

A SUGGESTION OF COLLECTIVES : NOW THIS.

In an earlier examination of the papers documenting the analysis of P. Schlumper a character appeared out of the blue under the pseudonym ‘Scarface’ to explain why the artist wanted to like **THIS** analysis the way he wanted to like a drawing when he’d finished up making it. So **NOW** there has been a lot of rubbing out to find somewhere to put the present because in here the story gleaned from the file is made to fit into each chosen collective notion no matter where that is & who is in it. The narrative plainly appears constrained in this monotony & shoots off all over the place whenever it can. So why was this slenderest of threads chosen? Because the collective nouns are a category with no current use & with never a thought of being used their inhabitants can appear out of nowhere instantaneously & troop off just as quickly having done nothing. So each time all the participants are herded into a fantasy space (all those bare interior spaces are the page) proper only to one group of things, or events of the analysis, where everything else is shut out, automatically, quick as a flash, they are in role. That is their kind of freedom: as contents of a non-existent present.

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Catching hold of **A ROPE OF APPEARANCES AND DIS*****ANCES** and by running along the river bank to a knoll of higher ground & launching herself out in an arc over the river on the rope dmu-t'ag tied to a tree branch & on the return to the same bank taking a few more faster steps while at the same time sliding the rope a few feet through her hands increasing the radius & again launching her body out in an arc over the river until after six or seven repeats gaining momentum the arc was far enough out for her to let go of the rope & land in a heap on the narrow strand of shingle of the opposite bank: Anguine Sakini arrived back letting out a startled cry of pain on impact. 'So much for a soft landing in this meat market.' She said to a totally uninhabited winter landscape, as blank as a white tablecloth can be. (Provided the still-life has plenty of utensils including an aluminium pot & fruit (a dish filled with large gooseberries) on it soaking up the colour).

"What did she expect? Easy street." The Wolf scowled at the analyst through an open window to hurry up for his go. Although the setting was familiar or possibly mundane, indistinguishable from a fairytale, the content was opaque. What were a well-endowed King, an endearing model, an endearing Miss Z., a talented but penniless artist, several honest rogues, a Queen (up to no good) up to? The Wolf scratched an ear. Whenever he took up his designated position at the cudgels something went rapidly backwards & wrong. It wasn't the present; it wasn't the past but it was difficult to hit.

"Are you asking me to try & do away with things that appear from nowhere in the content; this phantom Wolf, for instance, that you say I give a voice to, & the connoisseur silently contemptuous, then you say I will automatically have loosened the knot & lose

the problem of relating to them. And then together we would be able to see where & what that could lead to . . .” It wasn’t so much a suggestion from the artist to the analyst as a reverie out aloud. Perhaps even a hope for as she listened Dekobra pursed her lips sternly & almost began to explain that the very constriction he was posing the nebulous thought against was there in the succession of ‘loosen’ & ‘lose’. Popping the ‘o’s, she wrote in her notes glancing at the artist, does not help to untie the knot.

“How can I stop them appearing? Rub them out.” Wondered the artist in the same mode.

“When they seem drawn to me.”

Dekobra sighed & at that almost imperceptible sign the artist shuffled up ready to leave.

“A useful ploy in the resistance to power is to transform into something small.” Said a clear voice coming from far away as he strode towards the brown varnished door. Or was it very near taking its own advice?

“It beats me.” Said the Wolf looking over his shoulder knowing that a stick could become one of those things that might appear out of nowhere on its way back.

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Sakini remembered that sometimes on those exceptionally hot days of summer the shingle bank became a beach for all the children of the village to swim off. Normally Claudie Clockwork came too & masturbated in the willow copse.

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It was the model Red’s turn to have a swing on dmu-t’ag or it would have been if that altogether odd person hadn’t pushed in & grabbed the rope. “Ladies before Gentlemen, I think is the phrase.” Said this newcomer still mystified by the gender arrangement of this

vicinity (no that was for Vicuna) neighbourhood (no that was for horses) area (no that was a Finnish Christian name) place ('i' before 'e' except after 'c'. Not a fish must be right) while she double checked, abstracted, her hand was frozen on the rope.

“Hurry up if you must blatantly shove in.” The model grumbled idly appraising the fixity; dwelling particularly on those esoteric points of reference charted relentlessly by glossy magazines the detritus of which littered the airbrushed childish side of her mind.

The other smooth razored side took in the outlandish characteristics of this stranger with her fine hair so bright it looked like a fuzzy halo in the sunshine. This golden glow was divided by a diagonal plait of black matt hair a cut so dense nothing reflected off its surface; intrigued by her silver dress & sensing a fortuitous meeting the model was drawn to find out more.

“I see you have a badge like mine.” The model looked for the name – there was a capital zed. “Miss Z. we must be going to the same group discussion?” She proffered her tag, clipped precariously on a narrow lapel, for Miss Z. to read & paused for the expected comment but Miss Z. only read out. “A MODEL. What is the A. for?”

“A” said the model.

“How could we possibly be going to the same ‘one’? A.” Miss Z. asked, affably tugging at the model’s badge. “Besides. It is a mixed gathering & you are the same as me. I can tell by your body language. I am peeping.” She added disarmingly naive. “You are telling a charming tale with your bosom.”

The model almost tried to stop breathing in or out. She didn't mind someone reading her mind, it was usually spelled out in block capitals but reading her body. "Hold on. It is the introductory beginner's group, isn't it? You seem to be an adept."

"How do you do. I hope not." Miss Z. squeezed the handshake the way she'd read you must & the model winced & choked back a reaction. "But I am too old to begin. I expect the expert to cut the corners in the book."

"Well that's cleared that up." Said the model ruefully rubbing her fingers. "We need to buy a ticket at the kiosk then we're all set for lesson no: 1."

Miss Z. nodded wisely. "How much is it?" She took out a round tin from her leather bag & pondered over the huge coins. The model looked in to help; she had never seen any money like this – rectangular pieces with detailed engraving of hunting scenes. Numbers stamped on them with a die. High numbers. "I think these are the relevant currency at this time." She was milleniums out. She was also astray by several galaxies but that was only one of the disadvantages of the imagination.

"Are you sure its legal tender?" The model wondered clutching her bundle of banknotes held in a rubber band out of her black patent leather handbag. "I don't mind paying."

"Oh yes it is permitted to . . ." And she hugged the model with extravagant delight at the invitation. ". . . show some affection for the same gender."

The model gave a puzzled look up at the clouds but they were a blank so then relaxed & was squeezed almost breathless.

"Would you two misanthropes either take your turn or chatter & whatever out of the queue." An irascible voice prompted Miss Z. to let go & glare over the model's head at

the disheveled tree stump that was rudely addressing them. “You should undergo some treatment by a woodpecker for that misapplication . . . I am thinking rot but wonder if there could be a more fitting word . . . ?”

“You were right first time but you could try bombast it plugs a few gaps nicely.” Said Schlumper amiably enough sauntering up & pointedly reading their labels. “So we meet again.” The artist had never set eyes on them but it wasn’t strictly untrue (not at a molecular level in universal terms).

“We do not.” Replied Miss Z. severely interpreting the rules narrowly.

“We could have. Who would have guessed having got to the end of sorting through road sweeping with a spoon anyone would start again at the beginning but it has happened.

There was a song about it.” Schlumper pressed his point articulately, wisely not excluding Basho out aloud & thus starting an endless discussion with Miss Z. who was an expert on the narrow road to do most things.

“Bulot; Baiser; Dodo.” Suggested the model. “What can we avoid next?”

“One of those is extinct (in an endless sleep) & one of the other two all work.” Schlumper lumbered alongside. “So I’d say we’ve done enough work – we could try the next one after that. There’s a bit of effort needed there too.”

“We have our group one first.” Noted Miss Z. with sangfroid. Placing a coin on the counter at which the straw blond assistant ogled in amazement. “Keep the change.” Miss Z. had done her research well.

“Are you coming along?” The model & Miss Z. asked together, both trying to read his badge.

“Ann!” Said Miss Z. baffled.

“An ARTIST.” Said the model in a superior tone. “What luck.” And she stuck out her badge for him to read again.

“I wouldn’t miss this encounter for one of the worlds. I forget which one.” Schlumper exclaimed. “Or for a second go.” He smiled at Miss Z. who smiled back in a sisterly way despite her misgivings. Knowing it should have been for all the tea in China. And that prize didn’t inspire confidence in this language either. The girl behind the counter gave them three tickets & slipped the big coin in the pocket of her blue dress with gold stars stuck on it. It had the scene of Zoroaster & at least a dozen nymphets hunting for the original flame which was a surprise because she didn’t think anyone should be looking where he was for it. And shouldn’t be using what he was looking for it with.

“It’s this way.” The model stopped & bought a peacock feather from a man holding a bunch.

The rope dmu-t’ag had disappeared.

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“Is this the right place?” The trio hesitated outside a block of flats rising twenty storeys in front of them with rectangles of primary colours like a concrete Mondrianic cliff & then saw Sakini hurrying towards them. Someone waved from a balcony & Anguine stopped to wave back letting loose a piercing cry. They saw a package thrown down & Sakini catch it adroitly. Inside was a rope nicely coiled, neatly whipped ends, a card fastened onto it with an elastic loop ‘Dear Ann you may find this birthday gift- a rope called dmu-t’ag trying in helpful times, Kind regards, Miss K.’

“It’s for me.” Claimed Schlumper, running a finger along the string of arrows decorating the card.

“It is not. It’s for all of us.” Said the Zombie. “But you can deliver it. And that may not be as easy as it seems”

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‘I wonder what kinds of ‘rewards’ their various heavens had on offer.’ Pollak sitting cross-legged on the dry grass was studying a plan printed on rice paper & hand coloured very quickly by a child considering the daubs of gouache; although the choice of colours showed some sensibility – black for the faces, pink for the hands & red for the lips. And although the arms were boneless, curling round like fronds caressing the objects, a feather & a pot, held in a multitude of fingers they weren’t the cold, dead snakes felt by those who have lost a limb. ‘I can’t believe there would have been a sufficient supply of virgins (did masturbation disqualify them? Yes unless massaged by divine emollients) or apples’. Pollak had snatched the scrap of paper blowing in the wind against her body & had been surprised to find such a detailed plan on it. The King & Queen, they couldn’t be less coming as they did out of the blue, were drawn in a circle or on a wheel with no way out surrounded by a multitude of subjects cavorting in the blue spattered dust. All on one page: this was exactly the succinct diagram Pollak had been looking for to base her next move on. It was the answer to her curses. The Queen, who Pollak picked out & dreamily confessed she would like to be, if she were able to become (more rounded) fatter & a better looking (attractive) woman, was painted a greyish blue colour; a multi-tasker capable of doing twenty jobs at once but as she had a full circle of identical Ladies-in-

waiting Pollak wondered why. Lying on his back, the King, on whose nob the Queen was impaled, was quite rightly an insignificant feature, except for his wide spread smile & member which, by the look on her face of sweet rapture, the Queen was enjoying (in an off-hand way Pollak interjected considering herself well able to fight off any temptation). The King, his eyes were closed; was pure white (in fact the paper colour). Was he spellbound or was the bastard taking a nap? The Queen, in her jeweled girdle, should tie that love knot round his balls & pull instead of casting a spell as flimsy as a spider's web & hoping for the best to keep his heart in check. Mind you there were all those other beautifully bodied women, with slender waists like Pollak, around; one or two of those could have ridden him into heaven by the look of their broad hips & rounded thighs. Pollak wondered if that was all that counted; she didn't want to pin herself down so skipped the answer.

"I am so glad you rescued the child's picture for me." Said Holukos dropping down beside Pollak, deliberately infringing with that careless move & words every rule he knew Pollak reserved concerning any contact with anyone. Without a word she folded the paper swiftly & rose to her feet leaving Holukos talking to thin air.

"I followed you here."

But Pollak stood hanging her head refusing to speak.

"Are you waiting for someone?"

No compromise was possible for Pollak. If she could have got rid of her body at that instant she would, to forgo all communication with the world was bliss. But unfortunately her body was all there being compressed smaller & smaller by the presence of Holukos &

his intrusive questions. She would liked to have shot her mind out of her useless body & the constricting world it engendered – become a cloud. And in Pollak’s case it would have been a cloud of poisonous gas leaving Holukos blue in the face, frothing at the mouth.

“The ‘lady’ in the picture is called Yimkichor who had a predilection for the iron bird of the man, Tamar Qush.”

“How do you know?” Pollak was tempted out of silence.

“It’s in here.” Holukos slyly tapped the case he carried.

“Where did you steal that from?”

He pretended to be offended. “Do you want to see the proof?” He pulled out a loose sheaf of papers, sorted through & selected a full-length brush drawing of Tamar Qush showing it to Pollak. “He certainly had long barreled equipment to shoot with, didn’t he? And look at those ears.”

Pollak turned her nose up. “What does it say?” The script was Turkic.

“It’s a bawdy poem:

‘Yimkichor who liked it in
Yimkichor who liked to spin
Now misses the iron butterflies.’

That’s it roughly. There is a connection to head as well as heart in what Yimkichor liked to spin.”

“What are the iron butterflies?” Pollak asked, determined to be casual.

“Bullets, I expect.” Said Holukos equally casual.

“What did you miss out? There was more than that.”

“Just an obscure remark about a rope. It’s not what is left out it’s more what I put in. To hear the rest of the poem there is a small cost for its translation.” Replied Holukos with grim satisfaction that Pollak was nibbling the bait. He was going to find trading on her desire to harm . . . herself . . . nice.

“What?”

“You.”

“I’m just a hole. You know that.”

“Oh it’s not for my pleasure. Sometimes it is useful to be just that. If you use it wisely, naturally.” Said Holukos easily, with enough pretence of ineptness to make it ring false, to fuel her angry way.

“Naturally wisely.” Pollak sneered.

“I want a man called Schneider to do a difficult job for me. I want you to contact him & use your natural charms to persuade him to take on the work. It is the only way he can be hired.”

“Paid by rotten flesh.”

“Yes. And your tainted body is perfect.”

“And I get?” Pollak’s white face, with its lips twisted by the need they couldn’t express, hung like a moon in daytime. But with much less power.

“You get what you want. You can stuff yourself on the left-overs.” And Holukos grinned.

“After me.” He reached out & grabbed her wrist twisting it roughly forcing her down beside him; then before Pollak could recover he kissed her full on her thin lips.

“Sealed with a kiss.”

Pollak retched at the smell of rotting fish. Recoiling at what she had often swallowed as a child from her father or uncle or friend. And spat to clean her mouth of the taste of smega paste. Then replying through clenched teeth fighting to suppress her urge for instantaneous revenge. “I’ll do it. And I’ll decide what you pay.” She fled.

“The best way forward is the best way back.” Holukos shouted after her.

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Surveying this scene Izo Narkompros could not hide his disgust with that fool Holukos importuning some poor stranger; for a moment he contemplated stepping in but wisely decided concealing his interest was worth more so stayed his hand, & he too hurried off.

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If I ever catch up with Schlumper, said Sakini, I’ll brain him.

Difficult. And the artist is a recluse I believe that is why he disappeared, said a smiling Yimkichor whom Anguine had bumped into after a very difficult storming group session.

You can’t pick & choose. But bringing that twisted creature Pollak along. I wouldn’t mind but she . . . is also an artist.

She is malformed?

Hurt. And full of rage. She couldn’t tell herself that she had been damaged. If she could we’d be more than halfway there.

More than she can bear to carry?

She can bear it or she'd be dead. It's the way she allows others to make use of her hostility to most other people that is the trouble. And I mean trouble. It's easy to see she's being manipulated by some newly acquired friend at the moment.

Something passive but inflammable like a bundle of rags soaked in kerosene left deliberately near a fire Yimkichor suggested still smiling.

Anguine Sakini looked at her gravely; it was an odd image to use. Pollak soaked nothing up she repelled every touch. And her own was the most dangerous to herself. (She remembered the Bhuddist monk who immolated himself).

I have some papers on the problem that I will lend to you. They might help you with this difficult case. And also provide a clue for tracking the artist's movements. Unfortunately they contain some sentences of immense length like a rope full of contradictory reminiscences strung together for the express purpose of deceiving most readers. There are a few leaves from a manual on the manipulation of anyone you might encounter in a lucid dream. It may also be of general use. You can see his hand in that.

Of course he left traces? There's no real show without an appearance.

Half-meanings are the best places to start. But which one first? There are various alternatives of equal weight just as there are for many lines of a poem.

They stood under the crumbling façade of an empty building embellished with bas-relief scrolls in sap green noticeably pristine against the brown dribbles & accumulated grime of neglect. A male & female nude slovenly modeled reclined backwards below the green ribbon, their toes barely touching.

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At that moment, with fatalistic timing, the Wolf appeared scattering crumbs to his friends the sparrows; he'd heard they were worth keeping in with. "That session was diabolical. It was touch & go. Most of the time. Dekobra almost got me going." He blurted out when Izo Narkompros, baring his way, confronted him with his highly questionable behavior – im/person/ation to whit to put it bluntly. What did the analyst think of that? That that was the way with most relationships, that, or easy come easy go?

And the Wolf would have liked to say but daren't in response to the criticism. 'OK big ears you try it. And get the owl reference in as well'.

"You haven't got there yet." Said Izo taking in, in one scornful sweep of the broom a disheveled Wolf.

"Where?" The Wolf fumbled for the piece of paper in his pocket. Good it was still folded & thus unreadable. But did Nark know?

Nark took Wolf's arm & guided him into the Red Wedge Café. "What's the hurry? Here's a chance for you to get your head round your troubles without Dekobra interfering."

"I'm in a hurry." The Wolf protested weakly. "I haven't got any troubles." Which was more than enough to confirm that he was in deep shit.

"The way you are used, my word, it's reprehensible. Stop skulking at the edge looking like smoke." Nark said soothingly. "Snap out of it, change your act." He thumped the table.

"It would certainly be a 'go.'" Said the Wolf starting to scramble to his feet knocking into the back of a chair upsetting a pot.

At a nearby table the smart young woman Narkompros had seen beset by Holukos in the park now sat with a sombre face on the bench facing two men on chairs with their backs to the window. She stared distractedly into the park opposite the café barely touching her food. They were all silent. Only the disheveled waiter finished off a glib tale (if their faces were to be believed) before retreating under their stares.

“With so little to say in my book (not precious Shem’s) you’d get a high score for anti-social behavior.” She cried at the gloomy one, who hung his head. She licked her thick lipstick rubbing her crimson mouth wider with the back of her hand. And with the other lifted her perm off the collar of her new red dress.

“Not if scrupulousness was taken into account.” Said the other one who hadn’t caught on, stuffing himself, spluttering through a bolas of food.

“But he finds it easy to discard worthless objects. I’ll give him that.” She cried rubbing her eyes bigger spreading the mascara into the shadow & adding a touch of crimson with her knuckles.

“I’ll take that.” Said the passive, taciturn one.

“Unless they’re his own.” Said the other, still not catching on, at exactly the same time as the other morose one said something a convulsive stream of words spoken so fast it was unintelligible but you could tell he was angry & had been for some time.

“What do you want me to say?” She asked now with what big eyes & what a big mouth knowing full well she was being purposely sidelined & considering her only chance was to become sexually provocative: She smiled. There was red lipstick stain on her teeth.

“Close your mouth, Wolf.” Ordered Izo quietly. “You aren’t supposed to listen in.” But he was planning to rescue this woman who he knew for sure was being treated like a commodity & was disconcerted to see she was still eager, enduring the deliberate humiliation still hopeful of captivating the brooding man. Ridiculously inept in her artless courting yet perfect for germination (he meant tampering with).

“I only invited you.” She hissed with startling resentment glaring wildly beyond her silent companions. One of whom nodded. Slowly under this insidious hostility her face changed to a vacant pulp while he, the other one, bewildered, ignoring the evident distress in her voice (not daring to meet her look) carried on bolting down his food.

“I only invited him.” The flustered passive man replied cautiously fixing his plate unable to finish a forkful. Not wanting to blow on the fuse by furnishing an explanation.

Keeping singular detachment considering, over & under, the stake on all this. Yet unable to stop the mauling.

“To do what? Eat?” She asked in a strangled voice. “He could have been fed stones by the way he acts.”

He swallowed. It made a noise.

“Who is he? A sentry? On guard! Get back in your box . . . & you get in there with him.”

She eyed them both quickly.

The other head down, sullen, knowing sudden fluctuations in temper were possible for both of them, was certainly regretting his gushing speculative admirations, good words spent on nothing, resulting in a neat but empty identification. His shoes shone & pinched.

Expecting an inevitable bombardment so using silence, his usual tactic, this time he was

outmaneuvered, she stood up with a hypnotic stare fixed on the landscape of the park opposite perhaps trying to read the time on the palace clock to estimate how long she had been able to suffer the ordeal & without a word left.

As she hurried away Pollak vowed never to give her first name to anyone ever again (Joyce Joy Gone) it was dropped.

Izo tucked a banknote under his saucer & indicated to the Wolf that they were leaving. The pair dropped into step beside the forlorn but capricious Pollak striding in the park. The apparent randomness of their approach belied a purpose.

“Third time lucky?” Pollak stopped defensive & defiant. “I saw you in the Red Wedge eavesdropping & before that in here sneaking around. What’s your game?” There was something self-sufficient undercut with vulnerability in her stance. Her insubstantial stance.

“It sounded as though you needed . . . help in your amorous quest (her nose wrinkled & so did the Wolf’s but for different reasons) . . . & I need information. Very often they go hand in hand like lovers.” And Izo smirked.

“Yes.” Said the Wolf noting how thin this young woman was except for her large hands.

“Who asked you.” Snapped Pollak not exactly looking for trouble now she had sized them up as harmless nuts but no longer wary.

“She’s not exactly enchanting, Izo.” Whispered the Wolf behind his hand. But Izo waved him quiet. She was perfect. She was very unhappy. And because she lingered Izo knew she was available.

“This chance encounter in the vicissitudes . . .”

“Where?” Asked Pollak. “A half-blind man could follow your trail behind me, you liar.”

Although it was clear there was nothing much here for Pollak she still stood her ground.

“What did the scruffy waiter tell you about?” Izo enquired. “Was it one of his early sexual exploits delivered with his usual exquisite delicacy?”

Pollak flared up. “He was dumb; he didn’t know what he was talking about.”

“He claimed he knew you. Right?”

“He can claim as much involvement as he likes. It doesn’t make it true.” She spun round.

“What are you grinning at?” She demanded of Wolf.

“He isn’t. He’s gawping.” And Izo slipped in the essential question. “Did he promise you anything?”

“I said he claimed to know me.”

“Not much in that.” Said the Wolf. All three were motionless. Leaves skittered past. The stillness was pressure. Pollak felt she was being choked. “It was more than that.”

“Did he offer to prove it? Whatever it was.” Izo wondered casually.

“He did.”

“He did?” The Wolf scratched his ear & lowered his eyes. He was surprised to find Pollak entirely without guile & offered her his arm. With Izo on the other arm they strolled across the turf. Pollak moving stiffly like a child wanting to shed its parents grasp while at the same time almost certain to make an exploratory swing in their hold to test their affection knowing only too well that everything could collapse. It always had. Then, in response to a warm energy flowing from Narkompros & the Wolf she became melting & sinuous & relentless which gave impetus to an unsophisticated plan, pathological so

naturally one she had dwelt on. Unrestrained, she tugged the trio towards a copse surrounded by bushes; Izo seeing the drift of the loop pulled on his side getting the uncanny feeling that Pollak had an urge, both careless & deliberate, to allow them some profane act. Perhaps to compel them. But how? His fantasies very often were a string of infinitely dividing choices ending when the bubble (for they were almost always pneumatic in defiance of a poet) burst in a fine spray. He glanced sideways at the Wolf, who trundling on, oblivious to any subtle squeeze propelling them towards enactment, acted as an anchor.

To entice them; to compel them . . . what could be simpler? In the obstinate mind of Pollak they had already begun to ravage her. What else could they do if she presented herself so openly? The vague plan was risky, but not happy-go-lucky, if she could be damaged again & survive damaged she wins. And she couldn't keep this secret.

"I was going that way." She launched her body forward. She wanted any physical humiliation, any, to wipe out the real humiliation of her lover's tryst, so carefully hoped for, that had been a total debacle.

"We could make you tell."

"I might & I might not." She broke free & ran for the copse giggling wildly.

Indifferent, the Wolf was less surprised at the action Izo's words had triggered & held him back. "Is this pissing about safe?"

Izo Narkompros looked foolish being cautioned by the Wolf. "You're right. It's all coming off too easy." And brushed his hand off.

“It would be insane to blow it for that awful . . .” They stole away. “Do you think she knows who she is?”

Inside the gloom Pollak was delirious. She ripped off her new red dress trampled it into the moss & stood on the rags stiff as a ramrod posed against a massive tree bole.

The grimace she wore as she waited longer & longer was to be her singular call sign in the years to come.

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But no matter how incomprehensible the rejections were Pollak always knew in her despair all was not entirely hopeless for that was not her domain. And this belief was ineradicable. Convinced that her promise of success in love, the one she had constructed from childhood tales, was within the diligent working of certain inflexible rules she repeated her mistakes the way elves shelled a myriad of peas. Very fast & always finishing before dawn. Frequent angry reprisals were her other salvation & the failure of this rage to obtain satisfaction multiplied her difficulties. These two sides of Pollak very rarely met but when they did their clash invariably caused her harm. And they were never quits. One side or the other gained a slight advantage which rankled so she constantly had to make calculations (while hoping for an auspicious accident) to separate these enmeshed behaviors but it could only be done in a crude, incomplete way that caused similar anguish to the one she tried to extinguish, both forms being damaged by the operation. Both sides unable to live apart or together in harmony, then brittle anger turned upon her as she broke promise after promise.

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A disheveled Pollak emerged from the thicket swinging her black patent leather handbag blithely. In it she had the gift from her father, the knife.

Lying on his back staring up at the sky Tamar Qush awaited the sign described by Yimkichor as a smile in the shape of the clouds, then he could begin.

Wistfully, his haunches trembling, the Wolf lurked on the edge of a mind missing the pack.

Through an open window Schlumper, the artist, spied the model Red & her close friend Miss Z. approaching so said goodbye to Anguine Sakini & slipped his mobile into a cavernous overfilled pocket.

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As an unpleasant voice repeated it was to be an indefinite honeymoon with possibilities for the rich & ugly rich. We are told **FOUR MOVES** by characters of interest towards bridge no: 32 VIR were caught on CCTV camera & the footage filed for possible use.

1. Out by a stinking row of cardboard shanties in a sunken island underpass hidden behind smoking open fires at the hobo's Waterloo barely visible in the murk Wolf, nervously throwing pieces of bread to the inordinately greedy birds, made his way in the grey morning light. Where? It wasn't a secret, an address had been scribbled by Pollak on the piece of paper in his pocket.

2. Hurrying to one side of the abandoned brown-stained hospital the speed sanding her new shoes' shiny tiny soles; the tip of Canary Wharf looms in the mist: The model Red oftimes late this time is bright & early off to the artist's studio (written on the paper, she

couldn't keep a secret). On the cream bas-relief a nude male & female foot to foot touch fingertips.

3. Knocking off to spot the repulsive quality sometimes found in replicas & compare, Pollak headed for the meadow in the park. Nose in the air, refusing to turn her head at the taunts, hurled at every passer-by, from the occupants in the gloom of a bridge arch.

4. Stranded at the Ball (a conference of bores) thinking of sidestepping fate & of mad cow disease crossing over to humans & that word 'ogdoad' was pretty useless but the number eight was a nicer fit; the analyst slid her bulging handbag up to her elbow & carried on waltzing.

5. Clutching a single manilla envelope

Coated with honey

& brown sugar

Socks like kippers

The artist stood in the Monday queue.

"Shut that rattle up." Said the model Red. "If you want me to stay still."

'Carving another notch in her nettle tree.' Schlumper thought as he drew something entirely different from what he was looking at. "You can move R. you look better that way."

"If, by chance, anyone seeks out the events on that video file what will they finish up with & where will they be? Nothing. Nowhere." Said the analyst perusing the indecipherable page covered with bubbles transporting phrases away, blots obliterating

sense, words flying along arrows & bold positive underlinings of inaccuracies. “Is that where you want to lead them?”

“I agree.” Said Schlumper hoping for the best.

“What will writing that sort of tripe get us? I’ll tell you? Nothing. Not even trouble.” Said Pollak accurately vitriolic & dead on target in her nihilistic view of the creative world. It was an old-fashioned perspective but not an easy one to escape from. And that vanishing point, always available, was not only threatening but inevitable so why have we colluded with you? Pollak hung her head.

‘Contribution nil (not a flick of indigo, not even a jigger)’ Schlumper thought dismissing Pollak the way everybody did.

“Nothing but a troubling truth.” Suggested Miss Z. softly, unsettled by the model’s reference to the child’s toy; it wasn’t a child’s world. “Is so dangerous.”

“And where? Same place.” Said the model rubbing an elastic mark on her hip & nudged the Wolf who shut his mouth with a snap. “Sounds like our scenario.”

Miss Z. added. “Where we have been.” And she too rubbed an imaginary mark.

* * *

His next set of illustrations to distort what was left, if there was anything after they’d finished with it, Schlumper decided, with his fingers in his ears (metaphorically speaking) would be of a narrow escape. And you know how close slippery words (& shoes) can come to thwarting getting the best out of one of those exploits where a wounded figure (other than oneself) trapped with a black mamba (two drops of venom can kill) in an invisible net gets set free by giving a beautiful stranger the very tempting promise to

deliver up their soul (a human-headed one; the other kind being inconvenient for everyday use). After she, too, had promised to do her that exceptional good turn of making the net visible. Which she promptly did (**perform on her own**). That seemed straight forward enough, after all, who would be tempted to offer anything to be rescued by an ugly stranger. So they don't exist. (And it would be foolish to supply a non-existent need). Incidentally he wondered if she, the one released from the sticky filaments & the company of a poisonous snake, intended to keep her word & how it was she would do it. Or if a failsafe clause had somehow been inserted to end a sharp (**& interminable**) bargaining; or whether one of the parties was trusting enough to act on a hasty word. Surely the desperate situation would have precluded any argument or prevarication, but he wasn't certain because the trapped figure had already survived immediate danger & might be willing to take a chance on escaping without help (or risk dealing for better terms i.e. to **dance** the evil Wolf to death) rather than give away a prize more precious than her life. And as his mind drifted off into the intricate dialogue of deceit between these two seductive beauties trying to seal a contract for their mutual delectation (& advantage & knock the spots off each other) he drew a man cum beast circling round possibly listening in. Its ears were not the only body part unnecessarily large.

“She's not really wounded, Wolf, not dripping blood.” The Wolf stopped shivering on the model's reassurance. “And she can see the problem now.”

“Oh. She's only hurt. That's good.” Growled the Wolf brushing away a sentimental tear as he often did. “But wait, she is slumped over & there is vomit on her chest.” He pointed out, again in anguish. “She must be suffering from something terrible.”

“It’s in her mind.”

“Where’s that? We could try & help her, perhaps by cleaning it up.” Wolf made a swiping gesture with a hand knocking a pot off a shelf.

“She’s already been helped by the beautiful stranger.” The model pointedly nudged Schlumper. “I hope you’ve got that right. Dekobra is in on this?”

“We could push in.” The Wolf looked hopeful. “And take over.”

“You can push off.”

(Of course none of this takes place just as thousands of nudes never shiver in the cold).

But the thought is as real as the lump of rock, bulging under the cave painting, that suggests the boss on the bull’s neck; the crack which gives the line of the red dappled horse’s back exactly. The thought supplies the relief to a necessary lie. As well as the lie.

* * *

The artist had been ordered by the younger child to buy only green apples, not a speck of red was allowed. No reason was given. Now Schlumper was finding yellowing apples hidden in drawers & behind books. The decaying fruit were thrown down the garden. He said nothing about that but it was on his mind as he explained to Dekobra that although the illustrations show what can’t be written there would not be any additional text even if these people drawn in could ‘speak’ . . . what they said would be unintelligible because unlike in a dream the illustrations are not a succession of scenic image substitutions for words (words transformed to pictures). They would need a ‘talker’ in the way that a shaman very often had to have someone standing by to repeat in intelligible words what he was ranting on about. Dekobra had never dreamt that the figures would need to speak

it was enough to see where they were & what they were up to, to know why they were together like that, as if inevitable. It had crossed her mind that they would only repeat themselves. And break their promises.

Smiling in the nebulous way she had practised for years the analyst listened patiently to the somewhat incoherent babble carefully lifting the thread. Avidly jotting down the distortions with arrows shooting off them into a blue yonder. Developing another jumble of words.

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A COPULATION of the SIGNIFIED.

The trio were, an older man with a slight stoop & a piercing look stabbing out of blue eyes from under his hat; side by side with a fabulous sloe eyed, gangling creature who must have been, by the extraordinary way she hung on his arm, a young relative & just as close a tall, aloof woman, splendid like polished silver in her beauty, who could have been a sister to a siren. In their isolation they always would have claimed they easily blended with the throng in the waiting room & took the couch as a stronghold, entwined with a warmth alien to the occasion. Although Miss Z. glowered impassively at one or two observers who took too long over their covert appraisal, nothing was ever said aloud. The brown door swung open.

Dekobra Hotki, who had taken her name from economic necessity rather than eccentricity & then stuck to it, glowed like foxfire as she intercepted a devouring glance from one of the female companions, the stiff one, of the artist Schlumper; he never came to her consulting office alone.

‘I should grow a tree in my courtyard to tie some of my clients to as they did in Strasbourg. I’d start with that one. What pleasure would she give me? Would she snap?’ The analyst said to herself, quelling a fear & spilling out a fascinating imperfection. A cascade of other thoughts how their bodies would mingle gave to her face a heightened blush as she composed a greeting over them, while thinking. ‘What a process to try & gauge the mood in a second . . . then one false look . . . & more tiresome repairs. And those three, shinning in their innocence, I’m sure it makes my work harder when they

come. Because the clients are already uncertain of each other & even less certain of them.’ “You are next Mr. Holukos.”

‘She looks tense.’ Thought the model. ‘And all this hanging about can’t help so much borrowing takes place.’

“Is it good for us to tease them? Our presence is worrying their souls like a dog with a dead cat. I can feel it.” Miss Z. whispered to the artist. Her blanket stare covered their cohorts in the scene but her voice didn’t show how much she coveted a ‘soul’. She’d like a human-headed one, but just a square soul, like a parceled present, would do; so was tempted to ask Schlumper to enquire of the analyst how to obtain one or at least stop her longing for one, but she could imagine the puzzled look that this troublesome request would cause to flicker over his face so never asked.

“What you can sense is the pain. When they haemorrhage words the way they do, in there, a being split open & pouring out secrets like blood you should know its weakening effects. You spend most of your time constructing a labyrinthine defence against all & every possible probe.”

“Going for the jugular . . . mmm . . . a tourniquet wouldn’t be any use.” Miss Z. was clinical as usual.

“Keeping the balls in the air all at once.” The model was derisory. “When is it your turn? Can we watch? It would be priceless to see all that leaking.”

“You can watch out. This is serious. It’s a cut-throat business. Unpredictable though its result is I must continue.” Schlumper was determined this time to get the best out of it, come what may, well not exactly that, rather throw some light on the shadows in the

corners. Every corner. And the Wolf was all for going along with that, too. He was fed up with skulking in the grey light; he was better than . . . what? When trying to crown the thought with some sense he always got stuck there, the comparison weighing down on him, as well. Perhaps helping the artist would be best. And, as was always being pointed out, he invariably missed the obvious. Does something obvious remain to be discovered or revealed? Anyway here they were in a laudable effort (combined with Ms. D. Hotki) deploying themselves amenably, more or less without compulsion & finding most things shown in a favorable light whenever possible, what could go wrong?

For all this togetherness the Wolf did feel he was being overlooked. And Miss Z. swanning around as if she owned the place didn't help. Showing them up. One day he would shine.

"Is it a treasure hunt?" Asked Miss Z. munching on an apple. They were outside (after the truncated session thanks to Wolf) climbing steps up to a long steel bridge over the railway. Hung on its railings in several rows were skeins of bleached fibres, stuff like wool, twisted into figures of eight. No one was guarding them. Beyond the densely packed station platform under them the rails stretched away in the pollution haze where the crowds waiting on the ballast for their trains also became sparser. Standing back, after allowing a crocodile of visitors to hurry past trailing their guide, they hailed a cab & climbed in after a brisk argument to get the driver to go where they wanted & to fix the fare. Jammed along the hard bench seat, hanging onto the pipe-work that held up the vehicle canopy, together they dissected the session's revelations, their closeness perhaps prompting a taciturn Schlumper to open up more.

“Well. That was short. What happened? What did you tell her about us? Is that why you were tipped out so soon?” They all clamored their questions.

“There is nothing I can say. I never get a word in edge-ways inside her office.”

“God. Is she so tight?” Exclaimed the model huddling closer to him & pressing her lips together in an involuntary expression mimicking her real thought.

“That can’t be true.” Volunteered Miss Z. “And we aren’t concerned with her.”

“No? You all are it seems to me.” Said Schlumper sadly, missing Miss Z’s theoretical hint. As every jolt reinforced his intransigent mood. “I open my mouth & everything I thought I’d got clear is even more distorted, as I speak, than I had imagined when I straightened it out in my head.” Bad jolt. “Before speaking.” He added.

“Doesn’t she do the sorting? What’s her name? Thingamybob.” Asked the Wolf knowing full well Dekobra’s name.

“No. That’s my job. She tells me why & what it means that I’ve done it a certain way; not directly but with close attention to detail but I’ve usually done it several haphazard ways.” Schlumper sighed briefly before grinning. “Sometimes I can’t help slipping in a few irrelevant facts . . .”

“Lies.” The other three chanted.

“Of course she spots them but by the way she covers up her detection I think she secretly likes me trying it on.”

“Gives her more scope.” Suggested Miss Z. “She can pick up where you want to go. And take you there. This is a positive re-deployment.” The Wolf wriggled in the tight space

rubbing an itch & got a horrid glare from the model who wished she had said what Miss Z. had said. “That’s crass, Zed.” She said instead.

Miss Z.’s lips pouted. “By now we know what you think is half-witted; generally given by throwing in your lot with & practicing the bow wow theory of the origin of human speech. However it would be true in your case, Wolf.” She laughed & pinched his knee. It was an unusually free & easy action for Miss Z. & Schlumper looked concerned; was the analysis having more effect on her than on him?

“If I had thrown my lot anywhere that would have been the end of that.” The model was undeterred. “Whatever **it** was.”

“Well. I’ve found the songs’ of birds very useful.” Lied the Wolf with a corkscrew gesture of his hand. So the analysis was certainly affecting him.

“Especially the cuckoo.” Interrupted the artist without rancour but determined not to let the Wolf start whistling.

“Oh do go on.” Miss Z. undeterred, encouraged the Wolf, deeply interested, not being able to fathom in what way he could use noises she found nothing more than irritating twittering (& cawing & hooting etc).

“The scream of the woodpecker. Just think of it. No code in that.”

“Like an all-clear?” Agreed the model.

“Without any of the augmentations.”

“You like the noise . . . inducing colours . . . words . . . it’s your inspiration?” Asked Miss Z. going far too far. “I can see why. No geometry either. No running on & off the line.”

“Best of all the woodpecker is an artist.” Declared the Wolf abruptly. They all looked at Schlumper to detect his reaction. “The screech both protecting & declaring the completion of the hole.” And the Wolf held his breath.

‘Farfetched’ thought the artist ‘but a good start’; he didn’t bat an eyelid.

“No passing the baton, I expect.” Said the model a bit crestfallen (a diminution itself).

“They usually laugh.” Schlumper exclaimed. “Hideously.”

“Rather like colours, the woodpecker’s screams belong to the right hemisphere of the brain & the theatre of cruelty. We should examine this thoroughly with a visit backstage.”

True to form Miss Z. was busy starting to crack the problem by causing one.

“Nice night out that, Miss Z.” Said the artist. “Deafened by meaningless jabbering sounds while being haunted by a physical freak. Then go & meet the perpetrators.”

“I think I’ve read the book.” The Wolf had his hand up. “It is called . . .” The model levered his hand down dismissively. “Shut it.” And added. “Well you won’t have to look far for a numbskull to crack.”

“The screech transfixes us. Gives us the bird. Leaving it out of communication.” Miss Z. primly advised them.

“Oh. That sort of out. You’d got me worried for a minute I thought I understood what you were saying.”

Miss Z. started to look grim but astonishingly the model rose to her defence. “Stop teasing her, Mr. Schlumper. You are the one who badly needs the analysis.”

“Like I need a hole in my head.”

In the silence of absolute agreement within which the Wolf felt particularly pleased that his woodpecker idea had gone down so well, the cab pulled up under the arch outside the studio & the trio scrambled out quickly.

Pushing the studio door open Miss Z. & the model were met by the faintest breath of an unfamiliar scent, perhaps the trace of perfume left by a woman who had simply rushed through the space once. They sensed this almost imperceptible yet all pervasive trace & hesitated, unsure of their bearings, thrown by the very first thing they noticed, as if a spark had died; perhaps someone had struck two flints together, once. The artist also held back on the doorstep for he had never seen the two women simultaneously reach out & hold hands before.

So, he noted later grimly, when they arrived the door had been open.

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Pollak found it was easy to gain entrance to the building through a door hidden in the obscure light under a massive railway bridge. She stuck her narrow rump against the door & pushed the way she did when her hands were full. The brown door flew open at the soft touch. Flakes of brown paint with an undercoat of cream were left on her dress. She beckoned ‘Scarface’ Schneider to follow her. Frowning over the huge bundle she held finding no clean spot to put it down, Pollak wondered, ‘Door door door. These artists! Haven’t they heard of open plan? Are we in one?’

“Yes. This is the place . . . Has anything changed?” He silently shut the door. It had drawn an arc in the dust. “What about our footprints?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “It’s been deserted for years. Does it look like anyone is going to come in here after us?”

“Still.” Scarface peered into the corners. “There could be another way in. And this part may never have been used except for once or twice.”

“We may have to torch the place to cover our tracks . . . To fry the evidence . . . Is that what you want?” Pollak clutched her parcel; then reluctantly hung it on a nail over an old rusty chopper & stood with her hands on her hips.

“No. You can use the pigments.” Rows of 2lb honey pots filled with dry pigment of every colour stood on a wooden rack. “Use them to make a pattern in the dust . . . that should make enough mess to throw anyone off the scent.” Schneider unscrewed a jar & trailed a thin line of red from it drawing a square. “Keep out of this area – I’ll work from here.”

Pollak took the white pigment & emptied it over her head without a word. Then threw the glass jar against a wall.

Scarface deliberately ignoring her vandalism was busy filming the bare space:studio.

“Did you see that person lying on the pavement against the wall.”

“What person? No. I saw a man pushing a box on wheels.”

Scarface looked sharply at Pollak; her shaved upper lip glistened white; her cheekbones flushed red through the white powder by the excitement of the trespass. She searched very nook with her pale eyes; there must be somewhere safe for her cargo. Wondering with a flicker of doubt & unease at that express description of a woman with a pram, Schneider carried on panning the tiny camera getting more wasted shots of her contorted body in the frame than he had originally intended. And her facial expression as if coming

up out of water & struggling for air matched the set of her neck more deformed by childhood reading than by the corset that gave her a conspicuously small waist. She felt not only comforted by the false shape it gave her of a sexual offering but also, more compelled to wear this individually tailored garment on her stringy thorax, as a second protective skin. While he fretted over the incongruous description of the street scene as he worked, one he definitely hadn't seen, she flitted from one darkened wall to another scattering different colours in amorphous shapes & crossing these with trailed lines in black & brown.

“How long is it exactly since . . . you were out & about . . . working? And whose paying you?” It was the second feeble sleeper he really wanted an answer to. He guessed it had been a long time & she had dried up in the wait; a low-grade hatred had kept something stoked something sensitive to any negative appraisal.

Pollak grimaced & threw another jar in the air aimed to land in Schneider's red square haven; she hated being worked over, & didn't reply. She tossed the bundle onto the floor.

“As you're so engaging. You can fuck me over on that.”

Schneider sucked in audibly, his mouth slightly open. He hoped it wasn't going to get disagreeable so soon. The pay was too poor for extra trouble; negligible, in fact, unless he could supplement it on the sly. He had given the vague proposal Pollak made as long & hard a look as he could, given that there was no detail, just a date & a rendezvous. And while tempted by the obvious side benefit insinuated, he knew Pollak was counting on him falling for the sexual tag & come in cheap, so he was left with a doubt he couldn't dismiss. Why had she offered him this task? Was she hoping curiosity could work

something up? Pollak had told him more than that the pay was bad but not much about the job, mainly about herself as a way of keeping him in the dark. So he knew she had been abandoned more than once in her childhood which, she claimed, accounted for her divergent sexual needs that she did hint at & why she was frequently nasty, which showed. So Schneider, looking warily at the bundle, did not know if she was kidding or making a request or insulting him while at the same time expecting him to move on her. There was always an angle to Pollak that was unaccountable & unnegotiable. Standing pliantly beside the bundle with a knowing look creasing her face into an unpleasant leer, her mouth was dribbling, just slightly, at one corner. She sucked some of the saliva back. Then spat out a white gob.

“I’m just a hole.” He had heard previously therein was the rot at the heart of her sickness. The malignant gut fear all pervading; what she had was worthless except . . . she shook her dress off . . . what she could give without a scrap of feeling.

“Stop. You told me that. I believe you but you shouldn’t keep on repeating it.”

Revealing a shiny pink & white satin corset so complicated with plastic bones & red & chrome zips with patterned buttoned flaps she looked impregnable. Such a luminous carapace was such an obvious taunt it was nearly a challenge if Pollak hadn’t been so . . . unforgiving.

“If you want to get out of here . . . in one piece . . .” She studied the floor. “. . . you are going to have to perform.” When her head came up Schneider had never seen that much anguish stamped so clearly in the single shape of a mouth. As she held his embarrassed gaze she started to bleed. Schneider inadvertently felt the crumpled slip of paper he still

had in his pocket. He had a crazy desire to take it out & check if the print had mysteriously changed in the last instant. (The camera was on her so we know it is true, at least, this far). Instructions written in her cool tone. ‘Find your way in & out by yourself.’ Pollak tightened a black strap. Schneider had never seen an action so imbued with danger. He felt drained, ‘This would be a good time to turn to dust, he thought, & blend.’ “You always as slow off the mark? Scarface.” She didn’t know how to tease or encourage. The words came out with the gaudy brutality of exploitation born in the colours of her world that had no boundaries. Awash with hate. Their rough weight intruding into this bare but tight space mistakenly believing they could force it to surrender up his resisting flesh by the glamour of her supposedly irresistible gleaming exoskeleton. Drawn into her spell. “Open this flap up.” She pointed. “Never thought of doing it that way.” Pollak jeered. “I can tell. I don’t suppose you even got the drift of what was going on.” Pollak posed (cowered) bones licked clean, without the adolescent bravura of her words.

Schneider, the words drumming in his ears, spread his sweating free hand. “You always wear body armour?” He thought it was pitched light enough to let him off the hook. (But the quip fell stunned; she was now dripping blood through her fingers).

Transcribed from the film, sound quality was lost in this the only reliable witness left for examination (analysis). Grunts, yells & moans could have been added later. With the loss of definition inherent in the process, edges blurred between flesh & fabric in the last frames of the video so Pollak appeared utterly naked. With her hands thrust protectively in between her thighs, her torso covered in weals & slashes; the iridescent light being

swallowed by dark torn flesh & reflecting off the pale skin with an unnatural brightness flooded out any detail. Her drooping lower lip swollen with blood releasing a thin glistening line of spittle onto her chest. The pixels had completed the magic. Transformed Pollak into a victim before their very eyes. She fell out of frame.

“That’s all they’ll see.” Pollak scuttled like a crab (**read lobster**) to his feet the blood spreading & being smeared onto her legs. Her feet were grey with dust. Surprisingly, the corset, although stained with sweat & blood, shone pristine like polished chain mail.

“One last chance.” She bit his ankle.

In the ensuing delirium Schneider thought Pollak asked for the last dance & waltzed a complicated (but formal) dream with her.

Who let you in?

Anyone can get in. The door is wide open. Gaping I should say.

I hate you.

You only love her whose number is 545.

I hate her.

Pollak shuddered. I’m free.

‘With these numbers forget it. This is not a finished product there are bound to be errors, dross’ Schneider heard a hoarse voice bark ‘but I expect you to get rid of the Zombie & her friends’ and there the voice became garbled, the words getting unwillingly mixed up with the picture of a couple reluctantly embracing, each with an eye over the other’s shoulder, as if it was all one sound . . . a ripping . . . flowing beat . . . both bodies tapering snakelike dangerous . . . ruthless.

Don't complain. I'm in. Look at the crowd. Count yourself lucky.

"So it was a dream controlled by numbers." Asked the analyst. The first overt sign of interest Dekobra showed as she set the trap. (OK. She had often said the deductions of her interior world were mostly but not entirely constructed out of numbers).

"I never had **it**. I'm telling you about **it** because I thought you would get something from **it**." Said an exasperated Wolf. "And let me go. Forever."

I'm counting on you, Pollak, to get me out of this.

Pollak sniggered & only she could make such a futile noise sound evil. It took me long enough to get you here do you think I let go that easy?

He felt tormented by her clinging, not excited. The shape it made was wrong. Perhaps that was why Pollak was never wanted. He remembered that when the divining rod had jerked a flash of pain was caused by him seeing her features that had appeared in that instant.

Why would you remember that in here?

Is there an outside to this dream?

"The outside has been lost. But I can see why you brought it to me - by applying numbers randomly anything could be deduced from these few words which is, after all, very useful." Said the analyst. She threw in the bait 'after all' & wondered if the float would bob.

The wolf gnashed his teeth.

Floating up like an old carp rising out of the cold black depths into a patch of dappled sunlit water, a half-baked thought (with much more commonplace energy under it than

the fish) flickered for a second & almost gained coherence before it sank below the tension caused on his mind's surface by the improbability of any such event taking place. Although a picture of the artist & Dekobra interlaced in a sexual embrace of improbable contortions & high excitement was not unappealing it was censored before it attained any resolution, as soon as it formed into an irresolute question 'Do you want me to stay &?' Instantly the pool was empty.

It was that fishy?

Yes. Didn't you ever see her?

But I thought you were taken by her. (read She took you).

Didn't you ever see her eyes?

Why should I get that close?

You, Pollak, got round a lot of places.

I never got there.

We are getting closer in this.

What me & you? Pollak snarled enraged but didn't let go of his arms however hostile she sounded.

If there are two ways of taking it you want both

At that the fat fish went belly up & the artist was inextricably caught in a gutted body of viscous slime streaked with brown blood, rippling flesh skinned raw, ribs banded by hard razor-edged scales. As he searched over an undulating belly, feeling with both hands for the lips of a slit to enter, hoping it was also the way out he instinctively knew he would

be paying more than sperm to be sucked down a pneumatic tube like spawn to an opportune exit. He'd be used & worn to a skeleton before the analyst spat him out.

I can feel your bones, Pollak, you should eat more.

She swiveled in the intricate dance steps. So light on her feet Schneider wondered if she might be hollow. And when, twirling, she hit him for a split second with the heel of her hand it was the most intimate contact she had with anyone. We get to that later.

The dream didn't end. Schneider dropped out of it to find himself gripping the steering wheel of the bus travelling through dark pine forest that grew right to the edge of the road. He was dripping with sweat & someone was standing very close to him swaying easily with the lurching motion while digging the snout of a nasty weapon into his neck.

“Next time you ask a question I will kill you.”

Schneider recognized the voice but had lost the name. What had he wanted to know? He huddled over the wheel; brilliant splashes of sunlight alternating with gloomy green shadow could give the brain a temporary blackout, making this stretch hazardous.

‘This dilemma has other peoples' fingerprints all over it. And they don't care what danger they put me in.’ Schneider tussled with the road & his fears.

* * *

“We must end it here today.” The analyst broke in, in a measured way. “That beautiful woman you described as balancing on a fish was perhaps paralyzed, by fear, for instance. And for you to claim she wanted to have intercourse with the fish, apart from being an obvious diagrammatic equivalent of some ritual for an unknown deity, isn't strictly a true

picture. You can do better than that.” She gave him a reassuring but neutral half smile (not issuing the penalty word ‘trite’).

Schlumper scratched his head in disbelief; what had he said?

“She was splashed all glittering with drops of water.” Interrupted the Wolf again. “And fickle. And ‘she’ was a ‘he’ being spat out of the fish’s mouth.”

“As a task I would like you to think about **it** & the fish with an eye to discovering the outcome of their dialogue.” The analyst, partially ignoring the outburst for the moment, had put in a subtle touch with the word ‘discovering’ an aggression against the artist’s story that almost made the Wolf splutter with rage. Luckily the words wouldn’t come.

The artist saluted a half-hearted compliance, with a half-raised arm, to the analyst’s request. The door opened. The model & the Zombie had gone. In their place sat Pollak. Whose woeful eyes were glued to a photograph hanging on the wall on which a massive waterfall thundered incessantly, the spray whipping her face; the permanent rainbow, a rope of beautiful colours, linked two outcrops of cliff & Pollak knew that behind the wall of water there was nothing except smooth rock & clay. She was rising up against the rush of water being powered in this flight solely by her anger. So engrossed by this elemental struggle, her mouth wordlessly snarling like a dog worrying poisoned meat, she didn’t see Schlumper who, puzzled by her apparent pain but keeping silent, left. And outside descended the flight of steps into the lane leading out onto the main road.

The artist sighed thankfully, that session had got nowhere fast, the Wolf had behaved normally, more or less, he could relax; then he saw the shadows of four figures bobbing & jerking on the curved garden wall that bounded his view so he held back.

A bus roared down Church Hill & Schlumper could hear sudden cries of fear & a shout of “Maniac” above the noise of squealing tyres. As the vehicle flashed past he was amazed to see it was being driven (not steered) by two figures so closely locked together they formed the shape of a humped beast, one pair of arms clutching the wheel, while its body shook trying desperately to get free; one pair of hands trying to strangle the driver & keep hold of his writhing body with an extraordinary well-formed pair of legs. The dust settled. A woodpecker started its dynamic rattle again in an elm tree by the stone steps up which Pollak tripped carrying a small parcel that she placed in a niche near the top of the flight. She looked around to check she had not been seen & then gathered up a handful of dead leaves to hide it.

Schlumper melted into a shadow. The street was empty.

The artist sighed; the sound of the wind made the scene even more poignant for him because he felt as it rushed away all other noises an oppressive lack of both a past & a future. Similar days, spilling over with content, whirled away in the dust. And this one, torn to fragments & dispersing was not enough to hold him in the present.

Nearby Pollak entered the yard of a tumbledown house its exterior encased in scaffolding & sheets of blue mesh. A dog barked fiercely. A high wire fence within which some tall trees stood surrounded the garden. As the wind was blowing strongly the tree branches, in full leaf, were flailing in the inconsistent turbulence looking whipped like those in paintings by Soutine.

AN INTERRUPTION OF THE TORMENTED.

Painted out with a creamy brown

CLASS WAR

BURN THE RICH

DIE YUPPIE SCUM

sprayed in silver on Railtrack bridge no: 32 VIR only lasted three days.

Pollak noted that the A in WAR had a lightly underpainted O & wondered if the graffiti artist had intended a nude & started a breast but being pulled up sharp by his female companion (they had other poster sites to deface) foreswore the illustration & dribbled the slogan.

As she took the gravel path by the side of a mesh fence, Pollak discretely but compulsively ran her fingers over her breasts & reassured that they weren't contaminated continued into Bel Aire Park.

For those few seconds under her own caresses she never felt quite so rejected; so abysmally alone, but she was afraid & this feeling superimposed on the other deeper ones formed an amalgam of anger & despair which, in its turn, had hardened to hatred under the weight of Pollak's obsession. Blinded by this Pollak was an easy prey. The unscrupulous soon learned they could take possession of her by mixing correct proportions of superficial charm with covert threats of sexual violence. Under duress from this manipulation Pollak's inherent wariness fled, left wide open to suggestion more often than not she fell under the wing of a vulture or into the shadow of a wolf.

Schlumper observed her first by the flat splash of Indian red, then leaving the tennis courts behind heading for a clump of trees closer to the village. And lost her in the wood. Out of sight inside a dense copse, Pollak always feeling insecure but blanketed in the twilight composed herself. Was this really it? Would he turn up? Tamar Qush. Or was she deluded to expect a man to respond, even one for whom she had laid out more than Holukos's money.

Then again the recurrent harrowing thought took possession; all her brain cells were sizzling in the flames, all those lovely words were popping out of existence; & feverishly she was trying to rescue them. Hanging her shiny black handbag on a branch she had to squat & pee to put out the fire consuming her hopes. This took some time, as she was clad in layers of skintight underwear that she had to peel off. What letters had she saved this time to play with? Enough to spell 'Fuck me' Pollak icily rehearsed the words out loud. Would he have to? Would he want to? Why did she make it sound like 'Eat me'? Nothing was ever right. If only she had never heard those words repeated. Were they said tenderly? Pollak couldn't tell. Pollak was rendered deaf at the first softening note in a voice.

The meeting (Pollak couldn't bring herself to call it a date) was arranged to take place at a neutral address as she had been advised on a scrap of card given to her, when the money changed hands, by an escort agency. She had 'borrowed' the studio for this event. Now the card was safely tucked into one of the hoops of nylon she wore on each clammy thigh (as instructed by a pamphlet inserted with the invoice) it was very worn; the print had nearly disappeared under a multitude of hatched lines that she had drawn on it every time

she took it out to read the message scrawled over the gilt lettering. ‘Congratulations Miss P. This one is an excellent choice.’ Pollak had picked the name at random.

Pollak deadened everything she could & had changed the word excellent to repellent.

“Do they have to go your way? She asked the proprietress on the line.

“Your way? I’m not sure I know what you mean.” The woman’s voice had crackled on the bad line. Circumspect she doodled a ring around Pollak’s name. “Our clients never complain of the service. Most of them never look back.”

“What would they look back for?” Pollak enquired coldly. “Isn’t it an empty, loveless past they are buying a ticket out of?”

“I wouldn’t put it as directly as that.” The line crackled. “It’s often a step in the right direction.”

Pollak put the phone down. “Off the plank.” But she had taken a great deal of care over her appearance for the encounter; consulting the best glossy magazines & following their frivolous instructions to the letter. Shaved her fanny, just left a tuft. This makeover had cost Pollak most of her pride & used all of Holukos’s money. ‘It’s a trial run for your task’ she told him when asking for another payment up front, ‘You know Schneider is only interested in the fancy paper on the parcel’.

Pollak was a sucker for a bogus ‘come on’ & knew it; she was more responsive when she recognized it was happening. Bluff was a waste of time.

Pollak returned from her daydream squatting over a patch of steaming moss steadying herself holding a low curved branch. She stretched her head high so that a twig tangled gently in her hair – she caught it between two fingers as she brushed her hand through the

strands. Momentarily she remembered a scene from her childhood; for once her father was in the garden. Her mother had lost a ring & he was searching for it with a bent stick held in both hands. In response to this vivid flashback Pollak broke a forked twig from the curved branch she had been balancing with & shunted the leaves off with her thumb. She stepped out of her pants & stuffed them into the handbag. Somehow feeling secure with the image still clearly drawn in her mind. Pollak then moved in a circle; she felt the stick come to life & was so shocked she dropped it shaking her hands loosely at the wrists as if the sensation had deposited a dusting of toxic powder on them. The stick fell on the knife that Pollak rubbed clean with a detachment which, concealing turbulent feelings, did not for once preoccupy her totally. He had circled round the garden but never found the ring. Pollak smiled; he had given her this gift instead. She closed the blade & noticed an eye had been scratched on the smooth horn handle completing its likeness to a fish.

When the characters were asked – Is a **Ring** a possible collective we can use for changes?

At once Miss Z. was doubtful. And lightly crossed it out.

The gnarled grey Wolf dripped paint on the questionnaire so couldn't find a clean box to tick but the gleam in his jaundiced eye said it all.

If you gave them enough surface space, with so many carefree words each to play with, I don't see why not. The artist spoke hopefully. But didn't write it down.

(Pollak refused to consider it – she felt she was being cornered).

Biting into a doughnut the naked model knew she embodied a quite different take on things . . . Like the ring of a necklace. She tucked her thumb under the jewels & jerked it hard; crystal beads flew all over the place. “Pick those up.”

Crossing her plump legs the analyst waited quietly for the artist to speak.

Then, as usual, before Schlumper could open his mouth the Wolf jumped in seemingly pleased at the chance to make up for his earlier sloppiness. Unwittingly by frequently interrupting the analysis his was taken to be the voice.

“Nonetheless.” Said the Wolf bubbling over eagerly with his usual grin.

And **What** came gushing out of his mouth? From within it, out of the fangs & over the lips without any uncertainty, without any precautionary impulse - the image of Anguine Sakini making love in a fig tree struck out whirling free & full of expectations getting to within a hare's breath of bridging the gap between them & a childhood.

I, alone, was horrified to be enveloped once more by the choking dust of

This.

Happy at having got off to a good start the Wolf clutched his big ball of wool tighter waiting for his next cue. “The artist’s words would have been better lost in thin air.” He muttered impatiently, into his sleeve to avoid a rebuke for poking his nose in private parts. Despite being forever wonderstruck by the pitfalls caused by the merest shift of a word or even a letter, the Wolf knew he could make this fresh change possible; but who would take the word of a numbskull for it. He always took the bait.

“And got everything back to front. Everyone knew that.” Said the model Red bubbling over eagerly bubbling over eagerly.

That rang true.

Would the new girl arrive in time? She did. But instead of providing a graceful alternative to the Wolf’s plan the words accompanying her became an imperceptible dust cloud settling over everything until the fable was a uniform grey in which the Wolf could slink or skip at will. Please himself. Still an easy target although seemingly indiscernible. Can he discover a footprint to stalk? Had he been there before? Has he been landed in it? As he often was. Had his dreams gone up in smoke? Had she fallen for it? Seized with jealousy he held his breath & listened at a crack in the brown door shutting him out from the analyst’s office.

There was a very faint hiss as the analyst uncrossed her legs. “So?” She frowned over the little table with its carefully chosen objects; noted the artist’s hangdog expression & prepared for trouble. “Where were we?”

The hair on his neck stiffened at the sound as the artist replied with a finality that was cutting. “You know **NOW THIS** has a past. In there the future is told.”

“Held back for better days to come & to be put to better use.” Suggested Miss Z.

“Some hope.” Retorted the model.

“What can he do?” Pleaded the Wolf. “It’s gone. It’s happened.”

“Although you claim what you’ve given so far is a simple description of what you saw & an explanation of why the change happened, it sounds more like a frozen internal picture of where you need to start to make it happen. And what I hear is what you say to prevent it happening, to freeze the frame at this undeveloped still. It seems to be left to chance, but has the ring of being a possibly considered yet disastrous choice. What could be worse than that? Not real chance. Why try to blame it on the girl model.”

“I agree. I think it is an arbitrary whitewashout.” Said the model.

“In cipher?” Asked Miss Z. as an excuse for not keeping up.

“If there is another way of describing the beginning of that love (an undercurrent in the voice gave ‘madness’ for that word); I would like to hear it. And, if you are able to describe it truly, you should take that way instead.” The analyst was risking an unusual course.

At once the Wolf knew some So & So was being deceitfully kind with their advice; she held back from putting sniveling in there. He could tell. But chose. What?

“Was there anybody left?” The analyst’s sweet voice now only just reached him through the dust thrown up by happy memories.

In a desecrated church ruined by an earthquake the fresco scene of the sacred dance had been defaced, scratched out & smoked by candles. What is left on the wall looks like bloodstains. To get there the precipitous path edged along the top of the ravine. They lope

along it. Keeping close. Below, in a forsaken hamlet the deserted buildings look like blocks of stone fallen off the mountain. The grass on their flat roofs is parched. One or two houses are intact. Bolting close the blue plank door they made love in a dusty empty room.

Dishearteningly no part of their bodies was now in contact. The words were destroying the flesh.

“Was there anybody to start with?” The analyst was persisting. See, he was doing things with his hands that told more than what he said of the emptiness in that place.

The bodies disappeared. The thought was a blank hollow.

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“Words, repeatedly twittering like birdsong, overflow a boundary of meaning & flood my mind drowning out the pictures. Imagine being stuck under a waterfall. So now I feel writing was a blind alley, or worse an endless tunnel taken tangential to my desires. It made me a fugitive in the only place left for me. I thought at the time it would be a way of breaking the close correspondence, continually haunting me, between the marks I have no choice but to make & the other worlds thus barred by them to me. I hoped that the effacement or just a blurring of this tie as I made each mark, however indecipherable or meaningless, would deliver a tranquil haven, once & for all.” This said the artist slipped pencil & paper (teeming with hundreds of marks) into his pocket & started to rise. The analyst waved him back into the arms of the sofa. She closed her eyes. It never could happen again. Once done, damage to the fabric of that closed world was irreparable.

Although the voluptuous wood nymph is alone on her branch we join her; every time we look we make love in the blink of an eye. A tear rolls down her cheek.

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. . . Stop chattering. Why this uncontrollable desire to speak? Why couldn't you keep your trap shut in the first place? Now look where we are. For you a wound never forms a scar it is always open. This will heal it. The bed stood in the centre of the back wall under a Chinese picture of a branch. Two crumpled shapes under the cover: entwined lovers. His eyes were shut tight. She placed her palm over his closed mouth & felt the dry touch of his lips. He smelled the blood & his head sank deeper into the pillow.

Unlatched by someone, the brown door swung loose in the breeze. It was left to scrape backwards & forwards over the protruding pebbles of the concrete path.

You think it was me who gave the game away? Told the world what those strangers did. Don't you believe me when I say what was deliberately said to hurt you, to savage your life, was spread by someone else? Why do you want to blame me? And it happened a long time ago. It was your childhood.

Someone?

The words did the dirty work.

When the words leave you they are fine by the time I get them they cause trouble. They are corrupt.

He'd shaken his head loose of the gagging fingers & blew the raw odour of meat away.

Those words don't travel well because they are meaningless the moment they are spoken.

You always say that but to stalk their discontent amongst us like wild beasts they had to have been given a free hand by you & me & count for something to us.

How can they become deranged by crossing a few inches of space (or paper)? Close your eyes . . . another world exists.

The hated world of a thin undulating line. Its meaning? Unknown.

Even if untrue they can still spill out. Flood & sometimes drown the sorrow.

They were spilt. She waved her hand. Implicating them both but dismissing his explanation.

Eventually the analyst said. "You wrote them." She never failed to say this. And she thought he never failed to make light of it. This time by his continuing silence.

They didn't slip out over a loose lip.

Meaning she invited them. Suggesting she invited them. Saying she invited them.

The words were ill-fitting & evasive. They couldn't be mine.

"Are you saying you were discarding them?"

And the words lamely fall trapped where the deceptive & evidently interchangeable items of the narrative undermine the move & place it beyond reach. Almost said. Failing to be seen. Blow me a kiss.

"In a way in which they weren't written off."

Blow me.

"No?" Asked the analyst.

How can we be sure? But he believed that by now she had had the inevitable anxious thought. That was the crux of it. And she was nailed to it. She couldn't have lavished more care on them.

When words burst out, watch out. Obviously overeager to get in any ear or any storybook & to march proudly along the line into the circular labyrinth, trailing deceit, was grand. They must be closely watched.

The artist was still absently silent. What difference did it make? He said he was waiting for a fulsome word to use.

* * *

And he knew that as a continuing project trying to find somewhere to live outside the page it was hopeless merely aiming to gain another try on the same silent blank page. (But his excuse is that it wasn't quite the proposal. This time it was to be an unmapped vital journey much of which takes place in the convoluted (by destruction) space of an actual labyrinth laid out on the aisle & another parallel journey taking place in a real rose window towering above it. A stumble out of the earthen frying-pan into the fire of blazing colour).

What about the stone figures guarding the door? Through time they had all been damaged. They were all women. Now an armed sentry was on duty, to guard them, sleeping in the shadow. They were beyond reach.

How can somewhere special be discovered by an action, dubiously claimed to be clear-cut, that couldn't have taken place it took so much time to complete?

Who knows if it ever was?

You said, defensively, a place gained by an incomplete or unsuccessful mixing of fiction to establish a structure would do. There would be a touch of truth in it. We know that under the eyes of the world the most perfect flesh becomes tainted, covered in weals, pocked & gruesome. What was seen to be tasty now seems to be carrion. And at that moment is discarded although still pristine & fresh. Is that it?

“Any opportune perch & only one or two words to learn to earn my keep.” The Wolf replied to So & So in a hoarse voice & got up. The analyst said nothing but followed him with her eyes, a smile hidden by her fist.

* * *

A door was slammed shut. The wall, a substantial unity once more, reverberated to the sound of a waterfall. The Wolf looked decidedly uneasy at this turn of events. For not only was it happening far too early. It was also too late. He must have known more than the artist who, oblivious, was obviously lagging behind the run of things in the session taking the blows as they fell. Making no attempt to parry them. The Wolf thought forgetting could be useful here. But if that was right he was just about at the right spot at the right time biro in hand assiduously scribbling, leaning forward to catch every word . . . the reverie making sure nothing would be left out of the obituary.

And it would include all the other makeshift deliverances (non-pyramidal, he insisted) where he can ‘stop’ in all the warmth that word held for him as a child.

I find that hard to believe. She said to herself staring at the brown door. Was he ever able to draw a picture of that harsh & difficult time? Get anywhere near how alone he was?

She scribbled a note with the word ‘brutal’ underlined.

Wait. He almost turned back. Could he draw the past in & instead, just this once, give a powerful picture of the fast moving tight-line walker of his early dreams always trailed by a few vague figures, unidentified but friendly. A multiple being which could escape from every constraint & every danger & so traverse the clinkstone hills of childhood effortlessly. “That also meant go through them: burrow.” Eager to be off, the tiresome Wolf bounced the wool ball up & down in his hand, as ever in the know & pleased to give away a secret. “Where the rabbit is hidden.”

But, as we know, when the rabbit is pulled out of the hat there is the possibility, amongst other things, of a sale or a killing. We have to know if this is a sell-out. If it is desirable. Is the rabbit the goods?

“It’s the same old rabbit.” The Wolf scratched an ear. “We should try to get a new one.”

“Do we have to do this every time? Yes you can. No you can. Maybe you can. Don’t we know by now?” The artist was interrogating his own reflection in the mirror. And this fractured reflection was not coming up with the goods. He turned as Anguine Sakini stirred under the covers.

“Can or cannot fuck it all.” She said dreamily trying to recall all the ways the creatures she had seen copulating in a pond that night had done it. And Sakini, determined to draw up a list & work down it with the artist, with or without his agreement, stepped out of bed pulling off the black silk pants she had stolen from the analyst.

* * *

As Schlumper waited (the above should be sufficient explanation why he was alone) & considered the bollox of love, not scornfully but as an enigma, this artist, who was also drawing on a sheet of white paper, with a crayon tied to a long stick, an intricate entanglement of mutilated figures illustrating love's effects & treasures (but which also could have been a map showing where it was & how you got to the faraway (where else) land of Love) knew that by the faraway look of him he seemed to the others, because they misread that look, to see all the ins & outs of the evil day & of what was going to happen so had to act as if he knew what to do but what was, when it was nasty or worse, murderous, was only lumped passing blind in an immensity of excuses including this one, he said to himself casting a critical eye over the picture, a wipe-out & the artist erased most of the work.

Round about One hundred and eleven, Schlumper said tapping out an imaginary count with a finger. I've got to stop rambling.

That were what? The odds swollen up on the side of adversity. He looked strangely happy at that word & began meticulously drawing again. When it was plum it was an elusive assault never quite resolved into good luck or even a straight forward lost moment in monotony. In that state he could have disengaged his smile from the uneasy alliance it had with the rest of his face (the artist shrugged a nonchalant unknowing luscious shrug) where he could cast him off to slip away somewhere beyond numbers where his hollow tincan metal stick like a third limb with a horse's head roughly modeled would hold his weight & strike the earth at last not bend with sharp finality showing tiny rips on the

crease like the corners of an old mouth &, mind you, once there in pleasure take it. One hundred and seventeen, stop rambling. Schlumper was, as ever, unable to make it add up. Never regret lost chances: act those moments of possession & accept them.

Come on Schlumper he said to himself, you'll have to stalk this book instead of sheltering under an umbrella of frivolous denials, pull yourself out of that hole with no sides & try to re-engage in the struggle with the puzzle, for he knew, or had an idea that even if he couldn't pull away from it, it didn't mean being stuck in the headlight of euphoria (I know but 'frozen' is too stiff) while trying to pile in some meaning (any opaque reference would do), in slang, with a hoarse voice & keep it complicated enough to make the letters sing under their inarticulate load & fly uneasy but long along various trajectories wildly out of aim & as if that pool of light feeling was not the place to be or if it was, which is what I should have said, he said to himself, what am I doing or going to do after in that bulging mess when memory held together by silence is released & constructed into a sombre framework? That must add up to something he said as he nearly choked.

Should that be distended? How can it become that distorted? Watch it swell. Schlumper carefully drew the new figure's genitals, the pencil point stroking in sinuous curves.

I know, he repeated to himself as he ducked the issue, you'd stay submerged as long as you could in that thought & whether calling it secretive or prudent opting to say less & less until repetitively & you say it yourself, irresponsibly, lost.

Better leave it alone. Detach & fall into line; in with ecstasy. Schlumper turned the sheet 90% his eyes now slits, following the lure. He shook his head. At first glance he couldn't

believe who was now staring off the paper at him standing next to the dog, a rough looking animal lying along the lower edge, about to roll into dusty grey fixity at Schlumper's feet. Which shuffled nervous of the jaws of their new companion.

No I won't stay stuck in the same picture, Schlumper said to himself, I'd sooner pass white smoke instead of piss. In this one I feel imperiled; it is the coldest predicament I've ever trapped myself in & I must escape from it. A blunder will probably do the trick. Or something odd, a change only visible from certain angles. Quick. Sketch in a wall.

The stick whipped about above the paper giving the impression of a spontaneous outpouring but really it was painstaking & you know you've only got so long & this tangled mixture of pencil lines has drawn a scene with detail so slow the wind has been captured live in a half stripped tranquil landscape caught red-handed blowing a woman up against a black tree bole & she, feeling it is about to lick into her cunt, has her arms tucked across a flapping skirt & protectively thrust between her legs but showing her thigh while close by under a fly-over volleys of many many bullets incessantly fired from a machine gun swarm like smoked bees ricocheting around the concrete pillars until stuck & stilled in the fixed eyes of the woman her hair streaming over her narrow shoulders staring directly into my eyes, while being ravished & her face looked the same as that of the love-sick woman being rubbed out at that moment in the drawing.

The main point about something special happening is that you don't know it. If you do, something special probably isn't really happening. Like a bee incessantly bouncing off a transparent pane next to an open door. And Schlumper knew he was standing in for someone else in this woman's life. He'd known from the start. This doesn't mean he was

pretending; when he did it he was genuinely it. Nor did it mean she knew of her real desires that were only suggested by an ache betraying but not revealing them. And life had got crowded at times despite trying to spread the load onto stand-ins with aliases. So was he withholding as much as he could to make it a haunting life? Or was the secrecy a hindrance merely used for compression? To get it over with? Try to imagine it out in the open. That made him shudder. Or were the disguises necessary for covering the ground fast.

Now he was waiting for another person to take over & he wasn't sure he wanted to have his path crossed or wanted to give up tracing this world. Still unconvinced although he knew leaving its compass would save him. He had been content to be known as 'I' for there were several of those; including a little known indirect reflexive which he had found useful when necessary to fool himself.

Schlumper's acts seemed overshadowed by a previous or parallel life in one of those minute universes which abound & kept him at loggerheads with himself so it was never simply an error or deception when he spoke, it was almost always a repeat of a nagging distant echo that he could never quite catch.

And when he did?

When he did? He never did. He couldn't get it to emerge distinctly.

It sounds as if they couldn't agree where to be. Was it such a cacophony?

He could never approximate to it even by guesswork. That's why he looked so sad sometimes. He could never get it into focus long enough to explain it which, of course, would have pinned it down. Perhaps it was like a simple portrait painted over a more

complicated picture . . . a woman leaning over a cradle . . . four layers of meaning for her & then another four layers to paint it out. And when both are seen together by X-rays what you thought showed tenderness became less serene or even grotesque.

Perhaps that was it . . . too difficult to apprehend in the light of day. Or perhaps the thought dwindled away . . . leaked out . . . & vanished. And with the help of radiography, left the stark, unmistakable likeness of his earlier love waiting, standing alone, in a pale grey dress showing through the celebrations that had been taking place. A party now left in flat shadow.

Yet Schlumper who even a fortnight later thought (& I'm guessing hoped, as he always sought resolution while seemingly jumping on the spot) someone might turn up in this exploration with a plausible clue about what was happening gave up, eventually realizing that wanting to know what to do & wanting to be able to do it were a long way off up front, so far that their outline could be hatched in so many different ways the future might turn into anything. With a relatively lucid plot Schlumper claimed he could probably make it to the denouement. Provided the Wolf behaved. But how could it be both transparent & refined & have the model come along? And would the Zombie agree to have a few touching moments observed? She could make everything grind to a halt because of an insatiable need for explanation. You know the expression 'a monkey on your back'. Well Schlumper was the organ-grinder par excellence although he preferred to be called by other names when turning the wheel. So he would most likely fit in. But would the monkey ever stop begging or the music ultimately stop?

What is going to be tolerable until then?

Is it to be met, every time I turn a corner in my past again, by the prodigious imitation of a smiling face expressing welcome with no confusion written on it. I doubt it will happen . . . but

This

“First of all, Johnny.” Said She being as yet unnamed, her free hand cupped protecting her pussy. “I never said I was going this far.” Advancing demurely she used up the space between them as if dancing. She used up all the space in the room with a smile which constructed, temporarily, a sexy mask. He was always amazed how quickly that subterfuge could be changed by her bad temper. And when in her hold, under her, as the room swam before his eyes & contracted as if halved by the stroke of a pencil he felt free to challenge her duplicity . . . it had really become part of their sexual act.

“If you say it (whatever, she shook her head taking it in but claiming she wasn’t listening) emphatically you may appear to be confessing your part . . . connivance . . . I’d mumble or stutter or protect your mouth instead . . . you were more than eager . . . admit it . . . or dress like a man.”

Blank-faced at this but being penetrated as she wished she continued, with a rigid spine, bobbing up & down blaming him for the best part she felt forced to take in this show. Being a performer transcending the job she was on. And blaming herself for enjoying it. And drowning out these guilty thoughts with grunts & squeals as she skidded to a climax. “And who asked you to look in?” She paused breathless --- Questioning. The flush that had started up in her face at the moment she thought of sexual pleasure had suffused into her neck. Effortlessly she rolled onto all fours glancing over her shoulder expectantly. “Me.” A finger teasingly indicated a heart’s place. “You want me?” He saw a crooked finger meaning – Yank me. Crank me.

“You are an unwanted intruder. I never want to see you. But as you’re here . . .”

“So that’s why I was longing to become invisible. But as I am here as you say I’ll get on with it.”

“Supposed to become invisible. I don’t get the feeling you are a reluctant rider.” She grunted untrammelled opening herself up with her fingers.

“I’m in position.” He cautioned. Fully persuaded.

“Take a trip.” Head cocked on one side she stuck out her tongue signaling it was high time . . . “Where no one can find you out?” She squealed. What did she mean?

“He took that one. I want another.” He gasped. What did he mean?

“Here I am Anguine Sakini.” She shouted, as her crimson neck became rigid.

* * *

Such is Expectation & Joy I found those days excruciating as it felt like being inside the embrace of a foursome there were so many contorted limbs hitting on me, knocking me for being on the job (with at least one reluctant participant who, however, refused to disengage). A bit hunched over Schlumper, just for fun, drew more limbs than was necessary on the couple . . . Stargazing. He also tuned in the J.O.Y. channel on TV. There appeared in the snowy interference of this cheap channel a couple on a corny date in a boat on a shallow lake (think Manet/Monet). A jerk who seriously hopes he’s in with a chance to go down on a vain swallow with her bikini top gummed to her tits like a bullet bra of the 50’s, cold as ice but good at it. Tantalizingly close to nothing the boat is scuttled ‘blown up’ under them by scenic effects & they flounder to the bank wet through. And the man is really indignant knowing his chance had been scuppered. Not

made of concrete but as near its colour anyone could be & still be alive, holding his head in his hands hiding his face & casting a shadow of a vulture he read & Sakini speechless at its absurdity, heard him. “At that placeless frontier where vague thoughts abound in an obscure light . . . I draw. To embody them.”

“Dead meat.” Schlumper whistled out of tune pretending not to look or listen. He couldn’t pretend to be interested, the figures he was chalking on the drawing were now crammed in a room-like space with no way out except as part of a diagram that could unfold beyond the imitation on the page. (It was becoming increasingly difficult to keep the surface pristine).

“Was the shadow like that because it included Johnny’s hunched shoulders?” Sakini wondered, glancing at the picture. This question does make sense. Johnny is always there . . . handy . . . on the job satisfying Sakini’s whimsical needs whichever woman she is taking sides with.

“Don’t rush to answer. That field is rigged to catch you out. Don’t be deceived from now on whenever that is said up pop inappropriate images which may or may not be described or illustrated.”

“What?”

“The shadow.”

Schlumper knew it had escaped. He could see that clearly enough. And that it was mad. He grinned knowing how off putting a loose skull could be. (The eternally doubting face of the skull is staring up at us from the earth we chucked over it. Schlumper shook his head).

“But I suppose unless we can prevent it, it has to begin sometime.” He tapped his foot swiftly drawing a figure shape & filling it in black. Then he sketched some lines loosely forming a box you know it could be solid or open.

* * *

“What’s in here?” Tap tap again.

The Model re-appears (& could take hold of the stick.)

“Men!” notices stick.

“What do you want?”

“I’m a stick. I’m not very good at acting so I have to be helped”

“& held?”

Taps box. “I can always tell when I’m out of my depth.”

“And act it perfectly.”

“Whatever you do is going to be taken over. A glance in the mirror should convince you of that.” He glances in the mirror.

“Of what you are not . . . going to be.”

He gave her a kiss. She tapped him on the cheek with the stick instead of returning the kiss.

I don’t remember feeling the anticlimax of reality. Although I walked smack into it. I saw a man strolling along with a child & felt I had forgotten something very important about my past. It was a refusal to grapple with its name. Which means I am still in an unfulfilled future. Where all is constrained by an interpretation of reality, not making it, constructing it out of bits & pieces it doesn’t want to belong.

Schlumper carried on drawing. Several other figures followed the pencil point out.

I saw a huge man walking a toy dog.

I saw a disheveled drunk cross the road weaving through the traffic & walk into a barrier rail.

I saw a naked pregnant woman thrust out her breasts with a hat still perched on her head covering a bun of hair.

I saw two lovers although they couldn't have been doing much from the way they were acting. "You need more detail there, Mr. Schlumper." The model placed a finger on the back of Schlumper's hand & stopped him. He looked into her eyes. "Too late. She is ugly nothing more can be done. And she is interrogating him."

I saw what I thought was a figure pointing to the way out.

"I've had that image many times before. I never fail to fall for it."

So don't rush in. Don't fool yourself you can forget (& note it could have been essential if I wanted to survive to remain not just in the shadows but be part of them. To succeed I know I needed to be in a geometry drawn by someone else).

"Is that why you are skulking there now?"

I wanted to write 'be invisible' so much.

As Sakini's free hand, the one with the blue string around its wrist, slid over my thigh & wrapped her fingers into mine I felt her shudder as she asked.

"Why did you have to pile so many rapt bodies on the paper that they can't move?"

"Is that what happened?"

“You didn’t know? I can’t believe that. You were doing the illustrations.” Sakini grimaced as if pinched.

Here they are allowing themselves to be packed so tight they have to feel the life in each other, wrapped around each other tighter than the glistening marble coils of copulating snakes. Schlumper’s pencil choked the space with curves.

* * *

Get the facts in a tangle straight off. Mangle the ingredients. Peel the fabric off the roller & hang it up at the threshold which is both an entry & an exit where I am lodged observing myself stepping out into an adventure as I see myself returning from one, such is the fragility of my life, I peered intently into the room (box! It was the box but he didn’t know) believing I would be happy with what I saw.

Something happened. Is happening. Sakini believes you want to love her & although it could be written in Black & White it can’t happen, she can’t give her love.

She can’t pull the deceit off. A capricious shape as it moves with the present, dogging its shadow in its shadow then taking on a vague animal form; it slipped away this time.

It did happen. Not all at once. She knows he had got there, to that need, bit by bit & each piece was still clear & separate as it was put down although now irreducible from the rest (even the last bit).

And at that moment you would see

Colours glow on the white in between the black lines.

In silence.

* * *

If you are right the grey clouds parted. A moonbeam shone & its flight did momentarily light an entrancing vision, which, once made visible was gone in a flash. I think you are saying that's all there was.

Then why was it that other fugitive sparks illuminated her body so it was possible for the picture of the lovers to be remembered as she looked down at her swollen hump of Venus while making an open oval shape with her mouth at him which exactly expressed a feeling as elusive to my heart now as it was in that cool night?

As soon as Sakini felt her sex melt she whispered, "Nownownownow."

'We are but snowflakes.' Johnny had replied to a different voice with another hard tug on that tight knot of grief. And added in a strangled voice (was it a jeer?) 'We need the icy blasts to survive.' Sakini, uncomprehending, wriggled under him in an enticing way.

She didn't contrive the shape of her lips & she would never hear how the artist would feel now about her lips forming that crimson oval as she stared at each spark flying off the toes of her stockings stretched on her open legs offered out towards him. Silently.

Caught dancing, as earlier, by a petrified light which wrapped around the couple in a nebulous embrace; this cloaking dim & dusky stuff had never been seen on earth. As it drifted away he heard her say, 'I'm waiting for you to say it'.

Must you know what happened?

Why?

It would need more precision than I am capable of

And

It would require my presence.

Would we have asked the way from any of the fools off to the Wake? No. Because I know they will be back from the end to start off the rant again spluttering over the skin (skin?) again, with the same incomprehensible slippery tongued excuses in a language known only to one man as before for not going on the thin ice & nothing would be clear. I'd be no better off.

And I'll bet. Not a word will be said with more emphasis than you will muster while reading this & spit out 'cunt.'

What does this unnamed woman resemble at the moment of shaping her lips?

Is there a cloud of words for it?

And where is the word you are going to use when you have to ask this question?

Is it in the grey shadow of that cloud cast across your mind?

Or does your mind dissolve away, retreat from the shade thrown by the word?

Is my heart still reeling? In silence.

With disbelief of that lust becoming delectable, now as I participate in the instant of love again with that sighting, with her vision in the alliance of her look I know I had been shown the 'perfection' of desire

And this moment gives me an incomprehensible feeling impossible to contain because it simultaneously holds both the image & its loss; leaving me knowing that after having recognized the gift but failing to stretch out a hand to take it I denied the chance of something fading away becoming something to hold fast forever before it was tangible.

And this is not a memory; it is a permanent threshold from beyond which I have shaped a longing that only became a frozen response when repeatedly described. Silently.

And the need to keep saying it was used as deft as a spoon to spin the words out of the depths of my mind even as they were being repeatedly spoken by the same voice in my head.

You circle around.

Why is there solace in attempting a description of that glowing figure outlined in black.

Lost as she is forever.

Because that is what I do. I am a **pack**. I howl as I loot my own past so it can be dispersed into the winds as dust & then I can seek it out again.

Thus, there is no defect of memory only what has been previously purloined, smoked out once more, then irretrievably lost.

*

*

*

SNAP!

Spam, invented in time to welcome the artist into the world, was, Schlumper knew because his dogs always refused to eat the gelatinous mass, the right place for the Hotheads to congeal, so we get: **A Spam of Hotheads.**

A gust of wind as well as bringing with it leaden fumes, honks, squealing accelerations, driblets of city sounds & orts of corny bedroom recipes, also lisped softly carrying a vibrant secret it coyly refused to disclose. Was this wind simply reading off the paper as the text flapped loosely under the nose of the artist? A fiercer gust sucked more stolen memories into the same wild slipstream & tore through the decrepit graveyard, with its slate tombstones stacked against the walls, ruffling Schlumper's shirt sleeves as he glared at the looming landscape. With a 3x3 plan in his head containing, as well as himself, dwarves, wood nymphs, kings, concubines & others, all as malleable as putty (although their flesh was firm) announced to his surprised ears by the dreadful noises all around, Schlumper, the declared enemy of hierarchies, had been caught unawares sitting peacefully sketching a plain brick wall under a tall gateway laying in the skyline or their outline over the scribble of earlier years on a piece of hieratica.

Why was he waiting in this narrow patch of shade on the scorched grass outside a derelict housing block called 'NO DOGS', by the 'Hand in Hand' tavern? Cunningly keeping watch well before the appointed time of an assignation hoping to catch a glimpse of someone he had known; see the shape of things & on that peep decide whether to keep the rendezvous. Nearby a man carrying a big bunch of peacock feathers walked quickly: direction Elephant & Castle. His pace took Schlumper's suspicious eye along as swirling between the smoking blocks of flats built in the shaded clay void between the hills, the

hot wind sang & blew someone past him unnoticed. It then rustled under the sheaf of paper at Schlumper's side & scattered them all into the old world in triumph. So much for the stream of consciousness, a linear story or anything uplifting, thought Schlumper. He consoled himself knowing in the early twentieth century a glance could have made it clear from the top of Dog Kennel Hill to the Crystal Palace without a blink. Today from the materialistic rutted hilltop to the mechanistic lattice beacon concreted in the waste ground where the palace once stood the atmosphere is confounded by loaded sonic waves & it will take these incessant chords of a 'Fats' Domino tune from his childhood drumming in his head to get him across the divide.

When the colourful sound had hurtled him the short step to another world Schlumper was in that beyond which had been given to him many times for an escape & a trial.

THIS

park shaded by towering plane trees was where Schlumper had landed up. A parched island locked in by an iron fence. There in a paved corner stood a shed-like chicken-shack cafe, & eagerly leaning across the counter, almost sliding over the zinc to get a close look at him, he had been given a piece of paper for his trouble, often known as a 'slip' by a sinuous young woman. Flicking her rubbery lips with a pink tongue she wanted more time to eye him up & check his credentials but a fearsome look choked her off. It would have to wait. So after quickly making a silent compact with this skinny blond girl with a silly face, which, in retrospect, he liked but there at first only found attractive, Schlumper then read. 'Imagine a play in the night where you, a monster, are asked to act in a brutal manner. Do you accept the role?' Plus an address. He tapped his

thanks, a rapid beat, on the flap. She didn't know why or what it meant, then. But took her time to think about it with a fixed smile. The other people in the queue got hot & bothered except a tall yes & somewhat lanky girl who seemed to think she was on familiar terms with the artist & knew all about the causes of this delay.

“This often happened.” She said to no one in particular. “When no - while no - During that's right intercourse.”

So here he was on the grass keeping a sharp kiri kiri boiling hot behind the part burned-out ruined block 'NO DOGS'. Probably wasting time trying to spot who arrived at the ruined block 'NO BALL GAMES' for it was in there, several floors up into the desolate mess of wrecked homes, that Schlumper had been invited to a meeting-rendezvous; Schlumper not knowing how to welcome the word 'group' into his mind. A familiar urinal stink clutched his throat in the rattle-trap lift. Isolated in the grimy lift cage with its decoration of scratched graffiti on the grey tin walls, out of others earshot he muttered to himself answers to the cryptic questions posed about the crude images. . . . 101 that was the number on the white sail I saw as I kissed her . . . stop rambling Schlumper . . . fuck me yes she said that in the back of a bus before . . . so that would be her name no doubt . . . had the driver kept his eyes fixed on the road all would have been well but the greasy light of night had closed in blotting out the verge, although the driver knew animals would lie exposed on the warm, dry road to slumber he . . . that thin girl with those rubbery lips & that open look of desire had reminded him of someone he couldn't yet place . . . the driver was an ugly bastard. The bus brakes screeched. And the vehicle

skidded past the stop as three (or perhaps four) people raced after it flapping their arms in dismay.

The lift clanged: its door opened. Schlumper took a pace then hesitated. Were the thoughts random? They had come with such an easy intimacy, as if with him everyday, that he felt they mustn't be squandered. Were they entwined with this moment?

She lightly touched his arm. "What are you doing in this dump?" Said a thin girl, her cheeks pale at the rashness of her impetuous question to a stranger. With its heavy cargo of sexual intent, obvious to her, making her heart race & her voice fail but a need so disguised Schlumper mistook it for pleasantry.

Here she was again.

"Are you meeting the expert Sakini?" She asked encouraged by his stoop towards her as the hair on his neck bristled. The only Sakini he knew had been dead for many years.

She had stopped him, one very thin hand resting on a breast emphasized the contour of her body; there was resignation in the inclination of her head as she waited but didn't expect a reply. It was also a blocking move; her stance intimated an imminent collapse but denied being a call for help & so kept him fixed for use.

Taken completely off-guard, the artist blurted out. "I would be surprised & shocked to find her here." He held out an arm as if expecting the news to bowl her over.

"Oh. Why?"

"It's seems." Schlumper held back his knowledge of her death. "We knew each other in a different . . . you know . . . lifetime when Anguine was a model. What is her specialism now?"

“A model?” The frail looking young woman cried. She had smooth swelling in the skin all around her pale eyes. Like goggles but it wasn’t funny.

“She was an inspirational woman.”

“I would have loved to have seen her . . . then.”

“She is on show in a few museums but you wouldn’t really recognize her. Her natural beauty was so powerful it turned the paint into a boiling liquid you couldn’t tame it.” The eloquence damned them outright out of sight.

“Could I do it?” She caught him unprepared with this frank request.

“Do you want to model?” Covering why he was dismayed with a look he hoped she would take for an appraisal.

“I do.” She said in a very strange voice that also seemed to ring a bell & awaken someone in the distant past. “Am I . . .” Schlumper was already nodding anything to cut off the subject. He couldn’t see the other hand but its wrist was large, not fat, at odds with the rest of her scrawny figure. “My name is Pollak.” She offered her hand. He shuddered involuntarily, his spine felt cold.

Pollak shouldered open the door with an eagerness she would have had as a child rushing in to see Mother Goose. On the step they heard a voice babbling sweetly like a brook in a long lost summer.

“First there was that cardboard Bidonville where water cost an arm & a leg but everyone was rotting from the feet up apart from the nut who lived insulated on several layers of tinsel. Then that lugubrious squat exponentially filling with drugged bodies piling high, it almost immediately degenerated into a claustrophobic nightmare. Why?” She pointed at

the model. “Don’t explain. And thirdly the Post Office, always with an enormous queue like you.” She smiled at the newcomers. “In which every person could have been auditioning for a part in something like Mother Courage crossed with the Ziegfeld Follies provided there was no work involved.” She waved them into position. “When all hell was let loose by the Zombie somehow getting out of line we never got to the bottom of it because she went AWOL but there was a crime against some government code on cloning; then by chance, we were offered **THIS.**” Said an exasperated Anguine Sakini caught in full flow by a barrage of paper balls. “**NOW.** Can’t you ever leave anything alone?” She kicked an apple core into a corner & rubbed at the dust on her snakeskin boot as she hopped around on a grey bare foot. “Sticking your fingers into every cavity.” “Wouldn’t be human if I did. Or is it didn’t?” Retorted Miss Z. ineffectually brushing at the flecks of heart-shaped glitter on her bare thighs & peering up through the dense paste of her newly acquired mascara, magazine style, at the couple who had just arrived. She sneezed. “Stop kicking up the dust. We have been tipped out before & will be again. It wasn’t a paradise. What can we do?”

“Careful. You can’t tell what nerve you might hit. Look the harder you try the worse it gets. And that applies to your make-up as well.” The model ruefully rubbed a few grey spots on her outfit caused by return shots & made the smudges spread. She had decided she liked Miss Z.

(They all openly exchanged inquisitorial inquisitive furtive looks waiting for an introduction that never came).

“Well I’m thinking about what to do now.” Said the artist taking his place in the circle, wondering if he should seize the initiative, not naturally pensive but having a shot at it. He put his chin in his hand. “How could you expect to conduct meetings in examples one, two & three you mentioned? Would you try it in a ballroom while there was a dance going on?”

“I wouldn’t. When you’ve done spouting give me a sign, would you.” Raising her perfect glossy eyebrows the model mockingly raised a finger into an objectionable position pointing to an unobjectionable body part. Miss Z. was about to tell Schlumper that she would certainly do it on a crowded dance floor but then she was resilient when called upon to perform. Had she got the expression right? She wasn’t sure so stopped frowning & once again her face glowed.

The lift bell clanged. They all waited with baited breath. The brown door flew open.

“Err. Don’t give it. Or take it. Not yet . . . there’s a few more . . . err . . . bits & pieces to cut I mean to count off.” He looked over his shoulder holding his arm outstretched.

“Before I come . . . intervene.” Mr. Holukos was heading into the room not meeting anyone’s eye starting off at a mock dynamic pace in defence of his usual indecisive way in public. “Relax . . . relax.” He tried to become doubly expansive but was shot down like a false dawn stealing over the horizon.

Darkly, Pollak snapped. “Why do you let that brute hang around? He stinks of raw meat. He’s a butcher.”

“You should know the smell.” Schneider couldn’t resist the quip but didn’t like the way she went pale so quick. “Well fuck you.” Pollak rejoined coldly with a venom belying her stature but showing her temper. “Ah! No. I’ll take that back. I tried it once & it was shit.” Wrong-footed Schneider looked embarrassed & mean; it was a bad match for his normally ugly face. “You must leave your brain to science; they might be able to isolate the deadliest poison known to man from it.”

“I hope you’re the rat they test it on.” And in a second Pollak was twisted around him as if they were dancing a ‘slow’ with a heavy beat. “What luck. A blind cat happens upon a dead rat.” Shouted Miss Z. over the noise. Until Schlumper realized it was a real sound of the driver’s head being battered with a heavy bag & intervened. To no avail.

Pollak now enraged, having bitten Schneider, now nursing the wound feeling unwell, was kicking Holukos, now defending his legs with a chair hastily snatched from under the model who landed in the dust with a bump. Pollak was shouting. “You bastard. How can you expect me to . . .” Holukos clapped a hand over her mouth.

“I used to get the group off to a better start than this.” Said Sakini apologetically to Schlumper, then figuring the fact that he had entered with this vixen called Pollak asked not so mildly. “Where did you pick her up? Or did she bring you?”

“On the doorstep.” Schlumper replied. “Don’t you know her?”

“Never seen her before.” Sakini’s eyes narrowed as if a thought had shifted their focus before becoming conscious. She fixed Schlumper with a questing look as she prepared to wade in. “I’m getting careless.” It was ominously innocent.

‘She knows’ Schlumper reflected, ‘she has recognized me but can’t quite get it all to fall in place.’ He reached into the tussle & deftly took Pollak out of action, rolled her onto the floor with his knee in her back. He could feel a hard layer encasing her torso that creaked under the pressure. Everyone else stood back. “I can understand why she is never wanted.” Holukos said mildly full of guile. “She is difficult to get on with.” They all agreed, licking their wounds.

Normally in this counter-factual group the aggression ritual hadn’t gone this far but Pollak never could stick within the limits set by others; all the possible linear & spatial permutations there were to destroy harmony with her fellow beings she had pre-set to trigger on the slightest quiver of an insult (never tangible to anyone else).

Lying pinioned under Schlumper’s weight, face down staring wild-eyed but blind into the dust Pollak lost complete contact with the external surroundings.

“Get me something to tie her hands & feet. When she rejoins us it will be as a hellcat.”

Schlumper grinned up at Sakini stripping off her tights.

“One leg for each job.” She said returning his intrusive look with a wink & with a practical turn strung Pollak’s legs together & then with the same skill pinioned her arms.

Pollak wanted to turn the blowtorch on someone close at hand, someone who always seemed to squeeze her guts when they were near. ‘You can’t fiddle with the past’ she heard herself say as she stared at her back view in the mirrors she had set specifically for that purpose. ‘But where else am I going to forge all those conditions I need so badly to exist?’ She was bare-back, riding the King in front of all those other envious women but then her feet got stuck in the mire. Where had she conjured that shit up from?

“I don’t know what to do with her.” Said the disembodied voice of Schlumper.

“She will have to be taken in hand.” Said another sweeter voice. “She must have been after something or someone here. We could all have a turn with her. She might say if one of us gives her what she came for.”

“Pollak takes pleasure in the violence.” Pollak recognized Schneider’s voice & howled as the King forced her to spin while her feet were still being sucked into the mud so that her legs became twisted in an ever increasing spiral. This was the act of copulation being multiplied all through Pollak body & her body trying to reject it. ‘Why haven’t I come across this before? When it gets to my neck I’m done for.’ She said to herself. ‘The only thing that can save me is the corset.’ She writhed & bounced against the floor, movements to check she was wearing her second skin & also to re-establish contact with the world; the bare space of the room.

“She’s coming round.” A faraway voice said. And Pollak was going round & round & she knew the way to end it - open her eyes & with the touch of a murderous look dispatch the perpetrator of the depraved act away to . . . Kingdom come. At that, with the serpent penetrating her deeper & deeper driving her up the wall, Pollak knew she was being taunted & there was no way she could be reconciled to this fact. All her energy was now being swallowed up in the effort to free herself; but from what?

[Spam? First lay the fingertips lightly against the skull & collapse the extended hand, quickly bending it at the knuckles so the heel of the hand slaps the forehead. It means, I think, screwy. Spam is a very useful conversational tool.]

A RUB OF NUDES.

As usual Pollak was angry with Schlumper just for being there as she swirled her red colours into his studio. Unexpected & uninvited, vaguely crab-like coming silently out of the dark corridor, as she passed by gave him a sideways bump with the top of her leg, catching his thigh hard to let him know in no uncertain way she had hoped he wasn't going to be there & was insulted by his presence. It was thrown with all of her weight, a little more than playful & had happened more than once. He gave ground but she swung her buttocks again & squealed involuntarily upon the hard contact of her hip bone with his. In the ensuing tussle Schlumper ran his hands all over her upper torso but again he couldn't find a single verifiable piece of body for his fingers to claim under the flurry of baggy clothes; no bra underpinning breasts, no pants nipping in on a waist not even a strap to define her shoulder, & snap. But while butting him with her rear & deliberately trying to kick his balls with her heels as he tried to shake her into submission in an enveloping hold there was never a hint in all the action that it was anything more than a physical substitute for a bad-tempered row. There was never a tender interlude set up by a mistakenly gentle caress.

Keeping her head down level with his guts, her hair flying over her face sticking to her damp lips pouting defiantly, body folded over ramming his, putting more than an arm's length between her cleft & his hands, Pollak wrestled close going for his nob & he, although not unwilling to let her catch it, wasn't sure what she would do, so defended his fly fiercely. This always threw her.

Thinking to have the measure of what he was about she had constantly sought a showdown; now, rattled by his vigorous defence & unexpected strength, she suddenly gave up struggling; but even with her arms limp beaten in the assault, tacitly agreeing to be felt, he couldn't catch hold of her body. It needed more clothes on to define it.

After several bouts of this rough horseplay, which had acted as a substitute for any intimate conversation, where he once or twice skimmed her moist cunt, they seemed to have temporarily cleared the air between them. Schlumper now realized Pollak was poor & didn't own very many things, including underwear; but wouldn't settle for anything that she considered unfeminine. This obviously didn't preclude grappling with Schlumper at the drop of a hat.

As she rubbed her bruises ruefully, putting on more expression than necessary or convincing for the act, he forced the issue; asked if she would like to go shopping. "I guess you need a few things . . . a bra?" She nodded sullenly but half smiled keeping her lips over her teeth. "Tights? Cosmetics?" He continued. Her body shuddered & she scowled at him.

"Now?" He ventured. Silently Pollak headed for the outside door & turned to wait for him to unbolt it.

There must have been a shape of something under the loose scarlet sweater with its faint odour of pie-crust. Pollak bought, after much secret browsing & tiresome consultation with an eager assistant, a (J. Reger) softline bra 34B called Simone in azure satin.

(Schlumper got to know because he paid the £4.90. And that price gives you the date when all this happened). She lingered over the choice of cherry, mink & oyster before she

had the french knickers to match (£5.50). Then, seeing the hook was firmly in, she pointedly selected the whole silk set of Geisha range choosing chocolate although hesitating long enough over corn, turquoise & scarlet to make him feel mean. This bra was underwired Schlumper noted as he paid & speculated on its effect.

Since answering a note pinned up in a local shop & deferentially accepting a share in the studio complex Pollak had made it clear after a very short honeymoon period, she had an emotional axe to grind &, her parents being dead, was going to hone it on Schlumper.

In no time she had constructed a web out of wool, rope & slices of fabric set rigid by P.V.A. using Schlumper's large, white plastic jerry-can of the glue without permission (or was there a grudging thank-you when tackled about its disappearance?) This tangle filled the rest of the room left spare after a cubby-hole bedroom built out of flattened cardboard boxes had been put up around one of the two windows. It took a few minutes to knock up with the large sheets of card stapled to the wooden floor & plaster walls, a piece of flimsy golden cloth for the doorway, a black blind for the window. This refuge had been made because Pollak claimed she needed to escape from where she was staying & the unwanted attentions of an erstwhile friend who now, according to her (& she hadn't called the police) spent most of his time tracking her down & so swore Schlumper to secrecy. Frowning, Pollak idly stood by & watched Schlumper deftly perform & then, without a word, had thrown herself face down on the old bed that had become part of the structure, dismissing him.

When the worn blind was drawn down in sunshine, it gave a wonderful show of dusky light into the small room. Being covered with scratches & tiny tears the sunbeams

scribbled these marks onto the bed's vermilion cover & here Pollak lay for several hours until the blind was pitch black. She threw her old clothes off & clipped on the filmy bra & went to sit outside in her assemblage. She was there all night. As it became light & Pollak's skin began to glow with the dawn she rubbed & rubbed & rubbed.

"Shall we go again? Shopping." Schlumper asked appearing in an instant. "Different stuff this time."

"Shopping." And, covered in a gauzy but opaque shawl, she got up from her crouching position.

The astonished shop girl had a film of sweat above her upper lip as a wanton & relentless Pollak gave a show of lingerie plumping in the end for the revealing jet chiffon Isadora set. This time Schlumper got a few glimpses of what was what & there was little more than bone. She had worked her way through the workaday stuff to get there. And with the screen & mirror had effortlessly charmed the girl & aroused Schlumper's curiosity.

Pollak also stole a satin basque (in snow with red lace trim etc.)

On the way back, under the steel plates of a railway bridge, with its facing of grimy white tiles Pollak said. "I always know when you wake up."

Schlumper stopped. Pollak stood still; unintentionally she swung the fancy parcel on its string handles in the direction of his crotch. Behind her a streak of green slime was engendered & kept alive by a dribble of water leaking from between the tiles. Schlumper pulled Pollak to one side out of the puddle. "How?"

"Before you wake up you sigh loudly twice." She saw his disbelief. "I'll prove it in the morning. I'll catch you out."

This sorrow that he washed back into the night with the sighs wasn't up for play. It was held apart from Schlumper's daily life by a hard grip that he was afraid to relinquish. And this struggle had plainly showed in the faraway smile he gave her. The wrench her words had caused startled Pollak; she was surprised to have touched on something deep by such a superficial ploy. A secret decision made she looked forward to the next morning with delight & it showed in her provocative step. Schlumper clearly saw her change & was determined to give her a fright.

As he guessed she would, at the peep of day, Pollak came sneaking in on all fours wearing the two pieces of jet chiffon lingerie. She had left the bra unclipped so the transparent cups embroidered with lotus flowers rode loosely on her breasts, for, counting on surprise, she was confident she would win this fight hands down. And make him pay her price. Eat his words. There was nothing new about the dull ache in the pit of her stomach or the searing flashes of sharp pain in her genitals & she wouldn't have admitted it if there was a difference in this from the other stealthy attacks she had made or the many she had suffered as a child. She would wait for the sighs then strike.

Schlumper sighed once, rolled over & sliding his hands sleepily under the pillow grasped the blue silk thread he had hidden there. Pollak tensed, frightened she was about to be discovered & punished, caught her breath as she waited for the thrust which she could never say if she wished for or not & felt to her dismay that piss was dribbling out of her swollen pussy. She quickly tucked the flimsy knickers out of line & pulled them up tight into her crotch. Schlumper sensed the acrid smell & seemed to know it; his brow furrowed, his thoughts drifted to a day, long ago, in the workspace he had shared in a city

far away. It couldn't be true. At the same time he wondered how he was able to flit off into a dream about that at a moment like this. "But we do." He murmured, the gentle words bubbled out, their force was such he was unable to keep them back. They told little of the turbulence underlying the simplest whisper. And less about the thoughtless way he had rejected a naïve but simple attempt to seduce him only to fall in with another very dangerous seduction. Or had the first act taken place?

Pollak leaned towards him hoping that was the expected second sigh. And wondered what the words signified as she felt her breasts ride each nipple into the silk embossed points of the cups of the bra that she now clasped as she slowly rose to straddle the sleeping man's back.

Unseen, from behind, a woman's steely grey shadow lengthened up the wall, cast by the faint light given through an open door. Schlumper felt the warm wet silk clinging to the flesh pressing down on his spine. A warm glow rushed into his guts & that too took him back as had the raw odour of urine to the same event of long ago.

Automatically, unable to resist an urgent need, Pollak started to grind herself hard on the prone figure as if trying to force her body full into his back. She rubbed & rubbed & rubbed. Then she froze. Why hadn't she waited for the second sigh? What had driven her to such carelessness? A cold chill struck her. Surely that horrible Zombie couldn't still materialize? Scalding juice ran out of her, stinging the raw slit.

The shadow had detached itself from off the wall & had stealthily taken hold of Pollak's wrist with the delicacy & speed of a cat setting up a mouse. As the wraith tightened her

icy grip a terrified Pollak stopped flooding Schlumper's body. At that moment Schlumper sighed again & Pollak's other wrist was snapped in steel.

* * *

"I felt another presence."

"I didn't feel that."

"You can't feel . . . that."

"What did you feel?" Snapped the model, not sure. "You were caught red-handed."

"I felt a . . . a . . . a."

"Any unattended articles are liable to be removed without warning. They may be damaged or destroyed." Intoned Miss Z., tying the blue thread around Pollak's left wrist matching the one round her neck. "Now he can do whatever he wishes to do with you." She licked her lips. "He could have anyway."

"He did."

She rubbed her neck. "How do you know?"

"I helped." And Miss Z. cackled with delight at this betrayal. "We pinched you black & blue." She didn't know what else to say.

"There were that many of you?" Pollak gasped with an angry intensity that sounded like she had torn some poisonous lump out of her throat. Including her love?

"That's how we come. There were swarms of us. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha."

* * *

And she called out. I'll bet.

Her love's name? Did she think it was that simple?

I feel swollen, blown up with their disgusting air.

If it's only pneumatic bliss (Gods help you) where else to go?

“Was it enough?” Miss Z. really had no idea.

I will never know, Pollak thought as she discretely checked her finger that she had stroked through her vaginal slit. There was a streak of blood that she wiped on the sheet.

And wondered why it had been impossible to speak out when a child. Dangerous? And more so now? Same danger? From whom? To what?

However. It was dangerous. Somebody had been around who made her flesh creep. Who?

She refused to be tamed.

That comes later.

At that moment Pollak didn't want anything to hinder her progress. It meant swallowing her pride & asking more questions.

“I'll call Holukos. He'll know.”

“No point. He was here too . . . in spirit.”

* * *

Anguine Sakini chose the stunted old man to drive her to the hotel. He could barely see over the extra large steering wheel of the worn-out black vehicle. She knew she should have chosen a better car as they crawled along being overtaken by scooters carrying entire families & a man on horseback. The dwarf had his hand on the horn before he was in first gear & kept it there until the engine stalled in a bottleneck of heavy traffic.

Unconcerned he jumped out taking a hammer kept on the dashboard for these regular breakdowns. With the bonnet up he hammered a few times, slammed it shut & was

leaning through the cab door with his hand on the horn before he took his seat. The hotel, near the top of the hill, was down a side street where the driver refused to go; he snatched the notes she flapped over his head & was off hand on horn.

In the oppressive heat Sakini kept in the shade under the shop awnings. She dawdled remembering the waves in the music she had heard that morning . . . where corals lie (Elgar) sung by J. Baker. 'I didn't think you'd haunt the rest of my life (until) I saw your face in the reflections in the plate-glass.' Her perverse thought coincided exactly with the surprise as she saw Schlumper.

"You must wonder if this meeting doesn't mean there is an absence of choice."

"Luckily we have our memory."

* * *

Because of the uninvited onlookers, as she was **STARK** naked Yimkichor Qush drew on the artist's coat (surprised to find the sleeves were too short for her arms). It only reached down to her waist so she curved out of it giving everything & more away. Just the way she liked. And from a bulging side pocket she pulled out an alarm clock.

"Going to time us?"

"It was there for safe keeping."

Yimkichor had been drawn in ostentatiously hunting a shoe she hadn't lost, pretending she would get dressed if he didn't hurry up & make a move. A loose towel revealingly hugged around her until with all her elaborate weaving around his prone body it accidentally snagged & came off. That's when she took the artist's coat discarded on the chair back as he rushed in to protect what from whom?

Us from

THIS.

At the same time, give or take whatever time you agreed & need but do it **NOW**; from behind the back seat of a bus where he had taken cover the hostage taker shouted ‘SHUT UP’ I want to hear what she’s got to say for herself, but a stranger (Tamar Qush) who didn’t understand English very well stood up & was shot.

“That proves it makes no difference however hard you try to blend in you’ll get spotted (& taken out)”. Enjoined Miss Z. sadly or wistfully she could never quite make up her mind. She knew the story was true but what was the other stranger going on about that so annoyed the hostage taker? At least she would like to have known that fact so she didn’t make the same mistake if ever held against her will. “Not much chance of that.” The model said & tugged her friend to a shop front as they strolled.

“That’s true, camouflage doesn’t work.” The model agreed “I wouldn’t be seen dead in that.” She pointed through the shop window but as her finger rested on Miss Z.’s reflection it caused Miss Z. to catch her breath as if the touch had found a raw nerve or was it a bruise? She could never tell.

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At the same time or when you are ready, Schneider the driver had said. Endeavouring to catch the attention of a worn-out odalisque with beaux-arts associations, excrescent, recumbent & dumped like a turd on a sofa, there was this thin young woman, called Pollak, acting wild as if still possible to be a naughty child by making Yoga postures standing on her head beside the fireplace, legs wide apart, breasts staying in the same

position while upright & upside down. The older, silent woman protectively covered a loose comfortable soft fold of flesh below her belly with a towel. Wide, the thin girl showed a thick patch of blue-black pubic hair covering her snatch. Wider her slit split open. Obviously for provocation, Schneider added gratuitously, Pollak's body carelessly opened; not the configuration of a princess (or a tart) but, I'd say, of an angry child who continued chattering from the immodest posture. Offering a divagation, a winding counter argument to her pose with the rapid fire onanistic denigration of several recent quasi sexual encounters all failing miserably at first touch.

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When he wasn't ready, but at the same time, in response to light but persistent tapping, as if it was out of his hands, Schlumper impatiently rushed down the corridor with a brush trailing golden orange paint in a thin line on the boards & opened the door.

On the step a woman, who did not have the look of a stranger but whom the artist did not recognize, waited; at ease, without the slightest urgency about her eyes as she searched the man's face for a sign of recognition. Her hair, shinning the same colour as the paint in the sunlight, was woven with plaits into an intricate pattern of tufts & partings.

The clues that had eventually led her to this place had been manifold, cryptic, prosaic etc. scattered raw material for the mill of her untiring search to find & fit all the pieces of the puzzle. She may have seen the number thirty-eight inscribed on a paving stone as she walked the city, then noticed a picture of a famous person in a newspaper read over a stranger's shoulder in the tube & knowing the date of their death taken that; until she had collected enough data for a telephone number which she then called with a specific

enquiry in mind taken from her memorandum for the day. This way she slowly accumulated a body of material to interpret. And this abundance pervading her imagination very often meant that one clue had at various points along the trail represented different things in the way that a shilling could represent several things depending on need & how fast it changed hands to be spent. Not a linear thread but a bundle out of which a simple number or name had jumped; occasionally an incomprehensible image would appear which in itself meant nothing to her (as if detached from the notebook of a madman) & needed more information to be understood. Was everything significant? From her external actions a totally false conclusion of her intentions would be deduced because she unerringly inwardly concealed her heartbeat. Only rarely was this imperturbable veil, in itself next to nothing at all, blown aside to reveal true feeling. Did it happen now?

On seeing the visitor Schlumper had stiffened, a pang carrying years of regret struck deep, & he hesitated for in that, an unperceivable second, or so he thought, he also had a wish for danger, before the woman's open look made him shift his stance & stoop slightly towards her. She was a beautiful incentive. He saw that her blouse had partially rucked out of the waistband of her trouser; a silver button had popped on the left-hand cuff of the sleeve peeping out over her wrist. He took her hand momentarily; it was a light clasp & then fluttered away back into a bulging pocket of her jacket, open at the neck on which a necklace of transparent beads, loose, half-hidden by the collar of her blouse, sparkled.

"I'll get straight to the purpose of my visit. I need to talk to you about a certain day, quite a long time ago. It may be important to you as well as me." She had posed a foot on the

threshold. An elegant black boot with a slash of red, becoming, but not quite in style with the rest of her clothes it gave out another tone. “We have, I think . . . I’m almost sure, a mutual acquaintance who answered a lonely hearts ad. in a selection of literary magazines & made contact. And met an artist.” It was said without her seeming to force the pace & without any doubt that she would be believed, but she clearly wanted to enter the door for an entirely different purpose.

Schlumper (usually made of curiosity) felt the breath of this woman’s introduction blow on its embers but also felt not only constrained by the secrecy in which he worked, he was at that very moment aware of the dripping brush in his hand, but by a strange wariness that had effectively cut in the instant he saw his caller & made him observe detail normally left till later. She hadn’t specified the gender of the friend. Besides, he knew the model would act up thinking he had blatantly hired another girl to usurp her place.

So he did not invite her, as she hovered at the door, into the somber passage leading to his studio however inextinguishable his interest was. With a wave of an arm not to be interpreted as over friendly but giving the acquaintance a push in that direction, he said.

“I have some urgent work now.” He shook the brush. “Let’s meet . . . I’ll give you my mobile number. You can name the time & place.” He offered this but didn’t feel the impulse was his own.

With a charming nod of her head the stranger copied the numbers into her phone; she had expected to be stalled but hadn’t hoped to make this much progress in one fell swoop.

“I’ll arrange a few things & give you a call. My name is Yimkichor Qush.” She turned &

slowly walked away from under the arch where the studio door shut & over which an express thundered, into the sunlit street with a beautiful smile on her closed mouth. She had seen & recognized a photograph on the wall over Schlumper's shoulder; that was enough.

* * *

Had Schlumper known of Yimkichor's happiness at the result of the visit he could have imagined the beads on her necklace chiming & whispering, as the last embellishments left on her naked body, while she celebrated her success. And he would have been amazed to discover that Yimkichor Qush was enjoying with almost the same fantasy how she intended eventually to claim her reward as she loitered on her way to the next place on the day's agenda.

When Yimkichor arrived in a section of the city with many abandoned vacant lots filled with large sycamore trees, surrounded by ten-foot high mesh fences; the shock of the effects of neglect was immediate. Put out by the desolate front of the building, unable to gain entrance, she went down the side in search of a way in. This was not the destination she had imagined as she came in at the garden which, looking like a partially dismantled stage set crossed with a scrapyard undoubtedly belonged to a ruin. A dry fountain crumbled into its mud filled pool. A big truck rusted near to one corner. Wired on its bonnet was a foot high decoy bird in wood that looked quite at home. As if being struck, nothing else left in place in the garden had a permanent air & Yimkichor's guts dropped thinking she had been set up, sent to the wrong place & trapped. Was it a false address? She checked the protocol: no mistake. All the information she needed was there,

assiduously collated; the chosen cross-references tallied giving only one possibility that had absolutely no secondary factors or interests. All other leads were barred.

Then Yimkichor spotted a grey dog loping backwards & forwards on a flat roof, left to guard the place & this gave her hope. She sat on a white plastic chair, pitted with sooty moss, at a garden table to wait.

How long she had to wait she never said & most of the notes she didn't burn concerning this time of her life are like hieroglyphs inseparably crossed with Etruscan & it isn't certain whether she wrote them herself or a friend copied them down as she dictated; perhaps both. Only the dates were clearly marked. There is for this day one clue: she drew a stick figure with a stick dog, they overlapped or rather the dog was jumping up the man (she had drawn the genitals on both creatures). There were some lines which may have represented a journey. The rest of the text could have been rain or snow – not a word was decipherable; not even the ones in English made sense. Also there was evidence that this page had been torn out & stuck back in with the join almost invisible: it was flecked by hundreds of small pencil marks covering both text & sketch. Perhaps these could have been done while she waited, impatiently or uneasily, as therapeutic doodling in order to control panic or anger. Perhaps it was a shorthand script & perhaps it was enough for the marks to have been written down; she knew no one would ever read it.

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White chalk marks on a wall seemed to pulse when the sunlight eventually fell on them.

Then they caught Yimkichor's eye. She wandered over to check. There were three white

strings of flowing brush marks each forming a continuous rearing snake (painted as deftly as a Bradley Walker Tomlin) perhaps a script, perhaps beautiful daubs.

Given that the imagination with which she established the essential scaffolding of her life enabled her to paint a truer picture of the world she inhabited & also with these images in mind she was able to sidestep or unwrap the distortions constructed from erroneous facts & get to what she desired. So it was entirely in character that she should think here she was onto something.

Yimkichor Qush opened her laptop, checked the firewall & entered the signs. She was hoping this find was all she was here for. She never knew with certainty but it had the right feel. A breath of warm wind carrying a babble of voices was getting up, pushing the trees this way & that. Yimkichor pulled up the hood of her transparent plastic coat & stared at the screen. Each symbol was changing to a picture. One glance was enough. Seized by an irresistible compulsion to move out of this place she saved the data & set off through the undergrowth to gain the road. No sooner hidden in the shade of the trees she heard a call. Yimkichor sank low in the shadows of the undergrowth.

“You can get your hands off that . . . it’s mine.” A rough voice abruptly surprised her.

At first Yimkichor was shocked but suddenly cleared by a slow neural switch its harsh sound seemed so natural to her as if it was an internal voice cautioning but caring, & not that of a stranger, which had spoken. “I mean the data you have just discovered & saved. I’d like you to wipe the memory. Yimkichor.” Then after a long pause with his eyes closed, he resumed with a strange smile. “I have often wondered if our paths would cross.”

“I’m surprised you know my name.” Was all she could reply. Then, pulling aside some leaves so she could make out his features, was not surprised she didn’t recognize him. Prompted by his wistful smile, his voice, similar to that of an anonymous phone call taken years ago, made her recall the day of a family picnic. While the stranger, in even terms, explained why he wanted her to cease searching in her obsessive way.

A loving hand guided her body down towards her baby, on its back, wriggling on the cropped grass. She was on her knees hair streaming on her shoulders arcing over the child, hands firmly planted either side of its body, her nursing bra was exposed & opened & with her full breasts still supported by straps each nipple started to well milk. Big droplets hanging off the plump, raw distended flesh. She stroked one of them across the baby’s lips & then the other. Her loose light silk dress blew up over her back. A mouth kissed her pussy & a tongue swept up the crack & as she was mounted & penetrated, the baby, indifferent at first now sucked hard as surely as its hand found the other nipple to pinch.

The call was repeated. Yimkichor & her companion both glimpsed some figures emerging from the house so he fell silent & watched as Schlumper & his three companions sat down at the table.

“We should be able to pick up what they say from here. It must help my cause.”

Whispered the man. “He seems to be expecting someone else.” Which seemed to disconcert him Yimkichor was sure, & believing his hoarse voice would carry she made an impatient sign to him. He remembered that gesture.

And, with the dress clinging to her thrusting body, she climaxed into a tight arc. Her milk had gushed & spurted in two jets over the child as she held & pressed each nipple between the scissors shape of two fingers. Then her lover had slid under her belly holding the child to one breast while licking on the other.

While engulfed the lover still keeping watch had seen a shadow growing, lengthening then disappearing again at the corner of a building on one side of the courtyard.

Yimkichor too had seen the shadow as she flung back her head casting a glance beyond her lover's face, drawn to look for no reason. (Did she feel a rival could be lurking waiting for a chance to slip into their intimate world?)

As a grey dog came nosing around Pollak rushed into their cover, diving low brushing the foliage apart. "Whatever you do don't put in an appearance, Scarface. Under no circumstance. You're not welcome. And anyway it's too late." And she shot past without even a nod at Yimkichor.

"What I bring would be an embarrassment to her love." He said out loud yet to himself ignoring Yimkichor's quizzical look. "But you could still join them."

"I don't think so. I've finished examining here. And don't have the time to hover around more."

"You always were . . ." Scarface stopped preoccupied by a warning thought undercutting his assertion. Then exclaimed, so low it could hardly have been to Yimkichor. "Come on. We'll go. You're right." And he stood up to leave.

Puzzled, Yimkichor thought he intended to join the group who were now engrossed by a piece of paper shuffling between them. And cautioned. "I'd say that would be a mistake."

While Yimkichor was reliving a moment of lust during the hurried whispering ‘Scarface’ Schneider was still entangled in an internal dialogue about how much to divulge to this woman not knowing which side to come down on – both protagonists having scored good points – fact or fiction. He remembered at their brief meeting years ago she didn’t say anything but that he wished she had & not tapped the wall so obviously impatient for him to be gone; but, of course, if someone thinks so little of your feelings you can tell them anything, not only that you can tell them everything . . . & he had as her face became more & more flushed with anger. And now she claimed she didn’t know him. (What he never knew was that Yimkichor had had at that time a more important, animal desire she wished to satisfy; similar to the memory that had just been churning her guts).

As Yimkichor stood beside Schneider they could hear the murmur of voices at the table. “This is a fragment I have recovered torn off an old copy of the Diamond Sutra, it was used to send a message to my mother – look – written on the back. It was a warning of peril close at hand.”

“Danger.” Exclaimed the model derisively. “That could be a barber’s pole. It looks more like an invite although not exactly to a fantastic night out.”

“Was it correct?” Asked Miss Z. “Did she suffer some mishap?”

“She was killed.” Schlumper cut in.

“In strange circumstances?” Miss Z. persisted she knew the artist’s gruffness was a thin cover concealing his emotions about the story he wished to tell. He pointed to the script.

“It is a silly, slight remark about invisible bees or butterflies; it doesn’t make sense. I need to consult an expert who could read the other esoteric version of the poem because

every word in it has at least two meanings. But not just that; the numbers of each letter also can be added up to make another possible reading. And so on. The permutations give many, many combinations. But there is one definitive message. How that is shown I don't know." Schlumper paused holding the scrap up to the light. "I wonder if there is some correspondence between the letters on either side of the paper."

"Too simple." Said Miss Z. examining the sheet closely. "And not simple enough."

The Wolf nodded wisely, he could go along with that.

"Isn't it too late?" The model gave Sakini a questioning look. "Why are we getting hot around the collar? Hasn't the damage been done?"

"I like mysteries cleared up." Sakini replied evasively. "And you never know when things are going to come round again."

* * *

Let's pretend the guts have been pounded out of printed words on paper since 1470 so we can claim blood & pus is oozing under the brown splattered door at every move the Wolf makes from that mysterious day when he was linked with the door forever. Imagine the effect if all the stuffing falling out of words as they hint of forbidden animal pleasures showered down on the coupling lovers, soon piled high, burying them in slang, until, top heavy with half formed gasps & bottomless sighs the trio capsized & sank into their dreams. Where, juggled from back to front & back again losing letters & syllables at each pass we don't get to see the full body of the work entirely from the model's perspective; not straight away, not until its tail is tossed to the crowd. Also note, intimate detail got

lost on the line when described by the Zombie stubbornly sticking to the point while trying to catch an ear.

To sum up so far, said the analyst behind his back, grimacing at the mess but hoping the ice would carry in her voice; there was a Wolf & a wooden door, in a wall, I presume; several lovers one of whom seems mechanical; she paused. Biting her tongue knowing everything carnal would come out, come what may, anyway it liked & in as many forms as it wished; also a waterfall, & first & foremost, an artist interacting with others. It seems everyone is telling lies as truthfully as they can. Before they go too far & choke us I'll thin them out. I'll pick the best.

Fascinated, Anguine Sakini stayed silent, albeit sucking her finger noisily on the back row, in the fairytale romance. (Pollak thought they were all going to get shafted).

No wonder the artist said **NOW THIS** slanging match is a shambles.

Luckily, here, in real life, other things are nothing so we can carry on by shunting in

A WHAT OF ZOMBIES.

Last.

He felt unwelcome.

Violent & abusive thoughts ripped out of control through the hollow shaped slope on which the artist's mind was playing hide & seek with a clumsily drawn but desirable lump of flesh; she was stunningly faultless in the disjointed way a fantasy being can be.

The disembodied words, blazoning like a rayon banner on fire across the one-track

picture, demolished the interrupted seduction by becoming a fairly simple question put, calmly & deftly, by so & so, ‘And yet . . . You saw her again?’

(An unintrusive, yet raw female figure hovering about in the background was overwhelmed by jealousy but naturally the anguished Wolf, his eyes blazing, thought the question posed was vitriolic).

After playing havoc with any chance there may have been of gratification, the words changed to festive sounds. By doubling over the Wolf’s incomprehensible answer (to the usual painstakingly obvious question) angrily shouted by him in reply to so & so, who he refuses to name even under his breath, this invective effectively stopped any communication. Then the tussle was engulfed by a crackling din that could have been someone drowning out their sorrow by tuneless singing or just static from one of the Cat-calls now being exchanged by the carnivalesque rabble whipped up in the artist’s head. For them this very desirable she, having out-smarted the censorial pack of lies sent to block the fun, was slowly unknitting her scarf & in the seemingly endless repetitive way she was forced to act in these excruciating sequences of external dismemberment, swallowed up even more time than was expedient for the imagination by rubbing her pussy to rouse herself & help remove the next to the last piece of clothing. Only a shout was necessary to bring the sideshow to its climax. Her hand had started to slip smoothly under a strap when the badly tuned, grossly amplified wave of noise (perhaps of a fur coat being torn to shreds in the anger of despair) flung her into a corner stripped at last as she plucked the last least shred of gossamer off & pushed the glistening tips of her devastating lips into his hand.

Screwed up, **it** was thrown at the clock.

“What?”

As a surreptitious wink popped out of his eye like a rabbit out of its burrow, or a hat, the artist had shouted. “You double dealing double.” The analyst although surprised by the irregular wink, adroitly cracked. “It seems the world & everyday life is full of them.”

* * *

Next. As the brown lacquered door burst open all those waiting in the crowded room checked the time without there being the slightest break in their fervent & deeply guarded conversations.

* * *

One occupant (convex concave convex, noted the Zombie) spoke out brashly-six minutes-half the average- **WHAT** did you say?

Nothing

? So you weren't there again? What did she (a nod at the door indicated the analyst) think of that?

Nothing. The Wolf spoke first & I was tipped out.

* * *

Quicker than usual said the analyst taking a clean pair of black silk pants out of the drawer & pulling them on. Distracted she threw the soiled pants on the bed. Sniffed at the acrid stench. Then stuffed the damp pair under a pillow. She still felt hungry.

* * *

Sakini said the Wolf could have been in a temper the way he was treated by that ratbag, but didn't lose it. Could have got nasty too, but didn't lose it.

No good on his own, that's why. Vulnerable.

That's shit said Sakini. But he is simple. He's been taking it far too long.

* * *

Pang. Pang.

“Who or What's that?”

“Both.”

“Isn't one more than enough?”

“Depends.”

“For you to handle I meant.”

Words, issuing from a narrow slit, barely bigger than a crack, in a bare brick wall at the back of the studio against which Schlumper's ear was placed over his cupped hand, stung him into action. Perhaps they were a predetermined trigger to reanimate him . . . Words making him seethe: one sequence caught his ear.

“What.”

“Words make you see double!”

“They do?”

“They did me. They make you.”

“They do?”

“They did me.”

“I'm dying to.”

“To do what?”

“Who are you?”

“What.”

“Has it happened before?”

“What?”

Drawing a deep breath, not wanting any giveaway signs, he put his eye to the crack. Saw

THIS.

Two figures, one slim but feminine the other not, the one with a full, wide smiling mouth the other grim; she animated, every movement almost suggestive of an insatiable need for love making, him dour, were leaning against a rough wall that had, at one time, been painted red. Some flakes of paint still remained. So in the blurred light you could make out, if you knew it was there, the faded outline of a dappled mare. And mounted on this beast, holding fast to its mane, a woman clinging for dear life looked like she was escaping a headless, one-legged monster maimed by the loss of surface fragments. What had really been lost, chipped away, was that she was riding bareback being ridden double. (Could the wall be hiding more?) The risk was in picking them out to use before they were ready. No that's a slip for they were always available. The pick of which of the figures in the piece could convey, despite their multiple disfigurements caused by the decaying plaster, the heart of the story had been made with care so it was not a dangerous violation but a gentle exploration of the space left for the eye by these depredations. Also there was an ambiguity in their shapes that protected them from simplistic interpretation.

Their proximity gave the play & skipping quickly from head to hand to breast & where that lead nullified those blank uninterpretable places.

“Can you hear me?” She tapped his shoulder. “That’s a blunder. You might yet see something in the blanks you don’t want to.”

Schlumper yawned pretending to be unguarded, denying any significance to his spying.

“Buck up. Your attention span will increase when the new girl gets here.”

“This would do me fine.” Schlumper shifted his weight off the wall & made an involuntary diagram with his hands bringing to life with the gesture an actual presence as though by shaping deformations he was able to call to mind an earlier visitor from a different time, a different domain, now cast aside. By some luck he had been able to revitalize a husk drifting close by on the wind & the neglected memory giving it a shaky configuration impossible to conceal yet somehow no longer a worn-out shape in the landscape of the artist. A close theatrical contact overturning mere representation.

“What! Another bird! You can’t manage one.”

Schlumper & his girlfriend slump to the ground spent as if some great effort has been made wading through a fog of instructions & stumbling over her designated awkwardnesses that she didn’t recognize . . . asides thrown out block the way . . . her waywardnesses ordered to be rendered down into lists; dense passages reduced to greasy smears of drivel . . . after that, & look at it, our only resource is to narrate. Not a wrinkle shows.

Wait & see she is quite near, the bad weather must have displaced the co-ordinates of our story during her migration.

The lifetime of footsteps outside stop & leave footprints in the snow.

So she came. Giving us a snag.

Door slams. Loud sound of pissing. Goes on for a long time. “That’s easy to play to & she knows it. That’s why she does it every time.”

“She must have come from a long way away.”

“And not stopped.”

Schlumper mockingly cocks (an ear or better still) a leg as he starts to rise. Or his female friend, a model, turns round as she squats flicking up her skirt showing a bare bum to onlookers/readers. Or both. At this early stage there are alternatives.

Anguine Sakini enters & catches them both in a pose.

“Bit early in the day for **that**.”

“And dangerous.”

“It’s never too soon.” The model begins to strip showing expertise & enjoyment & gives the visitor one in the eye. Affronted, Sakini will reward the artist later when they are alone.

Loud tick tick begins. Consternation flits across their faces as in the acrid fumes they mouth the word ‘bomb’ Tick tick tick tick tick tick tik tok alarm. Crash. Most of the wall disappears with very heavy sounds revealing a dark yawning void. Groan. “So that was it?” Grating noises screeching through the dust leave Schlumper & his companions totally unprepared for the beautiful model-like woman who appeared in a flood of light barely covered by irregular pieces of metallic silver cloth. Her voice is musical but troubling.

“Wind me up.” They ignore her. “Wind me up.”

“Bit early for WHAT to wake up. But it has.” (Modern methods of writing perhaps giving birth to mechanicals, unnatural but real).

“**It.** I thought we agreed to call whoever came Mary.”

“We never agree. Mary (They can both say the name together). A wife like Mary Marvell is that what I get? Am expected to accept.”

“Have got.” She winked at the void.

“Why did you bring it, or is it a her, here, now at such a delicate moment?” Sakini asked eager to get her own back wafting the dust over the model & peering beyond the rubble where the wall once stood. She waved. It was a goodbye. She couldn’t disguise her relief.

“Wouldn’t you have felt gloomy if I had insisted on keeping it . . . her in the dark? Light is in the first step.” Schlumper considered his next step. “Now you’re here we will have to make the best of it. Come clean.”

Does he believe that clap-trap? Sakini can’t tell. “I know it’s your insistence on exposure that disturbs me. And irks me & I feel as though you’re tugging at the shape of my dream & distorting it.” Although there was no vehemence in her voice this reply was full of venom. “Yet.”

“I know.” They say together. “Nothing more is going to happen.”

“It has happened.” Said (so What?) the Zombie. “It has been painted. It is a corroding fact. No good trying to deny it. Now it’s up to you. The wall has gone.”

“Yes. Thank you.” Said Schlumper.

“Take a chance.” She elbowed Schlumper. “Good?”

“No. Not good. Untidy.” He stiff-armed her.

“We did our best.” Said the Zombie. “She too looked for the wink.”

“What?” Schlumper wondered to the ceiling. (The Zombie winked behind his back).

“How do you know? You didn’t have a hand in it.” The model, totally naked, squatted to piss as she carried on talking. (‘Again? Another piss?’ Schlumper puzzled, the act engendering more than the germ of a doubt in the writer’s competence. But he wasn’t to know that the illustrator had supplied several versions of the model, Sakini & the Zombie all pissing & the writer had been loathe to discard them). He wrinkled his nose as he hung over her inquisitive of her beauty admiring the thick bush of black hair through which she ran her fingers.

“What is that?” But he thought _____.

“I can see you are not thinking again.” Said the Zombie who peered intently at the model’s pubic hair & clicked a space in her own inventory of desires to run her fingers through.

“Again?” Schlumper, bewildered by the gathering getting out of hand, asked the wrong question. “Are you reading my thoughts?” But he scratched his mop of hair for no apparent reason.

“Again.”

“Haven’t we had this out enough times before? You are not allowed to do that. My thoughts are mine. Got it?” He thought he was stretching a point & when he thought about that he knew they knew too. They all nod. Uneasily aware that they were agreeing to something that lacked coherence. “No wonder I had to bring up this simulacrum with

her beautiful form & exquisite colour Burnt Umber as it happens, who can swallow the plot & at the same time fix it so the antagonism of you two, a useful device on the one hand, but not conducive to any beauty in the exterior effect”

“**What.**” They demanded. Because they had looked at the reflection in the water where he claimed beauty lay bubbling & seen nothing.

“How did you work that out?” (Tick desire: tock work). But we were questioning the use of ‘swallow’. What plot had Schlumper in mind? There are only 32 in the bag, if, & only if, you include animals. And he had already been cured.

“Cured?”

“By circuitry.” And the Zombie proudly winked again but questioned if it was appropriate as she knew that feedback caused a frightful whistling din. “Hung out to dry.”

Mimics are the worst kind said the analyst as she tucked in the sheet.

“I know she does everything by twos.”

“By subterfuge.”

They all seemed uncomfortable at this amplification. The model stuck her fists in her ears saying. “This can’t be happening. I can’t bear it.” That was unusual so she was serious.

“By adhesive.” Said the Zombie at random & looked closely for the return wink.

“That pot is cracked.” Schlumper pointed at one of the few non-erogenous zones in the vicinity.

“As yet.”

Sakini raised her eyebrows in answer. Zombie held its breath. (I'm kidding but it looked like it). The model carefully placed the full piss pot on a shelf. We can examine the meaning of this pot fully, later on.

"The more things that happen more loose ends are left to work on & the more difficult it becomes to get out." This is an example of contraction. It keeps us sharp & futile.

"Why?"

"They just are. The lines are multiplied. We invariably pick the wrong one. What are you doing Zombie?"

"I can talk the same nude."

"You can't."

"Does it matter?"

"There can't be two models." Said the model. "At least not identical ones." She looked at the Zombie with growing suspicion. "What's been going on?" The Zombie squatted on another empty zinc saucepan scrounged from the kitchen.

"Copying." Said Schlumper amplifying the noise with a hand to his ear. "And blatantly naturalistic at that. Absolutely nothing is made visible."

"I'd say, Mr. Schlumper, all is totally visible." Said the model who had noticed the Zombie's lack of pubic hair & was filled with a desire to shave her own off & was filled with glee. (Note this is a clue to the level we are at here).

"This is on the level? So we know at once to look out for the catch."

"Yes. But it's the same." Said Schlumper. "Just think, by duplication we get a better look at you the model."

“Duped.” Said the Zombie. “How.”

“No comparison.” Retorted the model. “I don’t want to appear awkward or a spoil sport (or catty or naked twice) but she must change. Or go.” This sounded very harsh & was sure to hurt the Zombies feelings.

Can a Zombie wince? They all checked a slight movement of the right dorsal whatnot.

And she helpfully waved a hand vaguely indicating the sensuously displayed rear.

“Sorry. That’s a waggle.” Irreducibly the self (and the butt of it).

“And misleading at that.”

“Are you sure that’s not a sophisticated wince?”

“Not where I was going.”

“It’s not a something. And it’s not a nothing.”

“Ah! A pair. I’d got that.”

[We could be onto something big here complete with a soft landing but not just a surface effect. Look hard for a difference; that could be a starting point. Even an illusory difference will do. Don’t you see. For the moment, at least].

Outside there is something going on. For as Schlumper looked out the window something shone, painted the shadows with unusual colours, a green, a violet & then spread its glow into the figure of a woman. Pollak entered smoothly but naturally at the wrong angle saying with a smirk. “It’s better outside now the clouds have broken.”

“Broken. Are you paid to speak?” His tone was sharp. Was Schlumper concerned at the mess Pollak (who he knew of old) was likely to bring in & the destruction she might start wreaking & there was the possibility of unexpected communication. Who knows?

“No.”

“Then shut up.” Schlumper said bluntly & swiveled round to take in the room before it could be disturbed by her entering the scene unwanted. There was the smell of scorched fur.

Inside is bare, devoid of furniture except a threadbare settee cum sofa cum couch cum settle cum daybed cum lounge (chaise longue). Why are there so many words for this piece of furniture & so few for ‘I’? Because there has been so much wrangling about who it is. We have all become mistrustful. And rightly so. Because . . . where is it this ‘I’? It is especially difficult to know when trying to read a stranger’s book upside down facing them on a journey while elaborately trying to disguise the fact. Also they mangled the ‘i’ too many times for its own good until it had to defend itself by becoming permanently rigid. You’ve probably experienced that one.

“Which one is it?” The Zombie asked joining Schlumper.

“Shh. I don’t know.”

“Not another ‘I holier than thou’ I hope.” She said then continued whispering earnestly in his ear. He put a finger on her lips.

So now Schlumper knew **what** was **what** but we must wait for a revelation or a twist (or, more prosaically, in this section, for the penny to drop) to get the facts. However, I am sure had it not been for his caution, the Zombie would have dropped a clanger.

As he now has the secret, no matter how hard Schlumper is going to try to wangle out of it he is trapped & cornered, even though the box is open-ended. And the secret will gnaw its way out of him.

Also he was distracted because Zombie was still tight up against him & didn't apparently know that she was poking her breasts into him occasionally. Anyway they were all agreed that he would have to comply with her demand because he had nodded, even if this head movement was caused by an endeavor to avoid her hard pokes. And his excuses would cut no ice. But as the ice was broken they could speak to each other.

"The Zombie said she had a wonderful dream." Schlumper began.

"Come off it. Can they dream?" Asked the model rudely right under the Zombie's nose.

"Wind me up."

In the dream Schlumper stared at the odd-shaped cloud. Yes, obviously broken. He had never been able to describe to anyone the feeling of loss he felt most of the time. The reflection on a windowpane of the people & their diversions in the room was carried on the wispy surface of this nebulous cloud. It was crowded with other shapes. Schlumper took them to be angels. But surely they were acting in a strange way for angels yet as they were falling (he looked closer) in love? Perhaps everything was in some sort of order.

* * *

The box is obviously a page. The open-ended side is the blank page facing you before you draw on it. It's better if you get the creatures of the mind out of it into the light . . . on the white page . . . before you plunge into speculation. Before you weigh in.

She traced round the girl's pictures in women's magazines which gave her drawings of figures with empty bodies; the outline of a circle for breasts. "They are geometric." She declared dryly gazing into his face but not looking for anything, not anything.

“The breasts are large.” He replied. “Why? You haven’t any.”

“I would like some.”

“You would have to fill that empty space.” He pointed with a pencil. She shuddered. “If I fill that . . . well . . . that would be that.”

Then she looked down & dismay clouded her eyes. “How far back can it be to go . . . how far far away can it be . . . how do I get there?” It sounded as if she needed to fade away.

She needed to be captured.

“This far.” Said Schlumper, his crayon working a dense mass, a seething orgy of wild animals into the rigid figures.

She was unusually animated. “Quick! Stop! Before it teems with pencil lines & smudges & rubs of pastels. Let that one escape.” She lightly touched the surface.

“He’ll never get free.”

“But as long as they’re playing. Please, please let him go.”

“He?” The Zombie peered between them glowering with disbelief. “I’d take that to be a woman.”

The Model shrugged disparagingly. “You mean you can’t tell?” And jerked her head again tauntingly. This gesture was lost on the Zombie who repeated. “I take that to be . . . the woman . . . of my dream.” With a perfectly expressionless face that cut across the Model’s frivolous indelicacies. Who now turned paper-white. “Stop. Please rub it out. It’s beginning to look like me.”

“Relax. I’m only after the inner self, that presence behind your eternal smile etc. Couldn’t make it look like you if I tried. I don’t know where all these beasts came from.”

“You are making me nervous. Do you think that inner self is there?”

“What?” Asked the Zombie.

“I really do.” Schlumper grinned wolfishly. “That’s the naked truth.”

“You’re making me feel optimistic.”

“That’s Art. It’s life what frightens me.” Said the Zombie. “Who let it loose?”

“Someone who is a bungler, expert in rubbing & pinching & walking on air & it’s a long story. Besides what matters this minute because we are trying for the 24 hour, one place, two tarts, at least, system with several close-ups & a switch (O Yes) of an illusionary but explicit nature, equivalent to a modern triptych but crawling with meaning not strictly pictorial & without the gaps & a natural break, our main concern is that we don’t botch it by adding nothing but oscillations to the already truly disorganized manual . . .”

“Did he say manual? Magic.” So the Zombie was paying attention. Forget it. She was hoping for a piece of the action. You were fooled by the strong perfume that had leaked in the drawer, blotching the script on the postcard as well as stinking the place out.

“ . . . but catastrophic, true-to-life certitude, have I had that one?” Schlumper fumbled his notes. “Despite everything & probably because of a second twin presence right at the beginning who threw the whole thing because they shouldn’t have spoken which said slewed it out of proportion grating like an old lock & into our adventure (**WHAT** the Zombie thought) which then running away with itself lost control; so inevitably we are going to get a smiling man, a seated woman (preferably not on the zinc pot pissing & making a puddle) a umber-coloured woman with zinc-coloured patches, smiling lying on a mattress but unable to differentiate between the other man & the other woman (she

being uninterested in sex or food & protesting some empty transformation) both of whom are trying for fidelity to their own being or parts of it which is what emerges purely, faithfully & notwithstanding the beforehand shifted back that I mentioned in passing so we can get a handle on it big trouble.”

“Big manual trouble?” The dazzling *Zombie* tried to catch hold of something but everyone just happened to be out of reach. (Including, *Schlumper* was eager to have noted, his mind’s eye).

“On the other hand & please don’t interrupt *Zombie* I hope you can grasp that instruction, given the puddle, the mattress & other extraneous objects gathered together purporting to make up this assemblage but really a mess, what direction can we take.” *Schlumper* caught most of the eyes on him in a quick sweep indicating it was not a question & blamed the *Zombie* for making him nervous & breaking his flow. She had thoughts that could penetrate glass. “If we follow the contour.” All eyes left him searching the shallow space that was all that had been given so far. *Sakini* glanced at the model ‘Where did she come in? Well she does have a redolent contour. Perhaps the loveliest.’

“Not much to go on, I know, but so far it’s only been coded.” *Schlumper* beamed with delight. “And we are waiting for the accidents coming one after the other to break it & give us the diagram.”

“Giving a message as clear as crumpled newspaper, as usual.” Retorted the model wondering if she was being made redundant by this new method & going to miss all those kisses & bouquets.

“Ghost drawings.” Schlumper corrected. “Following that voluptuous line, the one with nothing either side of it cutting through the non-figurative, chaotic, grey level & claiming it will unlock a very narrow purely optical space . . . my wounded heart declares . . .”

“Are we talking about a blank page covered with some scribble?” Zombie ventured, ever ready to interrupt to prove ready to subordinate tactile functions to others. With so much infinitive around it took an intense spiritual effort, if looks are to be believed, for Schlumper to stay cool. “. . . that was at hand.” He concluded.

“On what?” They all asked.

“Or should that be ‘What is shown where?’” The model drew attention to the missing bit “It’s on the end of the sentence.” He said glumly looking at a hand.

“And where is that?” They all asked.

“On the end of his hand only a bit curved, innocently misshapen, of course, that’s probably why you couldn’t get it.” Schlumper had obviously forgotten.

“Accidents everywhere.” Prompted the Zombie, who would have felt, if she could, that a wink would help things along here but couldn’t quite hop along the necessary abstract steps or zones to that procedure. Those little feats have very complex roots that are better explained upside down & that is very unlikely to happen.

“Oh! We could.” They all protested. “If, for instance, firstly, you had used the model (who fell silent at the word used) as a lure. That would bring a windy street corner usually near a telephone box into play & several punters with their car windows wound down.”

“Willing?”

“Wait & see.”

“And in the second place the Zombie (who gave a minimalist quiver for the correct effect) knowing whatever the something needed was, it was going to be supplied pronto & most notably joined by a convincing curvilinear line to the context or else she was * (& here the Zombie was failed by pride, she could not imagine being anyone else so a star would have to do). To continue: she can function just as good the other way up & completely bamboozle the punters, the model having given them the slip.”

“What if I want to slip as well. Please.” Pled the Zombie.”

“You can’t. It needs deft footwork & you are standing on your head at this point.”

“You know we would have been delighted to meet you no matter who you chose as a sub. (We know the star stands for Sammy).”

“Even Frankenstein. But not in my shape.” Suggested the model with a sweet smile.

“You’ll have to have a make-over. Or do they call it fine tuning for you?” Schlumper said, wisely keeping his voice down.

But he didn’t really mean it. Does the plan please him? At that very moment it becomes unimportant. Why?

“Proximity.” Suggested the Zombie more in hope than imposition while reading Schlumper’s notes which, by the way, looked as if the words had been thrown onto the page at the last minute & left as they had fallen.

“I guess because he hadn’t had his say he was subordinating a fairly simple argument & a bit of a rough tactic to the entire involuntary diagram, for an all-over clarity. Got it?”

“So he was nowhere near?”

“Give or take a slight resemblance . . . no.”

“He was right there . . . here.” Said the Zombie knowing full well how to use the language. ‘Now what was this tactic?’ She wondered with a trace of a race memory ticking in her heart. It feels as though it would require a scene (vast sea) change for the universal solution. Or, and this was the latest theory she had embraced, close consultation with the collective copulation. This was a Hobby. Don’t jump to a conclusion too hastily: this indispensable copulation is a mind game enacted between the subject & the predicate. So the Zombie was all talk. And, by this time, the model had slipped the punters in the front door & then blown them straight out the back door to oblivion.

‘How do I get there?’ The Zombie mused.

“While you dream, Zombie, or whatever you call it & I know it’s nasty because you never share it, we have to get down to some hard thinking.” Was the model’s hard-boiled shot fair? Or was she angry at being cold-shouldered? Which should have brought Zombie down to earth with a jolt, but the Zombie missed this jibe; thought she had heard a human scream just before the model spoke & felt as if her body was being pulled backwards & elongating. If she had had blood in her veins it would have been congealing. Was it oblivion calling?

“Does any one care about what’s going on?”

This question is obviously confused because what they had had they couldn’t do anything about & what they were going to get they couldn’t do anything about either at that moment. Not if Schlumper had his way because while his fingers stroked the Zombie absently (noting how cold she felt & there was a leaden grey horizon as well) he knew

that this closed world, for all their mental acrobatics, was deforming so fast they were all in danger unless they could curl around the edge of the paper & escape but that wasn't likely given their combined bulk of flesh; the other way out was to plunge past the preparatory work claiming it was done, find the way to the shaft by the draft, jump clear, out into the catastrophe into the firing line again. Something like that.

“Overloaded.” Enquired the Zombie, also feeling that Schlumper's hand was utilizing her.

“Possibly.” Schlumper hesitated. Was the Zombie calm? Could she not be? She had been collected he supposed.

“Mauled.” Suggested the Zombie, also feeling that Schlumper's hand was utilizing her.

“It could be put another way.” Schlumper agreed. “Sometimes it isn't easy to differentiate.”

“I can tell, easily.” Said the model, wishing to be utilized & hoping what was happening between the artist & the Zombie wasn't of great importance to Schlumper's psychic life because that's where she felt she had the most important role, the most say. Weren't they always lumped together as if one unit? Hadn't they emerged from the mess locked together, time after time, in rhythm? And exactly on the golden Mean.

“Oscillations.” Said the Zombie prompted, by the piercing jet eyes of the model eating into her, to jump to a different conclusion while reading her thoughts. “Leading to a climax on the Golden Mountain. Where is that place, model?”

“Of sorts.” Agreed the model reluctantly, loath to give the game away. “But they don’t count. And I’ve no idea **what** you are talking about.” She wanted to appear disinterested yet knowing.

“It will all take place in the strictly manual space though, Zombie. The one you know so well.” Schlumper’s hand became still as if he had suddenly come across the word ‘impenetrable’ & it had shocked him. “Can you still feel the hand of the technician in it?” “Anything could happen.” Said the Zombie sensing Schlumper’s growing excitement. And utilization was in there somewhere.

“No it can’t. “ Snapped the model also on the same wavelength. “Not if you are aware you have stolen my body-shape. Don’t forget. I’ve given you those lines.” She thrust out her hand to cut the air with the shape. And she eyeballed the Zombie for luck.

Prompted by this mechanism, the Zombie drew a deep, unnecessary breath. “And you have forgotten the most vital fact, if you ever were told it. When I die. You die.”

“Oh! An interesting intersection of ideas there, Zombie. A few threads to follow. Let’s hope we pick the right one. Must be a central theme as well, there always is somewhere in the tangle. Or at least the ‘Seelenachse’. Hadn’t occurred to me. Hardly a declaration of love. Ha. Ha.” Schlumper subsequently said he regretted being so casual about finding a way out of the labyrinth but he was covering up & knew it. And claimed there had to be a blasé element forced into it.

“Nothing like it.” Said the Zombie meaning ‘bull’ but not so ready to use anthropomorphic terms for obvious reasons.

The model swung her back to the Zombie, coming face to face with Schlumper, undisguised contempt in her look. He was taken aback by the negative emotion, or so he said, later. “You asked for it.” And the model pointed behind over her shoulder. “Now what are you going to do?”

“Interfere.” Said the Zombie.

“Or retrace my steps. Patch things up.” Schlumper said quickly. “Nothing underhand or moving in the air or destructive. And nothing like a Chinaman.” He swung his arm over his head in a peculiar way & grinned from under the other elbow as his body contorted as if hit by a giant’s punch.

“At first I took it for a compliment when you made that rubber mould & I liked the feeling as it was peeled off.” The model said. “Although he seems to live in a landscape of uprooted trees, I said to myself, he must care if he wants another me. But now I see how unreasonable it is. I didn’t expect it to be animated. And, by the way, he grimaced.”

“It took some effort to get the ball anywhere near.”

“What?”

“Stumps.” Schlumper insisted & made to leave.

“You see, he isn’t even willing to stick it out here with us.” She hardly wanted to make an alliance with the Zombie but what else was left except a tempting allusion?

“What?” Schlumper asked (virtually stumped about what to do next & impatient to be off). “I did it to iron out a few minor imperfections, nothing drastic, nothing less. I didn’t expect a song & dance about it.” The model’s face fell, dropping her jaw with exaggerated emphasis in the process, as she turned on the Zombie.

“It is part of his system, built in, to want to do that.” Claimed the Zombie with authority, on her own ground or circuit board ready to provide back-up at the drop of a hat.

“What hat?” Retorted the model. “He hasn’t moved & he’d better not.”

The Wolf, had he been there, would have claimed the hat for the rabbit, had it been there.

“Excellent. We are agreed.” Schlumper beamed at the two identical women. “That’s good. That’s good.” Did they know it was true? The strain was beginning to tell.

“We are **WHAT**.” Shouted the two exasperated women. The model standing on her toes barely touching the ground. The Zombie swiveling on her heels. And digging them in.

“Don’t you ever listen, Mr. Schlumper?” The model didn’t waver. “We are totally, absolutely, utterly . . . Identically opposite.”

“Disagreeable.” Said the Zombie. “And identical to an incomprehensible degree.”

“Incompatible.” Schlumper groaned & scratched an eyebrow realizing they were feeding off each other’s envy. And when full (POP) he involuntarily took a step back, their anger would explode. That certainly wasn’t in the loop. Yet it hadn’t been an innovative move to attempt girl – boy – girl nor ground breaking, nobody had been dug up. He had got the idea from an ancient Bhuddist carved relief at a sacred spot. They didn’t seem to have a care in the world, not that one anyway. And the girl’s friends on that particular panel weren’t bad looking either. Why was the model so aggrieved? O.K. She had to be admired morning noon & night or she felt not wanted. And was. (Or wasn’t if you have decided uniquely to take the Zombie’s side). He thought the rubber cast would take care of that but she couldn’t share & couldn’t bear not to be the favorite. Always had to be in

there somewhere, actually the centre. And didn't want to find the Zombie in there coveting her place when she got there.

'Is it easy or is it hard, to be her.' Wondered the Zombie, keeping in the channel as ever working on her part. 'At least her world is running like clockwork.' And a smile played faintly at the corners of Zombie's mouth, her lips remained a still, red gash. 'She should be riding high' the Zombie paused, 'or was that hood?'

"I have been a staunch & stark-naked companion to the artist whenever he needed me, wherever he may have been." Said the model defensively claiming her role & letting Schlumper know she knew what he was up to. Luckily for her, Schlumper had no idea what he was about. He never did until it was finished & by then, too late.

As you can tell the Zombie is practical & lucid but unfeeling; the model simply scatty. How has this come about? In the cross-over something essential was left out? Nice try but impossible, every precaution was taken. Something must have leaked?

"Piss off."

What part of the past had that invective popped out of? So has the model got to dismantle the Zombie? Or has the Zombie got to strangle the model? Or can we get them to exist amicably?

What can we do with **this**?

(a) Decide what is expendable. That will be the model's memory. It having a very short span. You will say.

(b) What is replaceable. Most of the Zombie. You will say.

(c) Which is one of many. You will say. If that is true we only have to wait for another one to arrive.

And put a spurt on to reach a conclusion quickly. Thinking 'climax.' Being seen has nothing to do with sawing. Correct.

"I have a suggestion." The Zombie broke her reverie.

"Sorry. Was that called for?" Schlumper asked cautiously, riffling through his notes that he had reclaimed, as if about to check & impose his control. This was lost on the Zombie.

"You haven't had the call yet. Don't prejudge everything."

An eerie wild howling floods the place.

In the panic this causes the Wolf enters melodramatically but unnoticed by a trapdoor muttering to himself how lucky he was to find the way out of that madwoman's clutches. (Wolf's stratagem of refusing the bait although trapped had totally undermined the transference. It had taken some balls). As he gained his bearings his heart sank. And he glanced back at the brown door quizzically. Still intact. Wolf would have cried if he could but he couldn't so dabbed a dry eye & scratched his chin taking in the scene. Had he imagined seeing a trailing brush, broken just like his own, disappearing the moment he bounded in? Because that would have denied, like crying he had been told, anything important having taken place & it had (hadn't it?) As he sniffed he could smell the waxy flesh of the model (as if she had been singed by the hot breath of a blow-lamp after being plucked). Or was it the unwashed body odour of a young girl slipping under the covers still wearing her over-sized black silk pants for show, borrowed (stolen) loaned (stolen) for the occasion from her mother (figure).

“Wolf had a call, that’s when he found himself, eventually. Up a tree.”

“Wolf was picked on, not called. He soon found himself in a fix out on a limb & had to go along with a lot of goings on to get free; & unfortunately after that the shit had stuck.”

“He was branded.”

The Zombie silently recalled a rickety brown gate with a broken spring & knew it wasn’t always shit that stuck. She decided an intervention would be pointless.

“I thought we would, well you would, need some kind of props for **this**.”

“No animals?” Asked the Wolf, testing the air with a dampened paw & with trepidation, afraid he might see the spit sizzle on his skin & not really wanting to know.

“There are resemblances to an animal in the caricature.” Schlumper, Zombie & the model agreed poring over the comic & tapping their pencils on various interesting parts of the drawings. “But would it be able to talk sense? Not all that snapping & snarling for nothing.” While they wondered, Schlumper was idly giving all the figures appendages everywhere they could do without: tails, extra arms & legs, feet, ears, & those as well.

“They do in fairytales.” Said the Zombie thinking she was keeping track of the artist’s pictorial intention. At this the model stared at the wall with a practised & ignorant look of boredom. “O really.”

To put it another way [& that this was possible (was it?) made the Wolf prick his ears] if a creature happens by can we afford to ignore it? We may use it one way or another if we can without causing some terrible disorder.

“We most certainly will not.” The Zombie righteously exploded.

“Like swine fever & foot & mouth?” Asked the model maliciously continuing the affront.

“They generally get terrible parts.” Said Schlumper absently packing into a creature the comfort of several extra yards of intestine.

“Have we found the order already? I don’t believe so.” Knowingly the Zombie hadn’t started into a rant at the model’s provocation & she was the best at it by far. “We need to form a queue.”

I’m first. No I am. You are not. I am. I am.

“Stop jumping the **queue**.”

* * *

If it was a strange Goddess or God that had happened upon the world at this moment, here it had been given the key to the plot in one & could shove in front of the queue with impunity. To get to the kiosk selling comic papers first it foolishly chose to push past the silver, willowy woman blocking the counter guarded by a wan blond girl. This contact was telling.

For at the front the Zombie partially held her ground holding up the queuejumper’s push with her thigh. Uneasy she giggled, her sharp eyes had seen the strange figure coming as she planted herself before the perspex screen drilled with holes behind which the girl said plaintively. “It’s suddenly getting very hot in here.”

Immediately after the bump the stranger rubbed its hip. Which became fuller & rounder & softer under the strokes. She straightened up. “Where are we here?”

“You might well ask. I’m no pushover, you know.”

“I do.” And the puzzled expression on her own face took some seconds to clear as it stiffly raised a hand glancing at the palm. By the covert sense it gave, the action

apparently should have taken place in secret. Suggesting that this stranger needed more time to gain its bearings. Her fingernails turned red. She had an urge, which it had thought redundant, to wear bright colours.

“Now we are married.” The emboldened Zombie experimented with a joke. And slyly, because she had learned it was part of the ploy, edged closer to the man.

“We are?” Asked an incredulous voice that was so melodious the speaker half glanced over her shoulder to catch whoever was speaking with it by surprise. Her eyes met the narrowing eyes of the Zombie dismayed that her attempt at social intercourse was rapidly biting the dust. Who thus felt she must retrieve the situation with an explanation before it went off completely. “Here.” And she vaguely pointed around. “We don’t always literally mean what we say.”

“What do you mean, then?”

“It generally means something else.”

“Always? Is this a rule.”

“In my experience, yes.” The Zombie hesitated conspiratorially lowering her voice. “But it’s not a rule. It may be me.” The wan blond girl with rounded eyes nodded her head.

“So I am free to go? Or have I misunderstood the opposite to what you said?”

A jubilant Zombie couldn’t believe her ears or its implication. She had made contact. It was as if she had met her soulmate. “Just give me a minute.” Said the Zombie anxious not to offend this stranger but hopeful of prolonging the interaction. Needing a second or two to gather her thoughts before plunging into this new territory: friendship.

Defly the newcomer shoved her hands in her pockets both to check the contents & hide the brilliant nails. They were empty. She felt trapped. It was so difficult to comprehend this hideous being. She turned her cheek to smile sweetly at the silver man but her jaw refused the command of intimacy. All she achieved was a bare tooth snarl. It was the instinctual reaction of a cornered animal. She felt her neck lock. She couldn't move her head. From the outside this excruciating reaction looked rather like a badly cracked grin. "I hope I haven't gone too far." The Zombie insisted on trying her best in the face of consistently disheartening circumstances & humour had been recommended (that this tete a tete was turning sour by the second Tik Tok hadn't dawned on her). "I know it's unusual to crack jokes with complete strangers, or even mere acquaintances sometimes, but I felt . . . I still feel (and it was a good job Zombie couldn't blush) an empathy with you."

The metamorphosing stranger quickly understood that this was a challenge from the silver man, a declaration of intent to do her harm. The rule previously explained made this clear. What hadn't been explained was what to do.

The Zombie held out a hand for the stranger to shake.

The Wolf was agog. Now he would see for himself the mystery unveiled etc. He kept still on his perch in the tree. And wondered. So what happens when the other one finds itself in the void? And must fill it. A name would be a useful handle. A hand could reach to grasp it. It could be filled by softly falling snowflakes, handily pure & delicate, ready for the footprints.

Slap.

A snowball hits a cheek.

Concentrate & keep watch. Do not let loose an important word. i.e. Shut Up. The Wolf nodded. You have 14 minutes to beat at the very outside. “Double or quits.” Shouted the Wolf with glee.

Next. The brown door slammed shut.

“I’m sorry I do not have any.” Said the stranger who was by now what would have been classified as a very beautiful woman of the period. And then she brought her hand up to her sparkling lips. “I’m sorry I do have some minutes.” A glow of relief churned her belly. Now the monster would understand.

The Zombie’s features froze briefly then quickly rubbing her hands together as if that had been her intention she said. “Good. Would you like to join me on a shopping expedition?” And smiled sweetly.

The young stranger could hardly keep her eyes focused on the steely face of the beast because its teeth were now bared in its ravenous mouth. Did it mean to mate with her? “I am not hungry for that.” She pleaded. “Are you?”

“I could eat a horse.” The Zombie replied. “But first aren’t there a few things you need? Items of clothing?” She had noticed the stranger hugging herself shivering. “We can get some grub down us after shopping.”

Her relief at hearing the nature of the monster’s diet was palpable.

The Zombie took her new friend’s sleeve; it was loose like the arm of a rag doll with just the slightest perceptible joint of shoulder & elbow & thus joined they seemed to drift across to the covered arcade.

Naturally it was the same day Schlumper & Sakini strode in at the other entrance to shop for underwear etc. Otherwise the townscape would have been left empty, enigmatic.

At the mirror surface in a store Schlumper & the Zombie met. "I may find if this goes the way I think it will that I shall need you to help me at dawn tomorrow." Schlumper declared to the Zombie in his usual roundabout way when asking a favour. He glanced over at Sakini lost to the world, trying on the lingerie.

"Is that your model?" Asked the Zombie. "She needs a wash."

"Yes. And it is her I want you to manhandle & give a fright at first light." He gave the Zombie a skeleton key, a card punched with several holes.

"Manhandle? Are there any guidelines for this enterprise? Do you mean scrub?"

"Isn't there something you haven't done yet & would like to do? Do it." Schlumper urged as he glanced slyly over his shoulder. "Hush."

Sakini, voluptuous in the chiffon negligee she was trying on, approached holding a dirty, limp sock between thumb & finger, one of her own that she could now throw away. She gave it to the Zombie compelling her to take it by shaking it near her face.

"Why have you given me this sock?"

"Doesn't it remind you a little bit of something?"

"Of a little bit of something? I don't understand."

"You know. Look. It's hollow. It's a hole."

"Hollow. Hole."

"I know there's a spud in the heel but imagine I hadn't worn it through there."

"Imagine there isn't a spud in the heel?"

“Yes. Can you try?”

She held it at arm’s length. Sakini twitched impatiently. The beautiful stranger fluttering in the background remained unnoticed.

“I haven’t found the spud yet.” The Zombie, though taken Underground by the clue, still apprehended the object as row upon row of stitches. “Ah! Got it. A burrow.” And pleased as punch with her guess absently pinched one of the girl’s large apricot nipples shuddering & bobbing close to her behind the transparent chiffon. And in that indiscrete action felt the full weight of the breast.

“What?” Sakini hysterically reddened, snatched the sock back & threw it on the floor.

The Zombie genuinely puzzled, now seeing Sakini as rabbit-headed, turned to Schlumper.

“Considering how roughly she treats me, I will certainly modify my existing gender arrangements to help you pull her ears tomorrow in that assault.”

“What?” Schlumper was surprised by her divergent coupling of anatomical detail with divergent action but recovered quickly. “No need . . . not yet . . . I’ll look after that aspect of the event. Stay as sweet as you are.” He had a promise to fulfill also. And absently hummed the song.

“If you are going to watch you could give me precise instructions.”

Schlumper made a face. Was she entirely clueless? Would the Zombie never learn to go along with things. After all she was one. And who was she with? He’d caught a fleeting glimpse of another of them. Quite a cracker.

So why hang around? The shop floor was getting crowded. There was not a hope of finding out anything useful; apart from the unconsidered preview of what the Zombie

expected she was being engaged to do at dawn nothing was happening. Is it really as transparent as that?

“Nothing to it.” Schlumper replied with an uncommon precision.

“So I am left alone to it.”

“Never. Never. Never.” Stormed Sakini tossing a bundle of clothes out of the cubicle emerging briefly, naked, to snatch up more.

“You can chose what you like but ask me first I don’t want you bungling this task.”

Schlumper couldn’t find the scaffold in words to support both his feelings & a thought as he started off to intervene. This abrupt gesture said something.

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” Retorted the Zombie to his back.

‘So she dreams of it’. Thought the stranger. ‘That’s an interesting modification.’ She meant development. ‘I wonder if there are any flaws in it’.

As Sakini emerged to continue with her self-absorbed floor show Schlumper grabbed her wrist & immediately felt a shuddering pulse telling him she would submit, although filled with rage because of her hatred of this underlying need to be compliant. She hung her head not in shame. Her eyes blazing she glowered at his feet.

“Shows what becomes of risky promises we believe we can keep.”

“I promised nothing.”

“To whom . . . yourself . . . or me?”

She tore loose & ran away doubled over. “I want to be sick.”

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That’s the drawback of being piggish.

Although not inconsequential I suppose it is.

I could try to see it differently, collectively. He liked to help them along.

If you say that is possible, it is. Where?

Certainly I agree they have no reason to behave lovingly towards me now but in the past they are safely out of the way with no connection to any permeable place where all & everything can seep in & choke me like smoke.

Like now. The analyst also liked to help.

I know these mutations are not natural but I have seen most of them & so, I guess, have you.

That's hard to believe. I thought we called them changes of heart?

When the characters are on show they mill around, merge or change hats as easily as evil becomes vile. Yes. Get to flock into view, in turn, but . . . He shook his head. His blue eyes became clouded.

Haphazardly expressed on a broken narrative line or the scribbles of an artist . . . there would be accidental encounters (e.g. sore, rose, eros).

But couldn't that proliferation be the cause of trouble.

Good point. It was to start with; it was a mistake to duplicate the model's body without getting the rest of her attributes into the bargain. Right?

Like a computer stuffed with small potatoes instead of working parts? She asked innocently.

Schlumper hesitated & took a good long look at his companion. Her resemblance to the Zombie in her manner had struck him at first but he had dismissed it as impossible. He closed his eyes. And said silently to himself 'not again.'

WHAT.

A SHRINK OF SEDUCERS.

By shrinking unnoticed into the shadows, or appearing unnoticed out of them, Anguine Sakini was able to observe that the analyst pointed out to Schlumper the big bed occupying a central room twice & allowed him a glimpse in the room twice. She even mentioned it as being central. And left the door open. Sakini twiddled the knobs on a TV. It was dead. The two children hung onto Schlumper's shadow like a broken tail, trundling after him, interacting but not interrupting the viewing. Tantalizingly close Sakini noted with envy.

Intriguingly large knives, forks & spoons, the sort you get in rented apartments, were placed in position on the brown oval table – a meal – English Sunday dinner – the children's eyes followed the woman's moves to construct a family dinner table. (It was becoming clear she rarely did this sort of entertaining; perhaps never had done this.)

There was a perfume bottle loose in Schlumper's pocket. He had taken it from a metal chest where he kept jewelry & cosmetics from his past; chosen with a deliberateness that belied the fact he didn't know what he was going to do with it & that he felt uncomfortable choosing it. Obviously, from the placing of the tarnished cutlery, this meal was going to be a disaster. Perhaps now was the time to offer her the present & that would save the day. He didn't know why. It wasn't that bad so he held back. But when it came, the food was strange as if boiled into the past, into his childhood. Was it put on for him?

The younger kid pissed his pants. No big deal but gave the analyst a chance to show some maternal experience. They were whisked into the bathroom to carry out the task.

Risky promises, formed as they are around emptiness, were exchanged in a few glances.

We believe we can keep them. Spoken, even wordlessly, they bind.

Sakini hung around. Schlumper dried the kid & wrung out the washed pants. Meanwhile the analyst without having to rummage in the drawer pulled out a pair of black silk shorts & holding them out at arm's length worked the elastic for Schlumper's benefit suggesting them as a replacement. Sakini's head hung down as she pouted at the drawer. Why was all her underwear in the bathroom? Usually kept in a bedroom. He turned down the offer placing the kid's damp pair on a radiator.

Later, after the meal, Sakini excused herself into the bathroom. To get something flowing she turned on all four taps & sat on the W.C. wearing only her stockings & boots she claimed later. Taking in the print of Breugel's 'Hunter's in the snow' hung on the pastel green wall & the spotless lino as she stroked & poked.

"Pang. Pang." She shouted catching sight of the man firing his musket, coming at last.

The ones left outside, & this is how most of them always felt, were uneasy at the sound of gushing water & her shouts. Was she fiddling with things they asked as they fidgeted with things. She was getting dressed.

Sakini pulled out the drawer & lifted the silk pants & slid them on over her own.

Smoothing the remaining contents she felt a lump & discovered the perfume bottle with its seal broken in an envelope with a picture card written in Schlumper's hand. Woofli's picture reproduced on the card had so much on it you couldn't really get into what it was about that easily. He was the master of labyrinthine diagrams. His private landscape so tightly blocked in, with its ordered quietness where nothing could be stolen irked Sakini.

And although every mark was placed to keep something extremely dangerous (murderous) inextricably fixed, the lack of ferocity in the touch was disquieting to someone who scribbled & scrawled her crayoning wherever & on whatever she could find.

Was the perfume a present; a keepsake? She dabbed some on. It stung her raw skin. She took out a biro & drew a picture on the wall with hasty meandering lines under the Breugel reproduction: a go go dancer with big tits, to show this woman, & a fluffy skirt etc. Sakini got quite lost in the work. Someone rattled the door. She read the card & took time to note the detailed directions given to get to an address unknown to Sakini. But before she opened the door Sakini frantically scribbled all over the writing so when she had finished it could well have been a message from Emma Hauch. Then, unruffled, let them in.

The analyst had talked & talked, still they knew nothing & by the time they left Schlumper & Sakini both felt drained & cross. Schlumper sniffed; grabbed her arm & asked what have you done?

Tried the perfume on Sakini confessed. It stinks.

It wasn't yours.

It wasn't hers Sakini said. She broke free.

What else were you doing in the bathroom?

Yoga.

Doing what?

I did the positions; the cat, the dog . . . the moving boat.

No wonder there was the sound of water sloshing everywhere.

What water? What shit Sakini said. I did the crab, the lobster & then I did the starfish. It's so complicated it's impossible.

So you didn't do it.

Of course I did it. I didn't do it right that's all.

That night Schlumper's dream of rejection had a very difficult powdery white stair in it that was so exposed it could have been a path up out of a ravine; next morning he told Sakini & she said it was his own fault. Sakini said she felt she had been made transparent just having to listen to that woman's tale of woe.

Woe? What shit Schlumper said.

And why had he given her perfume. For bed?

What shit Schlumper said. She was needy.

So needy she could run through a man in less than an hour Sakini said. And come back for the next & pulverize that one.

To mollify her he said he had decided the analyst was a wicked witch & had made the kid pee to be able to flaunt the knickers. Bragging off her tiny waist.

What shit Sakini said. And commonplace.

How would you know you're all mixed up Schlumper said.

No I'm not. Not since I've done Yoga. I meditate.

How?

I lie flat on the bed with my eyes closed. And my hands by my side. I don't move. I don't make a sound although I could.

You always make a sound in that position. Then what?

Nothing.

Don't you do the ostrich?

The analyst went away – no - left – had to go – no explanation – no – a refusal to explain but left saying nothing – no goodbye - a very strong feeling of blame hung around.

Schlumper could practically taste the residual feeling of humiliation. What shit Sakini said. They weren't your first impressions. You thought she was neat & tidy & clean & too eager & it put you off. So you said. And you were afraid she would try to steal something.

What shit Schlumper said.

Then remember what you were after when you asked about her pair of yellow streaked gloves?

I didn't. I said they were white. She pointed out they were soiled. And how did you know what colour they were? You weren't there.

I was. I was always there.

You weren't. We had lots of time on our own.

Was she unable to communicate? Sakini asked staring at the floor. And added. They were black.

What were black? Schlumper asked.

Nothing said Sakini. Did she contact you? You wanted something when you went on about the gloves. I know.

NO. I told you times. Didn't want to & expressly made that clear. Impossible for there to have been any confusion.

That's right Sakini said. You were the fly in the ointment.

What Schlumper shouted scratching his thigh as if insects were biting. What do you know?

I'm a woman Sakini said defiantly.

Schlumper guffawed. You're a bitch. That's the nearest you'll get.

Sakini leaned over like a crane & took her shoes off. I'll show you she shouted. Starting to tear at her clothes.

No. Don't. Schlumper shouted back. A dark memory unconsciously warned him. Then he shut up astounded. As he watched she shrugged off her bra & Sakini was immediately wearing nothing but a pair of tight black silk pants. He lurched towards her. She welcomed him with her eyes. His hands stroked down her back; his fingers tucked into the waist band of the pants. Sakini stiffened against him.

And then they both were somewhere else because the years fled. Some special places have to be constantly revisited. And

THIS

was a huge, bare, grey bleak loft built out of sawn planks roughly nailed to the struts. The space, how you would imagine the inside of a hollowed out hay rick & with the same texture was dominated by a misty grey & white picture with a chaotic black web crayoned over the loose, unstable outlines of three figures struggling to be free of the tangle of a meandering deadly black line slowly changing into a hybrid animal, which

clutches at one of the raw figures (a young woman). In front of the canvas, also with most of her clothes off, cut by a bright streak of light shining through a horizontal crack between the cladding, a young woman stood perfectly poised on a straw bale deliberately getting in the way of the painter's line of flight as he stared into the ominous picture looking for an opening to dash into; for the black line was spewing out of the figures as much as entangling them from outside. And he needed to be there lunging at it with the brush sweeping away the poison splashing over everybody. She was laughing gaily, still balancing & now stripped to her pants, squeezing her breasts together, taunting the artist to stop work & make love to her. She rubbed the fold of flesh showing through the gusset, deepening it. "I'm hungry." Leaning gently to one side another gash of light caught her face; one cheek was puffed, slightly swollen. She pulled up her pants. "Stop playing the spider." She lisped slightly because there were two recent stitches in her gum. She gave him the eye. Jumped off the bale & spun round kicking it out of the way. "I'll paint then." It never failed. He gave her the loaded brush. She took it in both hands. She knew this trick. And was pushed up against the picture. She steadied herself with the brush which under pressure dribbled paint. "Stop. I'll spoil it." He pulled down her pants & she stepped out of them & kept her legs open. He dipped a finger in the oil pot. She bucked & wriggled on the finger but it stayed firmly up as she slashed & thrashed the brush over the picture. She reached for the pot to reload her brush & he replaced the finger with his nob. With him close up behind her she bounced & bumped the brush on & off the picture surface. She lost her grip on the brush & used her hands caressing the painting. And sank lower & lower until she was scrubbing the surface with her hair.

Later, as they sat at a table face to face, she took his hand & separated out the index finger & then guided it to her cheek & placed the tip on her cheekbone. He felt a small, sharp nodule. "Can you feel it?" How could she ask?

* * *

In the dim nearly disappearing ochre light of a large ramshackle barn the Wolf, turning on the artist, fixed him with an eye swollen like a poached egg & said he was going to butcher a sheep; would he hold it while he tied its legs? Schlumper, leaning over a barrier built across the width of the barn with fencing posts, coils of wire, boxes, fragments of stone sculpture & sacks of potatoes; nodded yes. They went out to the fold & the Wolf caught the lamb in the crook by a back leg & turned the beast over. Then he had a grip on both back legs & lifting the beast up ordered the artist to hold the front pair. The Wolf kneeled beside the lamb & tied the back legs. With one knee on these he knotted the front legs. Then the lamb was thrown over his shoulder & they returned to the shed.

Newspaper had been laid on the table & on the floor. The lamb was thrown on the table.

A large aluminium jug was standing on a shelf ready for the blood. The Wolf said that the sight of the lamb being butchered might upset the artist. Perhaps he should go for a short walk. He took out a thick penknife as he spoke & opened a sharp spike as the artist went out the door.

When the artist returned the Wolf was fumbling with his trouser fly & both his eyes were bulging. He pointed to the shelf. On it the jug was steaming, full to the brim with blood ready to be boiled. The sheep carcass, still unskinned, lay on the table with two round pink rimmed holes in its neck. There was a scattering of glistening crottels on the

newspaper also covered in large spots of blood. The Wolf looked round for the knife to skin the sheep. And with a grin starting to form, scooped it from under the carcass & then the grin disappeared. The Wolf applied the blade to the lamb's throat & swiftly slit all the way down to its genitals. He then easily cut up each leg to its elbow. Taking a meat cleaver, hanging on a rusty nail through a hole in its blade, off the wall, he chopped each joint clean through. Giving the artist another loaded glance & nodding at the door the Wolf carried on gutting & dismembering the meat. At one point carefully taking his spectacles out of their case with his fingertips to closely examine the sheep's liver. He grunted his positive verdict. Although it did have a slightly golden tinge. Pouring the blood from the jug into a basin the Wolf lit a flame on the ring. It was time to boil the blood down. Thickened with oatmeal the mixture would harden up & then fill the sheep's stomach. When he had time the primitive sausage would be cooked again in a kettle of water. After cutting several ribs to boil the Wolf took an aluminium pan & finding it brimming over with a straw coloured liquid, annoyed, glanced up at the roof while he emptied its contents out. Refilling & washing it; water gushed from the tap overflowing the rim & sloshed the Wolf's boots clean. When the chops had boiled long enough they were picked out of a grey miasma left in the bottom of the pan & gobbled down. Then the Wolf, with a happy grin, pissed in the aluminium pot & replaced it, steaming, on the shelf.

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Painstakingly the artist prepared his drawings. Rubbing out over-blackened lines until only the breath of a shadow was left. Then he drew them in again etc.

“I’ll make them sweat. They will have to struggle to get much out of these hieroglyphs.”

He said this with evident satisfaction, difficult to understand, as he was supposed to be communicating . . .

“What shit. Who says they’ll want to. Whoever they are.” Said Sakini. I agree said

Schlumper. I’m simply grating & paring away to see how long I can hold out.

. . . not just expressing . . .

“Hold out what? Shit?” Said Sakini.

. . . an individual talent . . .

So there will be nothing left.

“What?” Said Sakini genuinely puzzled & using the word like she was intervening with a real hard fact.

. . . discovering itself . . .

“You’d better start thinking it up again because you’ve got it totally wrong . . . again.”

She sat down abruptly on a plan chest & broke a metre stick & partly because of the provocative way she swung her hips as she refused to act contrite that inconsequential blunder started a clumsy fight. Playful at first but getting stung by Sakini’s slaps

Schlumper put in more force until he had her jammed by his shoulder against a door to stop her flailing arms & legs. “Enough?”

“I can’t feel anything.”

“I’ll fix that.”

Then after pulling down the top of her pants around her knees to really show her he decided to pull her knickers down with them. Sakini dealt the back of his neck such a

blow his hand involuntarily sprang up between her thighs hitting the dry bone heavily. Sakini groaned & hammered him again with both her fists. Thrusting an elbow across her throat he pushed her head back with the forearm against the frosted glass & pinched her nipples then reaching down between her legs opened her cunt up with all his fingers. She, having obtained her objective, imagining the pink globes of her buttocks spreading flattened in full view to passers-by thrust out her pelvis but lost her balance, skidded & finished up dangling by her jumper that he had grabbed to hold her upright. She slid out of that onto her knees straightening her bra straps so normally as if getting dressed surprising Schlumper with a grin as she sat & tugged & wriggled to free her legs. He stepped back suspecting a ruse & she immediately went on all fours in the space he had made, denying a ploy with this sexual pose her head straining back to look up into his eyes.

“Join me?” She felt the weight of her belly, the weight of her breasts in the bra, the nipples still tingling from being rubbed; she felt the slit slowly widen peeling apart showing her need. She ran a thumb around the rim of her bra cups lifting each breast out. Her cunt let out a sigh, she felt the moist lips curl around the gap. “Now?” She licked her swollen carmine lips & deliberately flexed her arms stiff at the elbows to push out her breasts which swelled trembling over the constraining uplift wire. Brushing her nipples his hands took the rein as he knelt close to her sex easing her back to be penetrated. One hand pulled hard on the elastic strap that had slipped underneath her ribs. One hand lay over her hand she had pressed into her belly as she felt for the thrust & twisted her torso to glance approval back at him as her palm filled. Arcing a leg to face him full on she

rippled her body under. “More.” She smiled & propped her buttocks high forming a cradle with her thighs. With her weight on her shoulders & neck he caught her feet under his forearms & tightened the spring as he leaned over to suck her nipples. He was in so high she choked with delight as he rubbed hard & harder still on her clitoris.

* * *

Thousands of tons of river must have slipped past as they made love in what was no better than a concrete bunker. Outside, on the rough cast embrasure that served as a terrace the dusky violet light of the mist filled valley was burnt away by the sunlight & other shuttered concrete walls & unroofed spaces appeared dropping down in uneven stages to the green swirling water of the river. From hidden nooks thin wisps of smoke drifted up. Thousands of swallows took to the azure sky.

As a hard thin yellow line struck across their bodies Anguine Sakini stirred. She reached over to stroke the inert body next to her & started to sing. A striking voice, warm & free & uninhibited sang a rock & roll blues from the adolescence she had rampaged through giving the song back its anarchic origin. As the sounds simmered on the concrete walls Schlumper waking took her hand; grasping, trying to hold something precious lodged in the past from slipping entirely away. She shook her hand & he relinquished his hold.

A WEDGE OF RUNAWAYS.

If you close your eyes very tight you can see at some distance in time one way or other the artist wedged in the crook of a huge branch of a tall elm tree sheltering him from the eyes of the world. From this fork where he was sketching, not quite but almost directly opposite the blank stone tracery, fixed & opaque with slate glass, of the west side Rose window (whose zodiac he knew would appear to tremble with vibrant colours to someone gazing at it inside the nave, in the present light) this artist had a complete view of the motif: a Gothic cathedral. Far enough away not to be overshadowed by the spires, near enough for it to occupy all his line of sight as he drew a throng of compromised figures intermixed with other creatures that were nowhere to be seen. Not at this precise moment in time said Schlumper to himself. But they will be back. You could set a cosmic clock by them. And they were packed so close he couldn't get a pencil point between them.

Suddenly overcome with an acute feeling of loss he glanced down at the green turf where he had left an old grey dog guarding his belongings by the hedgerow & saw to his concern that the beast had gone. Schlumper sighed he knew from bitter experience the animal would not return alone.

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A pink tissue paper heart drifted down the west façade fluttering past the stony gaze of the fluted queen guarding the door. Schlumper caught the heart.

* * *

Instantly Sakini caught his eye. "The Wolf's at the door." And wriggled like she had a tail to waggle as her fingers curved through the air slowly coming to rest wedged between

her thighs. He had never seen her dance like it before. And the sound Anguine made to accompany the movement was a throaty whistle. Unheard before. And then she had rolled backwards onto the bed before finishing up on her side hugging her knees. If the billowing curtain hadn't been in the way her sex would have been revealed. Why was she naked? He didn't know what to choose next. And if he did, he wouldn't know how to say it. All the words he treasured had now been stolen, gobbled up & pissed away by the girl who had, to everyone's surprise in the unstable play of these events, an iron glove.

In a gentle breeze the half lowered blind fluttered. The analyst closed her eyes momentarily as she sat quietly in her chair, waiting for the artist to speak. He twitched angrily, knowing she had shut her eyes, & made a rapid sketch on the paper inside his pocket.

“Don't you have to see what you do?” The analyst wondered in her attentive immobility.

“Not always. Sometimes that is the barrier itself.”

“Ah! Are you sure that's not another useless new presence?”

“What. Like the endless wish?” Snapped the Wolf in for the kill eager to create the opportune moment for punctuation & get the artist out of it.

He was absent by then anyway. Frantically mopping up the precious words as the girl squatted peeing into a jug; squeezing & twisting the rag, wringing all the words out onto the paper again, then starting up in anger when he found it was impossible to read the jumbled mess.

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Hemmed in by unscalable, immovable wire barricades fixed in concrete slabs the Zombie, moving smoothly in sensible mules & the model, teetering on stilettos, found their way through to the platform number 6 barred by a padlocked gate. A side entrance was also shut tight as the model found, angrily trying the door rattling its bars while stamping her foot, then having stumbled almost twisting her ankle was forced to take off her shoes. The patient Zombie gently tugged the irate model through a narrow gap giving onto the otherwise inaccessible steps. And the Zombie wisely hung onto the model's arm as they flew up the last flight just gaining the platform in time for the Western Express. After cursing the way they had been impeded & the model flagrantly bemoaning her ruined stockings they scrutinized their fellow travellers & satisfied with their innocent appeal slumped down in a seat . . . "I think we've given him the slip."

The Zombie shuddered. "Is it possible?"

The model felt the warm seat. "Oh be careful don't speak too soon." And looked wide-eyed at the crestfallen Zombie. "One. Two. Three."

"Shut up. You make him appear."

* * *

For no practical reason he could remember the ground with which Schlumper had primed the canvas was the colour of rusty iron: that burnt red had tormented every colour laid on it: tortured the body of the pigment: wrung the last grotesque line out of his hands & now the dog had disappeared. Swallowed up by the earth. Vexed & unguarded, he uttered a loud, piercing whistle. Instantly the dog slunk silently out of the undergrowth. Followed, not casually but not deliberately as far as he could tell, by two bedraggled, indiscreetly

dressed figures, one hardly covered by her dress, female without a doubt; the other less voluptuous, female at a second glance. Alighting from the train on a whim they had doubled up the steps from the station & plunged into the cover of the hedge without a second thought. In her haste having tripped over the dog the model, stroking its head by way of an apology, said, as she stared frankly at the artist.

“Is this creature yours?”

“He came when I whistled.”

“But is he yours?” The model persisted & added she really didn’t know why. “So did we.”

“It’s more that I’m his.”

“I like that.”

“I like that, too.” Cooed the Zombie just a little bit mechanically. And she did. It jarred on Schlumper’s ear, but he also caught that she believed it & that intrigued him.

“Is the bad dog open to an offer?” Laughed the model. “With all that he owns, naturally.”

And by the look of his grin the Zombie was almost sure he was. And tried a whistle. Her first ever. The noise that came from between her lips was near enough an invitation so

Schlumper climbed down. Then the model tried a whistle, too. From his precarious spot

up the tree Schlumper had not been prepared for the beauty of the two women close up.

And now he saw that in some indefinable way they could be twins.

“Taken.” He said warmly clicking his fingers at the animal.

“We haven’t named our price yet.” Said the Zombie unabashed, not taking on board the nuance in the point of his eagerness. The model’s face softened. ‘He’ll take it. I can tell.’

She thought. And after a quick look down her body she touched her neck. “We need . . . we too are in a precarious position . . . help . . . but more than that . . .” She glanced sideways at the Zombie & saw there was no help coming from that quarter. Her friend was entirely occupied struggling with the tight clothes she wore. She had already discarded her boots. The mules having been abandoned in the dry gulch between carriages on the express. With a sense of foreboding & also wanting to close down what the Zombie might quite easily do next to feel comfortable, the model said. “Not much more . . . And yet . . . My friend, as you may have gathered, is something like an alien . . . out of tune . . . we need a place to stay . . . perhaps you know of somewhere?” She blurted out not knowing where it might take them.

“That’s unusual.” Schlumper started to blunder then tried an unpractised look of concern. “So, if I’m catching the drift she has entered the country illegally? Papers . . . none, I’ll bet. Or is it something else?” The uncomfortable thought that they could be runaways from some institution he would never have imagined existed before their appearance on the scene, crossed his mind. And couldn’t be crossed out. There was some appeal in the quick flash of fantasy of desperate women in peril to be protected but not much.

“And we are being pursued.” Given the clue the model thought it wise & expedient to take advantage of the artist’s misunderstanding. This did not calm the artist’s fears or blow on the spark of desire.

“We are nothing else.” Suggested the Zombie in an entirely different voice in response to his hesitation. “And he is a fast runner.” Clearly indicating the supposed fact with an

elaborate, ill-judged swing of her arm that caught the model off-guard on the back & almost knocked her bust out of her neckline.

“Careful.” Shouted the indignant model as she pulled her bra from the front & gave a quick shake to settle her breasts back lower.

“Do they still do that? Chase you.” Now warned by the inappropriate gesture, being deliberately vague, he looked at the Zombie expecting her to join in, wanting to hear the voice again to see if he could place it.

“If it’s important enough.” Snapped the model placing a hand on the Zombie’s arm to prevent her opening any more buttons on her dress with wild actions. Schlumper, warily shifting his weight from foot to foot (as if he was taking it in his stride – but getting nowhere) tried to seem not to see this. So, as they both had their eyes fixed on his face he pointed beyond the trees, actually at the moon the Zombie observed with interest, & waved. “We can sort something out in my workplace.” Not caring to expose it yet as his home to these strangers.

“How do we get **there**?” Asked the Zombie in earnest, making the model more ruffled than she was. “Fully dressed for a start.” She said & promptly pulled her companion in the indicated direction who stalling, leaned over & whispered in her ear. “Is this the man in the moon?” Exasperated the model tightened her grip. “Shut up & learn.”

“Wait.” Both women looked back at the artist & then followed his gaze into the foliage of the tree.

“What the hell is that?” Schlumper cried. Immediately the fur on the dog’s neck rose & it drew back its lips to show powerful fangs.

“Who are they.” Corrected the Zombie. “If you please.”

The model, who couldn't see a thing, demurely checked her cleavage like she was opening a door to a stranger's knock & said. “Onlookers. They shouldn't be here by the way the dog is acting.”

But Schlumper astounded by the Zombie's claim, said. “They.” Yet still couldn't make out what it was. When something is in the wrong place at the wrong time it can be very difficult to see. Or rather can be impossible to believe. The artist had made out a shape, he couldn't say what but manifestly unrelated to anything that should be in a tree where he had been working. The Zombie re-interpreting all the twigs, leaves & gaps with the light sparkling through them could see a multitude of things all she needed was another little clue before she would venture, tentatively, to name them. The model with undeveloped eyesight had clocked the natural tree, that's all, not its camouflaged occupant. Nor its overall symbolic use. By screwing her eyes up she thought she could see . . . herself? Amazed she glanced sideways at the other two to see if there was anything in the way they were acting to collaborate the vision. Captivated, they were stock still, hands over their eyes, trying to get a fix or transfixed & dreaming. By elaborating complex references into a guess plus feeding in the result of her looking, disregarding the incomprehensibility of the data of what she thought she was seeing, the Zombie decided she had been given the plan of an arboreal unconscious & must make the most of it. She didn't know how or what for, immediately, but reckoned a course of action to be at all interesting must include the (metaphorical) capture of the dog & the actual capture of its man straight off. The something or other would be in the detail; she

wasn't quite sure she would be able to perceive what. The model would know. And it might be fun. The Zombie had been told things were never what they seemed to be but as she always felt she was it (what else) she found this difficult to follow. Could they be lying? To deceive her would be easy, she knew that; but it might help. Thus the Zombie resolved she would keep her illusion a secret. If she was not mistaken the present task was to name every shape in the tree not exactly but truthfully. The dog & particularly the man knew someone had been spying on them. The man cast around for a stone.

"Don't throw that you might hurt me." Cried the model truly worried because of what might happen in a newfangled space/time. There the rock could do some damage.

"What." Exclaimed the artist & Zombie together.

"Can't you see it looks exactly like me."

With disbelief they both observed the model closely. And slowly, in mock deliberateness, turned to address the tree. The artist seriously wondering where she was coming from & held up a finger to measure it. And the Zombie wondering where she was going with this one. For immodest as the model was, she wasn't cracked. And yet she was all she was cracked up to be, the Zombie had heard. Nevertheless she thought the finger idea was a good one.

"Can't say as it does." Was his verdict of the comparison.

"One of them could be." The Zombie said thoughtfully. "But you're certainly wearing a different coloured dress up there unless you lost something in the climb."

"Not a lot could go."

"Wait. There is a naked female figure . . ."

‘What is she doing in there?’ The model wondered who else could be attempting a substitution. Perhaps she should have been thinking ‘Why am I still here.’

“There is?” The artist was puzzled & put out because by staring so intently into the sea of green leaves he had unfortunately lost the focus & turning away was now seeing smudgy patches of red all over the model’s light dress. And, subject to the same fatigue, her features were becoming blurred. Was she melting before his eyes? Was that blood? A premonition isn’t always clear to read. And the way the image was deteriorating it could be the analyst he was staring at.

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“You melt in love.” He heard himself whisper as he dropped the stone.

“Wonderful. But not the comment we need on that madness while trying to change one’s relationship to the”

“Other’s wishes.” Suggested the Wolf looking hopefully at the door.

“Desire.” The analyst finished not acknowledging that she had heard anything. Not wishing to end the session yet. “And it’s only the brain that melts in that condition, very often the heart hardens.”

“He wolfs everything down.”

“He? Does that symbolic possibility have a gender?”

“Not in a word . . . I imagine it’s a malfunction of need.”

“I can only guess at a shadow of the significance of that.”

“Try a shot at it.” Involuntarily the artist echoed an inner voice the owner of which immediately took flight. The sound of a door slamming floated up into the room.

“And behave clumsily.” This was not a question. “The silence of the image compels the onlooker to do what? The analyst asked briskly having decided to punctuate the session if he used the word ‘soften’.

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“Hold on. It’s fading away . . . No she’s back.” Said the Zombie (somewhat tremulously as she had also heard the expression concerning butter in someone’s hands & needed to concentrate not worry). In these few seconds of discovery & exposure, while the Zombie had learned a lot, she had also found herself floundering with a new emotion: envy. Not that she’d named it yet. The model would emphatically do that for her, later when they were heading for the steps by the church, down to the village. (On which Schlumper would compulsively examine the leaf filled niche carved in the stone for the leper’s bread & get a surprise).

“Oh! Yes! It is you.” The Zombie was delighted. She blundered on. “It’s your face.”

“And your arse I expect.” The model retorted to a shocked Zombie. “I don’t need you to see myself.”

“Is that how it works?” Asked the astounded Zombie. The model grimaced & nodded.

Crestfallen the Zombie looked at the dog that now had its tail between its legs. ‘Was that true?’ The Zombie asked herself, she thought she could see the model better than herself. And was thankful to be interrupted by the artist shaking out a plaid blanket from his pile of things getting a place ready for a picnic. Though she still surveyed the scene with a worried frown.

“I can hear you bickering. Snap out of it. Come on.” Said Schlumper quietly. He made a sign to the dog & it stayed put with a snarl. Keeping a woebegone eye on the food.

“Let’s drink & smoke the bugger out.” And paid no further attention to the tree other than putting on his glasses & giving it one last look.

His request took the two friends by surprise. “Us?” But they sat down cross-legged.

Wondering why he had so many packets.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” He hung motionless over the green blanket as if searching for a caterpillar in a cabbage patch. “It’s unnerving.” A multicoloured bead necklace fell out of his shirt top. A twig snapped. “Start.” Barked the startled artist.

Barely touching the food the model threw pieces of bread at the dog that snapped them up before they hit the ground. But she drank while the Zombie abstained. The artist ate the sandwiches ravenously. “Hard work.” He explained, holding up the remains after one large bite. “I’ll start a fire.” He dived into the ditch below the hawthorn hedge & emerged with a bundle of crooked twigs & a handful of dried leaves golden & ochre. With the greaseproof paper from the picnic box he soon had a blaze. The heat set the leaves directly above the flames dancing. The artist ripped handfuls of green grass from where it grew long & when he had a big pile heaped it all on the fire. Dense clouds of smoke puthered into the tree & hung amongst the branches.

Taking each other by surprise the three figures linked hands & twirled around the bonfire.

The tree was now enveloped in thick smoke. Satisfied they broke off.

The fact was. Ingenuously the Wolf had acquired a green suit & felt himself invisible so was surprised by the clamour set up by the artist & friends, having forgotten his feet were

dangling either side of a bough. A sure giveaway by the size of his boots. These boots were the first thing they saw appearing out of the smoke as he cautiously descended from his perch. With red rimmed eyes & a sheepish grin through which he spluttered an incomprehensible explanation he was met by & shouted down; the Zombie & the model both stamped their foot crying. “Shut up. Not you again.”

Schlumper thought he heard this stranger say ‘ . . . only just got here . . . not what I expected . . . the trouble I take to get you out of situations . . . protection.’ But couldn’t be sure.

“Do you know him?” He had to ask wondering if he was a ‘situation’.

“Know him. We’ve been trying to shake him off. See. We told you about his interfering way.” They were being unkind & meant it.

“Shake me off.” The Wolf was very upset although he seemed at the same time to expect the insults. But the dog’s hackles rose for the sheepish grin had changed to something much more aggressive. “I come all this way . . .” With his shirt hanging out like a tail he stepped forward. “And what do I get.”

“What did you expect?”

“In these days of the hard sell versus soft soap it gets harder & harder.” Said the Wolf morosely as if reporting to someone else & carefully edged onto the blanket.

“To do what?” Asked Schlumper feeling there was something reminiscent of his childhood in all this. Difficult to pin down like confrontations shaped over plates of food.

“And I take the full brunt of it. They never mention that.” The Wolf pointed at the two girls.

“We couldn’t be less interested.” Shouted the model.

“You wouldn’t have to exclude a lot to make your mind up.” Said the Zombie.

“And there wouldn’t be anything qualitatively different.” The model stood shoulder to shoulder with the Zombie.

“Back.” Shouted the artist, making a timely intervention, for the dog having misjudged the Wolf’s intention (starting to attack but prevented) swiftly moved behind Schlumper’s legs growling & nudging, its ears laid back still ready to fight. It bit the artist on the thigh to get him into the right mood for action.

“Ouch.” Yelled the artist flailing the dog’s head. “Wrong leg you brute.”

The Zombie, statuesque, white-faced with anger, swung towards the Wolf. “Your assistance is no longer needed.” Distracted, she was awkwardly holding a boot tightly in her hand while hopping in the other. “We were having a quiet talk . . . we had almost got to the point of intimacy in our encounter . . . a nuance away from (unsure she looked at the model for help to explain the awkward expression she had been taught about a bag) . . . then bang. As usual. You barge in with a glib excuse.”

“Rather sweet. Nothing contentious either.” Said Schlumper.

“And never was.” Insisted the model not wanting to get her fingers burnt just yet by pointing out the implication of manipulation that was being forgotten.

The Wolf blew on the embers through a hollow fist hoping it would give a dramatic effect. “I’m afraid.” He said haltingly being interrupted by a series of bleeps. “I cannot retire myself from this task. I have to be fired.” The glow of the fire showing up his irritated look.

“We cannot calculate the unknown.” Protested the Zombie.

“Not so far.” Said the model.

“Of what?” Schlumper asked pretending interest nodding as he read the mobile text he had just received. ‘Time to ride the milkman’s horse’ “. . . the milkman’s horse . . .” He muttered quizzically & sighed. “Where?”

“Not of. That being negligent I will fail to intervene at the right moment & become superfluous. Like now.”

“You are fired & the other.” Stormed the two women increasingly impatient at the Wolf’s lame excuse. The Zombie was pulling on her other boot. “Was that the signal to be off?” She glanced at Schlumper’s face.

“And you might look better singed that way.” Said the model. “Less hairy.”

“To whom?” Inquired the artist impassively. His mind was elsewhere.

“Whom?” Then the Zombie put two & two together. “Ah. The man in the moon.” She laughed delighted with her own ingenuity. “I’m looking forward to that. Let’s go.”

The Wolf looked stunned as if being accused of something he had definitely thought. And he had. “It wasn’t me. It never crossed my mind.”

“It being a permanent feature.”

“What.”

“It might be there.” Said the artist distractedly. “And highly dangerous.”

“I hope it is.” Said the Zombie completely missing the point or she would have attempted a blush. “The model said she’d show me the ropes when we arrived.” And grinned at the artist’s questioning look that had really meant he didn’t think the Wolf was off the hook.

“What’s what.” Said the model joining in enigmatically & touched the side of her nose as she inclined her head very slightly backwards. “On whom?”

Again the Zombie clapped her hands with delight & bobbed her head at the artist, nudging his back with the slightest touch of a breast. “Now?”

“HaHa. Something to do with enigmatic signifiers if I’m not mistaken.” Said the Wolf happy to be useful or for the opportunity to say something he thought was sensible & get the interrogation round to a subject (or something) he knew nothing about.

“No wonder you spend (& waste) so much time in a tree spying on people trying to spot, with a view to stealing, where they keep their most precious things.” Said the model. And she hitched up something.

“Boo Hoo.” Cried the Wolf livid at the accurate observation pretending to dab tears from his eyes. “What have you got to hide that anyone in their right mind would covert?

You’ve got plenty to say for yourself but who would want that? Nobody.”

“I’ve got a trick or two up my sleeve.” Said the model addressing the artist, stung by the Wolf’s snarl & apparent recovery of his spirits & his baleful expression. Looking to show the comfort her mouth could give.

The Zombie looked sharply at the pouting model; she knew this to be untrue. Surely the Wolf would call her bluff he only had to point to her skimpy dress forcing the issue of where the tricks were. The Zombie was interested in that as well.

“I haven’t imagined them yet but if you push me I shall & they will be appropriately vulgar. Don’t worry Zombie I won’t leave you in the dark.” The model’s eyes sparkled.

She linked arms with the surprised artist.

The Zombie who had thought until then that it had to take place in the dark or at least subdued lighting, winked at the model as she took Schlumper's other arm.

Schlumper blamed the dog for his predicament that was rapidly turning into a mess. Here were three unlikely strangers who seemed quite at home with him. One ugly. Two very, very attractive. He held himself in check. And you couldn't get a blade between them. He could feel this one's rounded shape weighing on his arm actually throbbing with a warm but reckless heart; her body knew she wanted him, as she would bite an apple. The cooler one was probably more dangerous because he was attracted to her; it was likely she would do anything given a push, to claim him for her use. He didn't know why but he could hear it in her enthusiastic misunderstandings & see it in her questioning looks at the model for a lead. She had something missing. Their keeper (shadow) although playing as if worn to a frazzle by their incomprehensible rejection of his help which they only saw as interference, had another strategy, Schlumper was sure. Watch out. An ugly customer. Should he lose them by cutting down the row beside the Sitwell cinema, climb the red brick wall & make his escape along the twitchel or should he slip in the door beside the blocked out green window & make excuses to the embarrassed man crouching behind his desk until the coast was clear? He could gain enough time to think this through. Big, black rooks were swaying in the thin twigs of tall elm & ash trees above them; they hesitated at the top of a flight of mossy stone steps. The model's hand was poised on the rusty pipe that served as a banister; she seemed to falter needing support. Once across Church street he only had seconds to decide whether to give them the slip. Schlumper

glanced into the stone alcove full of leaves. “Not yet.” The model placed herself in front of the alcove. “We still have time to turn back.”

“Why would we want to do that.” Cried the frustrated Zombie pinching the Wolf hard instead of the model who she really wanted to pinch.

“Ouch. I didn’t say anything.” He rubbed his arse ruefully.

“You wanted to. I could see it in your face. And you want us to turn back still.” But she was scowling at the model who refused to get the message or return her glance.

“Back to where?”

The Zombie didn’t like that retort & gave the Wolf a hard stare & in this stand-off saw to her dismay the artist adroitly slipping past the model although having to push her very slightly Schlumper then rummaged in the dry leaves as, in response, she leaned her body harder into his. “Whatever do you think you are looking for?”

“It is impossible for me to pass this place without checking to see if anything has been dropped into it. Don’t ask me why.” He knew she just had.

“Some people don’t know when they’ve got it on a plate.” Sneered the Wolf in the Zombie’s ear. And as the artist’s face lit up with surprise & he gasped with delight the model came so close to him they were actually in an embrace. “What is it?” Murmured the model. “A stone? And it’s chipped.” She added incredulously, in a way that was so fake only someone engrossed with a really wonderful present could have missed it. The Wolf winked at the Zombie who slapped his face in rage.

“Not a stone . . . a carving . . . a Venus.” Schlumper held it up in awe. “You’d be chipped if you were 23,000 years old.”

The Wolf coughed. “You’d better believe It.” & couldn’t resist another surly comment as he reached to touch the object. “Hey where’s its feet? It’s shaped like a vibrator . . . sure she’s not plastic?”

The Zombie slapped his hand down. “Hands off.” But she was looking daggers at the model. Now she knew why the model had taken so much care fixing her hair in an array of beautiful circular plaits wound round her head. It was a copy of the statuette’s hair.

“I didn’t expect this.” Crowed the artist. “That message was confusing. I wonder what it has to do with the milkman’s horse?”

“Nothing.” The model said curtly, she held the figurine. “It’s too heavy for stone. It’s metal.” Although not rebuffed felt something had slipped a notch despite her ploy, something she wasn’t wearing so it wasn’t in the scheme of things & prehistory wasn’t her strongest suite.

“It’s a bronze cast.” Said Schlumper.

“Give us a list of venuses Zombie, please. It might give us her name & just do the trick.”

She hoped to glide over the slip with the help of the Zombie, she had to bring her in or the chase was over. Schlumper pricked up his ears. Likewise the Wolf. Trick?

“Named ones only?” The Zombie replied unperturbed by the abrupt swing of subject matter. “Otherwise we’ll be here all day . . . no, she frowned thoughtfully . . . well into the night. I’ll stick to the old ones.” She stared up at the rooks & in the midst of their cawing began to chant what sounded more like a spell or a song than a list. “Tursac (the golden with burin markings) Willendorf (the lumpy limestone one; nice beehive hair-do, here the model beamed, Schlumper missed it & the Zombie added, particularly neat detail

of the vulva) Lespugue (ivory bubble with a lovely greenish patina) Savignano (serpentine stick) Laussel (with horn & delicate drawing above the vagina) Balzi Rossi (insect) Sireuil (slender) &, just for luck, a much younger sister from Fafos (clay with 'padded knickers'). Shall I continue? There are more than sixty.”

“That’s more than enough for now.” Said the model softly with a pleased smile. “I think the artist now realizes that we are, I mean he has a much better bargain than he thought.”

“What?”

“It’s off the original Venus of Willendorf. They took a mould off her when she was on loan to a museum & cast twelve in bronze; on the quiet. He has had a piece of luck now’s the time.”

“On the quiet.” Repeated the Zombie.

“Secretly & illegally.” Snapped the model. “For fun. Now we will all move in with him. It will save a lot of trouble.” She kept her voice down.

“How do you save that?” The Zombie wondered what she was missing, glancing across at the artist’s dog. “And we don’t have to buy him off the dog?”

The model just sighed.

Schlumper who had sat on the wall examining his prize, waiting until the two women finished whispering remembered being woken in the night by a persistent chiming of a bell. He lay & imagined going to the door & once there being shocked to discover hiding in a shadow, a young woman with all her hair plaited & pinned to the skull in an intricate pattern; he thought he vaguely knew her but wasn’t supposed to admit he knew her. She vanished. Schlumper then lay in a troubled half sleep that became a dream. He was in a

suburb of an old town, one he knew from his childhood. In a back street there was a collection of junk laid out along the pavement for sale, one or two people were looking for bargains & glancing behind him, he noted one man examining a set of three corroded, cheap metal objects standing on a board, not really like anything he knew, the nearest Schlumper could guess was that the main one was a broken candlestick. Further back there were two tall pots with a green flowery glazed design & other worn-out household pieces piled up. Schlumper needed to get to the railway station & a roughly dressed man offered to take him on a cart but it would, he was told, cost him at least five bob, a currency strange to the artist but he did have some coins in his pocket. At the top of a slope in an even more waste part of the city Schlumper asked to get off & taking out the coins which were heavy rectangular tablets with numbers on & a hole to string them through picked out one with a five stamped on it, added a smaller tarnished coin with many sides, handed them to the man who choked back a cry of astonishment & trundled off. Schlumper entered a dilapidated redbrick building like a warehouse & on the concrete floor in the undisturbed dust were several patterns in bright chalks each about a metre square divided & covered by mostly rudimentary geometric animals & figures with bold outlines.

Along with the memory Schlumper thought he heard one of the two women say. 'We will move in with him.'

And they did. That's how it came about. Schlumper was much too concerned with his dream currency to object. And the Wolf's manner seemed to change when he understood that he, too, was to come along. He became helpful & jealously protective towards the

artist. Very often speaking up for him when Schlumper became preoccupied with a difficult form or lost in thought, especially when he was in the presence of someone who the Wolf didn't trust to have the best interest of the artist in mind. Wolf's idiosyncratic judgement was, of course, under constant scrutiny by the two women & nearly always called into question.

"Yes." Schlumper said out loud but to himself. "She was a Medusa . . . Did my heart turn to stone at that moment?"

The other three were startled by this outburst & headed off down the steps. Schlumper was left in a daze. Now, after remembering the detail of the hair, he couldn't tell whether the female figure of his vision, who he knew full well had been dead for twenty years, was benevolent or malevolent & that didn't seem right. Surely after all these years she should be bringing something important & good. Then he had had the puzzling dream. "I'm guessing (she wasn't) but I think the Wolf was pulling that cart. You didn't pay enough attention." Said Sakini when he told her his dream. Hoping to extract more information. She, too, had taken it as a foregone conclusion that the three companions would stay. That wasn't in question.

"I had my back to him on the cart & only looked over my shoulder once. There was a bundle of rags in between us. His thin single-breasted suit jacket (charcoal grey) was open & the stiff red tie, with a tight greasy knot, slanted across a grubby white shirt. Like a spiv from the forties." Schlumper amplified the description but added nothing of use for Sakini's dossier. She doodled a face with a thin moustache on a torn sheet.

“Was there an engraving on the coins as well as the number?” Sakini enquired giving the head a crown.

“There was, but I can’t remember what . . . I was disappointed, it hardly seemed like money more like tokens.”

“It comes in all shapes & materials including flesh. Sounds as though the man completed his set with your contribution.” She added wryly but she knew it was lost on him. This was the first dream he had remembered for many years. She knew he had expected more from the long dead lover’s apparition or expected there to be more in the dream than was apparent because of her manifestation & that its secret, if there was one, may well depend on them finding the key or clue. Facts not interpretation.

“I was no where near the station.” Schlumper mused. “Perhaps he got off lightly?”

“Where were you? Was it a place you know?”

Schlumper seemed reluctant to pursue this line of conversation. “It was hazy, I thought I could see three or four people swimming in an irrigation tank sheltered by a clump of trees . . . so it was summer . . . let’s see.”

“Where?” Sakini impatiently scribbled a body under the king’s head. “Surely you can work out where you were from that detail?” To see this scene he would actually had to have been standing in front of a framed photograph of the scene in a corridor of an apartment in N.Y. but she didn’t need to know that. Now there was a Queen joined up with the King drawn in bold lines.

“I could usually only see that picnic spot from a hill out in the country quite close to here.

So you can understand why I’m puzzled. And not only by this displacement. I also thought I recognized the bathers.” Having started he felt compelled to tell her.

Sakini screwed up the scrap of paper. “Now we have something.”

“And one of them was you, Anguine.”

“Me. Swimming.” She laughed incredulous at his claim. A piece of defiant play-acting.

Schlumper was now sure she had been there.

“There were two other women by the shape of them both in the water, but I didn’t know them. And you weren’t in the water you were with the other figure on the bank . . . a man. You appeared to be enjoying each others company.”

“You are making this up.” Sakini blushed even at the thought of being seen with a man in a dream.

“You should know.” He waited. Sakini picked up the discarded scrap of paper & flattened it & looked very closely at the face she had drawn then scribbled heavily over it as she replied.

“How can this happen? Your old flame didn’t know I was there that day. How could she? Why would she? . . .”

“Is it any use?” Schlumper cut in. Perhaps this was something he didn’t want to know about. “For our present needs?”

“I’ll see & tell you later.” And Sakini left.

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As soon as they entered the artist's studio the model noticed everything was covered in a layer of dust but said nothing, she did observe that it had settled some time ago & had lain undisturbed. The Wolf sneezed but he, too, said nothing. The Zombie spied a three-legged table with three beakers & a cup on it & said. "Oh. Someone was expecting us." And giggled nervously in the prolonged silence. There were two vases with the remains of unrecognizable flower bouquets withered in them & two conical ink-pots. Between the table legs there was a large aluminium jug. Schlumper slapped his forehead. "That's right. Anguine Sakini laid them out to save time when we came back." But his frown remained.

"Anguine Sakini? Who? She knew?" The three murmured their inquiries politely.

"My model." And his arm gestured towards the window so the Zombie tripped over to it & peered through the rain grimed smoky panes (naturally because the room was totally devoid of any artifacts showing signs that a female form had been used in their conception). But on the window pane she noticed a faint picture drawn by someone's finger, years ago, by the way the overlaying dust had almost obliterated it. The Zombie wrinkled her nose & asked. "In the garden?" But she was concentrating on the diagram, despite its rudimentary form she felt she knew the place & so memorized it.

"She may have . . . gone." Schlumper's unconcern was genuine; the model could evaluate that, she didn't need dusty ornaments to establish the bungled character of the room either; but why had no one been here for some time by the look of it, not even him? Why did he want them here? She observed the artist closely; perhaps the necessity of their participation was not as concealed as he would like to believe in this abnormally

constructed normality. And if she overlooked as little as possible then what it was he was hiding might become intelligible. As well as what it was he was making.

“I expect she’s giving us some time . . .” And he couldn’t finish the sentence. Did he choke on the words to follow? Yet it was obvious the Zombie saw nothing amiss in the set-up. But Wolf & the model immediately exchanged a surreptitious look behind the artist’s back.

“Ah. Yes.” Said the Zombie brightly & she looked round for somewhere to sit & wait.

“I’ll sit just a minute.” The rest of the party shuffled awkwardly (including Schlumper) at the Zombie’s naturalness in this increasingly unlikely situation, made worse because she leaned over & caressed a tall vase with real appreciation. For no reason the model shivered; her teeth clenched as she watched the Zombie stroking the pot oblivious of the grime rubbing off on her hand. “Take the flowers out & throw them away.” Trying to get rid of the evidence of neglect or an element in an extraordinary meticulous subterfuge. But why? To start something fresh, perhaps. She looked at Schlumper & gave him a fleeting smile, fascinated by the graceful way he treated her, but not believing it was without motive.

“I’ll do it.” He said & snatched both withered clumps up, disappeared through a doorway & came back, slapping the palms of his hands together in a resolute pose. “Shall we . . .” He gestured towards the opening as if there was somewhere to go.

When the artist had taken out the dead blooms he had collided with Sakini coming in.

Warning her with a finger to his lips while mouthing the words ‘too soon’, he had thrust the flowers into her arms. Her cheeks went pale, her lips blanched as if the redness had

fallen off like petals fall, & she fled without a word, clutching the flowers. And merged into the shadows beyond the garden not leaving a trace.

The artist had gathered earlier from their ingenuous response to the mention of Anguine's name that one of this trio, or perhaps two, knew about her in some way. He also knew this was unlikely, but had insufficient knowledge of these people to be sure. It was true that the instant Schlumper saw Sakini, all those years ago, even as his heart was pounding he thought she could be the one. And had never pursued the detail of her previous life.

Later as the firelight flickered in the narrowing gap between them he knew he could be with her like this, so close without ever wanting to uncover . . . This reverie was broken by the violent noise of a low flying fighter plane crashing the sound barrier, it brought him back to earth & to his doubts, to usher his new friends out into the sheltered garden.

The model let her head fall on the Zombie's shoulder as they halted; they put their arms around each other warily surveying the sheds & other structures difficult to name. But there, on the garden table, in another tall vase, the model was astonished to see the dead flowers placed as if arranged with care. She nudged the Zombie who, spotting the bouquet at the same time had inclined towards this new still-life as if to examine it. And heard her friend's whisper. "Take care. Pretend that you haven't seen them."

"Here again we have an unforeseen choice brought into our lives by tricks." Said the Zombie quietly, turning towards the model & shooing the Wolf away with the back of her hand. Meanwhile he hovered. And they both wondered if he already knew the artist, but couldn't pin down a reason for their simultaneous suspicious thought. The model paid attention; she guessed the (selfless) Zombie was going into automatic so the thread, less a

disenchanted transfiguration than an erotic abandonment could become torturous (distorted); or could degenerate with cellophane gratification into a shameless & seductive diatribe. She was hoping for something somewhere in between & as it was completely unknown territory strove with her concentrated expression to guide the Zombie silently through her task without becoming bewildered & help her to avoid the inevitable holes of the argument. Consequently she missed most of what was said.

The Zombie finished, “Although beguiled into believing the events of today have been the result of a systemless series of meetings by both parties, I am beginning to question this chance & name it as a clever misconstruction . . . as a mangled means of representation . . . as a standby . . . in danger of becoming a permanent misunderstanding . . . in which we are expected to flourish if not blossom.”

“In short you think we’ve been had?”

“Not yet but it’s getting unadulteratedly close. We need a melange of elements like shit & sugar to construct, in advance, a technological escape route in case we need one.”

“It needs an external counterweight. Not nostalgia.” Interrupted the Wolf insisting on doing his job. “The truth here is indistinguishable from a raft of dubious reconciliations concocted to help, or inspire, you both to accept that the catastrophe was inevitable. You must redirect your efforts away from self-estrangement or the way will be left open for an apparition to come & take revenge then . . .” He was just warming to the subject.

“What catastrophe?” They both cried before he could finish.

“Keeping you ‘on the job’ just as you are. Until the end.” Snapped the Wolf. “You must spoil the plan that is intent only on keeping surface phenomena in play. Go for the” And he jabbed a flat hand rapidly to & fro at bollock level.

“To start with that would mean taking a name.” Said the artist who had sidled up & listened with interest. “And probably splitting up. And other involvement.” He gave a sideways glance at the Zombie a look which contained a lot of subjective consummation & that a break wouldn’t necessarily be a calamity & she didn’t miss either of those messages conveyed in a split second.

“Seems like a crude alternative, at the moment, to the aimless but charmed pleasure we are going to get from playing ball in the garden.” Said the model, who had also clearly understood & was showing by throwing her arms out sideways, parodying an infantile gesture, her contempt for the artist’s suggestion.

“What are you proposing? Zombie. A mechanical non-linear instrument?”

“Something like the scattering of written pages that never fall to the ground? Are never bound.” Asked Schlumper. “Could you handle that?”

“Is that a hobbyhorse of yours?” Asked the Wolf innocently. “Are we ready for it yet?”

“I wouldn’t handle any of it.” Said the model & she blinked.

The party was now sitting at a round table, its marble top veined by the same dead colours as the withered flowers which no one cared to mention this time. So being enshrouded by an unspoken veto they were abandoned to ornament a space difficult to find: Limbo. A female appeared in the doorway & Schlumper waved & shouted, “Yes.” Seemingly welcoming. She dived back into the opening. And it was unclear from the

clumsy execution of the action whether she had been caught unawares while observing them or, having noted their composition, would reappear in some role chosen to suit the look of them. It was in question for sure. It was in the reasonable tone of the artist's voice as he resolved to put off further indecision.

"Now we're here it is probably the best time to introduce . . . & he waved his arm again & shouted, "Yes." But she had gone & he was tapping the table leg with his boot toe. The smile vanished like a frog in a swamp.

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"Are you going to tell me the significance, if there is one, of what you have just recalled that caused your smile to fade so abruptly?" The analyst looked away from him. "No matter if there isn't one."

He certainly wasn't going to swallow that bait, given the contradiction he understood between her supposed indifference & the persistence of the line of questioning.

"Can I detect a trace of anger in your refusal, now as then, to share your thought in a concrete way? Other than with a vanishing smile. Is there a story perhaps?" This showed him how, in perfect sincerity, she understood.

The Wolf aimlessly moved an arm, signaling against the imputation, hoping to cut the flow; it was also an accusing gesture. It should have checked her but she, not losing any momentum, immediately declared. "Did you find the words difficult to swallow?" The analyst didn't want a reply; she knew it was time to strike. "And with the same inability to recognize, although not to perceive, the damage you were about to do, spat them out.

Worse than that even.” She had brought it out with a sharp look. “We’re told too many lies not to know.”

“Ah! A trick of the profession.” The Wolf spoke & winced as he floated a few silent, diagrammatic possibilities of escape routes into his head; none of which could extricate him, he knew. Only something from his innermost make-up would surface. Something rotten. And she wasn’t getting that. Not easily, anyway. The analyst appeared not to hear him.

So the artist replied. “I was always aware of the chance of a misunderstanding about my silence (good, thought the Wolf, rub it in & contradict that’s bound to do the trick) but those ‘omissions’ always were called in as evidence anyway. So why not forget the nuances & precipitate the bust up? Plan it, even. I knew she would return so I waited.”

“That’s all you did.” Snapped the analyst. “More was needed & you knew.”

“What did you want? A mishap.” Said the Wolf again springing to his defence. “That he invented.” He checked it was OK to carry on. “Because if you thought there could have been more done you didn’t understand his kindness. And he didn’t know how close he was to revealing . . . exposing . . .”

“It couldn’t be further from that.” Said the analyst, thinking ‘delusion’. “And you know it. So continue.”

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The artist shrugged. “She will be back.”

Sakini was upon them with such speed & amongst them with such familiarity, that they instantly forgot she had only just arrived. Except the Zombie who had felt a strange

tightening in her belly as they embraced & who, even now, was seized by a tremor she had never experienced before. Their food, a carryout in aluminium dishes, was delivered by a man on a motorbike riding in through a backyard gate hidden beyond the bushes. He circled & roared off.

Sakini said, to provoke them the model was sure, she would tell them of the time she learned to kiss, if they wanted. The Zombie, her eyes watering with the exhaust fumes, wondered if it was the first time but Sakini said no & took that remark as a yes.

“The bastard had a penetrating tongue that felt like the body of a reptile.” Anguine Sakini shuddered & flicked her tongue over her upper lip. “He was ugly but I was unprepared for the length of it & choked.” She clasped her throat with both hands re-enacting the scene; a teardrop emerged at each corner of her eyes as she pulled her lips that were full of blood, back over her teeth. “Or the taste of it.” She paused & licked her lips. “That was so delicious it made me run.” And she pointed between her legs & laughed. “You thought I meant ‘run’ didn’t you Zombie. Haven’t you . . .?” But the Zombie had had a different image, a fear; ‘the jaguar bites the lizard & nine underworlds later . . .’ She couldn’t speak. Was it that close?

The model noticed that Sakini’s nipples had grown large with this action & were bulging through the flimsy blue scarf she had tied over her bust; she would have liked to pinch them to make Sakini tell the true story that she knew, in fact, would never cross those swollen lips. But the instant of speculation brought an interested look to her face that encouraged Sakini who brushed the hair from her face & after a pause said awkwardly.

“We can be frank. Can’t we? Since now no one is missing. That kiss saved my life.” And

with these words she regained a tranquility that was rarely seen with her. “Except perhaps . . .” And there Schlumper placed a finger over her lips, not sealing them but delicately asking for her discretion. Unabashed Sakini sucked it into her mouth & made a show of biting it. So the moment passed; drawn back, the name was dropped & left behind.

‘So she is close to him. Or is it a show because she has been badly hurt?’ The model speculated, then pursed her lips at her brief stupidity, & to keep in an unneeded comment; having recognized that what she wanted to know would be revealed quicker in her silence. There was a margin left but barring a beautiful accident (their words being exactly & simply the text of a play, for instance & so compromised) in that margin the model decided to work her considerable charms & cast her spell. Fortunately the Zombie was having this thought of intimacy as well so they would pull together & didn’t need the least pretext for carrying it out in the most direct way. Their remarkable understanding set Sakini at a great disadvantage supposing she were at all interested in the artist; but it was difficult to assess the depth of her feelings because they were at odds with being shown in any straight way. As if these emotions shunned the clear light of day; were used to being constantly quenched & so, although deepened in twilight, never were anything else but clouded. Charming, she was never nice, moreover she was undoubtedly unscrupulous because it was impossible to tell the difference between her acting & not acting – the show was as inexorable as it was indifferent; as erotic as it lacked passion. There was, both the model & the Zombie concluded in their own similar way, some other goal for Sakini & her presence betokened only that. What she was after, however roundabout, would constitute a betrayal; they were sure, while still being something special &

untrammelled to Sakini. And it just might include them. All this wondering passed in the blink of an eye.

Schlumper looked steadily around the table aware of the inevitability of these four people meeting at this meal & although he cherished what he had been allowed to discover of Sakini he was doubtful if he really understood (or would be enlightened by her why she had engaged his help) the pretext for this gathering. Anguine was acting on knowledge obtained by painstaking work that made its own luck, about the history of something (about someone) she cared for seriously & it was unclear how far she was prepared to include him intimately in the venture to bring it to a conclusion. No one would be able to make that out, anymore than could be made of the vagueness of her replies to any question concerning this. Was the past so precariously hung that everything & everybody in the future had to be stock still about it?

The Zombie leaned her body towards Sakini almost touching her side. “And where & when did that kiss take place? Are you letting us into your secret?”

“And who was it?” The model added eagerly. “Since you were so affected by it.” She, too, leaned over the table.

There was a long silence; Sakini had closed her eyes as if the silence was a straight answer that had left her the least exposed & that to break it would hinder her work. Or at least to reply would make more haunting questions possible. Ensure that there would be more questions. But then, there might just be a slip. She whispered. “I can tell you what time it was, for sure.”

“Not now.” The artist looked sharp & interrupted. “Are there enough beds in the place. We must check.”

“One.” Said Sakini with an immodest grin that completely dispelled the serious air of her previous claim & gave the two other women a lead she intended.

“That’s enough for three.” The model & Zombie shouted & jostled each other away from the table & climbed up inside an old truck parked in a corner, chatting to dispel the gloom. And so decided to set themselves at Schlumper.

“We should always act together.” The model confided to the Zombie in a small voice so it wouldn’t carry. “No matter if you are irritated some times.”

The Zombie, taking in the local colour through the open window, said. “I can’t see any horrors.” And clicked her tongue. “But you & I . . . that would produce some mutations.” It made the model cross, so she moved about in her seat hoping to appear inscrutable (yet décolleté as well to counter the imputation & give the crease between the pages of the book).

The Zombie cried. “Just look at that.” A large bird landed on the rusty blue truck bonnet for a moment before taking wing again, startled at her cry.

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“Are you going to share what time it was? The analyst asked quietly. “That stolen kiss? Or do I get the name plus three guesses & we work on from those?”

Not knowing whether she was scornful or it was a ruse the Wolf bristled & barely repressed a snarl of anger at having his statuary three wishes stolen from under his nose.

Before the Wolf could bring himself to ask for them back nicely the artist hastily replied. “It’s a piece of cake you’d get it first go.” He felt he was being ignored. She didn’t admit it.

“Or is it a tool?” The analyst coolly checked on the last word to bring it fully into play; knowing she was introducing a choice into their relationship that could lead them somewhere as sweet as honey or messy as shit. “That we could use later on to mend something that breaks down.”

“It sounds as if you are asking me for a lost formula.” And there was an edge to the rueful sound of this reply. “If I knew it would I tell?” He added more for himself.

“I can’t guess what use knowing the time of that kiss & keeping it secret would be . . . to you or anyone.” Declared the analyst who knew the time to the minute. That wasn’t the point. She wanted to see whether they got a detour, a delay or respite.

The Wolf, who didn’t know the time of the kiss & didn’t care, could see this clinch was getting between him & his wishes had a glitter in his eye as he thought, ‘There’s one dead on every page.’ With that thought Wolf felt an old bitterness that made him grind his teeth. It happened every time, just as he was going to tap the two beautiful figurines with his wand & bring them to life, with a searing flame spouting from the analyst’s mouth they were reduced to waxen polished stones, before his eyes. He was definitely saving something special; the last wish was for her.

The challenge must have come on the spur of the moment because Wolf was still scratching the lobe of an ear as the artist continued. “It’s a one way ticket, a broken

string, why get intense about it?" He shrugged, affecting disinterest. "It couldn't have been cold recreation, could it?"

"It's no use murmuring words learnt by heart they won't undo any knots." The analyst was becoming tired of his facility. "You are not going to unearth all the buried secrets. I know that. We need one. One decipherable one."

"To upset the balance?"

"Don't get carried away." Said the analyst curtly. "We haven't found out where they are hidden yet."

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CRACKLE.

A **SNATCH** of models.

On one side of a torn sheet of notepaper was the printed logo:

In carcinoma FORTRAL Tablets

Ensure pain relief

See prescribing notes inside front cover

On the other written in her hand in black biro:

How do you explain

to a chinaman

that I'm not going

to wear cotton

knickers come what

may

Unfolded, slipped between the leaves of a book, the note in its poignant vulnerability described her exactly - completely exposed & torn, unformed.

Iron bullets of pain came when it was too late.

Then, taking pain killers five times a day, she decided on a mask to wear for the journey.

Black matt satin with six sequins in triangle on forehead between eyes, glitter eyelashes, broad shiny lace all round, down far enough so as to cover the mouth.

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'Loup' – wolf; smudge on a drawing; black velvet mask; fluffed entrance (& exit) of actor; sexual bruise marks on the thighs; phencyclidine an animal (pig) tranquilizer & a dangerous hallucinogen; pincers for extracting nails; flaw (in wood) & a general defect.

Surprisingly the doors were all half-open. Kristel couldn't believe her luck; it was so easy to get in. And, incomprehensibly considering her natural cunning, she didn't question this. Now she could lie in wait for her prey. With slightly parted freshly reddened lips that gave her mouth the exciting shape of a treacherous snare ready to be pulled tight in an unwitting kiss. And take flight. For Kristel could forsake this make-believe scene at any awkward time, at the least sign that her partner had an inkling he was the dupe of her double-edged pretext. And the flicker of approval in her blue eyes at the image of her now almost naked body in the mirror showed what she intended - to tempt the chance in a wish for destruction. But not without a semblance of control to insulate her passion & provoke with the subtle hint of danger in her gay smile the thought that although there was an opening to her heart it could spring shut in an instant – but might stay open. He had heard a husky voice at the end of the line; a promise of enticingly whispered words for later but soon after her arrival there were changes. She dropped things; bits of paper, & tore notes into tiny pieces that trailed along the floor. At night she let out confused noises as she wandered in the long corridor dividing the living space from the studio. When called she stiffened like an animal on the prowl, then melted back into her room, & in there curled up on a pile of clothes in a ramshackle den made of cardboard boxes, planks & string.

Some days Kristel could be tempted out & then she declared plaintively in defence of her ways. "But sometimes when I don't answer I must be somewhere else because I can feel the ladders in my stocking snaking up my leg to the knee & I am trying to move as little as possible to stop them reaching the thigh but I am penetrated before I have managed to

free my foot from this coil of wire or thorns digging into my ankle. And once taken I bleed. Then I can't move.”

A broken cobweb of silk threads under her grey & white spotted dress with drops of blood caught in the strands.

She put her left hand over her eyes to keep out the dazzle of the headlights. There was a siren in the distance which sounded as though it would eventually flash past the spot where she was standing transfixed but it died away without ever coming into sight. The words demanding rescue rolled out in a long rhythmic phrase. Gibberish, they were unconnected with any conscious thought; flung out beyond the reach of understanding by a dreamer whose breathing, grating hoarsely on & on confirmed she was in & losing a laborious battle; someone in dreadful pain. Kristel knew she must have been rescued – but when?

Indistinct grey shadows became or rather sprang out in the shape of a botched animal that engulfed the world giving her no choice but to leave as fast as she could or be swept away by it. She stepped into another enshrouded space & carefully made a disguise.

Two strangers appeared & as they passed close by Kristel & Schneider pelted them with snowballs. The couple replied amicably.

‘Playful combat . . . a bond . . . but not a softening.’ Schlumper thought as he ducked below the line of fire. He was good at that. And tugged Sakini down into a hollow. As the balls whizzed through the powdery snow that still drifted down carrying the street light up on into the bowl of blackness he also wondered who was the beautiful woman they had chanced upon. The snowball assault stopped so the artist peeked out of their shelter

& saw the couple were exchanging words – he couldn't hear them but their gestures were heated as they began to tussle. The girl fell & the man began to rub her face with snow. "Time to mount a rescue." Sakini prompted him with a chuckle as she blew into her wet mittens before starting to form another snowball. Then armed they stumbled forward. The wind strengthened & whipped the snow into a white blizzard so it took Schlumper & Sakini ages to reach the place where they hoped to find the couple. First they came across frozen lumps & strings of flesh.

Left wounded & stripped naked Kristel had crawled into the rotting carcass of a dead cow & wrapped the bloody matted hide around herself. It had kept her alive.

"What beautiful eyes she has." Sakini cried. "Is she alive?"

Schlumper looked aghast. What was Anguine thinking of, but his censure, accompanied by a painful sensation close to jealousy was fleeting; he, too, at the same moment, had lighted on the eyes & found them cruelly beguiling & felt the urge to slip inside the dead animal beside her. Covered in the matted felt of congealed fat, skin & hair the stricken woman breathed shallowly with a nearly indiscernible rattle in each breath; her mouth moved slightly but the lips were stiff so words could not be formed. A powdering of snow had frozen burnishing her raven hair; as the artist stretched out a hand to brush it off a muffled snarl rang out from inside the carcass & a muzzle, teeth bared, slid under his wrist.

* * *

When the chance came to encourage her brother Tamar Qush to step through the doorway of romance Yimkichor did. Not prompted by any hope of intimacy for him but as a matter

of fact in the dispassionate way she would have pushed any malleable person on. And with a warm persuasiveness to enter in the act that belied her real feeling. That she was holding back; wasn't committed to it did show. But as her actions were never submitted to scrutiny her hesitancy was never revealed. As she was not playing a double game there was nothing to unmask; although if a lover had held her, as one later did, & looking into her eyes asked if she approved she would have shook her head unhappy that this was what she had to do.

Simultaneously requiring his sister's help while excluding her from any intimate details, Tamar Qush proceeded blindly.

Yimkichor never openly interrogated Tamar & he never frankly responded to the subtle appeals she made to be included.

In the end Yimkichor felt she had to leave.

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As shown by the **ROT OF DIAGRAMS:**

While all **THIS** was happening, Schlumper explained diligently to Dekobra, searching for a strategy & before I came to you & met all of the others I had a strange moment, not a dream (more an inaugural step of hope over my dead dream but at the same time holding back as you would on coming across a gaily decked-out corpse). It came as I lay in bed running the words cold-blooded, cold-blooded, cold-blooded, constantly through my mind so I would remember them when I got up & pencil them onto the lines of my diagram.

As I lay restlessly half-turned on my side perhaps because of this provocation, this blocking mantra, suddenly there was a pig's head pushing from behind the pillow on which my head was resting, its snout appeared to my left in the middle of the bed head between the pillows.

I lunged up awake shouting 'cold-blooded' as I elbowed it back into oblivion because I knew with utter certainty it was after my carrots (I saw the bunch of orange-gold carrots as I reacted).

O. Oh! Now soon he will tell where he's at & get it muddled up with this, the analyst said to herself & looked even more attentive.

Also, I was not alone in bed. You were there, in fact, it was your bed, the one you diligently pointed out to me, Schlumper declared. So you see, you did exist in **this** for a short while.

I did? The analyst felt she would be wise to pretend to take someone else's part.

And as you shot up startled out of a crushing nightmare you realized you weren't alone either. You were bang in the middle, in between two bodies, because your daughter, Pollak, always climbed in your side.

Pollak, said the analyst, are you sure that's her real name? Think. We are getting close here. She said nothing but slightly shuffled her feet.

And she pushed up hard against you. Was she trying to turf you out? Was she trying to pass through your body & get to me to fornicate or become you? And you? You didn't kick her out for the rival she was. That would have spoilt the party. You kicked me out.

Rock-like refusing to give an inch as you were squeezed between two bodies eventually

you could stand the heat no longer. Though the reason for an action is always more than one simple thing or one simple way of deducing a reason, I know what you did was wrong especially in a dream, Schlumper held up his hand, but I'll avoid the counter interrogation this time if you don't mind. I know I should have left years ago . . . I was going to say bolted but, in fact, I had bolted & then like a hare in a shaft of moonlight become transfixed . . . caught so near the door but not through it.

Maybe Pollak (my daughter as you call her in this extremely violent action) is still lost?

The analyst's query was accompanied by a brief flick of her hand.

Yes & why? Because while desperately searching for a true love she is really seeking to find a lover for you (not realizing the madness of that on several counts). And thinking, because of the enormous task she had unconsciously set herself, they are hard to find (ditto parentheses). At last, when she believes she has found the man for her alone, is assailed by an unaccountable feeling of despair but as there is a complex bind, cannot part with him. So, now up to her neck with this lover, mistakenly thinking her need for him is unbearable, unwittingly hopes, as she did from the start, to pass him on to you to tear to pieces. Instead of being torn apart herself. Trying, with this gift, to placate or appease you. But, at the same time, hoping you will be murdered by him; because in this menage you are gobbling her up. Methodically. She is embroiled with a fearsome creature & acts like a wild beast something like a tiger or a wolf.

Snap. Half gone. You take your pound of flesh.

I do?

Lie here darling, safe & sound. Mmmm. You smell good. But the voice is hungry & trembles with famished desire. Mmmm. You can stay. Let me kiss you. She struggled loose.

The damage done Pollak blithely hopped out of bed.

“You must see this film.” Pollak insisted several times, with hardly a breath between the pleas, in the space of a few seconds. “The ‘mother’ falls in love with a younger man.”

“Yes, I’ll go. Sounds fascinating. Is it based on a true story?”

“No. Falls for her best friend’s boy-friend.” Pollak posed her thin hips out to one side & placed her hand on the curve; a gesture full of regressive spite. “It’s happening all the time.”

“Yes, I’ll still go.” But this time Dekobra did sound skeptical. Because from where she stood & took stock, & that was always in a spot before she was born, most interpersonal relationships were delicate, even difficult, usually disastrous. (And when drawing a bead from there on someone in the womb . . . something more than mirrors are needed).

“You’ll like it. I know you will.” She urged with delinquent enthusiasm but didn’t know why.

* * *

Between us, in those sessions, ran a streak of blood that was drying up. If I have got a clue how it came to be there it eludes me; yet as oil paint on a picture it ran into the claw of the lobster, tingeing it red, showing it was boiled.

The colour barely touched her lips.

“Why did this pig’s head appear? Do you know, apart from it wanting to steal your precious carrots?” Schlumper felt the analyst really would like to know. “Was it a false lover’s form?”

“Whatever it was.” (Perhaps a lustrous cone shape reflected on the sheen on the back of a doting lunatic flopped over after sex). “It was in the know, deliberately arriving too late to pull me out of the mess having timed it to perfection.” Schlumper didn’t want to hide anything but couldn’t express how dangerous he felt the image was swept loose from a menagerie of angelic figures barely suppressed or contained in their world, able to emerge & violate his thoughts anytime.

“Carry on if you can.”

“Nevertheless those demonic angels were there constantly glancing & grinning & I felt forced to draw them time after time.” Schlumper stopped talking & drawing.

‘Who was after what?’ Dekobra wondered as she made notes mimicking the artist & wondering if he would notice. ‘Or was this an animal companion-guide of the whirlpool assailant scouting out the victim’s territory in advance not expecting a violent rebuff? And fraudulently taking on the pig’s form just this once for the sake of opprobrious accuracy’. I’ll take this case on. “Let’s see if we can get those awful angels to speak to us.” She said as she arranged their meetings.

* * *

Listen closely & carefully & attentively with compassion: The woman calling me to her bedside, that scarecrow-like woman is the first love of my life sucked empty, to the bones . . . by cancer. She waved away her nurse as I took stock of all the tubes entering her &

leaving her, that were mainly to counter the nasty nauseous effects caused by the rising level of calcium in her blood. Her bones were disintegrating. She is the model, zombie, goddess, motherfucking daughter who came out of nowhere to embrace me: And by her bedside I saw her go back to nowhere.

* * *

An endless line of the dead (looking in the drawing like trees shattered by a hurricane) celebrated my despair, now they are watching my **street** from a high window as a girl-child from the slate huts across the canal bridge in Megalaughton Lane over-dressed in black pushes open a brown gate, with a broken spring encrusted in thick layers of rust & paint, hanging on the gate post like a turd hanging out of a dog's arsehole, to enter the tidy garden; then pushing the next taller brown gate with a trellis rotting above the thumb-catch, which one day a dog with a broken tail jumped through smashing the planks wide leading into the yard, where she knocks at the open kitchen door to be answered by a woman who immediately thought the child had been made to wear a fancy Halloween dress & screwed up her nose even though she knew the child's father, a maintenance labourer, had been scalded to death while fixing some insulation on worn pipe-work in a factory a few days before. All his flesh had fallen from the bone as a jet of super-heated steam from a fractured pipe swept over him. He took a few days to die in untouchable agony.

The incest taboo didn't hold at this child's house; she was well used by the family members. Every dogsbody invited in, were invited to have a go, all shagged Joy. That was the story going around on the banks of the Lo river.

Below the surface of the river in dense green water, I, along with the other children allowed out loose at any time, floated in the company of a buoyant log, dreaming of a way to gain access to that house where, by hearsay, a dream could come true. I didn't know why I should want to get in that house or what I would do. I know they had thrown their dog off a bridge & it had smashed to death on the tow-path. They were rotten that was enough.

That assailant has been in this bed before. I can smell the sour stink, she said.

She watched as we were allowed to walk up the back bork together a few times & then the calls to accompany her stopped.

Never mind. She will re-appear.

Cancer was in her bones & her flesh melted off them. To a shape of pain impossible to embrace. A slit for each eye, a hook for the nose. A dab of any red for the mouth. Done. Every object passed to her was either sprayed (an apple) or baked (books & magazines) to sterilize them. Glossy pages stuck together: spines split & broke: nothing could be done. The books were unreadable.

---So you didn't take us to see her because you would have had to bake us?

We all grinned, the three of us in the Gingerbread house, much more untidy than a fairy story, where, it is well-known, everything scattered around the palace – frogs, gold coins, sleeping beauties - are hastily snatched up near the end & thrown behind the sofa before the chaste princess (until recently) & her chosen one (recently transformed) enter & switch on the tele. Not noticing, in their bliss, there was a plate of half-eaten cauliflower cheese left on the floor by the sofa until later, in their amorous tussle, they rolled over it

& the white paste joined the rest of the excretions. Had my pain gone? When? In the few moments of love-making. When I was never there. (His excuse was that he had been taken in by this heavy petting line, projected there pell-mell by a saturated advertising campaign impossible to resist & fell in easily with the vulgar notion of amusement; so missed out on the lovers he thought he really needed most & by this foul hook lost the better ones he'd got. So the pain (which is a more flattering way of describing stupidity) persisted mashed with the milk & butter of surrogate affection.

---Some things were only half-baked.

The older youth balanced his mug of coffee on his bare foot as he had when he was seven. The younger, who hadn't spoken, straightened his head as he had when he looked out from the tree house alone for hours when he was two. "Well. What were you afraid would happen?"

"Note: a seven & a two." Said Sakini butting in. "Heaven without man. (ten ni jin nashi)." She checked the Zen pictograms. "Nothing showing as yet."

There was still a rectangular space just bigger than the airflow bed defined by an orange painted band over which we couldn't step.

Why haven't you brought them to see me? And then she faltered. She knew. I was already jibbed changing course. But I should have taken the boys & crossed the line with them.

* * *

At this hospital, with a familiar lack of heart that assails all top heavy bureaucracies, there was restricted access to the dying so Schlumper was sitting in the bogs hiding from the nurses until visiting time came round. Tidying himself up for their regular penetrating

appraisal as he walked into the ward. Sunshine yellow, flower bursts of curtains, neon strip lights, neat hair, clear face. On the green pastel wall amongst the scribbled lists of visitor's despair at ever achieving a wallow in the shit & the single brutal words of need there was a drawing of a heavily breasted woman (the nipples emphasized) with man's legs wearing pointed shoes, nude except for an elaborately drawn scarf holding up a fluffy skirt just below the belly button. Although the armpit had hair there was no indication of the pubic hair or surprisingly, anything else. One outstretched arm, with a bangle, held a lit cigarette with a wisp of smoke; the other was lost behind her body to give the breast more of a thrust. She had a mop of short hair. From the profile, with a closed mouth, a bubble on a string enclosed the words. 'I learned to smoke cigarettes in Paris. Glad I didn't go to Norway. They smoke herring there.' Someone else had added on a string, but not in a bubble. 'Baudlaire kept a lobster.' Schlumper thought that was more to the point. Next visit he would bring a biro & give the transvestite a sex & perhaps open her mouth.

* * *

It was a last time in so-called real life to visit the dying woman. First thing out of bed he had cleaned up the very large karki patch of dog sick using screwed up newspaper & burning it in the fireplace; locked the brown door with its permanent slab of ice over an inch thick on the inside; kicked at the dog so it slunk outside into a barn & its nest in the straw bales along with a hen sitting on about ten eggs. Guard the place it was ordered. Blinded, the winter sun was so low he pulled down the visor on the windscreen as the car rolled down the cinder track. And fired the engine.

The pale figure of a woman in the lower left-hand corner of the painting was in the process of becoming a boiled lobster. A claw arm was already red. Why? He braked at the end of the track. The blackened figure of a woman occupying the central horizontal part of the picture was in her last agony. He polished the mirror. As the young woman hiding behind the curtain stepped into view Schlumper could see her turquoise bra, full to the brim & overflowing, peeping through the spaces of her silver buttoned blouse. Her head bobbed up & down inviting him to speak but she spoke first as she pointed at the white boulders spaced around a small green slice of the curb. "They . . ." Schlumper didn't hear the rest. He felt the same overwhelming attraction as you feel in a dream & the same compulsion to be a willing agent in the work to be done; whatever it was it was sure to be sexual. "And the walls inside are damp . . . wet." She looked curiously into the car. "Is the dog inside?"

"He's in the barn sitting on his eggs."

She grinned wide. "I'm afraid to walk up the path your way because of him." And opened her door wider.

"Don't blame you, he's rough."

"Come & see."

He followed her inside & she lit a cigarette, offered him one & stood with her back pressed against a wall. "Feel this."

She had lightly placed one foot on the bed to lean aside to let him get to the wall. He gently felt the swelling curve presented by her pose as he squeezed by. One palm on the

wall, he slid the other one between her legs pushing up the whole weight of her body. “It feels damp . . . although I can’t be sure.”

“Let me show you.” Her eyes were smoldering & she was on her back on the fancy cover & slipped her pants off quicker than he could think of a playful reply. With her arms wrapped around her legs, & both hands grasping his arm she had its fingers tight onto her mound with their tips on the lips of her cunt before he could swivel round. So he slipped them in. And she pulled herself up & hung there like a fish on a hook squealing with the softest push & rub. At this slightest touch her vagina sprayed as she jolted her body rigid on her knees still holding his wrist in an iron grip. His free hand flicked open his fly but her hand was in quicker & with thumb & forefinger had his balls, jerked them out relinquished her hold on his wrist to get both hands on his genitals. She twisted the sac & tugged so hard he lost his balance, caught the strap of the turquoise bra to steady himself & she shook it loose & it came away into his grasp. One breast had a strange brown mark on it straggling down to the nipple formed as if it had been spat into place. He bent round to lick the filaments & as his tongue & lips sucked the birthmark she howled. “I remember. Now I remember.” Her mouth kept working soundlessly as he penetrated her. But it was a triumphant glance she gave to the wall as she closed her eyes & clenched her fists.

“You remember this! What?” Schlumper’s voice was soft as he stared into her blank look trying to catch an involuntary word or phrase, even a silent one, that would clear the presence, sweep clean the quandary out of his head. And if her memory was held back by mere dumb reticence perhaps here was a chance to lay the doubt that loomed over all his

actions; to strip out the idea that dogged his thoughts like a wraith, that always everything happening, despite its immediacy, was an echo, a reflection, a repeat.

“Tell me something.”

“I was asked to stop you; to delay you . . . anyway I chose. In any form.” She stretched her long legs past his ears. “This is so good I could stay here . . .” The sheer nylon stockings crackled as she rubbed her calf on his ear working her slit onto him. “Mmm the delight of touching you.” Of gobbling you up.

“From going where?” He responded with a surge of flesh as he considered ‘in any form’.

“Is it good?” She involuntarily stiffened a little. Was he dismissing her accomplishments? She had seen a faint flicker of concentration on his brow. A brief lack of abandon while she expected its impeccable expression.

“From going where?”

“Oh. To Hell. Anywhere. Isn’t . . .” Unsettled she paused momentarily at a noise outside.

“This better? Much better?” She listened again & tilted her head to catch a full revelation.

“We could go away somewhere.”

“Isn’t that taking your order (he had puzzled over the word so it was amplified in the question) too far?”

“Oh we could. I can.” She frowned, her hands perched on his shoulders. “It will be a chance missed if we . . .” She lurched from under him, stuffed her pants & bra under the pillow, fastened her blouse & shook her hair neat faster than she had stripped in the first place. This action almost seemed well practised, almost; she still had a hungry beauty about her look that told of a genuine fancy still needing to be fulfilled. But it still

conceivably could have been part of her managed seduction. She listened intently at the crack of the door then slowly turned her head to smile. “It’s your dog. I think.” The door lock clicked.

And again seamlessly switching with absolute ease she was on him like a tiger spread across his body; this energetic submissiveness was impossible to resist, could no longer stop, even with an animal persistently scratching at the door. No questions answered Schlumper decided (although knowing the decision wasn’t his) to get active & find out whatever she had to say about her past later. But as they rubbed each other the suspicion of a dangerous noise became a horrible realization & the necessity of her locking the door became apparent. A heavy step stumbling against everything it could, clumped towards their room & the brute of a wolfhound snarled.

By the weight of the sound of it (or vice versa) this intruder was certainly going to extricate the experience from the banal, give the seduction a form, with no frills attached, & a lot more with which to remember it unless Schlumper had his wits about him. He hadn’t as he whispered. “Does the window open?” & she nodded vaguely, any interest in his predicament would have to be lured out, for sadly Kristel’s task was completed.

* * *

Blood thundered in Sakini’s ears as she remembered his flight. Was that it? What were his last words as he levered his body over the ledge into the tangled scrub at the edge of the forest that grew right up to the cottage? Was he throwing out a threat to return for vengeance? Why? For what hurt? She was the one left half way up the hill. Sakini knew full well memory doesn’t play tricks, it makes available several versions of an event so

with one of them you can satisfy some present urgent need, but she was sure she hadn't climaxed. Had she heard this cry as a . . . plea? Not really. A promise to finish the job? Not quite that. A call for no compromise, right? She shook her head; not heartfelt enough & too many words are needed to express that complicated emotion, far too many to fit into the duration of the leap. Sakini also knew that as a last resort a picture of anything, selected for its aesthetic excellence, plus the choice memory of an unrelated action, involving no matter what objects, was usually able to be passed as a convenient solution for the purpose at hand, whatever it was, & that fulfilled, another version, bulging with fantastic detail, could rise up to obliterate the previous one. Or put it to shame. Looking at the photo, Sakini wondered if she had forgotten or had misheard some key words? Could there have been that many? And altogether different meanings could shelter under the same phrase depending on the listener. Surely there were barely enough words spoken to express anything except panic & disbelief? But as this memory had grown complex in a tangle of internal negotiations, each with a possible pleasing scene clipped to it, so it had become unwieldy & unable to carry a true picture, for at the time her door was splintering under the savage blows of an axe. The wolfhound, tearing lumps out of everything its foaming jaws found between them, was making a fearsome noise & the determined intruder grunting at the effort to smash the door & howling with rage as the wolf's maw bit on bone, choked out of his wrath some incoherent words. Could any of these have been mistaken for the fond farewell of an escaping lover robbed of a moment of pleasure? Or mixing with them, have falsified the place of a tryst to become the

message of an alarming, violent change of heart. Would he? Could he, in his haste, have given thought to name a place to meet between heaven & earth?

On her table, the black & white photograph aging to sepia, printed on thin, curling paper, showed Anguine Sakini the place. On the back was scribbled ‘ Here. Anytime this year. Come alone.’ The untidy script was unmistakably that of Schlumper.

Sakini was conscious there was something hidden deeper still under the few words; she searched the postmark for a date & gasped in disbelief. The very year of her birth. She checked again for smudges (discrete biro alterations). It was the clearest postmark ever stamped. Had she gone? She meant had she been taken there. And here did memory play her false because as she asked the question she imagined feeling her mother’s arms around her & the endless drone of a cargo plane.

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When ugly Dick Deadman finally smashed into Kristel’s bedroom he came hobbling through the debris without the expected, requisite swagger, blowing & gasping for air using the axe as a crutch & cursing the Wolf he’d found at the door. And that creature, unabashed at the abuse, came prancing in jaws grinning wide as if clamped around a leg bone. Spellbound by the woman’s beauty they halted & Kristel gave the bored open-handed gesture indicating that their intended victim had hopped it by way of the window. Two solemn faces surveyed the tangled mass of thorns beyond & knew from their considerable experience in similar operations, it would be an impossible chase. It would also be made dangerous. It always was. They turned away.

“Wrong door.” Said Dick D. apologetically now he’d caught his breath, but grinning nevertheless.

Kristel pointedly ignored his look & stared dejectedly at the floor. “Wrong time, too.”

Woebegone at her distress, Dick D. spread his hands, tried to explain. “Leaves me with a gap . . . in . . . a fix. Unless . . . (he brightened up) I’ll try the standard procedure . . . See if that works.” And he, after glaring at the Wolf, to her intense surprise manhandled her into possession, kissed her full & long on the mouth. As she crumpled into the embrace feeling her flesh fall off her bones she flooded out all the pent-up desire; yet more, that snatched but prolonged kiss elicited a feeling she had missed since childhood; to feel so fragile she could be turned inside-out. Then, extraordinarily, as quickly as this need had enveloped her it was gone & Dick D. stood back meekly as if he had planted a peck on her cheek.

Recovering herself Kristel said slowly. “This is not the time for trial & error. If there ever is. You can exit this fairytale when you like. But me . . .” And then in as flat & commonplace a voice as there could be uttered their dismissal. “Better luck next time.” She leaned her elbows on the window sill casually lighting a fat cigarette taken from a brown paper bag on the bedside table. Turning, with a nonchalance that belied her racing pulse & knees promising to give way, she exhaled smoke slowly into an empty room.

“But me . . . I’m stuck here, & where has the artist gone?”

Surprised at being ignored, the Wolf, covered in grey dust, tapped his foot nervously with a lath of wood picked up from the debris & hunched his shoulders as he often did when he was thinking. Forgetting his bulk, he also felt the stoop made him less obtrusive or

more amenable, he couldn't have both. "Schlumper was on his way to the hospital, what happened just now was a mistake. The wrong number came up."

"Totally out of order." Kristel petulantly rapped the window where the Wolf's reflection hovered & goggled. "A diversion, although it was shaping up nicely."

"Yes. Definitely that. So who tipped you off to stop him?" Wolf wondered. "You almost succeeded in setting him up."

"It came to me. I just knew." Kristel sighed appropriately but had a determined look.

"You could see the rot setting in." She drew a rough triangular shape on the dusty pane with the middle finger of the hand holding the toke so there were wisps of blue smoke drifting in front of this diagrammatic landscape of a magic mountain, with numbers & stick figures, all of which the Wolf carefully noted.

"This was sent to your mother." Now in his turn the Wolf looked apologetic as he picked up the photo. "Sorry to burst the bubble."

"I'll bet." Kristel snatched it back.

"It was sent in February, like so II (he drew on the pane) on the stamp; I know it shows XII for December, you can see what someone did. You look."

"Someone?"

The Wolf reached out, fingers poised, to take a complicit drag on the joint before spelling out what he knew. "Shit." Raw fumes almost gutted him & luckily he couldn't reply from a now frozen throat.

Kristel, waving her arms not wanting to hear any more nonsense, drove him through the remains of the door outside. The Wolf ambled before her trying to convey his contrition

with gestures & gasps. “I want to be on my own now.” She said. And set off in Schlumper’s footsteps.

After that Kristel could feel the Wolf loping along behind her but never caught sight of him. And soon he caught another scent. An invisible field had opened out around her into which no extraneous perception could pierce, she was lost in her own thoughts. “What had been traded for that kiss?” And around that enquiry she wove an escape or was led astray.

With an abundance of bitter grey ashes lifted & spread far & wide by the breeze, the artist’s trail was not easy to follow; it was never hot. It went cold the moment he had passed. Naturally Kristel didn’t take the Wolf’s tip, not trusting his word (so missed her best chance of finding Schlumper during the two hours he was in the city hospital). As she boarded the C train for Clinton-Washington she decided to work from the postcard hoping her intuition proved right.

* * *

Vaguely realized visual connections like Hell falsely illustrated as cooking pots & sunset mouths in illuminated manuscripts irritated Schlumper beyond measure. In making Hell a childish construction it was easy to throw anyone into its maw. With mass media, he scowled, the sixty years of his 20th century had done it better; but its maudlin leaders imbued by the same mawkish sentiments had continued to toss the people to a finely graded damnation.

A dull voice from the past (was it his own?) droned another screwy idea in his ear “. . .

Remember, the integrity of a collective noun is not sacrosanct. One member acting false

blurring the boundaries instigates decay in the tissue & becoming rotten its filling collapses to grey dust. When broken you can puff out this stuffing like the powdery spores of a *Lycoperdon* fungus. It gets into everything.”

From this the analyst knew therein lay essential territory. Could she venture into this inanimate place with him? She raised her notepad, a white diamond covered in single separate words. “But what is under that dust? What do you find in it? Can you see?” The analyst’s multiple query showed how tentative she felt.

How far should he go along with her? The Wolf considered the option of an inopportune comment. What was left? The exploded leathery puff-ball like a giant testicle. And scratched behind his ear deciding to wait. Shouldn’t he be asking the questions? Why was she so eager to get back to the beginning? Always wanting to repeat things. He knew, to his cost, that intermixing illusory forms spoil the taste of the prey. An easy catch was worthless.

True. It was meaningless. Or so the Zombie thought: she wondered what the model would say.

“Any magical capture is better performed by a striptease artiste able to firmly unzip & manipulate all erectile possibilities.” She did the mime. “Than by a lengthy, stage-managed sit-in, in the wilderness, staring at the wall of silence in the company of a necessarily compulsive liar.” The model stared with obvious hostility at the analyst. Dispersed on the wind dust carries humiliation.

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* * *

On reaching a barrier (something resembling the shape of a stupa but built out of cwt. sacks of potatoes) flung across the aisle in a dusky sepia light where the jumble of blurred cherubs chanting clap-trap adorning the screens surrounding him disappeared, Schlumper threw up his hands protectively. For there & then coils of plaited flaxen hair tapering to Sakini’s shoulders had been transformed into ogee curved snakes – cobra - prepared to strike reared up at a stab of starlight. Now, enveloped by the gloom, another buxom young girl in pigtails poured what looked like an endless stream of steaming words & letters from an aluminium jug to the delight of yet another good-looking smiling, but pensive, woman holding a large cloth with a map of the world printed on it strangely able to absorb this stream. Not a drop was lost & this was seen by a third willowy girl, breasts just swelling on her ribs, who was playing hard to get; secreted behind a pillar, practicing ogling like a tart at the artist, as she provocatively adjusted the lines of her negligible outfit solely for his benefit. The last thing Schlumper remembered was sinking down in the sombre aisle on the circular labyrinth embedded there, while the organ’s wolf chords,

a howling sound, booming & harshly grinding out a hymn without respite, drowned out his cries to the girl to take a chance & jump for it; while the fact he couldn't make out the hymn number on the placard stuck in his mind like a feather in a frosted spider's web. So it was winter, Schlumper said to a dwindling shadow. He was still trying to recall this essential number when he came to & joined

A QUEUE OF TALETELLS.

From his supine position making stone of his spine he could see the cracking model R's little red flag was flying as she whispered in the Wolf's ear, "Eatme Fuckme Eatme Fuckme Eatme."

"Hey! Make your mind up. This make-believe section is supposed to be told mostly in coloured pictures." Complained the crooked old grey Wolf knowing he was being spied on & made uncomfortably hot in a woolly jumper. "Everything said has to be short & sweet & suitable to go in a kid's balloon so cut out that dirty whispering. How can you expect me to incorporate that request in a fairytale."

For the suggestion made in her low, beguiling voice that was nakedly sensual had aroused some slyly defensive rigidity, a change of feeling in the Wolf, hardening an undertone of expectation once remote from any possibility, into gullible play. And now stinging them all into graceless action.

"POP." Out crashed a string of dialogue, which scattered all over the place jumbled beyond understanding. "Now sort that mess out. Mine wasn't that bad an offer. You dumb fucker." She shouted in a crushing manner & grabbed up her pile of clothes in a high

dudgeon. And, alas, it was true; less could be said now she'd popped the space in rage. She didn't give a hoot.

Our Wolf, all forlorn, with all the pregnant pauses left in a pickle bursting in between each chance given to speak with mixed piccalilli feelings, picked up a handful of broken letters (chipped sans serif as well) pointedly but clumsily ran them through his paws as he gave her a doleful look to draw a comment. "Just look what . . ." He started spasmodically, overcome by an excessive self-protective, violently yellow sensation, otherwise fear of the unknown. Her gasp of disbelief at his presumption & the undeniable leverage resulted in a hiccup because of her pent-up tension. Which broke about them furiously.

"Now, You, don't start off with that drivel. And, Wolf, don't **what** me ever again." She erupted. "Pop what little you both have to say in a balloon. Stop. Being. Silly."

There should have been an S.O.S. put out for both of us, as we bumped hopefully with the stupidity of bumble bees, against the transparently obvious dislike for our way, of this woman who dismissed them with a flap of her hand as she flattened the sodden rag map over her knees & studied it.

Left to it, the Wolf miserably tattered & torn, not the least bit cinematographic or cynomorphic for that matter but decidedly cyphotic, pulled at his jumper as he looked around. "Something round like a balloon to fill up with my hurts & hump. Something to unseal her honey pot." He muttered picking up a wrinkled pink finger of rubber that he immediately discarded with disgust. "Not easy this heartfelt dialogue." He said woefully crumpled & aware of his inadequacy in that department. "Fuck this 'empathic'

approach.” Then he grinned trying (& it took some uphill effort against use) to make that crease look as savage as he could. It was awful. It was inadequate even for a cartoon. He knew it. Scratching a rib thoughtfully he wondered about the practical basis for the Model’s optimism: naked hope? He’d better go to the zoo for advice about being friendly. Then the Wolf, grinning properly, with happy memories of days hunting in the pack, wiped his lips with the back of a paw as he remembered the taste of red blood.

“Excuse me, Miss.”

“POP” She shouted angrily. “I don’t like the look of your bloodshot eye. Did you get a poke in it?”

“That’s a pig. It comes later.” He blurted out & looked around blinking as if waking up. Immediately he felt the analyst again leading him to ask himself cold-blooded questions.

“No. Let me continue.” Pleaded the Wolf, blinking into a squint as if his thoughts had been made obvious in his longing gaze. “My quest, no that’s a sham word, my ambition is to sort out your emotional life (POP) without resorting to rape (POP) not yet anyway. This therapeutic line of business I’m in is serious (POP) Am I talking to myself? I’m certainly not listening.” The Wolf felt like slinking out of his skin, but what an image that would be on the books to be remembered by & she might yet take her clothes off & look angelic. (POP) “You should have seen their faces when I told them what I really did.”

“You did?” She asked feigning amazement (POP).

The artist looked startled. Had he missed what the analyst had said?

“So I’m not talking to myself?” Said the analyst. “For a minute I thought you’d left us.”

“You should know. You’re the one who thinks you’re always perfectly right. Especially about what to eat (POP) or wear. And you muddle them up. (POP) And that along with your horrible record makes it very difficult to swallow your presence here.”

As if that innocent answer made a welcome difference the Wolf shrugged his shoulders sheepishly. “I know. And digest. And to think I made that up.”

“And you can think again. Loser. When will you be worthy (& what a meal she made of that word the hypocrite) of the accolades you get from every psycho woodman.” (POP)

She was keen to prove something.

A whisper yet audible, mechanical yet human, self-contained yet destined for his ear (& a travesty of an American accent yet seductive the Wolf added later) said, “You can move. Please. Wind me up.”

A gauzy cloth thing fluttered on the line. It was snatched off & there was a gasp; an Oh & a slap all mixed up & then repeated several times in a different order.

The Model, mistakenly believing the Wolf had spoken, said “Is that so.” She sauntered right up to the end of his muzzle (POP) & with a look that (still to this very day) puzzled & frightened the Wolf, drawled, “Follow the pictures closely. See. You’ve got a nice job to do with me.”

“I’m on it.” Said the Wolf cautiously, knowing the real story the one with a floor & a bed & a table set for ten & food fell somewhere between the illustrations & the text. And well beyond reach. But his brush swept up in between his hind legs protectively. You couldn’t miss it. “But you know there is only so much you can do with this story. The plot has been hijacked by so many right wing religious groups with disquieting tendencies I may

have to splice in a tacky ending. Also there's the inefficient use of time . . . take the mouse, for instance.”

“Mouse?” Exclaimed the artist. ‘Christ’, he thought, ‘am I in the right place? This chick is going to be difficult. Impossible to negotiate with.’

The Model bared her teeth as she spun her cherry red bra on an index finger. “I’m getting hot & sticky & impatient.”

“What more could you want.” Wolf’s squeaky reply sounded plaintive as if she’d jumped the gun he’d tossed out of the story but really & truly the words had honestly just caught in his dry throat.

“Some Huff & Puff.”

“Oh! The standard commonplace general (1000 times said conventional) straight down the line usual ordinary missionary you know what I only use that for demolition.”

“Who mentioned ‘straight’?” And she pointed to the page blithely rubbing & scratching at the yellowish spots & blemishes, “Is this your dried spunk?” She accused him smudging the picture even more. Her picture book wasn’t going to last very long.

“You have to give a bit of yourself.” The Wolf coughed as if it might make a difference but his balls didn’t shift a millimetre in his paw. Or was it an oblique probe interpreting the noise as a spoken word, a question, & hoping for an unguarded reply with a fascinating revelation?

“Testing for signs of tumescence?” The model could have sworn he was holding something back. Was it the same one she was trying to prove had happened?

“Or was it the truth, having been subject to a presupposed spectacular textual switch, therewith becoming a blatant lie & sticking in his throat again?” Asked the woodman, out of turn & context & out of character because he can’t read, eyeing up the model as he would a bundle of kindling.

Unperturbed, still turning a good side (well not bad) the Model pirouetted & it was a hard word for her age. Not discouraged, but she did shudder, she began. She had to if she waited for the Wolf’s first move she’d be there all, well for all time who could tell. She stepped forward treading as hard as she could with her stiletto on the woodman’s toecap. “Some body.” They all wolf whistled. She’d slipped her knickers off & was squatting over an aluminium cooking pot having a piss, getting that bladder relieving shudder you get when you’ve held it too long & it rips through the lips.

Not only the Wolf was staring. Schlumper leafed through his notes & sighed. “That isn’t down here. That never happened.”

“It did now! Hey Wolf are you trying to wind me up? I know you’re hot for it. So show it.” She wiped herself with the knickers & tossed them away. “Never mind the script follow the comic strip.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” The Wolf gave a tentative smile in her direction without meeting her gaze. “Hands up.” Had he meant to say ‘honest’? Pull the other one, anyway where had the up come from? The heart. I doubt that.

“In your dreams.”

“I meant, I surrender.”

By scrupulous omission, large & simple, he was getting closer, so he thought, but to what. No. Emphatically N. O. Not to **WHAT**.

Standing up the model spun the cherry red bra the other way & began to sing:

no lysol

no arsehole

coldly deflowering

and shagging

on com fort able

con crete

Hearing the song we were all overcome by melancholy not infatuation, take my word for it. It has no speed so it's safer & more detailed & tepid. And they vowed to be more careful where they trod. Melancholy like dejection hangs around much longer than infatuation, like a bag of grey cloud.

Shabby outwardly, feeling ill at ease & not the 'nonchalant' which she had tried to fit him up with, Wolf glanced down at his limp member. I guess this must come under the heading of an idiosyncrasy, he thought wisely (I'm trying to be helpful without using a medical device) now what was to be done about that.

"Sensual background music would have been nice or an obvious setting for you know what. Where we are in a wood, nothing to be seen but a circle of trees. Say. In a clearing. A stranger. Things straggling a bit. Tufts. Pieces of paper covered with philosophic poetic scribble. Litter."

But, by now, they were already there & would have to make do.

“Same old place. I wondered why the grass was so trampled down.” Said the Zombie, now out in the open, her voice sounding raw & plaintive as if she had forgotten something from an earlier assemblage.

“I didn’t expect to find her here. But what can you expect?” Sighed the model somewhat flattened by the response to her wish.

“Who? Can’t see. It’s dark.” Said the Wolf, literally & metaphorically nettled by the devious reflection that had landed them in this place. “All we need now . . .” He pushed the Zombie forward from under his feet. “Who are you?”

“Are you going off your rocker bringing her with you.” The Model Red, still hard by & feeling hard done to, transferred the blame; jumped in like a ton of bricks (that would come in handy later) on the Wolf’s thought. “One word could ‘blow this deal’ & at what cost? Set the real story going for a song. No thanks.” And she had a very stony look on her face as she said. “And do you know why? I’m really enjoying this one. It’s a barrel of fun. It has stopped me in my tracks.”

Now for the surprise. When does a woman play the ‘tough’ except in a song? Is it apparently easy or difficult knowing how to handle someone stronger, bigger etc. Not by impulse (because with this autonomy is lost). Deliberately, coldly calling the shots.

“From inside the barrel?”

You’ll get to know this slowly. But it might cost you.

“You will not be disappointed by the outcome.” Said the Zombie but she was only warming up. She had no idea what she was talking about.

“You could be wrong about the fun you mentioned.” A gruff voice (actually thrown) spoke from the shadows of the bushes.

“Who has descended from a tree?” Asked the model. “It’s a bit spooky.”

“No. No. Wolf was stuck up one.” The Zombie wasn’t confused but was speaking out of turn & popping up in the wrong place again. It could have got ugly.

“No. They are all incomparable beauties.” The Wolf grinned behind the back of his paw but the lips curled as if the skin had a bitter taste & the inner necessity driving out the snarl had surprised him into the giveaway. Naturally all the women are beautiful or were beautiful; because they have all been lost. Or are dead, murdered, otherwise ‘finished off.’

“Like they were the yardstick.” The Zombie had yet to find the co-ordinates of this narrative. I think this was a clue being laid down for later but there is someone interrupting & it is distracting.

“What can I do?” Asked the Zombie with the feeling at last that she was definitely in the wrong place.

“What did you expect? An indoor setting a settee, drapes & an acquiescent bit of fluff squirting on the pillows?”

“That would be closer to it.” Said the Zombie. “You must agree.”

“I had my name down for a tasty piece of the action.” The Wolf interjected hopeful it might influence events.

“Fanny.” Croaked the model spluttering with fury. “It takes more than spelling out W.O.L.F. to get anywhere near that.”

“No. He certainly doesn’t get that.” Said the Zombie. “You must agree.”

“I’ve just said he’s out of luck. And I do agree, so cut that out.”

Anything but satisfying, the wind rushed mournfully through the trees. It had had its fill of the city.

After that outburst we know the Wolf was sore. Why me? He had asked. Yes he’d given the victim the eye, kept her mesmerized by reflecting her own perversions, but the other dogs had moved in for the kill. Why was their part ignored if not forgotten? And held against him. Although feeling unfairly exploited by complicated rules which always explained his actions by violence Wolf felt unable to challenge this because of the way he looked. How do you rectify that? He had tried a wag or two of his broken brush but gave up, no one listened to those silent pleas. And when, in desperation, he did speak in his own defence they said typical there he goes making excuses. Without any goodwill credited for his effort.

“Slash & gash. No more.” The model rolled her red corset on again. And dressed, declared.

“Hey brighten up. What are you thinking of? Look at that evil grin. Who else could do that?” The model gave him a quick appraisal & couldn’t suppress a groan at the sight of his broken tail. “And you worked very hard Wolf along with the Zombie to make nothing coherent happen in all the sessions (of analysis).” She added scornfully tying a bow at her throat. And looked to him for a tart rejoinder, some synthetic foundation on which to work the conversation round to murder. Hand on hip, pouting lips she threw no.1 professional pose (from the book).

“All the better for you . . . Dear.”

“No! That comes later. After. Now don’t go into a sulk.” The model wasn’t having any of that nonsense. Unhappy or not, she said to herself, this Wolf although tentative & demeaning to work with because of the drop or chop, would have to do for the job at hand. (POP) Prescient or not. And her mind was wandering now, was talking from a script fractured by the coarseness of its plot. Uncertain qualities anointed from the holy grail of literature having been added by an interfering busybody, aided & alphabeted by a friendly finger prompting the outcome before anyone else had got vaguely near it or others. Suspicious of sabotage by disarray, the model straightened her hem & brushed nothing perceptible vigorously off her barely covered irrefutable curves.

“The better for you all?” The Wolf stammered hoping he’d got the cue right & slowness might be on his side. One more provocative pose & he definitely would . . .

“No! That comes later. (POP) Remember you were being saved by a nice . . . ish part in a story for civilization Wolf, before you got into trouble or for it.” Her finger had slipped.

“Demonstrating the elusiveness of love the savants had factored in . . . in . . .” She had lost her place.

“Incest.” The Zombie helped without request.

“Was I mythologised into trouble?” The Wolf wondered with regret at not paying attention when he had a chance to hop it.

“What? No. We tried to get you into a recipe book.” The model lied. But through her teeth so she hoped it wasn’t so bad for the Wolf. He had been cruelly isolated, exploited & to top it all misinterpreted; practically dismantled. Left up a gum tree? Not exactly but

there was a tree in it. Thus problematized & neutralized in mystification & added into the bargain Wolf knew his real self coiled up in his mind like a clock spring was causing all those tics & those unhealthy pictures, about which a lot of people seemed very interested, the precise reason escaped Wolf but he let it go. He had to. Once he'd got started he got caught on the hop & that was uncomfortable . . . ridiculous really . . .

“Calm down Wolf. Go & pick flowers, that's a simple enough symbolic past-time with no sanctions attached to get you out of your head. And stop hopping. Leave the burden of thinking to the ones who know how.” (POP) Said the model, tapping her own chest for a change & wondering incidentally what the fuss was about.

“Scram.”

So naturally the Wolf dismissed in such a preemptory way felt short-changed & was plunged into the requisite murderous thoughts. As soon as he had made himself scarce she pulled a chair away from the wall & set it in the middle of the room. This is stage-lit. To examine these actions took as long as meat takes to go off & in the end smelled just as rotten. “O hell. Watch out we are back.”

Remember the fully-dressed model stood by the chair holding both arms out stiff this way & that semaphoring a frenchified message of complicated & contradictory desires. The motions conveying apprehensions as well as letters of the alphabet. (And if this book is in French use another word - baiser).

i.e. the flags are out waving & shagging is spelt perfect (despite trifling snags with the string of g's).

Next, showing it pays to be patient, as soon as they could lay hold of her, hoping to help her to fly, they tied the Model into the chair; ankles to the front chair legs, arms at the wrists behind the back. She looked a little ruffled behind her small smile because a button had popped & she had expected them to draw lots for turns to sketch? & keep in a nice, orderly queue. “You’re all in this gag together, admit it.”

“Yes.”

They said no more, not trusting the capriciousness of their tongues, produced a pair of scissors & starting at the bottom of her left trouser leg began cutting up the cloth & snipped right to the waist band, then they cut up the right one too. And tugged them off. Starting at the wrists they did the same to her blouse & whipped it off.

They snipped the side elastic to her thong & drew it up between her legs & off.

They snipped the straps holding the cups of her bra then took her by the hair & pulled back her head until her breasts thrust out pushing the nipples up over the silk. And left it at that.

And that’s the plain, refined version of the trim exploit, which didn’t take place.

Next the Wolf came back. And was Aghast. Wolf wanted the enchanted version, embroidered, naïve, cross-dressed, hats with cherries & satiation. “Nothing here for the frotteurs.” He growled crossing his paws in an appealing way without any motivation or result.

“Calm down, Wolf. You haven’t missed your go. Join the queue.” Said the model, goggling with her eyes wide in place of a corny protest. Horrified they might stop

because of his willful interruption. “There can still be very high stiletto heels for the ordinary fetishist to lick. Put them on.”

Luckily this is not being conveyed by a series of still photos that give a cut but not the thrust, because the Wolf had a lot of trouble getting those shoes on & when they were on he had a lot of trouble standing up & staying up, so only in those few seconds of stability when his eyeballs stopped rolling ‘Peach’ got the snap. Unfortunately the model had intended that she should wear them & her disappointment was angrily given to the Wolf in elaborate detail, who turned tail as he often did. And fell over. So the model had her shoes put on that looked pretty neat below the trussed up ankles. Now how did this relate to the rest of the body mass? Schlumper stepped forward holding a diagram & was about to hold forth on the three vital elements for the effective understanding of the position when the model cleared her throat & instead of the object they had all expected spat out the word “Ravish.” At the same time making a massive contraction of her belly which thrust out her chest totally dislodging the remains of her bra. “Is the word that comes to mind.” Then the Wolf knew he was living a charmed life & there seemed to be the bonus of a charmed life in it.

“Right you are. I’d forgotten to embody the co-ordinates from the 60’s. Sorry.” Said Schlumper with a silly grin & jerk of his thighs as if he had been tossed over the moon & so clamped a firm hand on the Wolf’s neck to steady himself.

“Now lay off.” Cried the Wolf, nearly rupturing himself because he didn’t mean it, & his protective paw ‘accidentally’ touched the model who gazed attentively at the spot & said, “Miles out.” She even tried to look timid so Wolf might feel encouraged to be braver &

try another lunge or sorry fumble. He hung back, abashed not wanting to get his fingers burned.

Sakini, a silent observer, took the model's rose-coloured nipples between thumb & forefinger & said, "Come on, Wolf, which one do you want to suckle first." And gently but persistently tugged at them as her own bosom rose & fell. His ambivalence was already known, now, could Wolf soar above the cliché? Was this the time to overcome his hostility to the spectators (& readers) purse his lips & suck despite the apparent cleavage in his mind. The model cooed her approval hoping Sakini would start, but with a last pinch Sakini abruptly stood back & Wolf found his nose very close to her breasts which quivered in their wonder bra. He could see the transparent, plastic shoulder straps biting into her flesh under the strain. Wolf didn't realize but a long spittle of drool hung down from the side of his jaw. He also didn't know that these breasts were leaking milk into the bra's pads. All this was clumsy & needed tidying up; Sakini stooped & again felt the nipples spirt & taking hold of a white rope that ran under the chair through the handle of a very heavy weight, yanked it. The model stiffened.

"Hold it." Schlumper, pencil in hand, measured the scene professionally. "Perfect."

"Perfect?" The Zombie was astounded. There wasn't even the semblance of coupling, a first order requirement; unless the chair's function over & above being under the model's arse was counted 'passive' & not wooden. And if you counted the model as being on the verge of 'springing up' which she wasn't, being trussed up to stop her. WHAT wondered the Zombie was the good of that? While ready to fly into the face of anyone in a very crude fantasy the model couldn't & while everyone attending her was ready too, they

couldn't. (Discount the Wolf's feeble touch-up). That chair was the stumbling block. Who had suggested using it? The Zombie whirled around, should she help on the rope? Sakini was in possession & seemed by her stance ready to fight to keep hold. Of course, it was the model herself who had placed the chair at the centre.

"We need an axe to chop up the chair." The Zombie declared in a cracked voice.

Something else showed. Was it a deep almost unreal hatred for mankind? Was it an attempt to regain the central ground?

At this point, from under the layers of superimposed needs, there emerged a rhythmic vibration, a redistribution of matter was taking place somewhere very near the Wolf in the motionless background & below the flat smile in his abominable head.

"Perfect?" Echoed the rest doubtfully. "I thought you said no deformations were allowed. And that was that. WHAT now?" They glared at the Wolf who was sniffing into the same dull background. Knowing underhand behavior accounted for the Wolf's sudden act & wondering what they were going to be subjected to next they countered on the artist.

"Perfect torso." Countered Schlumper flicking aside the gauzy screen (no he was oblivious to the sucking & blowing noises behind him). "Yet everything changes with the legs descending into that puddle." He pointed, large & relaxed, sure their thoughts would coincide although a whole portion was missing if he included the Zombie. But the rest, more subtly, were tense: the puddle appeared pink not greenish yellow as they had been led to believe. They felt anything could happen. A gash they hadn't noticed before had opened up like the petals of a flower & out welled a nearly colourless, viscous, Sartrean liquid.

“I think the model would have noticed this ‘gash’, don’t you Schlumper?” Sakini said pointedly. “If you believe this version you’ll believe anything. Including those disgraceful uncalled for interjections.” And she knew that was correct.

“And they are creepy.” Tell me, who is this presence floating around?

“That comes next.” The Zombie had taken Schlumper’s notes, to process. And, finding the picture to her liking was now, tall & slender, wearing a large hat, a heavy jeweled choker & nothing else.

“E JAC U LA TION.” Howled the Wolf out of his skull, with as much discretion as Holbein & an equal amount of technical virtuosity, rattling all the objects on the shelves in a shoddily painted dresser & making waves in the brim full pot on the floor.

Shoddily dressed painter was what the model heard & she looked even more vexed, these disordered, trial attempts at sado-masochism were transparently amateur, simply descending into farce. Now free she tugged at Schlumper’s rumpled sleeve. “Please. Don’t let the Wolf do the karioke it might attract attention.”

“Surely then we would get the true version.” This was a compelling line of attack including, as it did, the double bind. “The one with the unreadable open book.”

Here a picture could help. Let’s look what was going on.

“Going on? There is a total lack of that kind of activity.” Said the Zombie (never fazed by masturbation) contemptuously “It is very rarely shown, if ever, out in the open, so it shows who is in control because it has been depicted & is depicted behind closed doors (she looked around puzzled) if you want to find out what is going on do not look at the picture. It has invariably been doctored.” Now that really caught the Wolf’s attention who

scowled. “I don’t mind being left up a gum tree (preferably in someone’s disordered mind preoccupied in a fantasy tumble with at least a few body parts of a maid). I don’t mind being left on the rocks if they are in a glass tumbler, it’s better than being in bed with your mother. But not that.”

The Zombie wrinkled her nose. “You’re a stinker, Wolf.” He wouldn’t play ball.

The Wolf nodded. He was sad.

“Are you trying your best & worst to fuck the whole shebang . . .” The Zombie stopped.

The gender was correct. Was that it? Before she could re-aim her thoughts & try the anagram the Wolf said. “You’ve never known what it is to be ugly Zombie. You never had a childhood.” That threw her.

“So what am I doing here?” Why she wanted to know was more to satisfy herself in fact.

“You can see what human childhood is clearly. Fathers & mothers find their children so desirable they gobble them up. The kids are constantly running the gauntlet.”

“That’s more like it.” Cried the model still caught up in her dream. “But one glove isn’t enough.”

“For Christ’s sake.” Sakini swore. “How many hands do you want on deck?”

“I leave that to the punters who pay & their continental ilk.” This reply left the way open to bring in a load of troublesome characters later on.

Immediately Zombie threaded her way through the zoological maze in her memory bank incidentally picking a few flowers on the way . . . large quadruped with a funny look about its disproportionate antlered head . . . usually seen coming through a wall wearing a wooden collar. She glanced over at the Wolf. Hardly. A mismatch? Perhaps. Where was

the catch? There must be one; it was the only way to secure the yard door. Then under her gaze his eyes jellied into a petrified look as if his door had been smashed down by an ugly monster bent on . . . well just bent; who definitely had the trace of the evil thumb print left on the clay still showing on the bone taken from the machine mould as it had been cast in an awful clumsy way. Last thing before he fainted away the Wolf could see this mark on the monsters bare skull. It decided him there & then that he would prefer to be taken by a skeleton or even 'given the eye' by the Zombie (who was looking at him a bit queer) rather than having any interplay with this other insidious monstrosity coming through the doorway.

As the Wolf dropped flat over backwards. "I've got it." Cried Schlumper closing the door behind him. The Wolf knew at once from the sound of the artist's muffled voice it was a strange moment in which he was coming round again for the words made the poor Wolf shiver involuntarily as if someone had walked over his grave. He heard the artist say.

"Before we get going our model wears two layers of clothes or more if we can pull them on. We start & snip by snip we get down a layer & to another layer & so on. Building up the tension."

Had it been painful? Had it been pleasurable? We know Wolf didn't know.

'Building was in it.' The Wolf anxiously racked his brain for the faded memory. 'But was there a sniptease?' He played dead needing more time to collect his wits & check the burlesque, not unaware of the dangers of lying unprotected on the boards.

“Don’t we get bored? It is, after all, old hat.” My guess is the Zombie asked this on behalf of the model who had been dumbstruck by Schlumper’s suggestion & looked only half there. The voice had a clack in it.

“More or less. Depends if you’re in luck. Or we could if we were given time to settle in.”

Same voice with a clank.

Not much chance of that. Given only half the downstairs of a house made of horsehair plaster & lathes to use & a cross-section of a displeased bedroom constructed from cardboard & the missing furniture inside the actual bedroom (q.v. Rub of nudes). Four or five papier mache & chicken wire trees depending how few they could get away with & several large stones of the same material left over from last time. One of them is chipped.

Understandably your idea of luck will have to be modified.

“Can’t see anywhere to get comfortable as the bed is occupied, same old story, by . . . can’t quite make it out . . . pick that basket up . . .”

[When the gloves were off & the rest of her clothes what did we see? Was it delectable? Good enough to eat or was a squamous, reptilian skin exposed serrated, bumpy, roughly splashed with green & mottled brown; an aged cracked surface oozing blood?]

“The edible one.” They all clamored. Well don’t get carried away, that does not take care of that hat & you know why; even the purists could fathom it, in an excruciatingly pedantic way, if they were put to the test. This fairytale shows desire from the other side & it is torture.

“I was coming to that. Is the model still here?” She had been around for years. When one side (the out) was soiled she turned herself inside out like a sock. Do you believe that?

“Yes.” Said the Zombie & model in unison. Carried away by their enthusiasm for peace to surrender their mutual animosity. “Will we have to fight it out?”

“Violence. I wondered when that would crop up. Usually you girls are very sticky about slapping its ugly head. Although a knock-out contest might be useful as disjunction.” He paused to see what came.

“Coitus interruptus.” Exclaimed the Zombie hollowly.

“Knocked up.” The model flattened her belly with a stroke of her palm. “I’d sooner mix it & have a punch up.” She cried, squaring up to the pair of them as best she could given her sinuous shape(s) & trace. There was a rustle & a scraping sound like a pigeon’s wings in full flight as Schlumper impatiently pulled up the chair. “This could lead us straight to the Last Judgement.”

“Good . . . When do we weigh in?”

“No. Not good. A bloody mess.”

It was clear they hadn’t finished playing out the back of the pose even if they thought they had done the front, so he grabbed the model’s arms & the Zombie moved like lightning to help & sat her back on the chair. This time her legs straggled the seat with her back facing out.

Nevertheless the model does have a say in it. But will have to be quick because the Zombie with malevolence only known to her kind when threatened with only half a fuck has decided to gag the model. Not wearing a stitch to use for this task the Zombie had to cast around for a suitable something. The model had left her own clothes in a pile & from this the Zombie picked out an azure satin bra. “Excellent.”

“Well it wasn’t enough.”

Schlumper was abashed at this criticism. Patiently thumbing through the texts, he had gone to great lengths collating the material; even incorporating a recent surprise find that it had all been done before, which threw the scheme into disorder, in the cause of truth. Searching out background containing hitherto unremarked figures, or animals, it wasn’t always quite clear which; only dismissing figments when it was obvious that they had been maliciously planted to trip him up. The model or was it the Zombie could stand this no longer. “You’ll mention the stones next.” It wasn’t the Zombie speaking because at this she showed an interest. “Do they talk?” And let the model out of an arm lock. This irritated the artist, not in an irrational way, he didn’t mind the silly question, that was usual, but he had asked them to concentrate their efforts. They were drifting.

“How can this be taken for a desperate scene if you act as if knitting a jumper?” That was to them both. And to top it all, the Zombie took him seriously. Starting a rambling explanation of knit one purl one & the necessity of equable tension especially when ‘casting off’. She had felt a slight but urgent need to incorporate a tangential reference to ‘drifting’. But a stronger one to hold the artist in a hypnotic gaze for a few seconds to have him all to herself. To send him on a pointless errand to discover if he would tell lies on his return about the lie of the land.

“Forget I ever mentioned it.” Groaned an exasperated Schlumper, who knew he was being taken for a ride, looking round for the model, & realizing why. “This is way way off track.” She was nowhere to be seen & neither was the Wolf. That was a conjunction,

outcome & outing he had expressly forbidden. The Wolf wasn't allowed out. He barely existed on his own & he knew it.

“Why the fuss?” The Zombie was glad to see the back of the model for a while & the Wolf only appeared to her as a grey shadow lurking in the shadows. “They've probably gone to pick a few flowers.” And she chortled (made an attempt at it) at the euphemism. “Get dressed.” Snapped Schlumper & checked to see if the model had gathered up her clothes. They were still scattered where the Zombie had tossed them. “Use those.” With obvious delight the Zombie slipped her rival's kit on. “Now where?” She hoped, now the wolf had gone, that the artist would be able to follow her inclination . . . she waited irrepressibly openly wanting it sitting on the chair. Sitting pretty. Feeling pretty. Feeling this was precisely the place for a few anecdotal details to happen that might compensate for the lack of a plot.

“After them, of course, where else. They could ruin the whole picture. Where would that leave you? Don't ask.” The Zombie had had no intention (not of asking that is) because she knew very well where it was. And where she was determined to finish up. Now it was going to take a lot of determined work to get there. But which door had they left by? Schlumper knew the Wolf had always favoured the brown one contrary to the colour mentioned on the extract; he also knew the model had bad memories associated with the same door. He guessed the Zombie would choose to head in the completely wrong direction or whatever way led to a ‘mutual understanding’, he was translating that from the more robust terms he usually used because he sensed they were now tiptoeing through a fable again. “Dangerous feelings.” Schlumper said as he glanced over at the Zombie

waiting to see which way she would turn. (Hoping to harness the chanciness of her creative drive towards the pressing need she was exhibiting, while hoping this was not taken to be depreciating her perverse judgement in anyway. You can carry on this dissection later with the Wolf.)

“You get them too? Why rush off then?” The Zombie had reddened slightly; her very best attempt at a modest flush of colour in response to a penetrating look. Why was he brushing her off? She choked back a plea & started to pull down the knickers she had just pulled up. There was a scintillating display of leg & an angry flash of red. It wasn’t the only ploy from the wrong side she had left in the bank. She started to purr, her sinuous body made a luminous reflection in the tall mirror. “Not now.” Schlumper exclaimed, flattered & surprised by the open offer lacking any seductive quality other than unquestionable availability. And that was quite something. It carried a heavy charge. It made non-existence most unattractive. But intrigued & tempted as he was the blinding beauty didn’t dazzle him for the more urgent desire to survive was uppermost or held him back long enough so he could discretely slip from the Zombie’s half embrace half hold to keep her balance as the black silk pants became entangled on her ankles. An enticing clue. It struck Schlumper. The trap of pleasure . . . the trap door . . . Ha! Just when I was about to guess they had fled on a Jumbo jet. Yet unknown to all except the Wolf, precisely at the moment of interruption the model had taken a package flight, having easily given Wolf the slip. She was now winging well over the wood etc. Short circuiting, for the benefit of the Zombie, the permanent history of X & giving the ‘it is’ a good

shaking. No wonder Wolf's knees were knocking outside the brown door. He knew the analyst's work had been destroyed beforehand; there was nowhere to go.

Kind of knowing nothing could wear the urge out but as relatively more important work was needed, the platonic state was regained not without a few caresses in the right places; the mollified Zombie placed a restraining hand on Schlumper's arm. "Careful, the Wolf may be lying in wait. It could be dangerous to go after them." That was a mistaken move. What is a fatal outcome weighed against love: lust: evil? The emphasis was too obvious. "It could be a wild goose chase." Schlumper admitted. (His big ear to one of the doors, the Wolf licked his slavering chops). "Unless we read the signs correctly. For they could be both accurate & misleading depending on what we're after." At this the Zombie felt slightly ruffled & green, weren't they always after more than one thing? Or had she been unlucky & given too many big needs for her body to satisfy or be satisfied? "One." She hesitated to say the word as her mind had been juggling with the word 'satiated'. His door number having been called the Wolf was thrown into confusion. Would the false trail he had lain now lead them to the right cadaver sorry spot? Or should he have left it as it was? As he had done, Wolf quickly corrected himself but was left as exposed as a broken bone with a raw feeling that his thoughts were intent on betraying him. Schlumper glared hissing "Shush. We've got to find the right angle to crack this."

"I'm thinking 'nut'. Said the Zombie. "And not getting much feedback from it." He would have stamped his foot had he known the Wolf was there greyly lurking & tampering with the framework & the last detail & babbling nonsense to all & sundry. The Zombie was

taken aback adroitly turning the 'one' into a sneeze & snot. And said. "The world is full of them."

Ready to be off, the Wolf looked round for his small ball of wool; it was nowhere to be seen. The rabbit was back in the hat. So much for satisfying **the** drive with a modest change of object, fond dreamer. But the Wolf was heard to mutter. "It was never pulled out of the hat. So there."

Now Schlumper had his ear to the door & his hand on the knob. If the Zombie deferred to his choice, Schlumper would suspect he had overshot the mark & was going up a blind alley. If she seemed more willing to go the other way, he would still be cautious. "What mark?" The Wolf grinned, in the know again. The Zombie was ambidextrous every fool knew that. And didn't have a tattoo. The potential for a slip here into more luxurious surroundings was almost limitless. Everyone had their eye on the bed. If they won the battle to get out of the door.

By sidestepping something crucial?

What could be more important than the essential solitude? Drawing the curtains on the night etc.

"A dawn landscape" Schlumper clicked his fingers. "We can't vacillate here endlessly."

She probably could but wishing for a different rule to be applied the Zombie hinted, no doubt with a quickening pulse, without twisting his arm but using her body for a bit of extra excitement & hoping on hope the next episode had a key part for her. Inexorably they were heading out through a door. And while they knew it wasn't going to be a virtuoso performance of intimacy, she would shape up. Both took the step looking back at

the last moment hoping they might get a glimpse of the anamorphic image with its clue.

It still looked like shit. It sounded like shit. I'm never going there again

Wouldn't that be misleading?

I hope so.

Couldn't some of the uncertainty be held in abeyance? Mask a pile of garbage with a flurry of snow? "Come." Schlumper stepped out & the indefatigable Zombie followed him reluctantly into the cold. Into an unfamiliar place which at the same time she seemed to have a memory of looking into, as if she had chosen her own womb to be nurtured in.

"What we need here is that special skill of words – weightlessness."

"You could just switch the light on & find it." How often had that killed a passionate move?

With a heavy heart, which was obsolete now they were in the wide world, the Zombie couldn't pretend she liked the sound of the word taken from Schlumper's well-stocked list of banalities, or, to put it another way, she thought it would take consummate skill to turn that ordinary word into anything useable (and doubters, she meant consummate).

Because he was only catching dribs & drabs of what was said the Wolf thought he could have chipped in. 'Right I'm here. Who's dead?' but he wisely held back & bit his tongue instead. When you only have a bit part it's clever to know it.

It is a departure, elusive & precarious, of the model; & a risk following the Wolf. And a joke. We can take our pick here, or so we think, but must be canny, any change . . .

A superficial alteration?

Yes anything could set us back. Look the model has gone.

Here in the snow? The Zombie looked for a hump.

Yes. Look only one set of footprints.

Did we need this?

Yes. Now we can bring in tenderness & ruthlessness. (The puzzle is how had the model been blocking these qualities out?)

“I’m going to follow the footprints?” Said the Zombie. “It was careless of her to leave them behind.”

“Carelessness is one of her traits. So innocent. Yet useful.”

“Does she circle around?” The Zombie had been thrown by a sudden reversal in the prints; the heels now led the way.

“That could be it.” Schlumper grinned at being given another lead. They could be heading for Xmas (like a corny thriller plot). Perhaps he should describe an ‘Adoration’ but Who was in the club? Surely the model had more sense although she could get carried away, opting to take part in some unprotected sequences & enjoy the danger. He couldn’t push. The voice in his head didn’t go into detail. The model could have told him she had fought like a tiger. She was paid to. Only this time had slipped up. After a few practise turns felt softened by a look & surrendered to him. He took her. And after that had her when he wanted. She didn’t tell him but occasionally she called these acts love, to herself naturally. She also knew full well this was mistaken. But no doubt all kinds of things are invented, even love. This was her way to float through this strange patch of life. She would add it up later & add the things in she needed to complete a compelling history.

The Zombie slipped her hand into Schlumper's. It felt like a cool fish with dry slightly roughened scales. He grasped the cold object tight & she acknowledged this effort with a smile.

A serene moment, just a heartbeat but invoking in this limited & replaceable relationship a loving break. But listen, just to be less clear there is nothing going on here & nothing is going to happen. They are not falling in love. She expected him to be like her. Mirror her feelings. Well he couldn't, wasn't able to do it. He knew that could also be taken for an excuse for an uncaring action . . . letting her go when he knew she was vulnerable.

Perhaps he supposed that was the best way, for he wanted her to experience something of his existence. That wasn't possible; it was too bleak.

Your disaster she said.

One could say that Schlumper looked tenderly at the Zombie. Even under the dull sky full of snow her tight skin glistened; her eyes shone but there was a faint flicker of a chill behind them. Again the voice in his head sounding like a bell, yet comprehensible, warned him. There is peril hidden here. It is uncovered everyday. So flagrantly open it is missed.

Your disaster she said.

That was a terrified unhappy look: You were losing her: You scribbled a note, albeit carefully worded, resting the card on a shiny black handbag lying on the small table as you constructed a clumsy lure. What is this the analyst wondered after reading between the lines in an instant & turning the card over to peruse the very complex (& disturbing) picture he had chosen. Almost as bad . . . and she stopped herself because she

remembered her feeling longing to touch him to hold him tight to pull him into her. So she could struggle but submit.

Your disaster she said.

No. It was a savage hungry look. She hated it & wanted to hide from it or bite it. A hunter seeking something to kill. Still she wanted to roll naked under him & pull him down into her warmth but trap him in her thighs & crush him.

She wanted to rip open his belly & smother herself in his blood. Anything to make her fertile.

The lure of an embrace: Your disaster she said.

* * *

At one point in the air the model sat bolt upright expectantly & she didn't know why. A complete layer of white cloud, unbroken for hundreds of miles, stretched under the plane wings. Under her unbroken gaze it was slowly changed to purple. As the plane descended through the turbulent haze the model fastened her seat belt. It was tight over the growing lump in her belly. They need a break she thought.

After a short stroll along the bottom of a narrow ravine, the sky blotted out by overhanging rocks, passing some hidden flower gardens glimpsing blazing colours, ducking under trailing vines with apples & grapes ripe, side by side, at the entrances to tunnels cut by a stream in the soft white rock; the model scrambled out of the damp valley on a more tranquil path leading to a village. Under the shadow of the castle of Uchisar; the first stage of travel over the model sat alone on the terrace of the pension she had headed for, built into the side of a lava cone, called 'La maison du reve'. Her table

under the awning strung on rough poles protecting her from bright sunshine was set against the railings & as the mountain dropped steeply away she had an uninterrupted view over miles of the broken countryside with tall tapering cones of rock & deep ravines washed out of the light volcanic soil.

However slap-happy her choice . . . she was more than half way underground to start with & that was a good start the Wolf agreed when she called to tell him. He hadn't quite got the picture but the model let him dream on.

The wasp trap was dangling on a loop of wire from an iron spar jutting out from a post next to which the model rested her arm. Leaning back lazily brushing a hand through her steel blond hair waiting for her apple drink she took it in. This rectangular box trap was entirely made of grey metal mesh reinforced with angled strip (just starting to rust) on all the edges & on each of the four long sides there was a small round entrance set in a square plate of metal leading into a tapering cone of mesh. Once in the wasps could drop on the bait. Did they use jam or meat?

Now what would I use?

Meat.

Intricacies.

The trap held no bait. And where was the door? She stretched out a hand to turn it.

From out of an opening at the end of the terrace a woman hurried to help her. And at the same time a stranger sauntered over to the balcony rail handing to her an elaborately drawn & written message, with a nice ribbon border of slits & dicks or toadstools & lips, giving her the right number & instructions all in one (see illustration). The model

disengaged the serving woman with a smile & turned to the stranger. “Have you nothing to say?” Indiscreetly intimating in her usual way, which required her casual ability to dismiss or perhaps not see the reluctance in someone’s move or a stance, the inner purpose that had all its cards face up. In her everyday demeanour all the first impressions of her actions & speech seemed more comprehensible than they actually were. Because she was free of discretion & its neutralizing rule there seemed to be a beguiling clarity about her presence. This candour invariably confused anyone new to her ways. The stranger was no exception in being deceived by her charm. He felt he had to account for his presence (other than as a messenger) & in his haste unwittingly revealed more to the model than was advisable.

* * *

Meanwhile Schlumper & the Zombie needed to move double quick to cross the wasteland. The artist knew it was out of the question for them to step out into what was left after the model & Wolf had ploughed through it & it took a lot of persuasion to get him to sketch in some ameliorating features, posts to mark the way, a hint of sunshine, to comfort the Zombie. She was, rightly, wary of the frost touched brown Siberia of their making unfolding before them. Housing blocks bleakly splashed with black stains & flat windswept washes of sepia ground faded to the horizon. Even after the artist’s effort it was far & away the most unwelcoming place she had seen. “We should turn back. Why is there nothing there? I don’t like the look of it.”

“And why should you? You didn’t like where we were. Is there a place for you?”

“I feel that a trap will be set out there. We would be so exposed.” She was confused but felt, obscurely, that something evil could occur. They might fall foul of a trick of fate; with a sleight of hand or only a slip of the pen someone could be created who would pull into play an anonymous, unheard of stranger.

“Don’t be naïve, Zombie. I can’t help you take the right step. You’re well & truly on your own. Stuck unless you make a move quickly. Get your feet on the ground. It’s not that precarious.”

The Zombie started to sink slowly to her knees. “But what then?”

“What then?” Schlumper viewed the desolate landscape. What in Hell’s mouth did she mean? He looked sideways. “Get up you fool.” Was she acting or behaving?

“Didn’t you just say . . .”

“I didn’t say do that.” Schlumper realized there wouldn’t be time enough for an explanation of how to reconstruct herself after all the confusing undermining she had subjected herself to. It would take a miracle. But what the hell. And they were staring directly into it. Everything is possible with the right tools. He was reminded & didn’t know why of a pure mass of body, not a thought, a tremor of lust mixed in with a stream of hatred. It also happened when he held a loaded brush ready to strike.

The wasteland had gobbled the Wolf up. Houses like chicken coops. Ornamental trees pruned into perches. Gardens become runs. Echoes more solid than beings. No one to test the wind. It was far & away the most unwelcoming place she had ever seen apart from one or two things drawn by Kubin.

So Schlumper relented & against his better judgement pulled the Zombie through a wrought iron gate & steered her out of the open into the formal & ornamental garden of a grand house. Although the Zombie would always claim it was she who had known of the incipient danger she was lulled by the well tended garden with its fountain already boarded over to protect it from the winter frosts. Schlumper, dubious of his move, believed he felt her resistance as if she too, suppressing an urgent need to cling to him, knew it was not the place to be. They were distracted from their mistrust by the shouts of a child who was riding the polished bronze back of a sculpture, a crouching greyhound with the dead eyes of that breed & a woman who appeared in a trice on the terrace to shoo the child off. She turned back through the double door of the ochre coloured wall ignoring their approach. A few seconds of sunlight illuminated the tiny panes of glass in a window behind which a young woman, looking up from a task, sporadically followed their progress; a meander, drawing the contour a bird (standing on one leg) in the frosted grass as they took in all the nooks of the garden. At the tip of the crow's beak they stood at the steps of the terrace.

“It doesn't have to look as though we're eavesdropping . . . run up & take a peek through the window.” Schlumper immediately realizing the silliness of his request reached out to hold the Zombie back.

“And stare straight into the eyes of her?” The Zombie pointed by leaning her body, but particularly her chin, in the direction of the window & out of his reach. “We are being observed.”

Schlumper wiped his nose; it almost turned into a furtive gesture of concealment as the Zombie sprang up the three steps.

Unexpectedly, a tall, thin woman dressed as a page boy a Soutine lookalike (but in black) with the round Kulu hat embroidered to match her neat fitted tunic stepped out & with stiff arm movements like a stork walking invited the Zombie in. And at the last minute glanced at Schlumper with a bright eye & beckoned him with studied meticulousness.

The coquettish action left no doubt that he was the real target.

“It would be grim to leave him out.” She remarked to the Zombie, taking her in with a look, & after a considered pause added. “We must encourage him.”

“To do what?” The Zombie wondered not enchanted or delighted at the density of this woman’s slight remarks. Was it nothing but an innocent look or did she already know the artist? Had they been together a few years ago before her time? The Zombie didn’t want to dwell on this. I see nothing manifest the shape of her body said, nevertheless dragging its feet. Should she give her a chance? Better not.

Schlumper noted her dignified air & wondered what had passed between the women in the few moments before he came up to them. Then he recognised the analyst.

Caught on the wrong foot Schlumper murmured a pleasantry that sounded like a random, though not completely unambiguous shot in the dark. “All things come round.” It failed to gain him time to regain his composure because the analyst said. “Yes & now you will get the full twelve minutes.” And smiled broadly. It was difficult to decipher whether this was clownish or erotic frivolity.

The Zombie shuddered. Stimulated by submerged motives beyond analysis she knew it was neither. It was ominously, excessively expansive (of course the analyst knew) & totally inappropriate aimed just below the artist's belt, not quite a kick in the bollocks. But mad. (POP).

From that moment the Zombie, already unnerved earlier by the analyst's bewitching presence, planned to deliver them from this perilous house & vanish. Feeling so threatened she pushed Schlumper surreptitiously in the direction of the door.

When he was shoved Schlumper thought the bubble had burst as a result of the Zombie's fear. He was propelled towards the analyst, bent, as if giving her a sympathetic ear & found himself looking over her shoulder at a remarkable visionary landscape painted by the lawyer K in 1902. The small picture in its heavy, dark grey frame was built up from nothing more than distinct irregular colour patches; the pigment entirely put on to the surface with short nervous strokes from the tip of a palette knife. So the texture of each defined colour area was deliberately uneven where pressure on the knife had been varied letting the white ground more or less show through, illuminating the colour most where it was thinnest. K certainly hadn't identified with the motif but despite its stability & lack of complexity in its very bareness the painting sparkled with internal light & the landscape had been a perfect vehicle for his idea on the emotional meanings of colour. (Ideas, incidentally, which Schlumper found unfortunate (ie.wrong) even when they were carried more harmoniously in a constructivist format). Schlumper's delight at discovering an unknown picture to admire must have shown as the analyst turned to follow his gaze into the alcove where it hung. "It is quite a treasure trove, I know. These landscapes are

so wonderful. And yet similar pictures painted the same way a few years later (1906) fail to give me a glimmer of this transcendental feeling. Yet why they lack this gift to unveil the world in the same way, I can't say. It's a secret he lost." She smiled inviting the Zombie to comment but expecting her to remain silent.

"There is no enigma. In the later ones the landscape had closed in upon itself, become dulled, something we already knew, because he was mechanically repeating the touch. He had lost faith in the subject." Said the Zombie shuffling behind the analyst almost kissing her neck peering at the picture. Her lips could have been dripping poison the way they twisted as she spoke. "When he painted this one he was with somebody he loved. A woman." She questioned the analyst with a look. "When he painted the later ones perhaps he was alone. But there isn't anything unknown in any of the pictures. Nothing to be discovered. This one that Schlumper likes so much is simply a landscape we are given to know totally, now." She pronounced.

"But you haven't seen a later one yet." Cried the analyst, not flustered but surprised at the Zombie's claim to some intimate knowledge she surely couldn't possess & looking to Schlumper for support of her privileged position, to put his companion right. Or at least take her side.

"The Zombie's certainly got an eye." Was all he said. Secretly pleased to see the analyst unsettled. And stifling a doubt.

"Also he painted those before he was inspired." Said the Zombie.

"Yes? By what?"

“When he accidentally saw a Monet ‘haystack’ upside down.” The Zombie added.

“Although there’s nothing very spiritual about that.”

“How could he have seen one of those pictures upside down?” Schlumper wondered in his concrete way. “He may have been confused & unable to ‘see’ the subject.”

“What difference would it have made?” Said the analyst tartly thinking to finish it. “Your friend makes it sound as though she was there.” But she was less concerned with the aside wondering more if she had heard the artist right. ‘Zombie? Was it her nickname? It seems the world could be full of them.’

“Under Franz von Stuck. None.” The Zombie’s statement was made in a flat tone betraying nothing, she thought, of an unusual anxious feeling welling up inside her; but just by fixing the analyst with a false hard look, after a brief toss of the head, told much of her mistrust to the analyst.

“Quite likely.” Schlumper guffawed giving her shoulders a hug for the gift, oblivious to the struggle taking place. “Or at least in the Phalanx.” Frozen by these pleasantries they had hardly moved a foot towards the door; nor did they seem to serve one practical motive, but the artist was mistaken. They were held together by more than each other’s stray thoughts being spoken automatically. There was a temptation. Realizing the Zombie was edging towards the door & taking Schlumper in tow, the analyst regarded this woman called Zombie with new interest, with a feeling similar to the contradiction she often felt when seeing her own face as a strange object in the mirror then instantaneously recognizing herself. And while still in the confused feeling realizing the unfurling of a new being takes only an instant. It looked as if this Zombie had decided they must leave

in a hurry. Making the only move she could to save him from the analyst's further corrupting influence? That was in the past. Didn't this Zombie know that her own inaccessibility was the most valuable asset she possessed for his seduction, if that act was on her mind? Far outweighing any advantage gained, from the intimate knowledge the analyst had conjectured, or may have gleaned in their troubled sessions years ago. Now she found it was difficult to tell what conclusions to draw given the inherent ambiguity of the Zombie's uneasy actions. And the analyst, had she been in a less familiar place, would have remembered that in these moments of stress there was always a discrepancy between the look plainly from the outside & the one engendered from the inside. As there was in their interpretation. And immediately anticipated where she was in relation to them. But, off her guard, she was running through the possibility of some unique act of fun. Something misleading. A step back perhaps.

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In a bright, artificial light the artist appeared to be dreaming while a thickly worked drawing floated on the surface of a sink full of warm water. When it was drenched he poked it under & rubbed different places with his thumbs. The pigment rose in a grey cloud. Schlumper lifted the paper out, scrutinized it & fiercely screwed it up shaking the drops off his fist. And threw the tight ball of pulp on the floor. Then he donked another drawing back under water gently straightening it out. More grey gouache was lifted off into the cloudy water. That done the drawing was placed on a board & flattened with a sponge. Then he stretched it, the brown gum strip on the edges forming a doorway leading onto the now very faint lines of the picture. He dabbed off the surface water again

with a sponge & laid a newspaper on, rubbing it flat with the side of his fist to soak up the dampness over the whole board. Before it was completely dry he was lightly drawing once more with a soft lead pencil, using what there was left after the soaking to discover new forms. The line on the damp surface was very fugitive.

Here they were at a door again: perhaps the door. This could all be a repeat episode or worse a trailer. Yet it could be . . . just the same.

Can't be. It's in a different light.

It's still grey.

There are more of them. They wouldn't blend in. Surely the original people would recognize there were strangers amongst them.

You want to bet?

* * *

So they were lucky to be able to just make out the shape of what looked like . . . the Wolf emerging from an alley. "They were . . . lucky." Was the Zombie's astonished cry of protest that became strangled in her throat. "So that's why we are hanging around here. He is thinking he missed something important & is now trying to pull it in. Taking a chance to see if he can get it now. On a different line. Trying to change tack. That was what was now being encompassed. To claim a part of what he completely overlooked at first."

"Not 'he thought?'" The analyst wanted to be sure she wasn't dreaming, knowing how time hopped around in them from one image to another. "And what is it? Can you say?"

"No. It's a volatile situation."

“Something sexual?”

“It’s possible the pack could turn nasty & become anything.” The Zombie shifted uneasily. “Watch out.” She whispered urgently.

“Are you warning me?” ‘Pack’ she wondered as she thought. ‘How can one be intimate with someone who is, I suppose, empty.’

“Yes. I am warning you.” And the Zombie’s low voice added cogent emphasis. As did the dark clouds full of snow that sprang up on the horizon.

POP.

A CLOUD of Seekers.

Anguine Sakini claimed that in those few seconds after letting go of the rope dmu-t’ag as she sailed through the air before sprawling onto the far side of the river she had seen shallow ridges drawn in the pebbles of the shingle bank defined by the feeblest of grey shadows as if an object with some slight protuberances had been dragged over them once. Although there was no sign of a footprint the shingle had been disturbed recently for even a shower of rain would have obliterated the faint signs. These marks were only the trace of a very light body but perhaps those left, nevertheless, by another creature.

This time Sakini kept her mouth shut.

And that altered everything.

Lying there she wondered. ‘Why am I concerned which way the object had been pulled? Whether it was into the water or out of it? Why does it make a difference? But the questions themselves rang a bell. Or had someone emerged from the river delicately sliding over the pebbles?’

Sakini raised her head carefully to survey the immediate surroundings; a thicket of young willow trees spread into the shallow water giving a sluggish edge to the main current. In the trees she saw two children playing & a man cutting tall osier saplings. How do I know they will scorch the cut ends in a fire to stop the poles sprouting? Sakini realized she was back somewhere she had been before but couldn't remember more. Images flew about in her mind like a few angry bees after a hive has been destroyed. Fragmentary pictures of herself with shadowy figures in spaces she couldn't name; doing things none of which she recollected with more than a dull pain.

A bare room. A body or what was left of it. A table with three or four useless objects on it. An indecipherable note she must read. Was impelled to read but couldn't focus on the script. She could taste the sharp tang of a bitter-sweet fruit in her mouth again. A gooseberry barely ripe.

All this recollected material was covered in a patina of grey dust filtering through a green subterranean light.

In this search for Schlumper

She was available.

From the shingle bank where Sakini lay the bork (a path worn from the river to the sacred hill) ran skirting the water meadows up to the level crossing of the L.M.S. railway line then around the black pool of liquid tar up Megalaughton lane past the huts over the hump-backed canal bridge over the arterial road through the municipal park where the path meandered with the bank of Lee's brook for a few yards by arable land to the steep stone steps leading to the south side of the church.

In the far distance a group of figures trudged away from her.

A bird flew flapping its untidy wings back to a copse of tall trees.

Now, both the boy & the girl who was younger than him were some distance from the man chopping the budding willow trees. In their game they danced around & fell, then were in an embrace rolling in a flurry of skirts. A dog came racing to romp with them & they jumped up to chase the dog away. It began to rain. The man took a rope & bundled up the poles; he laid them along his bicycle with the axe & pushed his way to the bork.

The dog slunk after him. The children watched him go. They began their play again.

Bedraggled, their skimpy wet clothes clung becoming a second pink skin as the flesh reddened with their vigorous wrestling. There was something more untamed than playful in this game without concessions & that is what spun it out of control; from fragments of calm followed by determined attacks to gain control, they fought without respite. There was no reticence.

Unnoticed Sakini stalked closer.

* * *

What or wherever it came from, the hollering feeling of dissatisfaction Pollak always had, Pollak was convinced she would one day track down, find its source & dispel it. This quest, which left her forever wondering whether to add or deduct an arm or a leg from the turmoil of sexual fantasy in which she was both uncontrollably embraced & prostrated while being obnoxiously contaminated, was her single goal. And having chosen as ever to fight her way through to satisfaction (or release) on ground she had found herself mired in many times before; she set herself up this time to get it perfect.

And this same demand for perfection dismayed her, not in forcing her to turn her back on the shadowy moments that are a part of everyone's everyday living dream (she always longed to join in one of those tangible moments of love, each move selected to force more love) but in the wraith-like air she felt compelled to adopt in this unnecessary repeated passage if she was to succeed in annihilating her raper in the most enjoyable way. In the conflict that this desire to finish off her violation with a triumphant murder while still enduring the abuse, drew into play, dangerous & wild without rules, but unappetizing with them, the crazy outlines of these unopened forms of madness filled, or rather stuffed, with a lack of substance as hard as teak, this was the dialogue of empty rage that she could not keep from invading all her waking thoughts. Unable to censure the evil lust, she despised the flesh that craved it & consequently unerringly threw herself into harm's way.

Down by the river Pollak could see the children playing. She saw a man caution his dog to stay close. And was drawn to get close to them.

* * *

Sakini saw a small figure detach from the distant group.

The point of Schlumper's pencil was uncovering more trouble.

With an acrobatic jump only seen in diagrams, Sakini accompanied by a large **WHAM** or **WHO . . . AM**, landed silently behind Pollak.

A TRANQUIL of the FOOTLOOSE.

With a rope named dmu-t'ag Schlumper was certain he could swing the girl to safety across the flooded river Lo. Out of nowhere he felt the coils over his left shoulder & around his chest & saw the beautiful multicoloured thread that ran in amongst the strands of the rope.

At his feet the dead grass stalks were still matted white with frost. Before him the whole steep river bank shimmered crystalline white. The black icy water rushed smoothly over large black boulders. A green & crimson Holly tree with a huge limb leaning over the torrent could be used. The artist measured the distance by eye & then searched for a loose angular stone. He found a black & ochre flint off which in the warmth of his hand came the faintest scent of fire.

While his eternal companions, the Zombie & the model, were moving gracefully through the frozen landscape their arms & hands held like Spartan girls dancing on certain Abdera coins, Sakini with her head uncovered showing strawberry hair waved to ridges urged them on in their dance from a vantage point, avoiding Schlumper's sceptical gaze as she pulled off her two jumpers (exposing purple nipples hardening in the freezing air) to join them.

NOW the journey was usually easier than **THIS**. Despite the snail's pace. Much easier. He threw the weighted rope. It snaked over the branch. Anguine Sakini caught the stone as it swung back to the bank; shouted, "Hold tight" & swung herself after several attempts across to the other side.

*

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Becoming disorientated Schlumper had decided to travel in a straight line & taken a compass bearing. In opening up the way, the reading, a sublime act, had brought on the hazard of crossing the turbulent river beyond which stretched a tranquil plain to a horizon of ochre engulfed in a blue haze. This sudden change in the landscape showed their utter insecurity. Here they were beating their arms on their sides, frozen to the marrow, while over the river it looked like the parched Deccan, heat shimmering off dusty fields; azure water tanks as sharp as diamonds.

‘What a problematic situation something is missing . . . but where else could I find such contrasts, such distance . . . what a springboard yet it could disintegrate in a few seconds.’

He coiled the rope *dmu-t’ag* & threw it over his shoulder pleased with the flash of colours. The arrival of a clapped-out bus broke Schlumper’s thought. As it continued to slide past him after the application of the brakes he could see a young woman, the colour of a shrimp, crouching on the back seat looking for the source the sounds with sightless round hollow eyes from out of a white face sucking her thin lips even narrower in fright. By crunching in a zigzag over the scrub & bushes, wheels spinning in the loose ground of the kerb the bus eventually stopped, shaking & throbbing, emitting a cloud of black exhaust smoke & some flames before the driver was able to cut the engine. Sakini stood beleaguered on the far bank pulling her jumper on watching the two other women run waving towards the bus.

Schlumper wondered how this vehicle had been conjured out of the blue & then how it held together other than by the application of thick yellow paint, as he pulled thoughtfully on his nose not making a move towards it.

“What shall we do about Sakini?” The two dancers asked breathlessly, tugging at the artist pulling him towards the bus.

“Leave her she’s in her element.”

“Then let’s go.”

But he resisted their urging.

* * *

At last they got him to the bus. As Schlumper took hold of the chrome rail by the steps & watched his foot as he put it on the dimpled surface of an anti-slip strip, he groaned; a vivid memory burnt him like a sharp spark spat out of a log fire that hits with infallible accuracy the thinnest sliver of bare wrist. The prime image in the scene was a small municipal refuge, in a village he rarely visited, set close to the main road, surrounded by a privet hedge screening off the dust & traffic, with a slatted wooden bench. It was a bus stop. It was also his rendezvous years ago.

The day before as the double-decker bus lumbered up Cherry-tree Hill a vivacious schoolgirl had tapped Schlumper’s knee across the aisle & said her friend (she elbowed her much larger companion) wanted a date with him, could she arrange one? The whole top deck was interested. He mumbled his irritation & disbelief but took her plain friend in & showed enough lack of interest that spurred the girl to promise a larger prize.

“She’s easy.” Whispered the thin go-between her eager pale eyes flitting all over his body. “Meet her if you want it this evening, sixish, at the small municipal park by the park gate.” And yes ‘municipal park’ was odd but at that age when you’ve had the ‘hard on’ solid for a year (not an easy position to be in, in crowds; or piss in) an offer however

unpredictable the outcome was worth a twirl. Pocketing the 'art' book he had buried his nose in he softened his response to a gruff OK & another stare at the blushing girl with her head down. Then the top deck was free to begin to fantasize & again began to buzz. So at six when Schlumper saw this date slip into the 'municipal bower' holding hands with a lanky neatly dressed youth (short hair) pride stormed & he decided to join the fray. In those days the artist carried a sharp knife in the shape of a fish given as a present from another lout who was being harassed by his father about carrying it & so on.

"Shove off." He kicked the well-mannered youth through the hedge & he fell rolling down the bank into a fence; several loosely strung strands of barbed wire, in which he became entangled. A thin cheeky face observed this from cover & grinned as she rubbed her pouch aggressively. "I warned you. I warned you." Her snatch still ached from the kick he had given her when told of the tentative plan for the evening. "Do you want mine, now?"

Unfazed, the plumper girl was standing on the bench trying to see where her boyfriend had gone as Schlumper took the hem of her dress & pulled – she came down with an ease & urgency that surprised Schlumper, not that she wanted to participate in anything, she explained, but to save her dress being torn. And to please her friend, Pollak. In the same style with a clumsy movement she fell back onto the bench into a compliant but obviously untutored sexual position. "I didn't expect you to come. He's always around." The dress didn't help & she seemed to be straining holding an awkwardly posed (what she took for natural seductive) come on openness. Schlumper flicked open the knife & started to chop the leaves off a twig. And when he started to methodically strip the bark

she snatched the switch & flailed it across his thighs, then emboldened by his lack of response, whipped his face. Schlumper grabbed her wrist with both hands & gave it a Chinese burn then because she didn't squeal, twisted it up behind her back. She was big but soft & gave up immediately, he could feel that in the way she knelt on the slats with her head down. Having her arm held right up behind her neck she had to cling to it with the other hand to make the position bearable. Schlumper fingered open the ivory buttons at top of her bust-line, picked up the knife & slid the blade under the elastic between the cups of her bra. As this band was wide & reinforced by a folded hem he had to saw & jerk the knife to cut through. This made her shiver, the first reaction he could remember other than the open compliance. The frayed elastic parted but the cups still held on her breasts so Schlumper eased them off spiking the points where the lace was sewn to the satin with the tip of the blade. There was a sharp intake of breath. "Nice big tits." Said the thin girl emerging from the hedgerow. "Feel them. She likes it." And she helped herself. Pulling the loose cups that still nestled in the dress out & roughly opening up the bodice to expose her prize.

Schlumper let go of the captive's arm & she slumped into a loose defenceless pose as her friend flicked up her dress to examine her. "Still got her knickers on." And she deftly rearranged the girl's legs, pulled the offending pants off & threw them over the hedge. "He can have those."

Schlumper stood back. The thin girl, Pollak, sat on an exposed thigh & had her fingers working vigorously in her friend while rocking up & down relentlessly which clearly was intended to hurt her victim's back & thigh bones on the slats. Schlumper could see the

froth covering the bush & took a step. At that the girl showed him her hand. Which her friend took a firm hold of.

“If you’re so envious let’s see what you’ve got. Pollak.” So there was a spark. As if the trap was sprung slowly by a heavy log the big girl hoisted her thin friend round to face the artist holding her wrist at an angle to prevent any wriggling. “Whip her.” She now had her trapped between her knees & as she lifted the body by resting her heels on the slats Schlumper could see her slit with its reddened lips swollen & flecked pouting with the strain of the capture.

Schlumper slit the dress. And felt between her thighs. It was scalding hot. She looked into his eyes in triumph. So it was true, her plan was falling into place. She hissed with pleasure. “She’s a donkey. She always does that. Kiss me. Get rid of her. I love you.”

As a tattered grey figure crawled out of a gap at their feet the thin girl struggled free & sat on his shoulders hanging onto his head. “That’s right. Keep down out of sight. There’s someone peeping at that window.” It was the very moment Schlumper’s member was sliding into a welcoming hole evincing the loudest sigh with the most suction etc. If it was a shock that they were in full view it didn’t make either of the pair falter in the effort – they simply bounced down onto the prostrate couple & used them until they were spent. And Schlumper found it was his mate who decided when spent was.

That wasn’t all; as Schlumper’s prick was still erect even after the thorough work over by his appointed date (as it was for several months to come) he was persuaded to service the younger, thinner girl. “I promised you’d get it now I want it.” Pollak demanded urgently.

Despite a feeble protest from their boyfriend who had crawled by like a crumpled

shadow, the artist slotted her & she proved just as accomplished as her friend & pleaded to be finished off in 'hell' just for a change & could he ram it up she asked over her shoulder betraying serious knowledge of the complex male psyche. Pollak leaned on the recumbent body of the other one, now languidly consoling her boyfriend who jerked in time with the spasms of Schlumper doing his best to satisfy the utterly pliant body given up to him totally, so he believed, without discretion. She squealed "Yes" when her friend took charge of her snatch holding the clitoris tighter & tighter as Schlumper pumped. She noisily boxed the neat boy's ears when she came but then waited, with a beguiling but encouraging smile over her other shoulder, for the artist to take his turn.

Schlumper was punch drunk when he stopped the bus, with the agreed signal of a stiff arm held out at a right angle, just outside this arbour. The girls jauntily waved him goodbye. The thinner one was proudly wearing his jacket over her torn dress. The other, well-built one stood bare foot holding her shoes.

The next day they blanked him.

* * *

To cool the overheated engine, the driver, 'Scarface' Schneider, was cramming snow scraped from the mudguards into a watering can & pouring the molten drops into an open hose protruding through the wrecked dashboard (not a dial was still intact on it). Steam was hissing out of two pipes close to the steps warming his legs. As he stooped over the top of the driver's seat that had been pushed back blocking the way into the vehicle a shower of metal objects fell out of a pocket fixed on the back of this seat to hold the papers used on the journey. He clutched at them but they were scattered & rolled

everywhere. “Hands are stiff. Wouldn’t think it possible in this climate.” He wafted through the cloud & switched on the windscreen wipers, & watched amazed as they squeaked across the dirty glass leaving indelible streaks of black rubber. “That’s not supposed to happen. The wiper switch usually gives me . . .” The door-flaps closed. The passengers were huddled down in their seats & silent; warily sizing up the trio left on the outside.

“I have to go . . . can’t open the doors again . . . might be here for days.” The engine fired, thumping like a drum, under the swing of the uncomplicated boot of the driver who saluted the group bowing over the steering wheel. With her eyes still staring wildly at an out of focus beyond & her thin mouth now jabbering & pleading the young woman on the back seat was sitting very straight, with a convex curve in her back, holding what looked like a bundle of rags by her side. The Zombie knew in an instant that a metal object was pushing hard on this woman’s spine.

The bus gone, Schlumper, the model & the Zombie faced a scowling Sakini who had arrived on the other side of it. “We had better try again.” She greeted them laconically. Schlumper shrugged his shoulders. “How did you cross back?”

“On the ice.” Sakini waved downstream.

“It was wise to miss the bus.” Said the Zombie sticking her hands under her armpits. And she explained what she had guessed. “I think the driver helped us to avoid trouble in the only way he could.”

“It was probably going the wrong way.” Schlumper was surprised how quickly it had gone from view. “There must be dip over that way . . . shelter.”

The model stared down at her cold & raw feet but said nothing. Sakini grunted. “I had the feeling that bus was laid on for our benefit.”

“Yes. To get out of here.” Added the model giving a hopeful but undecided look.

“We’ll see. There isn’t bound to be a purpose for our delay but I’ll try & find one.”

Schlumper selected a forked twig & lopped it off, then knocked it against his boot to remove the ice & cut off the thorns with flicks of the blade; checked its pliability that he had guessed from experience, then held it out in a loose grip delicately but firmly. Then he slowly walked backwards & forwards. “Runs in the family but anyone can do it.” The stick dropped sharply down & slowly rose again. Schlumper made another pass over the spot coming at another angle, with the same result. He dug into the earth carefully scraping the debris away. It didn’t feel like disturbed ground. The others blew into their cupped hands fascinated so silently disgruntled.

“Give me a turn.” Said the Zombie. “I feel an affinity.”

“Grubbing around in the middle of nowhere freezing to death, pointlessly. That’s an affinity you could do without.” Said the model. “We should strike out for civilization or build a shelter.”

“Schlumper’s got a bee in his bonnet let him have his chance.” Said Sakini. “An old flattened & folded tin or a few rusty nails . . . who knows what treasure lies there.”

The Zombie listened very hard.

Schlumper handed the knife to the Zombie who felt as though she had been stung the moment she touched it. “Good they are here but invisible.” Crouching down, unaware of the looks exchanged, she took over. The hole was more than a foot deep when the knife

snagged a loop of wire & the Zombie looked up with a quirky smile playing on her lips. She was disturbed by the intensity she felt in the faces watching her as she lifted out a metal box. The copper wire was so rotten it fell off at the first twist. Inside was a bag. It was heavy as the Zombie held it up for them to see as well.

“Ah! Fuel for some kind of machine.” Decided the Zombie peering into the canvas bag. Schlumper looked at her with disbelief. It was full of highly polished bullets. The model wanted to count them & started & was stopped. Sakini wanted to share them out but didn’t say so, she knew better. “This cache has enough ammo for an expert sniper to kill eight to ten people.” She declared.

“How come?”

“Snipers use about two & a half rounds, on average, per kill (cost roughly 27 cents) plus the wage they are paid &, incidentally, ‘normally’ it takes fifty thousand rounds per kill (cost roughly \$2,300).”

“It seems an unlikely place to hide ammunition. I’ll carry on the search.” Schlumper widened his area of operation, methodically trampling out squares & setting up snowball markers, to no avail.

“Perhaps it’s too deep or wrapped in something that foils your stick?” Suggested Sakini tentatively. Agreeing with the model that it was time to go.

“Nothing.” Said Schlumper emphatically shaking his head. “Nothing can be shielded from this. I don’t know why.”

“Again. I’ll have a try. Show me.” Said the Zombie also eager to be off. Schlumper placed her hands on the forked stick & adjusted the tension. He could feel the tremor

through her coat cuffs. “You’re finely tuned.” He exclaimed. “We should be able to find a nob pin.”

The Zombie wandered about in a haphazard way avoiding the rigorous pattern of the artist’s attempt. The model yawned & looked decidedly unhappy, sure that if he had found gold coins they would have quit the place by now. But there was a strange conviction they shared that compelled them to complete a thorough search.

* * *

Look at those dogs down there, wild animals.

Look at that one! Isn’t it in back to front?

Shows how much you know about it.

Oh. There’s another . . . surely it can’t.

Just wait . . . there . . . extraordinary . . . I’m surprised that didn’t break it.

And so buoyant . . . popping up for it like a ball.

Look at that reflection . . . that one’s going after it.

No. It was a shadow . . . nevertheless . . .

Yes. Yes.

Now that will be top-heavy . . . I knew it.

Must have been nice while it lasted.

You bastard . . . it was unnatural.

They managed to do it for a few seconds.

You could only hold that under duress.

Intertwining.

How much do you know about it? Is that what is called sadico-zoomorphiste?

No you need wheels for that.

Then Oh! that must be ----- wrong.

Looks like an offshoot of fetishism of the podex.

* * *

You'd better go down & stop it.

I can't said the Wolf I'm not supposed to be here.

They'll never now. They won't see you. I won't tell. She lied. Don't tell me you daren't go. And she giggled to emphasize her contempt.

Under this offensive duress, like a shadow the Wolf stealthily circled round into the empty park, ducked under a wire fence with wisps of woolen cloth caught on its barbs, & slunk up the grassy bank & through the privet hedge snagging his belt on a twig. As he half turned to free himself the thin young woman with practised accuracy landed her genitalia on his head as someone else began to tug at his feet. Then they began to pull his jeans with a wild determination that felt full of spite, anger & frustration. This vigorous attack soon ripped the pants off him but Wolf was unable to see what was happening as the girl intentionally had her muff tightly scissored onto his face as she clung to his wrists defending her position with wiry strength also robustly rocking & kicking. Now naked from the waist down with two unknown assailants pummeling his body, Wolf felt he was not supposed to be there but did wonder why he had been so easily persuaded to act against his will. Before he could address the difficulty of that thought & use the more appropriate 'duped' another amorous couple landed on his shoulders frenetically

rehearsing an interminable climax, after which they rolled apart panting like dogs.

Neither seemed totally satisfied to Wolf's mind's eye. As he sat up the thin girl, having relinquished her scissor hold, kept a firm hand on his cock just in case as she pleaded charmlessly for her turn of the spit with the anonymous lover.

Wolf practically melted into the shadows as his tenacious & troublesome captor slowly disengaged as she was rhythmically & shamelessly shafted in the arms of her friend, while in the ecstasy nearly throttling the previously neat figure, who had appeared once more worse for wear through the gap left by Wolf, hoping to be allowed to join in while at the same time sounding the alarm that someone was spying on them.

* * *

Once he was out of the room & the brown door bolted she felt she could breath again.

That cunning bastard was so intrusive. He exaggerated so much. Ten times. How vexing a number can be. Dekobra slowly relaxed as she automatically undressed, a pleasure intensified by imagining herself observed, this time by someone of indeterminate gender tightly bound to the tree. I wish I had that tree. I would certainly use it to find out the truth. Naked, she was stock still in the centre of the room; gliding down the bole enveloping the helpless body. Her lips parted. She started to apply lipstick giving herself generous crimson bows.

There was a sharp rap on the door. Dekobra, coming out of a trance, had to hastily scramble dressed again; then running her hands down ironing straight the wrinkles pattered over to the door, silently unlocked it & returned to her chair in front of the window still in a daze.

“Come in.”

The Zombie tentatively pushed the door open a crack, then wide enough to poke her head through keeping all of her body concealed. “I have a peculiar . . . I have . . . well perhaps you wouldn’t find it . . . a special request.” She hesitated, she first saw the slash of red, was Dekobra there, then catching sight of a woman slumped in her chair, swiftly assessing the analyst’s body response & before Dekobra could respond closed the door & regained the sofa sitting down heavily between Schlumper & the model. “Not an appropriate gesture.”

“What?” They had both been astounded by the Zombie’s unannounced essay up to the door. And expected more than an immediate return. “A rebuff?”

“Nothing.” Said the Zombie.

“Nothing? That’s odd.” Schlumper reflected. “Must be something in that?”

“Surprise or love.” Said the model. “And both. You should have asked your question. What did you want to know?”

“Nothing.” The Zombie replied accurately.

“You pose a question, model, you should know that. You often look on the point of saying . . .”

“Well - no reply – you got that position pretty clearly. Anything else?” The model probed. But the Zombie was by now staring down the intrusive gaze of a stranger nearby.

“She was probably starting a ‘softening up’ process.” Mused Schlumper who always expected an outcome (even if it was only scribble). “The first impetuous dash followed by long considered constructive moves one, two, three & then . . .”

“Back to square one.” The model discretely nudged the artist & rolled her eyes over to the Zombie. “Is that worth a question or not?” She whispered.

“ . . . the castle . . . umm not in this case . . . the Queen . . .” Schlumper followed the indication & saw the Zombie had a tear in her eye. He shook his head. “Now this is going too far. How dare Dekobra hurt the Zombie’s feelings.” And then he faltered as the inevitable crocodile of doubt cropped up. “You’re sure she said nothing?” It was addressed more at the model who nodded agreeing the recap.

“She looked out of this world.” Sniffed the Zombie.

“That can mean a lot of things. Like Chinese writing.” Said the model, being modern, no ultra-modern with a twinkle in her eye.

“She was naked.” Said the Zombie. “Very Beautiful.”

“Well she never does that for me.” Said the artist hardly grasping the flight of the fact but tempted into play by the shape of it. While the model rocked & nodded & said. “I see. Blown it. I see.” Very quietly. “We just get you started here & now she has . . .

Lost it.”

“Revealed it.” Contradicted Schlumper, vexed.

If the Zombie has got X-ray eyes it is only under the same circumstances as the rest of us prompted by sexual yearning, reading naked voluptuousness into the slightest well-covered curve.

“I’ve never caught Dekobra Hotki unintentionally naked, in real life.” Schlumper revealed.

“Surprise. Surprise.” Shouted the model, subliminally catching the whole carp (to watch it gasp for air after being landed, wide mouthed, in the featherbed of Schlumper’s phantasy).

It was an unsubstantiated rumour floating around the waiting room the analyst did have some ritual or other to exorcise the residue (e.g. the fatigue caused by derision) between each session. But no one knew what. Speculation, fueled by every basic & embellished fantasy possible, and, more often, impossible, was rife & wrong.

“The Bull’s eye would be to know for sure.” Schlumper crossed his legs. At least some part of him was reading it right.

The model firling through her handbag keeping an eye on the door took out a booklet & thumbed through it still on the watch. “Ever had a lucid dream? This is the shorter guide to them. Indispensable at a moment like this.”

“Why?” Asked both Schlumper & the Zombie who exchanged pinches & then pinched the model.

“I thought it possible we might not have come here today but stayed cuddled up in bed instead & had a lucid dream etc. This tells you what to do to find out.”

“So you think we’re all in one together?”

“Could be.”

“Could not.” Said the Zombie with feeling. “Or Schlumper would have been knocking on that door by now.”

“Perhaps he has in his part of the dream.” The model was starting to get that faraway look about her & very lightly pinched her body in various places seeming pleased with the result.

“No doors in my dreams.” Schlumper claimed pulling the model’s errant hand up off his fly. “And I can remember coming through that one just now.”

“You think.” Giggled the model. “I mean in a dream the Zombie’s wish would have come true, wouldn’t it? She’d still be in the room. And you, not wanting to go along with it, could be miles away frantically establishing acts as facts that never happened.”

“What wish? Only Anguine Sakini could go along with that kind of reasoning & luckily she is dead.”

“Why do you have to bring her in.” Sobbed the Zombie. “It is a beautiful dream until then now.” Beating the arms of the sofa with her fists.

“But you were crying & sad.” An exasperated Schlumper threw up his hands half expecting to grab a pillow. Half protecting himself from being thumped.

“Get off. They are mine.” Said the model rounding on him. “This definitely isn’t a dream.”

As the hubbub in the waiting room became louder the analyst switched on the camera which served as a *gelosia* a metal lattice through which jealous wives could see what was what when there was a knock without being seen & observed the screen.

And who is that slipping through the door under cover of the noise? She put a hand over her mouth as she whispered. “Holukos.” Sneaking in like a stray Hurufi (you know the ‘loaded’ numbers sect where everything added up to nothing) horrifyingly real. “And I

thought the grey spook was a reflected figment (impediment) of my counter-transference.” She made a quick note. “All the time he’s its double.”

So that was why the first statement ‘This dream is not spontaneous.’ Had such a hollow ring to it. It is clear we are dealing here (Dekobra, using the ‘we’ obviously felt the need for numbers) with *to luko* two wolves & (& she scrawled the words of this inspiration down onto a page almost blackened by the dense script). The ‘dual’. Two.

Heaven without man (*ten ni jin nashi*). The analyst sucked her pencil then she drew the esoteric Zen numeral used to deal with dirty money. This implicated the Zombie in a way Dekobra Hotki had never imagined. ‘And where is the other one?’ She wondered. ‘I didn’t think we would be working in this *field*.’ She wrote the four squares with a brush. Split them & got two days. ‘A day in the sun. That close!’ The message became transparent (**read clear**) coming up roses she thought almost like a chocolate box, but not intelligible:

Concealed box

In

Earth

Near

Ledge or cliff or should she go for a hill?

Wait. There could be a Pig’s snout

That could be a weapon

And

Folded hands. (While you wait passively as would a sniper).

She glanced up had Holukos gone? Couldn't tell. The screen was covered in snowy interference. Going back over the shapes with a heavy heart she saw Lobster, yes there was a (red dead) lobster with its coffin-shaped heart.

'We are not just dealing with my, Dekobra Hotki's, interior world here' She said to move laterally. 'Someone else could have deduced:

Pig's snout speaking

Shots fired

Work

Ten jade gems. And these ten words are the pearls'.

"And Holukos is the swine." She checked the screen again. The man in question was being eyeballed by the Zombie. But there was something odd, a calculated withdrawal perhaps, in the way the confrontation was being played out. She concentrated & enlarged the picture. Was the Zombie giving Holukos a discrete sign, a direction, with her hand loosely hanging over the side of the sofa? And why was his wrecked face almost cracked into a benevolent smile or was that desire? Dekobra was overcome by a feeling of envy that began to blur & spread via jealousy into anger. "Conspiring out there under my nose. Who do they think they are? Contact. We'll see about that."

The lobster could escape.

Not with this knife inside it.

To make a character the bottom horizontal is always the last, closing stroke in squares or quadrilaterals. So there can be many strokes of the brush before the trap is sprung. The lobster could escape.

Horrified she kept her eyes on the glittering blade as it sliced the animal up.

Top strokes before bottom strokes

Left strokes before right strokes

Horizontal strokes before vertical strokes

But where the top horizontal stroke is connected with the right hand stroke & a left vertical stroke also forms part of the picture then it is usual to make the left hand vertical stroke first.

When she saw the thorax opened up Dekobra Hotki passed out; lips trembling, hair standing on end while the screen remained flickering with bands of blue & red diffused across the picture of a waterfall. It would have been possible for the Zombie to strip the analyst naked if she were quick & if she had enough patience to discover the order in which it was absolutely necessary to proceed to succeed in undressing her, before Dekobra's eyelids began to flutter; before the world took on its familiar shape for her again.

During her hallucinatory stupor the unresisting analyst had been embraced by a strange beast, a full-bodied woman with a rabbit's head who whispered 'sasakanana' repeatedly in her ear while touching erogenous parts of Dekobra's body in a specified methodical but totally mechanical manner without any result. And because, not surprisingly, this stimulation failed to arouse her prey sexually the voluptuous monster wrestled Dekobra down trying to bind her wrists & ankles with the embroidered meditation strap taken from around its knees. In the ensuing fight the analyst, while not moving, felt herself not only as heavy as lead but her flesh changing slightly at each imagined thrust as if other laborious fingers were modeling the fixed action in a plastercine counterpart. This help

aided her escape. She was transformed into someone so liquid, so fugitive, nothing could hold her. The last view she had from a backward glance in the vision was of the creature holding a strand of plaited golden hair in her right hand & pouring water, as black as ink, on it from a metal pot.

She came to naked in an empty room. Her clothes were neatly folded on a cupboard. She was cold & dry & ready.

On the screen Schlumper & his two companions sat quietly, beaming vacantly into thin air but the analyst didn't even glance at it.

When she opened the brown door & brightly called. "Next. Yes you Mr. Schlumper. How lovely to see you all. How are you?" It was effortless. Not a trace of control in her demeanour. Yet in those few seconds her eyes had thoroughly & aggressively raked the room.

* * *

Dmu-t'ag the rope, & the exquisitely beautiful silver Zombie & her equally delightfully endowed companion the model were such potent friends of Schlumper that Pollak, always standing on a scorpion, was ready to join forces with the Wolf if it meant she could torpedo the artist's plans. The Wolf, who was listening very carefully to this woman who reminded him of a spider, hadn't yet caught the thread of her plot or why she was clutching so tightly to his hand. At last she made her point. "The truth is . . . Wolf" He felt her hand growing heavier & heavier. "I love him more than they do."

"I thought you hated him." Said the Wolf agreeably but pluckily & determined to keep his eye on the end of the strand of wool; scared that the words Pollak spun might animate

the string & he then see it wriggling off while being anchored by the weight of her immense sorrow. And left lost with her.

Are you cold? (Or do you find me ugly?)

No.

But didn't you shiver?

No.

Involuntarily?

No.

I wouldn't mind if you had shivered. I understand.

Yes, but you change your mind a lot.

And you don't. I suppose?

I didn't shiver.

You did you liar. You did. You did.

The Wolf scratched an ear. Only the silly rabbit told lies in his book. What he, the Wolf, did was help out **now** & then. And Pollak wasn't going to get any help **this** time. But he always got it wrong. To the Wolf's eternal discomfort (because he knew it in his heart) you could still see his ears plainly sticking above the parapet of his illusory world even when he had taken himself in. And the door was always slammed shut.

"I have to go now. I'm expected."

"Rubbish." Snorted Pollak impetuously as if she was pronouncing him cured. "You are superfluous."

The Wolf cast about nervously, he had goosepimples; Pollak's web of disdain was sticky. "Nothing really gets finished off properly without me showing up." He tried to put a foot on the string surreptitiously. His flesh was creeping. Pollak watched him grimly. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Your specialism."

"Impenetrable disguise." Suggested the Wolf blatantly hoping above hope so openly it was thin, no, as Pollak would be insulted by that word, use transparent. "Or a transparent ploy with a motive so easy to uncover it's laughable, that you want executing so badly it cannot be serious but is? I'm your candidate."

"I thought you were in a hurry to get somewhere." Pollak jeered.

"I'm versatile." Said the Wolf & looking shame-faced mumbled. "And ready."

'For the bin', Pollak shook her head to empty out the thought. "I've got a lucrative job for me for you to do. Just your number - six six six."

"Spot on. How did you know?" Said the Wolf.

Pollak, ignoring him began to talk in a garbled code. "You will work from a note no: 1 at about page 307 in the gold mine of the 20th century viz. 'F W.' Listen. She read it out:

'Jests and the Beastalk with a little rude hiding rod'

It was a major clue. I knew at once I must seek you out, Wolf, to do the dirty work."

"Repressed into a synopsis. I suppose?"

"And put things in order once & for all."

"Who do you want me to shoot? Just for fun, I know." Asked an inquisitive Wolf putting his foot forward in it (not the best one on the wool) ready. This riposte with its speed of

understanding & nonchalance of delivery, & the way he ignored the all, angered Pollak who felt deep down to be a part of them; she suspected someone bulky of tampering.

“Shoot! It’s not a job to be sniffed at; not quite as simple as that. And it won’t be as easy as writing a few letters requesting this & that & the other ones when she’d done with them. We must brush out our tracks.”

“Who’s doing that?” Wolf had a sneaking feeling it could be him. His letter writing skills being minimal.

“Who do you think? The Artist. Don’t you listen? Do you always have to bunch up like fives? Can’t you follow a simple line of attack?” Pollak was inflamed (the wrong way as we have seen) by his sudden positive allegiance. It was inconvenient for her not to be able to turn nasty on someone on whom she was meaningfully dependent.

“Didn’t you just cross out simple & easy?” Asked the Wolf alarmed at how complicated it was getting & afraid Pollak might explode with the strain of keeping her foot on her feelings.

“Who is standing in the way (of my love, wishes & the rest being required)? What do I want torn to pieces?” The list was getting longer as she stood but the Wolf, shuffling his feet to avoid her dreadful feelings, didn’t know that, yet he felt decidedly uncomfortable as he wished Pollak to be looking the other way. “I’m not a good guesser.”

“I’ll soon knock you ship-shape.” Said Pollak (taking her pick – yawl, sloop, frigate, **tub**)

“First I’m going to test you in case you’re caught & interrogated by the analyst. She wanted to say tormented. I want to know if you’ll crack under torture. Here goes. Where was it?”

“What?”

“The quote.”

“About half way through.”

“What?”

“THE book.”

“What book?”

“Tricky.”

“Is it the book that fell open at a certain page?”

“What else. One fell swoop. I get the picture.”

“No you don’t that’s on the banknote – it’s mine.”

“Is it my turn now?” The Wolf pointed at his own chest.

“How did you get that far & stay sane?” Pollak knew that was below the plimsol line & so a goofy look was tagged onto it with a snigger.

“I skipped the first half & didn’t read the second half.”

“You **are** cunning.”

“Goes with the name, I think.”

“No. That’s a different animal.”

“Sorry. I rather hoped I fell into that category.”

“You must be surer than that about who you are if you are to convince cunning Dekobra Hotki you’re innocent – smile – let me see it. Mmm not bad, horrendous breath as well.”

The fact that Pollak found it admirable was no big deal for the Wolf, who said so.

“Insubordination - very good. An improvement. You’re just about ready for the field of action.”

“And that is?” The Wolf envisaged a dark wood called Tooting teeming with cowardly but unkerbed prey & easy women & gave Pollak one of his special understanding smiles again.

Pollak scribbled down the address of the analyst’s consulting rooms. “You must be at this place every time my friend, Schlumper, the artist, goes for ‘treatment’. You must help him survive her grilling & come through the ordeal unscathed no matter what the cost to you. I’m talking here psychologically I know you’ve got moths in your pocket”

“Help him?” Puzzled at her apparent change of heart the Wolf read the note. “This place is in the middle of the city. I’m a bit out of my depth there. I’ll be up to my neck in people. I’m going to have to lay out a lot on . . .”

“Plane tree branches.” Snapped Pollak. “So you can follow his movements. Use your head.” Pollak sighed what was the use. “No. Keep your head down. Lurk in the shadows & only pop up when the time is ripe.”

“I knew you would throw in a lot of extra work. Gardening. How am I going to keep close watch on . . .” And the Wolf faltered, he had never realized before but there it was in black & white.

“Is that all.” Demanded Pollak, who could, if she had followed the Wolf line of thinking closely have been doubly demented by now. Now it was obvious to both of them that this venture was certain to end in failure. That at least was somewhere positive to start.

“How will I recognize him?”

“He usually wears a badge.”

“Isn’t that unusual?”

Pollak fished out two old postcards issued by the Austrian Empire Army during the Great War. One of a bearded man; one clean-shaven.

“If he’s got a beard – that’s him. If not he’s this one.”

“Good.” Said the Wolf with a newly acquired professional air. “Now we are getting serious.” He studied the pictures. He knew both men. He knew they were the same man.

What was Pollak up to? He tucked them into his pocket.

“Also, I have been informed that on the back of a fragment of the Diamond Sutra is the picture of the man I am seeking. It’s the only one in existence. But I don’t know where it is.”

“Good.” Repeated the Wolf. “That should take a lifetime.”

Confronting a NOBBLE of Witnesses.

When the artist woke up it was crystal clear from the dream he had just escaped out of that in the legend of *little red riding hood* the Wolf had been given a raw deal. And as there may have been two wolves embroiled Schlumper was determined to explain why they were innocent to the analyst in the session that day.

Not that he wanted to let either of the shysters off the hook, but feeling strangely compromised by their falling into disgrace in his dream . . . unfair or not . . . he groped for the compassionate formula to clear them as a poet notes down lists of rhyming words before composing the line; irrational as it was to subordinate the evidence of so many

witnesses to his own imagination he was sure the analyst would understand or explain why he needed to do it.

‘Wolf was never far from it’ the model’s words rang in his ears. As did the Zombie’s puzzled query. ‘Is that Groddek’s it’?

If it was it was good bait.

Sometimes the place seemed to spin under the direction of the model, whipping up their emotions, like a top. And topple over when the whip was taken off it in a last chaotic figure before it came to rest, out of sight, in the most inaccessible spot.

‘Concluded elsewhere.’ Was the enigmatic way the Zombie had put it once. In this communal space which Schlumper assigned randomly as ‘below’ & then only just, where everything that could be breached was, he put down his pencil which the Zombie picked up & proceeded to ‘correct’ his drawing. The model sprawled with a scowl curious to see the artist’s reaction. He ate his toast & drank the morning coffee looking on relaxed as the Zombie smudged his work into oblivion. Refreshed Schlumper grimaced at the chaos, sighed & tore the paper to pieces putting them in a large cardboard box labeled ‘snow’.

And then all three headed for the city & Dekobra Hotki’s office. It was time for the artist’s ‘hour’ although he hadn’t managed to get fifteen minutes so far. ‘She is very hot on punctuation.’ The Wolf remarked pretending a credulous expertise every time she closed the brown door behind them & they left a little more bedraggled & forlorn.

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Rashly, Little Red Cap’s adventure’s fake dénouement was documented in stilted sepia albumen photographs at least three times by ‘Peach’ in the 1850’s so Schlumper had got

some evidence to go on. That there had been many attempts to whitewash the heroine even to the extent of inventing several make-believe clues & bringing in false witnesses was obvious. But making out she was mad or unco-ordinated was to no avail. She always came out pink. It is impossible to paint out Red . . . it always bleeds through. Schlumper showed the varnished prints to the analyst.

She's the spitting image of Pollak.

Where were the flowers?

She doesn't look like a child.

That's his slant on it.

Also it was Pollak's favorite story that she was more than happy to mutilate with reversals & omissions so he knew it was fertile ground in which an inopportune slip of the tongue 'don't enjoy yourself in the wood' could sprout rumour that became the undeniable truth of a deed no one was capable of in real life.

Unless they were a monster.

For a start she always had Red Cap on top shouting for more. Knowing that was a certain way of getting the best out of her audience (monster males).

As it's the first time Red has ventured this far sexually why would Pollak want to vilify the man for doing his stuff when she came his way with her proposition? It was right up her street.

"I want to redeem him." Schlumper said hoping to explain away with a lame excuse something clandestine that he guessed troubled the analyst although she hadn't

mentioned it. Anyway he thought she expected some disguised content & while normally he left it to the Wolf to supply the authentic aside at the moment the Wolf was indisposed.

“Rather in the way a bird will fake a broken wing to lure a predator away from its nest?”

“I’ve never seen that.”

“Oh. Something like that with three stages?”

She’d heard about Pollak’s childishness before. And so cancelled the word ‘waterfall’ out in her notebook.

Crystal clear?

Who was taking advantage of whom? Most of the crowd busy ticking the boxes of psychological data are going to say we all know he was led on. The impact of her sexuality being too potent to resist. She took a lot of time choosing her outfit for a start. And checked it in the mirror. Then again with her mother. So **she** knew what was going on.

Re-modeling she called it intuitively avoiding a scurrilous description.

Hanging about picking flowers. I suppose there she was showing off. Making out how easy she found it was to pull herself back together again nicely after the disastrous alienation.

I missed that. But now I see it had happened before.

And didn’t she imply he could help himself.

When? I didn’t get that.

Why should you have to be able to get it for it to have been apparent? You thought for years **they** were playing.

I miss that. What a mess there'd have been if the report was accurate. Did 'Peach' take a photo of that?

No need with your photographic memory.

There was a mess.

Nobody could have cleaned that up except a specialist firm of censors. What with a mattress soaked in thick menstrual blood splashed everywhere turning brown. And note the ambiguous language to fool him when he was on the roof.

Come down seems reasonable. But were they whispering as well? That may have added fuel to the fire.

Any emotional difficulty & straight away these borderline cases hop up onto the roof.

Craning their necks to try & get a better view of the world. Some hopes. What fire?

It's true some people claim there is another 'view' of a painting as if you or the picture could twist round somehow & show up some hidden aspect.

Another depth from the rooftop?

A second invisible shot at the surface problem.

Well that avoids the nasty problem of visible content.

Yes that's usually a tricky part.

I've seen you twisting about in front of some pictures as if you'd got the problem.

They even make out there is something actually behind the painting. If the canvas wasn't there. No. That can't be right . . . if you pretend it opens up, revealingly . . . & what it really is, is there before your . . . No that can't be right.

They imagine there is someone behind the painting. If it opens up like a door? Who? A querulous shadow? It can't be Whatnot's husband catching Nitwit lingering over a bush stroke or something more meaty than that (meatier) . . . a momentous event?

“Something that caused millions pain & still does concealed behind two areas of flat colour . . . Are they specific colours . . . Black & white for instance?” The analyst wondered aloud. “Surely as long as it is possible for the transubstantiation of the paint to take place (preferably in the body of the connoisseur) why worry? And just look what you want to do with that ‘r’”.

That sounds like Izo Narkompros, the grandiose schemer who couldn't sew a button on (or work out how to do it).

Or worse something incoherent & doctrinaire waiting to be wrung out.

Between it & the wall? The stretcher. Air. I give in. The fact it can be argued against with words says something.

“Not worth the paint to paint it out?”

No. More mysterious than that. Another image (being closely tagged by idea).

The painting to end all painting (I see it was declared dead in 1922 again) illustrated in a catalogue with a nice catching original water-colour by the artist's hand.

Claptrap. Can this only happen with a non-figurative painting? What a brilliant way of enlivening a banal slab of pigment & the artist doesn't have to work at it; with a bit of verbiage the connoisseurs can do that for him & everyone else. And you can't help noticing the similarity between this notion The same feeble line of thinking taken by the

die-hard right-wing analysts that abstract paintings were coded maps of military installations.

Procreation equals total annihilation. Where did I read that?

On the wall at the back of a picture. Only if this kind of picture has hung there obviously.

Otherwise you just get the blank wall. Otherwise every wall would be blanketed with screaming messages.

‘So ambitious but not equipped to wind up a clock. Why?’ The analyst shook her head, smiled, reached out & put her hand on the shiny black handbag she had placed on the coffee table between them. She had to make sure it was shut. The clasp clicked. Her notebook was propped against it. She took it up.

* * *

When Red first started to bleed she was overcome by this overwhelming desire for sex.

By the way, is that the overwhelming urge which makes Pollak feel vulnerable? She had just filled in her questionnaire for the M & B test (93 boxes to tick or cross) To find out what type would suit her down to the (fertile) ground. And hopefully get fixed up. It had taken lots of fabrication & the withholding of most of the facts.

She sent it off? That’s a breakthrough.

So **it** could have made her hopeful? (The **it** was emphasized for the sake of the Zombie who often takes it upon herself to check these statements).

The truth is Wolf was aghast to see his member covered in blood & thought (still believes despite the fondling he has given it regularly since) he had done himself, never mind Pollak, grave damage. Which he had for she was no where near satisfied.

Was there a hope slotted in there for both of them as well?

I don't know. They must have realized something was up but the only accounts I have are one-sided & sketchy.

We got up to that fact & over it before I was ready. Can you explain why we are concerned with Pollak, nobody else is.

'Peach' said that it had taken three years practise in expression specifically for the art of photography by the principal model before a satisfactory picture was taken.

What was he doing with her all that time?

What do you think! What were **they** doing.

So the basket fell out of her hand with boredom not fear. Luckily the Wolf was stuffed.

That's my point. He was stuffed from the word go. And Red dropped the basket.

I didn't get the idea it was a race.

She was in a hurry. Believe me.

To get the right feel the photographer was probably using 'strolling players' I'd have thought they knew their stuff. They'd be used to standing around while 'Peach' made his composition up.

He could have tilted the composition relative to the frame-up to give (so say the psychologists don't take my word for it) excitement.

He took his time, he knew his stuff & used every dodge & trick. Five negatives sometimes for one photo. 3x5 Fifteen years. The Wolf would have gone grey in that time.

Luckily . . . she didn't get pregnant . . . & go pear-shaped.

That would have been better & could have tipped the balance. Nothing would have heightened the life in that pose more than an actual change of shape.

Yes. But he was called 'Peach'.

To get the front & the back in I expect. Just like those critics claiming great thoughts dancing behind the fairly plain traditionally thinly painted non-figurative canvas.

Are you saying that there is someone repressed behind the canvas being inferred by external clues? Bulges, humps & that sort of thing?

No. He went for the pyramidal structures.

From the Egyptians? Acrobats of the Apocalypse?

No. Wilkie's painting.

Shouldn't 'Peach' be in with the connoisseurs?

Passions are invisible we mustn't condemn him on those.

I could put him in with them on the toe of a boot. Anger – perfectly visible either as a smile or a red face i.e. ambiguous.

"You made such a mess of that name 'Peach' it's difficult to read it. Looks like you've written death." Sakini handed back the rough transcript to the artist. "Takes some doing that."

That's what you get writing 'free-hand'.

Two slips are incredibly easy; it's keeping it down to one which takes skill & concentration.

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Patiently Schlumper recounted the day's events especially the analyst's bewildering lack of reaction to his narrow escape. He explained to Sakini that the legend had its roots in a transaction which took place in one of the Kingdoms along the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. In a village called Spondon (that can be translated as a shingle bank in a river by a hill) a man sold his half sister to a neighbour.

Or did he?

The deal was mooted.

Sakini thought 'I believe the dispute is still rumbling on.' And asked a few questions.

Should the butcher have stepped in? Was she handed over or did she jump at the chance?

What else was 'given'? She persisted. Didn't Red get a hint of what was cooking? Or was she playing along – seeing as how she was going to get what she was after.

I'm not sure but she was in a phase of drawing snakes a lot. That might be a clue.

They are easy to draw.

There was more to it than that . . .

What! Did she have a snake fetish while we're all scared of them? That could come in handy; snakes are very good, versatile props. Taking your eye they look so fetching wrapped around the body you can forget who you're looking at. Remind me to check that book I saw the model & the Zombie looking at.

Why?

The way it fanned out could be a reference to the snake god Sesha.

Let me know if it's a lead Anguine. Anyway they were told to leave, hold their meeting somewhere else but wouldn't. Pollak has got an obstinate streak. They wouldn't be pushed about anymore.

That's why the facts were never established; everyone had a lot to say but it was always about themselves. Red was rarely mentioned.

Tabboo I expect.

Red thought it odd the door was open when she got to her destination, thinking it was a closed session, in camera. We won't say where that was.

It was the artist's studio.

She said she was feeling strange & wondered about that too. The bare room seemed strange. Now where was she really?

Why?

No one turned up except Schneider acting about as if he'd flowed down the gutter was the way she put it.

Did you know Red met with the fierce Wolf a second time? She was probably bleeding by then. Did she mention it?

Was it the same one or are there two?

My guess is the Wolf snuffed the boiling sausage water & suspected Red was holding out on him.

That made him mad?

No he had been mad for ages.

It got her into hot water.

Does that stale sausage water remind you of something?

I got the connection with urine straight away. What I couldn't figure was why the Wolf was attracted to it. He was quite fastidious, you know, 'pick those flowers' 'walk nicely' all that stuff.

Yes. He was stuffed.

You keep saying that. Oh. I see. He was a sausage. Does that help?

Not really but you can keep it in mind.

I get it. It's a throwaway ploy, the water, a red herring. This story about the Wolf is all made up except the bit about him being a dummy. He was set up to throw everyone of the scent (of fresh meat).

Dummy is the telltale signature, the giveaway remark. Who was behind it moving the springs?

He was a hybrid of their imagination. An eight-legged beast when they finally got together.

So that's why the analyst picked up on the word ogdoad.

I've got to say anyone would.

How did they make out with all those legs?

You've got to be kidding. They only made out in fantasy, didn't they?

Look what happened.

Some were murdered. Some got off scot free.

What is that?

Didn't have to pay & wasn't injured.

Red!

Correct.

So you're saying she led him on into a trap & he was caught red-handed on the job.

Not quite that. She was set up as well.

She wasn't that dead between the . . .

Eyes. Legs. No. I made the mistake of trying to keep it all neat. Things, & such desires she was capable of did overlap & got in each other's way. So at some stage there could have been eight limbs waving & writhing all over the place.

That story badly needed something untouchable in it. Something like a winged horse.

But that would have brought in so many other complications needing explanations to make it half believable the structure would have been even more untidy. And overloaded.

The horse could have carried a messenger. I'll give you that.

A war story with a message goes down well as long as it's palatable with only a sprinkling of dirty words.

That horse did spring from the blood of a monster. If it had appeared no one would have thought twice about it. As long, as you say, the message was innocuous. But those sorts of tidings would have been impossible to take seriously unless an innuendo could have been insinuated.

It couldn't be anything else.

Right . . . inseparable.

What horse? Red would. It would have stolen her fire.

Is that why there was no mention of that bird the infamous woodpecker tapping as she strolled through the wood?

I don't think a particular bird would have caused her as much concern; it could have just been there singing with the rest instead of heralding an ominous & slipshod trace of hatred..

She would have noticed & she did twist this way & that not wanting to come out with it until she could make the story sound as though she was completely innocent. To get the right light shining on it; making such an effort it was obvious she'd been cornered.

The light that illuminates everything except the one thing you want to see exposed?

She was almost indifferent whether anything was made clear or not. Yet several things protrude awkwardly out of the fabrication when you take a good look at it. The bottle of wine has always jarred. Makes you wonder if they were planted.

To disturb you.

That explains 'What big eyes you have' she was saying what are you doing Wolf poking your nose in here at this time when we had already come to an arrangement you know I'm expecting to meet . . . a new friend . . . for some fun. And it explains 'What a big mouth you've got' now she knew he'd spill the beans unless . . .

That's right . . . unless you're prepared to really sweeten my life up a little.

A lot.

Yes a lot. She had been holding back. And he suspected this time with her new friend she would go all the way.

Which she was going to because by then it meant nothing to her.

I'm astonished to hear that. How did the change of heart happen so quickly?

Oh it can. A word. A look. Let alone a promise. And more intimate physical contact would give her the opportunity she was looking for to close down Wolf's persistent marauding. Take his mind off the job at hand. She didn't know this would really upset one or two people. Nearly everybody, in fact.

Close Wolf down. I get it 'What big hands you have' was their code because he was groping her regularly. But that's as far as he got. So when they met earlier in the wood Wolf said he'd go along with what Red was after but didn't grope her? And that made her mad?

That made her suspicious.

Why did he skip the detail? Was it to leave a blank as if nothing was happening, eluding observation, although everyone suspected there was, & this way get them excited by their own thoughts.

He was in league with her mother. That's my guess. Someone. But he hadn't been told all the ins & outs of the plan Red had devised. The precise detail would have put him off.

She knew he'd be sniffing around & intended to take him all the way for that was what she needed. Because now she'd got an inkling that her mother was more than just interested. And, as well, her mother had to get Red to keep an eye on Granny who she suspected of having one or two beaus in tow who might be more interested in the family silver than she was aware.

And he was double-crossing them as well, while still in the dark?

Seems likely. One of them. But while he was putting it over I'm not sure he was aware there was more than one person involved. Wolf admitted he was getting his information from a secondary source who later was proved to be a liar. At the time, these falsehoods he was fed were taken as gospel.

Funny that. Being the odd man out yet welcoming the chance to play false when requested by someone who he didn't trust. Who was being peddled a string of half-truths at best from which he or she selected prime cuts not knowing they were rotten to the core (that was thrown in for the psychologist's dog). Couldn't be the butcher, could it? Perhaps he was cleverer than was told?

Was she made to spy? Beaten by her mother?

Hush! No! That was Becket.

I thought he was stabbed.

He was.

So he didn't make it to this story.

* * *

On the analyst's notepad there were five stick figures drawn & she had started another one but crossed it out which gave her a stick creature with a big X jaw to consider.

X cert.

Dekobra thought a brief intervention might focus the session: We are trying to find the vital piece that has been deliberately left out or taken out. The picture has been drawn with perfect objectivity, with just a few selected marks on it, but enough information to set us up with an identity. Yet I'm beginning to think it could be a plain piece from a large

monotonous all over area of a nondescript, all the same to you, grey dusty tone (of a Ganzfeld). Packed with precise detail, more than enough, much more; so that it abolishes everything into an unfamiliar surface which we cannot penetrate. Now what?

Not an edge in it?

Probably not.

Are you scrutinizing it properly?

Probably not.

Are you sure it's not a waterfall?

Only a rude resemblance if at all.

Produced by compass & ruler decisions?

Probably . . . not.

I'd been led to believe Wolf's attack was unexpected & hostile, now it seems everyone colluded with Red to cover up a sexual adventure, pre-arranged & long awaited. The Wolf was well known around those parts. Almost a fixture.

Yes a credible action to defend themselves against illusion.

Whose?

Whose what?

Illusion.

Anyone taking time out to follow this . . . Anguine Sakini most likely. She had Pollak in her sights all right.

But Pollak was capable of infatuation, no more.

Like Red.

Correct.

But she wasn't a dangerous rival or are you suggesting . . .

Sometimes our own flesh gives us strange ideas.

Not to mention someone else's succulent flesh.

Red was all skin & bone.

So was Pollak.

Makes you wonder what the Wolf saw in her.

Yes. I, too, thought you should have followed up whether the action was credible. You still could.

I might get lost in all the rapid changes. (Pronounced vapid).

You have to guard against that. Didn't you notice the Wolf had a ball of wool – ideal in these circumstances when you may have to retrace your steps.

I noticed he didn't have a clue what he was up to. That ball of wool could have been his brain.

At least (if it had been) he could keep an eye on it as it unraveled.

It would have become cold though, strung thin throughout the maze. And given him icy thoughts.

Now I'm really puzzled. Who wasn't playing around?

For a start you'll have to discard the rational time sequences & everything else you've been led to believe & are docilely following. Red & the Wolf had met plenty of times at the edge of the wood. It was their regular place to date. And remember the space they

were moving about in was pretty flimsy. Shadows, half-light . . . scarcely any boundaries to speak of.

So that look of pained surprise was phony?

Completely.

One false step . . .

Not just one false step, one finger in the wrong hole & bang you've run out of perspective splattered flat on the page in a cold sweat when you had been tucked up warm in a pleasant dream where 'meanwhile' was also absentmindedly but carefully stated in revolving multibodied sequences with every last desire duplicated for your delectation.

So it's not strange that as the violent incident unfolded Red became increasingly disenchanted.

"It sounds like you're saying every chance encounter was an appointment." The analyst searched for a clue.

"Every meeting was an appointment."

"Oh." Said Dekobra.

Pollak, too, was revolted (& encircled) it had often happened to her but she didn't want to stand there & dumbly take it this time because Big spread Time metamorphosised into Deep Space too quick for Pollak's liking & several people got jammed in with her (as above) who she didn't like that close & could kiss her arse for all she cared. Also, & this was the main barrier, Pollak couldn't take to them & join in the free for all, already having her eye on someone who, although he was proving difficult to seduce, she thought she had at last devised a strategy for ensnaring.

A bribe? Actually paying for it!

Why the incredulity? Millions have & millions will. No. She hoped there was enough collateral in the situation given her family connections to effect the pull.

A threat?

The miracle working bait on the hook was her mutilated body, literally done up a treat, partially naked, he was simple that way; so preying on his mind, with all the disturbing implications & artistic references naturally encountered by shuttling between genders this extravagant image would create (reveal) the complete man (or woman depending on which way the hormones swing it) & make him responsible (yes to her) sear the inner self he kept so deep & inaccessible even to himself. In sum show he couldn't go on denying his true feeling for her & burn away the mist before his eyes (Blah blah) etc.

So. How did you manage to stay uninvolved? If I'm not mistaken didn't Wolf dress up in women's clothes?

You're wrong if you think he was more than a cross-dresser; they are usually drawn to it.

The make-up turned Red on that's why he did it.

Impossible to make a snap judgement whether he could get away with it. Then again he was too hairy to fool anyone & electrolysis on that scale would have cost a fortune. And he didn't walk very well; slouched in fact, so would have been horrible to dance with.

* * *

The analyst's eyelids barely flickered as they drooped. She sucked her pencil absently.

The room was swimming before her eyes. "The effect is disturbing coupled with all the

other symptoms.” She declared pulling herself together. “Did they go swimming together?”

Schlumper looked up in astonishment at the analyst. How did she know that? That fact had been suppressed & wasn't in any account he knew of, although it was true they had openly splashed about in the river on hot summer days. So did many other children.

‘She is struggling with rage basically. That is obvious from the photo. Is it significant?’

The analyst wrote as she wondered what her question could provoke. She cleared her throat to prompt the artist into action. He had chosen to tread this path today. Why the reticence now?

The bedroom was empty but the Wolf knew that cough meant trouble, someone was approaching the cottage (up the garden path & worse it sounded like a smoker's cough) so what else could he do but jump into bed tie a scarf round his head & hope to fool the visitor. When Red poked her head round the door he was relieved & grinned.

What the fuck are you doing in bed? You grinning idiot. Haven't you heard of foreplay?

She shouted throatily truculently throwing down the picnic basket. Or have you got toothache?

That was a flea in his ear.

Yes & that explains a few things. Listen. Wolf put his finger to his lips & opened his eyes wide indicating the door with little jerks of his head. Red took another drag on her cigarette & blew smoke straight at him. What are you doing? She spluttered waving a palm through the blue haze. What the fuck are you trying to pull.

Nothing. Said the Wolf looking sheepish.

He could do that. Hey!

A lone Wolf has to be very versatile.

This one certainly was & the other one you mentioned as well did he qualify for being called 'lone'?

They all did. (*Mon pauvre loup & mon autre loup* is what a friend of Red's mother called those darlings in the original). Hey. What have you got on? Where did you pinch those?

Red asked accusing him, but she was grinning now. From my clothes line? And walloped him across the chops. Wolf ruefully rubbed Red as she fingered his lips. Thereupon instantaneously Red's wish which was pretty bloody complicated came true.

Had she taken her cape off?

I suppose so.

Accuracy counts.

That the padding rings true don't mean you can believe everything else. I realize the scarlet cape was supposed to protect Red from being penetrated (it being impregnated with protective properties) but she was inclined to toss it off at the drop of a hat so it never had a chance to prove itself. The plain, descriptive bits & pieces, such as she did peg her lingerie out with the rest of her clothes, might be the only substantial part of the tale. The rest could be lies.

Hah! We don't know if she was taken because she was vulnerable having taken off the cape or because she wanted to be & could have kept the damn thing on . . . do we? It could all be a sleight of hands . . . & other body parts . . . Interwoven so cunningly they have fooled me?

Exactly. By now Red had taken everything off including the falsies she had been advised to wear by the fanzine (Fannie) she subscribed to, having gladly swallowed the fallacies it promoted & ordered a set to give her chest the allure . . . get them pointing in the right direction . . .

Wait. I'm not sure the editors were wrong unless, of course, you are suggesting she would have been in with a better chance of seducing the Wolf toting a 'boyish' look – short hair – ears sticking out – straight up & down.

It's too late now they're off & there wasn't the hope in hell of a long drawn out seduction at this stage. The artist knew they were old hands at it. And he was in bed trying to struggle surreptitiously out of the stuff he had pinched without loosing the covers & Red, who had stripped in a trice, was tugging this way & that riding down on him shouting for more. Well at that point, any.

Wolf wasn't concentrating?

On what?

On Red.

Quite why he was twisted over nearly falling out of the bed having seen the falsies pop out of the bra cups, I don't know.

Being quite taken with them?

He must have had a hare-brained idea pinching those.

Never had any effect to speak of.

So in the scrabbling around managed to flip the pair secretly into his trouser pocket (they were lying on the floor – I knew you were bound to ask – he never folded them). This

squirming frustrated the jockey Red who thought he was playing either hard to get or finding it difficult to get hard & that did give her a pang of conscience because she was coming on strong & knew it was her role to play coy.

I expect her mother had told Red often enough not to give it away.

That wasn't in the story I read. I thought you were after accuracy. If you had been listening you would have guessed her mother had practically thrown her into the Wolf's arms. Providing her with provisions so she could stay out late with her beau.

So she must have been up to something. No good?

She never let on.

I thought you hinted that Red was ready to throw herself there anyway & the mother as well. I remember that distinctly.

I did. It was an embellishment. I like to tart a story up sometimes. The rest of it is gospel, believe me.

It could have been hurtful bolstering the parts I might fall for. So Red was flat chested?

But not scrawny? Don't tell me she was a beanpole.

No. That came later & has nothing to do with us.

Is there anything else you're holding back? I was expecting a bloodbath.

She was holding nothing back & this is a story about the young & the not so young having sex, not cannibalism.

There was a murder.

They didn't eat her.

Well you must have seen something in that dream to get you going. A cleverly intimated spot of bother passing as pleasant daily intercourse.

She liked it much more than that & I saw the past coming at me like an express train.

A 'namer'?

Giggleswick. What a past that conjures up. But we must stay out of that part of it.

You know what they say. That could be an integral piece of the jigsaw.

You're right I saw something to avoid.

Another thing to avoid.

What was the other one? Remind me.

Schlumper glanced sideways at the Wolf & nodded.

You found her indecent thus desirable; more exactly there was no modesty in Red's behavior – stripped off & saying 'What big hands you have' without the slightest blush.

And don't be fooled, plucking flowers sounds like a modest pastime, but what she did with them . . . to continue

Who or What in Hell's name have you brought in with you? A friend! And put those weeds on the bonfire. Her rude grandmother's disbelief was worryingly apparent in the way she gnashed her large false teeth (much worse than those gold crowns of Felice) which Red tried to pass off as a smile saying 'what big false teeth you have grandmother they looked better in the tumbler on the bedside table. And when the old lady fetched her a hefty wallop for the cheek shouting 'I'll knock your block off' Red covered that transgression saying 'what big hands you've got granny so keep your mitts to yourself' which really ruffled her up & you know how a person's eyes widen when they're mad &

seeing this Red shouted ‘what big eyes she’s got’ & pushed the Wolf out of the door & followed him in all haste while the old lady was dancing around ranting trying to find her chopper. (Incidentally in her rage booting the basket scattering the cake & wine all over the floor).

Close shave?

You could have shaved your chin with that axe (the old lady probably did) the woodcutter had honed a razor edge on it, all right. But they didn’t have time. All fired up Red & the Wolf threw themselves into the bushes to hide from the old lady’s boots & wrath. They heard a key in the lock – shut out – they were sunk.

Didn’t someone sink in that trough full of piss?

Not this Wolf. He made a few moves & Red, the dash & narrow squeak having made her randy, took advantage of the close cover & ordered the Wolf mount her right outside the old lady’s back door. She was naked, remember.

Making a show of it.

Making a lot of noise about it.

Hearing the set two, thinking it was the neighbour’s tom violating her pussy, granny came out with a bucket of cold water to throw over the dirty act, but mistakenly picking up the wrong one in her haste, she pitched a bucket full of piss over Red & the Wolf still hard at it.

They were pissed off.

No, the Wolf kept on the job. He knew Red would have made a scene if he had cut it short. She didn't like short cuts. That's what you could smell. (And we all know it's as good as mother's milk). And it didn't spoil the fun, their heat dried them out nicely.

Before the climax?

Ask the granny, she couldn't take her eyes off them. She was shouting 'Puss. Puss.' And making these strange gestures with her arms & particularly her fingers.

Pretending to be searching for her cat?

She'd found that.

What was the outcome?

Forgive my puzzled look but you are kidding you must know that . . . Don't you?

I'd have said it was perplexed. I know the theory about the final outcome – that leaden feeling of dying – death. But I was merely wondering about this particular event.

Granny locked herself in. To have a quiet think, but before the grey matter could warm up, aided by a shot of whiskey, there was someone knocking at the door in a high dudgeon.

How does that look?

Red faced.

Good job she didn't know it had been used for that.

Come & get it shouted the old lady.

No. Surely she could barely hear the blows on the door having locked herself in the w.c. to hit the bottle.

As it happens it made no difference, Dick Deadman, now in practice, smashed the door down with ease having just come freshly geed up from a botched job down the road.

Whoops said granny playfully with her knickers still round her ankles, but her face dropped as she saw the Wolf looking in questioningly over Dick's shoulder & then when she caught sight of that slut Red hanging back grinning she quickly changed her tune & threw the pot full of boiling sausages at them.

I gather she didn't get the scatological implication of that?

No, but there were plenty of experts around just waiting to explain, holding their noses breathing down her neck. What do you want now she snarled although they hadn't had anything before. Information Red cried so pull your clouts up. She was a bit of a forward hussy. Have you seen Schlumper, the artist, we've got a message for him from Sakini. I don't believe you said the old lady, why are you bringing all this up? Anguine has been dead for years. So what shouted Red some things are a long time coming.

Like the future.

If you like, yes, but **this** resurrection was different.

Now I know why you have been emphasizing the sausage. That is the shape of **this**.

Offal or cock, not both.

You can't have both?

*It's either **now** or **this**.*

A **THORN** of Archivists: transfixed (stung by an accusation of daydreaming for want of a better word) lost in thought before the diffuse spoor of a fading script; each from an unrelated & different dimension located the same place on the surface & saw . . . or could have seen . . .

Stains & blots on the old paper, of an unknown viscous semi-transparent substance, formed the clouds of euphoria through which Tamar Qush strode cock a hoop singing ‘The right way forward is the right way back.’ How could he fail to win this woman over when success was written in the vaguely star-shaped doodles.

Meaning roughly ‘iron bird hits target’ wrote Sakini in her notes as she studied the ancient manuscript. ‘What was the target?’ She wondered searching for another fragment to match the ragged edge where, presumably, the tantalizing answer had been torn off.

“Written in sand?” Did she hear it right? The Zombie hesitated to state the obvious for she now knew beyond doubt most of the people here (& here was large, extensive & all embracing) were mad. “They didn’t expect . . .”

“They did.” Exclaimed the model. It was either an affirmation or a question she wasn’t letting on which one.

“The photos from outer space will show one way or the other.” The artist felt sure but looked to the Zombie for reassurance.

“. . . to find only one or two ways. Did they?” The Zombie frowned, she had seen nothing & alternatives always spelled trouble.

Was a date a dangerous task; did Tamar expect trouble?

Not really although it was a new move. After initial qualms Tamar Qush now felt Yimkichor had been right to encourage him to take this step. ‘It will be a wonderful open meeting . . . of hearts,’ she had advised when urging him to go to see this unknown woman.

“What has viscera to do with a well-founded delirium?” The Zombie wondered. “Surely deep feelings are processed in the head.”

‘Hasn’t she ever heard of having your heart in your mouth.’ Sakini wondered matching two edges & gasping in disbelief ‘would they have done that to a woman just for that?’.

* * *

More to keep her eyes open than for later use the analyst wrote ‘oceanic’ followed by ‘insatiable gulf/abyss/pit/whirlpool’ & hesitated, unwilling to cross any of the options out. They could all fit the ever-broadening picture. Dekobra smiled up at Schlumper.

“The dream of the bumble bee incessantly bouncing off the window pane beside the open door was enchanting.” And she snapped shut her notebook on the words ‘terrifying/misdirected fecundity’?

Given the ambiguous signal the artist hesitated before leaving & then swept out ushering the petulant Wolf along with a finger to his lips having decided not to suggest ‘waterfall’.

It was however playing on his mind because ‘enchanting’ in no way described the subsequent damage to the bee & the difficulty of its repair.

* * *

Back under the bridge in the cool shadow Schlumper posted another picture-card in the red box set in the brickwork, almost black with tiny writing, it gave a cryptic outline of

the day before & a word for word account of his session, which was imperceptibly inaccurate but left nothing to hide. And entering the warren of passages linking his rooms the artist found that a large table had been dragged into his studio & on it Sakini had spread all her material & reference books, which was surprising given her secretive nature when the most he usually glimpsed was a half-opened book. Now it was both necessary & insignificant so didn't weigh down on her in the way it can with someone who has nothing left to hide.

Knowing that Turkic omen texts were written in runic, Sakini copied the signs – ‘Head in a spin’ noting it looked surprisingly like ‘Sex in the wheel’. And returned to the transparency inserting a second microfiche over it. Did this match the torn edge? A page in the Uighar script (derived from Sogdian) a letter from wife to husband who she told was worse than a pig. Why had Yimkichor included that one? Was she trying to co-opt her as an accomplice for an, as yet, secret task. The overall text was changed by the superimposition but still readable. Surprisingly part of it did fit. But why? This sign for the entrails of a carcass instead of wheel can't be right she insisted, but kept a copy. Why would a copulating couple be in or probably on a dead animal? Schlumper was the one to ask, she decided, if there were any references to this aspect of the fractured text he might know. She knew that 9th century Sogdian was read vertically, bottom to top; but in the 4th century it had been read horizontally, right to left & back to front; Lord knows there were plenty of reasons for a misreading in that. Had the change taken place by the time of this fragment; had there been an error in the dating? Would it, by some very strange coincidence, read both ways? Or worse, in the conservation; each sheet was a jigsaw

puzzle of extremely fragile wisps of material teased out of packets in which the flimsy texts had been screwed up. If two or three fragments had been misplaced . . . most unlikely . . . she curtailed the doubt.

Then Sakini had the unhappy thought: was one of the lovers dead? Is this a detail about necrophilia, she wondered, or murder. She tackled Schlumper who suggested the *Left handed Tantric Way* could be a clue. And were the couple at it in a graveyard? Just to cheer things up.

Over the other side of the bare space the model & her close friend were engaged in a debate. Falling out; as indeed had the man & wife of Yimkichor's fragment.

"You're excluded from following any discipline Miss Z. not being born from an egg (or moisture)." The model was adamant. She had been tipped off about the obscure regulation by Schneider who was hoping for a pay-off by stirring up this rivalry not suspecting what purpose he could be serving, thinking he had come across the information by chance. What he was waiting for he never could say but he was sure it was out there being concealed by a cunning woman.

"No! I was born by transformation. That still counts. I must be included on the registry of models." The model snatched the form back before the Zombie could enter her name.

"The paper work has to be in order. Are you Caucasian? No. Well then."

"Never mind Blumenbach's nomenclature, he couldn't tell the difference anyway.

Everyone knows I come as a gift. It's stamped on my papers."

"Being that in no way bypasses having to stick to the rule."

“Nonsense. As usual you have missed out ‘keep’ so I get onto the register by default.”

Declared the Zombie.

“That could have read ‘I accept you as a gift.’ For what? A carpet? In barter a nicely woven one was worth a useful piece of land.” Said Sakini taking a professional interest in the argument after examining the docket the Zombie had been waving because it looked several hundred years old, perhaps even over a thousand & yet was remarkably well preserved. “There were many uses for an able-bodied woman. They were frequently abducted if they weren’t married.”

“And bought back in a hurry, I think.” Said the Zombie. “When their true worth was established.”

“Where did you find that document? Zombie.” Sakini asked unable to suppress her interest any longer.”

“Find? What a funny query. It is mine. Like your birth certificate, I think.”

Sakini nodded, amazed but she didn’t show it as she took the thick paper up once more.

She couldn’t believe her luck.

“Do I care what you think! Huh. I wouldn’t go on that register if you were to beg me. The model wasn’t worth a candle nowhere near a carpet. Forget it.” Pollak, skulking in a corner with very little chance of being carried off, wished these two self-righteous beauties would get lost & didn’t hesitate to make it plain. Flouting their bodies unashamedly. Giving fuel to the wrong ideas that men had anyway. Making it difficult for . . . Pollak didn’t want to fit herself in there so tailed off keeping her eyes on the ground.

“Was that possible? Some sentient being given away like a sack of potatoes.” Intrigued the Zombie inserted herself beside Sakini & looked at the paper. The number three had been written in. “Are you writing these numbers in? It adds up to four.”

“The four can, in certain divinatory systems, be taken as a three.” Said Sakini. “So in this we’ll change it to a three. And with the odd joining the even we get the hermaphrodite figure (Uroboros – serpent biting its tail) the wheel of flesh on which I am beginning to think we must place all this.”

“Or a hybrid five.” Snorted Pollak. “If it fits.”

“No it can’t, can it, Anguine? It was an embrace, wasn’t it?”

“Stop squawking. I made it seven. How can I think?” The artist remonstrated not taking his eyes off the paper pinned on the wall, a finger lightly posed on it, in case the drawing might fold itself back into a jumble without constant attention & all the conscious effort be swamped. And then Schlumper shouted involuntarily as if the shapes he had been shepherding had transmuted into words & they had escaped from out of an unconscious cage, tumbling over his lips. “And you, Pollak, you’re a nine killer, a red-backed shrike storing insects, for later meals, on thorns. Including that bumble-bee in my dream. If you don’t care you’re out – look at you dripping blood all over the place.”

Pollak hurried off cheeks burning, Schlumper could always be counted on to dig up an embarrassing observation. She hadn’t realized she was bleeding. And how did he know? He never looked at her.

Sakini continued studying the mutilated texts Yimkichor Qush had delivered to her as promised but was disturbed by Schlumper’s unusual outburst & how swiftly Pollak had

fled. 'Honte sangsuelle' she said to herself & carried on with her task. One text had been inscribed on a little wooden shelf that slotted into its own case. The top of this lid, around the clay seal, also had a brief outline of what the more detailed text inside contained; but in this instance they didn't match. There had been a deliberate attempt in underplaying the value of the contents to deceive any casual browser & stop them delving further. Now, if she could make a head & tail of it, this could be crucial. Sakini was wary. This lead itself could be the way down a false alley. She checked the fit; a perfect match. Baffled, as she reflected the words Schlumper had blurted out came back & why had she immediately thought 'honte sangsuelle' she must check that; the first shame; the second was a neologism of blood & sensual. She shook her head & picked up the inscribed board. It was a legal document about the sale of a half sister to a neighbour that was witnessed by a group assembled for the occasion. Two thousand five hundred muras was the price paid. The very same price as for the water rights from a pool. How many Tibetan tankas in that, Sakini wondered, the currencies were bound to be interchangeable for they were used when barter failed. On the lid it merely gave a list of animals sold for slaughter – so perhaps the neighbour was a butcher. But Sakini remembered that according to other documents meat was very scarce, it was so scarce poems were written about having it to eat. The pleasure of meat equaling, well exceeding, sleeping with your neighbours youngest wife; given what that might cost if discovered. And, to sew the matter up, one sixteenth of a piece of meat (that in itself a puzzle but probably the carcass of a sheep or a pig) was worth in the poetical mind hundreds of jars of oil. What price an aluminium pot full of blood for sausage making, Sakini wondered wishing to put a

number on it. So was that woman's husband worth less than a pig? What was Yimkichor driving at? Why did I remember a made-up word? They could have simply needed blood.

Yes it was in the poetic tradition but she, Sakini wasn't a poet. Back to work.

"Perhaps they had planned a feast & the meat was for that." Sakini said staring intently through the skylight. Schlumper looked at her but said nothing.

And there had been, Sakini carefully smoothed the leather document, an interesting reference to the price paid in the Lombardian currency, 900solidi, for breaking open a grave. It was the same year & same place – what were the coins doing so far east?

Raiders probably came up through Asia Minor looking for booty, especially women who they prized. Here it specifically mentioned a fine of three solidi against a fighter named W for causing the miscarriage of a female slave. (Note: in 749 two horses fetched about fifty solidi). He must have been careful to keep his hands off any free woman because rape carried a fine of nine hundred solidi, & at four grammes of gold each that was exceptionally steep.

"Half a house cost nine or ten solidi - - - so at nine hundred virginity was highly prized."

Sakini said out loud. "As, at the same price, was the undisturbed rest of the dead."

Schlumper looked at her again. "Is two plus two making four yet, Anguine? Isn't the date we are concerned with 737 AD?" (That was easy to prove; it was the first year of the Great King of Kings of Khotan, Kisya Shiya). "Those numbers look interesting." Sakini replied pleased to have something to get her teeth into & dismiss the troubling association Yimkichor had caused by the inclusion of items seemingly unconnected with the search

which, coupled with the two words thrown up by the artist's outburst were beginning to form a secondary but interesting item. An open wound still bleeding.

"No human would sell its sister, would they? Only a machine would do that. Or was it the beginning of a cull?" The Zombie tried to make it out. "What is a Half sister?"

"They share some identical genetic material."

"So do you all." The Zombie was still bewildered but left it at that.

"What's new. Leave them to it." The model suspiciously eyed the artist & Sakini bent over the scroll. "They are giving us some space."

"To continue - Seven – cutting without a knife (Laser)

Three – being without a centre (Zombie)." Sakini supplied the possible solutions firstly from the Zen numerology & looked pensive; there were other explanations. Schlumper scratched an ear. "Does that mean there are two of them?" He pointed a thumb over his shoulder at the Zombie.

"737. Two sevens." Sakini repeated impatiently. "Do you remember anything special about that Buddhist shrine you visited?" She wanted his first impression.

"There was a tremendous waterfall, about an hour after any rain, over the cliff in which the shrine was carved."

The place Miran where the Lop desert runs into the mountains had a river, the Lo, once rushing full of water, both city & stream have disappeared under the shingle.

"Did you see it?"

"I was trapped inside the shrine until the storm abated & I was able to slip out one side."

"Is that all?"

“There probably was more but it would take a poet to describe the change in the light.”

Sakini shifted her gaze. “Look at this. It is a contract for two workers, specifically able to labour unremittingly because of their stamina, written on silk dyed yellow. That’s why it is in such good condition (the Amur cork tree bark used to make the dye acts as an insecticide & water repellent).” She paused & pulled a face, then brightened up.

“Get to it, Anguine.” Schlumper murmured impressed. He didn’t know he was looking at a forgery.

“The short vertical strokes dividing the syllables of the name are finger seals. There is only one of the ‘beings without a centre’ on it. But the fragment is a forgery. That’s what is so interesting. Somebody was trying to legitimize the presence of two extra workers of extraordinary strength.”

“How do you know it’s a fake?”

“By that time silk was only used for important documents. It should have been on a palm leaf.” But she did have a doubt. Perhaps these two beings were so unusual they fell under the King’s prerogative, in which case silk would have been used.

“So there were two?” Schlumper noticed Sakini’s frown. “Are?” He corrected his slip; but still wondered why Sakini insisted on the present tense.

“We must assume that. On this other genuine piece there is a list of objects left behind, perhaps they were in a hurry:- A hammered mirror; a pair of red embroidered slippers used in religious services & one set of utensils, no number given. I’m surprised, very often a fictitious number say 99,999 would be chosen.”

“Why?”

“To tell you they were dead. They didn’t like to mention it. The improbable number was a formula like amen.”

“So they weren’t dead?”

Sakini frowned & nodded. The whimsical poem was coming back to her in flashes – ‘false sister – false human – false mortal.’ Why this should be happening she didn’t know.

“I suppose you would know!”

“There were three of them.” Sakini said quietly almost to herself. “Are you sure you were alone in the Buddhist cave?”

“I didn’t say that; although you often get lost in your own thoughts in those places & feel very much alone.”

“It would be helpful if you could remember who was there.”

“A young Jain pilgrim who shook my hand after looking at it very closely. I wouldn’t forget him he was wearing purple nail varnish.”

“I was hoping you’d take my question seriously.”

“I am, that was true; he also made sure I wasn’t holding anyone else’s hand with my spare one. I wasn’t. There were two other people in the shrine who after a cursory look around stood staring at the waterfall. It was magnificent. A solid curtain of constantly varying grey. Only very slight modulations but perfect. It was impossible to discover much about them as they were muffled up in robes. As these were exquisite I took them to be women.”

“Were they with the Jain?”

“Some hopes. He was afraid of the touch of their silk scarves never mind a hand.”

Sakini nodded agreement. "She could hold the answers."

Sakini stared over at the Zombie who was studying a set of instructions for interpreting body tremors printed on thin leaves of wood, which opened out like a fan. She was holding the model's wrist as she read.

"You're right. I do feel a bit shaky today. What does that mean?" The model played along.

"It depends where you are shaking. If you always shake where you are shaking it means nothing . . . usually . . . but in conjunction with another shaking or a twitch somewhere where you do not normally . . ."

"Shake." Said the model. "It means. What?" She insolently stared full on at her friend.

"Do we have to take the fluttering eyelids into account?" Asked the Zombie unabashed by the stare. "Or should we dismiss them as a reflex?" The model widened her eyes keeping her lashes still. Her eyebrows rose.

"The rising eyebrow is definitely interpretable, especially if only one is raised. But you rose two so that is discounted for the moment unless the toes were in movement. Were they?" The model kicked off her red shoes.

"They are my shoes." Exclaimed the Zombie. "The omen book is very accurate. It states that two raised eyebrows are a sure sign of a thief." She slipped her feet into the shoes.

"Now you can lower your eyebrows."

"They are pencilled that way, permanently, I like the curve." The model leaned an elbow on the table to accentuate the various recommended curves. It was totally lost on the

Zombie who asked. “Is that another tremor in the chest region?” And she flicked the fan wide to search for the reading. But the model closed the leaves together. “Save it.”

She waved at Schlumper who although he was looking in their direction was lost in thought. Sakini waved back & pulled a face indicating with a finger that the artist had lost it. But she was taken by the delicate red shoes.

“Now that I must look up.” Exclaimed the Zombie. “What is meant by a day-dreaming figure indicated by a strange finger sign & a grimace mmm.”

“Any tremors needed?” The model stood up. “Because I’m full of them.”

“The keeper, with that sign, indicates there is no foul play. Good. The other possibilities are – because the participants are at a distance the necessity of secrecy being paramount it is a possible variation to be taken for a discrete communication to invoke pleasure.”

“Don’t bother us with the others.” Schlumper called across the room. “Didn’t you miss ‘manifold’ out in all that?”

“Come off it Zombie, there are only two signs on the leaf. What do they really mean?”

Said the model afraid the Zombie would need some coaxing after Schlumper’s crass remark but trying an open gambit first.

“One is for rain & the other for a horse chestnut tree or perhaps a chestnut horse under a tree.” Said the Zombie’s cloudy voice.

“Given it’s so clear. How did you get all that twaddle out of a tree horse?” Schlumper persisted across the room. “Straight from the horse’s mouth.” He looked to Sakini for approval.

The Zombie pointedly faced the model. “We are at work in the sensible field. Out to lunch.” She paused & frowned. “Taking a picnic under a tree. There is an invisible filigree of shadow & into that we see further.” She turned to face the artist & Sakini. “An invisible substructure is under our noses & for it or from it there are certain substitutable things which we can choose.” She acted as if in a mechanical ballet whose movements were ordered by the words.

“Only you could make a day out sound ominous. What about the horse you missed that for a start?”

“The horse sign is very often used instead of one signifying a woman to keep her presence secret. The ‘real’ name is hidden, as is the purpose of the message. Also it can be a horse camouflaged by black leaves. I think in this case it is modified by the rain.”

“Was it a day out horse trading spoilt by rain?” Asked Sakini with a big grin, she was enjoying the Zombie’s discomfort. And there were no numbers involved.

“Have you forgotten how we came to these signs?” Asked the Zombie somberly. “It may seem that by this chance you can make game of me but I only turn the pages.” An altogether different note had entered the Zombie’s voice. “Sometimes that is all what is needed - a slip. The rain sign also modifies the woman.” She pushed the book over the table towards Schlumper. “It means she is in good shape, I think you say, like a pear.”

“Was she pregnant, too?” Sakini drew the scrip to her & saw it looked very like the sign ‘future death’ which was unusual because the delayed finality was determined by a signifier not specified in any of the grammars she knew. “We are missing something here. I’ve never come across this before.” She said pointing to the sign wondering if it would

draw the Zombie out (if she actually knew). “The outcome of some events turn on the meaning of a single word.”

“No. The delay, just as the name, is correctly spoken in the text.” Said the Zombie with a certainty that made Schlumper narrow his eyes. “The fruit drains the colour from the cloth leaving it pure white – a shroud.” She continued.

“What is missing is the answer.” Said Pollak returning to the fray.

“I don’t think it’s missing.” The artist took Sakini’s arm. “We need to find the right medium. The Zombie would say if she could so, because she can’t, we must be in the realm of the body that we use not the one we think about . . . all the time, in your case, Pollak when it isn’t being used.”

“Well I can’t think how we break out of this impasse because most of its functions are unique. We can’t take it to pieces & put it back together & find the answer written clear as daylight.”

“On an organ.” Pollak said.

“Correct.” Said Schlumper. “ Because there aren’t any. Now leave off Pollak.”

“Then I should know. Shouldn’t I?” Declared the model. “Although I don’t think I do.”

* * *

Tamar Qush strode past a scarecrow hardly taking in that there were no crops to protect & saw a dark-haired woman in the distance swinging a bag in tune to some celestial music by the way it was moving.

* * *

“Had any thoughts recently?” Sneered Pollak at the model despite the fact that Schlumper had a finger to his lips as he glared at her.

“No. Zee don’t look that one up.” Said the model who slapped Pollak so hard she fell over. “Look that one up.”

“Whatever was that punch for?” Cried Pollak from the floor.

“Reading between the lines, you ninny.” Said Schlumper. “You wouldn’t get hurt if you weren’t so brash.”

Unhurt Pollak stared up at him over a puny stonecold shoulder pale with anger at the rejection.

“So those two signs have stirred up this brawl. What next?” Sakini stepped in & pulled Pollak to her feet. “I need to check some more recent work.”

“Anguine.” The Zombie took Sakini’s arm. “I would like to help you.”

As they bent over the paperwork Sakini confided. “I seem to recollect a line of Symbolist verse by J.L . . . & the number fifty-six strikes a cord . . . or was it fifty-three?”

It turned out to be both. The cold cream shoulders associated with the fifty-third line of particular interest because it is a funny colour name in English & either ivory or alabaster would have been a better description for the stiff cold shoulder he had laid his head against for a moment before kissing her goodbye. And she explained that the fifty-sixth line containing the neologism (blood/sensual) had led to the question posed to Schlumper about the Buddha. Now she was considering the fifth classification of danger because of its links with ‘a pink, firm, young female’ she very slightly moved her head towards Pollak; someone always out late at inappropriate places. “Do you think it is uncommon

that a man saw young women as the flesh he forbade himself at his father's table?" Sakini rolled open a scroll. (the father was a butcher in fact).

"Are we getting closer to the half sister?" Asked the Zombie.

"Look at this passage." Said Sakini & placed a finger on the scroll 'The nymph of the Lo river'. "What I want to know is in what way were these scrolls cut up? Do we have an example still showing the pieces? What would be a 'peculiar' way if it wasn't to convey a special meaning?" Sakini turned the Zombie's piece the right way up. "We know there were twelve sections saved but with parts in different places. All but one were reconstructed because some of the pieces of that one are still missing. It is said that on them certain series of words were underlined in red ink. They weren't torn up in anger & retrieved later but cut by a knife into deliberate shapes that also edited the text. I'm not sure why because in those days it was just about impossible to reconstruct a forgery using the original fragments . . . unlike today . . . each letter would have had to be re-written. And the colour would have been difficult to match"

"Maybe there is a copy floating about out there." The Zombie said. "Do we hope that?"

"No." Said Sakini. "My guess is the damage had been done before those pieces were intercepted. The thick paint built up of several layers (with bad technique suggesting an amateurs hand) had flaked off to reveal the first marks on the paper not only the drawn outlines of the subject but also notes – meticulous directions of what colours to use & the names of some of the people shown."

"They would be useful."

"Yes, the names. And what we need is a tracing in order to juggle the shapes about."

“You think they are a map?” The Zombie guessed astutely. “So the words could also mark a literal path.”

“And the speed at which to follow it.”

“Could we be too late?”

Pollak gave the model, who had taken a pose in the absence of the Zombie, a wide berth coming up to Schlumper who stood contemplating the drawing as you would an inflamed boil. She lanced it with a cursory glance & took position between the artist & his paper.

“Can’t you do better than that dog’s dinner of a drawing. Where is everybody?” Said

Pollak giving Schlumper a rare compliment by acknowledging she had looked at the work, which he acknowledged with a scowl & started up again. The tangled lines of the

drawing were becoming denser than a puddle on a stormy night. The model kept her

pained expression deliberately exaggerating it. “Very nicely put & I can see Red agrees.”

“While she’s juggling numbers . . .” Pollak edged closer.

“A sanctified obsession before you say too much.”

“You must send some money to Holukos for me. I don’t want to be in his debt.”

“I did. But I think the trifles you are blowing it on are . . .”

“None of your business. Holukos says he didn’t get any. And I needed to . . . change . . . my appearance.”

“Do you believe that will do the trick?”

“That’s what I hope.”

It was immediately apparent that neither of them believed this was what they wanted to talk about.

“What is he trying for, do you think?” Pollak didn’t care & didn’t answer. The collaboration of Sakini & the Zombie was making her uneasy.

“It’s irksome to have to think about it. And futile. That fool is quite out of character & serves a different purpose. He isn’t party to any important insights.”

“You must have missed something when you were out with him, Pollak.” Said Schlumper following her gaze. And added quietly. “Leave them to it.”

Pollak shrugged. “I don’t take it seriously, not now.”

Had Schlumper been attentive (diligent) he would have asked the question Pollak was longing to answer or more accurately confess.

* * *

This exchange should have taken place in a few minutes but as it included a long drawn out pause while Schlumper groped for the right word & got the wrong one because of which there were a couple of dramatic silent stares between the women plus an ill advised attempt to prove the wrong word was right, it took considerably longer. And all their minds were racing giving another speed & level to everything not said & as that was the bulk of the event more time still was needed to spin it out to a satisfactory . . . catch? But who won? They all claimed the win . . . later.

(The artist’s mistaken defence of his mistake amplified it & turned this stream of hostility to a torrent; for shown as an increase in tenderness the doubt was out-of-place & took the women by surprise).

“What was the word?” Asked the analyst, not irritated but asking before she lost the thread. (He was worse than a Shingon monk writing cryptic characters on a six foot sheet of paper while in a trance, but the analyst didn’t know that).

“Waterfall.” Schlumper lied at a loss but also because that is what he saw. And, of course, he didn’t want to discriminate against it seeing as the image had presented itself in the nick of time. And that reduction reduced the waterfall to an abstraction of lines (lots of them). Which made him blurt the word out.

Dekobra didn’t believe him but also realized there was something to follow.

“Was that a happy day?”

Schlumper knew it wasn’t the right context & while he was at pains to clear it up with himself he failed to share this fear with the others & put them straight.

If she hadn’t broken one of Muriel St Clare Byrne’s rules for the valid use of parallels (if they existed, or indeed Muriel, it was news to the Zombie) the day in question may have been passably happy. And, if then she hadn’t compounded the misunderstanding by proceeding to cut right across Samuel Schoenbaum’s addition to these rules (if he ever breathed the Zombie would want to know why) by using attributed works as evidence for further attributions, the day could have been saved . . . But not without an intervention calling Schlumper to attention because at the paragraph most difficult to understand the artist was thinking of frying an egg. Also now he had remembered that Sakini had replied while barely looking up from the illustration she was tracing. “How would you know?”

“Have you ever seen the model & the Zombie apart?” Dekobra cocked her head on one side to accentuate the inconsequentiality of the prompt.

“ – couldn’t tell them apart?” The artist misheard her. “Yes I can.”

“Could you if there were more of them?” Dekobra insisted.

“What are the model & the Zombie looking for?”

“I don’t know.” Dekobra tried out her charming smile.

“Ask them.” Schlumper insisted.

“They wouldn’t know.” She replied. “Even if they thought about it. And they’re too simple for that.”

- what’s real can be derived from the impossible – occasionally –

* * *

“Nonsense.” Retorted the Zombie who had had half an ear on the conversation & half on some sort of coded request in the rumblings of her belly. “And uselessly complicated to boot.” She added automatically. How had they come by these spoken constructions? She could not attempt to guess other than from a desire to express the power of nonsense in the form of a pyramid although she had heard that this sort of erection was ascribed to a princess who used it as shelter when being taunted with the uselessness of her considerable upper bodily charms. There & then she had vowed that by making men pay for the use of these attributes (with the power of beauty & titillation) she would amass a bigger stash than anyone had ever. Her smile etc. was her fortune & into it slipped all her lovers’ gold. So they coughed up. But where, the Zombie wondered after all that output, was the boot? And then she let slip with a gasp of disbelief. “Booty.” It couldn’t be as simple as that.

“Correct.” Said Schlumper & Dekobra together. Sakini looked up from her tracing bemused at this co-ordination & caught the Zombie furtively measuring herself around the waist.

“It’s absurd to study that picture so closely.” The Zombie’s objection burst out to cover her action.

“Why?”

“Because what you are looking for is on the other side. This side needs colouring in. Then it will show.”

“Why? It’s already coloured & not showing. And why were you measuring your tummy?” Sakini suspected a ruse. Well it looked like one from her angle.

“So?” Replied the Zombie put out by Sakini’s blundering question & intransigence in the matter of colouring & the quizzical stare. “There is room for a lot more.”

“What & where?”

“It is here.” And the Zombie gently slapped her own stomach lost for the moment to Sakini’s presence.

An unambiguous voice thought he’d got a dog

He’d got a stick

reaching

a long way from the old boat

whose rigging forgetting squared the sky

behind the bank at the corner of Friendly Street.

“Why have you brought us here?”

“We are going to the theatre later. I thought this would be the best place to start from.”

In any **CROCODILE of artists** someone will claim that without them there would be a calamity.

“I needed alerting to that fictional duplicity. All I want now is the place & time of the event.”

How does anyone holding this line come to comprehend the ruinous delusion of their usefulness? Here is part of the answer: As vexing as the complaint: Don’t jump straight in to take your position. The maze is superficially the same size as the window.

RIGHT. Growled the Wolf with menace. Caught at the door.

By swallowing this whole you will cross the line.

And be sent to the back your wounds still open.

Not without trepidation having been there many times before the wary Wolf approached the brown door & flattened himself against it at the same time giving the whole room a disarming smile as if it was normal practise to eavesdrop on the analyst’s conversations. Grinding his teeth he listened intently to the charming refrain, sure he recognized that other sing-song voice.

“What are you promising the artist, Dekobra?”

“Something extremely simple – yet vital – that nothing will happen. Although I never tell him.”

“Even when he speaks of it?”

“Because he speaks.”

“Because you understand?”

“Because I can’t go as far as that.”

“Not when he thinks ‘This is what I find intolerable’?”

“Then I would have been mistaken.” Dekobra Hotki laughed with rare spontaneity. No doubt. Unguarded. She must be with someone she trusts. “And how would we know when he always has his mouth full?” She was teasing . . . very often it helped suspect angels come out into the open. Declare themselves a little.

“Make him spit the thoughts out or eat his words.”

Dekobra clapped her hands with delight. “And things?”

“Shatter them.”

Once freely spoken, even if carelessly, the foolish wish (that can no longer be doubted) binds the action irrevocably however painful. This wish cannot be swallowed back or recalled: it is always a wonderful chance wasted.

On the exotic postcard secreted in the artist’s pocket, a fetish woman dressed to kill (to the nines, in case Sakini finds this number helpful although a smaller number would have been a more accurate correspondence with the amount of flesh covered) was engulfed by a storm of black lines. Probably meant to represent her dark thoughts or an impregnation by a mass of capital ‘I’s’. He tapped the outside of the pocket as he entered the consulting room & this detail was not lost on Dekobra. She slipped her hands together. A hint of a secret difficult to grasp. She would have to gamble if she wanted to discover it.

When Sakini examined the design later (an intricate circuit for that is what the stencil was) she wondered how anyone could be so angry & not burst; but kept that to herself.

“I won’t buy it, I’ve done it all or think I will.” The Wolf’s whispered babble echoed around the room as he staggered away from the door; an awkward outburst in an awkward situation yet there was nothing else the Wolf could do but blurt out his fear as the cover-up for a momentary loss of purpose.

* * *

Noting the detour he had to make to fit that dialogue in caused by a small branch laid on the path & not wanting to disturb anyone the artist, excluded again while desperately including himself, very quietly pushed open the brown door.

- a fact – a sensation – big & large – or is that bye & large?-

As the artist entered the studio he wasn’t exactly talking to thin air but it was as close as he could get under his breath. For the model Red & her friend Miss Z. were locked in an animated conversation as usual about the look of external parts of their bodies & others. And he was hopeful, more than hopeful, that by catching them unaware some essential beauty wrought from the conjunction of these identical beings would appear in a picture that didn’t have a dot or splash on it of either of them.

- inhuman – got to be to do it – no change – the conceptual form –

“Humans are like thrown pots, all the same, hollow, easily cracked.” The Zombie insisted. “And I’ve heard you have to be steamed or baked in a warm place before you are ready. I think it was Tennessee.”

“You’re not sure which way we’re cooked or where.” Retorted the model concentrating into a mirror busy on one eye with a small brush. “You may claim we are all born fragile, bilaterally symmetrical, & doomed, Zombie,” She paused to glance over the glass. “Need

easy-seal & are thus odd, but I know Schlumper isn't. He wears his nob on the left." The model smirked. "Not odd I mean water-tight."

"What have political leanings got to do with the disposition of it." Demanded the Zombie reaching for a paint rag. She knew the protocol for this situation with a smirk, she was happy to say. Only having to face a slight but nagging doubt at the back of her mind because she knew with the rag there should be a bull somewhere; consequently Miss Z. hesitated & dropped the rag, then recalling the anomaly whenever the word China was found in most of these rules, she relaxed surreptitiously reaching for the rag. And she beamed. "How very observant of you. I suppose he has two testicles?"

- was there a scheme – simplification gone mad – i.e. incomplete –

"Both balls dressed on the left as well." Snapped the model who thought the Zombie had switched off.

Somewhat put out the Zombie mechanically appealed to the artist not expecting much as he appeared engrossed in a mantra. "How could she know all this?"

- unenlightening excellent – a muddle likewise – bare strands - false starts – mistakes – the work is progressing nicely – what did she say – appearance is it –

"She's guessing." Schlumper suggested absently poised with the loaded brush dripping red paint on his shoes. "Hold still."

"Why?" And she was right. What was the use? It just shows. Sadly, within a minute, he had fucked the picture up. Why else would he be called Schlumper. (And this, too, was under scrutiny; it having been a family given that they were descended from a group of German's going under the name of 'clumsy' but now in doubt).

- rehashing – hesitations – missed opportunities – the work is going strikingly well –

Is there a viable action? That is doubtful. There may have been but it passed unrecognized. The Zombie, seeing the artist had started to work (albeit on his shoes but there were more puzzling aspects of the behavior than that) took her clothes off; which the model put on.

- good – carry on – multiple beginnings – a yawning gap where the centre should be – everything in order – proceeding – not a sign of composition – chancy -

He looked down at the floorboards – something happening there – they will have to be prised loose & incorporated. Shit! A loose end.

- grab it - maul it – into focus – plop it out again – the formlessness looks too promising – lost – that’s better -

The biggest joke is the endless but unnecessary search for external justification; carried out with a thoroughness by the connoisseur which astonished even the artist with his foot firmly on the best piece of work. As did the stuff that was dug up. He wasn't buying that treasure-trove guarded by death angle but it certainly turned pure shit into a sausage sandwich.

- delays – procrastination – the work is winging along – accretion – deletion – same –

Constant, or is that incessant, preparation for the big event. Like you I have no more than a general idea of obsession.

- in a peculiar way futile – cut to pieces – still singing – tunelessly – coming close –

Fully aware of the pointlessness, not a faultless mark to be seen.

- omissions – how would you know? Bound to be –

- limited – imprecise – precision –

How do you know? I don't.

- distracted – inane – perfect –

“Did the cock crow three times or was it she sneezed three times?” The model pulled a fur coat around her shoulders.

“Both.”

Tut. The model Red had heard it all before. (Therefore so had Miss Z.).

“Why don't you bring your own clothes?” Asked the Zombie mildly.

“They are mine.” Retorted an exasperated model adjusting the drop, pulling the line & caressing out a few other wrinkles. “It's time you were taken on a shopping expedition.”

Pointedly fixing Schlumper with a glare. “And if you are going to borrow my things & crease them at least wear them in the right places.”

“Places?” Wondered Schlumper dropping a brush.

“Places.” Echoed the Zombie. “How many are there on these bodies?” And she looked down her nose at her swelling curves with mild distaste.

“What have you done to this bra?” Exclaimed the furious model more than irritated as she exhibited a wrecked piece of flimsy red lingerie, one cup larger than the other impaled on a vertical finger. “What do I do with this when it is supposed to be full to get the shape?”

“It often overflowed with beautiful memories.” The artist agreed.

“I keep my paper money in the left cup, rather like Schlumper.” Zombie forced out an incongruous giggle. “And small change which is big in the right cup. Full to the brim as

ordered. Hence the discrepancy. There isn't room for anything but my fanny in the thong where I know I am supposed to shelter . . . secrete . . . save my cash. I need a purse." She was petulant now. "For keeping it safe."

Grimly the model made a strange sign with her fist. "I could point one out for you to stick your head up for keeps if you don't stop."

"Ah! An impossible task." Mollified the Zombie looked pleased. "Is this a Western version of the Zen koan?" Do I have to meditate on it?"

"It's the English equivalent – nonsense - You can do what you like in it." Said the model tightening her belt deliberately squeezing her waist several notches smaller than the one they both habitually used. "You must be putting on weight, Z." She gasped, the unconcealed glee cut short by the pain from a paralyzed diaphragm.

"How long can you last without breathing, Red?" The artist playfully tried to poke a finger behind the belt which the model released. "Are you feeling for my money?" She hung onto his wrist to show him she wasn't angry or the tickle repugnant.

"He was going to get a hand on your thoughts or is it only men who keep them there?" Asked the Zombie seriously interested in the deployment of the mind.

"The pass was an infringement but not a foul."

"Are you going to take a kick or may I." Asked the Zombie sweetly. And she too took hold of Schlumper's other wrist, placing his hand over her delta of Venus, raising the stake against the model, or as she thought of it – displaying the gift of wise thinking.

- cogent – nonsense – artfully constructed – yes – yes – yes – not really – the pinnacle of tenderness – I hope not –

“I understand.” The Zombie was overjoyed. “This is what is meant by a bollox.”

How many times have I told you. At last.

- a mess at last – all too true, alas – luckily a perplexing fiasco –

Appraising the Zombie’s ploy (with her pubic mound) the model knew now she had to stretch to the limit of her artifice, so slipped close to the artist & began to undress. “Your turn.” She said tossing the underwear at the Zombie’s head with cobraic charm.

- fidelity sure – contagious probably –

“By the look of this.” Observed Dekobra Hotki. “That ruinous delusion mentioned earlier could be the delusion of virility given by naiveté, latched onto by artists & their models. Useful? We’ll see.”

* * *

That morning the coffee was very thin – mugafuk – the colour of the frozen slush on the wharf which had a multitude of footprints breaking it up into a nasty choppy surface. And there were tea leaves floating on the coffee. Whose fortune was she drinking because it was not her own. Dekobra was watching the door & was disconcerted & provoked when she realized so was the girl in the blue dress behind the counter who was also trying to disguise the fact. So when Schlumper arrived late Dekobra, at the same time as signaling her presence, looked directly at the girl who dropped her eyes.

* * *

“You didn’t mention the beehive the last time you recounted your dream. Or the fact that Pollak was sheltering under a parasol (there, I think, you first said someone had an

umbrella). It may be an inconsistency, & just that, nothing more.” Dekobra paused.

“What remains?” And falling silent Dekobra Hotki was prepared for a long wait.

The Wolf knew it was time to fidget with the objects on the coffee table to give the displacement of certain parts & a mixture of aspects & get them thrown out but resisted the challenge. Noting the plan & elevation of this innovation in the Wolf’s behavior the artist wondered that if the beehive is a breast & the bees are drops of milk & honey, he was stumped with the consequent flattening of the figure; unless they are fragments . . . no . . . they are identical moments . . . unless they are bullets . . . but he felt there was an aimlessness about the persistence with which he tried to track the elusive meaning of this image . . . the persistent banging against transparency . . . Where are we? Just where the pigment, a totally impenetrable surface (obscuring while describing) wants to take us . . . or leave us.

“Selectivity.” Suggested Schlumper.

“As he left out all colour except for the tiny red touches in the lips I wonder if it was intentional. Or maybe the artist had only just started to colour the drawing when he was interrupted. I would never have guessed that he began with the lips . . . I am intrigued . . . can you explain?” Dekobra’s voice was warm; at the same time she was thinking. ‘There are a few things to do with colours that I never hear him talk about. The brightness & the gloss & the glow of things. Rarely, if ever, about the fleeting appearances of those transparent things that seem to mock us.’

Schlumper, recalling the moment, sat with a glazed expression; the Wolf flapped his hand up & down in front of the artist's eyes. No response so he glanced at the analyst – she was at ease staring at the ceiling, her mouth shut.

- innocent destruction – a chance – chances make the artist – a long shot (is that life he can see in the bull's eye) – capricious – flight -

Suddenly the Wolf felt he was redundant. It was hard work dealing with the analyst's unspoken questions on your own. He had been warned that in the end he would be rejected & stared longingly at the door. Before he could spring an exit stratagem the artist spoke.

“In that silent world it was a way of expressing the delicate friction of the words as they streamed over her lips. And I felt it was the first thing I must show. A vital connection in that ugly situation – condemned to solitude - & all the demonic temptations that solitude brings – the stream of piss turning into a whispering serpent that tells lies of a possible sweet world of delights (forget the cost which will be a monstrous number, but ‘so what’ it hisses).”

‘What crosses his lips actually crosses mine leaving a trace of blood. The beast is only an aspect of the human being but if I’ve had it so has he.’ The Wolf said to himself. ‘I thought he was getting more like me. I must have misread the consanguineous signs.’ Wolf’s muffled feeling required a difficult effort to feel, but he made it. And to express, given the mute contact, what hadn’t been said in a few clear words was brave, perhaps foolhardy because it heralded the moment of separation. Not that it was noticeable in the

disorder of the drawing. An extra figure here or there poking around in the background – who cared?

“The figure, whoever it was, did for a start. It was nice to be included.” Said the Wolf looking round to see who else had made it out of the smudges into the black lines. And caught the analyst yawning into the back of her hand.

“If you think about it properly they are both the same.” The Zombie guessing his thought put an arm around the Wolf’s shoulders, her lips close to his ear. “Something else you missed out on, like me & the model.”

“That’s one adventure not to be missed by quibbling about the width of a line.” The artist blew on his fingers: to wake them up? No. The breath affirmed the belief the rest of his body had in their ability? No. “Each mark has a thickness, one clumsily rubbed so now less precise has become indecipherable; the other, unfortunately is still perfectly clear although lacking depth & accurately describes a body – yours.”

“Mine?” Protested the model. “With the ribs showing like that – there?”

“Spare. Correct.” Guffawed the Wolf.

“No. The Wolf’s. Unless of course you want a few corrections?” Schlumper reached for the rubber in his box giving the Wolf a steely sideways glance at the same time knocking over the analyst’s handbag, which scattered its contents on the table top.

“No. I’ll stick with what I’ve got.” Replied the Wolf hastily, also checking between his legs with very protective cupped hands.

“It’s writing you’ve got to watch out for, Wolf, not drawing.”

“They are both only scribble.”

“There can be some murderous sentences though.”

What shocked Schlumper the most was a large knife that fell out of the analyst’s shiny bag. Because its significance was so obvious? No, it is a commonplace enough object. What brought him up short was the practised way with which Dekobra made the sharp blade fly open before she calmly shut it & swept the knife along with the rest of the contents back into the bag. And with this nonchalant motion she gave the artist a big smile; & that rare action alone would have unsettled him normally. The Wolf leaned forward, transferring the weight off his mind to his elbows with a sigh of relief, about to rise & leave.

“Don’t go.” Said Dekobra. “We have to discuss the emptying out of my bag. You have tried twice before to spill it.”

“Now’s the time to spill the beans.” Said the Wolf impulsively, glad to be back in the driving seat.

She had really hit the spot because this shiny black patent leather handbag with its gold clasp was the only solid object Schlumper could clearly remember from the first meeting with Dekobra. Even her face at that time was reduced to a pink blob with a smear of red for the lips. He also recalled she had advised him to make a list of priorities to prevent an outburst of anger in which he might hit a fool on the head with a teapot. And, leaning the notepad on the side of the handbag, had even helped with a few suggestions, passing him the fountain pen, guiding him in quite a restrained way to place her well-being at the top of it. Now, here please remember the major source used for this report of make-believe truth is tainted or should it merely be called biased because the transcript of the analysis

with its shared illusions obviously has to be censored. And, understandably supplemented by private thoughts or mistaken testimony difficult to separate from actual brutal facts.

But even now as he cast his mind back to fish out another image, there it was again lying on its side while the analyst's hand groped in its belly to pull out a card.

"Wolf. You can go." Dekobra ordered. "And wait outside." She propped the picture card up against the closed bag but said nothing until the door had shut.

"Why did you send this?"

"It's a way of keeping in touch." Schlumper replied innocently.

"My eye." Said the Wolf through the door. He had got big ears.

Dekobra went up to the door & rapped on it. "Wolf. Go & sit down. And keep your big mouth shut."

The 'picture' on the card was a black mass of lines; at first glance a mess, neither calligraphic nor architectural. And there were more cards. As Schlumper sat quietly watching Dekobra produced a bundle held together by an elastic band; she set two more of them up both equally covered with a myriad of dense pencil lines. Then the analyst took out the knife, flicked it open with a speed that again made Schlumper catch his breath & began to cut each card into shapes with a deftness matched by the intricate pattern the knife point drew in the table top. She brushed the pieces into a pile. There were twelve cards; Schlumper knew.

"Would you like to finish off with the last one?" Dekobra passed him the knife & pointed at the card propped against the bag.

"Don't you want to keep that one whole?" He wondered. "It was the . . ."

“Most interesting.” Dekobra hurried in, she didn’t want to hear the words spoken. It was the wrong time. Too soon. Too late. The Wolf scratched his ear at the keyhole.

“Take these away. See what you can make of them. I’ll keep that one.” She opened the bag & slipped the card back; found an envelope, scooped up the remains of the other eleven & handed it to Schlumper. “It adds up to something.” She said in a matter-of-fact dismissal.

‘Out & no thanks to the Wolf.’ The artist thought stuffing the envelope in his pocket.

The ride back to the studio was made tedious by the Wolf’s complaint of being shut out.

“Not shut up.” The artist wryly commented. There, as soon as they saw the artist, the model & the Zombie knew Schlumper was hiding something so waited their chance.

When Sakini saw the black letter shapes that Schlumper emptied onto the sheet of white paper she pounced before any of the others could touch them. “Where have we seen these before?” And she glanced around at the expectant faces with a delightful smile curling her lips. “What did she say, again?” Anguine fixed Schlumper who knew to say nothing.

“She spoke two magical words.” Interrupted the Wolf eagerly. “ ‘Zads zupto’ I didn’t catch the rest.”

The Zombie looked thoughtful & slightly offended but didn’t make her customary translation. Luckily, it was obvious the Wolf had no idea what he was swearing or he would have had his foot stamped on.

“She didn’t say that.” Sakini replied haughtily as she arranged the shapes vertically up the sheet. She realized it was a transuranic dialect & that was enough. “These have been reduced in size . . . they are a set of trance written instructions, painted, in fact, on huge

sheets of paper. It would be instructive to know which mantra they chanted to arrive at the signs . . . were they specifically made for you, Schlumper?"

"Dekobra seemed to think they might be useful." The artist didn't know why he held back the fact that he had drawn the original marks over miscellaneous & randomly selected postcards mostly views of foreign cities or temple sculpture & mailed them to the analyst fairly frequently.

"Is that a yes? It's important because there is a relationship to a name sign here puzzling me. If we take it one way, the way I would normally, it could mean you have to set out immediately to . . . to . . . no wait it could read that someone (it can't be you) has set out from the bank of the Lo river." Sakini absently scrutinized the back of one of the shapes.

"Who?" They all wondered. Except the artist who wondered. 'Why? After all this time.' And 'How would she know?'

"Were you ever there at . . . Spoodon . . . strange sign that. Maybe someone's hand slipped when making it." She turned another piece over.

"Never." Said Schlumper. "Does it exist?"

"Must do." But Sakini's brow was furrowed. "Or must have." She turned another piece over. "Why were these posted." She held up two showing most of a stamp on the reverse sides.

"Where was it posted from?" The Zombie brought over a magnifying glass & switched on the ultra violet lamp. "The date is difficult to make out – eight – two in Roman numerals – February – very heavily mangled by a biro & what's on the other piece? – eighty three. What do you make of that Anguine?"

The model started to turn all the letters over but Schlumper stopped her.

“Were these scribbled over old postcards?” Sakini asked.

“Obviously. More numbers. Back to where we started.” Sneered Pollak.

Sakini ignored the jibe.

- fortuitous – gone – was it essential? A solution should be here somewhere – no that too has gone –

“For a rough guess this scribble looks like a sketch of a stringybark house, all tattered; where the crosspole represents the python as it rests on the forked (vagina) upright pole, unlike yours. Bear in mind the snake can swallow women & so become pregnant.” Sakini replaced the letter shape.

“Doing its stuff.”

“That would be strangulation.” The Zombie hadn’t spotted the glaring biomorphic fault taking that method of reproduction described above as normal in this crazy world.

And this way come to the question as Schlumper did ‘ Is the initial mistake (in brackets) deliberate?’ He looked at the team in the way one looked at a list checking for an aberration. They all fitted the bill perfectly.

“Places are number coded as well; this could be a field day for Anguine.”

The Zombie’s eyes narrowed; what did Pollak know about that day out. She checked to see if Sakini’s body had responded . . . not a twitch. Hindsight would have been useful here. It will be.

‘Dekobra must have known that.’ Schlumper pondered the fact still half looking for a tenuous clue. He thought it better to leave the cards on the table out in the open, so to

speak, & thereby keep it (the doubt) securely concealed. And if there was any merit in this ploy Schlumper was sure it would show; or rather not show if it was going to be a problem. The whole search, including the bits that had nothing to do with it, was taking on the central notion of Picturesque design – Sharawadji – satisfying balance instantly perceived within apparent disorder. The artist again screwed up his eyes against the glare & surveyed the group; their spirit of disorder was apparent, he was at a loss to see the balance. Begrudgingly he conceded that he had once before discovered one of those moments when only the present exists & here was another, this time at first hand, in which is absorbed the entire universe. Previously Sakini had been given the numbers 10 to 4 in a dream as the combination of the lock on the doorway to the single unlimited straight line. She would embark on the Bitter Ship at that time & be lost forever.

This time finding the day was proving impossible. Finding the door likewise. It was getting urgent. They could get to the deadline without knowing it . . . unless . . .

“Perhaps we should take a break.”

- nothing special – difficult stuff to fail with – unusual not to get something to show for the effort – if there was one-

“Could we send someone else?” They all immediately stared at Pollak. “Wouldn’t any female do?”

“Oh no no no.” They all cried instantly forgetting that she shouldn’t have known anything about the enterprise. “How could any number come up . . . silly.”

“Very silly.” The artist shook his head. “And it would be inhuman to send just anyone.”

But the cat was out of the bag & into the void. He sensed the change dawning on the others. And held his breath.

“Not if she behaved right.” Pollak said lamely obviously thinking of herself.

“And what way is that?” The Zombie snarled.

“Not drawing attention to herself.” Pollak was warming to the task but unfortunately inattentive to the others’ adverse reaction.

“How could we choose one out of such . . . rich pickings.” The model hoped to de-fuse the situation.

“They are only numbers.” Pollak was now nearly shouting in exasperation. “There’s no more to it than that.”

Sakini’s features turned grey as she gasped. “What numbers could signify so little?” The Zombie who considered herself to be composed entirely of numbers, glowing with a steely pallor, made a fist.

- wait until I’ve made enough mistakes – then you’ll see – that is if they obliterate themselves – in the mind’s eye -

The table had seemed cluttered, he had to agree. But not that fragile.

The artist went for the alternative. “Are you volunteering, Pollak, to take her place?”

“Wait.” Cautioned Sakini regaining her composure. “It might be a coincidence but I get an altogether different feeling . . . Has she been angling for this chance all along?”

“Chance.” The Zombie pondered as she toyed with the idea of substituting the word accident, but the word ‘bottleneck’ was also vying for attention & this the Zombie was finding not unnerving but a troublesome singularity.

Pollak, at boiling point (don’t question the fact, Zombie but please make a snap decision about the words) stormed. “I’ll go if Schlumper comes with me.”

“I knew it.”

- it would be an opportunity to adapt – take a new approach – it’s not easy to be lucid about a process that defies representation (we could do with one of the words Miss Z.) – only appearing at the surface for a split second - too fragile to remain – avoiding being snapped up by sinking back – all at sixes & sevens

After trying lots of lines

Someone's horror of rime was shrewd when it froze

two ugly sisters of time caught spreading near the humming pit

one a fright bawled fifties will do while the other was busy with a shoe

but a note slipped into page ten said

you make the unmade bed

What if it had been slipped into page nine beside a postcard woman dressed to kill

this time with her obsessive tricks – which a reigncoat dream & a swine negate

into action just when the springs begin to shunt in tune

one rose 1 between 2 will do

the other still busy with a shoe said what if it had been slipped into page eight

Two bells maimed near the entrance chine - you must go you must come you must go

you must come

But men a strange signed space between the lot think of rabble think of a mob

think of a hive decide cheap at 30p a life what if it had been slipped into page five

bone like a skull between her thighs

I know I had several tries

let's think who can make that skull grin

one less approval sought jive out the door fucked in the alley into the bin

what if it had been slipped into page four where a half chick half dressed asks for more

doormen beyond beneath behind become page three's stark blank stare

no note could survive in there dwarfed by Cinderella

Someone's

Pale pink heart fluttered what happened to seven what happened to six?

Hatred gave them such a shove they finished up lost in love.

There is in the graffiti caricatures on the wall inside a tavern in a drawing by Peter van Laar a complex figure composed of at least four part figures enough to form a **COBBLE of PERFECTIONISTS**.

One could have wings or be holding an umbrella blown inside out. One a Wolf whispering in a woman's ear or kissing the cheek of her companion by the side of a skull headed person holding up a box perhaps to distract attention from his erect cock.

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“After the scrabble of connoisseurs, under the dross, at the bottom of everything you usually find an elephant or part of one. And it stinks.” The model's comment was not this time induced by remembering the famously deconstructed ‘umbrella’ fragment of Nietzsche after glimpsing an old-fashioned umbrella stand. Nor, surprisingly, by the queue of pachyderms on the lowest strand of decoration on the side of the Hoysala temple in a photograph of a dancer she had just been handed by the artist to justify the pose. That much the artist, Schlumper, knew as he waited for the explanation; not expectantly because he guessed it could be a long time coming – she could be referring to something in the future or the past or both so neatly parceled up in her imagination you didn't want to unwrap it. But he was sure (& quite wrong) that she hadn't been talking to Henry Flowers in 1255 about his cumbersome charge & its large rear discharge. The Zombie had been thinking ‘rock bottom’ & took it to mean the original numen, around

which a temple was slowly elaborated, a rock bearing no resemblance to an elephant but stained red, by powder in recent years & given its name. Then drifted further back, remembering animal sacrifices on this altar; a wild boar split open to reveal a beautiful girl. Was that a trick?

When crossing an iron suspension bridge with two friends over the gorge & stopping in the middle to watch large plates of white scum slowly rotating on the river children pulling on the wire ropes rocked them.

Ready to pay Schlumper hustled a wallet out of a back pocket thinking ‘ If I could slip back where would the slide finish up? Remember the delicate little light-footed run off at the end of the polished sheet of ice necessary to be safe & stay upright? Well you keep forgetting to do it.’ And he examined the rail ticket again. The seventh bullet in a box on the information for passengers section on the back of the ticket stated ‘The bottom left corner of the ticket shows left to right a random no. Date & month. (0802) Time. (12:44) Location (Kan) & window no. (2) of booking. The random number was 223 & it preoccupied Schlumper more than the crazy quote ‘Selfless is a source of strength’ which also adorned that side of the ticket. But who knows this thin piece of card costing only 58 rupees had brought him 432km to Kankanadi on the Kon Kan. And here through ragged palm leaves the morning light on the balcony generously revealed a drawing to be done on the pages of rough grey paper scorched by a fire & bound together by cotton into more of a wad than a book. The ticket nestled against the spine between the back of the ninth page & the front of the tenth both already covered with pastel; an unsightly mess smudges of colour patches that seemed to add up to several multi-sexual figures in action

on each other. Given there is a longing induced by non-figurative pictures that is below the threshold of conscious apprehension its pangs are sometimes woken when a fragment of one of those pictures, which could be taken for the representation of a landscape or a face, jolts the perception engendering a strange feeling of something being completed but not anything specific. Sometimes that vagueness is more compelling than a completely joined up picture. On the balcony outside the bare studio Schlumper took up his notes. Below on a patch of waste ground a poor family had moved in & built a cardboard & timber hut. A Jackfruit had been left on newspaper lying on broken tile pieces strewn all over the dirt yard. The honeycomb exterior although a raw golden colour with a touch of green in it was made dark by innumerable fine faint black lines exactly the way newsprint changes the paper. This open parcel was in the shade of a large tree thirty yards to the west of the ramshackle hut's entrance; there was no door. Just a wide space always in shadow. A large rough spar held up the lintel & had a peg driven into it on which hung a soiled grey cloth.

A complete palm frond cross-woven with single fronds shaded the open fire that constantly burned. Its hearth was surrounded by beaten earth & blackened stones. This triangular but curved screen was a pale umber & tinder dry. A woven basket of similar colour & make was upturned on the tile section of the low roof. Between the permanent hearth with its large black kettle & the Jackfruit a spindly tree grew sparsely covered with serrated pinnate leaves. This tree cast no shadow. [A bird, black & slate grey, alighted on the newspaper & pecked at the honeycomb]. A pale green string line, parallel to the house

front, ran from the thin tree to a sturdier evergreen sapling which had dark green oval leaves that threw a light shadow.

THE BRIDGE IS BLOOD. Schlumper had underlined a conclusion in the fragmentary notes he kept of the analysis. He couldn't for the life of him remember how he had arrived at the statement.

* * *

The artist leaned over the balcony surveying the plot enclosed by a rusty mesh fence. Near the fire a young woman undressed: slipped out of her dress so quickly it could not be questioned & stood by the wood chips piled against a wall. She wore patterned shorts only; making dance skips & turns her hands pushed against the invisible wall. She stood on a concrete slab & poured water over her body jerkily thrusting out her arms looking down at her small firm breasts with their nipples standing proud.

* * *

The young girl now wearing a green & lime shirt ran to the footpath & scooped up a small bowlful of dust & returned to the house. An unseen fire gave out clouds of smoke beyond the tree behind the hut. An older woman pushed a folded palm frond under the black pot, took up a short metal pipe & blew down it to rouse the fire. Her lips didn't touch the silver pipe. Flames licked up the back of the black pot.

The younger woman, partially hidden by a raffia mat hanging over a line running from an untidy shelter to the corner of the hut leaned back & looked up over her shoulder to check he was watching as she exposed her breasts. She soaped them still catching Schlumper's gaze gauging his interest & smiling inviting him to fondle them with his eyes.

The old woman was setting a match to a pile of dried leaves; one, two, it failed to burn & she walked away. At the same time a child who was lying on a rush mat got up & took the mat & pillow inside. She emerged just as the old woman appeared round the side of the house with a flaming brand that ignited the leaves. The old woman & the child stood in a close embrace facing away from the fire. A bird warbled in the brush.

The younger woman scraped the remains of a meal from a silver coloured plate onto a mound of red earth. A large black bird descended to examine the white refuse & warily pecked at it as another bird alighted in the sapling. Two pecks & it flew off.

Two young girls passed by heading in the direction of the forest; the one in the green dress walked freely but the one in red with a long blue skirt carried four dry palm fronds awkwardly covering something in a basket.

The arm of the old woman was pointing straight out in front. Schlumper craned his neck to try to see what she was indicating. He could only see the wall.

A child appeared carrying a doll wrapped in a pink shawl. In response to a command she dashed back inside the shade. The younger child squirted water from a green shampoo bottle, running backwards making a dark wiggly line in the red dust which dried at once but left a faint snakelike trace still. She threw down this bottle & clapped her hands.

On the corrugated iron eaves a circular, whitish plastic tray lay holding eight coconut halves; a grey rag lay crumpled beside it & further along on the tiles the old woven basket rested in its usual place, now empty. On the open lot there were several large round areas of ash where the fallen leaves had been burned.

The young mother squatted with a few steel dishes & bowls rubbing them with a pad of coconut fibre dipped in wood ash. A long, dark purple cloth flapped on the line in the sparse shade of the sapling. Some crackers exploded quite far away & a bird half hooted, half cooed (with its batches of sound broken by a monotonous regularity of silences) in a dark green tree nearby. A white cow wandered in under the spreading tree & ate a cardboard box that had been thrown into the centre of the circle of ash. A man, who rarely showed himself, threw the woven palm frond onto the roof & returned inside; the wind blew it off.

A blue plate had appeared next to the coconuts; it had many reddish brown fruits the size of gooseberries mainly on the left side next to the nuts. A girl in a pale yellow & dark green dress skipped out of the doorway & back in again. On the fire the flames now showed all round the black pot. A white outline of a teardrop had appeared at the threshold of the hut. It had been drawn with white powder sprinkled carefully on a newly brushed area of baked earth. The young girl was being washed by her mother as she knelt on a stone slab. Two black pigs trotted into the brush at the sudden movements as the older woman hitched up her red skirt to continue the thorough soaping.

* * *

Brightly dressed women were working in a ditch that ran along the side of the road at the edge of the forest & the crowd had to walk on the bank of red earth thrown up or risk the heavy traffic or the undergrowth. Schlumper sauntered on this ridge of uneven ground sometimes taking to the scrub to avoid an obstacle. At one point, having stopped for no reason or so he thought, & tightened a strap he looked up directly into the eyes of the

woman in the red skirt. She had the younger woman in tow wearing a transparent pink blouse under which her breasts shone with their coating of oil. The older woman's hand fluttered towards him as he took in the glistening breasts. In her other hand she held a posy of flowers that she now offered to him. The girl hung her head & clung onto the basket.

* * *

Schlumper looked up again. The Zombie, bent over covered by a large grey overcoat with one sleeve hanging down representing a trunk out of which her fist ranged testing the air, was soundlessly trampling the bed. Then she began to trumpet.

“Yes. The elephant is already there the trumpeting follows.”

“We've got that – catch up.” Schlumper who was patiently following the action with a lump of grey conte glared over the edge of the paper.

“Oh Yes – How is it there was room for that elephant in amongst all the other things at the outset?”

“I call it up soundlessly.” The Zombie had lifted a flap to answer & they all saw she was naked inside the coat.

“And it comes without squashing anything or body? Even vague things?”

“Oh Yes. And especially vague things . . . they all make room.”

“They?”

“They can be anything at all.”

“You couldn't have a heap of things in there.”

“In where?”

“Where they are.”

“That’s what **we** don’t know but they are somewhere sometimes because **we** feel it.”

“What have you got in there with you?”

“An elephant.”

“Impossible.” Retorted the model, dumb struck, which she did really well.

“Cross my heart.” Said the Zombie & she thrust a breast out & carefully crossed across the nipple twice.

“I knew it, she is impossible, she’s even being vague about where her heart is.”

“That shows she’s dumb.” The Zombie droned down the sleeve. “And that’s most of the animal.”

“Does she have to line up with things.” Sakini wondered, she often felt slightly out on a limb & knew how difficult it could be to make things correspond away from the trunk.

“I wasn’t aiming at showing a truthful position; I was trying for the right thing.”

“Hence the right breast.” Snorted the model.

“Very praiseworthy but we would have preferred, at that moment, not forever, don’t get me wrong, a perceptual report on the . . . pretend . . . elephant.” The artist had to choose his words carefully for he could see that the model really thought the Zombie was crossing the line into her territory.

“The one that crossed my lips.” The Zombie laughed.

“It wouldn’t be the first member of the animal kingdom to go that way.” Then the model feeling she had cut the ground from under the Zombie’s feet sat back in her chair; the picture of obduracy.

Faced with this dicey situation the artist knew he would have to play his cards well to turn it to his advantage. “And to retrieve the plot we will have to go to the theatre.”

Schlumper waved a bunch of tickets (with some trepidation because he knew with the model & the Zombie at loggerheads they should be escorted to the zoo or the circus separately).

“Was this configured in the stars?” Sakini wondered again but this time because a heartfelt (& she knew where the organ was) wish had come true. Well, if he had picked the right play. “What’s playing?”

“The Rat Trap.” Schlumper beamed. “Lucky mutton.”

“Yes, very lucky mutton.” They all replied glumly.

While strolling by the river to the theatre Schlumper explained that it was a version of ‘Hamlet’ they were going to see. And not a pallid version (one in which the metaphorical expressions had been expurgated in favour of supposed clarity). Hard pushed in two trees that had been badly mangled by a recent pruning leaving them almost leafless scores of large fruit bats hung like black sacks exposed in broad daylight. Occasionally one would drop off & open up like a segment of umbrella to flutter around the mutilated trees.

They arrived at an elongated concrete pit surrounded by steps. An audience was gathering as twilight fell.

A gaunt unkempt man, eyes burning with inner emptiness, strutted in one corner of the space & with loud blasts on a whistle clenched between his teeth guided in **his** invisible bus.

“Is he part of it?” They inquired drifting into position.

And Schlumper, who scratched an ear, wondered. “Perhaps this is the dumb show put on too soon.”

“He is cracked.” The model decided. While the man kept up his birdlike movements clasping a black folder tightly in his left hand. And so he continued guiding his bus into its stand throughout the main body of the play . . . a couple debating love seemingly oblivious of the whistling man oblivious too when a massive bus crashed out of the shadows onto the stage hard by with its ghostly passenger & they were still arguing when the bus, boarded by the tormented man had gone.

And so were the theatregoers later when they gathered around a table for supper under the meagre shadow of the pruned tree. A privet hedge grown against chicken wire concealed them from the pavement.

What happened to Ophelia?

She was on the bus at the back.

No that was the King.

Which one. They all looked edible except the very pale one.

No as well as him.

I saw him take a picture postcard out of his folder. Did that have the destination on it?

His stop.

A piercing whistle interrupted them & they gazed at each other quizzically. Then Sakini craning her neck saw a thin figure zigzagging up the slope of the road. “It’s . . .”

“Hamlet.” The model helped with a shrug.

“There are nearly 30,000 critical essays & reports in the file on that guy . . . Why all the interest? Why all the coverage?” The Zombie glanced at Schlumper. Who glanced back & mouthed. “All falling short & getting twisted up & contradicting themselves.”

“They like him pre-packaged.” Suggested the model. “Anything about this whistling version?”

To consider Schlumper’s nebulous hint the Zombie took a thoughtful minute. “Negative. As yet. But the wind-bags will undoubtedly catch up with him.”

“There’s no escape no end?”

“Look at him.” Schlumper pointed over the hedge. “What do you think?”

“But the play finished centuries ago.”

“I wasn’t that bored.” The model looked bruised, not really but in the way that is very difficult to do convincingly; a mere shadow line could have spoilt the effect.

“It did drag on a bit.”

“The ingenious short cut to madness forced on everyone of importance (except those who died) keeps up the interest.”

“Pack of lies.” Declared the Wolf cryptically. “Evasive fictions. Couldn’t get to the bottom of it. Except the willow tree.”

The whistling stopped. They all regarded the Wolf skeptically (not having realized they had a hermeneut in their midst). A shriveled head, its expression lacerated by doubt, appeared over the privet. Its grin was hyphenated by a metal whistle.

“He looks fatally infirm.”

“Rotten.”

“A lurid white.”

Loud blast on the whistle. “It’s the vocation; dying twice a day on three days a week you become desperately short”

“ . . . of breath?” Asked the Zombie attending to technical details.

“I suppose the whistling cuts through the chaff . . . speech being what it is these days . . .”

Suggested the artist with his fingers in his ears who understood the bare necessities.

“I can’t say.”

“We know that.” They grumbled. “But you could have tried. Even if it was only a formality. And given that whistle a rest.”

“Again. It wasn’t in the script.” The man over the hedge snapped uncompromisingly.

“Have you thought of spontaneity - intended effects?” Wondered someone at the back.

“They are just strategies to give the lie to deception.” The man was rather dismissive.

“I thought you were peevish with Ophelia. All those discourteous blasts blew any chance of romance.”

“I didn’t get it myself.” And now he looked haunted, more in part.

“You could tell that by the way you delivered the lines, so expertly & the noise. And the interplay.” Added the Zombie. Enigmatically pretending to open a door & then

explaining. “To let in the real cries from the street.” She cupped her hand around an ear.

Beneath the willow tree’s sparse branches the Wolf swore he could hear calls of distress & howls of hatred. It was tantalizing. He didn’t know whether to shout or connive. He

licked his lips. The crux of it was he didn’t know which way to play it.

The analyst was frowning she had nearly had enough of whistle blowing.

“I had the same trouble.” In short, hand on heart, up front. Agreed the man a paragon of disinterestedness. “In choosing between them.”

“At least you didn’t have to stumble over the words that would have irreparably choked you if spoken.” The artist rounded on him sharply. “You’d got it all by heart before you began.”

“And he still went ahead with it?” Cried the model. “Isn’t that disgusting?”

“Could have been had it been serious but as it is he’s helping himself to a portion of Ophelia on the side. Quite a serving.”

“Did he admit this?” The model looked suspiciously at the forlorn man who appeared to badly need a big helping, never to have had one. “Or make it up?”

“About half the reports go with the lie the other half with the other lie.” Truly the Zombie shredded any hope of a rapprochement.

Staring up through the branches at the moon the Wolf knew he should have done as he was told & read between the lines before butting in so often but here he was curious (much more than that) eager to know where the side was . . . he guessed for a start it wasn’t this side of the grave; then an inner voice coughed, possibly in a controlling kind of way, but the Wolf was blinded in the thick underbrush (dense fog?) of his naiveté & took no notice so he was certain to collide in his folly with a bigger experience than ‘side’ even if it was in the form of a marvelous back ‘side’ if he interrupted the analyst this time.

‘At some point,’ Sakini thought, ‘the Wolf is going to get smart & start sounding like the analyst & then we’ll all be in deep trouble as we all start to converge. But we’re OK at the moment. Why? We’re still having many experiences, not in reflection.’

‘I wouldn’t count on it, Anguine, we are only able to fix this by numbers for a short while to tell them apart.’ Sakini glanced sharply at the Zombie but said nothing.

And yet there was still hope because Schlumper suggested a visit to a friend. “We’ll have to gamble on a welcome.”

‘It’s a long time since I’ve included that in a greeting.’ Sakini thought. And rubbed her knees. They should all stand up & troop off but don’t. Several insects dropped out of the tree making much more noise as they hit the tabletop than would have been expected from their size. So the chirring & clicking that had accompanied their meal stopped.

“I must go.” Said the man, speaking out one side of his mouth because he had replaced the whistle, as he perused the metal watch on his wrist that looked broken to the Zombie who could almost feel the pain. “You don’t want to string along?” She asked. “But I see the fingers are jammed it’s probably later than you think?” The Zombie reaching over the hedge took his wrist to emphasize the fact.

“What if the other one isn’t there?” The man shook his hand free. “What if she was stolen away?”

“It’s more likely she would have stolen away.”

Silently agreeing with the model the Zombie fixed him grimly for a minute. “You have been waiting for that bus long enough you can surely wait a few more minutes.” Then she dropped her eyes denying his wish to be incorporated & released him.

“All in all.” Quoted Schlumper unwittingly. “That bus is beginning to loom large.” The Zombie shuddered partly in terror, partly in disbelief & for the most part because she knew for some peculiar reason encoded but rarely explained that if someone trampled on a grave this was the correct response. “We are only able to fix . . . What other one is he talking about?” Under the analyst’s bemused eye the artist counted heads. “Two.” He said pointing to her chest. There was an involuntary strangled cough. “And a half.” The artist, for the Wolf’s sake corrected himself. Dreamily the model puzzled if the half would fit in the all & concluded without reference to the Zombie’s vast store of numbers or Sakini’s prejudice that having used two ‘alls’ the artist had 610 left, or losing the look of disdain she had lighted on the man, that it would; only being a tight fit the analyst might not like it. Or the crude form it would surely take. The answer, without distinguishing five other possibilities, was to leave him out. “All or nothing.” Unsuppressed she followed the Zombie. “Some hopes.”

Schlumper opened the door having already forgotten that they were out in the open & it was only a last minute intervention by the Wolf, judging the situation as it was, that saved the night from grand exposure (Wolf’s words not mine) by drawing attention to the folly of paying heed to superficial detail. The result was not an unwanted decision but an idea, more adventurous for being vague, but which went down badly to judge by the muttered comments.

“Poke about.”

“Intrude.”

It was true they would have preferred a more compacted thing to start on & wondered if Wolf's was an innocent desire to speak up for the artist as they seemed irreconcilable characters.

"The one mordant the other . . . er . . . natural."

"There is a resemblance though, if you look closely."

"We both have a nose apiece." Schlumper added mildly; genially inserting himself back into the action when he had his hand on the doorknob to the Wolf's chagrin. "So we have agreed – no rescue just the ransom paid in words."

As he left Dekobra gave him a generous smile.

When the door shut the model straightened her back, gave mock applause. "Sold yourself cheap again."

"But not short. And still keeping it very complicated." Schlumper took up his brush.

What about the visit?

I'll paint in the door. (Six strokes of the brush & it's done).

How do we open that up?

We don't. We knock.

Who is rapping at my door at this time of night?

Hurry up spluttered the artist we're already behind schedule.

Legs flung out like poles as she moved, it was hardly a walk, not gawky, not a foal, she got to the door & hesitated head on one side showing a white hatchet cheek solid light as she unfolded a piece of paper & flattened it against the wall. What she didn't know was that the diagram was incomplete; above all the Wolf had failed to map the vaporous

scintillating other river rising & flowing invisible over the boulder-strewn riverbed
changing the landscape for it always had to flow towards a mountain.

It's the right year for a visit she said & that's close enough for the beast in my breast.

Hello Kristel said the artist with extravagant charm in a voice like a brick launched from
afar full of different alphabets we've come a long way & were just passing so knocked on
the off chance. I can remember you being born, Schlumper lied as quickly as he could,
not because he wasn't there, he was, but this situation demanded the momentum; had he
said delivered it would have rung truer if slicing open a wild boar is a legit way of
delivering a child/woman. Then he saw the very paper loose in her hand & at a glance
knew it. Oh you must have been expecting us having that map to hand & reached towards
it. Could save us a lot of time we need it to complete . . . the journey . . . I know said
Kristel I've been expecting you I thought you would come alone. Hoped she rubbed her
brow staring at his companions as if unable to bring them into focus. It's no use to you
without me she lied folding it protectively into her body. Ha ha said the artist ushering the
model forward only by catching her by surprise you see I have my hands full not having
much to go on he used his eyes fuck off said the model brushing off the old routine keep
your mind on the task at hand ready for descent God knows your body won't take the g.
If you give away any more she will not have to fish or hallucinate said the Zombie &
we'll be sucked in she glanced down the very long corridor who's she Kristel wanted to
know with a pout that strained her crimson lipstick. They all drew breath this could be
going to take all night they checked the time simultaneously daylight coming fast. If we
start at the beginning Schlumper declared even if we skip the analyst's parts as there's

little to be gained deep down who's she Kristel wanted to know starting to close the door. Something to be desired said the Wolf who's he Kristel wanted to know he comes as a warning in the shadows a bad surprise he usually speaks up earlier than this into thin air he must have been mesmerized by the change in her you. Seeing something chilling scylla wearing a basque the Wolf struck dumb was a stroke of luck this time they would be able to sit it out if they ever got inside & hear the rest wrapped in nostalgia & slurred they noticed the bottles tantalizing for no reason. And empty they scutter into & down with Kristel laughing along behind them tucking the map into her knickers & beyond. Then the Wolf knew they'd hopped a few hedges & felt eager to convey the news to the artist who scratched his ear with the same circuitous warning finger that kept the Wolf quiet in time ingratitude for what it's worth while Kristel continued deriving comfort from the secreted map until they arrived in, the Zombie noted the broken rock & the multitude of stolen cosmetics noted also the patches of rude colour rippled on the woman's body revealed by a stronger trick of the light as if she'd hurt herself a lot of times noted as well the bulge in her knicker gusset & guessed bringing with it a surge of sympathy & a plan immediately vetoed by the artist who wanted a go on the vacated sofa alone by which time Anguine had arrived toting up some number bringing them up to strength & causing Kristel some concern & weakness as there was a faint trace of something familiar in her look that disturbed her the map got damp the river ran on a few inches a mountain was washed away a road washed out a name. Seconds passed before Schlumper's fingers came across the object of his desire containing the thing they had come for & that was more mess for the deft conservators to tut over as the artist deftly

rifled (& here we are allowed to stretch a point because the Wolf the guardian of continuity has been temporarily silenced by awe) her cunt. A jealous Zombie wrinkled her nose which she showed to the model as proof of prior total knowledge who likewise in exaggeration of a missed opportunity bluntly scowled back that was misinterpreted by Sakini who sighed which being misunderstood by the artist blew her a rare kiss that was a long, long way off the mark. Have you finished fishing Kristel squealed not like that dead fish don't blame yourself if you must remember re-embodiment someone who never existed it's been dribbled on & more that friend of yours was right I couldn't get the picture perfect I have the same trouble too the artist in agreement amiably revolved her widened buttocks an inch or two to settle the lips in a better suck & slushed the rhythm of this common feature you could have heard a nut come loose the Zombie remarked to Anguine who got the gist wondering how the words escaped their fate so (& this word is the Wolf's fault) deftly. Eventually replete no time specified Kristel reluctantly unstraddled the artist letting him limp home now reinscribed as well in the echo of an empty room into which in black boots with black bag strode a professional smiling Dekobra Hotki full crimson lips caressing many teeth the Wolf counted it being his line just imagining the bird's heads & no more to cut a loose idea naked again still condemned to silence easing most of his mind into the hellhole web a double-cross with the artist in tow wake up Dekobra murmured to herself wet at the thought as much as what she got frowning come on girls Anguine frightened off put her arms around the model & the Zombie hightailing it for the door (brown) before it shut Kristel's shouted so long didn't sound perturbed having got what was coming auspiciously losing the plan without getting

saturated it was something whatever direction she looked as Dekobra recognized a continuous succession she wouldn't be surprised at a hermaphrodite popping in next created by something she had neglected yes the bag did feel heavier changing to dark silver a dark womb in which she could set to with her tongue on that cruel angel refusing no one given a chance if the notes held. Panting Kristel tried to hold onto the artist & he was trying to hold on not as well given women were generally smoother but not with what the girls were tugging while hard at his heels the subtle distinction being a better grip the analyst went for some easy to grasp body part mind in between sublimated naturally one way or the other the Wolf not entirely excluded saw to that from his disadvantage point outside in amongst other things the vital clue February the pelt a definite plus that month to cover his ears keeping out the racket everyone talking at once an interminable waterfall of torrential language meaningless meaning both opposites at one & the same time without consequence in the general drift. Got it in one said the artist reweaving his way to the door keeping a sharp eye on the transparent plane whereupon Dekobra took his hand for the first time in a farewell.