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Italo Svevo

ZENO'S CONSCIENCE

A Novel

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

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PREFACE

I AM THE doctor occasionally mentioned in this story, in unflattering terms. Anyone familiar with psychoanalysis knows how to assess the patient's obvious hostility toward me.

I will not discuss psychoanalysis here, because in the following pages it is discussed more than enough. I must apologize for having suggested my patient write his autobiography; students of psychoanalysis will frown on this new departure. But he was an old man, and I hoped that recalling his past would rejuvenate him, and that the autobiography would serve as a useful prelude to his analysis. Even today my idea still seems a good one to me, for it achieved results far beyond my hopes. The results would have been even greater if the patient had not suspended treatment just when things were going well, denying me the fruit of my long and painstaking analysis of these memories.

I am publishing them in revenge, and I hope he is displeased. I want him to know, however, that I am prepared to share with him the lavish profits I expect to make from this publication, on condition that he resume his treatment. He seemed so curious about himself! If he only knew the countless surprises he might enjoy from discussing the many truths and the many lies he has assembled here! . . .

Doctor S.

PREAMBLE

REVIEW MY CHILDHOOD? More than a half-century stretches between that time and me, but my farsighted eyes could perhaps perceive it if the light still glowing there were not blocked by obstacles of every sort, outright mountain peaks: all my years and some of my hours.

The doctor has urged me not to insist stubbornly on trying to see all that far back. Recent things can also be valuable, and especially fantasies and last night's dreams. But there should be at least some kind of order, and to help me begin *ab ovo*, the moment I left the doctor, who is going out of town shortly and will be absent from Trieste for some time, I bought and read a treatise on psychoanalysis, just to make his task easier. It's not hard to understand, but it's very boring.

Now, having dined, comfortably lying in my overstuffed lounge chair, I am holding a pencil and a piece of paper. My brow is unfurrowed because I have dismissed all concern from my mind. My thinking seems something separate from me. I can see it. It rises and falls . . . but that is its only activity. To remind it that it is my thinking and that its duty is to make itself evident, I grasp the pencil. Now my brow does wrinkle, because each word is made up of so many letters and the imperious present looms up and blots out the past.

Yesterday I tried to achieve maximum relaxation. The experiment ended in deepest sleep, and its only effect on me was a great repose and the curious sensation of having seen, during that sleep, something important. But it was forgotten by then, lost forever.

Today, thanks to the pencil I'm holding in my hand, I remain awake. I can see, or glimpse, some odd images that surely have nothing to do with my past: a puffing locomotive dragging countless coaches up a steep grade. Who knows where it's coming from or where it's going or why it has now turned up here?

As I doze, I remember how my textbook claims that this method will allow you to recall your earliest infancy, your cradle days. I see immediately a baby in a cradle, but why should that baby be me? He doesn't look anything like me; on the contrary, I believe he was born a few weeks ago to my sister-in-law, who displayed him as a miracle because he has such tiny hands and such big eyes. Recall my infancy? Hardly. Poor baby! I can't even find a way to warn you, now living in your own infancy, how important it is to remember it, for the benefit of your intelligence and your health. When will you discover that it would be a good idea to memorize your life, even the large part of it that will revolt you? Meanwhile, unconscious, you are investigating your tiny organism in search of pleasure, and your delightful discoveries will pave the way toward the grief and sickness to which you will be driven even by those who would not wish them on you. What is to be done? It is impossible to keep constant watch over your crib. In your breast — you poor little thing! — a mysterious combination is forming. Every passing minute provides a reagent. Too many probabilities of illness surround you, for not all your minutes can be pure. And besides — poor baby! — you are the blood relation of people I know. The minutes now passing may actually be pure, but all the centuries that prepared for your coming were certainly not.

Here I am, quite far from the images that precede sleep. I will make another attempt tomorrow.

SMOKE

THE DOCTOR WITH whom I discussed the question told me to begin my work with a historical analysis of my smoking habit.

"Write it down! And you'll see yourself whole! Try it!"

I believe I can write about smoking here at my desk, without having to sit and dream in that chair. I can't seem to begin, so I must seek help from my cigarettes, all very like the one I am now holding.

Today I discover immediately something I had forgotten. The cigarettes I first smoked are no longer on the market. Around 1870 in Austria there was a brand that came in cardboard boxes stamped with the two-headed eagle. Now, around one of those boxes I see a few people gathering, each with some characteristic, so distinct that I can recall their names, but not distinct enough to prompt any emotion at this unforeseen encounter. I want to delve deeper, so I go to the armchair: the people fade and are replaced by some clowns, who mock me. Dejected, I return to the desk.

One of those figures, with a somewhat hoarse voice, was Giuseppe, a youth my own age, and with him was my brother, a year younger than I, who died many years ago. It seems Giuseppe received a generous allowance from his father, and used to give us some of those cigarettes. But I am certain he offered more of them to my brother than to me. Hence I was faced with the necessity of procuring some for myself. So I stole. In summer my father hung his waistcoat over a chair in the breakfast room, and in its pocket there was always change. I procured the ten pennies necessary to purchase the precious

little packet, and I smoked its ten cigarettes one after the other, rather than hold on to the compromising fruit of my theft.

All this lay in my consciousness, within reach. It resurfaces only now because previously I didn't know that it could be of any importance. So I have recorded the origin of the filthy habit and (who knows?) I may already be cured of it. Therefore, I light a last cigarette, as a test; perhaps I will throw it away at once, revolted.

Then, I remember, one day my father caught me with his waistcoat in my hands. With a shamelessness I could not muster today, which still disgusts me (perhaps – who knows? – that disgust is highly significant in my life), I told him I had felt a sudden impulse to count the buttons. My father laughed at my mathematical or sartorial leanings, failing to notice that I had my fingers in the watch pocket. It should be said, to my credit, that this laughter, inspired by my innocence when it no longer existed, sufficed to keep me from ever stealing again. Or rather . . . I stole again, but unawares. My father left some half-smoked Virginia cigars around the house, perched on table edges and armoires. I believed this was how he threw them away, and I believe our old maidservant, Catina, did then fling them out. I carried them off and smoked them in secret. At the very moment I grabbed them I was overcome by a shudder of revulsion, knowing how sick they would make me. Then I smoked them until my brow was drenched in cold sweat and my stomach was in knots. It cannot be said that in my childhood I lacked energy.

I know perfectly well also how my father cured me of this habit. One summer day I returned home from a school outing, tired and soaked in sweat. My mother helped me undress, and wrapping me in a big towel, she made me lie down to sleep on a sofa where she was also seated, busy with some sewing. I was almost asleep, but the sun was still in my eyes, and it was taking me a while to lose consciousness. The sweetness that, in those tender years, accompanied repose after great weariness is clear

to me, like an image on its own, as clear as if I were there now, beside that beloved body that no longer exists.

I remember the big, cool room where we children used to play; now, in these times when space has become so precious, it is subdivided into two parts. In this scene my brother doesn't appear, and I am surprised because I think he must also have participated in that excursion, and should have shared in the rest afterwards. Was he also sleeping, at the other end of the sofa? I look at that place, but it seems empty to me. I see only myself, in the sweetness of that repose, my mother, then my father, whose words I hear re-echoing. He had come in and hadn't immediately seen me, because he called aloud: "Maria!"

Mamma, with a gesture accompanied by a faint sound of the lips, nodded toward me, whom she believed immersed in sleep, though I was only afloat on the surface, fully conscious. I was so pleased that, for my sake, Papà had to control himself that I kept absolutely still.

In a low voice my father complained, "I think I'm going mad. I could swear that, not thirty minutes ago, I left half a cigar on that cupboard, and now I can't find it. I'm getting worse. I'm losing track of things."

Also in a low voice, yet betraying an amusement restrained only by her fear of waking me, my mother replied, "But no one's been in that room since dinner."

My father murmured, "I know that, too, and that's why I feel I'm going mad!"

He turned and went out.

I half opened my eyes and looked at my mother. She had resumed her work, but was still smiling. Surely she didn't think my father was about to go mad, if she could smile at his fears like that. Her smile was so imprinted on my mind that I recalled it immediately one day when I saw it on the lips of my wife.

Later, it wasn't lack of money that made it difficult for me to satisfy my craving, but prohibitions that helped stimulate it.

I remember I smoked a great deal, hiding in every possible corner. Because of the strong physical disgust that ensued, I recall once staying a full half hour in a dark cellar, together with two other boys of whom I remember nothing but their childish clothing. Two pairs of short socks that stand erect because there were then bodies inside them, which time has erased. They had many cigarettes, and we wanted to see who could consume the most in the shortest time. I won, and heroically I concealed the sickness produced by this strange exploit. Then we came out into the sun and air. Dazed, I had to close my eyes to keep from falling. I recovered, and boasted of my victory. One of the two little men said to me: "I don't care about losing: I smoke only when I need to."

I remember the healthy words but not the little face, also surely healthy, which he must have turned toward me at that moment.

At that time I didn't know whether I loved or hated cigarettes, their taste, the condition nicotine created in me. But when I came to realize that I hated all of those, it was worse. And I had this realization at the age of about twenty. Then for some weeks I suffered from a violent sore throat accompanied by fever. The doctor prescribed bed rest and absolute abstention from smoking. I remember that word, *absolute*! It wounded me, and my fever colored it. A great void, and nothing to help me resist the enormous pressure immediately produced around a void.

When the doctor left me, my father (my mother had been dead for many years), his cigar clenched firmly between his teeth, remained a little longer to keep me company. As he went out, after gently running his hand over my blazing brow, he said: "No smoking, eh!"

A huge uneasiness came over me. I thought: "It's bad for me, so I will never smoke again. But first I want to have one last smoke." I lit a cigarette and felt immediately released from the uneasiness, though my fever was perhaps increasing, and at

every puff I felt my tonsils burning as if they had been touched by a red-hot coal. I finished the whole cigarette dutifully, as if fulfilling a vow. And, still suffering horribly, I smoked many others during my illness. My father came and went with his cigar in his mouth, saying: "Bravo! A few more days without smoking and you'll be cured!"

These words alone made me yearn for him to leave, to go out at once, allowing me to rush to my cigarettes. I even pretended to fall asleep, to induce him to leave more quickly.

That illness provoked the second of my troubles: the effort to rid myself of the first. In the end, my days were full of cigarettes and of resolutions to smoke no more; and to make a long story short, from time to time my days are the same now. The whirl of last cigarettes, begun at twenty, continues still. My resolutions are less extreme, and my weakness finds greater indulgence in my elderly soul. When we are old, we smile at life and at everything it contains. I can say also that for some time I have been smoking many cigarettes . . . and they are not the last.

On the flyleaf of a dictionary I find this note of mine, recorded in an elegant, even ornate, hand:

"Today, 2 February 1886, I am transferring from the school of law to the faculty of chemistry. Last cigarette!!"

That was a very important last cigarette. I remember all the hopes that accompanied it. I had become infuriated with canon law, which seemed to me so remote from life, and I was rushing to science, which is life itself, perhaps condensed in a beaker. That last cigarette actually signified my desire for activity (even manual) and for serene thought, sober and solid.

To escape the chain of carbon compounds in which I had no faith, I returned to the law. An error — alas! — also marked by a last cigarette, which I find recorded in a book. This one was also important, and I became resigned yet again to those complications of the mine, the thine, and the theirs, always with the best intentions, finally throwing off the carbon

chains. I had demonstrated scant inclination for chemistry, thanks in part to my lack of manual dexterity. How could I possibly have been dextrous, when I continued smoking like a Turk?

Now that I am here, analyzing myself, I am seized by a suspicion: Did I perhaps love cigarettes so much because they enabled me to blame them for my clumsiness? Who knows? If I had stopped smoking, would I have become the strong, ideal man I expected to be? Perhaps it was this suspicion that bound me to my habit, for it is comfortable to live in the belief that you are great, though your greatness is latent. I venture this hypothesis to explain my youthful weakness, but without any firm conviction. Now that I am old and no one demands anything of me, I still pass from cigarette to resolve, and from resolve to cigarette. What do those resolutions mean today? Like that old doctor described by Goldoni,* can I expect to die healthy, having lived with illness all my life?

Once, as a student, when I changed lodgings, I had to have my old room repapered at my own expense, because I had covered the walls with dates. Probably I left that room precisely because it had become the graveyard of my good intentions and I believed it no longer possible to conceive any further such intentions in that tomb of so many old ones.

I believe the taste of a cigarette is more intense when it's your last. The others, too, have a special taste of their own, but less intense. The last one gains flavor from the feeling of victory over oneself and the hope of an imminent future of strength and health. The others have their importance because, in lighting them, you are proclaiming your freedom, while the future of strength and health remains, only moving off a bit.

* Carlo Goldoni (1707-93), Venetian playwright. This prolific writer of comedies of Venetian life (as well as libretti, memoirs, and other works) has remained in the repertoire, not only in Italy.

The dates on the walls of my room were written in the most varied colors, even painted in oil. The resolution, reaffirmed with the most ingenuous good faith, found suitable expression in the strength of the color, which was to make the previous vow look pale. Certain dates were favorites of mine because of the harmony of the numbers. From the last century I remember one date that I felt should seal forever the coffin in which I wanted to bury my habit: "Ninth day of the ninth month of 1899." Significant, isn't it? The new century brought me dates of quite a different musicality: "First day of the first month of 1901." Today I still believe that if that date could be repeated, I would be able to begin a new life.

But the calendar is never lacking for dates, and with a little imagination any one of them can be found suitable for a good resolution. I remember the following, because it seemed to contain a supreme categorical imperative for me: "Third day of the sixth month of 1912, 2400 hours." It sounds as if each number were doubling the stakes.

The year 1913 gave me a moment's pause. There was no thirteenth month, to harmonize with the year. But you must not think so many harmonies are required for a date to lend significance to a last cigarette. Many dates that I find written down in volumes or in favorite notebooks stand out because of their dissonance. For example, the third day of the second month of 1905, at six o'clock! It has a rhythm of its own, when you think about it, because each number contradicts its predecessor. Many events, indeed all, from the death of Pius IX to the birth of my son, seemed to me worthy of being celebrated by the usual ironclad vow. All of my family are amazed at my memory for our anniversaries, sad and happy, and they believe me so considerate!

To reduce its outlandish appearance, I even tried to give a philosophical content to the last-cigarette disease. Striking a beautiful attitude, one says: "Never again." But what becomes of that attitude if the promise is then kept? It's possible to strike

the attitude only when you are obliged to renew the vow. And besides, for me, time is not that inconceivable thing that never stops. For me, and only for me, it retraces its steps.

*

Disease is a conviction, and I was born with that conviction. Of the disease I had at twenty, I would remember very little if I hadn't had it described for me at that time by the doctor. It's odd how you remember spoken words better than emotions, which cannot stir the air.

I went to that doctor because I had been told he cured nervous disorders with electricity. I thought that electricity could endow me with the strength necessary to give up smoking.

The doctor had a big belly, and his asthmatic breathing accompanied the clicking of the electric mechanism he employed immediately, at the first session: a disappointment, because I had expected that the doctor would study me and discover the poison polluting my blood. On the contrary, he pronounced my constitution healthy, and when I complained of difficulty in digesting and sleeping, he opined that my stomach lacked acids and that my peristaltic action (he used that adjective so many times that I have never forgotten it) was rather sluggish. He administered also a certain acid that ruined me; ever since then, I have suffered from excess acidity.

When I realized that on his own he would never arrive at discovering the nicotine in my blood, I decided to help him, expressing the suspicion that my illness could be attributed to this cause. With some effort he shrugged his heavy shoulders: "Peristaltic action . . . acid. Nicotine has nothing to do with it!"

Seventy applications of electricity followed, and they would continue to this day if I hadn't decided seventy were enough. Expecting no miracles, I still hurried to those sessions in the hope of persuading the doctor to forbid me to smoke.

I wonder how things would have turned out if my resolve had been strengthened then by such a prohibition.

And here is the description of my illness that I gave the doctor: "I'm unable to study, and even on the rare occasions when I go to bed early, I remain awake until the small hours strike. So I vacillate between law and chemistry because both these disciplines involve work that begins at a set time, whereas I never know at what hour I may get up."

"Electricity cures any form of insomnia," my Aesculapius averred, his eyes always on the dial rather than on the patient.

I went so far as to talk with him as if he were equipped to understand psychoanalysis, into which, timidly and precociously, I had ventured. I told him of my unhappiness with women. One wasn't enough for me, nor were many. I desired them all! In the street my agitation was immense; as women went by, they were all mine. I looked them up and down, insolently, out of a need to feel myself brutal. In my mind I undressed them, leaving only their boots on, I took them into my arms, and I let them go only when I was quite certain that I had known every part of them.

Sincerity and breath wasted! The doctor was gasping: "I certainly hope the electrical treatments will not cure you of that illness. The very idea! I would never touch a Ruhmkorff* again if I had reason to fear such an effect."

He told me an anecdote that he considered delightful. A man suffering from my same illness went to a famous doctor, begging to be cured, and the doctor, after succeeding perfectly, had to leave the country because otherwise his former patient would have had his scalp.

"My agitation isn't the good kind!" I cried. "It comes from the poison that surges through my veins."

* Heinrich Daniel Ruhmkorff (1803-77), inventor of an electrical device, a "coil," popular around the end of the nineteenth century.

With a heartbroken expression, the doctor murmured: "Nobody is ever content with his lot."

And to convince him, I did what he was unwilling to do, and I examined my disease, reviewing all its symptoms. "My distraction! It also prevents my studying. I was in Graz preparing for the first state examinations, and I made a careful list of all the texts I would require until the last examination was over. Then, as it turned out, a few days before the examination I realized I had studied subjects I would need only several years later. So I had to postpone the exam. True, I had studied even those other things only scantily, thanks to a young woman in the neighborhood who, for that matter, conceded me little beyond some brazen flirtation. When she was at her window, I could no longer keep my eyes on the textbook. Isn't a man who behaves like that an imbecile? I remember the little, white face of the girl at the window: oval, framed by fluffy, tawny curls. I looked at her and dreamed of pressing that whiteness and that russet gold against my pillow."

Aesculapius murmured, "Flirtation always has something good about it. When you're my age, you won't flirt anymore."

Today I am certain that he knew absolutely nothing about flirtation. I am fifty-seven, and I'm sure that if I don't stop smoking or if psychoanalysis doesn't cure me, my last glance from my deathbed will express my desire for my nurse, provided she is not my wife and provided my wife has allowed the nurse to be beautiful!

I spoke sincerely, in Confession: a woman never appeals to me as a whole, but rather . . . in pieces! In all women I loved feet, if well shod: in many others, a slender neck but also a thick one, and the bosom, if not too heavy. I went on listing female anatomical parts, but the doctor interrupted me.

"These parts add up to a whole woman."

I then uttered an important statement: "Healthy love is the love that embraces a single, whole woman, including her character and her intelligence."

At that time I surely hadn't yet known such a love; and when I did encounter it, it was unable to give me health; but it's important for me to remember that I identified disease where a man of science found health, and that later my diagnosis proved true.

In a friend who was not a physician I then found the person who best understood me and my disease. I derived no great advantage from this association, but in my life it struck a new note that still echoes.

This friend was a gentleman of means who enriched his leisure with study and literary projects. He talked much better than he wrote, and therefore the world was never to know what a fine man of letters he was. He was big and heavysset, and when I met him he was undergoing a strenuous cure to lose weight. In a few days he had achieved a considerable result, so that in the street everyone came up to him, hoping to enhance their own feeling of health, in contrast to his obvious illness. I envied him because he was capable of doing what he wanted, and I remained close to him for the duration of his cure. He allowed me to touch his belly, which shrank every day, and, in my malevolent envy, wanting to sap his determination, I would say to him: "When your cure's over, what's going to happen to all this skin?"

With great calm, which made his emaciated face comical, he replied: "In two days' time, massage therapy begins."

His cure had been planned in every detail, and he would certainly respect every date.

I developed a great faith in his wisdom, and I described my disease to him. I remember this description, too. I explained to him that I thought it would be easier to renounce eating three times a day than to give up smoking my countless cigarettes, which would require repeating the same wearisome decision every moment. Having such a decision on your mind leaves no time for anything else; only Julius Caesar was able to do several things at the same moment. True, I am not asked to

work; not while my accountant Olivi is alive, but why is a person like me unable to do anything in this world except dream or scratch at the violin, for which he possesses no talent?

The thinned fat man did not reply at once. He was methodical, and he first pondered for a long time. Then, with a learned mien that was rightfully his, given his great superiority in the field, he explained to me that my real disease lay not in the cigarette but in the decision-making. I should try giving up the habit without any resolutions or decisions. In me — he felt — over the course of the years two persons had come into being, one of whom commanded, while the other was merely a slave who, the moment surveillance weakened, flouted his master's will out of a love of freedom. This slave was therefore to be granted absolute freedom, and at the same time I should look my habit squarely in the face, as if it were new and I had never seen it before. It should not be fought, but neglected and forgotten in a certain way; abandoning it, I should turn my back on it nonchalantly, as on a companion now recognized as unworthy of me. Quite simple, really.

In fact, it did seem simple to me. It's true, moreover, that having then succeeded with great effort in dispelling all decisiveness from my spirit, I succeeded in not smoking for several hours, but when my mouth was cleansed and I felt an innocent taste such as a newborn infant must know, and a desire for a cigarette came over me, and when I smoked it I felt a remorse for which I renewed the decision I had tried to abolish. It was a longer way round, but it arrived at the same place.

One day that scoundrel Olivi gave me an idea: I would strengthen my resolve by making a bet.

I believe Olivi has always looked the way I see him today. I have always seen him a bit stooped but solid, and to me he has always appeared old, as I see him now, at eighty. He has worked for me and still works for me, but I don't love him,

because in my view he has prevented me from doing the work that he does.

We made a bet! The first one of us who smoked would pay, and then each would regain his own freedom. So the accountant, who had been imposed on me to keep me from squandering my father's legacy, tried to diminish my mother's, which I controlled freely on my own!

The bet proved extremely pernicious. I was no longer occasionally the master, but only a slave, the slave of that Olivi, whom I didn't love! I smoked immediately. Then I thought to defraud him by continuing to smoke in secret. But, in that case, why should I have made the bet? To smoke a last cigarette, I hastily sought a date that might have some attractive tie with the date of the bet, which I could somehow imagine had also been recorded by Olivi himself. But the rebellion continued and I smoked so much I became short of breath. To free myself of this burden, I went to Olivi and confessed.

The old man, smiling, collected the money and immediately took from his pocket a thick cigar, which he lighted and smoked with great gusto. I had no doubt that he had observed the conditions of the bet. Obviously, other men are made differently from me.

Just after my son's third birthday, my wife had a fine idea. She suggested I have myself confined for a while in a clinic, to rid myself of the habit. I agreed at once, first of all because when my son reached an age at which he would be able to judge me, I wanted him to find me stable and tranquil, and also for the more urgent reason that Olivi was ill and threatening to abandon me, hence I might be forced to take his place at any moment, and I considered myself ill-suited for such great activity with all that nicotine inside me.

At first we thought of going to Switzerland, the traditional land of clinics, but then we learned that in Trieste a certain Dr. Muli had opened an establishment. I sent my wife to see

him, and he offered to reserve for me a locked apartment where I would be guarded by a nurse, assisted also by other staff. As my wife told me about it, she smiled and even laughed out loud, amused at the idea of having me locked up, and I laughed heartily along with her. This was the first time she had participated in my attempts at treatment. Until now she had never taken my disease seriously, and she used to say that smoking was only a somewhat odd and not entirely boring way of life. I believe that after marrying me, she had been pleasantly surprised at never hearing me express any nostalgia for my freedom; I was too busy missing other things.

We went to the clinic on the same day Olivi told me that nothing could persuade him to stay on with me beyond the following month. At home, we prepared some fresh linen in a trunk, and that same evening we went to Dr. Muli's.

He welcomed us at the door, in person. At that time Dr. Muli was a handsome young man. It was midsummer; small, nervy, his lively, shining black eyes even more prominent in his sun-burnished face, he was the picture of elegance in his white suit, trim from his collar to his shoes. He roused my wonder, but obviously I was also the object of his.

A bit embarrassed, understanding the reason for his wonder, I said: "Of course. You don't believe in the necessity of the treatment, or in my seriousness in undertaking it."

With a slight smile, which somehow hurt me, the doctor replied: "Why not? It may be true that cigarettes are more harmful to you than we doctors admit. Only I don't understand why, instead of giving up smoking *ex abrupto*, you haven't decided simply to reduce the number of cigarettes you smoke. Smoking is all right, provided you don't overdo it."

To tell the truth, in my desire to stop smoking altogether, I had never even considered the possibility of smoking less. But this advice, arriving now, could only weaken my resolve. I spoke firmly: "Since it's been decided, let me give this cure a try."

"Try?" The doctor laughed with a superior manner. "Once you undertake it, the cure must succeed. Unless you employ brute force to overpower poor Giovanna, you will be unable to leave here. The formalities to release you would take so long that in the meantime you would forget your addiction."

We were in the apartment reserved for me, which we had reached by returning to the ground floor, after having climbed up to the third.

"You see? That barred door prevents any communication with the other part of the ground floor, where the exit is located. Not even Giovanna has the keys. To go outside, she also has to climb to the third floor, and only she has the keys to the door that was opened for us on that landing. In any case, there are always guards on the third floor. Not bad, eh? In a clinic originally designed for babies and expectant mothers?"

And he started laughing, perhaps at the thought of having shut me up among the babies.

He called Giovanna and introduced me. She was a tiny little woman of indeterminate age: anywhere between forty and sixty. She had small eyes, intensely aglow, and a cap of very gray hair.

The doctor said to her: "With this gentleman you must be ready to use your fists."

She looked at me, studying me, turned bright red, and shouted in a shrill voice, "I will do my duty, but I certainly can't fight with you. If you threaten me, I'll call the orderly, a strong man, and if he doesn't come at once, I'll let you go where you like, because I certainly don't want to risk my neck."

I learned later that the doctor had given her this assignment with the promise of a fairly generous bonus, which had only increased her fright. At that moment her words irked me — fine position I had put myself in, and of my own free will!

"Neck, indeed!" I cried. "Who's going to touch your neck?"

I turned to the doctor: "I would like you to instruct this woman not to disturb me. I have brought some books along, and I want to be left in peace."

The doctor uttered a few words of warning to Giovanna. Her only apology was to continue her attack: "I have children, two little daughters, and I have to live."

"I wouldn't condescend to murder you," I replied in a tone surely not calculated to reassure the poor creature.

The doctor got rid of her, sending her to fetch something or other from the floor above, and to soothe me, he offered to replace her with someone else, adding: "She's not a bad sort, and when I've instructed her to be a little more tactful, she will give you no cause for complaint."

Wishing to show what scant importance I attached to the person charged with watching over me, I declared my willingness to put up with her. I felt the need to calm down, I took from my pocket my next-to-last cigarette and smoked it greedily; I explained to the doctor that I had brought with me only two, and that I wanted to stop smoking at midnight on the dot.

My wife took her leave of me along with the doctor. Smiling, she said: "This is your decision, so be strong."

Her smile, which I so loved, seemed a mockery; and at that very moment a new feeling germinated in my spirit, with the result that an enterprise undertaken with such seriousness was doomed perforce to fail at once. I felt ill immediately, but I did not realize what was making me suffer until I was left alone. A mad, bitter jealousy of the young doctor. Handsome he was, and free! He was called the Venus of doctors. Why wouldn't my wife love him? Following her, as they left, he had looked at her elegantly shod feet! This was the first time since my marriage that I had felt jealous. What misery! It was no doubt a part of my condition as a wretched prisoner. I fought back! My wife's smile was her usual smile, not mockery after having eliminated me from the house. It was she, indeed, who

had caused me to be locked up, though she attached no importance to my habit; but she had surely arranged this to please me. And, furthermore, I should recall that it wasn't so easy to fall in love with my wife. The doctor may have looked at her feet, but certainly he had done so to see what sort of boots to buy for his mistress. Still, I promptly smoked the last cigarette; and it wasn't yet midnight, only eleven o'clock, an impossible hour for a last cigarette.

I opened a book. I read without comprehending, and I actually had visions. The page on which I had fixed my gaze was occupied by a photograph of Dr. Muli in all his glory, beauty, elegance. I couldn't bear it! I summoned Giovanna. Perhaps if I could converse, I would calm down.

She came, and at once gave me a suspicious look. She cried with her shrill voice: "You needn't think you can persuade me to neglect my duty."

Meanwhile, to soothe her, I lied, assuring her I wasn't thinking any such thing, but I no longer felt like reading and would rather have a little chat with her. I made her sit down opposite me. Actually, she repelled me, with her old crone demeanor and her youthful eyes, shifty like the eyes of all weak animals. I felt sorry for myself, having to put up with such company! It's true that even when I'm free, I can never choose the company most suitable for me; as a rule it's the others who choose me, as my wife did.

I begged Giovanna to entertain me, and when she insisted she could say nothing worthy of my attention, I asked her to tell me about her family, adding that nearly everybody in this world has at least one.

She then obeyed, and started telling me that she had had to put her two little girls in the Institute for the Poor.

I was beginning to enjoy her story because her brisk way of dealing with those eighteen months of pregnancy made me laugh. But her temperament was too argumentative and I simply couldn't go on listening to her when, first, she tried

to convince me that she had no other course, what with her scant wages, and then that the doctor had been wrong, a few days before, to assert that two crowns daily were enough for her, since the Institute supported her entire family.

She was shouting. "And what about the rest? Even after they've been fed and clothed, they still don't have all they need!" And out she came with a whole stream of things she had to provide for her daughters, all of which I have now forgotten, since to protect my hearing from her shrill voice, I deliberately directed my thoughts elsewhere. But I was distressed all the same, and I felt entitled to a reward: "Wouldn't it be possible to have a cigarette? Just one? I'd pay you ten crowns. Tomorrow, that is. Because I don't have a penny with me."

Giovanna was hugely frightened by my proposal. Then, speaking purely at random, just to be talking and to maintain my composure, I asked: "In this prison there must at least be something to drink, isn't there?"

Giovanna responded promptly and, to my astonishment, in a genuinely conversational tone, without yelling. "Yes, indeed! Before leaving, the doctor gave me this bottle of cognac. Here it is, still unopened. You see? The seal hasn't been broken."

In my present position, the only avenue of escape I could then envision was drunkenness. To such straits had my confidence in my wife reduced me!

At that moment my smoking habit didn't seem worth all the effort to which I had subjected myself. Already I hadn't smoked for half an hour and I wasn't even thinking about it, concerned as I was with the idea of my wife with Doctor Muli. So I was entirely cured, but irreparably ridiculous!

I opened the bottle and poured myself a little glass of the yellow liquid. Giovanna watched me, her mouth agape, but I hesitated before offering her any.

"When I've finished this bottle, will I be able to have another?"

Still in her pleasant conversational tone, Giovanna reassured me, "As much as you want! To comply with your slightest wish, the housekeeper must get up, even at midnight!"

I have never suffered from miserliness, and Giovanna immediately had her glass filled, to the brim. Before she could finish saying thanks, she had drained it, and she immediately cast her bright eyes on the bottle. So it was she herself who gave me the idea of getting her drunk. But that was no easy undertaking!

I couldn't repeat exactly everything she said to me, in her pure Triestine dialect, after she had drained all those glasses, but I had the profound impression of being with a person to whom, if I hadn't been distracted by my own concerns, I could have listened with pleasure.

First of all, she confided to me that this was precisely the way she liked to work. Everybody in this world should be entitled to spend a couple of hours every day in just such a comfortable chair, facing a bottle of good brandy, the kind that doesn't cause any ill effects.

I also tried to converse. I asked her if, when her husband was alive, her work had been organized in this same way.

She burst out laughing. When her husband was alive he had given her more beatings than kisses and, compared with the way she had had to work for him, any job had seemed a rest, long before I arrived at this place for my cure.

Then Giovanna became pensive and asked me if I believed that the dead could see what the living are up to. I nodded briefly. But she wanted to know if the dead, when they reach the other side, learned of everything that had happened back here during their lifetime.

For a moment the question actually did distract me. It had been asked, moreover, in a much softer tone because, to avoid being overheard, Giovanna had lowered her voice.

"So," I said, "you were unfaithful to your husband."

She begged me not to shout, then confessed that she had been unfaithful to him, but only during the first months of their marriage. Then she had grown accustomed to his blows and had loved her man.

To keep up the conversation, I asked: "So your older daughter owes her life to this other man?"

Again in a low voice, she admitted to believing as much, also because of a certain resemblance. She was very sorry she had betrayed her husband. She said this, but was still laughing because these are things you laugh about even when they hurt. But that was only after his death, because, before, since he didn't know about it, the matter couldn't have any importance.

Impelled by a certain fraternal friendliness, I tried to allay her sorrow; I told her I believed the dead do know everything, but certain things they don't give a damn about.

"Only the living suffer over them!" I cried, banging my fist on the table.

I bruised my hand, and there is nothing better than physical pain to provoke new ideas. It occurred to me that while I was here tormenting myself with the thought of my wife's taking advantage of my confinement in order to betray me, perhaps the doctor was still in the clinic, in which case I could recover my peace of mind. I asked Giovanna to go and see, saying that I felt a need to tell the doctor something, and promising her the whole bottle as a reward. Protesting that she wasn't all that fond of drinking, she still complied at once and I heard her climb unsteadily up the wooden steps to the upper floor, to emerge from our cloister. Then she came down again, but she slipped, making a great racket and screaming.

"The devil take you," I murmured fervently. Had she broken her neck, my position would have been greatly simplified.

Instead, she joined me, smiling, because she was in that state where pains aren't so painful. She told me she had spoken with

the attendant, who was just going to bed; though, even there, he remained at her disposal, in the event that I turned nasty. She raised her hand, index finger pointed, but she tempered those words and that threatening gesture with a smile. Then, more sharply, she added that the doctor had not returned after seeing my wife out. Not a sign! Indeed, for some hours, the attendant had hoped the doctor would return, because a patient needed to be looked at. Now the attendant had given up hope.

I looked at her, studying the smile that contorted her face, to see if it was habitual or if it was totally new, inspired by the fact that the doctor was with my wife rather than with me, his patient. I was seized by a fury that made my head spin. I must confess that, as always, in my spirit two persons were combating, one of whom, the more reasonable, was saying to me: "Idiot! What makes you think your wife is unfaithful? She wouldn't have to get you locked up to create the opportunity." The other, and this was surely the one who wanted to smoke, also called me an idiot, but shouted: "Don't you recall how easy things are when the husband is away? And with the doctor you are paying money to!"

Giovanna, taking another drink, said: "I forgot to lock the door upstairs. But I don't want to climb those steps again. Anyway, there are always people up there, and you'd look really foolish if you tried to run away."

"Yes," I said, with that modicum of hypocrisy now necessary to deceive the poor creature. Then I, too, gulped down some cognac, and declared that with all this liquor now at my disposal, I didn't give a damn about cigarettes. She believed me at once, and then I told her I actually wasn't the one who wanted me to break the smoking habit. It was my wife. Because when I smoked as many as ten cigarettes a day, I became something terrible. Any woman who came within reach of me then was in danger.

Giovanna began to laugh loudly, sinking back in the chair: "So it's your wife who prevents you from smoking the ten cigarettes you need?"

"That's exactly how it was! At least she used to keep me from smoking."

Giovanna was no fool once she had all that cognac inside her. She was seized by a fit of laughter that almost made her fall out of the chair, but when she had recovered enough breath to gasp out a few words, she painted a magnificent scene suggested to her by my illness. "Ten cigarettes . . . half an hour . . . you set the alarm . . . then . . ."

I corrected her. "For ten cigarettes I'd need an hour, more or less. Then, for the full effect, about another hour, give or take ten minutes . . ."

Suddenly Giovanna became serious and rose almost effortlessly from her chair. She said she would go and lie down because she was feeling a slight headache. I invited her to take the bottle with her, because I had had enough of that strong liquor. Hypocritically, I said that the next day I wanted to be provided with some good wine.

But she wasn't thinking about wine. Before leaving, as she held the bottle under her arm, she looked me up and down, with a leer that frightened me.

She left the door open, and a moment or two later a package landed in the center of the room. I picked it up immediately: it contained exactly eleven cigarettes. To make sure, poor Giovanna had chosen to be generous. Ordinary cigarettes, Hungarian. But the first one I lighted was very good. I felt enormously relieved. At once I thought, with smug pleasure, how I had outsmarted this place, fine for shutting up children, but not me. Then I realized I had outsmarted my wife too, and it seemed to me I had repaid her in her own coin. Why, otherwise, would my jealousy have been transformed into such acceptable curiosity? I remained in that room, calmly smoking those nauseating cigarettes.

After about half an hour, I remembered I had to escape from that clinic, where Giovanna was awaiting her reward. I took off my shoes and went out into the corridor. The door of Giovanna's room was ajar and, judging by her regular, noisy breathing, I imagined she was asleep. Cautiously I climbed up to the third story where, behind that door – Doctor Muli's pride – I slipped on my shoes. I stepped out onto a landing and started down the other stairs, descending slowly so as not to arouse suspicion.

I had reached the landing of the second floor when a young lady in a rather elegant nurse's uniform came after me, to ask politely: "Are you looking for someone?"

She was pretty, and I wouldn't have minded smoking the ten cigarettes in her company. A bit aggressively, I smiled at her: "Dr. Muli isn't in?"

She opened her eyes wide. "He's never here at this hour."

"Could you tell me where I might find him now? At my house there's someone ill who needs him."

Kindly, she told me the doctor's address, and I repeated it several times, to make her believe I wanted to memorize it. I wouldn't have been in any hurry to leave, but, irritated, she turned her back on me. I was actually being thrown out of my prison.

Downstairs, a woman was quick to open the door for me. I hadn't a penny on me, and I murmured: "I'll have to tip you some other time."

There's no knowing the future. With me, things are often repeated: it was conceivable that I might turn up there again.

The night was clear and warm. I took off my hat, the better to feel the breeze of freedom. I looked at the stars with wonder, as if I had only just conquered them. The next day, far from the clinic, I would give up smoking. Meanwhile, passing a café that was still open, I bought some good cigarettes, because it wouldn't be possible to conclude my smoker's

career with one of poor Giovanna's cigarettes. The man who waited on me knew who I was and gave me the pack on credit.

Reaching my villa, I rang the bell furiously. First the maid came to the window, and then, after not such a short time, my wife. I waited for her, thinking, perfectly cool: Apparently Dr. Muli is here. But, recognizing me, my wife laughed, and her laughter, echoing in the deserted street, was so sincere that it would have sufficed to dispel all suspicion.

Once inside, I postponed any inquisitorial action. When I had promised my wife to tell my adventures, which she thought she knew already, the next day, she asked me: "Why don't you go to bed?"

As an excuse, I said: "I believe you've taken advantage of my absence to move that armoire."

It's true that, at home, I always believe things have been moved, and it's also true that my wife very often does move them; but at that moment I was peering into every corner to see if the small, trim body of Dr. Muli was concealed somewhere.

My wife gave me some good news. Returning from the clinic, she had run into Olivi's son, who had told her the old man was much better, having taken a medicine prescribed by a new doctor.

Falling asleep, I thought I had done the right thing in leaving the clinic, because I had plenty of time to cure myself slowly. And my son, sleeping in the next room, also was surely not preparing to judge me yet, or to imitate me. There was absolutely no hurry.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

3 May 1915

I'M THROUGH WITH psychoanalysis. After having practiced it faithfully for six whole months, I'm worse off than before. I still haven't discharged the doctor, but my decision is irrevocable. Yesterday, in any case, I sent him word that I was tied up, and for a few days I'll keep him waiting. If I were quite sure of being able to laugh at him and not lose my temper, I might even see him again. But I'm afraid I'd end up coming to blows.

In this city, after the outbreak of the war, we are more bored than ever, and, as a substitute for psychoanalysis, I have returned to my beloved papers. For a year I hadn't written a word; in this, as in everything else, obeying the doctor, who commanded that during my therapy I was to reflect only when I was with him, because unsupervised reflection would reinforce the brakes that inhibited my sincerity, my relaxation. But now I find myself unbalanced and sicker than ever, and, through writing, I believe I will purge myself of the sickness more easily than through my therapy. At least I am sure that this is the true system for restoring importance to a past no longer painful, and the dispelling the dreary present more quickly.

I had put myself in the doctor's hands with such trust that when he told me I was cured, I believed him completely and, on the contrary, I didn't believe in my pains, which still afflicted me. I said to them: "You're not real, after all!" But now there can be no doubt! It's them, all right! The bones in my legs have been converted into vibrant scales that hurt the flesh and the muscles.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

But this wouldn't matter all that much to me, and it isn't for this reason that I am giving up my therapy. If those hours of reflection at the doctor's had continued to be interesting bearers of surprises and emotions, I wouldn't have abandoned them, or before abandoning them, I would have waited until the end of the war, which makes all other activity impossible for me. But now that I know everything, namely that it was nothing but a foolish illusion, a trick designed to affect some hysterical old woman, how could I bear the company of that ridiculous man, with that eye of his, meant to be penetrating, and that presumption that allows him to collect all the phenomena of this world within his great new theory? I will spend my remaining free time writing. To begin with, I will write sincerely the story of my therapy. All sincerity between me and the doctor has vanished; now I can breathe. No stress is imposed on me any longer. I don't have to force myself to have faith, or to pretend I have it. The better to conceal my true thoughts, I believed I had to show him a supine obsequiousness, and he exploited that to invent something new every day. My therapy was supposedly finished because my sickness had been discovered. It was nothing but the one diagnosed, in his day, by the late Sophocles for poor Oedipus: I had loved my mother and I would have liked to kill my father.

And I didn't become angry! Spellbound, I lay there and listened. It was a sickness that elevated me to the highest noble company. An illustrious sickness, whose ancestors dated back to the mythological era! And I'm not angry now, either, alone here with my pen in hand. I laugh at it wholeheartedly. The best proof that I never had that sickness is supplied by the fact that I am not cured of it. This proof would convince even the doctor. He should set his mind at rest: his words couldn't spoil the memory of my youth. I close my eyes and I see immediately, pure and childish and ingenuous, my love for my mother, my respect and my great fondness for my father.

The doctor puts too much faith also in those damned confessions of mine, which he won't return to me so I can revise them. Good heavens! He studied only medicine and therefore doesn't know what it means to write in Italian for those of us who speak the dialect and can't write it. A confession in writing is always a lie. With our every Tuscan word, we lie! If he knew how, by predilection, we recount all the things for which we have the words at hand, and how we avoid those things that would oblige us to turn to the dictionary! This is exactly how we choose, from our life, the episodes to underline. Obviously our life would have an entirely different aspect if it were told in our dialect.

The doctor confessed to me that in all his long practice, he had never witnessed emotion as strong as mine on discovering myself in the images that he thought he had been able to evoke from me. For this reason, too, he was so prompt to declare me cured.

And I didn't simulate that emotion. It was, indeed, one of the most profound I have felt in my whole life. Bathed in sweat when I created the image, in tears when I held it. I had already cherished the hope of being able to relive one day of innocence and naïveté. For months and months that hope supported me and animated me. Didn't it mean producing, through vital memory, in full winter the roses of May? The doctor himself guaranteed that the memory would be vivid and complete, such that it would amount to an extra day in my life. The roses would have all their scent and perhaps also their thorns.

Thus, after pursuing those images, I overtook them. Now I know that I invented them. But inventing is a creation, not a lie. Mine were inventions like those of a fever, which walk around the room so that you can see them from every side, and then they touch you. They had the solidity, the color, the insolence of living things. Thanks to my desire, I projected the images, which were only in my brain, into the space where

I was looking, a space whose air I could sense, and its light, and even the blunt corners that were never lacking in any space through which I passed.

When I achieved the drowsiness that should have facilitated illusion, though it seemed to me nothing but the association of a great effort with a great inertia, I believed those images were real reproductions of distant days. I might have suspected at once that they were not, because the moment they vanished, I remembered them again, but without any excitement or emotion. I remembered them the way you remember an event narrated by someone who was not present. If they had been true reproductions, I would have continued laughing and crying over them as when I had experienced them. And the doctor made notes. He said: "We have had this, we have had that." To tell the truth, we had had nothing more than graphic marks, skeletons of images.

I was led to believe this was an evocation of my childhood because the first of the images placed me in a relatively recent period of which I had retained, even previously, a pale memory that this image seemed to confirm. There was a year in my life when I went to school before my brother had begun there. I saw myself leave my house one sunny morning in spring, and cross our garden to descend into the city, down, down, with an old maidservant of ours, Catina, holding me by the hand. My brother, in this dream scene, didn't appear, but he was its hero. I sensed him in the house, free and happy, while I was going to school. I went off, choked with sobs, dragging my feet, an intense bitterness in my spirit. I visualized only one of those walks to school, but my rancor told me that I went to school every day, and every day my brother stayed home. To infinity, though in reality I believe that, after a fairly short time, my brother, only a year younger than I, also went to school. But then the dream's truth seemed to me beyond debate. I was condemned to go always to school while my brother was permitted to stay home. Walking at Catina's side, I calculated

the duration of the torture. Until noon! While he's at home! Further, I recalled that, during the preceding days, I must have been upset at school by threats and scolding, and then, too, I had thought: They can't touch him. It had been a vision of enormous immediacy. Catina, whom I had known as a small woman, seemed to me huge, surely because I was so little. Even then she had seemed very old, but, as is well known, the very young always see older people as ancient. And along the streets I had to follow to reach school, I glimpsed also the strange little columns that in those days bordered the sidewalks of our city. True, I was born long enough ago to see still, as an adult, those little columns in our downtown streets. But the ones along the street I took that day with Catina were gone by the time I emerged from childhood.

My faith in the authenticity of those images persisted in my spirit even when, quite soon, stimulated by that dream, my cold memory discovered further details of that period. The chief one: my brother also envied me because I went to school. I was sure I had noticed it, but that did not immediately suffice to invalidate the truth of the dream. Later it despoiled the evocation of any semblance of truth: the jealousy had in reality existed, but in the dream it had been transferred.

The second vision also took me back to a recent time, though long before the first: a room in my house, but I don't know which, because it is vaster than any room actually there. It is strange that I saw myself closed in that room, and that I immediately knew a detail that the mere sight of it could not have provided: the room was far from the place where my mother and Catina then stayed. And another detail: I hadn't yet started attending school.

The room was all white and, indeed, I never saw a room so white or so completely illuminated by the sun. Did the sun then pass through the walls? It was certainly already high, but still I was in my bed, holding in my hand a cup from which I had drunk all the milky coffee and in which I continued to

scrape the spoon, extracting the sugar. At a certain point the spoon could collect no more, and then I tried to reach the bottom of the cup with my tongue. But I failed. So, finally, I was holding the cup with one hand and the spoon with the other and I was watching my brother, lying in the bed beside mine, as, belatedly, he was still sipping his coffee, with his nose in the cup. When he finally raised his face, I saw it all somehow contracted in the rays of the sun, which struck it fully, whereas mine (God knows why) was in shadow. His face was pale and a bit disfigured by a slight prognathism.

He said: "Will you lend me your spoon?"

Only then did I realize that Catina had forgotten to bring him a spoon. Immediately, and without hesitation, I answered him: "Yes! If you'll give me a bit of your sugar in return."

I held up the spoon to underscore its value. But Catina's voice immediately resounded in the room: "Shame on you! Little shark!"

Fright and shame plunged me again into the present. I would have liked to argue with Catina, but she, my brother, and I – as I was then, small, innocent, and a usurer – disappeared, sinking into the abyss.

I regretted having felt that shame so strongly that it destroyed the image which I had achieved with such effort. It would have been so much better if, instead, I had offered the spoon, meekly, and gratis, and had not argued over that bad deed of mine, probably the first I committed. Perhaps Catina would have enlisted my mother's help to mete out a punishment to me, and finally I would have seen her again.

I saw her, however, a few days later, or thought I saw her. I might have realized at once it was an illusion, because the image of my mother, as I had evoked it, resembled too closely her portrait, which hangs over my bed. But I must confess that in the apparition my mother moved like a living person.

Great, immense sunlight, enough to blind you! From what I believed was my youth, there came so much of that sun that

it was hard to believe this was not that time. Our dining nook in the afternoon hours. My father has come home and is sitting on a sofa beside Mamma, who is marking with a certain kind of indelible ink some initials on much linen spread over the table at which she sits. I find myself under the table, where I am playing with some marbles. I move closer and closer to Mamma. Probably I want her to join in my game. At a certain point, to stand on my feet between them, I clutch the linen cloth hanging from the table; a disaster occurs. The bottle of ink falls on my head and stains my face, my clothes, Mamma's skirt, and also produces a little spot on Papà's trousers. My father raises his leg to give me a kick.

But I had returned from my long journey in time, and I was safe here, an adult, an old man. For an instant I suffered at the threatened punishment, and immediately afterwards I was sad that I couldn't witness the protective gesture that no doubt came from Mamma. But who can arrest those images when they start fleeing through that time, which had never before so resembled space? This was my notion as long as I believed in the authenticity of those images! Now, unfortunately (oh! how it saddens me!), I believe no longer and I know that it wasn't the images that sped away, but my clear eyes that looked again into real space, where there is no room for ghosts.

I will say more about the images of another day, to which the doctor attributed such great importance that he pronounced me cured.

In the doze to which I abandoned myself, I had a dream, immobile as a nightmare. I dreamed of myself, a baby again, but seeing only that baby and how he also dreamed. He lay mute, overcome by a joy that pervaded his tiny organism. He seemed finally to have achieved his old desire. And yet he lay there alone and abandoned! But he could see and hear with the clarity that enables us to see and hear even distant things in dreams. The child, lying in a room of my house, saw (God knows how) that on its roof there was a cage, fixed in very

solid foundations, without doors and windows, but illuminated with the most pleasing light and filled with pure and sweet-smelling air. And the child knew that only he could reach that cage, and without even going there, because the cage would come to him. In that cage there was just one piece of furniture, an easy chair, and in it sat a shapely woman, delightfully formed, dressed in black, a blonde with great blue eyes, snow-white hands, and little feet in patent-leather pumps from which, below her skirts, only a faint glow escaped. I must say that the woman seemed to me all one with her black dress and her patent-leather pumps. She was a whole! And the child dreamed of possessing that woman, but in the strangest way. He was sure, that is, that he could eat some little pieces at the top and at the base.

Now, thinking back, I am amazed that the doctor, who, according to what he says, has read my manuscript so carefully, didn't recall the dream I had before going to see Carla. To me, some time afterwards, as I thought it over, it seemed that this dream was simply the other one, slightly altered, made more childish.

But the doctor recorded everything carefully, then asked me with a somewhat syrupy attitude: "Was your mother blond and shapely?"

I was amazed by the question, and answered that my grandmother also had been the same. But for him I was cured, quite cured. I opened my mouth to rejoice with him and I adjusted myself to what was to come next: namely, no more investigations, no research or meditations, but rather a genuine and diligent reeducation.

From then on, those sessions were downright torture, and I continued them only because it has always been so difficult for me to stop when I am moving or to move when I am still. On occasion, when he exaggerated, I would venture some objection. It wasn't really true — as he believed — that my every word, my every thought was criminal. He would then widen

his eyes. I was cured, and I refused to realize it! This was true blindness: I learned that I had desired to steal my father's wife – my mother! – and yet I didn't feel cured? My stubbornness was unheard of. However, the doctor admitted that I would be even more cured when my reeducation was finished, after which I would be accustomed to considering those things (desire to kill father and to kiss mother) quite innocent matters for which there was no need to suffer remorse, because they occurred often in the best families. Basically, what did I have to lose? One day he told me that now I was like a convalescent who still wasn't accustomed to living without a fever. Well, I would wait until I was accustomed.

He felt that I was not yet entirely his, and, besides the reeducation, from time to time he returned also to the therapy. He tried dreams again, but we didn't have a single one that was authentic. Annoyed with all this waiting, in the end I made up one. I wouldn't have done so if I could have foreseen the difficulty of such simulation. It isn't all that easy to stammer as if we were immersed in a half-dream, or to cover ourselves with sweat or turn pale, not giving the game away, or perhaps turning scarlet from strain, and yet not blushing. I spoke as if I had gone back to the woman in the cage and had persuaded her to extend, through a hole suddenly produced in the wall of the little room, her foot for me to suck and eat. "The left one! The left one!" I murmured, putting into the vision a curious detail that might make it resemble the previous dreams more closely. Thus I demonstrated that I had understood perfectly the sickness that the doctor demanded of me. The child Oedipus had in fact done just this: he had sucked his mother's left foot, leaving the right one for his father. In my effort to concoct a reality (far from a contradiction, this), I deceived also myself and could taste the flavor of that foot. I wanted to vomit.

Not only the doctor but I, too, would have liked to be revisited by those dear images of my youth, authentic or not,

which I hadn't had to invent. Since, in the doctor's presence, they no longer came, I tried to summon them when I was away from him. By myself, I ran the risk of forgetting them, but I wasn't looking for therapy, after all! I wanted again May roses in December. I had had them once, why couldn't I have them again?

In solitude, too, I was fairly bored, but then, instead of the images, something else came and for a while replaced them. Simply, I believed I had made an important scientific discovery. I thought I had been called upon to complete the whole theory of physiological colors. My predecessors, Goethe and Schopenhauer, had never imagined what could be achieved by deftly handling complementary colors.

I should say that I spent my time sprawled on the sofa opposite my study window, from which I had a view of a stretch of sea and horizon. Now, one evening, as the sunset colored a sky jagged with clouds, I lingered at length to admire, along a limpid edge, a magnificent color, a pure and soft green. In the sky there was also a good deal of red, along the outlines of the clouds to the west, but it was a still-pale red, diluted by the white rays of the direct sun. Dazzled, after a certain time, I shut my eyes and it was obviously the green to which my attention had been directed, along with my affection, because on my retina now its complementary color was produced, a brilliant red that had nothing to do with the luminous but pale red of the sky. I looked, I caressed that color I had created. My great surprise came when, after I opened my eyes, I saw that dazzling red invade the whole sky and cover also the emerald green that for a long time I couldn't then find again. So I had discovered the way to color nature! Naturally, I repeated the experiment several times. The wonderful thing was that there was also movement within that coloration. When I reopened my eyes, the sky would not accept immediately the color of my retina. There was an instant of hesitation, during which I was still able to see

the emerald green that had generated that red by which it would be destroyed. The latter rose from the background, unexpected, and spread like a frightful fire.

When I was convinced of the exactness of my observation, I took it to the doctor in the hope of enlivening our boring sessions. The doctor settled the question for me, saying that my retina was more sensitive because of nicotine. I was almost ready to say that, if so, then the images we had considered reproductions of events of my childhood could also have been generated through the effect of the same poison. But then I would have revealed to him that I wasn't cured, and he would have tried to persuade me to start the therapy all over again.

And yet that brute didn't always believe I was poisoned like that. This was clear also in the reeducation he undertook, to heal me of what he called my smoking sickness. These are his words: smoking wasn't bad for me, and if I were convinced it was harmless, it would really be so. And he went further: now that the relationship with my father had been revealed and subjected to my adult judgment, I could realize I had contracted that vice to compete with my father, and had attributed a poisonous effect to tobacco thanks to my unconscious moral feeling that wanted to punish me for my rivalry with him.

That day I left the doctor's house smoking like a chimney. A test was necessary, and I gladly subjected myself to it. That whole day I smoked uninterruptedly. Then a totally sleepless night followed. My chronic bronchitis returned, and there could be no doubt about that, because it was easy to discover the consequences in the spittoon.

The next day I told the doctor I had smoked a great deal and now it no longer mattered to me. The doctor looked at me, smiling, and I could sense his bosom swelling with pride. Calmly he resumed my reeducation! He proceeded with the confidence of one who sees flowers blossom from every clod on which he sets his foot.

I remember very little of that reeducation. I submitted to it, and when I emerged from that room I shook myself like a dog coming out of the water, and also like the dog remained damp but not soaked.

I remember, however, with indignation that my educator asserted that Dr. Coprosich had rightly addressed to me the words that had so provoked my ill-feeling. But would I then have deserved as well the slap my father tried to give me, as he was dying? I don't know if the doctor also said this. But I do know for certain that he declared I had hated also old Malfenti, whom I had installed in my father's place. Many in this world believe they cannot live without a given affection; I, on the contrary, according to him, became unbalanced if I lacked a given hatred. I married one or another of the daughters, and it didn't matter which, because it was a question of putting their father in a place where my hatred could reach him. Then I defaced, as best I could, the house I had made mine. I betrayed my wife and, obviously, if I could have succeeded, I would have seduced Ada and also Alberta. Naturally I have no thought of denying this, and indeed the doctor made me laugh when, in telling it to me, he assumed the attitude of Christopher Columbus arriving in America. I believe, however, that he is the only one in this world who, hearing I wanted to go to bed with two beautiful women, would ask himself: Now let's see why this man wants to go to bed with them.

It was even more difficult for me to tolerate what he thought himself entitled to say about my relations with Guido. From my own account he had learned of the dislike that had marked the beginning of my acquaintance with Guido. This dislike never ceased, according to the doctor, and Ada was right to see my absence from the funeral as its final manifestation. The doctor forgot how, at that moment, I was intent on my labor of love, saving Ada's fortune, nor did I deign to remind him.

It seems that, on the subject of Guido, the doctor had even made some inquiries. He asserts that, having been chosen by Ada, Guido couldn't be the way I've described him. He has discovered that an important lumberyard, very close to the house where he practices psychoanalysis, belonged to the firm of Guido Speier & Co. Why hadn't I mentioned it?

If I had mentioned it, it would have been an added difficulty in my already quite difficult exposition. This omission is simply the proof that a confession made by me in Italian could be neither complete nor sincere. In a lumberyard there are enormous varieties of lumber, which we in Trieste call by barbarous names derived from the dialect, from Croat, from German, and sometimes even from French (*zapin*, for example, which is by no means the equivalent of *sapin*). Who could have given me the appropriate vocabulary? Old as I am, should I have found myself a job with a lumber dealer from Tuscany? For that matter, the lumberyard belonging to the firm of Guido Speier & Co. produced only losses. So I had no call to mention it, as it remained always inactive, except when thieves broke in and made that barbarously named wood move, as if it were destined to make little tables for spiritualist séances.

I suggested to the doctor that he seek information on Guido from my wife, from Carmen, or from Luciano, who is now a well-known, successful merchant. To my knowledge, the doctor consulted none of them, and I must believe he refrained for fear of seeing, thanks to their information, the collapse of all his construction of accusations and suspicions. Who knows why he has been overcome by such hatred of me? He must be another hysteric who, having desired his mother in vain, takes it out on someone totally extraneous.

In the end I grew very tired of the struggle I had to sustain with the doctor, whom I was paying. I believe also that those dreams didn't do me any good, and then the freedom to smoke whenever I liked finally depressed me totally. I had a good idea: I went to Dr. Paoli.

I hadn't seen him for many years. He had gone rather white, but his grenadier figure had not yet been fattened by age, or bent. He still looked at things with a gaze that seemed a caress. This time I discovered why he seemed like that to me. Obviously he enjoys looking, and he looks at the beautiful and the ugly with the satisfaction that others derive from a caress.

I had gone up to see him with the intention of asking him if he believed I should continue my psychoanalysis. But when I found myself facing that coldly investigative eye, my courage failed me. Perhaps I would make myself ridiculous, telling him that at my age I had let myself be taken in by such charlatanism. I was sorry to have to remain silent, because if Paoli had forbidden me psychoanalysis, my position would have been greatly simplified, but I definitely would not have liked to see myself caressed at length by that great eye of his.

I told him about my insomnia, my chronic bronchitis, a rash on my cheeks that was tormenting me, about certain shooting pains in my legs, and finally about my strange memory gaps.

Paoli analyzed my urine in my presence. The mixture turned black, and Paoli became thoughtful. Here, finally, was a real analysis and not a psychoanalysis. I remembered with affection and emotion my remote past as a chemist and some real analyses: me, a test tube, and a reagent! The other, the analyzed, sleeps until the reagent imperiously awakens him. Resistance in the test tube doesn't exist or else it succumbs to the slightest increase of temperature, and simulation is also completely absent. In that test tube, nothing happens that could recall my behavior when, to please Dr. S., I invented new details of my childhood, which then confirmed the diagnosis of Sophocles. Here, on the contrary, all was truth. The thing to be analyzed was imprisoned in the tube and, remaining always itself, it awaited the reagent. When it arrived, the thing always said the same word. In psychoanalysis there is never repetition, neither of the same images nor of the same words.

It should be called something else. Let's call it psychic adventure. That's right: when you begin such an analysis, it's as if you were going into a wood, not knowing whether you will encounter an outlaw or a friend. And even when the adventure is over, you still don't know. In this, psychoanalysis recalls spiritualism.

But Paoli didn't believe it was a question of sugar. He wanted to see me again the next day, after he had analyzed that liquid by polarization.

Meanwhile, I went off, basking in the glory of diabetes. I was about to go to Dr. S. to ask him how he would now analyze, in my bosom, the causes of such a disease in order to nullify them. But I had had enough of that individual, and I wouldn't see him again, not even to make fun of him.

I must confess that diabetes for me was infinitely sweet. I talked of it with Augusta, who immediately had tears in her eyes. "You've talked so much about diseases all your life, that you had to end up having one!" she said, then tried to console me.

I loved my illness. I fondly remembered poor Copler, who preferred real sickness to the imaginary. Now I agreed with him. Real sickness was so simple: you just let it have its way. In fact, when I read in a medical volume the description of my sweet sickness, I discovered a kind of program of life (not death!) in its various stages. Farewell, resolutions: at last I was free. Everything would take its course without any intervention on my part.

I also discovered that my sickness was always, or almost always, very sweet. The sick person eats and drinks a great deal, and there are no great sufferings if you are careful to avoid ulcers. Then you die in a very sweet coma.

A little later, Paoli called me on the telephone. He informed me that there was no trace of sugar. I went to him the next day and he prescribed a diet, which I followed only a few days, and a potion that he described in an illegible prescription, which did me good for a whole month.

"Did diabetes give you a great fright?" he asked me, smiling.

I protested, but I didn't tell him that since diabetes had abandoned me, I felt very much alone. He wouldn't have believed me.

In that period I happened upon Dr. Beard's famous work on neurasthenia. I followed his advice and changed medicines every week according to his prescriptions, which I copied out in a clear hand. For some months the treatment seemed to do me good. Not even Copler had had such an abundant consolation of medicines in his life as I did at that time. Then that faith also faded, but meanwhile I had postponed from day to day my return to psychoanalysis.

I then ran into Dr. S. He asked me if I had decided to give up therapy. He was, however, very polite, far more so than when he had had me in his hands. Obviously he wanted to get me back. I told him I had some urgent business, family matters that occupied and preoccupied me, and that once I found peace again, I would return to him. I would have liked to ask him to give me back my manuscript, but I didn't dare; it would have been tantamount to confessing that I wanted nothing more to do with the treatment. I postponed such an attempt to another time, when he would have realized that I no longer gave therapy any thought, and he would have to resign himself.

Before leaving me, he said a few words, meant to win me back: "If you examine your consciousness, you will find it changed. As you will see, you will return to me only if you realize that I was able, in a relatively short time, to bring you close to health."

But, to tell the truth, I believe that, with his help, in studying my consciousness, I have introduced some new sicknesses into it.

I am bent on recovering from his therapy. I avoid dreams and memories. Thanks to them, my poor head has been so

transformed that it doesn't feel secure on my neck. I have frightful distractions. I speak with people, and while I am saying one thing, I try involuntarily to recall something else that, just a moment before, I said or did and now no longer remember, or I even pursue a thought of mine that seems to me enormously important, with the importance my father attributed to those thoughts he had just before dying, which he, too, was unable to recall.

If I don't want to end up in the lunatic asylum, I must throw away these playthings.

15 May 1915

We have spent a two-day holiday at Lucinico, in our villa there. My son, Alfio, has to recuperate from influenza and will remain in the villa with his sister for a few weeks. We'll come back here for Pentecost.

I have finally succeeded in returning to my sweet habits, and stopped smoking. I am already much better since I have been able to abolish the freedom that foolish doctor chose to grant me. Today, as we are in midmonth, I have been struck by the difficulty our calendar creates for regular and orderly resolutions. No one month is the same as another. To underline better one's inner resolve, one likes to end smoking together with the end of something else: for example, the month. But except for July and August, and then December and January, there are no two successive months that form a pair thanks to their equal number of days. Time involves true disorder!

To collect my thoughts more readily, I spent the afternoon of my second solitary day on the shores of the Isonzo. Nothing is more conducive to meditation than watching the flow of water. You stand motionless, and the running water supplies the distraction needed, because it is never identical to itself, in its color and its pattern, not even for a moment.

It was a strange day. Certainly up above, a strong wind was blowing, because the clouds constantly changed shape; but

below, the atmosphere was unmoving. It happened that from time to time, among the shifting clouds, the already-hot sun found an aperture through which to lavish its rays on this or that patch of hill or mountaintop, emphasizing the sweet green of May amid the shadow covering the landscape. The temperature was mild and there was also something springlike in that flight of clouds in the sky. There could be no doubt: our weather was regaining health!

Mine was genuine meditation, one of those rare instants that our miserly life bestows of true, great objectivity, when you finally stop believing and feeling yourself a victim. In the midst of all that green, emphasized so delightfully by those patches of sun, I could smile at my life and also at my sickness. Woman had an enormous importance in it. Perhaps in fragments: her little feet, her waist, or her mouth filled my days. And seeing my life again and also my sickness, I loved them, I understood them! How much more beautiful my life had been than that of the so-called healthy, those who beat or would have liked to beat their women every day, except at certain moments. I, on the contrary, had been accompanied always by love. When I hadn't thought of my woman for a while, I then called her to mind again, to win forgiveness for thinking of other women. Other men abandoned their women, disappointed and despairing of life. I had never stripped life of desire, and illusion was immediately, totally reborn after every shipwreck, in the dream of limbs, of voices, of more-perfect attitudes.

At that moment I remembered that among the many lies I had dished out to that profound observer Dr. S., there was also the story that I had never again betrayed my wife after the departure of Ada. This lie, too, had helped him construct his theories. But there, on the bank of that river, suddenly and with fear, I remembered that it was true that, for a few days now, perhaps since I had given up the therapy, I hadn't sought the company of other women. Am I perhaps cured,

as Dr. S. claims? Old as I am, for some time women have no longer looked at me. If I stop looking at them, then all ties between us are severed.

If a suspicion like this had come to me in Trieste, I could have resolved it at once. Out here, that is much more difficult.

A few days before, I had picked up the memoirs of Da Ponte, the adventurer, contemporary of Casanova. He, too, had surely passed through Lucinico, and I dreamed of encountering those ladies of his, faces powdered, limbs concealed by crinolines. My God! How did those women manage to surrender so quickly and so frequently, defended as they were by all those rags?

It seemed to me that the thought of the crinoline, despite my therapy, was rather arousing. But my desire was fairly artificial, and it wasn't enough to reassure me.

The experience I sought came to me a little later, and it sufficed to reassure me, but only at great cost. To have that experience, I altered and spoiled the purest relationship I had had in my life.

I ran into Teresina, the older daughter of the tenant of a farm situated next to my villa. Her father had been left a widower two years ago, and his numerous brood had found a new mother in Teresina, a sturdy girl who got up every morning to work, and stopped only to go to bed and rest in order to be able to resume her work. That day she was leading the donkey habitually entrusted to the care of her little brother, and she was walking beside the cart loaded with fresh grass, because the far-from-large animal would have been unable to carry up the slight slope the added weight of the girl.

A year ago, Teresina had seemed to me still a child, and I had felt for her nothing but a smiling, paternal fondness. But even the day before, when I saw her again for the first time, despite the fact that I found her grown, her dark little face more serious, her slight shoulders broadened and the bosom

rounder in the scant ripening of the overworked little body, I continued to regard her as an immature child in whom only her extraordinary activity could be loved, and the maternal instinct from which her little charges benefited. If it hadn't been for that accursed therapy and the necessity to verify immediately the state of my sickness, I could have left Lucinico once again without have disturbed such innocence.

She had no crinoline. And the round, smiling little face was ignorant of powder. Her feet were bare, and half of her legs were also visibly naked. The little face and the feet and the legs were unable to excite me. The face and the limbs that Teresina allowed to be seen were of the same color; they all belonged to the air, and there was nothing wrong in their being exposed to the air. Perhaps for this reason they were unable to stir me. But on feeling myself so cold, I was frightened. After the treatment, did I now require crinolines?

I began by stroking the donkey, for whom I had won a bit of respite. Then I tried to return to Teresina, and I put into her hand a ten-crown note. It was a first assault! The year before, with her and the other children, to express my paternal affection, I had pressed only a few pennies into their hands. But paternal affection, of course, is a different thing. Teresina was dumbfounded by the rich gift. Carefully she raised her little skirt to put the precious piece of paper into some concealed pocket or other. Thus I saw a further bit of leg, but it, too, was still tanned and chaste.

I returned to the donkey and gave him a kiss on the head. My affection provoked his. He stretched his muzzle and emitted his great cry of love, which I heard always with respect. How it crosses distances, and how significant it is, that initial cry that invokes and then is repeated, diminished, ending in a desperate lament. But, heard at such close range, it hurt my eardrum.

Teresina laughed, and her laughter encouraged me. I returned to her and promptly grasped her by the forearm,

where my hand moved up, slowly, toward the shoulder, as I studied my sensations. Thank heaven I was not yet cured! I had given up the therapy in time.

But Teresina, hitting the donkey with a stick, made the animal move on, following him and leaving me behind.

Laughing heartily, because I remained happy even if the little peasant girl would have none of me, I said to her: "Do you have a boyfriend? You should. Too bad you don't have one already!"

Still moving away from me, she said: "If I do take one, he'll surely be younger than you!"

My happiness was not marred by this. I would have liked to give Teresina a little lesson, and I tried to remember from Boccaccio how "Maestro Alberto of Bologna virtuously shamed a woman who wanted to shame him, as he was in love with her." But Maestro Alberto's reasoning didn't have the desired effect, because Madonna Malgherida de' Ghisolieri said to him: "Your love is dear to me as that of a wise and worthy man should be; and therefore, save for my virtue, ask surely of me any pleasure, as if it were yours to demand."

I tried to do better: "When will you give old men some time, Teresina?" I shouted, to be heard by her who was already far away from me.

"When I'm old myself!" she cried, laughing wholeheartedly and without pausing.

"But then the old men will want nothing to do with you. Mind what I say! I know them!"

I was shouting, pleased with my wit, which came directly from my sex.

At that moment, in some part of the sky, the clouds opened to release the sun's rays; they struck Teresina, who now was at least forty meters from me, and about ten or more higher than I. She was tanned, small, but luminous!

The sun didn't illuminate me! When you are old, you remain in shadow, even when you have wit.

26 June 1915

The war has overtaken me! I, who was listening to the stories of war as if it were a war of olden days, amusing to narrate, but foolish to worry about! I stumbled into its midst, bewildered and at the same time amazed at not having already realized that sooner or later I would have to be involved. I had lived, completely calm, in a building whose ground floor was on fire, and I hadn't foreseen that sooner or later the whole building, with me in it, would collapse in flames.

The war grabbed me, shook me like a rag, deprived me at one stroke of my whole family and also of my business manager. Overnight I was an entirely new man, or rather, to be more precise, all twenty-four of my hours were entirely new. Since yesterday I have been a bit calmer because finally, after waiting a month, I received the first news of my family. They are safe and sound in Turin, whereas I had given up all hope of ever seeing them again.

I have to spend the whole day in my office. I have nothing to do there, but the Olivis, as Italian citizens, have had to leave, and my few able employees have all gone off to fight on this side or that, and so I have to remain on guard at my post. In the evening I go home, burdened with the heavy keys of the warehouse. Today, feeling so much calmer, I brought with me to the office this manuscript, which might help me endure the long hours better. In fact, it has provided me with a wonderful quarter-hour in which I learned that there was in this world a period of peace and silence that allowed one to concern himself with such trivial matters.

It would also be beautiful if someone now seriously invited me to sink into a state of semiconsciousness so as to be able to relive even one hour of my previous life. I would laugh in his face. How can anyone abandon a present like this, to go hunting for things of no importance? It seems to me that I have only now definitively separated myself from my health and from my sickness. I walk through the streets of our

wretched city, feeling privileged, not going to the war, finding each day what food I require. Compared with everyone else, I feel so happy – especially since I've had news of my family – that I would feel I was provoking the wrath of the gods themselves if I were also perfectly well.

The war and I met in a violent fashion, though now it seems a bit comical to me.

Augusta and I had gone back to Lucinico to spend Pentecost with the children. On 23 May, I got up early. I had to take my Karlsbad salts and also go for a walk before my coffee. It was during this cure at Lucinico that I became aware that the heart, when you are fasting, attends more actively to other repairs, spreading a great well-being through the whole organism. My theory was then to be perfected that very day, when it forced me to suffer the hunger that did me so much good.

Bidding me good morning, Augusta raised her head, now totally white, from her pillow and reminded me that I had promised my daughter to find her some roses. Our only rose-bush had withered, and something therefore had to be done. My daughter has become a beautiful girl and resembles Ada. From one moment to the next, I had forgotten to play the gruff educator with her, and I had turned into the cavalier who respects womanhood even in his own daughter. She immediately became aware of her power, and to my great amusement and Augusta's, she abused it. She wanted roses, and roses had to be found.

I planned to walk for a couple of hours. There was a bright sun, and since my intention was to keep walking and not to stop until I had returned home, I didn't take even a jacket and hat. Luckily, I recalled that I would have to pay for the roses, and therefore I didn't leave my wallet behind with the jacket.

First of all I went to the nearby farm, to Teresina's father, to ask him to cut the roses, which I would collect on my way home. I entered the great yard girded by a dilapidated wall, and I found no one. I shouted the name of Teresina. From the

house came the smallest of the children; he must then have been about six. I put a few coins in his hand and he told me that the whole family had crossed the Isonzo early that morning for a day's work in a potato field, where the clods had to be broken up.

This news didn't displease me. I was acquainted with that field and I knew that it would take me about an hour to reach it. Since I had determined to walk for two hours, I liked the idea of being able to give my walk a specific purpose. Thus there was no danger of its being interrupted by a sudden fit of laziness. I set off across the plain, which is higher than the road, of which I could therefore see only the edge, and the crowns of a few flowering trees. I was really in great spirits: in my shirtsleeves as I was, and hatless, I felt very light. I breathed in that pure air and, as I often did at that time, while I walked I performed the Niemeyer pulmonary exercises, which a German friend had taught me, very useful for a man who leads a rather sedentary life.

Having reached that field, I saw Teresina working near the road. I went toward her and then noticed that, up ahead, her father and her two little brothers were working, boys of an age I couldn't have said precisely, between ten and fourteen. Working perhaps makes the old feel exhausted, but, thanks to the excitement that accompanies it, still younger than when they are not doing the work.

Laughing, I said to Teresina: "You're still in time, Teresina. Don't wait too long."

She didn't understand me, and I explained nothing to her. Since she didn't remember, it was possible to resume our former relations. I had already repeated the experiment, and with a favorable result. Addressing those few words to her, I had caressed her not just with my eyes alone.

I quickly made an arrangement with Teresina's father for the roses. He would allow me to cut as many as I wanted, and afterwards we would agree on the price. He wanted to go back

to work at once, while I turned toward home, but then he changed his mind and ran after me. Overtaking me, in a very low voice he asked: "Didn't you hear something? They say the war's broken out."

"Yes! We all know that! About a year ago," I answered.

"I don't mean that one," he said, out of patience. "I'm talking about the one with -" And he nodded toward the other side of the nearby Italian border. "Do you know anything about it?" He looked at me, anxious to hear my reply.

"As you must realize..." I said with great confidence, "if I don't know anything, that means there isn't anything to know. I've come from Trieste, and the latest news I heard there was that the war has been averted for good. In Rome they've overthrown the Cabinet that wanted war, and now they have Giolitti."

He was immediately relieved. "That's why we're covering these potatoes, which are very promising and will be ours! The world is so full of big talkers!" With the sleeve of his shirt he wiped away the sweat trickling down his brow.

Seeing how happy he was, I tried to make him even happier. I love happy people, I honestly do. So I said some things I really don't like to recall. I declared that even if the war were to break out, it wouldn't be fought up here. First of all there was the sea, where it was high time they did some fighting; and besides, in Europe there was no lack of battlefields for anyone who wanted them. There was Flanders, there were various departments of France. I had also heard - I no longer remembered from whom - that in this world there was now such a need for potatoes that they carefully dug them up even on the battlefields. I spoke quite a while, looking steadily at Teresina; tiny, minute, she had crouched on the ground, to test its hardness before taking her hoe to it.

The peasant, perfectly reassured, returned to his work. I, on the contrary, had transferred a part of my own serenity to him and was left with much less for myself. It was certainly true that

at Lucinico we were too close to the border. I would discuss it with Augusta. It might be a good idea for us to return to Trieste and perhaps go on even farther in that direction or another. To be sure, Giolitti had returned to power, but there was no knowing if, arriving there, he would continue to see things the way he had seen them when that high position had been occupied by someone else.

I was made even more nervous by a casual encounter with a platoon of soldiers, marching along the road in the direction of Lucinico. They were not young soldiers, and were very badly outfitted. At their hip hung what we in Trieste call the *durlindana*, that long bayonet that, in the summer of 1915, the Austrians had had to take from the old storehouses.

For some time I walked behind them, anxious to be home quickly. Then I was irritated by a certain gamey odor that they emanated, and I slowed my pace. My uneasiness and my haste were foolish. It was also foolish to be uneasy just because I had observed the uneasiness of a peasant. Now I could see my villa in the distance, and the platoon was no longer on the road. I quickened my steps to arrive finally at my coffee and milk.

It was here that my adventure began. At a turn in the road I found myself halted by a sentinel, who shouted: "*Zurück*," putting himself actually in the position to fire. I wanted to speak to him in German, since he had shouted in German, but that was the only German word he knew, so he repeated it, more and more menacingly.

I had to go *zurück*, and, looking always over my shoulder in fear that the other man, to make his meaning clearer, might fire on me, I withdrew with a haste that remained with me even when I could no longer see the soldier.

But I hadn't yet given up the idea of reaching my villa promptly. I thought that by crossing the hill to my right, I could pass well behind the threatening sentinel.

The climb was not hard, especially as the tall grass had been trodden down by many people who must have passed by there

before me. They must surely have been driven by the prohibition against the use of the road. Walking, I regained my confidence, and I thought that on arriving at Lucinico, I would immediately go and complain to the mayor about the treatment to which I had been subjected. If he allowed vacationers to be treated like that, soon nobody would come to Lucinico anymore!

But, reaching the top of the hill, I had a nasty surprise, finding it occupied by that same platoon of soldiers with the gamey smell. Many soldiers were resting in the shade of a little peasant house I had known for a long time, at this hour completely empty; three of the men seemed to be on guard duty, but not facing the slope by which I had come; and some others were in a semicircle before an officer, who was giving them instructions, which he illustrated with a map he held in his hand.

I didn't have even a hat, which could serve me for greeting. Bowing several times and with my best smile, I approached the officer, who, seeing me, stopped speaking to his soldiers and started looking at me. Also the five Mamelukes surrounding him bestowed all their attention on me. Under these stares and on the uneven terrain it was difficult to move.

The officer shouted: "*Was will der dumme Kerl hier?*" [What does this fool want?]

Amazed that, without the slightest provocation, he would offend me like this, I wanted to demonstrate, in a manly fashion, that I was offended, but still with appropriate discretion, I altered my path and tried to arrive at the slope that would lead me to Lucinico. The officer started shouting that if I took even one more step, he would have his men shoot me. I immediately became very polite, and from that day to this, as I write, I have remained always very polite. It was barbaric to be forced to deal with such an idiot, but at least there was the advantage that he spoke proper German. It was such an advantage that, remembering it, I found it easier to speak to

him politely. Animal that he was, it would have been a disaster if he hadn't spoken German. I would have been lost.

Too bad I didn't speak that language more fluently, for in that case it would have been easy for me to make that surly gentleman laugh. I told him that at Lucinico my morning coffee was awaiting me, and I was separated from it only by his platoon.

He laughed, I swear he laughed. He laughed, still cursing, and without the patience to let me finish. He declared that the Lucinico coffee would be drunk by someone else, and when he heard that in addition to the coffee, my wife was also awaiting me, he yelled, "*Auch Ihre Frau wird von anderen gegessen werden.*" [Your wife, too, will be eaten by someone else.]

By now he was in a better humor than I. Then, apparently sorry he had said words to me that, underlined by the laughter of the five clods, could seem offensive, he turned serious and explained that I must give up hope of seeing Lucinico for some days, and in fact his friendly advice was not to ask to go there, because my mere asking could get me into trouble!

"*Haben Sie verstanden?*" [Have you understood?]

I had understood, but it wasn't all that easy to adjust to giving up my coffee when it was less than half a kilometer away. Only for this I hesitated to leave, because it was obvious that if I were to descend that hill, toward my villa, on that day I would not arrive. And, to gain time, I meekly asked the officer: "But to whom should I speak in order to be able to go back to Lucinico and collect at least my hat and my jacket?"

I should have realized that the officer was anxious to be left alone with his map and his men, but I hardly expected to provoke such fury.

He yelled, making my ears ring, that he had already told me I wasn't to ask. Then he ordered me to go wherever the devil might wish to take me (*wo der Teufel Sie tragen will*). The idea of being taken somewhere didn't displease me, because I was very tired, but still I hesitated. Meanwhile, however, with all

his shouting, the officer became increasingly angry and, in a highly threatening tone, he called on one of the five men around him and, addressing him as *Herr Kaporal*, gave him orders to conduct me back to the bottom of the hill and to watch me until I had disappeared down the road to Gorizia, and to shoot me if I hesitated to obey.

Therefore I went down that hill fairly willingly: "*Danke schön*," I said, also with no intention of irony.

The corporal was a Slav who spoke rather decent Italian. He felt he had to be brutal in the officer's presence, and to encourage me to descend the hill, he shouted "*Marsch!*" at me, but when we were a bit distant he became gentle and friendly. He asked me if I had news of the war, and if it was true that Italian intervention was imminent. He looked at me anxiously, awaiting my reply.

So not even they, who were waging the war, knew if it existed or not! I wanted to make him as happy as possible, and I repeated to him the words with which I had calmed Teresina's father. Afterwards they weighed on my conscience. In the horrible storm that broke, all the people I had reassured were probably killed. Who knows what surprise there must have been on their faces, crystallized by death? My optimism was incoercible. Hadn't I heard the war in the officer's words and, even more, in their sound?

The corporal rejoiced, and to reward me, he also advised me not to attempt to reach Lucinico. Given my news, he believed the order preventing me from going home would be revoked the next day. But meanwhile he advised me to go to Trieste, to the *Platzkommando*, from which I could perhaps obtain a special pass.

"All the way to Trieste?" I asked, frightened. "To Trieste, without my jacket, without my hat, without my coffee?"

As far as the corporal knew, while we were talking, a heavy cordon of infantry was closing off all transit into Italy, creating a new and impassable frontier. With the smile of a superior

person, he declared that, in his opinion, the shortest way to Lucinico was the one that passed through Trieste.

Hearing this counsel repeated, I resigned myself and set off toward Gorizia, thinking to catch the noon train and go on to Trieste. I was agitated, but I must say I felt fine. I had smoked very little, and hadn't eaten at all. I felt a lightness that I had missed for a long time. I wasn't at all displeased to have to walk more. My legs ached slightly, but it seemed to me I could hold out till Gorizia, for my respiration was free and deep. Warming my legs with a brisk pace, the walking, in fact, did not tax me. And in my well-being, beating time as I walked, jolly because the tempo was unusually fast, I regained my optimism. Threats from this side, threats from that, but it wouldn't come to war. And thus, when I arrived at Gorizia, I hesitated, wondering if I shouldn't take a room in the hotel, spend the night, and return the next day to Lucinico to make my complaints to the mayor.

I rushed first to the post office to telephone Augusta. But at the villa there was no answer.

The clerk, a little man with a wispy beard, who, in his small, rigid person, seemed ridiculous and obstinate – the only thing I remember about him – hearing me curse angrily at the dumb telephone, approached me and said, "That's the fourth time today that Lucinico has failed to answer."

When I turned to him, in his eye a great, joyous malice gleamed (I misspoke! there's another thing I still remember!) and that gleaming eye of his sought mine, to see if I was really so surprised and angered. It took a good ten minutes for me to understand. Then there were no more doubts for me. Lucinico was, or a few minutes from now would be, in the line of fire. When I finally understood that eloquent look, I was on my way to the café, to have, anticipating lunch, the cup of coffee that had been due me since morning. I immediately changed direction and headed for the station. I wanted to be closer to my family, and – following the suggestions of my corporal friend – I went to Trieste.

It was during that brief journey of mine that the war broke out.

Thinking to arrive so early in Trieste, though there would have been time at the Gorizia station, I didn't even have the cup of coffee I had so long been yearning for. I climbed into my carriage and, alone, addressed my thoughts to my loved ones, from whom I had been separated in such a strange way. The train proceeded normally until beyond Monfalcone.

It seemed the war had not reached there yet. I regained my serenity thinking that at Lucinico probably things would have taken more or less the same course as on this side of the border. At this hour, Augusta and my children would be traveling toward the interior of Italy. This serenity, together with my enormous, surprising hunger, procured me a long sleep.

It was probably that same hunger that woke me. My train had stopped in the midst of what is called the Saxony of Trieste. The sea wasn't visible, though it must have been very close, because a slight haze blocked any view into the distance. The Carso has a great sweetness in May, but it can be understood only by those not spoiled by the exuberantly colorful and lively springtimes in other regions. Here the stone crops out everywhere from a mild green that isn't humble because soon it becomes the predominant note of the landscape.

In other conditions I would have been hugely enraged not to be able to eat, suffering such hunger. But that day the grandeur of the historic event I had witnessed cowed me and led me to resignation. The conductor, to whom I gave some cigarettes, couldn't procure me even a crust of bread. I told no one about my experiences of the morning. I would talk about them in Trieste, with a few intimate friends. From the border, toward which I pricked up my ear, no sound of fighting came. We had been stopped at that place to allow eight or nine trains to pass, storming down toward Italy. The gangrenous wound (as the Italian front was immediately called in Austria) had

opened and needed matériel to nourish its purulence. And the poor men went there, snickering and singing. From all those trains came the same sounds of joy or drunkenness.

When I reached Trieste, night had already descended on the city.

The night was illuminated by the glow of many fires, and a friend who saw me heading home in my shirtsleeves shouted to me: "Did you take part in the looting?"

Finally I managed to eat something, and immediately went to bed.

A true, great weariness drove me to bed. I believe it was produced by the hopes and the doubts that were combating in my mind. I was still quite well, and in the brief period preceding the dream whose images my psychoanalysis had enabled me to retain, I remembered that I concluded my day with a last, childish, optimistic idea: On the frontier no one had yet died, and therefore peace could be regained.

Now that I know my family is safe and sound, the life I lead doesn't displease me. I haven't much to do, but it can't be said I'm idle. No buying or selling is allowed. Trade will be reborn when we have peace. From Switzerland, Olivi had some advice transmitted to me. If he only knew how hollow his counsels sound in this atmosphere, which is totally changed! I, for the moment, do nothing.

24 March 1916

Since May of last year, I haven't again touched this little book. Now, from Switzerland, Dr. S. writes me, asking me to send him everything I have so far recorded. It's a curious request, but I have no objection to sending him also this notebook, from which he will clearly see what I think of him and of his therapy. Since he possesses all my confessions, let him keep also these few pages and a few more that I will gladly add for his edification. I haven't much time, because my business occupies my day. But with Doctor S., I still want to have my

say. I have given it so much thought that now my ideas are clear.

Meanwhile he believes he will receive further confessions of sickness and weakness, and on the contrary he will receive the description of sound health, as perfect as my fairly advanced age will allow. I am cured! Not only do I not want to undergo psychoanalysis, but also I don't need it! And my healthiness doesn't come only from the fact that I feel privileged in the midst of so much martyrdom. I do not feel healthy comparatively. I am healthy, absolutely. For a long time I knew that my health could reside only in my own conviction, and it was foolish nonsense, worthy of a hypnagogue dreamer, to try to reach it through treatment rather than persuasion. I suffer some pains, true, but they lack significance in the midst of my great health. I can put a sticking-plaster here or there, but the rest has to move and fight and never dawdle in immobility as the gangrenous do. Sorrow and love – life, in other words – cannot be considered a sickness because they hurt.

I admit that before I could be convinced of my health, my destiny had to change and warm my organism with struggle and above all with victory. It was business that healed me and I want Dr. S. to know it.

Stunned and inert, I contemplated the upheaval of the world until the beginning of August of last year. Then I began to *buy*. I underline this verb because it has a higher meaning now than it had before the war. On a businessman's lips, then, it meant he was prepared to acquire a given article. But when I said it, I meant that I was the buyer of any goods that might be offered me. Like all strong people, I had in my head a sole idea, and by that I lived and it made my fortune. Olivi wasn't in Trieste, but it is certain that he would never have allowed such risk and would have left it all for others. But for me it was no risk. I knew its happy outcome with complete certainty. First, following the age-old custom of wartime, I had

set about converting all my wealth to gold, but there was a certain difficulty in buying and selling gold. Gold that might be called liquid, as it was more mobile, was merchandise, and I stocked up on it. From time to time I also do some selling, but always to a lesser extent than my buying. Because I began at the right moment, my buying and my selling have been so fortunate that the latter provided me with the great means I needed for the former.

With great pride, I remember that my first purchase was actually an apparent foolishness and was intended solely to put my new idea immediately into effect. A not-large stock of incense. To me the seller broached the possibility of using incense as a substitute for resin, which was already growing scarce, but, as a chemist, I knew with absolute certainty that incense could never replace resin, which was different *toto genere*. The way I looked at it, the world was going to reach such a state of poverty that they would have to accept incense as a surrogate for resin. And so I bought! A few days ago I sold a small part of it, and I received the amount I had had to pay out for the whole stock. At the moment I pocketed that money, my chest swelled, as I felt my strength and my health.

The doctor, when he has received this last part of my manuscript, should then give it all back to me. I would rewrite it with real clarity, for how could I understand my life before knowing this last period of it? Perhaps I lived all those years only to prepare myself for this!

Naturally I am not ingenuous, and I forgive the doctor for seeing life itself as a manifestation of sickness. Life does resemble sickness a bit, as it proceeds by crises and lyses, and has daily improvements and setbacks. Unlike other sicknesses, life is always fatal. It doesn't tolerate therapies. It would be like stopping the holes that we have in our bodies, believing them wounds. We would die of strangulation the moment we were treated.

Present-day life is polluted at the roots. Man has put himself in the place of trees and animals and has polluted the air, has blocked free space. Worse can happen. The sad and active animal could discover other forces and press them into his service. There is a threat of this kind in the air. It will be followed by a great gain . . . in the number of humans. Every square meter will be occupied by a man. Who will cure us of the lack of air and of space? Merely thinking of it, I am suffocated!

But it isn't this, not only this.

Any effort to give us health is vain. It can belong only to the animal who knows a sole progress, that of his own organism. When the swallow realized that for her no other life was possible except migration, she strengthened the muscle that moves her wings, and it then became the most substantial part of her organism. The mole buried herself, and her whole body adapted to her need. The horse grew and transformed his hoof. We don't know the process of some animals, but it must have occurred and it will never have undermined their health.

But bespectacled man, on the contrary, invents devices outside of his body, and if health and nobility existed in the inventor, they are almost always lacking in the user. Devices are bought, sold, and stolen, and man becomes increasingly shrewd and weaker. His first devices seemed extensions of his arm and couldn't be effective without its strength; but, by now, the device no longer has any relation to the limb. And it is the device that creates sickness, abandoning the law that was, on all earth, the creator. The law of the strongest vanished, and we lost healthful selection. We would need much more than psychoanalysis. Under the law established by the possessor of the greatest number of devices, sickness and the sick will flourish.

Perhaps, through an unheard-of catastrophe produced by devices, we will return to health. When poison gases no longer suffice, an ordinary man, in the secrecy of a room in this

world, will invent an incomparable explosive, compared to which the explosives currently in existence will be considered harmless toys. And another man, also ordinary, but a bit sicker than others, will steal this explosive and will climb up at the center of the earth, to set it on the spot where it can have the maximum effect. There will be an enormous explosion that no one will hear, and the earth, once again a nebula, will wander through the heavens, freed of parasites and sickness.