tried again. Silence. They must have been halfway to Tindivanam when Raymond could contain himself no longer and began to speak in a most confused and incoherent manner—at least that's how it sounded to Pierre, who listened with increasing incredulity to his always so precise and clear-minded psychologist-brother :

"... The circle was closed, you see—birth, life, old age, death, each with its particular problems, oh, just a handful of them, nothing much new under the sun, a few handfuls of complexes, frustrations, archetypes, motivations, according to which school you follow, again any one or two out of a few handfuls of schools. But little sun, little joy, little light, man condemned to his drab existence with a few permitted frustrations, problems, interactions, all according to one textbook or another. When you come across a new type, or model, or complex, or defense mechanism, you become famous, look at me !—but it's all within the same closed circle really. And you know what solves all human problems, all psychological complexities ? Death ! Your patient can be suffering to any degree : death finishes it all ! Death a problem too ? Nothing doing ; it was the solution . . ."

"Was ?" Pierre interrupted the flow.

"Yes, 'was,' until three weeks ago. Was ! Yes, was, that is, for me."

"And now ?"

"Man, don't you see, are you blind ? For twelve years you have been living here in India. Haven't you ever seen the sun, the light, the spark, the life ?" He looked Pierre square in the face.

"The what ? . . . The sun ? Yes, daily . . ." Pierre stuttered and looked up at the blinding blue of the sky, blinking.

"No, no, not that sun, the sun of love and light and

space and joy, the sun in the face, in the hearts of people. Our Paris-sun is always clouded, rainy, misty, laden, overcast; here I have seen the warmth and light of the sun shining at me on the seaside boulevard, in the bazaar, in the faces of your friends, and especially . . . yes, may I say it, don't you know? . . . in your dear wife Sundari. My God, man, brother, you haven't begun to appreciate the treasure you've found and which you keep hiding from yourself. And maybe even more have I found the spark in little Kumar. What a child! A problem child? A problem to you, because you are crazy! You know who is the problem in your family? Not your wife, she is a gem; not her mother, she is a jewel; not your little child, he is a pearl; no, you! Yes, you, you are a dry pebble, a thick opaque piece of stone. So, there you are . . ."

"*Monsieur, je vous prie,*" Pierre started in high, polite French and interrupted himself with the very colloquial, "*Merde merde, merde.*" You too! Is it a conspiracy? Did you fall in love with my wife, or . . ."

"No, I fell in love with myself. I broke out of my little circle of professionalism and egoism and narrow philosophy of life . . . This country, I tell you, this sun that shines here, these people, this old, ancient land, it opened twenty-six eyes in me and I looked and looked, and now . . . who am I, who is going back to Paris? Back to what? To cheating some more people with some more imaginary solutions to their ill-understood problems? It is so closed, so narrow. It all ends with the same simple definitive ending: death."

"But who . . . how . . ."

"Who got me out of it? Who opened my eyes? Well, actually two people did it. First of all Kumar."

"Which one, my father-in-law? He is dead, dead, dead! Stop pestering me, you too!"

"O.K., the final blow, then I'll stop pestering you and then we can begin to talk: yes, first of all Kumar did it."

The father ? The son ? the father-in-law ? No, no, the one and only Kumar who died and was born, who died and was born before and will die and he born again and again. That's the secret I finally saw—and that opened my cage in which I have been devouring patients and people and systems and schools and approaches and frustrations, bah !” Silence.

More silence. Then Pierre, whispering : “So, you too !”

“Me too ? Rather, how come not you ? How come you are the only one who doesn't want to see what is so obvious to everyone around you ? You want to devour your little child, to have him all for yourself, to tie him down to this one lifetime, together with yourself—‘my son’, ‘unique’, ‘mine’.”

Pierre sighed, “Instead of a solution you are bringing me one more problem, you !”

“No, you are the problem, not Sundari, not Kumar, not me : you !”

“No, you are.”

“Let's stop this game, Pierre, and let's stop the car and have a little walk to cool down. Then let's talk like brothers and friends, not like patients and enemies.”

When they and the engines had cooled down a bit, Pierre asked quietly, “And who was the second person who brought about your change, your . . .”

“Call it a conversion if you want. It's an inside-out experience, a breaking through barriers, a total revolution in my head and heart. Nothing less. And all because of the simple discovery of the unreality of death. Before, death was the enemy, now it's the ally. Don't you see how that makes all psychology irrelevant, all problems illusory—What am I going back to . . . ? And what am I going to do ? I'll have to start all over again, re-thinking everything, relearning life because I have seen death, I have played and walked and joked

with a dead man, your old friend Kumar, who is a wonderfully alive little boy, so sweet, so clever, so himself . . . Who else brought about my conversion? You want to know? You won't be upset? Ready? It was you, Pierre, you yourself who made me see, you again who presided over the death of your brother Raymond to become the father of the newly born Raymond."

"Raymond, be serious please, because for me this is no joking matter, you were my last resort, have I lost you, too?"

"I am dead serious. It was you. That's why I asked you not to mention the subject of your concern to me throughout the three weeks of our holidays, if it can still be called a holiday. I didn't want your mental approach to this Kumar-thing, your incessantly repeated doubts and hesitations. I wanted to try to come into contact with your subconscious feelings, frustrations, elations etc., about your old friend and about your child. Listening carefully to you speaking on different levels of your personality at first I was shocked and then suddenly one day I thought I caught a spark of something strange and then I saw it clear as crystal."

"I requested you to look into the father-complex of my wife," Pierre insisted, "and into the enforced identification of my son with his grandfather. Have you failed? Are you circumventing the issue by making me the target?"

"Don't worry about Sundari. Sure, she loved her daddy, maybe more than most girls love their fathers. She was very concerned about him when he got sick and withered away, and she talks on and on about him with such a pure feeling of love that she could have become the receptacle for his pressing and deepest urge to remain together. Don't you think he could have consciously withdrawn from his body in order to

s'owly merge with the miracle in the belly of his daughter, a unique opportunity for the purest and highest love—a father-daughter relationship translated into a mother-son relationship. Once you discard death it's so beautiful, so logical, so simple !

"Don't worry about Kumar either. He doesn't imitate his grandfather, he is more himself than I have ever seen a just four-year old boy being himself, he's not a copy, not a pseudo-father-in-law. He is a full, rich, conscious being who is doing it all over again, with great joy, for he is almost but not fully aware of his continuity through death and birth and of his deepest being which he may not be able to reach yet, he certainly is conscious, and I assure you, I have never come across so much consciousness in so small a body !

"There remains you, Pierre . . . Why don't you want to see it ? Because there is a link-in-love missing in you ! What I discovered first was not the love between father and daughter and between mother and son, but the lack of love in you. Or rather not the lack of it, but the fact that you cover it up, hide it. Deep down it's there but you don't want to admit it because . . . because . . ."

"What, you are still sparing me, after all the dirt you have thrown at me ? O. K., throw the last brick !"

"Because actually you hated your so-called old friend Kumari . . . So, there you are . . . and I am not imagining things. It's you, Pierre, you who kept telling me . . ."

"You're out of your mind ! . . ." With great unbelieving eyes Pierre looked at his brother, not knowing whether to beat him on the head, to laugh or to cry. "What did I tell you ? It's a lie. When did I tell you ?"

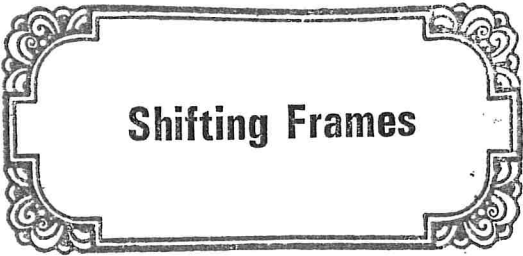
"Very simple, actually already in this very same taxi three weeks ago, but you repeated it over and over again—to your wife, to your mother, to your friends, to

me. Not so much the words, as the way in which you kept saying it finally made me notice it, lit a spark in me, made me see it with great clarity and then upset my life's work, my life's philosophy. The words? 'He is dead! He is dead, you understand, he is dead!' That's all. So strong, so violent as if you had killed him yourself and were proud of it. Why? I have reflected a lot on that, but maybe you can tell me better than I can tell you. My suggestion is: because he stole too much love from your wife, whose love you had to share with him, and now he keeps doing the same thing through his death and new birth. He is stealing your love. You are not able to share it, therefore you hate him and your hatred makes you blind!"

Pierre had no words any more. He just sat there, beaten, deaf, blind, almost unconscious. For a long time. He even forgot about the magnificent *masala dosai* in Madurantakam and the taxi sped on towards Madras airport.

Much later he took Raymond's hands into his own, once again, and started crying, once more. But this time it wasn't a cry arising from somewhere on the surface layers of his personality but from the friction and pain caused by the rending of a screen which had hung in front of the inmost sanctuaries of his being. His crying became the sobbing of a soul torn in two. Raymond held his hands very firmly, very strongly, as if to symbolically pull him out of the pit. Approaching Chinglepet, the last town before Madras, Pierre began to quiet down. He sighed deeply, at least five times. Then he just managed to say, "You go on from here in this taxi. In Chinglepet I'll take another taxi straight home. I must go there, right now. Stupid fool I am. My Kumar... my good old Kumar and my good young Kumar... My Sundari, my love... I must go back, right now!"

“Wait one second ! Am I going to Paris ? What am I going to do there ? Listen to stories of misery and death and contribute more stories of misery and death for the rest of my life ? I have discovered here in this country unknown treasures of light and love and knowledge of life and greater life. It laughs in the sun, in the wind, in the eyes of the children and even adults. Can I still live without it ? Driver, back to Pondy please, yes, right now !”



Shifting Frames

Carolus must have felt like someone who stutters so badly that it takes him fifteen years to say the one word he's had in mind all that time. Then the word bursts forth as an explosion and a liberation. He had not been stuttering but painting for fifteen years and now all of a sudden the word had found expression. "Painting" is not even the right word ; he had been struggling with matter, trying to conquer the world of expression by force, by cunning, by sweetness, by bribery, by hatred and love and what he had created was a series of pictures which were like question marks shot on to creation, in-depth-searches for meaning, living atmospheres of quest, analyses of the profoundest layers of being.

The moment came when, by some luck or destiny or who-or-whatever puts these things together so nicely, his paintings were hung in an exhibition right next to Carmen's works. He was stunned, utterly speechless, and when for the first time he looked at Carmen, he knew that she was going through the same experience of destruction and new creation, in rapid succession. They looked at each other and at their life's work hanging on those walls and knew that all the questions they both had thrown onto their canvases had found an answer in each other's works. It was mutual, it worked both ways. Fifteen lonely years on his part and almost as many on hers were sealed in a glance. There are those moments when long speeches and lengthy sermons are summarised in a single sigh. Such a sigh, arising from the feet, climbing through the knees, gaining volume around the

thighs and reverberance and depth in the throat, such a sigh, when it finally emerges, tells more about a person's life than a thousand-page biography. Their two sighs came simultaneously and said it all, including their Yes to each other, to each other's emotions, art, destiny, mind, soul and body. It married them more firmly than an army of priests or mayors could have done.

Without a word they began to live together, to share the same atelier, the same table, the same bed. It couldn't have been otherwise. But the main thing was their painting together which, in their togetherness, gained any number of dimensions. All their love, their sweetness, their understanding were expressed in colour and shape, but even more so in atmospheres and moods which became tangible entities on their canvases. They read each other as open books and though often not a word was exchanged for days on end, every second was undiluted communication.

Carmen knew it before Carolus himself, and even before the doctors became aware of it. She saw it in his painting, felt it, knew it and expressed her secret knowledge in a canvas from which Carolus could extract all the consolation he would need in his ordeal. He quickly realised that his cancer was terminal, but he saw in Carmen's painting a force conquering death, moving beyond the everlasting silence into a community of love in which there can be no barrier, no limit, no reduction. Holding on to this he insisted, against the doctor's advice, on creating one final painting. A self-portrait, Carmen knew, before he had even begun. It was a particularly intense time for Carmen, because she felt it was time for her to withdraw all the parts of her personality which had intermingled with his, so that he would once more be free to be himself, his own best self, to put just purely himself into his self-portrait without the extra dimensions of their relationship. She felt she owed him this, especially where

he was summarising himself and his life into this final act of self-giving. She created space and he knew it and appreciated it, for he had to explore the far corners of his total being and transfer the findings onto the canvas, and that required the maximum introspection of which a human being is capable. He was slightly worried she would experience it as a withdrawal from her but then he realised she was walking hand in hand with him in the cellars and attics of his being, watching but not interfering, checking her every vibration, unravelling every emotion, taking back every projection, every transfer. In the silent activity of their days and nights it was a heroic feat and they both knew it, facing life in its fullness in order to face death. She saw the real Carolus emerging day by day, he was not just painting his well-known and beloved face, but rather the vibration, the living power of his personality.

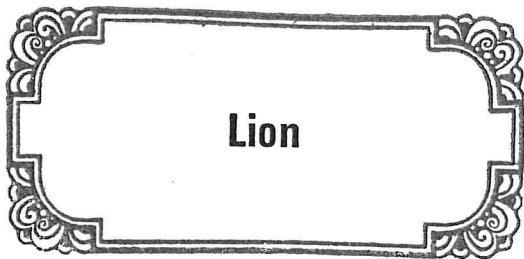
About half-way through, for there was a certain urgency since his physical force was diminishing as his inner clarity increased, she had a difficult moment: for looking at his painting, which they never discussed, only looked at and felt and shared, she saw herself entering: a vibration crept in which was not fully him. She hesitated to point it out to him, for perhaps he consciously wanted it like this. She checked all her emotions and feelings one by one and his as well, and she concluded that her vibration had entered through the backdoor. She knew it was not to be and she gathered courage, dipped her brush into the paint and approached his canvas reverently. He watched her coming close and when she had blotted out a line there followed a great moment of introspection in which he was face to face with a part of himself he had not dared to acknowledge. Then he smiled and she knew they had come through it. The painting became even more fierce and intense as the total Carolus became visible, uncontaminated, pure and real, without defence,

without escape.

They knew that though somehow it was his last painting, it was his first real one, absolutely real and true, alive and vibrant. Only now did they both come to understand what a painting is supposed to be: not an imitation of reality or a mirror of the known, but a discovery of the reality behind the reality and of the real thing which makes things move. In that way Carolus' self-portrait was becoming more real than the actual Carolus, for it expressed his soul, his destiny, his living force in a durable permanent way without becoming static; one felt as if he could live on, go on experiencing, keep being himself within that painting. Without saying a word about it she fully understood what he was doing, what he was trying, and she knew he could do it. He was going to remain with her, fully present, aware, conscious. He was only creating the vibratory setting in which he would be able to enter and be with her almost as tangibly as he was now, tangibly in another manner, that is.

Then it was completed. Arm in arm they stood looking at it for a long time, deep in silence, in complete harmony. Now she felt something stirring in the depth of their togetherness, as if something had come loose somewhere, as if a gentle breeze were blowing at the bottom of their souls. Then the breeze which blew through them increased slightly in force, steadily crescendoing to become a concrete inner movement; she saw how he was tearing himself away from himself, though not from her and then one intense moment followed, as if a climax, like a strong gust of wind, and suddenly an inner shift took place in him, a shift from the physical frame undermined by cancer to the painted frame which was all fresh and ready to receive him. She felt the soul-breeze passing and clung to his physical frame a moment longer, realising in the same moment that in

the depth and intensity of their love nothing had changed, except for the anchoring point in matter. Then she gently laid down his dead body and kissed his eyes closed and looked up at the Carolus who, though maybe not with his painted lips, but she wasn't so sure of that, smiled at her with all his being. And she, too, smiled and if she shed a tear, it was not one of sorrow but for a joy which surpasses understanding—even her own.



Five days already, and I still don't even know how to roar, not to mention how to "think, feel and be like a lion" as they so easily said. It's hard to get used to their methods anyhow ; in their brochures they didn't mention any of these approaches. There it all sounded so fine and inspired : "Exploring the extreme limits of man, both sides of him, above and below, and learning the language of pre-humans and post-humans alike ; expanding man's awareness of himself, taking in more and more forms of consciousness and behaviour ; learning through unlearning etc.," all the slogans one hears nowadays packed and crammed into "a course of three years, or more or less, depending on each candidate." The principles are sound, no doubt, and the aim lofty, but the method of the introduction seems a little crude. "Astronauts of Inner Space" is the title of the course and since I firmly believe that the only way to the universe is through consciousness and inner space rather than through those cumbersome machines, I subscribed, expecting a good deal of theory and practice of inner development and psychology of higher consciousness states. Instead, they didn't give us any introduction at all, not a word, not theories, visions or insights ; they just dumped the whole bunch of us, thirty-two in all, in some far-off forest—protected from "real" animals and prying eyes by a solid fence, made us undress, yes, down to our barest bottoms and then they told us only this : "Try to find out which animal you naturally relate to strongest. Be that animal in everything, in habits, behaviour, sounds, psychology and conscious-

ness." Five days of this nonsense and here I am lying in my den, tickly branches and rough leaves uncomfortably arranged into some semblance of a lion's den, hidden in the bushes, alone, utterly alone and miserable. We are of course not allowed to speak, to communicate or exercise any of the natural human interchange. They must be watching us from somewhere, everywhere, unseen, and it seems there is no fixed time limit, it all hinges on your finding "it", "the secret",—lionhood. Then you are taken out, to heaven knows what other far-off cruel place next.

It was rather embarrassing at first. We looked like a group of solid well-educated, highly civilised adults, all possessing at least one degree required to gain admission. People with a light in their eyes or some such idealism enveloping their heads like an aureole. Not just an average group of citizens; the aim as well as the requirements of the course were set too high for that. With a two-sentence introduction we had been literally thrown into the woods, leaving everything behind; yes, everything, except our bare skin and what happens to be inside it. It is not a sight designed to inspire, a bunch of denuded professors and bare-breasted educated ladies, lost to themselves and to each other. Especially when one after the other, pensive and meditative, we dropped down on all fours and began to crawl off among the trees like ugly overgrown babies. It's amazing how little nothing is. No language, no houses, no books, no light, no clothes, no food except the unsavoury plates they provide us with here and there and now and then to supplement what we are unable to dig up for ourselves, no protection, no watch, no exchange of words, no laughter—it drives you desperate and sometimes crazy. And for what? What do they think they are doing to us, except degrading and humiliating us.

Oh ! I had my hours of revolt, my days and nights of displeasure with them which almost grew into hatred—an emotion I had not really known before. Maybe beginning of something—does a lion hate ?

What do I know about a lion . . . I am a decent anthropologist with a good deal of research and some well-respected monographs behind me, forty-two years old, unmarried, rather common but idealistic as well and slightly romantic, a bit on the heavy side, but even that is straightening itself out after five days of creeping around on my hands and knees. Having come to the end of an intellectual cycle and seen enough of the "anthropos" in particular as well as in general I opted for a larger anthropology, which would take in the future race as well, the "man after man," to see if I could lay a finger on the next evolutionary step which is around the corner and . . . well, to see if I would qualify to be part of it. With these high expectations, all my pencils sharpened and my notebooks and index cards virgin white, I joined, only to find myself Beng Beng-Beng deprived of pencils and ideals, index cards and expectations. Wait, I have to roar a bit to keep in practice . . . "Oooooowahhhhh—Brruuuuuhhh . . ." Nothing gets scared of me or runs away when I roar, so I haven't got it yet.

A night is really long ; as soon as it gets dark it's all over, no light (anyhow nothing to read) and just what does a lion do all night long ? Oh, of course, he hunts at night and sleeps in the day. Clever idea, let me try it tonight. Now first for a drink at the pool. That's where we all meet at regular times, without words, of course. There are quite a few who do much better than I. The elephant begins to be like a real elephant ; with a gait not unreminiscent of the elephants I used to see in the circus, he approaches the water. His trumpeting is still weak but even that's picking up slowly. The she-frog is quite all right too, though it must be tiring to move around

like that ; still, she looks all the better for it. There are of course a few whom I can't even recognise yet—one of whom may be a giraffe but could also be a kangaroo, another who chirps like a bird but moves like a worn-out old wolf, and two or three others who have discovered themselves to be monkeys and have quite a lot of noisy fun together up in the trees. Just my luck, there is no lioness. I wouldn't mind some company, too ; the life of the King of the Forest is hard and lonely enough . . . Oh my ! I am the King of the Forest, it's only just now struck me, having been a lion for eight days. Why don't they respect and obey me ? Probably because I am a lousy and improbable lion. I should exercise more authority. They even make me line up at the foodplates. Just wait till they hear my next roar, than they'll scatter and know who I am . . .

My tenth night in the dark forest ; happily there is plenty of moonlight. It can't go on like this, I am not getting anywhere, neither to the after-man nor to the pre-man, our four-legged ancestors. Tonight I must review my situation. First of all I must stop hating them for having put me in this ridiculous situation—maybe they do have a point, there might be a few things I ought to learn out of this. I keep carrying all my old intellectual baggage around with me, day and night. Maybe I'll have to throw off a few of my ideas and ideals after all, with some old habits and values, morals and ethics. Does a lion have any ethics ? Probably only those inherent to his lionhood, in which case I had better delve into lionhood right away. Actually I can better start off by forgetting everything, forty-two years of upbringing and culture and learning ; anyway that's probably what they want me to do, to be empty and fresh and transparent for the next phase of the course. Throwing off, forgetting, unlearning ; let that be my programme for the next few days. This marks the end of my negative and reactionary phase, and the begin-

ning of my taking this whole thing seriously, which is already a big step for such a decrepit and disillusioned lion as me! From now on I'll be the King of the Forest, and they'll soon find out!!

I believe I am getting somewhere! My roars are becoming more frightening, already two or three "animals" ran away from me, and I even managed to fight my way to the head of the food line—my rightful place, of course. To those who resented this I showed my bare teeth and my terrible claws. My main worry now is that I am beginning to enjoy my lionhood. What I felt at first as a deprivation has now become a blessing: no newspapers, no telephones, no books or visitors, no interviews, duties, reports or board meetings, just the moonlight and the wind, the trees and freedom. No thought or idea or feeling needed about anything whatsoever, and frankly I find it nicer without them. The courage to be free... to stand naked and unprotected. Yes, they do have a point—though they put it rather crudely—for would not after-man, the next creature who will grow out of the existing race, find himself just as naked and unprotected in this old world? In many respects, there must be a similarity between what came before man and what will come after him, and that is of course what they are trying to bring home to us here. Actually it is quite clever how they manage to convey so much message in so few words. If all this is true, then I must begin now to play their game—our game—seriously. Anyhow, I realise there's no way I'll get out of here until I am a "real" lion. I have a feeling that some of our group have already succeeded and have been taken out of the forest, but it also looks as if some others have joined us. Latecomers, or a new class? Can't even ask them...

Yes! newcomers. And now I am waking up to my true role and coming closer to full lionhood, for one of them is a lioness! Unmistakably! She is an adept, she

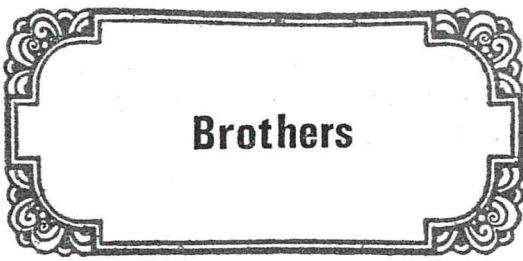
crawls around like a real wild one, roars beautifully and even scares away other bigger "animals". She doesn't scare me, of course, she evokes rather . . . uh . . . different feelings in me. Her den isn't far from mine, she must have recognised me. Maybe I am not doing so bad after all. I am now working on the more intimate aspects of lionhood and my aim is to get her to move in with me, or vice versa. I think this is a genuine aspect of being a lion—you see, I am beginning to think and feel like one already. I still don't have enough of that pride and arrogance which goes along with being the King of the Forest, but I shall give that some attention today.

Yes, she is going to be mine. Was it chance meeting in the middle of the night or did both of us have designs? Anyhow, she wasn't too reluctant, though she growled a bit at first—as a woman or a lioness. I am not sure, and I can't even make out to which one I am responding; let's stick to the theory that it's her as a female lion, just to be on the safe side. It's quite a field of exploration—not dealt with in any of my anthropology manuals—how to express and to return lion-appeal. We played it by ear, though it looked like she was the more experienced one. I won't go into all the details, beyond making a few basic observations. Any approach that looked humanly male was violently rejected by her, she tried to bring out the essence of lionhood in me. But the dividing line, I must admit in joyful humility, is rather thin. She was fierce rather than loving, but when we frolicked in the moonlight—actually it is wonderful not to have to talk, your range of expression automatically increases tenfold—she did have her tender moments, and even managed to transform the awkwardness which accompanies walking on all fours to a level of grace which, in that wild setting, became positively irresistible—I am now speaking as the lion, of course. There were no encumbrances of dress and other cultural paraphernalia, so we could let our animalistic

tendencies have their free play. One weak point is that she insisted on taking the lead and kept things pretty superficial. The total game she is apparently reserving for after we have moved in together. Even so, I am quite proud of my ferociousness and "ani-male" beastliness. If I am the King of the Forest and of all the animals, I ought to start with her. At least I did make a beginning.

Coming back from the pool an awful thought struck me: she is a newcomer! Why newcomers at this stage? Because she is one of "them" put into the game to provoke us, excite us, carry us on, spy on us or teach us something. That explains why she is such an adept at her role; she has done it before, she knows the tricks. It also explains why she was leading me on, always up to a certain point, then to start from another angle all over. Yes, she was definitely the leader and she led me on and cut me off and played with me, more than I with her. The bitch! One of "them" in our domain; now I really feel like a lion and my aggression is mounting. I am going to tear her to pieces tonight, or at least I'll sink my teeth her and give her a real bite.

But first let me have a little nap, actually I am quite exhausted after so much playing around. Then I can think over quietly the implication of my unmasking her as one of "their" accomplices. How dare they—I feel that old, already conquered hatred rising again. The intruders! Here is my den, let me just lie down and plot a bit. But what is this...? A little note. Words... That's against the game. Must be from her... A declaration of love? I open it carefully, my nerves on edge. Just a few words: "Maybe you are not a lion after all; try a hare."



Brothers

I have always felt my best friend Vincent to be quite a normal and happy being. He paints all right but that in itself doesn't make him anything exceptional. His mind runs along the customary, though more often not that slightly wild, patterns. His vital being, his life-centre, is strongly developed of course, for otherwise he could not paint with so much devotion, and very often his mental lattice is overgrown with the ivy of his life-force. This only serves to make him an interesting and warmhearted man, an artist, a real friend. His wife's centre of consciousness is much more in her head ; whereas he acts on feeling an impulse, she keeps a clear head and her feet planted firmly on the ground.

As for me, I am a bit of both ; I can feel along with her very strongly and can think along with her very nicely, and not infrequently I am called upon, during one of their heated all-night discussions, to settle some point of difference between them, an endeavour which requires able steermanship to guide the craft of their marriage between the wild waves of his impulses and the sturdy rocks of her opinions. By dawn I can usually leave them with a quiet heart at the foot of the altar of their love to perform whatever secret ritual of reconciliation the occasion inspires.

Last week she phoned me and said : "You are needed here tonight, more than usual. Something has crept in and I can't get it out, He has suddenly discovered he is Vincent van Gogh . . ."

". . . of course I am," Vincent assured us. "I've known

it all my life, but I didn't know I knew it, the knowledge was stuck somewhere inside me and now it has erupted."

I looked at his latest canvas. We were sitting in his atelier surrounded by easels, old-time couches, blobs of paints, and all the chaos that goes into creation.

"You must be joking," I said. "No painting has been further away from van Gogh's brightness and abundance than this gloomy, almost morbid piece."

"Ha, that's where you've wrong and where I've been wrong all my life. Do you think that in each of my incarnations I'd paint the same things all over again! What's the use of coming back again and again, if not to try it once more from a different angle. That's why it took me so long to see it; me too, I had expected that Vincent reincarnated would paint the same bright sunshine for all eternity."

"Then there is no way of knowing," Mary-Ann interrupted. "You could only make out your so-called continuity by some sort of identity. Just for argument's sake, we should be able to recognise something of the old Dufch Vincent in you or your works."

"By identity, that's what I, too, always thought. Until it suddenly dawned on me that it's not by identity but by contrast that those things are known. Roger, you believe in reincarnation, don't you?" he asked me bluntly.

"You know I do," I answered as bluntly, "but I am aware that there are certain rules to the game. I am not inclined to believe every idiot who claims to have been Napoleon or Madame de Pompadour. I believe there is a continuity, but I also believe that clear memories of past lives are rare, very rare, and if at all something manages to break through to the waking consciousness, it can only be a flash of the highest moments in a past life. None of the rubbish, no cheap theatre, only glimpses of the soul-reality beneath all the millions of irrealties which go into building a life . . ."

"But that's it exactly!" Vincent exclaimed, "That's just what I went through. For a split second I saw myself standing in front of a brilliant canvas full of sunshine and happy colour in a wide sunny landscape, which I was trying to catch in my painting . . ."

"A van Gogh perchance?" Mary-Ann asked.

"Definitively a van Gogh!" He sounded very sure of of himself. "But that's only half the picture, the other half being a sense of gloom, almost despair, flowing palpably through my veins. You can't imagine, so much contracted in one split-second experience. And then I knew the real Vincent van Gogh and his life's drama, and then I knew it was me! You want to know what the truth of him was? A lie! A big great gloomy lie, a sham. And if now I look again at one of his . . . of my . . . pictures I can hear, I can feel it shouting at me: it's a lie!"

"People seem to be ready to pay an awful lot of money for a lie like that," she said, unbelieving.

"See how the lie gets commercialised! Because modern society is as mad, as incoherent, as much decrepit as the crazy genius who created those wonderful pictures."

"Wonderful? But you said . . ." I was a bit lost.

"Of course wonderful, whole, composed, balanced, full of force, full of light and conviction. That's the lie. He had no right to paint like that. I . . ." he hesitated, whispered almost, ". . . I had no right to paint like that. And people have no right to buy that stuff. It should be destroyed, all of it, just like it destroyed me! . . ."

"Oh always so happy Vincent," I said after a long silence, "oh happy Vincent, so what? Are you going to go around with your axe to the greatest museums and exhibitions in the world and say, 'Sorry, do you mind if I smash these things to pieces, it was a mistake, a lie . . . lie . . .'" I ventured this in a lighter vein as a test of his sense of reality, at the risk of shutting him off and

losing the thread. To my relief and in proof of his basic sanity, he took up step hint and we joked for a while about asking instead for the profits, of buying up all the van Goghs in the world and organising a huge bonfire and so forth, so much so that Mary-Ann thought he had come out of his illusion at last.

"Actually," she tried, "who cares who you were; you are my Vincent and one of you is enough for me!"

"Ah, no, no, you won't get away with it so easily," he said and as he spoke that one sentence we felt, almost saw, something taking over again. "No, no, that's not the way out, that's not why I have come back—as Vincent again (how did my parents know?), again as a painter. I have to set right the lie! And you know what I have been doing all my painter's life, until today? Living and painting the same lie, but then the inverse of it." And we looked from the normally simple, happy, uncomplicated Vincent to his dark, gloomy, complicated paintings and we could almost see what he meant.

That night we didn't get any further, even though we went through lie and truth and more lie until well past dawn and breakfast.

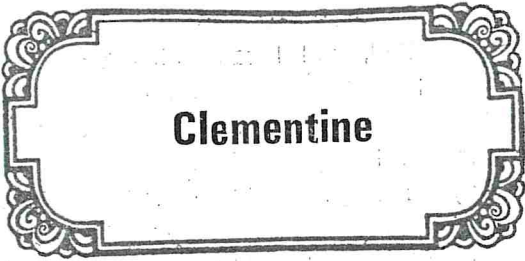
Mary-Ann and I had lunch together the next day, brain-storming on ways and means to shake him out of his identification, but at the same time considering the desirability of reinforcing it so as to bring out the best of the man and painter Vincent. We agreed that his experience was a genuine one which we should respect, but that it had to be separated from the identification with the other Vincent, the Dutch painter, and such high-brow amateur-psychological theorising as two developed minds can wallow in without in the least affecting the meandering life-forces—or whatever forces go into the making of an artist who experiences things.

While we drank our cups of tea, Vincent was drinking his cup of destiny and when I accompanied Mary-Ann back to the house, we found him in a bloody mess. While we had been building our castle in the sky, with that pride inherent in mental solutions, the two Vincents must have been engaged in an epic struggle and the earlier one must have won, for we found Vincent, our Vincent, husband and friend, lying unconscious at the foot of his easel with his ear cut off.

I have just now returned from the mental asylum where we were obliged to admit him, poor fellow. Damn it, with his head wrapped up in that big bandage he does look like van Gogh as he portrayed himself with his cut-off and bandaged ear. Physically he is all right and the doctors have assured me he will pull through. But as for his mind? Is he mad or am I? In these dark subterranean regions you don't know what to believe any more. The whole thing has been a blow to my linear concepts of man. Who is who in this world, and what do we know after all? Maybe Vincent did come back and has a mission in this life to set right something from his previous life, to grow one step further, to complete something.

I had decided, before I saw him today, to leave all options open, to walk in without any preconceived idea, to let flow whatever ancient or secret rivers flow through our lives and to keep my mind as silent as possible. It has changed my awareness of reality which has become both more violently alive and warmer. I have never before known myself like this. And when I stood at his bed side I looked at him with new eyes, with a new warmth, and I was overwhelmed with the feeling that this man was more than just a good friend to me, he was like my brother... Oh, never in my life have I loved so much as in that moment. Then Vincent looked

up at me and smiled, and I saw in his eyes that same something which I had seen when he discovered his so-called identity a week before. But this time I didn't remain an outsider, I went straight into his world, as if through his eyes I had entered into another time-dimension. And stretching out both hands to me he uttered the one word which made my old world collapse. "Theo ! . . ."



Clementine

Patrick crossed his legs again and his limp foot banged the seat in front of him, following the rhythm of the bus's jumping and jerking; uncrossing them again he crossed his arms instead, yawning all the way down to his navel. "See if I can shake hands with myself behind my back," he thought, but he didn't make it by far. He let his eyelids droop; sleep dangled in front of his nose like a withered carrot. He proceeded for a moment to envy the multitudes who can doze in any position, under all circumstances. Looking out of the window he saw the ten-thousandth replay of an already boring film; letting his gaze wander over the people inside the bus, he discerned not one item worthy of a passing glance. The same faces, the same clothes, the same every day again twice a day even, twice forty-five minutes; every day one-and-a-half hours wasted. "If only I had that one-and-a-half hours to myself, I could be a great poet," he thought. "No, I would be an inventor; what couldn't I invent in one-and-a-half hours a day, nine hours a week, 36 hours a month, 432 hours a year..." He yawned... and yawned again. "Why is it people yawn so much in trains and buses?" he wondered. "They look like caged animals when they roar—without the soundtrack. Must be our animal origin, our silent protest against being caught by civilisation: 'the call of the wild'."

Ah, something unusual, finally: a fly crawling through the abundant hair of a girl, a few rows ahead of him, across the aisle. He watched the fly, then watched the hair; only while watching the girl's neck did he realise that he had seen it hundreds of times before but never

really seen it. "Nice neck ! Beautiful, lovely skin indeed !" Would the fly make it down there to the plains ? No, it was still stuck somewhere in the dense forest. The skin again, the neck. "Not bad. Wish I were the fly, I would crawl down there, and down, and down . . . How come I never noticed that neck on such a great body ? . . . The blindness of boredom, not of love." He imagined being the fly and disentangling himself from the golden riches. Ha, there he landed in his imagination on the smooth skin, feeling the silky softness, enjoying the . . . What ?? ! Bang ! Oh ! crushed he was, the imaginary fly on the oh-so-real skin . . . She lifted her hand suddenly to rub her neck, just where he had landed. Funny ! he thought. And then he sat straight up in his seat as it dawned on him : the real fly hadn't touched her, it was still stuck in her hair, he was sure of it. Then why had she lifted her hand, why rubbed her neck ? She couldn't have felt the fly yet, so . . . she must have felt his fantasy fly ? Or perhaps she felt him gazing at her, his concentration ? Is an imaginary fly as itchy as a real one ? Can a gaze sting ? His boredom had flown out of the window and he was suddenly very alert.

Beneath her right ear a tiny spot of snow was visible ; her hair was pulled back, revealing a small mountain paradise. It was there that he now focussed his laser-attention creating the image of a fly. A perfect piece of skin, he could almost feel it under his myriad crawling legs as he proceeded to kiss it with his tiny insect-mouth when . . . Ah . . . she lifted her hand and with her fingernail she scratched the exact spot. Patrick almost laughed aloud and got quite excited. What a power ! In his imagination he could be a bird flying over the bus or even over the city, or an ant crawling into her sweater. Would it work only with her or with just anybody else as well ?

Directly in front of him he saw a huge bald spot which passed for a head. He encircled it a few times, searching

for a landing strip. Then he flew down with a thud and crept around a bit, getting the feel of this slippery mountain top. Let's dig a hole here, he thought, and he began to try to pierce the shiny crust with all of his legs. Immediately, a catastrophe: had he really been a fly he would have been crushed.

Patrick, with his capacity of being infinitely bored, possessed at the same time a systematic mind. He was a young man who would not only jot down some bright idea, but would be able to find it again when he looked for it six months later. He always remembered just where he had put his nail clippers. He now brought this capacity into play in his experiment. He tried the fly on children, who responded almost immediately; and people who were dozing or actually asleep often responded all of a sudden while waking up, sometimes minutes after the fact. The older they were the harder it was to get through; women were definitely easier than men, and younger women quicker to respond than older ones. Very soon he began to concentrate exclusively on girls and not only the fly, but other suggestions as well. One day he might signal to a girl something like, "Your hair is all messed up," and automatically the girl would begin primping her hair; or, "Watch out for the man behind you," and after some time the girl would begin to look around suspiciously.

Now Patrick began to look forward to his bus rides. Even while in bed he was training himself to focus his laser-beam, for he soon found out that for the more complicated messages, a more concentrated energy was required which sometimes had to be sustained for minutes on end. The fly-trick was easy enough, it worked almost instantaneously and he began to refer to it as the low-frequency beam. The medium frequencies were harder to achieve and he had to learn to maintain his concentrated focus for as much as ten minutes or longer without any letup. That took hard work, for the mind tends to

wander from one thing to another every ten seconds or so. The power of the higher frequencies he could only guess at—and dream about : what couldn't one do to a girl . . . make her undress right in the bus . . . force her to kiss some fellow of his choice . . . make her fall in love with him . . .

For the moment he concentrated on the medium frequencies. Considering his victims carefully, he finally selected the same girl with whom it had all started. She responded quickly and as desired, and, moreover, he liked to concentrate on her. She had something dreamlike about her ; before the fly episode he hadn't even noticed her but then, he had never really noticed girls before anyway. As a student who had to work at night in order to continue his studies he had worries enough and he had decided to postpone the entire matter of women until some later date. He felt that to do otherwise would mean that either his work or his study would suffer—and probably both, and that he couldn't afford just yet, except as a pastime in the bus. But then, why not spend his concentration on some girl whom he found attractive ? He now began to study his original specimen more carefully and soon he came to know her clothes, her habits, her hairstyles. Had he been an artist he could have drawn the line of her neck, the shape of her ears, every wave of her thick golden hair by heart, but always only seen from the rear ; he got to see her face only occasionally, whenever she would get down from the bus a few stops before his own.

Not knowing anything about the girl except what he could see from behind, he built up his own story about her, imagining that she was rich and loving, wise and full of humour. For the sake of gaining experience she condescended to do some modelling for the best studios in town. He conjured up the most romantic name he could think of for her ; Eileen, Maureen, Patricia, until after

several days he finally settled on Clementine.

He now began to suggest to Clementine that she remain in the bus for one more stop. He concentrated on this suggestion for at least fifteen minutes, that's to say, off and on, since his attention tended to drift and needed constant refocusing, but still he succeeded for at least half of that time. Right before her usual stop Clementine began to get nervous. She started to look around without noticing Patrick, lifted up her bag and then hesitated, looked at her watch, looked at the passing street scene, got up a few inches from her seat only to sit down again ; but when the bus came to a halt she suddenly jumped up and dashed out quickly. A failure ! Patrick thought, but still very successful.

Next day he played the same game on her. This time she became even more nervous and lifted her bag several times up and down, and when the bus came to her usual stop she went to the door, but hovered there and ... didn't get off ! Patrick wanted to shout for joy, but outwardly he showed no sign of victory. Three days later he got her to remain in her seat until even the next stop, and after that even her nervousness began to disappear : apparently she had simply changed her habit, or rather he had changed it for her. Maybe her work is closer to this bus stop than to the previous one, he thought, and she has easily rationalised her new habit. To test this out he now wanted her to get off at her previous stop but one. It took him almost two weeks of great concentration, but finally he got her to do it. She had shifted into yet another pattern which she maintained so long as he kept up the pressure. When he reduced the intensity or withdrew it altogether she was once again caught in the dilemma of which bus stop to choose, for the three patterns were now in conflict with one another.

Having experimented with Clementine for over a month, he now chose, for comparison's sake, another

girl and with great patience and scientific application he began the bus stop act all over again. This girl was by far not as attractive as Clementine. She was, in fact, slightly dull, probably worked in a grocery store in order to maintain herself and her aging parents on the edge of existence. Surely she was not brilliant and thus she was a good contrast to Clementine for experiment's sake. Patrick invented for her the plainest name he could think of and landed up with Jane.

It worked, but with much more hesitation on her part and the whole thing took much longer. Nor did he derive as much pleasure from this part of his research as he had with the golden-haired Clementine, who for her part had resumed her former habit of bus stop No. 1 when he abandoned her for Jane. He wondered why he had more luck with her, and a few days later he knew the answer: he had begun to like her and he did not have any such feeling for Jane. Actually, he admitted to himself, he missed Clementine while focussing on Jane. A beginning of love? of attachment?—would it not interfere with his scientific research? he wondered. Then he thought, what the hell, I do like her and I'd like to focus on her with whatever I have. After all, he amended his own thought, probably the experiment only works because I do like her. Less love, less result; more love, more result. He therefore began to allow his natural attraction for Clementine to follow its own course and by so doing the power and the warmth of his laser-beam were greatly intensified. She began to respond more easily to the simple tasks and instructions he beamed at her.

Of course, it couldn't go on forever in the impersonal way in which he had been playing this game with her. She began to assume a larger and larger role in his life, and now the difficulty was not in keeping her in focus but rather in putting her out of his mind while he was

supposed to be studying, working or doing something else. Actually the only place where he was not bored was on the bus, and he had to apply his newly acquired power of concentration in order to get through his study and his work. The little game had turned him inside out and he felt as if he were now faced with a major decision: either to continue the game and let "the woman" enter his life (and he was quite positive that he was on his way to making Clementine his woman) or to break it off right now, forget about her and continue his studies in peace. He knew somehow that he couldn't go on having it both ways, for his laser-beam wasn't quite wide enough to embrace both worlds.

For the next couple of days his two forty-five minute sessions were spent in focussing on this dilemma, in an attempt to exclude her from his mind; he even managed to not look in her direction. It was the famous old heart-mind conflict, animus versus anima, duty versus love, ying against yang, Narcissus contra Goldmund, and Patrick's beam of concentration was tossed back and forth for several days. On the fourth day, duty, upbringing, tradition, his father and his mind won and he sat back and sang a silent Halleluja.

Afterwards he was obliged to find some other focus for his boring bus rides and he began to apply his newly developed powers of concentration on the problems which arose in his study. He realised how he had indeed wasted his time, both before and during his Clementine period, but still he was grateful for the experience because now that he applied the same intensity to his studies, he made rapid progress.

So engrossed was he in solving a particularly intricate problem that he wasn't even aware that he had got off the bus until he found himself standing on the curb, and only then did he realise that he had disembarked one stop before his usual one. He looked around as if in a

dream, suddenly waking up to a frightening discovery. "The bitch!" he growled and began to walk the extra half a mile, simultaneously cursing and smiling.

Next day he was of course well-prepared to stay glued to his seat until his own stop. Stealthily glancing in Clementine's direction he didn't notice anything special. From the rear her back was still as attractive as ever. He returned to his problem-solving, firmly determined to get down at his own stop and nowhere else. But he couldn't really get his mind to focus; it felt as if there was some interference somewhere, some static criss-crossing his silence, a ray intersecting his beam. Shifting his focus slightly he set about concentrating, letting everything fall quiet so the music would stand out. And then he heard it, not in so many words, but in symbols, feelings, vibrations, he just knew what was entering, a strong suggestion of the same type he had been sending by the dozens to the girl. That is why he could recognise it, translate it into rough and hard words which would come down to, "I love you, you love me... I love you, you love me..." against the rhythm of the engine's drone. With amazement he saw this happening, somewhere in a hidden corner of himself, and then all the rest of his being cried out, "No! No! No!" Looking straight at the girl he suggested, using his most powerful beam, "Stop it, I don't want it, I don't love you, lay off!" So intent on this message was he that even after she had got down without a sign, a glance, a gesture, he was not even aware that the bus had gone past his own stop. Now, doubly confused, he had to backtrack all the way, not smiling this time, only cursing. Rather, in the far background there was the trace of a smile, for after all, how could he not enjoy being the catcher caught? Nevertheless, he kept focussing on the big "No" for the rest of that day and the next couple of days as well, trying to purge her from his system. It was a battle of

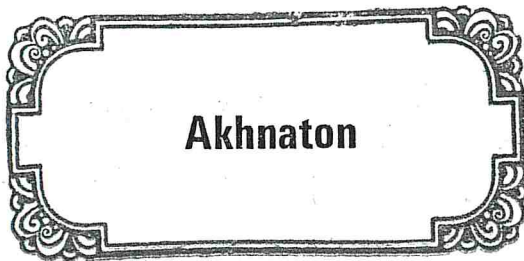
wills, unnoticed by anybody else in the bus, though he was amazed that anybody could fail to notice the sparks.

Of course, he knew he was going to lose, even though he held out for several weeks. No ying without yang, he thought bitterly, no animus without anima, no chance for a poor old male like Patrick against the onslaught of feminine might and one day, there he went, he felt it coming, he knew he wouldn't be able to resist. They got down at the same stop and he followed her from a distance. He felt her pulling him like a magnet, the same old words still reverberating through the vaults of his soul, "I love you, you love me . . . I love you, you love me," and already his "No" had become a "Well" . . . and then grew and turned inside out and jumped upside down and changed from icecold blue into bright-hot red and emerged finally as a big YES of his whole being. "Yes, I love you, you love me . . ."

With Patrick in her wake she wove her way for some blocks off the main road and then entered a shop ; judging by the confidence with which she entered it, she must have been working there. Patrick hesitated in front of the shop window, wondering whether he should go inside : there would be other people, how could he declare himself . . . For five, ten minutes he stood there, trying to make up his mind. Suddenly she came rushing out and whispered to him, "Get away, you fellow, why are you following me ? I know you have been watching me for a while. I don't want anything to do with you. Get away ! or . . ." And she slammed the door in his face.

That evening she was not in her usual seat on the bus. Still confused and downcast, Patrick sat there wondering how it could all have been an illusion, all those hours of focussing, all the music of love, all the pulling and drawing, all the sparks and fireworks of the last couple of weeks. All imagination, all waste, one immense self-deception . . . He sighed a lengthy sigh, one of those deep sighs reserved

for the most critical moments of a lifetime, and then he sat straight up . . . He seemed to hear the inner chant again, "I love you, you . . ." He couldn't believe it, she wasn't even on the bus, it wasn't possible ! He fell still and listened, empty, quiet. It was coming through pretty clear all right, no doubt about it. He looked around. She wasn't there and nobody else gave a sign of anything either. He began to focus on the direction from which it was coming. Everything fell away within him, he listened with his whole being, tuning into that wordless, endless litany of love. Like a living radar he scanned the bus. Then he got it . . . how could he have been mistaken ? . . . he smiled and cried and cursed and sang all at the same time. The music was coming from Jane.



It's no joke to live face to face with all the Egyptian Pharaohs eight hours a day, seven days a week. There they stand all in a row, along one full wall of my huge museum hall ; all the Ramseses, Akhnatons, Tuth-thises and Tuth-thats ; stone, monumental, enormous, silent, and so awfully present. As a museum custodian there is no escape for me, I just have to remain there, in the hall, all the time, to watch and observe but nothing else, not even to guide or explain.

The first few weeks were overwhelming ; I could hardly make it through the whole day, beneath the weight of all those centuries alone—for there are but few visitors and most of them leave in a hurry, almost instinctively driven out. Often I hear them sigh when they reach the door. But I must remain, hands behind my back, and go forth under the gaze of those giants, between mummies and art pieces, unidentified cold objects and undeciphered hieroglyphs. Not infrequently I used to catch myself looking over my shoulder when, startled, I thought I heard a sigh from somewhere up there, from one of those petrified stone smiles, or a faint chuckle from a sarcophagus. In my imagination's eye the whole chamber sometimes became alive, charged with an eerie presence as if all the statues and mummies were conspiring.

After some weeks I got a bit used to them and was less afraid and I began to sort of talk back to them, and when I felt some backtalk coming from one of the mummies I was brave enough to bend over and threaten him.

But after my fertile imagination had played itself

fully I began to get bored. They didn't talk or chuckle or smile at me anymore, and the room became simply a big tomb, in which I might well have been a corpse myself. Eight hours a day became a very long and tedious torture.

Once I had fought myself free from the presences and powers in the hall, I finally got time, plenty of time and nothing but time, to concentrate on my studies. In the daytime work as a custodian I earned enough to pay for a night course in electronics, at which I have now become fairly advanced. Of course, I couldn't take my books along to the museum, but in my mind I went through the lessons, problems, diagrams, and articles over and over and now it's I who smile at all the Ramseses and Akhnatons and chuckle when I shuffle past the mummies; they may know something, but at least in electronics I was their Pharaoh. And so I was living in two totally different worlds simultaneously, eight hours a day, seven days a week.

Until one day they collided! Ancient Egypt and the computers and diagrams and electronic gadgets. That's to say, I shortcircuited: the Pharaohs became huge computers and the computers became mummies with red and green eyes lit up and I found myself walking through a madhouse of the living-dead and dead-living eight hours a day. It took me almost two weeks to sort things out and draw the lines again: Pharaohs on one side of my brain, computers on the other. And then I suddenly saw the joke . . . !

And I laughed for several days and amused myself tremendously—though I was obliged to keep as straight a face as I had in my boring or crazy period. And I played and connected and animated and dreamt and had the time of my life, eight hours a day, and even more in the evenings, for now I let the Pharaohs and mummies peep over my shoulder.

And I laughed and studied and invented and

played. I would henceforth refuse to be bored even for a second in that big hall, I assured myself. I went over the various possible connections and combinations many times and though there were any amount of extremely funny and daring ones, I had to choose the most unobvious and modest one so as not to be found out. I selected Akhnaton for my first experiment. The equipment wasn't very sophisticated so I could easily manufacture it myself.

I waited in amused tension for my first victims. An elderly couple I allowed to pass unharmed, some children as well. Then they came, apparently newly wed—and he was showing off his knowledge. Perfect! When they came to stand in front of Akhnaton they looked up at his face, towering many feet above them. At that moment I pressed the button in my pocket and for a fraction of a second the far-away but extremely clear remote-controlled little spotlight flashed on his right eye. It gave a definite impression that he was winking. I watched. They stared. At Akhnaton. For a long time. Silence. Then they looked at each other and back to Akhnaton and again at each other until she grabbed his arm and they fled past me through the door. Only then did I allow myself a little smile.

I reckoned that I could do such a stunt only a few times without being found out. In all, I was able to do it only five times. My final performance was my best. My victims consisted of four student Egyptologists from some foreign university. I let them carry on their conversation and listened closely. All kinds of historical information I let pass. There followed a silence and then they began to exchange their experiences, especially about the strange living power which the ancient Egyptians seem to carry even now through the ages. "Look, for instance at Akh..." and when they all looked at him, Akhnaton winked. Deep silence. Each of them had seen it, each

grew pale. One of them stumbled towards a stool, mumbling, "... the curse ..." The others held on to each other and remained staring upwards. I wondered if I should press the button again but decided against it. The "mysteries" are most mysterious when they stand by themselves. "It was HIM ..." one of the students whispered. "He lives ..." "He knows ..."

Then all four of them lined up in front of Akhnaton and in unison, as if seined by a common intuition, made a deep bow. "You have chosen us, O Great King Akhnaton," one of the students spoke, "and we will choose you for our life's work ..." and they sat down on the floor and stared up at him in silent adoration.

After more than twenty minutes one of the students stood up and addressed the Pharaoh, "Give us one more sign, Oh August One, and for ever we will be yours!"

Now I had the power over the lives of these four scientists at my fingertips. It was too delicious. I pressed. With an abundance of tears they bowed and kissed the huge feet of the statue and without a glance at me filed out of the room, still crying like children.

It scared me a lot. This was too much responsibility, making and breaking lives. It was only supposed to be a joke, wasn't it?

My next experiment was meant to be more innocent. Since I am specialising in miniaturisation, it was a very simple task to build a tiny electronic taperecorder into one of the mummy cases, whereby the sarcophagus served as a loudspeaker. I had concentrated on deep full sounds with a reverberating echo. Again I had my remote control and I toyed expectantly with the button in my pocket.

Some young people came in who weren't too serious about any of it. The boys made some funny remarks about the big statues and the girls giggled. "Oh, look here," one of the girls cried out, and they all rushed to my mummy and, arms around each other's shoulders, the

whole group bent over the sarcophagus. I listened closely and when one of the boys said, "Oh, the poor fellow . . .," I pressed my button and a deep sound echoed, "...ellow..." which sounded just like "Hello!" It kept echoing for a little while—"ellow...ello, hello..." They all jumped back in confusion and looked at each other and at the tomb. The girls grabbed the boys and the boys grabbed the girls and tightly intertwined they snuck out, not even daring to cast a glance at me. I knew then that I could never be found out, because nobody would openly admit to having seen a Pharaoh winking or having heard mummies speaking.

I did it a few more carefully selected times, but in the process I became aware that my attention had shifted considerably. What I had been doing as a prank slowly grew in my scientific mind into a distinct possibility. Having mentally played out all sorts of crazy fantasies like computerising the Pharaohs and robotising the mummies, I began to seriously consider the link between old Egypt and electronics. This concept took on a new momentum when one day I happened to have in my pocket a mini-sonoriser which I had built myself. This tiny machine emits a whole range of sounds which are inaudible to the human ear. It must have been on an auspicious wavelength that day, for when I happened to pass an "unidentified cultus object," lying in a glass case, the object suddenly responded and emitted a sound. I jumped half a metre into the air and then laughed and laughed; caught at my own game! But from that moment on I began to take it very seriously and the hall became my laboratory. I worked with miniature instruments, my hands in my pockets and a straight face.

First I tried all the wavelengths of my sonoriser on all the statues, mummies and other objects. Of course the mummies, having been living beings and highly developed ones at that, responded most vividly: they

hummed and whistled and almost whispered, and after some time I became so proficient at adjusting my tuner that I could almost make them hum a tune. Of the statues, obviously, it was my friend Akhnaton who was most full of music and sympathetic response. But the "cultus objects" were even more amazing. I almost began to believe they were not cultus objects at all but tiny computers. I became confident that with enough study and ingenuity, I could produce an instrument capable of such perfect tuning that it would allow them to talk. And then there were the hieroglyphs! Each one was emitting a different sound, and then I understood that each one was rather a musical notation than a script... It might not be so hard to let the walls talk and sing too!

The game was growing far beyond me, and I knew that one day I would need help, that I would have to share my secrets...

Akhnaton forced the issue in no uncertain terms. I had been refining and expanding the range of my sonoriser and had it linked up, through my underwear, with a "Waver" in my other pocket, a gadget I was developing which could emit and also measure all sorts of sound waves. At a moment when I wasn't expecting any visitors I had turned it on high, and I was nervously making the rounds. I knew it was a bit strong. As I was passing Akhnaton I turned the knob up another notch as if in a silent salute, and it must have exactly corresponded to his wavelength; for with a tremendous roar and an enormous tearing sound the statue was jerked off the wall, torn loose from its granite background, just as if it had suddenly stepped into the hall. I don't know who was more shaken, he, or I, not to mention the very foundations of the museum. From all sides people came rushing in and stared at the colossus with open mouths. When the director of the museum came running in, he stared for a second at the scene and immediately sent

everybody out, ordering the entrances sealed and sending at once for the Egyptologists, as well as the Board of Directors.

The Board were lined up on one side of my friend Akhnaton and the Egyptologists on the other. They stood in silence for a long time. Once my initial fear had left me I began to enjoy the drama and was in the process of deciding whether to remain hidden or to confess. Now the director stepped forward and looked in turn at each one of the directors and all the scientists, and then he said : "A thousand dollars for a clue !"

Greed must have thrown the balance of my pros and cons and slowly I walked to the centre, bowing before Akhnaton before I turned to face the firing squad.

"Gentleman," I said quietly, "I am responsible. And if you would be kind enough to sit down and grant me one hour of your attention, I will make a clean breast of all my mischief. Then you will decide . . ."

Not knowing what else to do they sat down on stools and benches and on the floor. No professor ever received an audience of such concentration as I reviewed the conflict of my two worlds in great detail, the Egyptological world and the electronic one, and narrated how I had begun playing and frightening people. The episode of the four foreign students had the scientists rolling on the floor with laughter and the Board exchanging excited whispers. But when I came to the "real" part of my research, where I could make the mummies sing, the walls speak and cultus objects chant, I knew I had them. Even the professors among them whispered, "unbelievable," and "... finally the break-through ..." and I felt their admiring glances intermingling with the Board members' anger. I went on and on unperturbed and finally I pulled the sonoriser and the waver out of my pocket and showed them some low-key effects, carefully evoding any full blasts. "And that is," I concluded, "how

Akhnaton walked."

The director, I could feel it, had been working himself into a frenzy and when I finally concluded he jumped up and shouted, "You're fired!"

But the professor of Egyptology got up quietly and with a broad smile shook hands with me and said, "You're hired."

The Art Of Dying

There was the pain and there was the panic. The former one all the time, varying only in degrees of intensity; the latter as a deep background of anxiety, fear and stress. A doctor can say it so easily, "Three more weeks to live," but for the patient, the victim, it is a condemnation, an ordeal. There you are lying on your back, everybody around you tied up in knots, everything around you slipping away, to be forcibly surrendered, abandoned. You catch your mind going on with its plans . . . next month I'll . . . and then remember that next month you'll be dead. Dead . . . DEAD !

Jeremiah was only forty-seven, and he had one more week to live. His wife and two sons came to see him daily, but even that was sheer torture. What could they say to him, he to them ? One more week . . . Talk about the weather . . . Bah ! the neighbours . . . a new film, about their studies . . . But then what ? About the fact that he was going to die ? . . . About his pain ? his panic ? Tension, sadness and tears, sometimes hidden, sometimes flowing freely and openly, constituted the major part of their conversations.

Six more days to go, give or take one or two either way and then . . . dead ! So abstract when it concerns someone else, how often you read and hear about it. This one died, that one died, so many dead here, so many victims there. But when it happens to YOU . . .

"Why you, of all people, Jeremiah ?" his wife had exclaimed yesterday. "Such a healthy, happy, wonderful man whom everybody loves. So on top of everything, so full of life and joy and . . . and . . ." the rest flowed away

in tears . . . "and so . . . so alive !" So alive, yes, with only five more days to live.

Today the doctors came and went without a ray of hope or light, the nurses had done their duty in a loving routine ; he was lying down again, facing it alone. All around him blackness and darkness, in front as well as behind—his life, his achievements . . . what did they all mean, with only five more days . . . who cares, who CARES, WHO THE HELL CARES . . . and once again tears of helplessness welled up inside him.

With moist half-closed eyes he battled once more with life and death, but then something happened to his tears—a sparkle from somewhere, so playful and tender and happy that he wiped away his tears with his big white towel and looked around. It was nothing. A ray of sunlight had landed on the glass of water by his bedside and reflected it in his eyes, the tears adding the sparkle. Nothing. But everything. Jeremiah almost smiled. Almost. Actually, he did smile. He really smiled. And pulled himself up a bit. And looked around the room and wondered to where the blackness had fled. That little ray, reflected, had broken something, a black spell he had been under.

And for the first time since the doctor had uttered his judgment and condemnation, now a good two weeks ago, Jeremiah could look at his situation from a larger distance. He saw himself on holiday, playing and running along the beach with Beatrix and his two fine sons, laughing and jumping, full of energy and vitality, of the joy of life. And he saw himself in his sports car, racing down the boulevard to an appointment, to his office, to a restaurant, back home, content, fulfilled, happy and full of zest. And he saw himself the way he knew and liked himself best, as an energetic man who tried to stay above things, someone aware of the major movements of his life, aware of his awareness of life. During an earlier

crisis he had discovered "consciousness" to be one of the most intimate and all-determining factors of life, and since that moment of discovery he had tried to live consciously, awake, aware, observing, with it all, in it all, but above it all—to keep a station outside life and its rhythms from where he could witness his own reactions to people and events. He had fallen away from that station again and again and climbed back to it, only to fall once more, but for some years now he had managed to keep a fairly steady foothold there, in life but not of it, in the events and flows and movements, but always watching, observing, witnessing as well.

Until that fatal day when the doctor had spoken those dooming words; then something broke, he fell, he lost sight of his station and became the black cloud which had entered his life. He became the ailing body, with only a few more days to live. He became identified with the sick Jeremiah instead of remaining the full Jeremiah who happened to be either healthy or sick, strong or weak, succesful or a failure, this or that, high or low, little did it matter. The tiny ray of reflected sunlight restored him to himself, and it was as if something in his whole body lit up and all his cells reflected that tiny ray and all of a sudden awoke. Finally back in his station of life beyond life, awareness beyond awareness, his consciousness relocated the Jeremiah whom he knew and liked best.

Two weeks lost, he now realised, two of the most important weeks in his life, which should have been the two most beautiful ones. Stupid fellow, he cursed himself, unconscious, weak, wasteful fellow! But then the consolation dawned on him: five more days to go! Not to live, but to die, which is the most intensive moment of one's life, second only to being born. And now he knew he could be living the best moments of his life, if he so chose. He straightened up a bit further and looked once again about the white and sterile room, looked at the

sun shining outside and at the glass of water which had transmitted to him that happy spark, and he picked up the glass and sipped from it as if to absorb that light in all the systems of his body and then he spoke, almost aloud, "I so choose!"

He relaxed again, he closed his eyes and thought, "So far so good, I have tried to live consciously which is not easy, but now how do I set about dying consciously? Is there such a thing as a 'living death', a conscious ending? And if there is, then how to do it? Where to start? It's too late for a lengthy study on the subject, or any consultation, and who would know anyhow? Well, the only way to learn to live is from life, so I guess I'll have to learn to die from death."

He slept over it for an hour or two and when he awoke he began to look at it seriously. First item on the agenda, he decided, was to investigate thoroughly how the subtle threads of consciousness are interwoven with the heavy mass of the body. "Let's not do it all at once," he thought, "let's start with a tiny part, let's start with the left foot." He placed himself comfortably on the bed and stuffed a pillow under his left foot, as if putting it under a microscope—or on the altar. He tried to enter his foot with all the conscious energy at his disposal, directing it away from his head, neck, shoulders, arms and elbows, chest, belly and legs, down through his knee into that one foot. His foot began to scintillate, to feel warm and pleasant and now Jeremiah tried to relax it fully, as if to say to each separate nerve and muscle, "Let go, boy!" It sort of worked, he felt, but he had to try it several times for not all muscles were equally willing and obedient. At last he felt his foot totally relaxed and under control.

"And now," he announced to the various parts of the foot—so many separate parts, he discovered—"now a general rehearsal for death." (A good place to start,

he realised deep down, a foot may not mind dying as much as some other parts of me !), "There we go . . ." And now he began to withdraw his consciousness systematically from each and every part of his foot, even separately from each part of every toe, very slowly, very carefully, sometimes losing the thread and having to begin all over again. To let even one foot die might take an hour, he realised in the end. "Shall I have that much time for my whole body when the hour comes? Better I should start with the diseased parts, the painful parts first? No! Let me first try the outlying areas, just to get the feel of it!" While the consciousness slowly moved back up his legs, he felt he really had left his foot behind, emptied of feeling and awareness and for all practical purposes dead.

He allowed the consciousness to flow back into the various other parts of his body and slightly outside it, but then needed a good rest. Dying is quite strenuous, he concluded to himself with a smile—a smile which his wife glimpsed as she quietly opened the door. It would be nice to relate that hour of her visit in detail, actually it should have been taperecorded for it really was an event. Beatrix's tears were of sadness one moment, and of an untapped joy the next. The most important portion for our purpose is the one where Jeremiah asked her and his sons to assist him in the art of dying by letting him go, by not clinging, not holding parts of him back through their sorrow and grief. He asked them to train themselves in death—his death—too, by trying to transform the natural sorrow they would feel during the next four or five days into joy, so that in the final moments they could celebrate the feast of death together as a culmination of their wonderful life as a family. If living is an art, then why not dying too, he reflected.

That day and night and the next day he experimented

with all the easier parts of his body, his hands, knees, his buttocks and shoulders, and he gained quite some proficiency in his newly learned art of dying. But there remained the most difficult parts, those which normally fall outside the range of our awareness—the autonomous functions: how do you enter your spinal cord and its marrow, and how do you again get out? How about the liver and the kidneys, not to mention the glands, and ultimately the brains? He more and more discovered the immensity of the problem, the complexity of life and—of death. He had to select his areas of work carefully, just for training's sake, and for some hours he worked on his bloodstream, flowing red and rich and conscious throughout his system, into all the cells of his body, then slowly withdrawing his conscious energy from the streams and rivers and channels and rivulets, as if stepping ashore to watch it go by, following its own course, where it might as well flow or not.

Then, in the middle of the night (why should he waste time sleeping, except for an occasional breather after a strenuous exercise, for he had an eternity of rest just around the corner) the thought struck him, "Why not work on the disease in my body, the degenerative forces in the system which, unchecked and uncontrolled, will carry me to my end!" For the first time he looked those powers or destruction right in the eye and he shuddered. He spent an exhausting part of that night and the next morning engaged in a great battle between his accumulated life forces and the forces of degeneration which were rapidly eating up his body. Even if he could manage to identify with them, would he be able to hold them in check or force them to withdraw? He fought and battled, encountered and tried to penetrate, only to discover that it was too late: he would need much more time and training for that. If only he had started two weeks earlier, or even before that; when the disease

first came to be noticed, he might have managed but now there was not enough time. Then he realised that it was his own stupidity and denseness, his own fear and negativity which had condemned him to death. He should have listened to the doctor's verdict with a smile and begun the battle straight away, then he might even have reversed the process. Now nothing remained for him but to learn how to retreat with honour.

Retreat to . . . where ? That became the next problem once he had finished blaming himself again for his waste of two weeks, a loss, a collapse of consciousness which he had now to pay for with death. Retreat to what, to whom, to where ? He reflected on this for a long time, using up time which was becoming shorter and more precious every minute. When he withdrew his life energy from his foot or his shoulder, he withdrew it into the rest of his body. But what if you withdraw it from the body itself, then where do you go ? In a flash he saw the play. It was exactly that point which he had been aware of for many years now, that station above and beyond the life's currents, the point of the witness from where he used to observe his own life and energies and movements ; in it, but not of it, a station outside life and its ebb and flow. He had built up over the years a fairly easy line of communication with that witness, the one stable point behind the myriad fleeting ones. He now began to see it in a new light, as a receiving station for all the currents of energy and streams of consciousness which he so far succeeded in disentangling from the total Jeremiah event now immobilised on the bed.

He changed his tactics and began to widen and strengthen the communication channels with the witnessing point, which became the point of accumulation around which he tried to rebuild as much of his personality as he would be able to preserve—or found worth preserving. The alternative, he intuited, would be to fall apart

at the moment of death, the life and mind and body-energies scattering throughout the universe. Holding oneself together consciously in an integrated pattern would afford a greater chance of converting the last giant step into the first new step of the next cycle.

That conscious point outside—though very much inside—became for Jeremiah his new abode. Even as he experimented with his withdrawal techniques on some part of his body, he shifted the liberated energy towards that point which grew all the time stronger, wider, more elaborate and total. Rather than a single point it became a pattern, assuming more and more the pattern of the physical Jeremiah but for the strictly physical elements. He began to identify himself more and more with it and with only two or three more days to go, he reached a point in his process of transfer when a dialogue took place between his old form on the bed and his new form loosely linked to it but able now to begin to stand on its own legs in a more subtle reality—just behind the denser one in which disease is disease and death is death and that's it. He felt less and less inclined to leave his new home of bliss and, firmly stationed there, he tried now to pull whatever worthwhile energies were still attached to the old frame away from it and to integrate them into his new pattern, a pattern which was growing increasingly into a personality.

The heart-energy was in fact the only flow which still remained between the old Jeremiah and the new one. He had not done much work on that area yet, leaving it for last, knowing that its withdrawal would cause the final break—"It would be fatal!" he smiled to himself. When Beatrix and the boys came to visit him again he decided it would be better to communicate with them from his newly gained position. Well, to "communicate," as he soon enough found out, wasn't so easy anymore, for he had already withdrawn too many elements and anyhow

the old sick body was too far gone to make "normal" communication feasible. He looked at that possibility for a while and then decided to try his best. He entered into his former frame with as much joy as it was possible for the frail but firm channels to bear and began to experiment on how to express joy, lots of joy and bliss in the physical thing on the bed, hoping they would receive the message. He entered the head and worked on the mouth and the eyes; he entered the arms and hands once more in a gesture of farewell and made them respond to bliss, to express beauty and surrender and joy beyond joy. He noticed how Beatrix and the boys drawing close around the bed were absorbed in watching him intensely and how they definitely were catching some of the streams of love and light he was trying to transmit through the body and into the room. "How beautiful!" he heard them whisper as he succeeded in creating out of the old material the warmest and fullest smile in a totally relaxed and peaceful face. He moved his hands once more as in a farewell greeting and again they responded by taking his hands in theirs. He then tried to fill his closed eyes with presence, peace and power and when he knew he was in them as much as he ever could be he opened his eyes once more and looked at each of them in turn. It nearly blasted them. His youngest son whispered, after a long silence of linked joy, "Now go in peace, daddy." He pulled everything he had ever been and was and ever would be into his eyes, two burning coals of light and strength, let it hover there for a moment and then closed those eyes, quickly withdrawing everything through the now well-known and firmly established channels towards the new shape.

And this time he took everything along, pulling the final traces of awareness out of his heart and his brain, and cut himself loose from himself completely, and now he stood there, alive, total, deeply aware, looking at the

three of them—the four of them. Tears shone in their eyes, but tears not only of pain and sadness, he knew, and he thought he had managed to convey at least something from the other side, enough to let it grow in them.

One last time he lovingly looked at Beatrix and his two boys, then with a smile which summarises deathless life Jeremiah stepped through the closed door and with confident strides he moved into the tunnel of Light.

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INDIAN CREATIVE WRITING IN ENGLISH

