

## Saturday

Now people are accusing me of mystification. Not long ago a woman charged up to me in the Polish Center: — You mystify! It is never clear whether you are being serious, paradoxical, or just bluffing.

—A nitwit—I answered—fears nothing more than being turned into one. This fear never leaves him: they are putting me on! But listen, nitwit, what good will it do you to know whether I am “sincere” or “insincere”? What does this have to do with whether or not my thoughts are right? I can utter a soaring truth “insincerely” and say the stupidest thing “sincerely.” Learn to judge the thought independently of who says it or how.

Sure, mystification is advisable for a writer. Let him muddle the waters around himself a bit so that no one knows who he is—a clown perhaps? Scoffer? Wise man? Cheat? Discoverer? Blusterer? Guide? Or perhaps he is all of these at once? Enough of this blissful sleep in the womb of mutual trust. Be vigilant, spirit!  
Be prepared!  
And so long, nitwits!

## XXI

### Wednesday

An enticing little morning, an idling little springtime, dust motes dancing in the streaks and streams of sunlight—oooh, ahhhh, I am happy to pull on my trousers with the thought that I am going for a walk, a little walk, I'll relax, I walk to the door—the bell, Irmgard goes to open the door and in a minute in walks Simon.

So I say: —*Hola*, what are you doing here at this early hour? Have a seat, *compañero!* To which he replies: —How are you?—and he sits down—sits down—sits down somewhat too easily perhaps, too quickly, or perhaps because he sits down in the nearest chair—enough that he immediately alienates me with his terrifying absence.

I say something again—he to me—but this conversation is and is not—as for him, it looks as if “he had forgotten to take himself along.” It was as if . . . yes, as if he were not there. But what do I know, after all. . . . I smile and keep talking when suddenly his upper lip quivers, in a bad way, in a bad, bad way.

He looks.

Explains.

A vat.

A vat full of boiling water.

His daughter.

A vat filled with boiling water spills on his daught . . .

So, I see . . . and “it has been going on for hours in the hospital and is still not over” and he “doesn't know what to do with himself” and he “is of absolutely no use,” so he came. And he apologizes for intruding at such an early hour. —No problem! Of course, certainly . . . But I go silent, he goes silent and we sit, if I can express it this way, nose to nose. Face to face. Alone. Hand to hand. Foot to foot. Knee to knee. Face to face. Until this stupid identity begins to irritate me in the room and I think, how is it that he repeats me, that I repeat him, face to face—all of a sudden the scalding of the child scalds me until I hiss—and then I see that even though we are so similar, there is no use sitting here and it is better simply not to sit at all but to leave, leave, leave,

exit, any kind of exit; distance, removal, become urgent, burning! . . . And I say: — Shall we take a walk? He gets up immediately and we leave; first I and he behind me with that daughter of his.  
Zephyr.

We go out and the fact that we go out is just right. So we go. I immediately turn right, although I could go left — streets, houses, sidewalks, movement, hubbub, ringing, honking, look — someone is hopping into a tram, someone is bending over, someone is biting into a chocolate bar, someone is buying something from a vendor — we feel better immediately at the sight of this hive with hands, feet, ears, like us, but alien, as if it were innocent. . . . And what relief! . . . because even though that evil thing is lodged in us, there on the street corner people call out to one another! They greet each other from afar!

I choose the most crowded streets to lose myself in the throng and disappear — and I gamble that this is a race with time, that his daughter cannot keep dying endlessly, it has to end somehow, and then Simon will leave me alone. I haven't the least idea what is going on in him, a conflagration or frost — he walks next to me. Sun. I see a fruit vendor on the corner, he is weighing apples and somehow I like it that he knows nothing and is weighing a kilo of apples, talking to a customer . . . his ignorance appeals to me so much that I think that I, too, will buy some apples and will at least relax for a moment with this man, rest, somewhere at his place, far away. . . . — A kilo? — said the fruit vendor. — Right away. Everyone is buying them because they are as sweet as pears.

Suddenly I blurt out: — A terrible thing has happened to this man, he has a four-year-old daughter and she is dying.

I bite my tongue . . . why?! It is out! Never mind. He weighs the apples. I am humbled in this silence and empty, like an eraser rubbing away everything. How awful — says the fruit vendor — such a misfortune! When I hear this, it grows in me, unwinds, jumps and howls all in one second, bursting all boundaries . . . I shout:

— Take these apples away! Take them!

Lightening bolt. I move forward, blindly, like a man possessed! Behind me Simon with his little daughter, like a man possessed! And again we are alone, he and I, I and he, but this time the secret is out, the war declared, trumpets and drums, the march is beginning!

And at exactly this moment, note, a dog barks (I do not see him, I merely hear his barking).

Trams! Buses! Swarm of passersby! The street is unrolling itself like a carpet, I walk on, after me him, and after him, his daughter! We walk in my outburst, in my outburst to the fruit vendor, which revealed,

betrayed, and announced . . . and it no longer helps us to be immersing ourselves in the throng, my cry follows us and behind it that horror . . . and with it something like an animal, why has an animal joined in? An animal? I am thinking of the dog's barking. Well, a dog not a tiger . . . at any rate this barking joins my outburst, my outburst, I remember it now, it rings out together with the barking of the dog and as a result my outburst changes a little into some kind of animal, well, it is enough that the animal is, that it has already joined in, dog or no dog. An animal. We walk. He walks. I walk. Out of a cornucopia come houses, windows, streets, street corners, signs, displays, and the human swarm, in which we are immersing ourselves more and more quickly, in order to lose ourselves . . . what will I do? Where are we going? What should we do? . . . but we go down Florida Street, where the crowds are greatest, and we tear through, push, rub shoulders. Until we stop because a passing omnibus blocks our way and an elderly gentleman asks Simon, very politely:

— Pardon me . . . Which way to Corrientes?

Simon looks at him and does not answer.

Then a little taken aback, the man turns to me with his question.

And I look at him — and don't answer. NO. I agree, it is nothing too unusual, he probably thinks he has come upon foreigners who do not know the language . . . nevertheless, you must understand, this is a NO and a shove into nothingness . . . as if a knife were cutting it away. This is a REFUSAL, a dark, black, remote refusal in the bright sun.

And we move ahead, like madmen, and then the shriek of a parrot reaches us, who knows from where, maybe from a passing taxi, this shriek joins to my earlier outburst and renews the earlier barking of the dog . . . and the Animal again makes itself heard and suddenly tears into our lack of an answer! Nothing. I still do not know what is in him, in Simon, although I am the same as he, and alone with him! Nor does he know about me. But bound by our outburst and by our lack of an answer, isolated and marked like criminals, we quicken our pace to get lost in the crowd, when the end loomed before me — the end, I say, which makes me feel queasy. . . .

Namely, Florida is ending. Before us the square — the Plaza San Martin — as if on a platter.

Return to Florida? But no . . . because we walk in a hurry, as if we were going somewhere and this would reveal that our movement is a lie!

Enter the square? Except that there are almost no people there. What are we to do in that square — the two of us, alone!

Too late for second thoughts. We are walking through the very center of the square—it is cool, quiet, fresh, and the wind blows over us from afar. The sudden distance practically knocks our feet out from under us. The square is sublime, overlooking the port and river, it hovers like a balcony, and there, in the distance, in the black and blue combinations of water, fog, and white sky, floats the cringing or straight smoke from ships immobile on the river, and this immobility of ships on the immobile river together with the stone skeleton of the port, sharp with the spines of buildings—from here, from the mountain—smells of stagnation and backwardness. We slow our pace. Stillness. Emptiness. Peace. Our gallop has exhausted itself, broken down in the immobility—and we stop. Suddenly our walk has completely exhausted itself.

What?

Face-to-face, but I have no idea what he is doing with himself in there—perhaps something, perhaps nothing—I have no idea. We stand, he a little to the side, and we stand, and there, in the distance, some sort of immobile gloom is forming and growing between the glassy water and the watery heaven of steam, fog, clouds of smoke, in the stillness of ships imperceptibly moving, in the lifeless outline of port fortifications. Silence, silence, when a piece of paper rustles at our feet, moved by the wind. I look at my companion out of the corner of my eye—he is holding the paper down with the tip of his shoe and his eyes are riveted to the ground. The paper rustles again. I glue my eyes to the paper, he glues his eyes to the paper.

Again the paper rustles. Then he looks at me with furrowed brow, with a look so concentrated and penetrating that it seems he is preparing to say something most urgent, important, and conclusive, in the greatest haste . . . but he says nothing, the paper rustles, he holds the paper down with his foot and looks at me, and there far away it goes on, grows and floats. . . . I think, what will happen if the paper rustles again?

One-on-one. I prefer not to look at him and in not looking at him, I begin to wonder if I am in danger . . . will he . . . me? . . .

It is important for me to substantiate this thought, it is not at all fantastic, I would not want to be accused of lacking common sense. . . . Let us agree: a man subject to such pressure could explode, is it not true that he could explode? But the very explosion worries me less—the nature of the explosion, more. For, let us understand that I do not know what is going on inside him, and more may be going on . . . well, much more may be going on than custom anticipates and one could even ask if this tormented creature is still residing with both feet in our, human, world . . . and in general this story is risky and elusive beyond

expression, yes, risky . . . but perhaps I would not be so disturbed if not for the paper, if not for the paper flapping under his foot, like something living, like an animal, you see, completely like a shout turned into an animal, the result being that the animal joins us again, but this time, how shall I say it, low, at the very bottom, because it is no longer from a dog, a parrot, but from a piece of paper, a lifeless thing, and there, low, the Animal with the child answers, the child-animal. . . . And I wrack my brains, wrack my brains, why is the child turning into an animal, but there is no helping it, one has to bear it—except, that I am relating to “man” with suspicion, to a man who stands in a void, next to me, a man for whom a dying child has become an animal and who carries this within himself. . . . I do not believe in the devil. Simon is a good person by nature, he wouldn’t harm a fly. Except that . . . this time . . . There is no grace to be found anywhere. Not a penny’s worth.

What then might he be capable of . . . if the paper rustles again? (This is all connected to the paper.) But the breeze has died down. I prefer not to look at him too much. The worst thing is that this kind of animal is an unknown to me, even up close, but the fact that it comes from the child, and is linked to a dog and a parrot and paper, does not inspire confidence. There on the outskirts smoke and streaks of fog. A child? An animal? What kind of animal? I should not, in any case, have taken a walk with him, this is really providential and now I have to duck out, detach myself—before it becomes too late—and what are we doing here like this anyway, on this elevated square, alone, one-on-one, without anyone except for us. . . . I have to detach myself. But how should I detach myself? Quickly, quickly, because at any moment the paper might rustle . . . it is really silly that even though he is so similar to me, nose for nose, ear for ear, foot for foot, I haven’t the least idea as to what he might do!

I calculate that if I leave suddenly, at least a moment will pass before he can move—during which I can reach the stairs and quickly run down the stairs alone. Except . . . how am I to leave so abruptly? . . . I go silent inside—and then under the influence of my silence that silence returns to me, the silence with which we received the gentleman who asked me about Corrientes; that silence of ours returns together with the deafness and blindness, and in this deafness and blindness, I break with him, I suddenly leave!

I am already on the stairs. I am running down. This escape is like a challenge! Because I am fleeing from something like an evil spirit! And he remains behind like an evil spirit! Suddenly a diabolical evil finds itself between us. I was hoping to come upon a station and lose myself

in it—I run, I run inside, I dive into a crowd and finally I stand in line for the cashier, any kind of cashier, just to stand. —Where to?—asks the clerk at the window. —To Tigre—I say the first station that comes to mind, because it's all the same, the important thing is to get on a train, to get away. But I hear behind me: —To Tigre—And it is his voice.

This frightened me and I am not joking!

Actually there is nothing shocking about all this—the two of us step out for a walk, then the two of us buy a ticket for a suburban train . . . well, yes, except that I am running away . . . and he, in order to catch me, has to run after me and this running after me is pursuit. . . . At any rate, he attaches himself to me again. And this time I am no longer able to escape, the possibility of escape has already been exhausted. So we take our tickets and together, shoulder to shoulder, await our train in a great hall of glass and iron; we stand over a line of sleek tracks, where slowly the passengers gather—we wait for the train.

Which is not arriving. We wait. He says nothing. I don't know what is in him, what he is like now, where he is going, I know nothing—zero—about this face staring at the tracks—and, at the same time, in proportion to the arrival of people, our intimacy grows, our acquaintance forces us to stand next to one another, it creates a pair of us. Who is this creature standing next to me and what sort of animal has his child—which he has with him—become? My common sense, as healthy as it is, does not leave me for an instant in these obsessions of fear and about ten times I become furious at my fantasies and chimeras—but—but—once the facade of the ordinary shatters, the place we occupy in the cosmos becomes what it is in essence—something abysmally inconceivable and therefore containing the possibility of everything. After all, I would not even concern myself with this too much—if not for a certain drastic detail, if not for a certain reptile, concealing itself in the dark womb of being—if not for the Pain—yes, if the riddle did not cause pain!

Pain! Only this is important—the cruel eyes of Pain in this black well—pain hurts!—This merciless finger transforms everything it touches into reality—even fantasy becomes truth in contact with this real thing, pain. I wouldn't make anything of this if it didn't hurt; but I have already been informed about the pain of the child in the hospital, the terrible pain that hurts here, right next to me, in this man—and this horror is not a delusion, because it hurts!—and I am close, close . . . and maybe it is beginning to look at me . . . that animal of a burned child . . . I do what I can to conceal it from myself, or, too, myself from

it, but the undeveloped thought about the child turned into an animal, a bad thought . . . Animal? What kind of animal? The barking of a dog, a parrot, rustling paper, ah, I weave my deaf, dumb, blind arabesques from anything at hand and they would be so harmless if it didn't hurt, it hurts, O the pain, the pain, it hurts!—except for the pain of a child confirming my fancies!

Meanwhile more people arrive, Sunday travelers with bags and in spite of everything their normal demeanor somehow soothes our usualness—until a train rolls into the vastness of the iron-glass hall, pigeons in the vault—and together with others we board, he and I—and we are confined to an overflowing train car. Whistles. The train moves. In a moment it emerges into the sun, devouring the tracks that run out of the sides of the road with a rhythmic rocking. We ride the relaxing, fleeing space and I am already thinking about what I am supposed to do in this Tigre for which I am headed, when—Tigre? Tigre! Why Tigre?!

Why to Tigre, for what, to do what? . . . And why not to some other station? In the crush I can see practically nothing through the gaps created by chins, spines, collars, and necks, and I feel hijacked to Tigre . . . why to Tigre? . . . and I know that in the train there is not one person who is going the way I am going there with him, without reason, so completely blindly (and deafly) to Tigre . . . and with the same kind of baggage. I look, truly amazed, at their faces, so similar, it is possible that they may even look like us—and this fact becomes a springboard for a mad leap, that we are going to Tigre without reason, borne away by the train. Tigre? What is waiting for us in Tigre? The train stops, then moves. I feel something . . . nearby . . . some sort of machination, some sort of indistinct effort to overpower . . . me . . . thirst for conquest . . . of me.

This is indistinct. Murky, dark, quiet. He stands next to me, squeezed. This is not a distinct, possessive movement—nothing of the kind. I catch him in rather tiny almost preliminary doings—the movement of a hand, perhaps the shifting of weight from foot to foot, the shy, crowded movement of an elbow—perhaps this is natural in the discomfort, but I seem to see something, that it is not he who is moving, but something within him . . . something I fear desperately, a child turned into an animal, that animal of his, which is endowed with its own movement like the rustling paper and which possesses him. Again I feel in him the movement, something like the movement of a fetus in a mother's womb, and I feel the presence of an evil with fangs, claws, furiously evil. I cringe again, for the cry of that child, in the hospital, really is—so my delirium has real fangs!

Then I realize: Tigre—tiger! Which has not occurred to me until now. So we speed on to Tigre . . . and I would laugh to tears over this, if not for the child in the hospital making it come true!

Simon moves again!—or it moves in him—and I run to get away—but in the crush all I can do is move away from him spasmodically and thus, moving my entire body, I crawl onto another—soft—body. An enormous, warm obesity whose face I do not see, into whom, out of horror, I am falling, into a sweaty, awkward, vulvar softness, into a probably quiet, humble, decent obesity, hospitable if suffocating. Oh, what a cozy little corner this is! . . . in which I slowly domesticate myself, make myself at home . . . in the warmth of his shirt plays today's and yesterday's sweat, mingled with the scent of vanilla, in his pocket he has a notepad, on his lining a label with the name of the tailor SMART, the shirt is patched. It is quiet here and good, a hundred miles from that . . . burning . . . problem, that other thing is completely inconceivable, it is something completely different, a different country, respite and calm . . . at the other end of the world. Finally! I am resting. I am elated. And suddenly a terrible blow is dealt beneath me from beneath.

I say "beneath me from beneath" because this is neither simply "beneath me" nor simply "from beneath," just as if it were divided and doubled—do you understand?—and this was not really a blow, rather a grabbing; and this grabbing was not "executed," but was becoming like a threat on my periphery . . . and suddenly I understand that my moment of laxity has been taken advantage of in order practically to bite! I freeze. My head is stuck between his chest and jacket. I cannot pray. I cannot move. I cannot shout. No, I cannot shout, but a god-awful shout breaks out from all over and embraces everything, tumbles headlong into the heartrending Animal to the very bottom. And, with my head hidden, immobile, I wait for it to jump.

But then . . .

Something . . . something . . . something! What? Hm . . . Suddenly . . . something like a tickling on the back of the neck. Can't be. Perhaps someone has pulled out a handkerchief and is touching the back of my neck? No. Someone is tickling me. Deliberately, his fingers on the back of my neck. . . .

I wonder. What could this be? Who?

The fat man? Why? I take all the possible solutions into consideration: madman, homo, joker.

Simon? Has he gone mad? Even if he has gone crazy, he cannot reach my neck from where he is.

One of the people standing next to me? Maybe an acquaintance is letting me know he is here? Highly unlikely with my head stuck in the Fat Guy.

Meanwhile someone's fingers are dancing lightly down the back of my neck.

I wonder—who? What? I puzzle and puzzle.

I wrack and wrack my brains, what sort of joke is this—but I have no illusions for I know that the lack of connection between the tickling and the Animal is precisely the guarantee of their diabolical *affiliations*, their plotting, their pact—and I wait for the Tickling to get chummy with It, with the Animal, before it sinks, like a knife, into the unknown, inconceivable, still unuttered scream.