



MODERN  
CLASSICS

# Clarice Lispector The Apple in the Dark



*The Apple in the Dark*

Clarice Lispector was a Brazilian novelist and short story writer. Her innovation in fiction brought her international renown. References to her literary work pervade the music and literature of Brazil and Latin America. She was born in the Ukraine in 1920, but in the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Civil War, the family fled to Romania and eventually sailed to Brazil. She published her first novel, *Near to the Wildheart* in 1943 when she was just twenty-three, and the next year was awarded the Graça Aranha Prize for the best first novel. Many felt she had given Brazilian literature a unique voice in the larger context of Portuguese literature. After living variously in Italy, the UK, Switzerland and the US, in 1959, Lispector returned with her children to Brazil where she wrote her most influential novels including *The Passion According to G.H.* She died in 1977, shortly after the publication of her final novel, *The Hour of the Star*.

**Copyrighted Material**

CLARICE LISPECTOR

*The Apple in the Dark*

*Translated from the Portuguese by Benjamin Moser*  
*Afterword by Paulo Gurgel Valente*



PENGUIN BOOKS

**Copyrighted Material**

PENGUIN CLASSICS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia  
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at [global.penguinrandomhouse.com](http://global.penguinrandomhouse.com)



Penguin  
Random House  
UK

First published as New Directions Paperbook 1579 in 2023

First published in Penguin Classics 2023

001

Published by arrangement with the Clarice Lispector estate and Agencia Literaria Carmen Balcells, Barcelona. Originally titled *A maça no escuro*.

Text copyright © Paulo Gurgel Valente, 2023

Translation copyright © Benjamin Moser, 2023

Afterword copyright © Paulo Gurgel Valente, 2023

The moral rights of the author and translator have been asserted

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-37135-0

[www.greenpenguin.co.uk](http://www.greenpenguin.co.uk)



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Copyrighted Material

*By creating all things, he entered into everything. By entering into all things, he became whatever has form and whatever is formless; he became whatever can be defined and whatever cannot be defined; he became whatever has support and whatever has no support; he became whatever is coarse and whatever is subtle. He became all manner of things: that is why the wise men call him the real one.*

—Vedas (Upanishads)

**Copyrighted Material**

## *Contents*

FIRST PART	How a Man Is Made	3
SECOND PART	Birth of the Hero	133
THIRD PART	The Apple in the Dark	223
	The Involuntary Eyewitness by Paulo Gurgel Valente	387

**Copyrighted Material**

*First Part*

HOW A MAN IS MADE

**Copyrighted Material**

**Copyrighted Material**

THIS STORY BEGINS ON A MARCH NIGHT AS DARK AS night gets while you sleep. The way that, peaceful, time was passing was the extremely high moon passing through the sky. Until much deeply later the moon disappeared too.

Nothing now would distinguish Martim's sleep from the slow and moonless garden: when a man was sleeping so in the depths he came to be nothing more than that tree over there or the leap of a toad in the dark.

Some of the trees had grown up there with rooted ease until reaching the top of their own crowns and the limit of their destiny. Others had already come out of the earth in sudden tufts. The flower beds had an order to them that was concentratedly trying to serve a symmetry. If that symmetry were discernible from the height of the balcony of the big hotel, a person standing even with the flower beds could not make out this order; amidst the beds the driveway was picked out in small chiseled stones.

Above all on one of the lanes the Ford had been parked for so long that it already belonged to the great interwoven garden and its silence.

Yet by day the landscape was different, and the crickets vibrating hollow and hard would leave the expanse entirely open, without a single shadow. Meanwhile the smell was the dry smell

of exasperated stone that daytime has in the countryside. On that very same day Martim had stood on the balcony trying, with useless obedience, not to miss anything that was going on. But whatever was going on wasn't much: before the beginning of the road that wandered off in the suspended dust of the sun, just the no-more-than-contemplatable garden; comprehensible and symmetrical from up on the balcony; tangled when you belonged to it—and for two weeks the man had been keeping that memory in his feet with careful studiousness, stashing it for a possible use. No matter how much attention he paid, though, the day was unscalable; and like a dot drawn atop another dot, the voice of the cricket was the cricket's own body, and told you nothing. The only advantage of the day is that in the extreme light the car was becoming a little beetle that could easily reach the main road.

But while the man was sleeping the car would become enormous the way a halted machine is gigantic. And at night the garden was occupied by the secret weaving with which the dark sustains itself, in a work whose existence the fireflies unexpectedly bring; a certain moistness would also denounce the labor. And the night was an element in which life, because it became strange, was recognizable.

It was in that night that, reaching the empty and sleeping hotel, the car's motor gave a jolt. Slowly the dark had begun to move.

Instead of waking and hearing it directly, it was through an even deeper dream that Martim went to the other side of the darkness and heard the noise that the wheels made spitting out dry sand. Then his name was pronounced, clear and clean, somehow pleasant to the ear. The German was the one who had spoken. In his dream Martim savored the sound of his own name. Then the vehement cry of a bird, whose wings had been frightened in their immobility, the way fright resembles great joy.

When the silence remade itself inside of the silence, Martim

slept even farther away. Though in the depths of his sleep something was echoing difficultly, trying to organize itself. Until, without any meaning and free of the inconvenience of having to be understood, the noise of the car remade itself in his memory with the details more finely picked out. The idea of the car awakened a soft warning that he didn't immediately understand. But that had already spread through the world a vague alarm, whose irradiating center was the man himself: "so, then, me," his body thought, feeling moved. He remained lying down, remotely basking.

Two weeks ago that man had come to the hotel, found in the middle of the night almost without surprise, so much did exhaustion make everything possible. It was an empty hotel, with just the German and the manservant, if he was a manservant. And for two weeks, while Martim was recovering his strength in an almost uninterrupted sleep, the car had remained halted along one of the lanes, its wheels buried in the sand. And so immobile, so resistant to the man's habit of incredulity and to his care in not letting himself be fooled, that Martim had finally ended up thinking of it as at his disposal.

But the truth is that already in that night of wobbling feet—when he'd finally let himself collapse half-dead into a real bed with real sheets—already in that instant the car had represented the guarantee of another escape, in case the two men should show themselves more curious about the identity of their guest. And he'd dropped into sleep confident as if nobody would ever manage to wrest from his firm claw, which was only holding the sheet, the imaginary steering wheel.

The German, however, had asked him nothing, and the manservant, if that's what he was, had hardly glanced at him. The reluctance with which they'd accepted him didn't come from mistrust, but from the fact that the hotel hadn't been a hotel for a long time—as much time as it had been uselessly for sale, the

German had explained to him, and, in order not to look suspicious, Martim had nodded with a smile. Until the new highway was built, this was where cars still had to pass, and the isolated plantation house couldn't be better located as a forced rest stop for people spending the night. When the new highway had been laid out and paved fifty kilometers away, creating a distant detour, the whole place had died and there was no more reason for anyone to need a hotel in the region that had now been left for dead. But despite the apparent indifference of the two men Martim's stubborn search for safety had been anchored in that car upon which spiders too, tranquilized by the varnished immobility, had carried out their ideal aerial labor.

This was the car that in the middle of the night had uprooted itself with a croak.

Within the once again intact silence, the man now looked stupidly at the invisible ceiling that in the dark was as tall as the sky. Tossed on his back in the bed, he tried in an effort of gratuitous pleasure to reconstruct the sound of the wheels, since as long as he didn't feel pain it was as a general rule pleasure that he'd feel. From the bed he couldn't see the garden. A bit of fog was entering through the open shutters, which revealed itself to the man with the smell of damp cotton and with a certain physical ken for happiness that mistiness gives. It had just been a dream, then. Skeptical, however, he got up.

In the shadows he couldn't see anything from the balcony, and he couldn't even guess at the symmetry of the flower beds. A few stains blacker even than blackness indicated the probable location of the trees. The garden was still no more than an effort of his memory, and the man looked quietly, asleep. The odd firefly was making the darkness even more vast.

Having forgotten the dream that had led him to the balcony, the body of the man thought it was nice to feel itself healthily

standing: because the suspended air was hardly changing the dark position of the leaves. There, then, he let himself remain, docile, stupefied, with the line of empty rooms behind him. Without emotion those empty rooms were repeating him and repeating him until going out somewhere the man could no longer fathom. Martim sighed inside his long daydream. Without pushing too much, he tried to reach the notion of the final rooms as if he himself had become too big and scattered, and, for some reason he had already forgotten, needed obscurely to pull himself together in order perhaps to think or feel. But he couldn't, and it was quite delightful. That's how he stood there, with the courteous appearance of a man who'd been struck on the head. Until—the way a watch stops ticking and only then makes us realize that it was ticking in the first place—Martim noticed the silence and inside the silence his own presence. Now, through a very familiar incomprehension, the man started at last to be indistinctly himself.

Then things started to reorganize themselves from the starting point of himself: darknesses started being understood, branches started slowly to take shape beneath the balcony, shadows divided into still-irresolute flowers—with their limits hidden by the motionless lushness of the plants, the flower beds were marked out full, soft. The man grunted approvingly: with a certain difficulty he'd just recognized the garden that during these two weeks of sleep had constituted at intervals his irreducible vision.

It was at that moment that a faint moon crossed a cloud in great silence, in silence spilled over calm rocks, disappearing in silence in the darkness. The moonlit face of the man then looked toward the lane where the Ford ought to be immobile.

But the car had disappeared.

The man's whole body suddenly awakened. In a sly glance his eyes ran over the whole darkness of the garden—and, without a

gesture of warning, he turned toward the room with a monkey's light leap.

Nothing however was moving in the hollow of the room that had become enormous because it was so dark. The man stood panting watchful and uselessly ferocious, with his hands held out for the attack. But the silence of the hotel was the same as that of the night. And without visible limits, the room was prolonging in the same exhalation the darkness of the garden. In order to wake up the man rubbed his eyes several times with the back of one of his hands while leaving the other free for defense. His new watchfulness was pointless: in the darkness his totally open eyes couldn't even see the walls.

It was as if they'd dumped him by himself in the middle of a field. And as if he'd finally awakened from a long dream in which had featured a hotel now dissolved onto an empty floor, a car merely imagined by desire, and above all else as if the reasons for a man to be all expectant in a place that was itself only expectation had disappeared.

All he had left of reality was the wisdom that had made him leap in order indistinctly to defend himself. The same wisdom that was now leading him to reason with unexpected lucidity that if the German had gone to turn him in it would be a while before he could go and come back with the police.

Which still left him temporarily free—unless the manservant had been asked to keep an eye on him. And in that case the manservant, if that's what he was, would be at this very moment at the door of that very room with his ears listening for the guest's slightest movement.

That's what he thought. And summing up his thinking, at which he'd arrived with the malleability with which an invertebrate makes himself smaller in order to slip away, Martim plunged back into the same previous absence of reasons and into

the same obtuse impartiality, as if nothing had anything to do with him, and as if the species would take care of him. Without a backward glance, guided by a slick dexterity in his movements, he started to climb down from the balcony pressing his unexpectedly flexible feet onto the bumps of the bricks. In his watchful remoteness the man was sniffing close to his face the malevolent odor of the straggly ivy as if he'd never again forget it. His soul now simply alert couldn't tell what mattered and what didn't, and to the entire operation he gave the same scrupulous attention.

With a soft leap, which made the garden choke in a held-back sigh, he found himself right in the middle of a flower bed—which trembled all over and then closed back up again. With his body on the lookout the man waited for the message of his leap to be transmitted from one secret echo to the next until being transformed into a distant silence; his thud ended up spreading across the slopes of some mountain. Nobody had taught the man this connivance with whatever happens in the night, but a body knows.

He waited a bit longer. Until nothing happened. Only then did he tap his pocket with caution in search of his glasses: they were whole. He sighed with care and finally looked around. The night was of a great and dark delicacy.

THAT MAN WALKED MILES LEAVING THE PLANTATION house further and further behind. He tried to walk in a straight line and sometimes would freeze up for a moment grasping with wariness the air. Since he was walking in the darkness he couldn't even guess in what direction he'd left the hotel behind. The thing that led him in the dark was just his own intention to walk in a straight line. The man might as well have been black, so little use the lightness of his own skin was to him, and he only knew who he was because of the sensation inside himself of the movements that he himself was making.

With the meekness of a slave, he was fleeing. A certain sweetness had overtaken him, except that he was monitoring his own submission and was somehow directing it. Not a single thought was disturbing his constant and already numb march, except for every once in a while the unexplained idea that he might be walking in circles, with the disconcerting possibility of once more finding himself before the walls of the hotel.

Always, besides the ground that his steps were reaching, was the darkness. He'd already walked for hours, which he could calculate by his feet swollen with fatigue. He'd only discover where the horizon was traced when day broke and the fog dissolved.

Since the darkness was still so stuck to his uselessly open eyes, he ended up concluding that he hadn't escaped the hotel at dawn, but in the middle of the night. Having inside him the great empty space of a blind man, he was moving on.

Since he didn't need his eyes, he tried walking with his eyes closed, since as a generalized precaution he was trying to save his energies wherever he could. With his eyes closed it seemed to him that he was turning around on himself in a dizziness that wasn't at all unpleasant.

As he was walking the man was feeling in his nostrils that acute lack of odor that is the property of very pure air and that keeps itself apart from any other fragrance that you also might be able to smell—and this was leading him as if his only destiny were to encounter the finest part of the depth of the air. But his feet had the distrust of millennia of the possibility of stepping onto something that might move—his feet were feeling out the suspicious softness of things that take advantage of the darkness in order to exist. Through his feet he entered into contact with that way of giving in and being able to be shaped that is the way you enter into the worst part of the night: into its permission. He didn't know where he was stepping, though through the shoes that had become a means of communication, he was feeling the dubiousness of the earth.

The man couldn't do anything but wait for the first half-light to reveal a path to him. Meanwhile he could sleep on the ground that, distanced by the darkness, seemed unreachable to him. No longer prodded by danger, the wisdom that would now only be a hindrance to him had disappeared. And again the soft brutalization was overtaking him. The ground was so far off that, abandoning his body, that body for an instant experienced the fall into the void. He'd however hardly touched the ground that retreated at his feet, and that ground instantly was disenchanting into some-

thing resistant, whose hard stable wrinkles seemed like those of the palate of a horse's mouth. The man stretched his legs and laid down his head. Now that he had immobilized himself, the air had sharpened and was hurting extremely cleanly. The man didn't feel like sleeping but in the dark he didn't know what to do with his great watchfulness. Anyway there was nothing to watch.

By now he'd already grown used to the strange music you hear at night and which is made of the possibility of something squawking and of the delicate friction of silence up against silence. It was a lament without sadness. The man was in the heart of Brazil. And the silence was savoring itself. But if mildness was the way you could hear the night, for the night mildness was its own sharp sword, and in mildness the whole night was contained. The man didn't let himself be bewitched by the delight he felt in the tenderness; he could guess that for miles around the darkness knew he was there. So he kept on the lookout, having under perfect control the night's means of communication.

Several times he tried to find a more comfortable position. He was taking an impersonal care of himself as if he were a package. But beneath was the definitive ground, above the only star, and the man was feeling awakened by the two things awake in the darkness. With each movement he made, his face or his hands would encounter something energetic that once pushed away would return with a slight slap at him. He groped around with wise fingers: it was a branch.

A moment more, however, and abruptly sleep assaulted him in the most unexpected position: with one of his hands protecting his eyes and the other pushing away the rough foliage.

The man slept watchfully for hours. Exactly the hours it took for a thought to shape, whatever thought it might be, since he could no longer reach himself except through the sharpness of sleep. From the moment he'd closed his eyes the vast inarticulate

idea started to take shape—and everything worked so perfectly that the idea filled, without a break and without needing to go back a single time to correct itself, the sleep he was needing in order to sleep. While he was sleeping he wasn't feeding off the little he had become, but was taking from some thing like from his race of man, which was indistinct and satisfactory. Through that thing made of growling he was reaching a great deal: his mouth was thick with good and nutritive saliva. So, when the final step of his future was complete, Martim moved on the hardness of the ground. He hadn't yet opened his eyes but as he felt his own numbness he recognized himself, and with reluctance understood that he was awake.

In fact atop his thin eyelids he had already felt with pain the great weight of the day.

But in a mistrust without intelligible reason he apparently thought it was more prudent to communicate with the situation through touch: with his eyes closed, he slid gradual fingers across the earth that now, with a promising sign, which he didn't understand but approved, seemed less cold and less compact. With this primary guarantee, he finally opened his eyes.

And a rough brightness blinded him as if he'd received in the face a salty wave of sea.

Stunned, his mouth open, that man was childishly seated in the middle of a stretch of desert that extended out of sight on every side. It was a stupid and dry light. And he was sitting there like a doll dropped into the middle of that thing that was asserting itself.

The place where he found himself was far from being confused in the way in the dark his sleeping feet had imagined. Worried, his body didn't know if it should or shouldn't feel pleasure in this discovery. With caution he noted the few trees scattered by the distance. The infinite ground was dry and reddish. It wasn't a forest as he'd calculated by the branch that had hit him in the

face. He'd happened to fall asleep near one of the rare bushes in the open field.

Seated, he was however looking around on the alert: because if silence is a natural part of darkness, he hadn't counted on the vehement muteness of the sun. He'd always experienced the sun with voices. He therefore remained motionless in order not to frighten whatever was there. It was a silence as if something were about to happen that a man doesn't notice, but the few trees were swaying and the animals had already disappeared.

Wisely keeping in mind his own limitation that was making him more defenseless than a rabbit, he then waited with his head uplifted as if a neutral pose would make him invisible. Nobody had taught him that either. But in two weeks he had learned how it is that a being doesn't think and doesn't move and nevertheless is entirely there. After, with the carefulness of prudence, he started to look almost without moving his head, merely tilting it imperceptibly backward, in order to enlarge his field of vision.

And what Martim saw was an extended plain vaguely rising. Far away a slight slope was beginning which, thanks to its lines, was promising to slide into a yet invisible valley. And at the end of the silence of the sun, there was that elevation sweetened by gold, barely discernible amidst mists or low clouds, or perhaps by the fact that the man hadn't dared put on his glasses. He didn't know if it was a mountain or just illuminated haze.

Reassured then by the vastness of the distance that was pushing off any extremities, the man started slowly bringing his gaze to everything around him in a more personal way.

In the calm expanse, the odd bush stuffed by the final immobility of the sun. Spaced far apart, a few rigid trees. The occasional boulder was arising perpetual.

Then the man undid the tension of his body: there was no danger. It was a calm and loyal expanse, entirely at the surface of itself. And without any traps—except the short and hard shadow

that dug itself in next to every thing that had been placed there. But there was no danger. In fact you couldn't even imagine that that place had a name or had ever been seen by anyone. It was just the great empty and inexpressive space where, out of their own free will, stones and stones were arising. And that brightness of energy that had set him on edge was nothing more than the other side of the silence. Even so, with extreme frankness, the brightness as much as the silence were looking with exposed faces at the sky.

The sun's silence was so total that his ears, rendered useless, tried to divide it into imaginary stages as on a map in order to comprehend it gradually. But right after the first stage the man started to spin inside infinity, which startled him as a warning. His ears, rendered more modest, tried at least to calculate where the silence would end: in a house? in some forest? and what actually was that smear in the distance—a mountain or just the darkness that comes from the heaping up of distances? His body was hurting.

But by standing up the man unexpectedly retrieved all the stature of his own body. Which automatically gave him a certain superiority as if, by standing, he had inaugurated the desert. And despite his hunched shoulders, he felt himself dominating the expanse and ready to follow it. Though he was blinded by the light: there none of his senses were helping him, and that brightness was disorienting him more than the darkness of the night. Any direction was the same empty and illuminated route, and he didn't know which path would mean moving forward or going back. In truth, wherever the man tried to stand, he himself became the center of the great circle, and the merely arbitrary start of a path.

But ever since, two weeks ago, that man had experienced the power of an act, he had also seemed to have gone to allowing the stupid liberty in which he was finding himself. Without a

thought of reply, then, he withstood motionless the fact that he was his own only point of departure.

Then, as if contemplating for the last time before departure the place where his house had been burned down, Martim looked at the great sunny emptiness. He saw it clearly. And seeing was what he could do. Which he did with a certain pride, his head held high. In two weeks he had recovered a natural pride and, like a person who doesn't think, had become self-sufficient.

Soon his even and repeated steps created a monotonous march. Thousands of rhythmic steps that addled him and brought him forward by themselves, benumbed, inflated by fatigue, now moving ahead with the look of a contented idiot. So much that, if he stopped, he'd fall. But he kept going and getting more and more powerful. As time went by, the sun was getting rounder and rounder.

It was in the direction of the sea that the man had intended to go, even before finding the hotel by a happy coincidence. But—without a map, knowledge, or compass—he'd threaded his way inland. Either because any path would necessarily end up in an open coast, which was a truth, but difficult to attain with feet; or since in reality he didn't have the slightest plan to go to any specific place. Later, with the flattening continuation of days and nights—and joining himself to the continuation, pasting his whole body onto it, had become the secret objective since he had fled—with the continuation of nights and days the man had ended up forgetting the reason why he'd wanted to find the sea. Maybe it wasn't for any practical reason. Perhaps it was just so that, when he finally reached the sea, in an instant of obscure beauty, that's where he would have arrived.

Whatever the reason might have been, he'd forgotten it. And walking without stopping, the man scratched his head violently with hard fingers: he had a naughty pleasure in having forgot-

ten. Which didn't stop even now—if in the semiwatchfulness of his steps he'd close the eyes whose moisture the light had already dried—even now the vision of the former desire was being made concrete. When he closed his eyes he suddenly saw green water break against cliffs and salt his hot face. So he ran his hand across his face and smiled mysteriously as he felt his hard beard growing sharp, which also was some promising and satisfying thing; he smiled in a scowl of false modesty, and hurried his steps still more. He was being led along by the tenderness of the beast, the same that lends animals such a lovely pace.

But sometimes, to that body that his steps had rendered mechanical and light, a deserted sea no longer meant much. And searching inside himself, only God knows why, the contact with a more intense desire—he managed to see the sea full of the extreme height of masts and of the rattling of the gulls! gulls of intestines screaming their breath of salt, the fizzing sea of those who depart, the tide that leads further on. I love you, his gaze said to a stone, because the sudden sea of screams had profoundly disturbed his own intestines, and that's how he looked at the stone.

A kilometer later the man however had already forgotten that form of sea, whose effort of invention had in fact left him exhausted. And stumbling hurriedly on the pebbles, he stretched in a great appeal his arms toward the desire of a nocturnal sea, whose murmuring would unravel at last the thickness that exists in silence. His hollow ears were thirsty, and the primary murmuring of the sea would be the thing that least endangered the cautious way in which he had become just a walking man. Because he'd stretched out his arms abruptly, he lost his balance and almost fell—his heart thumped in fright several times. All his life that man had been afraid of one day falling over during a solemn occasion. Since it would have to be at that moment that, losing the guarantee with which a man stands on two feet,

he ventured into the painful acrobatics of awkward flight. With his mouth wide open, he looked around because certain gestures become terrifying in solitude, with a final value in and of themselves. When a man collapses by himself in a field he doesn't know to whom to give his fall.

For the first time since he'd started walking, he stopped. He no longer even knew what he'd stretched out his arms to. In his heart he was feeling the misery that exists in suffering a fall.

He then started walking again. Limping was lending a dignity to his suffering.

But with the interruption he'd lost an essential speed for which he tried to compensate by substituting a kind of intimate violence. And since he needed to look forward to something awaiting him—once again the sea broke in fury against a cliff.

Reaching the sea someday was, however, something of which he only now was using the dream part. He didn't think for so much as a moment about acting in such a way that the happy vision would become a reality. Not even if he knew which steps would bring him to the sea, would he take them now—so much had he been slowly with instinctive wisdom shrugging off everything that could keep him fettered to a future, since future is a double-edged sword, and future molds the present. With the passing of the days other ideas too had gradually been left behind as if, the longer that time by not defining the danger was making it all the greater, the man was shaking off everything that weighed him down. And especially everything that could keep him stuck to the previous world.

Until now—without any desire, lighter and lighter, as if hunger and thirst were likewise a voluntary detachment in which he was slowly starting to take pride—until now he was moving ahead enormously in the countryside, looking around with an independence that went to his head with an uncouth pleasure,

and started to make him dizzy with happiness. "It must be Sunday"—he even came to think with a certain glory, and Sunday would be the great crowning of his impartiality. It must be Sunday! he thought with sudden haughtiness as if his honor had been offended.

This was his first clear thought since leaving the hotel. In truth, ever since he'd fled, this was the first thought that didn't have the mere usefulness of defense. At first, moreover, Martim didn't even know what to do with it. He simply stirred at the novelty, and scratched himself voraciously without ceasing to walk. Then, approving of himself with ferocity and following the thought with a hoarse encouragement, he repeated: it must be Sunday.

Apparently it must have been more of an indirect acknowledgment of himself than of the day of the week, since, without halting his stride for a second, he completed the radiant and dry gaze that he'd just called "Sunday" with an awkward tap of his pockets. For no reason, except that of fatigue itself, he was walking faster and faster. In fact he could now hardly keep up with himself. And agitated in this competition with his own steps—he looked around with innocent bedazzlement, his head boiling with sun.

Without counting the days that had passed there was no reason to think it might be Sunday. Martim then stopped, a bit disconcerted by the need to be understood, of which he had not yet freed himself.

But the truth is that the countryside had a clean and foreign existence. Each thing was in its place. Like a man who closes the door and goes out, and it's Sunday. Besides, Sunday was a man's first day. Not even woman had yet been created. Sunday was a man's countryside. And thirst, freeing him, was giving him a power of choice that inebriated him: today is Sunday! he determined categorically.

Then he sat upon a stone and quite stiff looked out. His gaze

met no obstacles and wandered in an intense and tranquil noon. Nothing was keeping him from transforming his escape into a great journey, and he was ready to enjoy it. He was looking.

But there is something in a stretch of countryside that makes a lone man feel alone. Seated on a stone, the final and irreducible fact—is that he was there. Then, with sudden tenderness, he lovingly tapped the dust from his jacket. In an obscure and perfect way he himself was the first thing set down on the Sunday. Which was making him as precious as a seed, he plucked a piece of lint from his jacket. On the ground his black and defined shadow was outlining without room for error the place he was. He himself was his first frame.

Although, besides trying to clean himself up as a simple matter of decency, the man didn't seem to have the slightest intention of doing anything with the fact of existing. What he was doing was sitting on the stone. Neither did he plan to have the slightest thought about the sun.

This then was where freedom ended up. His body squealed with pleasure, the woolen suit was making him itch in the heat. The limitless freedom had left him empty, every one of his gestures would echo back like handclaps in the distance: when he scratched himself, this gesture rolled directly toward God. The most dispassionately individual thing would happen when a person had freedom. At first you're a stupid man having as an advantage the greatest solitude. Then, a man who got whacked in the face and nevertheless smiles blessedly because at the same time the whack gave him as a gift a face he never suspected. Then, bit by bit, you start, slyly, to pull yourself together and to take the first immodest intimacies with freedom: the only reason you're not flying is because you don't want to, and when you sit on a stone that's because instead of flying you sat down. And then?

Then, like now, what seated Martim was experiencing was a

mute orgy in which was the virginal desire to degrade everything that was degradable; and everything was degradable, and that degradation would be a way of loving. Being content was a way of loving; seated, Martim was very content.

And then? Well, really only whatever would happen then is what he'd say would happen then. For the time being the fugitive man remained seated on the stone because if he wanted to he could not sit on the stone. Which was giving him the eternity of a perched bird.

After which, Martim got up. And without questioning what he was doing, he knelt before a dry tree in order to examine its trunk: he no longer seemed to need to reason in order to make up his mind, he'd disburdened himself of that too. So he tore off a half-loose piece of bark, crumbled it between his fingers with a slightly affected attention, behaving as if he were in front of an audience. And this having been his study of the peculiar way in which whatever is unknown organizes itself, Martim stood as if in response to an order and continued his march.

It was further on that he halted in front of the first little bird.

Picked out in the great light was a little bird. Since Martim was free, that was the question: in the light the little bird. With the careful zeal to which he was growing accustomed, he set to work straightaway greedily with this fact.

The little black bird was perched on a low branch, at the level of his eyes. And prevented from flying by the man's rude gaze, it was moving more and more uncomfortably, trying not to face whatever was about to happen to it, shifting nervously the weight of its body from one foot to the other. That's how the two remained facing off. Until with a heavy and powerful hand the man picked it up without hurting it, with the physical goodness that a heavy hand has.

The bird was trembling all over inside the hand without dar-

ing to peep. The man looked with a harsh and indiscreet curiosity at the thing in his hand as if he had imprisoned a fistful of living feathers. Slowly the small dominated body stopped trembling and its tiny eyes closed with a female sweetness. Now, against the man's extremely auditive fingers, only the minute and quick beating of the heart indicated that the bird hadn't died and that comfort had resigned it to rest at last.

Startled by the automatic perfection of what was happening to him, the man snarled looking at the little animal—satisfaction made him laugh out loud, with his head tossed back, which made his face confront the great sun. Then he stopped laughing as if that had been a heresy. And absorbed by its task, the half-closed hand letting only the bird's hard and sharp head peek out, the man started walking again with lots of strength bearing his companion in mind. The only thing in him that was thinking was the sound of his own shoes echoing in the head that the sun was now tranquilly igniting.

And soon, with the sequence of his steps, once again the physical taste for walking began to overtake him, and also a barely discerned pleasure as if he had ingested an aphrodisiac drug that made him want not a woman, but to respond to the tremor of the sun. He'd never been so close to the sun, and he was walking faster and faster clasping before him the bird as if he had to bring it before the post office closed. The vague mission was inebriating him. The lightness that came from thirst suddenly overtook him in ecstasy:

—Yes, indeed! he said loud and meaningless, and he was looking more and more glorious as if about to drop dead.

He looked around at the perfect circle that, in a stunned horizon, the sky of lights was making as it joined an ever softer earth, ever softer, ever softer ... The softness bothered the man with the pleasure of an itch, "yes, indeed!", and he free, freed by his own

hands—for suddenly it seemed to him that had been what happened to him two weeks before.

Then he repeated with unexpected certainty: “yes, indeed!” Each time he’d say these words he was convinced that he was alluding to some thing. He even made a gesture of generosity of largesse with the hand that was holding the little bird, and thought magnanimously: “they don’t know what I’m referring to.”

Afterward—as if thinking had reduced itself to seeing, and the confusion of light had trembled inside him as inside water—it occurred to him in a confused refraction that he himself had forgotten whatever he was alluding to. But he was so stubbornly convinced that it was something of the greatest importance, though so vast that it was no longer discernible to him, who respected with haughtiness his own ignorance and allowed himself ferociously: “yes, indeed.”

—You no longer know how to talk?!

The man halted with a wide-open mouth. As if he’d been thrown forward, he saw again the impatient face of a woman who had once cut him off only because he hadn’t answered her. The first time the sentence had sounded like just another sentence—while trams were dragging themselves along and the unremitting radio was playing and the woman ceaselessly listening to the radio with a lack of ennui and hope, and he one day had broken the radio while the trams were dragging themselves along, and yet the radio and the woman had nothing to do with the meticulous rage of a man who probably already had inside himself the fact that one day he’d have to begin from the exact beginning, he who was now starting from Sunday.

But this time the simple irritated phrase, resounding in the red silence of the countryside, made him grind to a halt with such perplexity that the little bird awoke moving afflicted wings inside his hand. Stunned, Martim looked at it, astonished to have a bird in

his hand. The drunkenness of the sun had been suddenly cut off.

Sober, he looked with modesty at the thing in his hand. Then he looked at the Sunday countryside with its silent stones. He'd been sleeping deeply while he'd walked and for the first time was waking up. And as if a new wave of sea were breaking against the rocks, the brightness settled in.

The man looked with docility at the little bird. Without a mind of their own, his now innocent and curious fingers let themselves obey the extremely living movements of the bird, and opened inert: the bird flew in a bolt of gold as if the man had launched it. And it perched worriedly on the highest stone. From there it was looking at the man, chirping without relent.

Paralyzed for a moment, Martim looked at it and looked at his own hands that, empty, were looking at him astonished. Pulling himself together, however, he ran furiously over to the little bird, and in that way chased it for a short while, his heart beating in rage, his impatient shoes stumbling over the pebbles, his hand getting scraped in a fall that made a little rock roll in several dry leaps until going mute ...

The stillness that followed was so hollow that the man tried to hear one last thud of the stone in order to calculate the depth of the silence into which he had tossed it.

Until a wave of great light undid the tension of waiting, and Martim could look at his hand. It was burning, and thin blood was seeping out. Forgetting his chase, very interested now, his dry lips sucked at the scrape with a keenness of a caress like a person who is alone. At the same time that it awakened his thirst, the blood in his mouth gave him a warrior attitude that immediately passed.

When the man finally raised his eyes, the disturbed little bird was waiting for him as if it had only struggled because it planned to surrender. Martim held out his wounded hand and grabbed it with a firmness without effort. This time the bird flapped less

and, recognizing its former shelter, made itself comfortable in order to sleep. With the light weight to carry, the man continued his march amidst stones.

—I no longer know how to speak, he then said to the little bird, avoiding looking at it out of a certain tactful modesty.

Only later did he seem to understand what he'd said, and then he looked straight at the sun. "I lost the language of others," he then repeated nice and slow as if the words were more obscure than they were, and somehow quite flattering. He was serenely proud, with bright and satisfied eyes.

Then the man sat on a rock, erect, solemn, empty, officially grasping the bird in his hand. Because some thing was happening to him. And it was some thing with a meaning.

Though there was no synonym for that thing that was happening.

A man was seated. And there was no synonym for any thing, and so the man was seated. That's how it was. The nice thing was that it was indisputable. And irreversible.

It's true that that thing that was happening to him had a weight that needed to be borne—he was well aware of the familiar weight. It was like the weight of himself. Though it was some matchless thing: that man looked as if he no longer had anything equivalent to put in the other pan of the scale. He was vaguely aware of that. In his former apartment sometimes he'd had this discomfort mixed with pleasure and awareness—which had always resulted in some decision that had nothing to do with the disconcerted feeling. He'd never felt it, it's true, with that final neatness of the desert. In which he was helped by his own shadow that was marking him off unmistakably on the ground.

That thing that he was feeling must be, in the final analysis, just he himself. Which had the taste that the tongue has in the mouth. And that lacked a name the same way that the taste the

tongue has in the mouth lacks a name. It wasn't, then, anything more than that.

But, in the face of that thing, a person would grow a bit attentive; and growing attentive to that, was being. Thus, then, on his first Sunday, he was.

Which, however, started to get a bit intense. The man then moved uncomfortably on the rock, responding physically to the immateriality of his own tension, like a person who's disturbed. And if that's what he did that was because, though he didn't know himself, he was familiar enough to himself to know how to reply. That though wasn't enough. He then looked around, like someone seeking the counterpoint of a woman. But there wasn't so much as a synonym for a man seated with a bird in his hand.

So, patient and dignified, he waited for the thing to pass without so much as touching it.

Because that man had always had a tendency to fall into profundity, which one day could lead him to an abyss: that's why wisely he took the precaution of refraining. His restraint, on the easily breakable scab of profundity, gave him the pleasure of refraining. It had always been a difficult balance, that balance of his, not to fall into the voracity with which waves and waves were awaiting him. A whole past was just a step from the extreme caution with which that man was seeking to keep himself merely alive, and nothing more—the way an animal sparkles in its eyes alone, keeping behind it the vast untouched soul of an animal. Then, without touching it, he prepared to wait stolidly for the thing to pass.

Before it passed, he involuntarily recognized it. That—that was a man thinking ... Then with infinite distaste, physically clumsy, he recalled in his body what a thinking man is like. A thinking man was one that, when he saw something yellow, would say with a dazzled effort: this thing that is not blue. Not that Martim had quite reached the point of thinking—but he'd

recognized it in the way you recognize in the shape of the legs the possible movement. And more than that he recognized: that thing in fact had been with him during his entire escape. It was only out of carelessness that he'd now almost let it spread.

Then, startled, as if in alarm he'd recognized the insidious return of an addiction, he was so repulsed by the fact of almost having thought that he pressed his teeth in a painful grimace of hunger and helplessness—he turned worriedly in every direction of the desert seeking amongst the stones a way of recovering his powerful previous stupidity that for him had become a source of pride and dominion.

But the man was disturbed: so a person couldn't take two free steps without falling into the same fatal error? since the old system of uselessly thinking, and of even savoring thinking, had tried to return: sitting on the rock with the little bird in his hand, out of negligence he'd even felt pleasure. And, if he neglected himself another minute, he'd recover in a single gush his previous existence: when thinking had been the useless action and pleasure simply shameful. Helpless, he moved on the hot rock: he seemed to be seeking an argument to protect him. He was needing to defend something that, with enormous courage, he'd conquered two weeks ago. With enormous courage, that man had finally stopped being intelligent.

Or had he ever really been intelligent? the happy doubt made him blink his eyes with great vivacity—since if he managed to prove to himself that he'd never been intelligent, then he would reveal as well that his own past had been something else, and would reveal that some thing in the depth of himself had always been whole and solid.

"The truth is," he then thought trying out with care this defensive stratagem, "the truth is I just imitated intelligence the way I could swim like a fish without being one!" The man stirred con-

tented: imitated? but yes! Because, by imitating whatever it would mean to come in first in the statistics exam, he'd come in first in the statistics exam! The truth is, he then concluded very interested, he'd just imitated intelligence, with that essential lack of respect that makes a person imitate. And along with him, millions of men who were copying with great effort the idea that they had of a man, alongside the thousands of women who were copying attentively the idea they had of a woman and thousands of people of goodwill were copying with superhuman effort their own faces and the idea of existing; not to mention the anguished concentration with which they were imitating acts of good or evil—with a daily care not to slide into some act that was true, and yet incomparable, and yet inimitable, and yet disconcerting. And meanwhile, there was some old and poor thing in some unidentifiable place in the house, and people sleep worriedly, discomfort is the only warning that we're copying, and we listen to ourselves attentively beneath the sheets. But we are so distanced by imitation that whatever we hear comes to us so without sound as if it were a vision that were so invisible as if it were in the darkness that was so compact that hands are no use. Because even comprehension, the person was imitating. The comprehension that had never been made of anything but someone else's language and of words.

But there was still disobedience.

Then—through the great leap of a crime—two weeks ago he had risked not having any guarantee, and had started to not understand.

And beneath the yellow sun, sitting on a rock, without the slightest guarantee—the man was now rejoicing as if not understanding were a creation. That caution that a person has in transforming the thing into something comparable and thus approachable, and, only starting from this moment of security, looks and allows himself to see because luckily it will always be too late

to not understand—that precaution Martim had lost. And not understanding was suddenly giving him the entire world.

Which was entirely empty, to tell you the truth. That man had rejected the language of others and didn't even have the beginning of a language of his own. And yet, hollow, mute, he was rejoicing. The thing was excellent.

Then, to kick off the conversation, the person was sitting on the Sunday rock.

And the man, with perverse enjoyment, was feeling so far from the language of others that, from a daring that came to him from security, he tried to use it again. And he found it odd, the way a man who soberly brushing his teeth doesn't recognize the drunk from the night before. In that way, as he fumbled around now with still cautious fascination in the dead language, he tried out of pure experience to give the formerly so familiar title of "crime" to that thing without a name that had happened to him.

But "crime"? The word echoed emptily through the desert, and the voice of the word wasn't his either. Then, finally convinced that he wouldn't be captured by the former language, he tried to go a bit further: had he by chance felt horror after his crime? The man felt around carefully in his memory. Horror? and yet that is what language would expect of him.

But horror too had become a word from before the great blind leap that he'd taken with his crime. The leap had been taken. And the jump had been so great that it had ended up transforming itself into the only event he could and wanted to deal with. And even the motives for his crime had lost their importance.

The truth is that the man with wisdom had abolished motives. And had abolished the crime itself. Having a certain experience with guilt, he knew how to live with it without being bothered. He'd already previously committed the crimes not proscribed by law, so that he probably considered it just bad luck having carried

out two weeks ago exactly one that had been proscribed. A good civic education and long training in life had made him good at being guilty without giving himself away, it wouldn't be just any torture that would make his soul confess itself guilty, and much would be necessary in order to make a hero finally cry. And when this happens it's a depressing and repugnant spectacle that we can't stand without feeling betrayed and offended; someone who represents the rest of us is unpardonable. It just so happens that, for special circumstances, in two weeks that man had become a tough hero; he was representing himself. Guilt could no longer reach him.

"Crime"? No. "The great leap"—those really did seem like his own words, dark like the knot of a dream. His crime had been an involuntary vital movement like the reflex of knee to a tap: the whole organism had gathered so that the leg, suddenly incoercible, could give the kick. And he hadn't felt horror after the crime. So what had he felt? The astonished victory.

That's what it had been: he'd felt victory. With bedazzlement, he'd seen that the thing unexpectedly was working; that an act still had the value of an act. And even more: with a single act he had made the enemies he'd always wanted to have—other people. And still more: that he himself had finally become incapacitated to be the former man since, if he went back to being that, he'd have to become his own enemy—since in the language from which up till then he had lived he simply couldn't be the friend of a criminal. So, with a single gesture, he was no longer a collaborator of other people, and with a single gesture had ceased to collaborate with himself. For the first time Martim found himself unable to imitate.

Yes. In that instant of astonished victory the man had suddenly discovered the power of a gesture. The goodness of an act is that it goes beyond us. In a minute Martim had been transfigured by his own act. Because after two weeks of silence, now he'd very naturally started calling his crime an "act."

The truth is that the feeling of victory had only lasted for a fraction of a second. Immediately thereafter he hadn't had any more time: in an extraordinarily perfect and lubricated rhythm, the deep numbness he'd needed in order for this current intelligence of his to be born had followed. Which was as rude and sneaky as a rat. Nothing more than that. But for the first time as a tool. For the first time his intelligence had immediate consequences. And it had become such a complete possession of his that he could skillfully specialize it into securing him, and securing his life. So much that he had instantly started to learn how to escape as if everything he'd done up till now in his daily life had been nothing more than a vague rehearsal for the action. And then that man had become finally real, a true rat, and any thought inside that new intelligence was an act, though hoarse as a still-unused voice. What he was now wasn't much: a rat. But as a rat, nothing in him was useless. The thing was excellent and deep. Inside the dimension of a rat, that man was fitting entirely.

Yes; all this had followed the crime to such a perfect extent that Martim hadn't even had time to think about what he'd done. But before—during a fraction of a second—before the victory. Because a man one day had to have the great rage.

He'd had it. And for the first time, with candor, he'd admired himself like a boy who discovers himself naked in a mirror. Apparently, with the accumulation of thoughts of goodness without the action of goodness, with the thought of love without the act of love, with heroism without heroism, not to mention a certain growing imprecision in existing that had ended up becoming the impossible dream of existing—apparently that man had ended up forgetting up that a person can act. And having discovered that in truth he'd already involuntarily acted, had suddenly given him a world so free that he'd grown dizzy in victory.

That man hadn't even wondered if there was anyone who could act except through the intermediary of a crime. What he