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11/22/00 Wednesday's Rock, Grace Maryanka

Today the Assistant Director, Rakmanov, appeared and announced that he had been asked by the Director to take his place for a class in drill.

“Collect all of your attention,” he announced in a crisp, confident tone. “Your exercise will be as follows. I shall select an object for each of you to look at. You will notice its form, lines, colours, detail, characteristics. All this must be done while I count thirty. Then the lights will go out, so that you cannot see the object, and I shall call upon you to describe it. In the dark you will tell me everything that your visual memory has retained. I shall check up with the lights on, and compare what you have told me with the actual object. Listen closely. I am beginning. Maria — the mirror.”

“O good gracious! Is this the one?”

“No unnecessary questions. There is one mirror in the room, and only one. An actor should be a good guesser.

Constantin Stanislavski
An Actor Prepares

Was it the sun or the sea? Whenever Grace was overtired now, and dared to close her eyes, this enormity would besiege her, so that she did not know whether to cry for joy or to weep, so great and so ambiguous was its presence. She was prostrate, convalescing in her suite at the Ritz, relieved to be at last alone, having turned the usual nest of flattering well-wishers away and ordered the fretful Françoise to bed. *Mon Dieu*, to be somewhere else, anywhere. Perhaps a Greek island, washed by the azures of Mediterranean light, and far from any gazer's feasting eyes. The crystal facets of the chandeliers launched schools of lampfish flickering through the room. She watched them undulate across the elegant surfaces. The Persian rug, the vases filled with roses from Lamaître's and Charton's, the silk upholstery, the velvet wallpapers, the red-veined Sarancolin marble of the carved mantel, were all transforming themselves. The suite became the set, Bakst's intricate and polychrome décor. This was a scene that lived for a moment only, like money spent and gone, like words spoken to no one and forgotten, like music silenced by the thin baton. The room had become the sheerest ephemera, an instance, like all others, of pure theater.

She was spent, but also exhilarated, as she so often was following a performance or a rehearsal. But tonight, something was different. She knew that it was coming, that some of the applause was for her reputation, and that, if her grace was still evolving, her animal strength was waning. Like tonight, the slight weakness in the fish slide of the *pas de*

deux. Vaslav detected it, and compensated. Oh, for the days of *la décadance*, when men were banished or kept in supporting roles! Now she would have to bear the insupportable insolence of this upstart, assuming airs of condescending concern, asking in that “tone” about her ankles. She felt a suffocating rush of horror, and slumped down on the bed to catch her breath. Perhaps she should call Françoise to administer the fumigations.

No one understood her, except the genius invalid, whom she alone recognized and honored. The audiences, of course, still applauded madly and threw roses, but they were cows — rich, important, even titled cows, but cows nonetheless. For a moment she had a shuddering vision of humans and cows together, consumed in the most frightful slaughter. For a moment, she, Grace Maryanka, *prima ballerina assoluta*, felt a pity that rumbled deep in her bowels. She shook it off. Oh, she knew that Alexandre would rave as he always did. But Alexandre was a supercilious sycophant. She knew the truth. She who had attained the apotheosis of artistic expression knew that even the slightest diminution of that greatness was a calamity. All the lauding philistines on five continents could not alter nor diminish in scope the colossal pit of this catastrophe. She trembled under the cerise brocade of the bed’s canopy, and looked into the mirror over the mantel. The carved cherubim smiled. She felt again like a child in Mother Russia, before she entered this harsh discipline. Why did she think now of that ridiculous English doctor and his *enfant sauvage*?

The patterns and the colors in the Persian began undulating like a sea, wild with innumerable reflections — jittery, liquefied mirrors, or melting honey, colors that could be tasted, smelled, felt. The threads of cinnabar, indigo, azure, chamois, pewter brown, teal, deep raspberry, willow, peacock blue — every hue and more of Bakst’s wildest sets, all arabesqueing now, like exotic, alluring serpents, not only through the carpet, and through the room, but through her body also, her skin, muscles, sinews taking on the characteristics of watery light, in colors, not solely of the earth, but like those of the Redon screen, seeming to her like fluidic gems in dreams. To escape from the hallucinating beauty of these hypnotic images, she directed her eyes from the floor, and to the glass hung above the mantel. The speculum reflected a strange view of gilt cornices and wainscoting, which seemed to cut odd angles through the darkness. She was growing smaller as her fame grew larger, and the room was accounting for this phenomenon in the mirror, where all the finite objects, however lush, however bright, were draining into a cold, dark hole. She heard a creaking sound, almost as regular as a heartbeat, which she thought were steps approaching from the corridor. But then she realized that it was her eyelids, dry, and mechanically — obstinately — blinking. She reached for the sleep mask resting on the nightstand, but before she put it on, she gazed in the mirror. There, from the jumbled angles and writhing serpents, he appeared. The cherubs smiled — He had come again! — the visitation of the ruggéd one, huge in his shaggy cloak and feral hair and beard. He seemed a thing inhuman, more than human. A being battered by the elements, guiding his coracle over tumultuous seas. His face bore two-deep sockets, one dark, one gleaming with a shard of amber. In those eyes, she glimpsed the darkness of her future: a scarred rock rounded by the weathering of time. At first she fought the apparition, but then she surrendered, entered it, entered *him*. Then peering out of those two foreign eyes, she scanned the sumptuous havoc of her room with

its lone figure on the bed, serene, but broken. She put the sleep mask on and swallowed her troubled breath. Then, as she slipped beneath the icy waves, she heard the whistles, the moans, the creaks, the clicks — and here, in the trench — before sleep's blackening rush — there swished the eerie echolocation calls of whales.

1/24/01 Wednesday's Rock, Grace Maryanka
Closing time: 11:26 p.m., C.S.T.

Sometimes when I feel a nocturnal need I venture forth into the city . . . and hustle headlong along the pavements . . . The screams of clouds echo around me, burning bushes, a distant beating of wings, and people shadowing and spitting. The moon burns against my hot temples . . . The city nears. My body crackles. The giggles of the city ignite against my skin. I hear eruptions at the base of my skull. The houses crowd near. Their catastrophes explode from their windows, stairways silently collapse. People laugh beneath the ruins.

Ludwig Meidner
Letter written on the eve of the Great
War

A great destruction is also a song of praise, complete and separate in its sound, just like a hymn to a new creation, which follows the destruction.

Vasily Kandinsky

Following her apotheosis in Trouville, Grace Maryanka entered a new phase of her life, one characterized by anonymity and annihilation. She returned to Paris, and after a few more conflicted days with the *Ballets Russes*, she informed Serge and Fokine of her retirement. They were relieved, and the public, which had idolized her for so many years, quickly succumbed to their new preoccupation: bombastic politics, and after August 1914, the actual bombs of war.

At this point, the general passions of the times eluded Grace. But she too was preoccupied. She now entered the second phase of her life's discipline. The first being the rigor of her training as a dancer, and the second, more rigorous yet, being a metaphysical reversal of those initial bodily exercises. The first stage of training she now saw as an aesthetic requiring an audience, but in this second one, there was only an emptiness requiring solitude. She flipped like a mirror, reflecting the world on one side, and blackness on the other, turning from adulation to isolation. And she noted that this was only a small personal irony embedded in the larger storm of ironies engulfing the whole of European civilization. The situation reminded her of the public's reception of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. "Arhythmic dissonance!" "Filth!" "Merde Musicale!" the critics screamed. How they derided "this expectoration of eroticism," and how they slandered Nijinsky's choreography as "angular, brutish foot-stomping." The prissy, decadent patrons of the Theatre des Champs Elysees were characteristically boorish and puerilely titillated. They all pretended to be scandalized by the rape and

ritual immolation. They howled in protest. They insulted one another in the press. They fought duels carefully designed to uphold their manhood while eschewing any possibility of bodily injury. Occasionally, they even punched each others' blue noses red. But all the while they lusted for real violence. These men stamping their expensively shod feet in protest at Stravinsky's barbarism, would in two years time be living in their own feces in trenches decorated with the torn limbs and corpses of their comrades. Grace had seen the devil, that was certain, millions of them in fact, all wearing metal hats.

As the weeks wore on, and the totality of this new war's carnage started to become apparent, Grace slid into a funk of emotional abhorrence. In the first place, the setting was crap. Instead of the refinement and organized chaos of the real theater, where responses were cunningly calculated to appease even the crudest instincts, and yet somehow to evolve them, in these amateur theatrics of the war, passion had devolved into a sick haphazard minimalism of mud, trenches, stench, splintered trees and shattered stones. True, the sheer immensity of scale marked this unimaginative design with a kind of crude grandeur. But the effects were perverse. Instead of refining them, they bludgeoned and dulled the perceptions. In her internal discipline, Grace discovered, through the instructions of the Alma, the existence of a third theater, an extravaganza completely hidden from the habitués of the other two. This third theater, subjective, yet teeming with beings whose impact on people's lives and history had enormous, although entirely clandestine, consequences, was what the Alma called the vesicles of the psychode, a buzzing realm just under the surface of mundane reality, through which Grace learned to fly, projecting her sensory perceptions to places far beyond her bodily locale. From these new vantage points, she viewed the war from every angle, and entered simultaneously into both the moronic plans of the generals and the unspeakable agonies of the soldiers. Here was a theater of theaters, one that bled with colors and music beyond even the most lurid imaginings of Bakst or of Stravinsky.

The Alma insisted that she "begin at the bottom," declaring, "that which you hate, you must love, that which you love, you must hate. That is the Maladhara's manner." And there was so much hate in this war, so much pure venom, that in a sense, the meditations were frightfully easy. Wholesale murder admits to no possible distractions. Her focus was extreme. "This," said the Alma, "will save you many painful incarnations." She traveled through the psychode.

Pushing myself along the ground with my arms and my right foot, I crawled on my belly. I drank greedily and wanted to finish the whole bottle. I crawled further, making my way slowly over limbs writhing in the death agony and flaming fever, beyond large heaps of charred coal in the form of human beings, gazed into eyes torn wide open as through they could not realize that they were already dead, fell over wounded men who were groaning loudly as through they were lying with a woman in passion. Soon both of my canteens were empty. I saw the corporal again. With amazing precision, his generative organs had been shot from his body. "Herr Lieutenant, and I have never yet had a girl." He gladly accepted the cigarette I gave him and I softly stroked his hair and forehead. Finally I slipped my hand over his eyes and, as a little smile of pleasure curled

over his mouth, I pushed my mercifully brutal sword into his side. There passed over him a moment as through he wanted to sneeze, and that was all. He was saved.

When Grace returned from such journeys, she trembled before the Alma, unwilling to continue. She remembered the early days of her dance training as a child — sore, humiliated, ungraceful and mercilessly harangued by the dance master. All this in the name of beauty. The Alma never harangued, made no reference to the goals of her training, nor ever acknowledged her terror or disgust. He simply continued. Once, when she asked him about this, he only said: “When you get to the end, you simply find the adepts of all eras with their mouths hanging on the wall. Still, one mouth is laughing: HA! HA! If you know this one, you pass the second ring.”

These kinds of statements appalled her. They were worse than physical punishments. But they gave her the strength to continue.

The whole mechanism of drill and the whole activity of the militarist hierarchy is intended to inculcate in the soldier a feeling of inferiority, and to constantly nourish his feeling by suggestion. This feeling of inferiority explains a great portion of the psychological and erotic aberrations among soldiers. The latter, who was trampled by those above him, compensated for this by oppressing those under him; his drive for personal achievement and honor, negated by his superiors, had to seek fulfillment in those beneath him.

The important thing was to make the recruit learn to recreate in the stench of his own shit. He was forced to jump up, fall down, shine shoes while vomiting on them from fatigue, strip naked, have his genitals and anus examined on the sadistic whim of this superior. He lived in a catastrophic world of spoiled food, sickening body fluids, cigarette smoke, mud, lice, fleas and blood. And this was only training. We knew we were getting close to molding a soldier when he could take a crap in the company of fifty strangers and laugh, or masturbate and eat cabbage gruel at the same time. The goal was simple, reduce a man's sensibilities by the foulest crudity and get him to feel that the whole thing was a spiritual calling to honor and glory, that the stinking demon he had become was redeemable as long as he unquestioningly obeyed.

Grace saw the bodies of horses rotting in blasted trees. She vomited and lost control of her bowels — she — Grace Maryanka — the *prima ballerina assoluta* — the toast of five continents and all the glittering capitols of Europe — abjectly reduced to this! The Alma simply continued, without cruelty, without kindness, he continued. One day, after a particularly virulent sojourn through the psychode, she asked him the purpose of all this suffering. The Alma said:

Stars fall, thunder rolls,
The mirror faces forms without subjectivity;
The pearl in a bowl rolls of itself.

Don't you see, before the hammer, gold refined a hundred times,
Under the scissors, silk from one loom?

But she did not see. She did not understand. Yet a compulsion drove her, and she continued.

Numbed and dazed, without saying a word, with our hearts pounding, we await the shell that will destroy us. The wounded are increasing in numbers around us. These poor devils not knowing where to go come to us, believing that they will be helped. What can we do? There are clouds of smoke, the air is unbreathable. There's death everywhere. At our feet, the wounded groan in a pool of blood; two of them, more seriously hit, are breathing their last. One, a machine gunner, has been blinded, with one eye hanging out of its socket and the other torn out: in addition he has lost a leg. The second has no face, an arm blown off, and a horrible wound in the stomach. Moaning and suffering atrociously one begs me, "Lieutenant, don't let me die, Lieutenant, I'm suffering, help me." The other, perhaps more gravely wounded and nearer to death, implores me to kill him with these words, "Lieutenant, if you don't want to, give me your revolver!" Frightful, terrible moments, while the cannons harry us and we are splattered with mud and earth by the shells. For hours these groans and supplications continue until, at 6 p.m., they die before our eyes without anyone being able to help them.

M' dear old parents,

Here we have war, war in its most appalling form, and in our distress we realize the nearness of God. Things are becoming serious, but I am inwardly unalarmed and happy . . .

She knew now where the mouths came from, the ones on the wall.

After a time, the internal and external wars, rolled in as the breath rolled in, and then rolled out again. Terrible changes took place within her body. But to her it was only breathing.

I saw two rings of gold upon the black ground. One ring was smaller and was encircled by a larger ring. Within the small ring lay a male child as though in a womb. It was surrounded by amniotic fluid. I wanted to get the child, which held out its arms to me, but I could not seem to step over the outer rim.

The Alma encouraged Grace to stabilize her breathe to an ideal ratio, and synchronize her heartbeat to that pattern, a laborious exercise that he repeatedly exhorted her to accomplish by counting, counting, counting. She learned that a human body on average breathes 18 times per minute, 25,920 times per day. She learned that there are 25,920 years in the sun's zodiacal circuit. She learned that the heart beats ideally 72 times per minute, in a 4:1 ratio with the body's breath. She learned that in one year we drink 9,460,800 inhalations and pour out the same number of exhalations. She tried to

concentrate on the numbers, but the Alma upbraided her for being too mechanical. He said: "The scents of roses and rain, sunlight and the sea intoxicate these aerial excursions. Trees imbibe our effluent as perfume." She tried to think of the forests she was feeding, while counting counting, counting. She learned that the heart beats 103,680 times per day. "A number," the Alma reminded her, "not to be found in the accounting ledgers for military expenditures." She wanted to feel for her pulse in her wrist, but the Alma demanded that she feel it in her chest. "Sometimes," he said, "the muscle contracts in fear, sometimes in joy. In a year, it thumps its drum of life 37,843,200 times. And all of this music inside of us strives for love." She strived to listen, and he admonished her for striving. She repeatedly failed, but she continued.

As the months passed, the fighting continued, and she felt in her breath, in her heart, amazing and violent cessations.

The numbers were appalling. In five months the war's cruel tally rung up a million Frenchmen and hundreds of thousands of English, Germans, Russians, Austrians, Turks, et al. Along the banks of the Marne, on the banks of the Somme, along the mellifluent Meuse, and beside the gentle Aisne, the waters gathered the hair and skin of the dead. So many breaths, so many heartbeats stilled! But the Alma, unmoved, continued. And Grace learned another, more agonized kind of counting. It was excruciating, the only thing she wanted now was out, but when she asked to pass to the second ring, the red-haired barbarian only brightly laughed, exuding a sound as profound as the rolling sea's.

What is the Matter?

We always had our suspicions that there
Was something in her ceaseless tidal shiftings,
Her rolling foams, her moods beneath the moon,
Something more focused than her broken mirrors,
Igniting the clouds and coloring the skies,
Something that seemed *connected, thoughtful, wise.*

We stand on the shore and listen to this wisdom,
Absorbing purpose through our ears and eyes,
As if her rantings boomed articulation,
As if her restless movements were a dance.

Mother, in this great war, this land-locked striving,
What are you trying to teach us from these depths?
Whose voice is speaking from our harried flesh?
What message stirs inside your seething cries?

1/31/01 Wednesday's Rock, Grace Maryanka

Closing time: 8:58 p.m., C.S.T.

In an amusing way he foreshadows the criticism of writers that is still made about the author of *Le Cote de Guermantes*: ‘These gentleman may have a great deal of wit and imagination, but they talk about matters of which they know nothing. Just such a fellow has the nerve to introduce us into the home of a duchess, when he has never been there himself.’ . . . The case is a curious one and it provides a clue to a kind of law of biography: someone who plays a walk-on part in real life may become an important character in a book, because an image, which coincides with one’s secret expectations, may resound in the imagination for a long time; in contrast, old friends, brothers, even lovers, may disappear without trace; whatever leaves an imprint on a work is a matter for literary biography; the rest, everything else being equal, only demonstrates the negative work of the imagination.

Jean-Yves Tadie
Marcel Proust: A Life

Every day, *après le petit déjeuner*, Grace would send the obedient, but ever present and ever fretful Françoise on pointless and extensive errands. In her servant’s absence, she would receive the visitations of the Sea-Alma. These visitations, these trainings, were exhausting, but also exhilarating, just as her performances and training as a dancer had once been. She always approached them with an unsettling admixture of gleeful anticipation and dread. Although her retirement had taken place only a few months before, that life was not only sinking into the past, but had actually been displaced, or rather, its raw material had been reconfigured into other times, other embodied awarenesses. Now, following a session with the Alma, or upon awakening in the morning, it seemed rather arbitrary that in any given moment her consciousness would find itself lodging in *la maison du la Grace*. She should have been disoriented by these continual shiftings from body to body, but in fact, after the first few such experiences, it seemed odd to her now that she had ever been so confined. The memory of her former existence appeared to her like the recollection of a convict who thinks back on his incarceration as a terrible sequence of minutes, hours, days, months, years — the stultifying period of a sentence, which is the stony prison of sequential Time itself. In retrospect, she wondered how she had stood it, that life imprisoned in such a fictive tissue of blood, bones and personal history. Now that she had been severed from identification with the organ sack, and had learned, through the Alma’s specialized discipline, the freedom of mind in the labyrêve of the psychode, the possibilities for a new and especially intoxicating kind of performance revealed themselves. Not even Fokine or Bakst had imagined such a stage.

Still, she was puzzled. What was the purpose of all this rushing about, this wallowing in what the Alma called the “Maladhara’s squalor,” the blood, mud and feces of total war? And then to be freed — at least in certain instances — from the hell of this first circle, to float about in passionless solitude? Françoise exhausted her, her overprotection, her paroxysms of passion and patriotism concerning the war, her incessant anxiety over the possible fate of her fiancé. Fortunately, Grace had long been trained in the artificial production of emotion, otherwise she would have simply appeared as indifferently cruel to her excitable servant. Not that Grace imagined for an instant that Françoise was

insincere, but rather, she understood that Françoise's inner life was merely an imprint made by impersonal forces. Her servant's emotions were endlessly replicable and replicated, and therefore, they seemed to Grace as unreal and as irrelevant as reflections in fun-house mirrors. For Grace, at this juncture, everyone seemed nearly dead, functioning as they were only from the anal sphincter, equally and exclusively in love with appetite and with death. Grace realized that it was from this foundation of bowel-bricks that they had built their façades, be they servants or Tsars, their bodies were crap embedded in cultures of crap. It was all, as the Alma persistently showed her, *merde*. At first, Grace was disgusted by this, but after her vision of the golden ring, it ceased to be noisome to her. For Grace, the whole edifice of the war, and the lives being fed into the Moloch of its yawning maw, were only whisps of dark vapor stealing across darker glass. She was not indifferent, but neither was she engaged. Perhaps it was merely apathy, perhaps, distraction. What was happening to her was experienced as a complete depersonalization. Food tasted like chalk, and she lost all depth perception. Her rooms and the city's streets turned into flat, distorted and vaguely menacing photographs. Grace was simply at sea, and, as such, she felt unformed, unable even to formulate the questions which might free her from her endless dissolution and ennui.

And yet she had an inkling. Call it a vermilion spec in an ocean of colorlessness, and this inkling led her to the invalid. In the middle of the night, while Françoise, drugged by night-cap Cognacs, snored, Grace would slip out quietly — thank God for all those years of walking on her toes — and steal through the darkened streets to the Boulevard Haussmann. She would knock gently, but persistently at number 102, and call, as discreetly as she could and still be heard: “Céleste! Céleste!” And if she were patient, and she was always patient, in time, Madame Albarét, the invalid's servant — keeper really — would appear. With the utmost formality, Céleste would address Grace, as if it were quite proper to receive callers in the small hours of the night, in a Paris blacked out because of the war, and beg to know the nature of her visit. Always it was the same ritual. “Would Monsieur Proust be so kind as to receive Mademoiselle Maryanka, in consideration of her admiration of Monsieur, and not through any merit of her own.” And Céleste would reply with a stiff sang-froid: “I will retire to know if Monsieur is presently at leisure to receive Mademoiselle.” More often than not, Céleste would return and beg her pardon. “Monsieur wishes Mademoiselle to know that Monsieur is quite humbled by Mademoiselle's too-gentle solicitations, but Monsieur regrets that he is unable in this moment to receive the fragrance of Mademoiselle's presence.” Always the words were delivered by Céleste in such a manner that Grace had no doubt that they were a verbatim reply from the sick man above. When Céleste spoke, she adopted the voice and speech patterns of her genius ward to such an extent that it was almost as if the servant were a mere automaton, herself *sans* will, except for this will that the dark sun of her life had breathed into her. “Monsieur begs Mademoiselle to be quite sure that Monsieur is always thinking of Mademoiselle.” These formal interchanges, although they thwarted the purpose of Grace's visit, nevertheless afforded her a sort of pleasure by proxy. It was the pleasure of knowing that one living soul was still awake in all this noxious dark. However, Grace lived for those nights when Céleste would open the door to the inner sanctum, and usher her into the squalid cork-lined room. There was the object of her quest: the invalid lying on his soiled bed, his liquid brown eyes glazed with

golden highlights and swimming from the after-effects of veronal and its antidote — cup after cup of strong, black coffee. The Master's face was like a mask — white, bloodless — with only his sweat-soaked hair seemingly alive, his hair, and the lexical nest of his beautiful mind. The magical, marvelous head glowed in the wavering gaslight, like a luminescent creature floating just an inch or so below the most limpid waters. A gauze-like haze of golden vapors pervaded the atmosphere, so that the head, almost as if it were a parasite on the sickly body, was surrounded by a sulphurous nimbus, which, nevertheless, to Grace exuded the sweetness of violets. The room was spare — a few books, a bamboo table beside the bed — his “long boat” as he called it — and on the table, a little silver tray with a bottle of Evian, a lime tisane, and a short, deformed candle to ignite his medicinal fumigations. The “boat's” main purpose, however, was to hold his writing implements — paper, a bottle of ink, and a crystal tumbler that contained several fountain pens. On the coverlet of the bed, which was often nothing more than an old overcoat (from Binder's perhaps, but the Binder's of the 90's), were scores of bandage-like slips of paper. These desiccated strips of winding sheets were the memorials of mummy-cloth, which he pasted together to create his enormous *Recherché*. Always, as part of the ritual, but an informal part, as soon as Grace saw him, the breath would go out of her body. Here was the master of memory and time.

Over the course of many nights, in which the invalid, politely, apologetically, relentlessly plied Grace for technical knowledge on music “*pour mon livre*,” Grace no less politely, apologetically, relentlessly pursued his thoughts on remembrance. By this means, after many post-midnight exchanges, she patched together a terrible truth: that the body was a storage-house of time. This was not a mere metaphorical assertion — as if, as he said, there could be anything outside of the domain of metaphor — but a physiological fact. For in moments of emotional excitation or through “openings” induced by reverie, the cells of the muscles and organs were susceptible to an exact and nearly indelible imprint. And what is more, the data from that imprint, could, and in fact, must be re-experienced each time the body returned to that posture. She imagined that all of her years as a dancer had taught her something about the body and its possibilities for movement. But here, encoded in every nuance of gesture, was a whole personal and cultural history. And more, here was the whisper of leaves on a summer night, the sunlit warming stones in a neglected garden, the bodies of insects and hidden tiny creatures, the flights of birds and the lights of distant stars — a whole complex array of chronological choreography unfolding in the movement of a finger. These were the overlays of times on times, impingements from other bodies, memories impacted that were purely impersonal, purely cultural, purely biologic. Yet, they were all there, trapped in the body's armor. Ordinarily, each human life became more and more encumbered by this armor, until in old age, and often long before, a stiffness — the habits of a few gestures repeated obsessively, as memories often repeat themselves, trying to stay alive, trying to understand their own natures — these few, these proud, these everlasting dead, imposed themselves upon the body. The result was the fabrication of a prison, an un-alive, but breathing edifice. In short, the result was the habit of time mummifying, petrifying a human being. This was the thing that the invalid disdainfully called “character.” “My book, my books, are filled with these relics, these fossils of temporal artifacts, and are they not distressing” — then catching the darkening look in Grace's eye, he would

quickly add — “and are they not amusing!” And here, for a moment, their ritual exchange of courtesies would explode at first into laughter, and then, for the *auteur*, into coughing fits. Such ecstasies were always interrupted by the vigilant Céleste, who would rush in and cow them both with her lupine eye. It was hideous. It was fascinating. They both knew that they were also victims of their own discovery, and that the only way out of the prison was through the escapism of art. In just these moments, Grace realized that all of her physical training had enabled her to retain a flexibility unique among human beings, a flexibility, not only of body, but also of spirit. For Grace had learned to move beyond the reflexive response of imprinted emotional stimulations. Through unwavering practice and discipline, she had discovered a meditative freedom. It was this “uniqueness,” the accident of her profession, which had singled her out for the Alma’s visitations. Grace was pliable. Grace was useful.

One night, while sitting beside the invalid’s bed, she reached down to pick up a pen he had dropped to the floor. Now, suddenly, as she stooped, all of the horrors of the war’s trenches came flooding into her body, and in an instant, she lived them, and she felt the millions of bodies cringing in that exact position, each one imprinted with agony and horror, each one destined to “store” that agony and repeat it for the rest of their lives and perhaps beyond. She saw old men, stooping to put on slippers and reliving the mutilation of a friend. She saw them feeling their way through hell, again and again, by merely leaning on a cane and walking. Time was laid open for her with all of its wounds, and she was swept away in seas of blood. It was only an instant, a tick or two of the clock, but it triggered an aphasia, an apnea, which demanded rescue through the fulminations. She was gassed back to life as others were gassed to death. She had, in more ways than she could have at that moment imagined or made sense of, passed out. When she returned to the room, Céleste was there, tight-lipped and prim on the outside, and imperturbable as stone. But the servant’s eyes were as wild as a jungle, as free as the ocean. Marcel was smiling. “So now you also know the remembrance of things past.”

But he was wrong. She knew nothing. She excused herself as politely as she could, and left him lying in his yellow vapors, sailing his long boat into history. Grace was lost. She felt clumsy and afraid, stumbling back to her hotel, crouching furtively along the alleyways, hugging the stones of buildings, thinking that any moment she might be killed, exploded into millions of pieces. But it was too late. The event had already transpired. Her apathy had ended. Now she feared. She managed to enter her suite without waking Françoise, and she stared relentlessly into the gilt-framed mirror.

She had hoped that the intensity of her staring would summon the Alma from the restless, ever-present, howling seas. But that did not happen. Instead, as she looked into the frame, her face disintegrated into music. She had naively, inadvertently absorbed her whole insane, epoch, its suffering, its endless barbarity, its crudity, its filth, its petty appetites — and now that cacophonous welter was slowly changing into light and glass. She heard a harmony of many voices, like diamonds rubbing diamonds delicately, each motif of each phrase a separate strand derived from the inferno of the world, but now transformed to an elixir. Her embryo floated through this star-lit heaven, itself a star that wove a luminous song.

Now the sought-for Alma did appear within the mirror-frame, at first, as impassive as ever. But then, he laughed. “Babies are fed with white, fluidic pap. This is Svadhisthana’s way. The second circle has enraptured you.”

Musical Measures

When the disk of the moon is visible, but black,
Lighting a thin, white smile by which she proclaims
Her willingness to share her flame with stars, the time,
The timing, has come, and is exact. The creatures,
Living in lightless agony, hear, and respond.
This is night’s music, turning into day, day’s song
Expanding through the twisted tunnels, the animals
Awakening in joy. Happiness is an art,
Inclusive of living’s most prodigious sorrows.
It is time removed from its coffin, freedom’s whim.
It is wind that combs the white wave as it’s falling.
It is this voice that moves with perfect timing.