

thing. Yes, try waking up each morning to hear that Clinton was still 20 points up.

Dole didn't really want to look into his problems. They were like Chinese boxes. One inside another. Polls had shown that values bothered people more than the economy. But what had destroyed the values? He might think privately that we had carried on the Cold War for too long. But how could he tell people that? Say that the Russians had not been in any way a real enemy for 20 years. Maybe 30 years. It would be political suicide to say that excessive use of patriotism as a political tool is debilitating to national intelligence. Or take advertising. Has to corrupt values. Has to be manipulative, meretricious, mendacious. Fastest way to dull a child's brain. Yes, just keep shattering your child's attention. Every 10 to 12 minutes. Do it with a TV commercial. Yes, fine things for him to say. Well, Dole could begin to feel sorry for himself. How do you restore those old American values? Two lonely fellows on the highway of life—Dole and his sound bite.

Over the next five days, everything got worse. Dole went to New Hampshire on Sunday, and the storm was so bad that all the oxygen masks tumbled out of their receptacles

as the 727 slammed down in its landing. Only a small crowd was waiting to see him. New Hampshire. Dole's old Vale. Vale of Defeat. The *New York Times*/CBS News Poll had Clinton up by 22 points. In Michigan, Dole said, "I'm going to win whether you like it or not." His fatigue was beginning to show. Worst kind: brain fatigue. "I'm running for president of the United States because I believe that—with strong leadership—America's days will always lie ahead of us. Just as they are now."

On October 24, Dole asked Perot to quit. Perot responded. Called the request "weird and totally inconsequential." In New Orleans, same day, Dole said, "This country is going to hell in a handbasket." In Montgomery, Alabama, same day, October 24, Dole said, "It's coming from Indonesia, it's coming from India! All over the world, money's coming into America right into the President's coffers!" Stop.

In Pensacola, Dole said, "Something's wrong in America.... I wonder...if people are thinking at all. Wake up, America!" Stop. "When will the American people have had enough?" Stop. "Don't inflict this on America for four more years. We can't take it."

Then he hit full stride. "You probably heard about the drug dealer in Miami who got invited to the White House. We will not have drug dealers eating at the White House in a Dole administration. This is a disgrace. This is a disgrace.... Bill Clinton ought to be voted out of office in a landslide.... To him, this is all a power game. It's a game! It's a game! It's a game!"

On the same day, Clinton was in Birmingham,

~~Pharaoh~~

Alabama. He said, "The way I was raised, my mama would have whipped me if I ever said I was better than anyone else. We were taught never to look down on anybody."

Next day in Houston, Dole was asked about a report in the *New York Daily News*. It stated that he had a long affair with an Australian woman, which had begun close to four years before the end of his first marriage. From the *Washington Post*, October 26: "Dole looked disbelievingly at the questioner, waved his arms dismissively and said, 'You're worse than they are.'"

From the *New York Post*, same day: "Dole asked, 'Where is the outrage?' seven times. At one point he lowered his voice to say it softly, as if he was saddened as well as frustrated. 'If it wasn't for the media, I could have won this election two weeks ago....' At Southern Methodist University, Dole said, 'Don't read that stuff! Don't watch television! Don't let them make up your mind for you.'"

On Friday, October 25, at a rally in Atlanta, one of Clinton's supporters, Mayor Bill Campbell, told the crowd, "Bob Dole is out of touch, out of steam and out of time."

By then, the dean had been with the Clinton campaign for two days. The differences were large. Now, one was following the camp of an engineer who planned superhighways. They might

2484

not get past the state line—but no one knew that yet, not even the engineer. He was ready to build a road around the world. →

One matter was not in doubt. Clinton was going to win the election. That had seemed almost certain after the debates, but if any trace of reservation remained, it was gone by the time the dean followed Clinton through Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia. The impact was equal to watching a prodigiously powerful football team come out on the field against a school with a modest athletic department. The Clintons had it all: the size of the crowd—always three to five times the count of Dole's audiences—the throw of the loudspeaker system, the attention given to every item of his program. Dole's campaign grew in charm as one recalled its carnival atmosphere, a one-ring circus next to these five rings. Naturally, the big tent was not as much fun. Too little went wrong. But the dean came to understand one more cliché—the power of the incumbency. To be near the man, to see him pass, conceivably to touch his hand, to raise your offspring on your shoulder so that the child could see the President clearly was to endow your family, for years to come, with a recollection of strength. You had gained some instinctively felt relation to the immortal. In city after city, they would praise the President because he had been good enough to visit them. Clinton could not have been happier with the office.

In Bantu philosophy, there is a belief in *kuntu*. It is an individual spirit that adheres to concepts and to objects. A beautiful woman who puts on a

24/85

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2484

beautiful dress has her beauty magnified more than the combination of the woman and the dress, provided the *kuntu* of each is in harmony. (High fashion would be hard-pressed to exist without the instinctive belief of society women that something of this sort is true.)

The *kuntu* of the presidency fit Clinton. There in Birmingham, Alabama, again in Louisiana and Georgia, he looked prodigiously like a president. One was sharing a city square with nothing less than a celestial oxymoron—part rogue, part god. What other man in America has ever had as many vices catalogued? Yes, down to the alleged “distinguishing mark” on his penis. To the crowd, he was all but luminous. One had to go back to the pharaohs to comprehend such worship. The dean recollected a story of how Ramses II, at the climax of the year’s largest religious festival in Thebes circa 1250 B.C., lifted his short white robe to reveal to 300,000 Egyptians a mighty phallus. It was erect. Ramses II is probably the star of all time. Those 300,000 souls cheered. Their pharaoh was mighty; Egypt would prosper.

We are civilized, even corporatized, but our enthusiasms may still go back to that root. Seeing Clinton at work with a partisan crowd was to rec-

26

34187

ognize that he might have as many personalities as Bob Dole (or Maggie Thatcher). Unlike Dole, he would not offer three or four of them in 15 minutes. On the campaign trail, Clinton remained one man, but that man was not the guarded, near-diffident, reasonable, self-protective and uneasy candidate of the debates. Now, his confidence was immense, his comfort was complete, and his energy did not flag. He loved the crowd and they loved him. ~~They were in the presence of the Man;~~ he was with those who knew he was the Man. It was balmier than sweet sleep. A young crowd, always a young crowd, they hardly cared what he had done to get where he was. Power had its own signature.

Let us, however, not ignore all the details. No matter how well things had been arranged by Clinton's advance men, a few things did go wrong. A school band was playing the music in the Academic Quadrangle at Birmingham-Southern College, and when they were asked to produce the "Star-Spangled Banner," they did not have the sheet music. Who would sell that sheet music down in Alabama? Ask them rather to play the fight song of the U of A. So there was an embarrassed silence, perhaps one extended minute before someone was inspired enough to suggest they sing it, whereupon the band, much abashed, all heartfelt trumpets dented, sang away slowly. Some of the audience even joined in.

Senator Howell Heflin got up to speak, but could not make the last step up to the podium. Now retiring from the U.S. Senate, Heflin is a grand old man with horn-rimmed glasses, a full

23

underhang of double chin and a prodigious belly in graceful concert with that double chin. But Heflin was too fat to occupy the small riser at the base of the podium. His belly kept pushing him back. The crowd laughed and he laughed, and he stayed where he was and just spoke a little louder. "Radical far-right pachyderms," he told the crowd, "have been raising their snouts to fling their mud and vicious slander."

"Give it to them, Howell," yelled the crowd.

"You, Mr. President, however, have conducted yourself in a disciplined, gentlemanly Southern manner." High applause from the crowd.

(Prodigious cheers.)

Clinton was next and began by saying, "Hello, Alabama, I met Howell Heflin 21 years ago when he was the chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, and I was a former candidate for Congress—and a loser, I might add. He came in the law school at the university, and I thought that he was the darndest fella I ever met in my life. He had a wonderful sense of humor, a great sense of compassion, a fine mind and a lot of country common-sense wisdom...."

"Folks, we are on the verge of a new century.... This is the last election for president of the twentieth century and the first election for president of the twenty-first century. And you have to decide. Many of you young people in this audience, in a

(29)

few years, you will be doing jobs that haven't been invented yet. Some of you will be doing work that has not even been imagined yet. And you have to decide: What kind of America do you want? ... For me the answer is simple but profound. I dream of an America in the twenty-first century where every person—without regard to race or region or income or religion or gender or background—who is responsible enough to work for it, can have a shot at the American Dream." [Applause]

That evening, outside of New Orleans, in Marrero, a town that had had its troubles with crime, Clinton had 17 prize cops lined up in front of the backdrop on the dais. The focus proved to be the SPAR program: Surveillance, Policing, Arresting and Rejuvenation. "The job they are doing," said Clinton, pointing to the police, "is a job second to none."

"Thank you, President Clinton," said one of the speakers, "for a peaceful night's rest." Marrero, obviously, was one bad town.

Half of the principals that night were black, as indeed had been true in Birmingham. The proportion would be kept the next day in Atlanta. Clinton would engage in a conference call with more than 600 black ministers during a late lunch at Paschal's restaurant, and he had materials to lay on them. He was for blacks and he was for women, middle-class blacks and middle-class women. Had any American president understood as well as Clinton those who aspire to the middle class?

Here he was on the conference call: "One reason I try to make sure every person would be

~~President~~

guaranteed at least two years of education after high school is that I think our country ought to work more the way these community colleges do... They're not bureaucratic; they're flexible, they're changing all the time. They have to meet high standards of performance or they go broke. Everybody that graduates from them gets hired. And they're open to everybody, and everybody is treated the same. That's what I'm trying to do for America. So I'm proud of the results we've achieved... the biggest decline in inequality among working people in 27 years, the biggest drop in child poverty in 20 years, the biggest drop in poverty among female heads of households in 30 years and the lowest overall poverty rate among African-Americans and American senior citizens ever recorded.... I'm sure most of you on this phone call know, we have appointed more African-Americans to important positions in the cabinet and the White House, in the administration, on the federal bench, than any other administration in history [and] though there have been more women and minority appointments, by far, than any previous administration, the American Bar Association has given higher ratings to my federal judges than any other president since the rating system began. Which proves that we can have excellence and diversity. Which proves you can have affirmative action and equal opportunity and high standards. ~~[Applause]~~"

How could those black clergymen listening over the phone not warm to him? They understood human complexity better than their white counterparts. They knew all too well how much goodness was to be found in a bad man and how much evil was secreted in someone nominally good. So Clinton's morals would not bother them. He was comfortable with black people. They were comfortable with him. They could see him as the kind of car salesman whose clients would trust him even after he had palmed off a lemon. (Like the end of welfare!)

"Friend, I feel for you," he might say, "and I want to make you feel better. You just fix your heart and vision on the law of averages. Because that's going to reward you in the future. I certify that the next car you buy from me will be top of the line."

How were you going to desert a fellow like that? Hell, his uncle, Raymond Clinton, a huge influence on his life, had owned a Buick dealership in Hot Springs, the old mobster hangout. Yes, Clinton was full of pain for your car's bad performance.

For that matter, he said to the clergymen, "Atlanta is one of the urban centers of the world, because forty years ago, it became the city too busy to hate." A beautiful sentiment. Like everything he uttered, it was half true. One didn't have to be in Atlanta long to recognize that it was one more corporate town. The vitality of Atlanta was there, and thousands of blacks and whites, well dressed,

mingled in the crowd with little tension, but Atlanta looked like all the other new American skylines. Coming into a large American city no longer offered much excitement unless you were arriving on business. Then, you might thrive within the spiritual blockade of 40-story offices and hotels, but the truth was that Atlanta was about as unattractive as any of the other new and major corporate monoliths that offered no mood other than the emptiness of the mood they projected upon the skyline. They were without resonance, sentimental memory, surprise, or hope for a little fresh air in one's existence. So, they were invariably reinforced with security. They had to be. They were minimum-security prisons for our good American character. What was there about America that no politician or civic leader ever raised an objection to how we kept building these corporate blockhouses of the soul?

In Woodruff Park, a green surrounded by corporate architecture, Clinton held his morning rally. The young trees were still not tall enough to hide the surroundings, and so to set a mood, the band played loudly for the thousands assembled. A lot of electric power was in the sound. Kids with enormous amplification of middling talents had now replaced Sonny Rollins, Miles, Thelonius Monk, Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey—let us not go down memory lane, but let us also not pretend that we have not lost the entrance.

Clamor is the stimulus. It is there to overcome the numb silence of the corporate presence. You can play jazz in a graveyard, but you cannot play it in a corporate park. For that you need electronic blast. Power imprinted upon emptiness is money.

In Woodruff Park, Senator Sam Nunn, who had for years been Chair of the Armed Services Committee, got up to introduce Clinton. His thin gray demeanor had little impact. Even with the loudspeakers, it was hard to hear Sam Nunn. Phrases came through. "Most competitive in the world...that's our America." Something of the sort. Sam Nunn had to be the dullest speaker heard in five days on the road. The dean decided that Senator Nunn must have been awfully good at other things to get elected so many times, and his campaigns must have been well funded by defense manufacturers. But then if you are a main gear in a process that can conceivably bring on a nuclear war, you do not want to serve up much energy in your voice. You certainly do not want to sound like Joe Pesci. That could frighten the hell out of your defense associates. What you have to convey is, "I may not even have the pep to press this button." So Nunn droned on with the introduction. When it was time for Clinton to speak, nobody in the crowd had been warmed up.

Clinton barely needed such a service. The crowd came alive at the sight of him. It would be hard, at this point, to argue that Clinton's appetites had really hurt his career. After all, he had

done no more than take an agreeable political premise—press the flesh—and carry it forward to a natural conclusion.

Good old Bill, the dean decided, had raised the perilous sport of tomcatting into a state-of-the-art tool that probably helped him to read the national mood. He had been closer to that mood than the Republicans. The people were more concerned about their children than ever. They were also market oriented, wanted hope, were weary of negative campaigns and political hatchet jobs. Perhaps they saw it as too close somehow to crime in the streets. So Clinton had fashioned a strategy of nonresistance to insults. It worked.

After the bombing in Oklahoma City, which had to increase ~~our~~ ^{the} fear of terrorist acts coming close to us, by several orders of magnitude, the people needed reassurance that things could get better. The salesman from Hope had been smart enough to provide a box of toys. In Chicago at the convention he said—and he would repeat it often—“Every library and classroom in America connected to the information superhighway by the year 2000.”

What no one seemed ready to contemplate was that the information superhighway was only too well named: It was a real superhighway, efficient yet deadening. Masses of quickly available processed information would soon bear the same

2495

35

relation to culture that a superhighway presents to a country road. One's memory will not retain much of Colorado or South Carolina if you drive through them on an Interstate. Memories, like etchings, are fixed by attention to detail—by working one's way along a two-lane road full of towns, cheap stores and little courthouse squares.

With the World Wide Web, we will be given the screen of a monitor rather than the page of a book. But the people wanted the technological world. It was simpler. All the values could be compressed into one—power. Clinton gave off the confidence that he could help them get it, and when the dean saw the way black kids looked at Clinton, he was moved. Clinton had the power to offer them the hope of future power.

Yes, Clinton's sunny public nature was his greatest asset. He connected these kids to a vision of their future: They would go to college, they would succeed. Like others, they would gain power. The country was starved for that kind of promise. Dole's range went from elegant to dour. He was not the most optimistic man in America. Of course, he was not. ~~How could he be?~~ He was all too aware of the basic problem—too much money was going to the top.

Dole might even have had a chance if he had been able to say, "I'm opposed to big government, but I'm also opposed to giving corporations those tax write-offs and subsidies. The largest part of the 15 percent tax cut will come from ending corporate welfare as we know it."

~~Shirley~~

Of course, he could not say it. You could not be a loyal Republican and speak in that manner, not unless you were Pat Buchanan. But Dole was not Buchanan. So there was never the thickness of a width of dental floss between the real economic programs of the Democrats and the Republicans. The only gap was in the candidates: They were far apart in temperament.

Dole's war wound had branded him. If something in his soul would never give up, something else might never be at rest. For Dole's right hand, seen up close, was a small dark object, not unlike a shrunken head, and this resemblance was so striking that one would not have been surprised to see long hair growing out of it. Who could contemplate the pain of carrying such a dark affliction as part of your body when you are a tall and handsome man? How much of his personality was nested in that shrunken right hand? It had made his sensitivity to others acute. If Dole was speaking to an audience, one had to do no more than look at his right hand and ponder its effect upon him. His left hand would come over to protect it.

The gesture could remind you of a smoker who lights a cigarette at the smallest invasion upon his ego. Bogart used to take us into his thoughts by the way he performed that little act, but then he was the greatest of leading men.

Reagan was another leading man with much

DEBATE
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2497

less talent than Bogart, but he happened to be president; when you came down to it, Dole as an actor might have made even more of a leading man than Reagan. Of course, Dole would never have been a *star*. The gulf in character between a leading man and a star can indeed be measured by the difference between Dole and Clinton.

identity, ~~ego~~ The leading man, no matter how he presents himself to the public, is a study in ego. He can never go beyond his sense of himself, but that sense changes with every event, good or bad. His ~~ego~~, in consequence, is on an elevator. Like an old elevator, it is always in danger of breaking down.

The star has gone on a longer voyage. He has transcended ego. He is doing what he wants. The leading man, however, is always debating the merits of the role: Is this a good role? Would another one have been better?

~~The star sees the role as one more way to develop the project which is himself which is being served by the program.~~

¶ It is why Clinton, in a bad time, a very bad time for America, could conceivably lead us into fascism. For he could never let go of the idea that the program may have to be redesigned. Of course, all of us could be wearing uniforms before that process is done, and we might have to be quick to salute the police as they go by. Let us assume this is only a worst-case scenario, a dreadful but most remote possibility. It is better to expect that

~~In contrast, Dole is more concerned with whether the fools who are making the movie have provided him with the right kind of lines to suit~~

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to go on p 38

24/98

38

his talents. The leading man, ultimately, is an entertainer and so often feels that he is an impostor. Secretly, he can believe he was lucky to have come this far. ^{whereas, the} The star is a creator who does not know the limit of his ambition—he knows only that it is close to boundless. INSERT from p 37

The star works on the assumption that good and bad news ^{will} ~~is~~ always ^{come} coming in at a great rate. He need only look at the balance. Too much is happening on too many fronts not to be able to forgive; too much is happening to be loyal to old debts, old friends. The leading man is a striking feature on the landscape; the star is a river, a soul migration, a destiny. What he seeks is larger than himself. Which is why he cannot always name it.

So the dean had come to his conclusion. He would vote for Clinton. It was a dangerous choice, and he disliked two thirds of what Clinton stood for. He had a certain fondness for Dole, who had at least taken a few wild chances, such as 15 percent and Jack Kemp. There was certainly no question that the press plane following Dole had been a living carnival in the air, while the media traveling with Clinton had been, of necessity, serious. Who but priests can attend a pharaoh?

Yet, it would have to be Clinton. If the dean were going to vote (and his vote for president was all but meaningless for the category of president, since he lived in Massachusetts, and in no way could Clinton ever lose there), still, it would be equal to betting on a game. How could one watch

though Ross
Pardner had
by now
become a
potent
Sopranos
in the Clinton.

2498

31

a professional contest if no bet was on the line? The dean was betting that a star, unlike a leading man, is always capable of greatness. In Clinton's case, it would not be the kind of greatness that the dean was likely to admire—it would be too managed. But at least Clinton had the potential to be, in one way at least, a great president. He could bring blacks and whites together. To some degree, at any rate. That might be more important for America's future than anything else right now (with the divine exception of reducing the enormous ratio between wealth and poverty).

So the dean had his epiphany in Georgia and came back to Massachusetts to write about the campaign while he followed the last week and a half in the newspapers. And, of course, the oldest law of journalism and police work came into effect: It always happens when you are not there.

Dole grew angrier at Clinton over the last ten days as the polls refused to lift him rapidly enough to offer any hope of victory, even if ~~Perot had become a scourge to Clinton~~ Perot declared: "It's like saying, 'Bonnie and Clyde, we want you to be president of a bank. But for heaven's sake, quit robbing the banks, would you?'"

Perot said more. He spoke of how America could not afford to have the White House under investigation for the next two years. You could feel Clinton losing

though Ross
Perot had,
by now,
become a
potent
scourge
to the Clintons.

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votes even as Perot spoke, but then, every one of Perot's ideas made some kind of sense, except for his idea of himself. Concerning himself, he was hopeless. With Perot, you did not have to worry about any technological warp the TV set might introduce into your perceptions. Perot had a personality as strong as a turnip sealed for three months in a plastic container. He was far beyond the warp system of TV. If Perot were ever elected, the country would go mad. For he had a voice guaranteed to bring out the worst in all, and his intellectual habits were meaner than his voice. He had a solution he would bring to all our grievous problems, and he would reveal it soon. When? Why, in some soon-to-come hour. Time was not an element. Ross Perot was higher than time. There is no limit to the shamelessness located in the skewed brain cells of the very rich.

Dole took one more gambit. For the last 96 hours of the campaign, he went on his marathon. He spoke in something like 30 cities in the last four days. With very little sleep, he was close to incoherent. To save himself from verbal breakdown, he began to repeat each sentence.

"He's no good," he would say, "he's no good." Stop. "Honor and trust, honor and trust." It was as if both halves of his much-divided soul were now obliged to show up for each and every ut-

40

2561

terance. Of course, by now, both sides of him—the good guy ~~and~~ the bad guy—were beginning to agree with each other. We are always full of energy when the best and worst in us are moving in the same direction. "I will bring integrity back to the White House," said Dole, "and I won't have any drug dealers over for dinner." His voice was gone. His speeches were down to ten minutes, to five minutes.

"Integrity, character, honor, duty, country, decency." Stop. "While I still have my voice, I want you to know. I'll keep my word."

It was not for naught. Perot had become the attack dog that Kemp had refused to become, and Dole had not quite known how to be, and Clinton, always vulnerable when caught at the trough, was hurt seriously by the newest gate—Indogate. Clinton must have lost four or five points at the end, a crucial loss, since the Congress would still be Republican.

It was Dole who looked like the winner on election night. As he made his speech of concession, he looked quieter and nicer and more decent and happy than ever before on television, but then, by his own lights, he had saved his honor. His party, in danger of despising him for the ineptitude of his campaign, had seen him make amends with his 96-hour marathon. He had probably moved the Senate and the House of Representatives over to the Republicans in those four last days. Now he would be honored until his death (unless he went back into politics), and so

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one had the pleasure of looking at the rarest political animal of them all—a completely happy defeated candidate.

As for the dean, his vote took a turn or two. He too was put off by Indogate. While the Republicans certainly took in vast sums from wealthy Americans who were probably as charmless as any Indonesian, Clinton had done it again. He might have the makings of a great man, but could he swim fast enough to escape the sea of his past?

Midas of an

polluted

Meanwhile, November 2, on C-SPAN, the dean heard a television address given originally by Ralph Nader on October 25 at the All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. And after all these months, the dean found at last that he could be moved to moral respect for a candidate.

"We have tens of millions of youngsters," said Nader, "sitting on the couch 30, 40 hours a week, watching TV, watching video.... They're more out of shape, our preteen-agers, more out of shape, more flabby, more overweight than any preteen-agers since we started recording their physical state in 1990. They're not out in the backyard, kicking the can, playing with kids in the neighborhood. They're sitting gazing, gazing, learning the lessons of modern corporate hucksterism on television and video: Violence is a solution to life's problems. Low-grade sensuality

2503

from junk food to soft porn. And addiction, above all addiction, because that means more sales and more profits.

413

"The children are growing up even more corporate. Ever listen to their vocabulary? It would shame Esperanto with the sparseness of their vocabulary. 'You know, kinda...cool...you know, look, like, kinda, sorta, cool, you know...' [Laughter] That's growing up corporate.... We all grow up corporate. That's how we're controlled. We are participants in our own domination if we accept the way corporations look at the world."

So the dean decided to vote for Nader. To hell with Clinton. To hell with his own epiphany and ithyphallic revivals. He would vote for Nader. But when an election official passed him the ballot in Provincetown, Massachusetts, he discovered that Nader was not on it. No Greens in Massachusetts—how odd. What was more odd in retrospect is that it never occurred to the dean to write in his vote on the ballot. He did what, at last count, 49.2 percent of all voting Americans did: He sighed. He voted for Clinton. It was a profound sigh.

again some

Would America never have a major candidate to give us the promise again that politics could become as great and exciting as our dream? There was something immeasurably insolent in the way politicians patronized the American heart. Marilyn Monroe once commented on the way strangers could be awfully rude to her. "I guess," she said, "when they say those things, they think they're only doing it to your clothing." ☐

2504

Courtship

It's a fine wine
hearty as one drinks it,
peppery
yet it seems
to come
florid
and
soft

Yes, I answered,
we have an
old peasant
saying:

It's a fine wine
but the devil
farted
in it
once.

Clinton years

Comparative Carnality:

(Examples of Pagan and Early
Christian ~~Manifestations~~
Manners and Movés.)

"She was a mighty Queen, and great as the greatest Pharaohs," Nefertiri said, "She attached the chin-beard to Her face that all Pharaohs wear. And even as the God Hapi has breasts, so is it said that Hat-shep-sut had the divine member of Osiris, strong, and with three branches. With it, She could make love to Her architect." Here, Nefertiri began to laugh, and with much pleasure.

Hat-shep-sut was a Queen of strength, Nefertiri told me, because She was descended from Hathor. No Monarch who has such a Goddess for an ancestor can ever be weak. Terrible punishments would come down upon cities when Hathor would attack, and She was so fierce in Her massacres that blood would even flow uphill so much was it pushed by the blood behind. In the face of such fury, Ra saw that no one in Egypt would be left alive. So He sent many Gods to the barley fields, and They fermented grain in this blood and brought seven thousand jugs of this beer to Hathor. Her lion's mouth crusted with gore, She was still slaying the troops of all mankind. "Pour out the beer," said Ra, and the Gods inundated the meadows until Hathor, looking upon the new lake, began to drink and was ferocious no longer, but drunk, and wandered about, ignoring mankind until it could begin to recover.

Start

→ As Nefertiri told me this tale, so did I remember the Battle of Kadesh, and smell again the field where we roasted meats in the night, and the Division of Set arrived with camp followers. I thought of all the men and women I had known by two mouths or three that night. No sword had been so strong as mine but the sword of Usermare, and He was in the other field counting hands. I could see again the tent of hands, and blood on earth, red once from the wounds and again by the light of the campfires, and I was returned to the joy of seizing lovers I did not know and entering them. So, the smoke of those fires returned to my chest, and my Queen Nefertiri had thereby warned me further. In the mirror, Her eyes had the light of campfires. Beneath the woven-air, Her breast rose and fell. Even my awe before Her was no longer like the chill of a temple but more like the cold blue fire of the altar when salt is in the flame.

Now, She set aside the mirror, and gave Her attention to my short linen skirt, only She did not look upon it with desire, but calculation, in the way I might approach a new horse before considering whether I wished to mount. Then She gave a sigh. Whether it was at the monumental rage of Usermare if He knew Her thought,

or my own not so subtle tortures, I cannot say. However, She most certainly drew a circle around Her head before proceeding to tell me another tale.

That was of still another architect. Back in the era when people were crude, and there were no monuments, there had been a sad reign of a Pharaoh Horus Tepnefer-Intef, a weak King Who stored His plunder in a vault built by the architect Sen-Amon.

Horus Tepnefer-Intef feared for these riches and so the walls of the vault were of great thickness, the stones even chosen by Sen-Amon himself, for he was a mason as well as an architect. At night, however, after his laborers had left, he polished one stone, and set it on so perfect an incline that he could draw it forth from the wall. So Sen-Amon slept with the knowledge that the riches of Pharaoh Tepnefer-Intef were, if he desired, his own. But he was old and stole nothing. He merely visited the vault with his oldest son, and counted the King's fortune.

When Sen-Amon died, his son, however, went in with his younger brother, and they took as much gold as they could carry. Since the Pharaoh also liked to count His hoard, He soon discovered the theft. Full of consternation, He set a trap.

When the thieves returned for more, the lid of a sarcophagus fell on the younger brother, and he cried out: "I cannot escape. Cut off my head so no one will recognize me." His older brother obeyed.

When Tepnefer discovered the headless man, He was frantic with terror. He hung the body by the wall of the main gate and told the guards to arrest whoever would weep beneath. "This was," said Nefertiri, "a terrible act for a Pharaoh to decree. We honor the bodies of the dead. Tepnefer-Intef must have been a Syrian.

"The mother of the poor dead thief did not weep in public, but she told her oldest son to rescue the body of his brother, or she would claim it herself. When he went by the wall at evening, therefore, he fed the guards wine. Soon, they were drunk and asleep, and he cut down his brother and escaped."

"Is that all of Your story?" I asked. I was disappointed. The stone that slid in its socket moved in me as well. As the brothers stole the gold, I had felt a first stirring in myself. Yet now, the thought of a headless body lay on me like the weight of a coffin's cover.

"There is more," said Nefertiri. And She told me that this peculiar King, Tepnefer-Intef, infuriated by the cleverness of the thief,

was unable to sleep. Tepnefer-Intef even commanded His daughter, Suba-Sebaq, famous for Her wide-open thighs — “they can only be Syrians,” said Nefertiri — to open Her house and receive all men, noble or common, who came to visit. Any of these men would be free to take his pleasure by way of any of Her three mouths if he could entertain Her with a true account of the most wicked deed of his life. So She learned of the escapades of the worst men in the reign of Tepnefer-Intef. Many of these stories exciting Her, the men learned much of the smell of the meat in the three mouths of Suba-Sebaq, “that slut” — now did Nefertiri’s clear voice deepen in my ear. Such was Her excitement, that Her thighs came apart and I could see in Her parted hair, the eye of Horus gleaming. Then Her voice, rapt as the oncoming of the river, went on to tell of the ingenuity of this oldest son of Sen-Amon. To prepare himself, he cut off the arm of a neighbor who had just died, and concealed it beneath his robes. Then, he went to the Princess. In Her Chambers, he told how he had rescued his brother’s body. But when the Princess tried to seize him, he gave Her no more to grasp than the arm of the dead man. It came right out of his robe, and Suba-Sebaq fell backward in a swoon. Then, while She lay beneath him, the thief made love to Her by all three mouths.

“After he left, Tepnefer-Intef so admired his boldness that He sent out word He would pardon the tellow. Thereby, the son of Sen-Amon disclosed himself and married Suba-Sebaq and became a Prince whose wife was known by half the men of Egypt.”

Now, Nefertiri kneeled before me, raised my skirt, seized my swollen but still sleeping snake, gave a small tug with Her slim and playful fingers, said, “Ah, this arm does not come off,” and proceeded to give Her beautiful face to my limb. As the royal mouth came down upon my honor, my desire, my terror, my shame, my glory, I began to feel the seven gates of my body with all their monsters and snares, and a great heat, like the burning of the sun, blazed in me. Then I was alone again, and the fires were subsiding. She was no longer on me with Her mouth. “You smell like a stallion,” She said. “I have never smelled an unperfumed body before.”

I knelt and kissed Her foot, ready like a hound to slaver atrociously upon Her sandal. I wished to abase myself. The sensation of Her lips upon the head of my phallus remained, and that was like a halo. My cock felt as if it were made of gold. A glow rose in me. I could die now. I need feel no shame. The woman of Usermare

had given me Her mouth, and so my buttocks were my own again, yes, I could have kissed Her feet and chewed upon Her toes.

"Truly, Kazama, you smell dreadful," She said in Her fondest voice and wiped Her mouth as if She would never have any more of me. But then, She knelt, and despite Herself, gave one queenly teasing lick of Her tongue, light as a feather, along the length of my shaft, down into the tense bag of my balls, and around, a fleeting lick.

"You stink! You smell of the end of the road," She said, which, in the Court of Usermare where people spoke so well, was the worst reference you could make to the anus, and I wondered if something out of the marrow of Ma-Khrur's fats, some thirst of the lost Pig, or slime of the hippopotamus, must be oozing forth from me, an abomination, or so I would have said until I saw Nefertiri's face, and another Ka was on it. Her delicate features had their own thirst. She was full of folly.

FOURTEEN

 "OH, I adore how dreadful you are," She said. "Did you visit the Royal Stables? Did you rub the foam of a stallion's mouth all over your little beauty?" She took another lick.

I nodded. I had indeed gone to the Stables before coming here. I had rubbed myself, and with one of Usermare's horses, no less, back from a ride with his groom and not yet rubbed down, I had managed to get my hand full of the slather of the beast, nor had I known why.

"You are a peasant. Common as Lower Egypt," She said, and teased what I had anointed by way of Her fingertips, clever as starlings' wings, but with Her tongue and lips as well, a flutter into the ferment of my seed.

I knew what a mighty revenge She was taking upon Usermare. She never left the crown of my shaft, indeed She called it that, "the crown," and in a crooning voice, almost so pure as one of Her blind singers, said, "Oh, little crown of Upper Egypt," and laid on the butterfly wings of Her light tongue, "Oh," She said, "doesn't the Upper Crown like to be kissed by Lower Egypt," whereupon Her tongue curled like the cobra that comes forward from the Red Crown, and She laughed at the mating of the two, as if She would laugh again when the White Crown and the Red of Usermare were together on His head, and He was solemn with His ceremony. "Oh, don't you spit at Me," She said, "don't you dare, don't let that wickedness of yours begin to shine, don't let it leap, don't let it dance," all with the sweetest little kisses and tickles of Her tongue, trailing the fingertips of one hand like five little sins into my sack and over my shaft, and all the while She played with words in the way I had so often noticed among the most exalted, but all such games were nothing to what She said to me now. It was as if Her heart had tasted no pleasure in so long that She must croon over

my coarse peasant cock (and She called it that) and called it by many other names, for after each tickle of Her tongue, I was "groaner," and "moaner," "knife," and "stud," "inscriber," and "anointer," and then, as if that were not enough, She spoke of my "guide" and my "dirty Hittite," my "smelly thickness," and lo, they were all much like the sound you hear in *mtba*, although a little different each, and then using a word so common as *met*, which I heard every day, now came such sweet caressing sounds as "Do you like the way I tickle your *rein*, My *governor*," and She gave me a nip with Her teeth, "or is it *death*?" Yet, if it were not for the cleverness of my ears after the Gardens of the Secluded, I might have thought She said, "Do you like the way I tickle your governor, My death, or is it the vein?" some such nonsense, but we were laughing so much, and enjoying ourselves so freely that She began to flip my proud (and now shining) crown against Her lips, and She cooed at it and called it "Nefer" but with a different meaning each time so that it was sweet. "Oh My most beautiful young horse," She said, "My *nefer*, My phallus, My slow fire, My lucky name, My *sma*, My little cock, My little cemetery, My *smat*," and She swallowed as much of my cock as Her royal throat could take, and bit at the root until I screamed, or near to it, but then She kissed the tip. "Did I hurt My little *ben*, My provider, My *hemsî*, My dwelling place? Oh, is he coming forth?" and indeed I would have been all over Her face and spewing on the woven-air across Her breast, and there to watch Her rub it into Her skin slowly and solemnly as if painting the insult to Usermare upon Her flesh — such was all I saw in Her mind — but the coming-forth turned upon itself with all rude force, clear up my fundament, into my cave, seizing my heart, and drew all the joy in the head of my cock right back into my sack, and I knew we had made no small commotion. Yet I had small fear of that. Her Palace was not like the Secluded where every house had its walls yet every sound belonged to all. Here were no walls around Her rooms. Her bedroom opened to a patio that gave on a garden which ended in an arbor beyond which was a pool. So royal was the air, however, and so sweet and heavy the music of birds, and the cawing and barking of Her falcons and greyhounds, that She had no concern for gossip. Who would care to carry such a tale? Her body servants were not only eunuchs, plump as geese from rich food, but silent as fish. For they were also without their tongues — a considerable cruelty, to be certain, but done, I learned later, not to silence their speech, although it did, but

by order of Usermare so they could not lick Her. Indeed, if it would not have made them too hideous in appearance, He would have cut off their lips as well. Of course, He did not protect Himself altogether. Once, later, She whispered to me, "They have marvelous fingers, these Nubians."

I speak of such matters, but by now the desire aroused in me was like a fire that could melt a stone. As I stood before Her, trembling, all but flinging myself and my seed in all directions at once, a fire in my stick, and honey in my bowels, my mind was aflame with the stories She had told, and I had to seize myself at the brink before the cream of my loins was shining on Her queenly face. But I had another desire now, large as Usermare Himself. It was to fuck Her, fuck Her good, good and evil. She was murmuring, "Benben, benbenben," but with such little twists and stops of Her mouth, such a beat of Her breath that as I heard it, benben said all too many words, "Oh, *come forth* with Me, you little *God of evil*, you *fucker*, give Me your *obelisk*" — for that was also a *benben* — and then Her gown of woven-air was gone, and Her field was open before me, Her thighs like slim pillars, and Her altar wet with the passions of my tongue. "*Hath, bath, bath,*" She panted like a cat in heat, "Let us *fuck*, let us *fly*. Come into My *flame*, My *fire*, My *bath*, My *cunt*, come into My *snare*, enter My *sepulchre*, Oh, come deep into My *cemetery*, My *sma*, My little *cemetery*, *unite* with Me, *copulate* with Me, come to your *concubine*, O *heaven and earth*, *bath, bath, bath!*"

We kept looking at one another, She on Her back, I on my knees, and I drew into myself all I could remember of the most reverent moments I had known — anything to hold me from shooting every white arrow at once — I saw the solemnity of Bak-nekhon-su when he sacrificed the ram, and the grandeur of Usermare as He received the hands of the Hittites, and all such thoughts I took in upon my fires like smoke, my lust steaming on the hot stones of my will. I knew all the madness of the lion. "Would You like," I said to Her, my lips as thick as if they had been beaten, nay, scourged, "would You like my obelisk in You, Queen Hat-shep-sut?"

"In my *cunt*, yes, in My *weeping fish*, oh, speak to My *weeping fish*, enter My *mummy*, come into My *spell*, *work your oars*, work your *spell*, *slaughter* Me, *shet, shet, shet*, oh, come into My *plot*, come into my *ground*, come to My *pool*, yes, fuck your *Ka-t*, fuck your *cunt*."

Yet when I entered, Her breasts looking at me like the two eyes of the Two-Lands, all the reverence I had drawn into myself made me ache with a radiance equal to a rainbow in a storm. Having banked the fires of my balls, I entered Her with the solemnity of a priest who reads a service, and lay upon Her lips, but the lips of Her enclosure were so hot that my fires almost flamed over the river. Then all was calm again, and She was lying on Her back. My obelisk was floating on Her river. She made the sounds of a woman in birth, *aq* and *aqaq*, and yet with all the clarity of a greeting to enter, "*Aq*, please *enter*, come to My *sunrise*, come to My *sunset*, Oh, *aqaq*, *raid Me*, spy into My *entrance*, look on My *uba*, rest in My *Court*, *read the prayer*, rest in My *gate*. *Uba*, *uba* live in My *cave*, move in My *den*, *ri*, *ri*, *ri*, *mover of stone*, you are a *mover of stone*, *haa*, you *travel by sea*, be My *embarcation*, *haa*, My *entrance*. Oh," She said, going suddenly still, "do not *burst into flame*, do not *burn up*, *haa*, paddle away, *khenn* and *khennu*, oh, slip into My *snare*, *hem*, *hem*, *hem*, crush My *majesty*, *hu*, *hu*, *hu*, let it *rain*" — I heard it all. She sang of the beauties of my testicles (which She held with fingers that had learned the tongueless art of the Nubian) She governed me with words of power, with *heq* and *beha* and *hem*, and as She sang to me, I entered the Land of the Dead that was in all the life of Her, and felt like a noble. She kissed me on the side of my mouth with those lips that had brought royalty to the head of my cock, and our mouths were on one another and our tongues met like woven-air and I felt Her voice on my ear, "*Netchem* and *netchemu* and *netchemut*," She crooned, "Oh, what a merry fuck you are, *ri*, *ra*, *rirara*," and on Nefertiri's face was such tenderness that *rirara* rose in me and I could not enter enough into my *nefer* of my most beautiful Queen, my *nefer-her*, beautiful like rain in the fourth hour after rising, She was a Goddess, She was Her majesty, and She was shameless. *Tcham*, I fucked Her by Her youth, *Tcham*, *Tcham*, *Tcham*, by Her *Sceptre* and Her youth, and our hips moving together, She cried out, "*Shep*, *shep*, *shepit*, *shepit*, and all such words like *shepu* and *shepa* and *shepat*, Oh, *light*, oh, *radiance*, oh, *brightness*, oh, *blindness*, oh, *wealth* and *shame*, *vomit* and *shipwreck*, *shef*, *shef*, *shef*, ram into Me, *swell* into Me, give Me your *weapon*, give me your *power*, *shefesh*, *shefesh*, I have your *sword*, I have your *gift*, give Me your *evil*, give Me your *wealth*. *Khut*, *khut*, *khut*, *tehet*, *tehet*, *tehet*. Oh, by the *sacred backbone* of Osiris, give me *tcham*, *tcham*, *tcham*, *qef*, *qef*, *qef*, show Me to My *Ka*, *dead white*, *dead black*, I am a *fortress*, *ai*, *ai*, what *light*, what

splendor, go deeper, you obelisk, fuck Me into glory, take Me to flame, I am rich, oh, stop, I am fire and light, I am your filth, your offal, your devils, your friends, your guide, oh, good, good, good, give Me your benben, evil fucker, nek, nek, nekk, nekk, fuck me, slash me, murder me, aar, aar, aar, I am your lion, your bird, your lock of hair, your sin, I come, oh, I come, I come forth, I am the Pharaoh."

And even as I was rising into a celestial city by a field of golden reeds, there to know a change as great as death itself, I heard the deep sounds of the bowels and the high sounds from the wind in my throat, the cries of my heart roaring in the water rising in me, and I flung myself out to fly to the heavens, or crash on the rocks, and saw the legions of the Land of the Dead and a myriad of faces, all the damned and perfected souls that Nefertiri could command, and rammed into the last gate of Her womb with the moan and groan of a peasant cock, the radiance of Amon blazing in me like the Hidden Sun of my mother's belly, and She rebounded beneath like a beast, Her limbs storming over mine with the strength of Usermare as I was borne aloft, but not by Her so much as by the wrath of my Pharaoh Who lifted me high like a feather over the flame, and slammed me down like a rock, then gave me another blow and another blow of Her queenly cavern, my tomb. I gave out within Her while the storm still blew, and She washed over me. She came out of every great space that Usermare had left in Her. "She was much more powerful than myself."

Saying these last words aloud, my great-grandfather Menenhetet fell from his chair to the ground, and there his body began to shake. His head rapped on the marble of the floor. Out of this seizure, he continued to speak, but now it was in the voice of Ptah-nem-hotep.

And as I heard the tones of my good King, Ramses the Ninth, so did the limbs of my great-grandfather quiet, and his body turn still. But the voice continued to speak out of his face, cultured and noble, weary and bemused as Ptah-nem-hotep Himself.

pp 174-181

2514

38

Mary Magdalene

That night I fasted. The people of Jerusalem who greeted me on my path called me King, but they did not know that my kingdom, should I find it, would be in heaven. They were looking for a monarch who would restore the greatness we had known in Israel under King David.

The dawn was cool, and I, feeling restored, was ready to go again to the Temple and sit beneath a sacred tree. I would teach.

But on the road that went by the Mount of Olives, Pharisees stood in my path, and with them was a woman. They said: "Master, this woman was taken in adultery. She was

caught in the very act. The Law commands that she be stoned. What will you say?"

I knew that they would look to accuse me of leniency toward sinners. Therefore I gave my eyes neither to the woman nor to them. "You shalt not commit adultery," I said. "Whoever looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart." These words were for the young men among them whose eyes reflected their delight that they could stare openly at this woman taken in adultery; I also knew that their thoughts would soon provide idle hands with other forms of delight. To myself, I thought: If thy hand offend thee, cut it off.

This woman before me must have within her every filth and effluence of the Devil's spew, fornication being the most powerful instrument of the Devil. So these Pharisees stood confidently before me, certain that I would find a way to pardon her and thereby admit that I was ready to traffic with whores. But I did no more than stoop down to the earth. And with my finger I wrote in the dust as though I had not heard them.

Their minds were rich with calculation. They knew that to an Essene, unseemly fornication leads directly to the Fire. They would know how much I had learned from the scrolls about the perils of an unclean woman. Indeed, they had read the same scrolls. I remembered what was written of Jezebel in the Second Book of Kings; this Jezebel, a princess, had been thrown down from the high

window of a tower, and her blood spattered upon the wall; courtiers rode horses over her and left her underfoot. When the king saw this, he said, "Bury this cursed woman, for she is a king's daughter." But they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. So they came and told him and he said, "This is the word of the Lord: 'Dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel and the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the field.'"

Now, I hardly dared to look upon this woman whom the Pharisees had brought to me. Instead, I continued to write with my finger in the sand. If I did not know what I wrote, so I did not let them see it either.

To myself, I whispered from the book of Proverbs: "The lips of a strange woman are honey and her mouth is smoother than oil, but the other end is as bitter as wormwood, as sharp as a two-edged sword. Her ways are loose. So do her feet take her down to death, those same feet once so swift in running after mischief."

I did not look at her. Peter had come to sit beside me on the ground, and he unrolled the scroll that he carried with him to read when we would rest, and he always carried the scroll, even if he read with great difficulty.

Yet he was close to my thoughts, for he pointed to a passage with his stout finger, twice as thick as one of mine, and in the old Hebrew tongue whispered: "It says: 'On account of a whorish woman is a man brought to a piece of

bread.' " When I nodded to go on, he whispered further:
" 'An adulterous woman eateth and wipeth her mouth and
sayeth, "I have done no wickedness." ' "

I kept nodding in order to keep myself from stealing a look upon this woman. To myself I recited the words of Ezekiel: " 'The Babylonians came to the harlot Aholibah and took her into the bed of love, and they defiled her and she was polluted with them so she discovered her nakedness, yet she did multiply her whoredoms for she doted upon men whose issue is like the issue of horses.' "

Despite myself, I gazed at last upon the woman taken in adultery.

As I feared, she was beautiful. The bones of her face were delicate, and her hair flowed down her back. With art, she had painted her eyes. She was gentle even as her mouth was proud and foolish.

My abhorrence of fornication had filled my years with thoughts of lust. I had suffered the ravages of unspent fury. But now I heard the soft voice of a spirit. Was her angel searching for mercy? I was offered a vision of this woman in the fumes of sin. And with a stranger! Even so, she was a creature of God. She might be near the Lord in ways I could not see, even—could it be?—in the wallow of fornications with strangers. Was she, then, so different from the Son of Man? He too must be close to all strangers. Yes, she could even be close to God all the while that the hands of the Devil embraced her body. Her heart could be

one with God even as her body was close to the Devil.

So when these Pharisees, having been as silent and patient as fishermen, now asked me again, saying, "Moses and the Law command us. Such a woman should be stoned. What do you say?" I lifted myself up and spoke not only to my disciples but to the circle of scribes and Pharisees. I said: "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off." When they looked at me, I told them: "It is better to enter the other life maimed than to have two hands to take into hell." Then I saw fear in their eyes. "If your eye offend thee," I told them, "pluck it out. It is better to enter the Kingdom of God and see only with the eye that is left than have both eyes look into the flames. In hell-fire, the worm that eats at your flesh does not die." I was amazed. I felt cleansed of disturbance toward this woman, and by my own words. So I also said: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

A tumult arose. It was so sudden and of such force that I nearly lost my balance and had to stoop once more and write again in the dust as if I cared more for what my finger could say to the earth than for all of them.

Soon, and with each moment, their fury began to abate. Before long it had fled. Now they were pained by their own misdeeds.

I saw them go away. They left one by one, commencing with the oldest man among them. (He had, perhaps, the most sin to support.) The last to leave was young, and may

have been near to innocent. I was alone. Even Peter had departed. Only the woman stood before me.

I could not bring myself to look into her eyes, then I did. In so doing, I still could not see her eyes. Instead, like a dream offered by Satan, I heard a verse from the Song of Songs. "The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of a master's hand" were the words I heard, "and thy navel is like a round goblet." I told myself that I was in the presence of evil angels. For I could find my own evil, and it was rich and dark and begging to be cast forth from me. And these evil angels were so powerful that I knew I must be wary of the beauty of this woman.

So I chose to speak to her in the words of the prophet Ezekiel. I said: "Behold your sin. It is written: 'I will raise up thy lovers, and they shall come against thee with chariots and wheels, and they shall deal furiously with thee; they shall take away thy nose and ears and thy residue shall be devoured by fire. They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes and take away thy fair jewels. Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease immediately and thy whoredoms be brought out of the land of Egypt, so that thou shall not remember Egypt anymore.'"

And this harlot, whose eyes were as purple as the last hour of evening, said gently, "I do not wish to lose my nose."

I said, "Woman, where are your accusers? Has no man accused you?"

She said, and her voice was modest, "No man is here to accuse me, Lord."

I said, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go!"

Yet it was not enough. For within this woman remained every echo of her whoredom. So I said: "Where can you go? Are you not bound still to fornication with strangers?"

She replied: "If you do not condemn me, then do not pass judgment. Without the flesh there is no life."

She was vain. She was strong. And I could see that she was wed to the seven powers of the Devil's wrath and to their offspring: the seven demons. So I must attempt to cast out these seven powers and demons. I knew they would come forth slowly. And indeed, when they did come forth, it was one by one, and they clawed at all good spirit between us. Some were sly and some were lewd, and more than one was hideous—seven powers and demons.

The first was Darkness and its demon was treachery. Indeed, I was to realize even as I named each one that I had learned more from Satan than he wished to tell me. So I knew that Desire was the second power and pride would be its demon. And the third was Ignorance, with a huge appetite for the meat of swine, a gluttonous demon. Love of Death was the fourth power and its demon could be no less than the lust to eat another. For nowhere is our knowledge of death closer to us than when devouring flesh from a fellow human. The fifth power sought Whole

Domain and its demon worked to defile all spirit; the good spirit that had come to this woman and myself was much buffeted as this demon came forth. And the sixth power was Excess of Wisdom. Its demon had the urge to steal a soul. Of them all, the last power was the most fearful. It was the Wisdom of Wrath; its demon was the lust to lay waste a city. Such were the seven powers and demons I drew forth from her. Only then could I say: "Go and sin no more." And she left.

Afterward I would learn that her name was Mary and she was from Magdala in Tiberias, a city where many Jews had died in war against the Romans. Their bones now lay under the foundations of the buildings that had been erected by the victors. So this woman Mary Magdalene had committed adultery upon the ground of our martyrs. Yet I did not regret what I had done. For by half she was gentle, and that half belonged to God. Nor did I know that I would see her again. Yet I did.

1200 B.C.

2522

a.k.a. Bosnia?

The Battle of Kadesh

P327-377

Start

"I was trying to decide the worth of my news. Would He be ready to hear? I was not, however, to see our Pharaoh so quickly. There were ten officers waiting to speak to Him, and I, full of the most unusual uneasiness, went walking around the camp with a void in my torso as if my stomach had died.

λ "In those days, we still made camp in the same manner as in the age of Thutmose the Great. So, on this morning, the pavilion of the King was erected in the middle of the officers' tents, and the royal chariots were on all four sides. This square was surrounded by our cattle and provenance, and infantrymen were placed to the outside, their tall shields planted vertically on the ridge of an earthwork dug the night before. In that way, we were like a fortress of four walls of shields, and you even entered through gates, except they were not real gates, just the road and a platoon of infantrymen either side of that opening. Inside, you could stroll about, and visit your friends. If not for my message, it might have been good to feel like a soldier again. On ordinary days little made me happier than to be inside a camp, even if many did nothing but snore, or sharpen the blade of a dagger for one hour and then another.

"On this day, in the expectation that we might still be marching into battle — what life had an army without rumors? — many a Nubian put on his helmet, and would not take it off. These blacks, some in leopard skins, some wearing long white skirts with an orange sash slung from the right shoulder, made quite a sight. The blacks liked to be seen, and I watched five of them arguing in one place, and ten sitting so quietly in another that their silence was stronger than clamor, curious soldiers about whom we charioteers disagreed, some saying the Nubians would prove brave in combat, others said no. I knew they were strong, but I thought of them as horses, brave until frightened, and much in love with their plumage. Like horses, the Nubians would put at least one yellow feather at the top of their leather helmets. What a contrast they made to the Syrians who often had bald heads, no helmets, and big black beards.

"About the time I realized it would be afternoon before my King might see me, all discomfort went away, and I relaxed in the sun with other charioteers and told of my adventures, keeping the best to myself, and walked back and forth through the inner and outer square, the goodness of Ra warming my flesh, so that at last I was down to no more than my sandals and a loincloth, lolling about like half the soldiers on that ground, and the day grew lazy. I stopped for a while at the shop of the Royal Carpenter to tell him

of the loss of my cart, but he was too busy to care, for he was putting together a chariot from two broken buggies, and promised to do better for me than that, since his workmen could return you six chariots ready for battle out of seven half-dismembered carcasses, and I listened to him while he stood in the middle of his shop with chariot wheels in one stack, the spokes for wheels in another pile, and heaps of broken parts on the ground. I did not know how he would ever be able to move.

"Then I watched other infantrymen carrying paniers of water up from the ford to a large leather bag hung from three sticks in the center of camp, and horses being walked to the blacksmith shop. I watched soldiers drinking wine, and a few were wrestling, and two others led a couple of cows to the field kitchen. I smelled the sweat of the day and the odor of roasting meat. Two of the soldiers drinking wine began to skirmish with daggers. They had been doing it for a long time and knew how to lunge at each other, then stop short. A Sherden, sweating like a fountain in his red and blue woolen cape, was beating a donkey who had gotten his nose into a bag of provisions. The food so excited the beast that he promptly got an erection. The Sherden kept beating on him and the donkey kept scampering away but never lost his excitement, nor took his head out of the bag, not while I watched. Next to him, another donkey, excited by all this, was rolling in the dust.

"Most of the men were sleeping. The afternoon grew lazier still, and I could feel the fatigue of all the days of the march that had brought these troops this far, and then felt my own fatigue, and went back to a tent I was sharing with other charioteers and fell asleep on a ground-cloth, only to be awakened by word the King would see me now. In bewilderment, still dreaming of forests and thieves, I stood up, threw water on my face from a bowl, and went over to the King's pavilion. I had been dreaming of the Hit-tites and saw a road where they planted sharpened stakes, and Egyptian soldiers were dying on them. Slowly in my dreams, bodies slid down the stakes. My bowels were cold. I took a slug of wine from a skin, and that made me sweat. Looking like a man whose insides must belong to others, I entered the great tent of Ramses the Second.

"It was as much a fine house as a tent. He had not only His sanctuary for prayer, and His bedroom, but a dining room as well, and then a great room for anyone to whom He would give audience. On this day many officers and Generals and the Prince, Amen-

khep-shu-ef, were with Him, yet when I entered He was so impatient that He began to speak before I had finished touching my head to the ground. 'Would you,' He asked, 'give up the richest province of your lands without striking a blow?'

"My Lord, I would try to fight like the Son-of-Ra."

"Yet, some here tell Me that the King of Kadesh is two days' march on the other side, and dares not come nearer. He is a fool. I will let all know his shame. The stone I put up to celebrate my victory will show that the name of the King of Kadesh is equal to what you see between a whore's thighs!"

"It was hot in the tent from the sun coming down on the other side of the leather, and hot again from forty officers' bodies, but the greatest heat came from my Pharaoh. He was like a fire on a hot day in the desert.

"Who says he will not defend Kadesh?" I asked.

"My Pharaoh pointed to two shepherds sitting quietly in a corner. By the dust of their long robes, they looked as if they had been traveling with their animals for a hundred days. Now, with smiles that showed their teeth — the teeth that were left — they bowed seven times. Then the older spoke, but in his own language. The Overseer-of-Both-Languages, one of our Generals, exchanged the Bedouin's words for ours, but only after each breath the shepherd took, and he took many breaths.

"O Beloved Ramses, Adored-by-Truth,' I heard, 'does not the Good and Great God know happiness when He cuts off the head of His enemy? Does that not give Him more delight than a day of pleasure?'

"I saw my Pharaoh smile.

"The shepherd spoke in a long slow grave voice as deep and full of echo as any prophet, 'O You-who-are-the-Majesty-of-Horus-and-Amon-Ra, You-Who-are-firm-on-His-horse-and-beautiful-in-His-chariot, know that we have come to Your throne of gold' — and indeed my Usermare-Setpenere was sitting on a small chair of solid gold — 'to speak for our families. They are among the greatest of the great families who are sworn to Metella, King of Kadesh and chief of the Hittites. Yet our families say that Metella is our chief no longer, because his blood has become the color of water. His force is to Yours as the eye of the rabbit to the eye of the bull. Metella sits in the land of Aleppo and cannot find the courage to march to Kadesh. So our families have sent us to You, as a pledge of their desire to become Your subjects.'

" 'I am honored,' said Usermare-Setpenere, 'because I know you tell the truth. He who does not tell the truth before Me is a man who will soon lose the limb that makes children. Behold, he must look upon his lost parts with both eyes before his eyes are sent to join the lost parts.'

" 'Never had I heard my Pharaoh speak that way, but then I had never felt such heat come off His body. 'I believe these men are telling the truth,' He said, 'how dare they lie?' But in the same anger, He turned to me and said, 'Do you believe them?' When I was silent, He laughed. 'You don't? You believe they are so brazen as to deceive your Pharaoh?'

" 'I believe them,' I said. 'I think they tell the truth that is the truth of their family. Yet it is several days since they have left. While they have been making their journey to us, so may the armies of the King of Kadesh have also been traveling. O You-of-the-Two-Great-Houses,' I said, so frightened that I also struck my head seven times to the ground, 'in the dawn, this morning, as I descended from the hills, I saw to the north, near Kadesh, an army.'

" 'You say an army?'

" 'I saw the light of an army. I saw the light that is made by lances, and swords, and the polished metal on shields.'

" 'But you did not see the swords?' asked the Prince Amen-khep-shu-ef. 'Only the light?'

" 'Only the light,' I admitted.

" 'The light is from the river that flows around the walls of Kadesh,' said the Prince. A good many of the Generals laughed. When our Pharaoh did not, however, they were silent. Now I knew why the heat that came from my Pharaoh was so strange. Hera-Ra was not by His side. I remembered then how much of the heat used to come from the beast. Yes, the Generals were now silent before Usermare-Setpenere the way once they had been silent before Hera-Ra.

" 'On your travels, what did you hear about the King of Kadesh?' I now was asked.

" 'That Metella hides in the forest near the city,' I said quickly. 'That he has a large army. That he will come on us suddenly.'

" 'It is untrue,' roared the Pharaoh. Under the black and green of His cosmetic, I saw how the whites of His eyes were red. 'It is untrue,' He repeated, 'yet I believe it is true.' He glared at me as if I had taunted Him.

" 'A discussion began whether to break camp in the dawn and

march to Kadesh with the first two divisions, or, whether — and here I could not keep silent and was soon in the debate — it would be wise to wait one more day. Let the last two divisions come through the gorge. 'Then,' I said, 'we can march onto the great plain with a horn to the left and a horn to the right.' I said 'horn' because I remembered that on the day we traveled to His tomb, Usermare had told me how Thutmose the Great never said 'wing' or 'flank.' He spoke of His Armies as if He had a head and two horns, a Mighty Bull.

"My Pharaoh nodded. He looked into Himself and saw His Chariot at the center of a great army on a great field with two horns, and I thought He would give the order to wait. But Prince Amen-khep-shu-ef also knew His father, and said, 'On that great field we may wait for another week, while the King of Kadesh does not come. Our men will fight with each other. They will desert. We will look foolish, and our horn will crumble.'

"The Pharaoh nodded to that as well. Now, the council was concluded. He gave the order. We would break camp in the dawn. That evening, Usermare-Setpenere stood on the cage that held His lion. One night in the forests of Lebanon, Hera-Ra had eaten one of our soldiers. So a cage had been built for him next morning. Now our Pharaoh spoke to all of us from the top of that cage, while Hera-Ra roared beneath.

" 'The battle of Megiddo was won by the Great Pharaoh, Thutmose the Third. The King, Himself, led the way of His troops. He was mighty at their head like a flame. So will I be mighty at your head.' The soldiers cheered. I knew again that I was part of an army, for the evening was red once with its own light, and red again with our cheers. 'Thutmose went forth to slay barbarians,' said our King, 'and none was like Him. He brought back all the enemy Princes even though their chariots were wrought with gold.' We cheered again. Each time our Pharaoh spoke of gold, we cheered. 'All fled before Thutmose,' said our King. 'In such fear did they run that their clothing was left behind.' A great snickering laugh huge as a river of mud came out of us. 'Yes, they abandoned their chariots of gold and silver' — we gave a sigh like the whisper of moonlight on water — 'and the people of Megiddo pulled their soldiers over the wall by what was left of their skin. In this hour, the armies of Thutmose could have captured the city.' Here, our King paused. 'But they did not,' He said. 'Our soldiers gave all their attention to the plunder left on the field. So they lost the treasures that were in

the city. The men of Megiddo were stretched on the field like fish, but the army of Thutmose picked at their bones like gulls.' A groan came up from us. 'Do not act,' said Ramses, 'like gulls. The city that was not taken on that day had to be besieged for a year. The army of Thutmose had to work like slaves to cut down forests so that they could build walls to approach the walls of Megiddo. And the work was not done until all of the wall of Megiddo was surrounded by the wall of Thutmose. It was a year's work. The city starved, but in that time, they also hid their gold. It was lost to us. No good slaves were taken. Only the dead and the plague-ridden greeted the armies of Thutmose. So I say to you that we will fight a great battle, but none of you will take plunder until I give My word! It is Asiatic hands I want to see on the pile, not Egyptian.'

"We cheered. We cheered with fear in our throats and disappointment in our loins at the thought of less plunder, but we cheered, and the lion roared. Next morning at dawn after a night when few of us could sleep, we broke camp and crossed the ford at Shabtuna. Although the water in the deep places came to our chest, not a man nor a horse was drowned. Disturbed, however, in their nests at the riverbank, beetles gathered like clouds and came between us and the sun. The swarm of their flight was so thick that it left us in shadow. No one saw a good sign in the rising of these beetles.

"Once we were across, we formed our ranks and set out on the great hard plain in the valley of the Orontes that leads to Kadesh. Its soil is as baked as a parade ground. May I say that our horses and our chariot wheels rode over the bodies of all the beetles that had tired of flight. We left the mark of our route as much behind us as if we had trampled through a field of berries. Beetles were in our hair and clothing like a pestilence.

"Again I could feel the impatience of my Ramses. He was in the vanguard of the march. His charioteers, taken together with His Household Guard of the strongest Sherdens and Nubians, giants all, had, counting everyone, not five hundred men. We were certainly in the van. There was a clear distance behind us and the first troops of the Division of Amon. Worse. Looking back from a rise, I could see how far we had marched this morning across the plain. But the troops of Ra were just crossing the ford. It would be half a day before the Division of Prah could follow. As for Set, those men were still jammed in the gorge. They would be no use to any of us until night.

"All the same, I was happy to be in the van. The dust was less.

Clouds rose from the hard-baked clay of this plain that were thick enough to drive away the beetles, and such clouds drifted back on Amon and its five thousand marching men. It would have been like passing through smoke to ride with that division.

"How we must have been visible from Kadesh! Through the dust, we could see it in the distance where the sky met the hills. The city was not an hour's ride away on a fast horse, but would take us until afternoon, I knew, because now we were winding through lightly forested rises, and could see ahead no more and so could not go forward without pause, but had to send out scouts, then wait for their return.

"I was carrying a weight in my chest like the heart of a dead man. Yet, I felt neither weak nor spineless, but even in the midst of my oppression, alert, as if throngs were waiting inside me for the battle to begin. I tried to think of what I would do if I were Metella, the King of Kadesh, and where in these woods would I choose to attack the Household Guard of the Pharaoh so that I could capture my great Ramses? Then it seemed to me I would prefer to wait until half the division of Amon was past, or even half the Division of Ra, so that I could strike at a large force when it was stretched out on the trail of the forest as long and vulnerable as a worm you could cut in half. Still, the effort of trying to think as if I were someone other than myself, especially a foreign King, made me know vertigo, and I supposed I was living with a fearful gift from the secret whore of the King of Kadesh. Maybe I was not trying to think like this Metella so much as I was indeed living in the thoughts that came from his heart. If that were so then our vanguard would go forward untouched and the Division of Amon as well. It would be on Ra that the thunder would fall.

"My fear was replaced by woe. At this instant, we were in no danger, yet in a greater danger. I could never tell this to Usermare-Setpenere. He was riding with His son Amen-khep-shu-ef in my place. That left me as a driver for no one better than the Overseer-of-Both-Languages. This fellow was a General called Utit-Khent, but, of course, this name, 'Mistress of Expeditions,' was only an army joke. He was said to have a rectum like the mouth of a bucket. So I knew again my Pharaoh's anger. He would have me share a chariot with such a man. Of course, He was now listening to the advice of His son. So soon as He discovered the power of my thoughts to reach into the thoughts of our enemy, so might I be His driver again. In the meantime, Utit-Khent babbled along about the dust, but in

so clever a way I began to laugh for, lo, he pointed out there were Gods for every fish and cat, and the God of beetles was a Great God, but no God ever bothered to inhabit the dust. You could not name such a God. He was harmless, this General, a clown for other Generals, he commanded no men, and had been a flunky for Prince Amen-khep-shu-ef, but I had to wonder if this poor Utit-Khent had once been a strong soldier but had grown weak serving the father of Usermare. Maybe, that Pharaoh Seti had held him by the hair.

"We were not on a bad trail, indeed it was more like a road wide enough for one chariot to pass another. That was comfortable and it was cool in the forest under the heat of midday, but none of us were comfortable — Kadesh was too near. Besides, you had to wonder where a squadron of chariots could strike at us. While the forest reached to the road in most places, still we also crossed fields, and an army could hide at their edge. Five thousand men could charge down on five hundred, yet now my good King, impatient at delay, did not bother anymore to send out scouts. He must have believed the gates to Kadesh were open.

"Into the early afternoon we traveled, and passed another wood, and many a cultivated field, even saw a farmer or two who ran off at the sight of us, but we kept moving with the Orontes at our right, and the river was shallow here and slow-moving, and had several fords wide enough for an army, if this was where Metella wished to attack from the other bank. Still, nothing happened, and we came around a turn in our road and saw before us, there in full view to the north, the walls and towers of Kadesh, and no Hittite army was drawn up in front of it. There was nothing before us but the river which wound around its walls to the left. We had been marching so long to reach this town, so many days on the Nile and in the desert and the mountains, that I think my good King could not stop, not yet, but must keep going while He passed the city on our right hand. Soon, the walls would be behind us, and here, as if confused by the absence of any soldiers, or even any face in the windows of the towers of Kadesh, in this silence of the hills where the largest sound was the groaning of our chariot wheels, not a large sound, for we hardly strained on the level ground, Ramses the Second finally gave the order, and in a thin wood with many small fields and scattered trees, we halted beside the river in a place too steep to cross. The three open sides to our square that looked out on the land were quickly faced off with our shields, and an earth-works to support the shields was begun by the Nubians right about

the Pharaoh's pavilion. Here we waited in silence, no sound but the digging. The Division of Amon soon followed, and built a larger square around our square, which enabled the King's Guard to move back from the Orontes. Now, the Division of Amon had the river for a fourth side. There was still not a sound from the town.

"Around us you could hear the echo of the five thousand men of Amon digging away, although with no great effort. In another hour we might be moving again. So they carried on with the ease of men unharnessing their horses, feeding their beasts and their own mouths, and in all this unyoking of the provision trains, there was a feeling of safety at the size of our numbers. Only I felt oppressed in my breath. Even though I did not want to fight beside Utit-Khent, still I worked on the chariot I might yet have to ride with him, grinding the bronze rim of the wheels with a rare hard stone I carried in my leather bag until the edge was sharp as a knife. That would not last for long, but, oh, what cruelty a wheel, freshly honed, could commit on the body of a fallen man. All the while, I continued to feel heavy in my lungs. When we came to this camping ground, I had seen no sign of another army, no litter whatsoever, and the red pine needles of the forest floor were smooth. Yet they did not look smooth so much as swept back into order. I had the feeling an army had been here before us, even this morning, and wondered how easily pine needles could conceal their traces. Besides, I could smell the God of the pine trees and He was almost as strange as the God who came with the myrrh from Punt.

"Men kept coming to the Pharaoh's pavilion with little pieces of equipment. Here was a wagon-spoke unfamiliar to us, or a broken leather cinch with a strange-smelling oil. More and more did a sentiment become powerful to me that the forest was stale. Then I thought if I were Metella, yes, I would stay on this north side of Kadesh well hidden by the forest, even as Usermare-Setpenere moved forward from the south. Only when He came up to the walls, would I cross the river to the east and hide on the other side to keep the city between us. Then, if He came even further north to this place, so would I move altogether to the south and still be hidden by the walls of Kadesh. That way I could cross the river in the place where there were many fords and strike into the middle of the division of Ra, there in that open field south of the city.

"Even as I was considering such maneuvers, an outcry began in our camp. Two Asiatics had just been brought in by scouts, their faces covered with blood. Soldiers in the middle of cooking a meal

stared as the captors led these prisoners to the pavilion of the Pharaoh. Then came many screams and the sound of the flail. By the time I entered the King's tent, the backs of the prisoners were as bloody as their features, and I was glad I could not see their expression.

"Each bite of the flail whipped loose a piece of skin large as your palm. Usermare-Setpenere now pulled off a strip from the prisoner's shoulder like a ribbon of papyrus, and threw it to the ground. Then He said: 'Speak the truth.' That Hittite could not have known a word of our language, but he knew the voice, he knew the eyes that looked at him. The light from those eyes was as full of flame as the sun. So to Usermare-Setpenere, by way of Utit-Khent, he said, 'O Son of Ra, spare my back.'

" 'Where is your miserable King of the Hittites?'

" 'Behold,' cried the Asiatic in his language, and 'behold' said our Overseer-of-Both-Languages in our language, 'Metella the King of Kadesh has gathered many nations in great numbers. His soldiers cover the mountains and valleys.'

"He continued to speak even as Amen-khep-shu-ef was twisting this man's arm behind his neck. I thought his shoulder would dislocate, for even the bleeding stopped, so white did his back become from the pressure. Yet the scout said it all, every word, waiting each few words for Utit-Khent to express what he had said, all the while swallowing his groans. Now, Usermare-Setpenere raised His sword. 'Where is Metella now?'

"He could hold out no longer: 'O my Lord, Metella is waiting on the other bank of the river.'

"I thought the sword would fall. It hovered. Instead, our King let go of the Hittite, and turned to us. 'See what you have told Me,' He cried out, 'see how you have spoken of the King of Kadesh as a coward who flees.' Now I thought He would take the sword to His son. The Prince struck His head to the ground seven times, and must have had many thoughts, for when He looked up, He said, 'My Lord, let Me ride back to tell the Division of Ptah. We will need them.' When our King gave a slow nod, as if forced to agree despite His wrath, the Prince was out of the tent, and at once, I suppose, on His way, although none of us were able to know what another did, for in the next moment, chaos fell upon us. I heard a far-off din, a nearer uproar, and then the voice of a hundred horses, a most fearful clamor, a pandemonium, the shock and crash of chariots. We did not know that the shattered legions of the Division of Ra,

horses without chariots and charioteers without horses, were now running our way, infantrymen chasing wagon trains pulled at a gallop by horses without drivers, and all of this disorder came down on us. Only later would I learn that the Division of Ra had been cut in half even as I had foreseen it, there in the road where they were long indeed like a worm. Now the rear of Ra was running back to the Division of Ptah, and the front half was on us in their rout, some already falling under the first chariots of the first Hit-tites, while the survivors were staggering up to the shields and earthworks of the outer square of Amon. The armies of Metella, like a serpent of the Very Green, had washed right up to the shore on which we stood. In this clamor, we saw the sky become as dark as the metal in an infantryman's dagger.

NINE



"I COULD tell you," said Menenhetet to our Pharaoh, and to my mother and father, "of how we spoke of this battle later, when each man could tell it to his own advantage. Then, it was only by comparing the lies that you could begin to look for the truth. But that was later. At this moment, there was nothing but noise, and much confusion. Yet I do not find it hard to remember how I felt through all of that long afternoon to follow when so many of us were nearer to the dead than the living, because I never felt so alive. I can still see the spear that passes to the left of my shoulder, and the sword that misses my head. Once more — it is as near to me as falling from my bed in a dream — I am thrown out from the Pharaoh's Chariot by the shock of a lance against my shield. It was the greatest battle of all wars, and in my four lives I never heard of anything like it. Of course, my mind did not speak to me on that day as on others, and it is true that the most unusual moments and the most unimportant passed equally like separate strangers, but I remember that in the instant when the clamor first beat about our camp, Usermare-Setpenere turned to me, and said, 'Take your shield and ride in My Chariot,' and I who had dreamed of this moment down the Nile, in the dust of Gaza, and through the mysteries of Tyre, could only nod my head and think that the work I had spent in sharpening the wheels of the chariot of Utit-Khent was work worse than lost, for Utit-Khent would probably cut his own leg off falling out of the chariot, and such is the shock of battle where events become as shattered as broken rocks whose pieces fly in all directions, so I was seeing fragments of what was yet to happen, and Utit-Khent certainly did fall out of his chariot, and his leg was mangled by the wheel ^{that} sharpened even as his horses in panic ran over him.

"As I say, all I could feel at the instant was that I must now

find my leather bag and my stone and begin to sharpen the wheels of His Chariot. But even to have such a thought was stupid. A squad of soldiers — the Royal Guard of the Chariot-of-the Mighty-Bull — were forever polishing the gold and silver filigree, and working many royal stones on the treads — you could lose your finger running it along His wheels. So I climbed up instead on the cage of the lion to get a better view of all that was happening about us. Immediately, Hera-Ra started roaring beneath like a drunken beggar, hooking at his cage so furiously I almost fell off. Standing on those slats, the beast thumped my feet with his tail and shoulders and head, while I looked in all four directions, my organs in an uproar to match a confusion of sights multitudinous as the foam of the Very Green. I could certainly see the King's square surrounded on all four sides, for the larger square built in such haste by the soldiers of Amon was now lost. Beyond our square was a chaos and a carnage. The Division of Amon were fleeing their meals, their games, their tents, their wagon trains and their animals. While our inside square stood fast for the Pharaoh, outside I could see no more than a few of ours to face hordes of Hittites overrunning us so quickly they were caught already in their own rush. These Asiatics were not riding in one careful rank behind another of charioteers in perfect order the way we Egyptians like to advance, no, just a mob of hundreds of chariots, three men in each, wearing odd yellow hats, nor did they fight with bow and sword but tried to run everything down with their axes. In this din, our chariots, at least those still fighting, kept weaving in and out, our charioteers, some even at this hour with the reins around their waist, were pulling bows, quick as sparrows fighting boars. The enemy was so big and clumsy that I even saw two Hittite chariots crash into each other, three men in one catapulted out even as the other three were hurled to the ground. Yet over every hill, through these thin woods, came more ranks of Hittite chariots, some at a run, some at a walk, and then I saw the nearest thirty or forty, maybe a squadron, riding at a gallop toward the King's square itself. They charged our breastworks, up and over, and nearly all spilled. Those who did not, landed among the strongest of the Pharaoh's Sherdens who seized these Asiatic horses by the bridle, and held their footing long enough to turn the horses' necks and halt the chariot, at which moment, other Sherdens ripped the horses' bellies with their daggers. Then they pulled off the Hittites. Of the thirty who charged into our square, not one was left, and I, like a boy quick with excitement on

the cage of Hera-Ra, had only an instant to see that the Pharaoh, His head down, His eyes closed, was still praying. Out of His mouth I heard these words: 'In the Year Five of My Reign, third month of the third season, on this Day Nine of Epiphi, under the majesty of Horus, I, Ramses Meri-Amon, the Mighty Bull, Beloved of Maat, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Son of Ra Who am given life forever' — so I heard Him call on all His names, and even as a shaduf lifts its pail of water up the hill, so was my Pharaoh pumping up His blood as though the very water of the Land of the Dead must be lifted into His heart until He feared no death, and the dead as well as the living would listen: 'I, Who am mighty in valor, strong as a bull, Whose might is in My Limbs like fire' — so He kept speaking while on the battleground of woods and fields outside our square I saw a horse go over backward with an arrow in its neck, down on its own chariot with its own three Hittites, and one of our charioteers with a short spear in his chest fell forward onto the shaft between his two horses. On their backs, everywhere, were dead men staring at the sky. The nearest was farther away than I could throw a stone, yet, brilliant as a bird's eye was his eye. I could see it. Near him lay another dead man clutching his genitals. Then I saw a man whose arm was caught in the hub of a chariot wheel, and a Hittite came along and hacked at his head with an axe. All the while, most of our army was running into the woods. I could not believe in what panic were the men of Amon.

"Now my Pharaoh had finished praying and He unhooked the door to the cage of Hera-Ra who came out. Then, to my surprise, Usermare-Setpenere leaped into His Chariot on the driver's side. I, thereby, to the other, and He rode in a circle through our square, nearly striking some of our own men as He called, 'We are going to attack. We are going to attack.'

"Six chariots, seven, now eight, followed in our circle. Others saluted but did not move until the next time around. Now others joined, but not enough.

" 'Follow Me,' said Usermare-Setpenere, and with a force of twenty chariots, He rode at full speed to the southern side of our square, choosing the lowest place in the earth wall, and we drove over it and down the other side, banging against one another badly; but then we were on the field, Hittite chariots before us in every direction, and, when I dared to look behind, half of our force was still with us. The other half had not dared to make it over the wall. We were surrounded already, if you could speak in such a way

when our Pharaoh, having pumped the courage of the dead into every one of His limbs, not to speak of the force of Strength-of-Thebes and Maat-is-Satisfied, fastest horses of any land, and Hera-Ra bounding at our side, his roars louder than an avalanche of rock down a cliff, were, all of us, galloping through every bewilderment of battle so fast that none, not even our own men, could keep up with us, although some tried. The Hittites parted before our passage, as well as any poor Egyptians from Amon or Ra whom we passed, and for the length of a field, through a wood, and down another field, not one arrow was shot at us, not one did we shoot, and no Hittite came near, not man nor chariot — perhaps they were all afraid of the brilliance of the chariot of Usermare-Setpenere and the face of Hera-Ra, bounding beside us.

"Behind, like a tail that becomes so stretched the end must pull off, were our charioteers. I knew what it cost to keep up with the Pharaoh over rough ground, and only a few stayed with us now. When I dared to look, for I felt as if my good life depended on keeping eyes to the front, I could see how some of our men were surrounded by Hittites, and some had turned back, or were fighting their way back, and still my Ramses the Second galloped south, no one more happy, nobody so brave, nobody so handsome — He looked as if the sun shone out of His eyes. 'We'll break through,' He shouted, 'and find the troops of Ptah. We'll kill these fools when we come back,' and with that, we met a hundred Hittite chariots waiting in the next field.

"Now I saw more battle than a man could fight. Never will I be certain how many of our chariots were still with us, if any. For when our Ramses drove with His golden vehicle full-force into the center of these heavy Hittite carts with their three men, there was nothing for the next few minutes I saw whole. So I saw the spear that came at my shield and the axe that just missed my head. I saw Hera-Ra leap across three men of one chariot onto the horses of another. I saw him hanging upside-down with his muzzle on a horse's neck. Hidden from the arrows of the Hittite charioteers, he clung to the horse, his jaw on the blood of the stallion's throat, the claws of his hind legs opening the belly, until the horse stood up in such extremity of pain that his mate stood up too, both screaming, and they fell backward on their drivers, even as Hera-Ra leaped from the horse to a man and bit off an arm, or most of an arm, I could not believe what I saw, all from the side of my eye, between the movements of my shield, a hundred arrows seeming to come at

once, all at the Pharaoh, as if no one could think of the horses nor of me in view of His golden presence. Those arrows were wild, but not the ones I blocked. They came at us hard as birds flying full tilt into a wall, and their points came through the leather of my shield, evil as the nose of your enemy.

"All the while, Ramses the Second would draw His bow and loose an arrow at full gallop, swerve by one Hittite chariot, then another, and was so adept we could stop, wheel, then charge away to stop short again as chariots converged on ours. 'Your sword,' He shouted, and there, not moving, two of us against three on either side, we fought back to back with our swords against their six axes, only it was not so unequal as that, for Hera-Ra charged one chariot, then another, and with such bloody fury that others did not come near, and we were free again, we had broken through, we were on our way to the south once more, we could reach the Division of Prah, so we thought, so we shouted to each other, only to find another hundred Hittites facing us in still another phalanx.

"Sometimes a few of our own chariots caught up so we were not always alone, but five times we fought like this, five times we drove into a mass of men and horses so thick the only forest you saw was swords, armor, axes, horses, limbs, and chariots turning over. Vehicles raced by empty of riders, and ran into one another. The trees quivered. Ramses' great bow, which nobody but He could draw, had a force to drive its arrow through a man so hard it could knock him from the chariot to the ground, yet these sights I saw in fragments like the eye of a face on the shard of a pot. So, for instance, did I see a Hittite hold up a man who was expiring in the flood of a wound, while two others galloped away in a chariot without reins. The third Hittite had fallen off already. Many a soldier was trampled by horses or run over by wheels — I saw so many of those Hittite wheels with their eight spokes that I dreamed of them for years, foul dreams, the little wheels puckered as a strange anus, and there were sights full of folly: I even saw a Hittite attacking his own horse in harness; such was the fever that the fellow killed the beast with his axe. Maybe it had tried to run him down. I did not know, I never saw more, I was ducking a blow, sticking a lance, or reeling from the impact of the Pharaoh's body against me when He slammed our horses through a sharp turn, once I even fell off, landed on my feet and jumped up again. My lungs knew the fire of the Gods. I saw Hera-Ra leap at three men who stood motionless in

their chariot, transfixed by the loss of their horses. They were still looking at their useless reins as he clawed down on them.

"Loose horses were everywhere. I saw one on broken front legs, trying to rear, and a charioteer lay on the ground, holding the tail of this horse until the animal flopped around to bite him. Another man was all alone in his wagon, his horses walking in stupor with loose reins. Then the man fainted, and I saw him slide to the ground. To the other flank was a riderless horse trying to crawl into a fallen chariot. It was a madness. One pair of horses, stripped of all three men, tried to dash over a collision of other chariots, but stumbled, and the empty chariot catapulted overhead while the horses stampeded into the ground. I never heard such a scream come from animals before. The worst was a howl from a steed Usermare-Set-penere struck in the chest with an arrow when it tried to leap between our stallion and mare. Everywhere, beasts in panic were defecating as they ran. On it went. We would think we had broken through the Hittites only to see another phalanx to the south, and we would attack again, even break through, but on the sixth attempt, we saw a thousand Hittites coming toward us in orderly formation.

" 'It can't be done,' I said to Him, 'we can't get out!' He glared at me then as if I were the worst coward ever seen, and said, 'Strengthen your heart. I will lay them in the dust!' I looked at those thousand soldiers and at my King's face, and in it was the expression I have seen in the eyes of mad beggars when they believe they are sons of the Pharaoh, yes, my Ramses the Second could swear to destroy all who called themselves Hittites, and I could feel His certainty so powerfully that I believed in it myself, although in a different way, and I said, 'Let us return, my King, to Your Pavilion, and we will gather Your troops and fight and destroy these Hittites from there,' and on that word, He wheeled our horses and we went charging back to the north, back to the remnants of the King's square that was two hills, three fields, and I do not know how many small woods away.

"There were enemy everywhere, and none of our chariots to be seen, yet no Hittites came to intercept us. They were all too busy plundering the deserted camp of the Division of Amon. So we swept back into the King's square and heard the cheers of all the men who were left. Officers came running forward as we halted, telling in great excitement how they had defended our square by the north

side, the south side, the west and even by the river until the Hittites had retreated — with all their thousands, they had failed to take the square — but Ramses listened with wrath. To hear of their exploits, you would have thought we had none of our own, yet the arrows were still sticking in the quilting of our horses and the face of Hera-Ra was more red with the blood of the Hittites than the chest of a man laid open with a sword. I could not believe how red was the brightness of blood when you saw a great deal of it."

Menenhetet paused. "In what I have told you, there is not the heart of what I truly felt. Those sentiments were magnificent. During all that time we tried to break through to the south, I had been like a God, I felt twice my size — even as They are twice our height — and I was four times my strength, even as Gods know the power of four arms for each of Their shoulders. Never had I been so tireless in so heavy a work, and never was my breath so close to Them. I could have fought through the afternoon and night with the love I knew for Ramses and the horses and all that came forth from how we moved together. Often as not, I had no more than to think of a quick turn to the left for my King to perform the move, and, as if given vision in the back of my head, knew to swing my shield when a flight of arrows came down on us, never did I know as in those moments that we live for Them to see us, see us well, and thereby let us feel like Gods ourselves. I could no more have fled from the field than cut off my feet, at least so long as the Gods were with me, yet I lost them in the instant I saw the chariots of the thousand Hittites, except I do not know if I really did, for I was not full of fear when I saw that frightening sight, merely cool and calm and tired, my arm was suddenly heavy, and the voice that spoke to me was the same God's voice I heard in the flame of the hottest combat, still the same voice now said in my ear, 'Do not let this fool attack, or you are both dead,' and I say to You that the voice was amused — it is the word — It was amused, yet so fine and quiet a voice I could swear I did not hear from Amon with His mighty tongue but the soft tone of Osiris Himself. Who else would dare to speak of my Pharaoh as a fool? Only the Lord Osiris Who gave me the advice to return quickly to the King's Pavilion. And so I said to myself, 'Even if I am the son of Amon, it is Osiris who saved me today.'

"Now we were back in the middle of the Household Guard, and in the joy of our return, so did I feel the strength of the Gods once more. My height doubled again, at least to myself, and I de-

sired combat so much I felt the swelling of my member, and did not know whether to laugh or cry out in exultation. I saw Hera-Ra bounding about, licking our soldiers' faces with his bloody face, and mighty for a cat was his member, also fully extended, he was one in good spirits with me. I do not know if it was the blood on the field, or the jubilation of these troops that they had held their square, maybe it was the early fermentation of the dead bodies around us before their seven souls and spirits had begun to depart, but I can only say that the air in our nostrils was like a rose at evening when the light of the sun is also the color of rose, just so fine smelled the air with our desire for new combat. I thought again of my mother's story at how she awoke at my father's side and a God brilliant in the gold of His breastplate was above her, and the hut was filled with a perfume lovelier than any she had ever smelled.

"Now I knew what she had known, and it was equal to the tender odor of this air, and whether we owed it to Amon or Osiris, I could hardly say, but I was moved to climb onto the cage of Hera-Ra, and this so pleased him that he, in turn, walked with humorous thumps of his paws into the space beneath where he began to purr. Only then did I look out to all four sides, and the Hittites with their thousand chariots and a thousand more behind were walking their horses toward us in two great semicircles coming in from the west and the south. To our north was devastation. All of Amon and Ra were long departed, and I saw nothing but corpses, abandoned chariots, shattered tents, and provision wagons being plundered now by the Hittites on the field. The wisdom of Osiris must still have been with me, for I whispered to my King, 'At the east by the river, the line of Asiatics is thin.' It was true — fewer Hittites were there than on any of the other sides of our square, indeed the river was not two hundred paces away, and so He, adding the force of Amon to the mind of Osiris, shouted to the brave Household troops on all our four fronts, 'Come with Me. To the river!' Leaving our flanks and rear unprotected, Ramses mounted His Chariot and we took off at a gallop, followed by our remaining chariots, and foot soldiers from all four sides.

"There were not fifty steps from our line of shields on the east side to their line, and we crossed before you could blink three times. That was just as well since I never saw so many arrows coming our way. They surprised me. A moment before, these Hittites by the river had been somnolent, as desultory in shooting at us, as we at them. So long as arrows went back and forth from one entrench-

ment to another, you collected what fell, and soon the arrows you returned to the Hittites were sent back again. All the same, I was amazed at the number that now came at us as we galloped across. I heard foot soldiers cry out as they were struck, and then in the full shock of combat, for so it is, full shock, we slammed into the shields before us, and our good horses, Maat and Thebes, took us up over the earthworks of the Hittites, and we came down on their chariots with all our own chariots behind us.

"I do not know what it is like to fall into a river and be dashed over rocks. Since I cannot swim, I will never know, except I do, for the golden chariot of my King, stronger than any beast and beautiful as a God, was met by three Hittite chariots at once. With nine men, six horses, and three heavy carts did we collide, and all four of the vehicles went over I think, it is certain we did. I remember striking the ground and the King with me, and our chariot coming over on us, its wheel, much blunted now, still scoring my back, then we were bouncing up and the horses were trumpeting, and even as I was coming off the ground, so His Chariot was up again as well, I do not know how unless it kept tumbling with the horses, it was His, after all, and we jumped on once more, and rode in a circle, firing arrows into the Hittites. With it all, these collisions, bumps, falls, and recoveries had been happening as slowly as you would slide down a mountain in a dream. Never had I had as much time to arrange my body for each new shock, nor been this quick with my feet.

"Neither can I tell You how well we fought. It was nothing like the maneuvers we had practiced for years, no orderly sweep of rank on rank, no herding of infantry into a corner, no, we were in a rush to drive them to the river and fast, very fast, before other Hittites overran the King's square we had just left. Maybe it was the desperation of where we were, no front, no rear, no flanks, and probably no King's Pavilion to return to, but we fought like Hera-Ra, and so great was our lust to win a victory on this dreadful day that we were forever jumping in and out of our chariots, Ramses and I often fighting back to back, and many a soldier we wounded, and more than a few we killed, and back to our chariot against new Hittites. Everywhere I could see our vehicles circling their heavy carts with our skillful turns. On the ground, the Nubians were impaling Hittites with their short spears. I saw a man bite the nose off another man, and more than one Nubian had his yellow sash turn red. Three Hittites galloped by, and one of them had an axe in his

hand and an arrow in his buttocks. He kept looking backward as if to see who had bitten him.

"We drove them all into the river. Foot soldiers, chariots, charioteers, even their Princes. It was fierce, but our swords were strong, our desperation was the virtue of war itself, and snorting, sobbing, growling at each other, charioteers on foot and infantrymen so crazed they leaped up on loose horses, we fought them to the edge of the embankment of the river, and then one Hittite chariot went over, down the bank and into the stream, a scream, a splash, they were washing away. Speak of rock and a rapid river, the river was narrow here and deep, and downstream a rapids began with many rocks. The first chariot to go shattered on those rocks, and I heard water swallow up the middle of a man's cry.

"Now, river at their back, the desperation of these Hittites matched our own, but we were close to a triumph here and our soldiers were berserk. Since we had overrun their campfires, some of us seized burning branches and hurled them, and I even saw a Sherden swinging a leg of half-cooked beef, and Hittites fought back with torches, and with daggers, and sword against sword, and axe against sword. We pushed them all in, every last man who had not fallen on the field, and the few who clung to the slope of the wet and precipitous bank were struck in the face with arrows, although one of our Nubians was so emblazoned by now with the heat of battle that he slid down the bank to push a Hittite in, and failed. Both men drowned instead, biting at each other, arms around each other's throats.

"What a sight! We stood at the riverbank and cheered, breathless and sobbing we cheered. It sounded like the demented wails you hear in a funeral procession, and over the water we looked, and there were sights no one would ever see again. A horse was swimming downstream with a Hittite trying to climb its back, and falling off, and trying again until he slipped off and drowned, but the horse reached the other bank, and other Hittites pulled the animal out of the water. There was a Prince washed up next, that I knew by his purple raiment, and the Hittites held him upside-down until I could not believe the liquid that poured out of the man's throat, and later I heard he was the Prince of Aleppo, no less. So I saw royalty held by its heels, and then my eye flew to another Hittite who was sinking. Clearly I saw him wave farewell to the land as he went under the water, and another man swept by right beneath me, his arms around his horse's neck as if he would kiss the

creature, and he was speaking to his animal, I heard him weep with love before the rocks struck him and the horse. Behind him went a man who had already drowned, but so fat he floated with an arrow in his belly. I even saw one soldier make it with his animal to the other bank, and crawl ashore and lie there dying from a wound. As he expired, his horse licked his hand.

"Then we saw the Hittites come out on the other bank of the river. Out of the woods they emerged, too far for any of our arrows to reach, and I, practiced at making a quick count of a hundred men in a field, or a thousand, here saw something like eight thousand. I was happy they were on the other side of the river at this place where there was no ford, though I must say so soon as our Ramses saw them, that was equal to destroying His pleasure at what we had gained, whatever it was.

" 'Attack again,' He cried. 'To the west.'

"I never knew if my King was wise in battle, but then wisdom is a word by which one judges a man not a God, and He never looked to see if His command was followed. Instead He charged back over the old camping ground that lay within the entrenchment of our four sides, and everywhere were plundering Hittites, their backs to us and their faces to the ground. Like maggots on meat, they were as blind. The fools were so hungry for spoil they had stopped short of bearing down on us from the rear while we were at the river. Instead, they attacked our riches. Two hundred of them were ransacking the King's Pavilion when we came back. We set fire to them there. In that way I could never understand my Pharaoh. No one loved His treasures more than Himself, yet so great was His heat in battle that He was the first to pick up a burning log and throw it on His tents, and a hundred of us added to the blaze, indeed our chariots ran a relay from the campfire to the fine stuff of His tent itself. Its walls were now collapsing upon the Hittites plundering within, and as they ran out, their beards on fire, their woolen capes on fire, even their groins on fire, our Nubians met them with short clubs, and cracked the heads of these fools on fire, twice fools for they died with the plunder in their arms. The stink of the leather of the King's burning tents was even worse than the odor of burning flesh. Yet the smell was like a marrow to give us blood for the battle. I felt vigor in my sword, as if even the metal could know exhaustion and look for new spirit.

"We destroyed the Hittites in the King's Pavilion and came down like a scourge on the petty plunder of the wagon trains. We

took back our four sides and were a square again. Again, we gave a cheer. The two semicircles of Asiatic chariots who had been advancing upon us at a walk now stopped some hundreds of paces from our lines. They, too, were busy at plundering, but it was their own infantrymen they stripped. For those soldiers were still picking up the spoil left behind by the troops of Amon until the Hittite chariots scourged them like big animals eating little animals.

"Now the King's Pavilion was down. Its leather was consumed. White ashes lay on the ground, and some still glowed. My Ramses said, 'Who will bring Me our God?' and the Captain of the Nubians pointed his finger at one of his blacks, a giant of a man with a huge belly, something in build like Amon Himself, and the black stepped into the hot ash and ran to the middle of the fallen tents, picked up the blackened statue — may I say it took all his strength — and staggered out. Given its weight, the Nubian had to hold it against his body, and his breast was burned, and his belly, his hands, his forearms and his feet, yet once he had set the God down by my King's feet, so did Usermare-Setpenere kiss him, kiss this black — what honor could be so great as for a black to be kissed by the Pharaoh? — and then my Ramses knelt beside Amon, and in the tenderest voice began to speak to Him, talking only of His great love equal to the rapture of the sky at evening, and He took one end of His skirt and wiped all that was black from the God's face, kissing the God on the lips even though His own mouth blossomed at once into two great blisters which He wore in combat. A frightening sight it made, for now He could only speak out of the swollen rope of His upper and lower lips.

"I would have wondered at the power of the black to bear such pain, and even the love for Amon that would lead my Pharaoh to seek such pain, but at that moment a broken feather flew loose from the headdress of Maat-is-Satisfied and drifted to my feet. When I picked it up, the feather was heavy with the blood and grime of battle and moved in my hand like a knife, it had weight. I knew enough to kiss it. So soon as I did, a terrible heat went out of my Pharaoh's lips into mine, and, lo, I, too, was now to fight with white and swollen blisters upon my lips.

"Can I tell You of the rest of the day? Our battle, You remember, had begun under a dull and heavy sky. In that gloom, so strange to our Egyptian eyes, the sweat was cold on our bodies whenever we paused for breath, and our thirst was dry and cold and as desperate in our throats as our situation itself. Now it was easier, and

as the Hittites came back into formation from plundering each other, and began to attack us, so were we also stronger. The Army of Amon that had deserted us was coming back from where they had fled, and many a skirmish was fought between these returning soldiers and the Hittites. Seeing the desire of such lost troops to make their way back to our square, my King, to help them, rode forth many times with our charioteers of the Household Guard on either side. Five times we rode out and felt the shock of battle but it was less each time for now we knew that the first of our advantages were the bows. Our arrows flew farther and so we did not have to crash against their heavier vehicles, but would stop short and send off as many arrows as we could afford, and pick up those that came back. The Hittites were hurt in this combat. Many of their horses, struck by us, would drive their other chariots amok with confusion, and often they were forced to retreat. On these scenes, the skies parted, and the Sun was revealed. We were warm in the late afternoon and grew stronger. It was then my Pharaoh lost all sense of how much we were outnumbered. Without a word to any but myself, out of the very warmth He felt from the Sun, and the burn on His mouth, with the reins hardly flogging our good horses, and Maat and Thebes no longer horses to me, but giants, may I say, in the bodies of horses this day, so did He gallop toward the largest circle of Hittites and at such a speed that we came to where they had put up the tent of the Hittite leaders, and in that place, before their phalanxes, alone with me again, my King approached their flags and standards. We were all but surrounded by a circle of the Asiatics' chariots. Hera-Ra roared at them with such fury that I think each enemy was afraid to draw his bow for fear the lion might attack his face alone. I do not know why they did not charge, but there was peace for this moment on the battleground as if no one could move, and even Hera-Ra was silent at last.

" 'I am with Amon in the great battle,' said Ramses the Second, 'and when all is lost, so will He cause them to see Me as the two mighty arms of Amon who are Horus and Set. I am the Lord of Light,' and He raised His sword until the sun glittered upon it, and then jumped down from His chariot, and walked ten steps toward the Hittite leaders.

" 'Tie the lion,' He commanded me, and He waited, sword in hand, until I tethered Hera-Ra to our chariot. Then He held up the forefinger of His hand as a way of saying He wanted to fight their best soldier.

"From the Hittite leaders came forth a Prince with a terrible face. His beard was lean, and one eye was as flat as a stone, the other was bright. He, too, was dismounted, and in the moment Usermare saw him, I think my King was not at ease.

"They began to fight. The Hittite was fast and his movements were quicker than my Good and Great God. If this Prince had been as strong with his blade as my King, it would have ended soon, but Usermare attacked with such force that the other went back in a circle away from His great arm. Still, the Hittite's parries blocked the sword of the Sun from above and below, and now, given the chance, he struck back. Behold, there was blood on my King's leg. He limped now, and moved more slowly, and the look in His eye was not good. He breathed like a horse. I could not believe it — the sword of the Hittite grew bolder. Soon he began to attack, and my Lord retreat. The weight of all these hours of fighting was on His mouth, and, then, fending an overhead blow from the Prince, my Ramses' nose was broken by His own shield. I thought He was lost, and it may be that He was, but the end of the fight was interrupted. For the lion had become so agitated that I had to cut him loose from the tether or he would have turned on the horses.

"The Hittite, seeing the beast bound toward him, lost no time running back to his own people, and, Usermare, much fatigued, leaned on His sword. The lion licked His face. A sound like the bellowing of hippopotami came forth from the Hittites, and I was certain they would charge us where we stood. If so, we were done. Usermare might not have the strength to lift His sword, and then the lion and I would be alone. Yet at that moment, a Hittite trumpet blew. I heard a call for their retreat. Now, to my astonishment, they moved out quickly, leaving their royal tent behind.

"I was certain of a trap. I could not believe they would leave such spoils for us. Not when they were so strong. Yet in the next moment, I saw their reason. The Division of Ptah had come on to the field at last. The phalanxes of its chariots were moving up fast from the south. So the Hittites were now in a rush to reach the gates of Kadesh before Ptah crossed the line of their retreat. We had been left alone on the field.

"I think my King had a vision then. It was other sights He saw. I can only tell you that He staggered across to the abandoned tent and emerged with a bull in His arms made of gold. It was the God of these Asiatics, and had great furled wings, and the face, not of a bull, but of a beautiful man with a long Syrian beard. It also had

the pointed ears of a monster, and a castle in the shape of a tower was its hat. I had never seen a God like this. He was screaming now, in some harsh language of the Asiatics, a hideous host of lamentations, and must have been naming all the larger catastrophes, locusts and boils for being deserted by His troops. In truth, it was the most horrible voice I ever heard. It spoke through the blistered lips of my Pharaoh, the oaths resounding in Usermare's throat until He threw the God to the ground. Whereupon fumes came from the mouth, yes, from the golden mouth of this bull-beast came smoke, I swear it. I did not know how my Pharaoh could be called the Mighty Bull of Amon, yet here before us was another bull, also a God, with wings, and a beard. It was then I saw the face of the secret whore of Kadesh. It was her features I saw on the winged bull, a beautiful woman's face with a beard. So I knew that the cries of this voice came from Metelia's God. We were hearing His agony that the battle was lost. Maybe it is in war that you come to the place where the rainbow touches the earth, and much that has been hidden is simple.

TEN



"WITH the departure of the Hittites, the fields were empty. We were alone, as I say, and Hera-Ra raised his head and gave a lonely cry. It was a sound of much confusion as if the animal did not know whether we were victorious or desolate. In the distance I could see the legions of Prah give up their attempt to reach the gates of Kadesh before the Hittites. They wheeled instead toward the King's square. Yet my Pharaoh disdained to raise an arm to greet them. We returned over these bloody anguished fields to the sound of many an injured cry and more than a few of the dying to give us a cheer. One fellow even managed to make a sound with his head half off. You saw nothing but the hole in his neck out of which he seemed to speak. My Pharaoh, however, ignored the pandemonium with which our soldiers cheered and as we came through the opening of our square, He drove to the ruins of His Pavilion in silence. He did not dismount.

"Even as His officers came toward us, bowing, then crawling forward on their knees, so did He speak only to the horses. 'You,' He said, 'are My great horses. It is you who rode with Me to repulse the nations, and you were under My hand when I was alone with the enemy.' If there had been sparks when He struck the sword of others in combat, now there was flame in His eye as He looked at His officers. They did not even dare to beat their heads to the ground. 'Here,' He said, pointing to the horses, 'are My champions in the hour of danger. Let them know a place of honor in My stables, and let their food be given to them when I am fed.' Now, He stepped down from His Chariot and caressed each of their noses. They gave an answer in voices full of pleasure. Their feathers were in shreds and their hides were red, their legs shivered in fatigue, but they called forth a thanks to Him. Then my Ramses heard the voice of His officers.

" 'O Great Warrior,' they cried out. It was a babble, however, of one hundred names of praise in six or seven languages, and all in a rush. 'O Twice-a-Great-House,' they cried, 'You have saved Your Army. There is no King that fights like You.'

" 'You,' He said to them in return, 'did not join Me. I do not remember the names of those who are not beside Me when I am in the midst of the enemy. But here is Meni who is My shield,' and He put His arm about me, and patted my buttock as if I were a horse. 'Look,' He said to all those officers. 'With My sword I have struck down thousands, and multitudes have fallen before Me. Millions have been repulsed.'

" 'They all cheered,' said my great-grandfather. "Some had fought, and some had even fought a lot. Many were bloody with their wounds. Yet they listened in shame and lowered their heads and when the Generals of the Division of Ptah came forward to greet our Monarch at this reunion, He did not thank them for saving the day, nor reward His son Amen-khep-shu-ef for the rigors of that ride to join the legions of Ptah, but only remarked, 'What will Amon say when He hears that Ptah left Me alone on this great day? I slaughtered the enemy beneath My wheels but other chariots were not there, and neither was My infantry. I, and I alone, was the tempest against their chiefs.'

" 'We could only bow. A desolation worse than the swords of the Hittites was being felt. His officers touched the ground, they struck their heads, they lamented. I, in the most peculiar of positions, also bowed, but out of caution, and tried to keep from smiling. I thought that perhaps I was in error and should, unlike the others, remain standing so that my King should never mistake me for them, and I wondered if His mind had not taken a wrench from the screams of that Asiatic God who roared out of His throat. I did not know, but my King was soon silent and sat by Himself, alone by the blackened statue of Amon, and with the linen of His own skirt cleaned the soot from the belly and limbs of Amon, and pressed His forehead to the golden brow in a long embrace.

" 'We surrounded Him in silence. We waited. As the gold of the late afternoon lowered with the sun, and evening was near, He said, 'Tell the men they may begin the counting of the dead.' By these words the Officers knew they might speak to Him again.

" 'Yet, I know He lifted His head from the brow of Amon with the greatest regret. So long as He sat with His forehead touching the golden forehead of the Great God, so did He see a sunset behind

His closed eyes and feel the peace of our Egyptian wisdom enter His mind and pass into the scourged flesh of His throat and mouth. I could not believe it but when He looked up, the blisters were gone from His lips. (They still remained on mine.) So I could see that in all the splendor of the pure gold out of which Amon was made, there was also balm as cool as dew. What merits in this metal of the Sun!

"Soon, the counting of the hands was begun. We used to lay the hands of thieves in a heap outside the gate of the palace, even as we do now, but, in that time of Ramses the Great, the counting of hands was also done after battle. Usermare-Setpenere stood in His Chariot and soldiers came forward in a line from the Household troops to be followed by the soldiers of Amon. Many hundreds, then thousands of these soldiers passed one by one before the Pharaoh on this night even though we did not know yet if all of the battle had taken place or it was only the first day. Metella still had his infantry and his chariots, and both were inside the gates of Kadesh. They might come out tomorrow. So we could not say whether we had won or must get ready for the dawn. But the field where we fought this afternoon was ours for tonight, and that is like having another man's woman. She may go back to him tomorrow, but no one can tell you tonight that you have lost. So the longer this evening went on, the more it became a night of pleasure. As if in contempt for that enemy who had gone behind his walls, we lit so many campfires that the field was scarlet and gold and its light prevailed through the darkness like a glow of sunset on one of those miraculous evenings when night itself still hovers, or so it seems, on the last, and then the very last, and then beyond the last light of evening and nobody loses their shadow. So was our field luminous on this night, and the light came from that part of the sun which entered the trees in their youth, and now came forth again while the wood was ablaze.

"All through the night, our fires burned, and through the same night, Usermare-Setpenere stood in His Chariot under a full moon and received the severed hands of the slain Hittites one by one. Since He spoke to no one but the soldier who came before Him on His right hand, and then to the scribe who sat at His left hand entering the name of the fellow bringing in the trophy, so was I able to move away often and come back. Yet on all that long evening, for so long indeed as the line lasted, so did Usermare-Setpenere stand in the same place on His Chariot and never move His feet. I

realized once again how to be near Him was to gain all knowledge of how a God might act when He is in the form of a man. He looks so much like a man and yet reveals divinity by even the smallest of His moves. In this case, it was that He did not move His feet. To receive a thousand men, and another thousand, then another, to take into one's right hand the severed hand of a man dead since this afternoon, or dead in the last hour — we were still killing our prisoners — to inquire the name of the soldier who has given over to you this cold hand, or this warm hand, then tell it to the scribe, then throw the hand on the pile without ever moving one's feet, was an exhibition of such poise that one saw the mark of a God. He never moved His feet. Each time He cast another hand onto the pile, and may I say the pile grew until it was the size of a tent, He threw it with the same grace by which He steered Maat and Thebes when the reins were about His waist, that is, He did the task perfectly. One could not think of another way to have done it. He was showing us the nature of respect. The right hand of a dead warrior, the same right hand that might have seized His own in a treaty, having been given to Him, so did He cast it onto the pile with care, and to the place where by His eye it belonged. The pile grew like a pyramid whose corners are rounded, and never did He allow the base to become too broad nor the top too blunted. Yet He was also careful to avoid the vanity of building too fine a peak, for then one misplaced throw could destroy the shape. No, these hands were added to the pile in a harmony between the height and the base that was equal to the harmony with which our Ramses received His soldiers." Here Menenhetet closed his eyes as if to recollect whether it was all so perfect as in his description.

When he began to speak again, he said, "You may be certain that the calm of this ceremony was not matched by the scenes on our campground so recently a battlefield, and now a campground again. It is one matter to kill a man in battle, another to find time at that instant to cut off his hand. Oh, there were sights even in the worst of it when your chariot was overturned, yet through the spokes you'd still see one of ours on his knees sawing away at the wrist of some Hittite he'd just dropped. You'd even see some fellows so blind and red-faced for their trophies that they did not see the Hittite who came up behind, killed them, and started to cut off their lips, the lips! Can you imagine if we had lost the battle to the Asiatics this day?

"You can see then that no good soldier would stop to claim a

hand during the tides in and out of such a battle. Figure then the disputes that arose among us that evening when men who had been the bravest on the field were without a prize at night. Those hands were worth much to a soldier. You were able to say your name to the Pharaoh, and have it put on a list. Benefits, even a promotion, could follow. Besides, it was humiliation to go through battle and not have a hand to show. What, after all, were you doing? I can promise that fights broke out. When one squadron of chariots who had fought with the King's Household discovered that a company of infantrymen from Amon, the first to run, were now approaching the Pharaoh's line with a larger collection of hands than the charioteers themselves, a second war nearly began among our own. Soon the officers were in a council to make peace on this matter.

"They knew there would be terrible argument unless they agreed on some allotment. A fracas could spew forth in front of the Pharaoh. So, forcibly, we had to declare how many Hittites were slain by each company. That way we could determine the numbers of hands to be passed out, platoon by platoon. If it came to five for every eight soldiers in one company, you may be certain the five strongest men then seized their hands regardless of how they had fought that afternoon. Let me tell you — more than one ear got bitten off in the little fights that continued. Given the outrage of real warriors who had been passed over, not to speak of the bravado of many a big fellow who had been a coward earlier but was not remembering it that way now, we embarked on a night I will not soon forget. Another fifty of our own must have perished before the darkness was done.

"It was worse with the captured Hittites. Wherever one was not guarded by brave and responsible officers, he soon lost his right hand. More than a few bled to death. More than a few had the stump bound with a leather thong and went on to live and be brought back to Egypt. Naturally, they could expect the prosperous future of a slave with one hand. All the while, those of our men who had not been allotted a trophy went searching the bloody ground with their torches, and some even dared to cut the hands off our own slain, although to be caught in such an act was equal to losing your arm. After all, everyone's trophy would be tainted tomorrow if some of the hands proved to be Egyptian, so, count on it, every dead soldier of ours who was found mutilated at the wrists was stripped of his few clothes and his face soon made unrecognizable — I will spare you more. Even so, the corpse still looked like

one of ours in the morning. With or without a face, a dead and naked Egyptian does not look like a naked Asiatic. We have less hair on our bodies.

"Speak of hair, these poor Hittites had beards like thickets and probably hoped to protect their necks from a sword. They also had hair on their head as tough as the hide of a helmet and that may have been to shield their skulls from our clubs. Small use now. Even a helmet cannot protect you from all blows. As the night went on, we used these captives, we gorged on them, we devoured them, of that I will speak. Everywhere was the comic if piteous sight of ten or twenty Hittites all tied with their hands behind their necks, the same cord binding them to the throat of the next fellow, until when told to walk, twenty would hobble along in a lockstep, their eyeballs squeezed out of the heads by terror, their necks at an angle, yes, so hunched up and bound together you could mistake them for a clump of figs on a string, except that these figs groaned frequently from the pain of their bonds. May I say their captors guarded them poorly. Any gang of soldiers who came blundering along could cut off the first or last on the line — it was too much work to untie a captive in the middle. Then you would see some sights in the blaze of the campfires. Many a poor Asiatic's beard was treated like the groin of a woman, and his buttocks as well; why, you would see five men working on one fellow who had already been turned into a woman, and one poor captive was even put into harness like a horse while our soldiers played with him as they would never dare play with a horse. This Hittite could not even get his mouth open to scream — it was filled near to choking. Picture the fury of the man who straddled his head.

"You would have thought with all the blood we had seen this day that some would want no more. But blood is like gold and feeds the appetite. You could not smell it enough and some could not even taste it to their full content. All of us, despite the discomfort of being covered by it, sticky with it, crusted over, came, sooner or later, to want more. It was like fresh cosmetic over old. Blood was now as fascinating as fire and nearer to us. You could never travel to the center of a fire, but the blood was here in everybody's breath. We were like the birds who collected in a million and infinity on this battlefield and would feed through the night on all they could tear from the flesh of the slain. They would fling themselves into the air with a heavy tilting of the earth as we came near and give a clap of sound like thunder, but it was only the uproar of

their wings breaking away from us and the blood. Then there were the flies. They enraged us with their bites as if they now carried the fury of those we had killed. In the pestilence of those insects, I brooded much on the nature of wounds, and thought of how a man's power goes out of his flesh when he is injured, and travels into the arm of the man who gave the wound. On the other hand, so soon as you laid a cut into a man, you could treat his pain. If you were sorry for what you had done, you could spit on your hand and that might reduce the suffering of your victim. The Nubians had told me so. But if you wished to irritate his wound, you did well to drink hot and burning juices, or wine heated over a fire. Then would his wound be inflamed. So I was thinking of the Hittites who had given me the cuts and slashes I knew on my chest, my arms, and my legs, and I looked about until I could find a Hittite sword. All through the night, I oiled this blade and took care to bury it in cool leaves so that it would ease the festering of my body tomorrow. I also drank hot wine to irritate the wounds I had left on my enemies.

"I remember some of us even took the heads of Hittites and put them on long pointed sticks. While others held torches, we waved them aloft. We stood on one side of the river, across from the walls and gates of Kadesh, and we mocked them in the night while the banks began to stink from the early corruption of the bodies and would be a monstrosity in hot days to come.

"As we stood at the river, arrows came our way from the walls, not many, so few as to make me wonder at the thousands of Hittite soldiers who had not fought today — why were they silent with their arrows? — it hardly mattered now. We were so drunk that when one of us, a charioteer next to me, was struck with a spent arrow in his chest, the point going just deep enough to stick in his flesh, and thereby oblige him to remove it, he threw the head and shaft away, rubbed the wound with his hand, and with a laugh, licked the blood from his fingers. When his chest still bled, he painted his skin with it. When still it bled, he cut some locks from the beard of the dead Hittite on his pole and stuffed that into the hole in his chest."

"There is," said my mother in a sudden intrusion on this story, "nothing to compare to the monstrousness of men." As she spoke, I was close to her feelings, twice close because of pretending to be asleep, and I lived in her emotions once more. Never had I felt such rage at my great-grandfather, yet I could also feel her courage to

scold him sink into itself as she looked at his face, for she was also much excited. Her belly had an ache of expectation that settled in my head like the pain of a tooth. It was enough to make me cry out.

Menenhetet merely shook his head. "On the other side of the river," he said, "at the top of a tower, was a woman who looked out at us and saw the Hittite whose beard had been shorn of a lock. She began to scream. Maybe it was the face of her lover that she recognized, or her husband, or a father or a son, but I tell you her shrieks tore the sky. Her moans were bottomless. I have heard women cry in that way ever since. We know those who make such sounds at any funeral. Hypocrisy is the possession of such women. For their grief speaks of the terrible end of all things in their heart, yet a year later that same woman will be with a new man.

My mother answered in a deep voice. "Women search," she said, "for the bottom of their grief. If they can find it, they are ready for another man. Why, if I were ever to weep for a lover and learn that my sorrow was bottomless, I would know he was the man I must follow into the Land of the Dead. But I cannot be certain of such feelings until I wail." She gave my great-grandfather a triumphant look, as if to say: Have you ever believed you could be that man?

Ptah-nem-hotep gave a small smile. "Your account, dear Menenhetet, has been so exceptional that I have had ten questions on every turn of the battle, yet I did not wish to divert your thoughts. Now, however, since Hathfertiti, out of the depth of her feelings, has spoken to you, let me ask: What are the sentiments of My ancestor, Usermare-Setpenere, during all of this, this dreadful night? Does He really see none of it? Do His feet, in truth, not move?"

"They never moved. I had been, as I said, standing near Him, and I would also, as I said, go away. When I came back the pile would be higher, but nothing else had changed, unless it was the mood of the Pharaoh. That grew more profound. No matter how well one came to know Him, even if you were to see Usermare-Setpenere every day, be certain you would not approach with ease. If you found Him jovial, then even from some paces away, you would feel the same as you did on entering a room full of sunlight. When He was angry, you were aware of that before coming through the door. On the battlefield, His fury was so great it served as our shield. The Hittites could not see into the dazzling light that came

from His sword. The horses of our enemy were afraid to charge. One does not ride up to the sun!

"As this night went on, however, I saw He was not only the Beloved-of-Amon, Blessed-by-the-Sun, but also a King to live with the Lord Osiris in darkness and be familiar with the Land of the Dead. It is certain that the longer He conducted this ceremony of asking each soldier his name, repeating it to the scribe, and making a throw of the hand onto the pile, so did the weight of His presence grow heavier on me until I would have known with my eyes closed that I was somewhere in the presence of Ramses, just as a blind man can tell that he has stepped into a cave, even a large cave. On this night, my King filled the darkness, and the air near Him, unlike the fires of the campground, the red lick of the flames, or the breath of us drunks, was an air cool with the chill of the cave. He was observing the spirits of the dead, or at least that much of them as could be known by their hands. Even as we appreciate something of a stranger by taking his fingers in greeting, so could my Ramses know a little about each of the enemy soldiers as He held their last manifest for an instant. So He understood a bit of the character of the fellow and his death. Never had I seen my Monarch brood in such a way, and His mood continued to deepen until it was much like the sound that holds your ears in the roar of the Very Green.

"Indeed, as I stood near Him, which is to say as I entered the cave He inhabited this night, I could not know if each thought I comprehended was mine or my Pharaoh's. I only knew that the longer I looked at this pile of hands turning to silver in the moonlight, the more I thought of how the power of the Hittites was now in our possession, and we owned the field. They could not put the curse of their dead on us so long as our Pharaoh touched each evil thought in the hand of each lost soldier, and drew strength from it for future battles. So did my Pharaoh hold the fortunes of our Two-Lands together.

"I stayed so near to Him for so long that whenever I left to go wandering around the campground, I think I shared a part of His thoughts. Or maybe it was no more than the keenness of His nose for what was next. I know I was hardly surprised to come over a hillock and there between two rocks find Hera-Ra half-asleep under the full moon. I do not know if the lion had never been put back in his cage or whether some of our soldiers had set him loose, but he was quiet and only half-awake. Still, such were the fires of this

night on this field just a hill away from the solemnities of our Pharaoh, that Hera-Ra now gave a great broad grin at the sight of me, rolled over on his back, spread his legs, showed me the depth of his anus and the embrace of his front paws and invited me to roll on his belly. I never knew the day I would have been that brave. Not in four lives. I patted his mane, kissed him on the cheek. With a grunt and a growl, he rolled over again, got up, and burped in my face to give a sour whiff of all the blood he had drunk; but then, my breath with its wine could have pleased him no better. At any rate, we were now friends enough to go for a walk. I do not know if I ever felt any more life, health and strength than making the tour of that flame-filled bloody field with ten thousand of our madmen spread over all of these meadows and a thousand fires you could look into for a carouse, yet I was the only one with a lion! It was a wealth of sights — more buttocks than faces!

"Let me say that there were also women among us. A company of camp followers had marched along with the Division of Set, for these were the soldiers last to arrive and they came in on the full moon. They were famous as a lot of fornicators and buggerers, this Division of Set. The tortures that had been tried up to now on the captured Hittites were nothing compared to the practices of the fresh troops who had just joined us.

"They had done little that day but march, and toward the end, as they got word of our victory out of the mouth of some messengers from the Division of Ptah, they had broken into their provisions and were drunk when they arrived. Now lines of men were waiting before each whore brought in by these soldiers from Set (who incidentally were collecting Hittite spoil in recompense). I saw more ways of making love that night than I would see again in three full lives. Since there were more men than women, it behooved you, if you had concern for your own buttocks, to see who was behind. I swear, it was a disgrace. Those Nubians are big, and it is the practice of their males to use one another until they are rich enough to afford a wife. On this night, woe to the poor Egyptian soldier if he waited in front of a Nubian, for he was soon on his knees, Egyptian or not. We are a smaller people. That night, a good deal of our strength was given over to the Nubians and the Libyans, and for what good return? To be able to shoot the few arrows you had left into the loose cave of a mongrel whore? The rush was so great in the fires of this night that many a man could not wait for his place at the front, and so took the girl between her cheeks, while she was

busy up forward, and thereby made a three-backed beast, a copulation of serpents. Now, a new man was at her mouth, and another in the third man's bottom. They looked worse than those captives who had been tied like figs. Others, waiting, kept yelling 'Hurry up, hurry up.' Over it all was the smell of sweat. I could smell the buttocks of half an army. A fit husband was that odor to blood and smoke. I would speak of these acts as abominations but it was less than what was yet to come. Besides, I will offer no judgment. After all, is not our word for a night-camp the same as one of our expressions for fornication? I can only say I was part of it, and much stimulated. I swear, if it were not the Night of the Pig, you would not know so much of this. Enough that Hera-Ra and I moved through campfires and snoring drunks, through lovers and plunderers and scavengers, even past the groans of our wounded — for in the middle of it all, men were still dying, our men mostly (theirs already gone) — our amputees and our belly-gutted fevered, dying first of thirst, then of wine given them to drink. Sometimes you could not tell the oaths of pleasure from the wails of the doomed. Through such cries did Hera-Ra and I walk among the flames. Occasionally the lion would trample over a group of copulators, squeezing their grapes, so to speak, and many a soldier, catching the breath of the lion in his nose, or the wild look in his eye (and Hera-Ra, even when feeling like a kitten, had the wildest pale-green eye anyone had ever seen) would, staring face to face with such a beast, lose his erection for this night and more. Such frights, like a sword, cut you off. The whores, be it said, loved Hera-Ra. I have never seen women so insatiable, so brutal, so superior in pure joy — it is their art, not a man's. Even in this riot, where one came forth so much more than one wanted that the joys were like the throes of one's death, it was still extraordinary with these women. They were only camp whores with putrid breath, but I saw the gates of the Heavenly Fields open in my loins — these women took the sweetest shoots right into the center of themselves. It must have been all the blood and burning flesh. Maybe Maar approaches with love when all are choking with smoke. You have to wonder how many Generals are conceived on campgrounds such as this.

"But I spoke of burning flesh. You cannot know the hunger that comes to your stomach on a battlefield. It mocks the hunger of your private parts. I was ravenous, and Hera-Ra was ravenous. All of our army was hungry, and after we ate all we had plundered from the Hittites, we broke into our own provision trains. I saw

salted quarters of beef thrown into the fire, then pulled out, and sawed up for steaks, one side black, the other red. Then the cow was thrown back again. Soon they were cutting into the dead horses as well.

"It was, however, a peculiar hunger. I do not know for how many I can speak, but each taste of meat gave me the desire to taste another kind. I could not satisfy myself on beef, nor even on horse, although there was something already in the flavor of the cooked blood in a stallion's meat that spoke of strange truths and new strengths. I just kept eating to fill a hole in my intestines. Maybe it was the presence of the lion. He kept poking his snout into the wounds of the dead, and before it was over, many of these men had become as ravenous in their taste — how can I confess it to you? Walking next to that lion, he became my best friend on the field. So I could see into his thoughts as clearly as into my Pharaoh's, and the lion, to my surprise, had a mind. Now he did not think with words, but with smells and tastes, and every sensation put sights into his eyes. As he ate the raw liver of a dead man — I think he was dead, though he twitched — Hera-Ra was seeing our Pharaoh. I knew, by the gusto with which he chewed, that the valor of our Pharaoh had made him happy, just as happy as the liver of the brave warrior he was eating. Then it turned out that the dead fellow was not so brave after all. A taste of bile came into Hera-Ra's throat. Like a dirty vein through the liver was the secret cowardice of this warrior.

"I watched Hera-Ra nibble on dead men's ears until he found those that pleased him most. It was then I could see that as he ate, he had before him a heaven with stars more brilliant than our own smoke-filled sky so obscured by mist and scud. Indeed, my own mind felt blessed as he ate, for I was learning that our ears are the seat of all intelligence and the very door to the Blessed Fields. Now Hera-Ra began to lick the skin of many a forehead. With deliberation and much choice in his taste, he passed from head to head comparing the taste of their salts. Soon enough, I knew why he enjoyed such licking. For the picture he gained from the forehead that pleased him most was of a soldier running uphill, forcing his face up the hill into a stiff wind; truth, the fellow he finally chose had been a monument of perseverance. Then Hera-Ra ate him by the testicles as well and chewed into the groin. The soft growls of Hera-Ra were enough for me. I realized he had selected this fellow as the very seat of manly strength.

"I must tell you more. Before the night was over, I, too, indulged the meat of a limb, burned it in the fire, took a taste, and knew that the pleasures of a cannibal were going to be mine this night. Suffice it that the first step in what is considered the filth of my habits was taken. It has led me through many a wonder and many a wisdom. But then you do not really wish to hear more of the Battle of Kadesh. Let me say only that human fat, gorged in considerable quantity, has an intoxicating effect. I became as drunk as Hera-Ra."

With these words, Menenhetet shut his mouth and did not speak again.

ELEVEN



WE were left with much curiosity. The silence broke, but only into another silence, and our Pharaoh gave a wise look at the fireflies and said, "I hope you will continue. I would like to know of the next day."

Menenhetet sighed. It was the first sound of fatigue he had uttered on many a breath, and the insects quivered behind their fine linen. Did I see what was not to be perceived, or did the glow of these mites fade in salute to the dawn that came outside the walls of Kadesh when the fires were burning down and exhausted soldiers began to sleep? It is certain that their light was less. But then I could remember Eyaseyab telling me that the finest food for these fireflies was themselves, and they ate each other.

"I do not know how much there is yet to tell," said my great-grandfather. "Metella must truly have been cursed by his secret whore; he did not come out in the morning with his eight thousand infantrymen, nor with what were left of his chariots. Even when we took a captured officer, tied his arms to his chariot, and drove him into the river so that he drowned under their noses, Metella did not come out. I thought he was a fool as well as a coward. He should have attacked. We were so festered and unruly that morning, so entangled in a million and infinity of evil spirits that Metella could have overrun us — unless his troops had also had a night like ours.

"We held a council. Some of our officers spoke of siege, and tried to tell how Thutmose the Great had cut the fruit trees in the groves surrounding these hills in order to build the siege-walls that He brought forward against the walls of Kadesh. In the months ahead, if we did the same, the city could be taken. My Ramses listened, and looked affronted, and said at last, 'I am not a slayer of trees.' By that afternoon, camp was broken.

"It proved no easy departure. First, our dead had to be buried,

and our wounded gotten ready for the trip. It took a lot of digging before the bodies were covered over, and the pits were never deep enough. These dead men were pressed down so tightly that a hip, an elbow, or even a head would push up and the birds must have had their pick. Of course, the insects devoured the other half. Seeing those myriads swarm over the pits before they were even covered, I knew the answer to one question forever. I learned why the beetle Khepera is the creature closest to Ra. In the middle of any hot night, beneath the silence, give a moment's attention: You will hear the mightiest sound of them all. It is the drone of insects. What multitudes! They possess the silence.

"Needless to say, a few of our dead were saved from the birds and the maggots. Each division had a platoon of embalmers who carried a sacred table with their wagon, and they soon wrapped the Princes and Generals who had fallen. Even if you were no more than an officer (but also happened to be the dead son of a rich merchant) there was a good chance someone would speak up for your remains. No embalmer could be unaware of the award he would receive in Memphi or Thebes if he delivered a well-wrapped son back to the family. Before it was all over, a hundred officers were stacked with care on the different work carts, and though the task was done in the field, only a few of these wrapped bodies began to stink.

"The wounded were worse. Some lived. Some died. They all stank. The Divisions of Amon, Ra, Ptah, and Set traveled behind each other in so long a line that it took a day to move from the van to the rear. Now we were truly like a worm cut in four pieces. Yet the smell connected us. We moved slowly, a thick river, full of rot, and the screams of the wounded were terrible when their wagons shuddered over the rocks of the gorges.

"Of course, we were all in pain. Who did not have foul cuts and scrapes? I soon grew a dozen boils to meet my other afflictions, and you could feel the poison of these wounds growing in new places even as they were being worked out of the old. Some of us were demented by fevers after the third day, and in the heat of our march, what had seemed a victory quivered before us like a defeat. By the fourth day, we were being attacked. A few of Metella's best troops began to follow, not enough to matter, but in sufficient numbers to raid our rear. They would kill a few, wound a few, and ride away. We would lose time in chasing them, more time in burying our dead. Since the carts for the wounded were filled, foot soldiers were

now used as litter-bearers and some dropped from the heat and were left behind and had to catch up again. Others were lost altogether.

"One of the Hittite raids even tried to steal a few of the donkeys transporting the hands. We used more than ten for this purpose alone and each carried two large bags, one for either side of their back. The smell was not atrocious unless you came close — there is finally so little flesh on a hand that the skin dries quickly and by itself — although the odor from one of those baskets (if you were fool enough to put your head in) was as clear to the nostrils as rotten teeth. A true curse. Leave it alone and it would hardly stir. Go too near, and the stench lived in the lining of your nose. Hera-Ra could not keep away. Untethered, he would bother these donkeys in the worst way. Trying to bolt, they tangled in their harness, nearly strangling — donkeys in doubt always climb over one another — and in the confusion, a bag broke. Hera-Ra made a meal of what fell to the ground. I came running up to pull him away since I was the only one he obeyed besides our Pharaoh, but I was late. He had gorged on a dozen of those hands, and then more. Pictures of the Pyramids danced in his brain, then sights of great cities. I had never seen buildings like the ones Hera-Ra now envisioned in his head. They showed thousands of windows and great towers and went to vast heights. It was as if a part of great buildings yet to come was in the knowledge of those hands he ate. Yet what a dreadful meal! Hera-Ra had teeth strong enough to break your bones, although not quite — his mouth was happier in soft flesh which he liked to tear to strings. Now he broke one of his own teeth, and whimpered like a baby at the pain, yet kept on eating — all that unspeakable swallow of leathery skin, cursed smell, dried flesh, together with those little bones of the hand that crunched so hard. All the same, something in their odor drove Hera-Ra to more. He growled in real rage at me when I tried to pull him back. He wanted to take this curse. Some curses we dare — we wish to penetrate them. A dull anger went up from these mutilated hands at this second destruction. But then, that was why Hera-Ra took on such a fury. It gave him visions of the future. Again, I saw buildings high as mountains.

"The lion turned ill from his meal. By the next day, he could not walk. His belly swelled, and his hind legs, which had suffered any number of slashes from Hittite swords, began to fester. On his shoulder, an open hole from the point of a spear turned black. He

could not keep the flies away. His tail was too weak to brush them off. We built a large litter and six men carried him, but Hera-Ra's eyes took on the dull shine of a dying fish. I knew the hands in his belly were gripping his vitals, the little bones flaying his intestines like knives.

"My Pharaoh was with us ten times a day. The Royal Wagon's golden walls and golden roof were deserted by Him, and He walked along the litter beside Hera-Ra and held the beast's paw, and wept. I cried as well, not just for love of Hera-Ra, but in the terrible fear of knowing that the animal would not have gotten ill if I had kept him away from the donkeys' bags.

"Once, His tears washing thin lines through the black and green cosmetic about His eyes, Usermare-Setpenere said to me, 'Ah, if I had vanquished that Prince of the Hittites who met Me alone, all would be well with Hera-Ra!' and I did not know whether to nod or deny His words. Who could decide whether it was better to encourage His wrath against Himself or take it on my back — I should have known the answer. My good Pharaoh Ramses the Second was not made to bear His own anger.

"Then the lion died. I wept, and more than I would have believed, and for a little while my sorrow was all for Hera-Ra. I even wept because no man had been my friend so much as that beast.

"Few of the embalmed Princes had also been granted the honor of having their organs properly wrapped. The provision wagon of the embalmers could carry a few sets of Canopic jars, but how many can you treat when it is four jars to each fellow? Even Generals were having their organs thrown to the woods. For Hera-Ra, however, the embalmers used the next to last set of jars, and his wrapping was supervised by Usermare-Setpenere Himself. Indeed, I heard the rage in His voice when He examined the intestines and found bits of broken bone protruding from the coils like arrowheads of white stone. By the look my Pharaoh cast at me, it was clear that I was out of favor again.

"My punishment, however, was not so simple this time. He had me travel with Him often in the Royal Wagon. We sat on chairs of gold and looked through open windows at the chasms of the gorge, while we rocked perilously within. Certain bumps so tipped the wagon (which was high enough inside for us to stand) that we all but went over.

"Sometimes, He would not say a word. Just wept silently. The eye-paint streaked. The Overseer of the Cosmetic Box would repair

Him, a nimble fellow, nimble as Nef" — this with a nod to my father — "and we would sit in silence. Sometimes when we were alone (for on occasion the King would wipe all cosmetics from His face and dismiss the Overseer) He would speak briefly and in gloom about the campaign. 'I did not win, I did not lose, and so I have lost,' He said to me once. Since His eyes did not leave my own, I nodded. It was the truth. But not even the Gods love the truth when it scores each breath. Before the day was out, He said to me in the gloom of the carriage, 'You should have given your arm to Hera-Ra before you let him eat those hands.' I bowed. I struck the floor seven times with my head even though the floor of the carriage was bumping like a rock in a fall. It hardly mattered. A sigh, long as the sound of the death that had come out of the lion, now came from the throat of Ramses our Second, a terrible sound as though the eyes of the lion were losing their light once more. What can I tell you? I thought often of the meaning of that sigh, and realized that the death of the lion was the end of Usermare's happiness at the sight of me. In the heart of His rebuke was the thought that if I did not know how much my good fortune depended on the health of His beast, then good fortune and I were best separated.

"We were. By the time the troops returned to Gaza, I was transferred from the Household Guards of Usermare-Setpenere to the charioteers of the Division of Amon, and I may say that no division of the four was in worse repute after Kadesh. Still, we were given a good reception by the natives of Gaza, and I was not surprised. In the last days of our return, people cheered us on the road. A runner traveled in front to tell them that the Armies of Ramses the Second had scourged the Hittites from the field.

"I think my Pharaoh must have listened to His messenger. He had healed from His wounds and looked magnificent. On the last day I would see Him for what would yet be fifteen years, He was on the parade ground at Gaza. There He displayed the winged bull of the Hittites and gave it to the city as a gift. This captured God, He told the multitudes, would protect our eastern frontier. By the next day, we began our march to the Delta, and, once there, sailed up the river to Thebes. I sat in the same crowded galley with my back pressing against the knees of the man sitting behind me, and since the winds were not steady, our trip upriver was even longer than the descent. Soon after our arrival, I was sent on duty into the depths of Nubia. That is to say, my King was banishing me to a distant place called Eshutanib. In command of a small detachment,

I went up the Nile as far as a boat could go, and then had twenty-four days of march across a desert whose heat I will not soon forget." Even as he spoke these words, I could see such a desert before me. "In that time," he said, "I gave my farewell to every great and exalted moment I had known. The desert was hotter than the steam that rises from the Land of the Dead, and I was an officer without a true command." He ceased, he nodded, and said, "I think I can end my recollections here."

An Introduction
to the Gospel of the Sun
which will explain
why Responses and Lessons
which deal with Jewish
imagery and exegesis
of the gnostic precursors
the novel excerpts

1902
F-3

An introduction
to The Gospel of the Son
which will explain
why Responses and Reactions
which deals with Jewish
Visionaries and Ecstasies
of the ghetto precedes
the novel excerpts

1962

This should go as a preface to GAT

2568

15 THE ARGUMENT ALL BUT CONCLUDED

F-3

~~PROCESSES~~

The next piece is one of a series written for Commentary as an existential exegesis on Buber's Tales of the Hasidim. Metaphor is used here to explain a miracle, so the piece while rabbinical is nonetheless indispensable. It may as well be remarked that science once saw itself as the intellectual effort to comprehend each separate miracle. About the time (a) miracles ceased or (b) those cognitive senses which could perceive miracle had withered—then too did metaphor disappear from science.

~~PROCESSES~~

~~RESPONSES AND REACTIONS V~~

The Fear of God

Once Zusya prayed to God: "Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Let me stand in awe of you like your angels, who are penetrated by your awe-inspiring name." And God heard his prayer, and his name penetrated the hidden heart of Zusya as it does those of the angels. But Zusya crawled under the bed like a little dog, and animal fear shook him until he howled: "Lord, let me love you like Zusya again!" And God heard him this time also.

There is an existential logic in this story which leads to a root in the meaning of miracles. Zusya is ambitious, he is intellectually ambitious, he wishes to feel a fear of God because he is secretly confident he will be able to withstand that fear and so acquire more knowledge of the universe, more revelation of the secrets of God and Nature. The request

is Faustian. Yet God in revealing Himself further to Zusya terrifies him profoundly. Why? Does He terrify Zusya because He is Jehovah, a God of wrath and rectitude, an essentialist's God? Or is the fear which comes over Zusya a part of the profound fear God feels Himself, a fear that His conception of Being (that noble conception of man as a creature of courage and compassion, art, tenderness, skill, stamina, and imagination, exactly the imagination to carry this conception of Being out into the dark emptiness of the universe, there to war against other more malignant conceptions of Being) yes, precisely this noble conception will not prevail, and instead a wasteful, slovenly, slothful, treacherous, cowardly, and monotonous conception of Being will become the future of man—such a fear must for God be insupportable. It is the heart of existential logic that God's ultimate victory over the Devil is no more uncertain than the Devil's victory over God—either may conquer man and so give Being a characteristic Good or Evil, or indeed each may exhaust the other, until Being ceases to exist or sinks through seas of entropy into a Being less various, less articulated, less organic, more like plastic than the Nature we know. What a fear is this fear in God that He may lose eventually to the Devil! What abysses of anxiety and pits of woe in such a contemplation! Zusya, asking to fear God more, is given instead a vision of God's fear. Like any other man, Zusya draws back in terror.

But is not one of the secrets of the miracle just here? The miracle is revealed to those who can bear to undergo the terror which accompanies it. If intimacy with God is not merely a communion of love but a sharing of the Divine terror, then the beauty of any miracle delivered by God is always accompanied by a fear proportionate to the beauty. Because a miracle is not merely a breach in the laws of nature, but a revelation of the nature of the God behind Nature. If one cannot undergo the fear, one does not deserve the revelation. So our taste for miracles has left us. Man in the Middle Ages lived with dread as a natural accompaniment to his day. His senses uninsulated by the daily use of daily drugs (nicotine, caffeine, aspirin, alcohol, so forth), his mind not guarded by a society which was antsupernatural, medieval man was therefore able to live with gods, devils, angels, and demons, with witches, warlocks, and spirits. Miracles, while terrifying, were nonetheless a mark of merit. One was honored to receive them. Whereas we reach quickly and in terror for the first chemical which will flatten an affect, deaden our senses, damp our madness, or forestall a miracle. Conversely, we also look to a drug to induce a hallucination—because any visitation produced by a drug is exempt from the terror of engaging the supernatural. For we know, even as the experience is upon us, that we are not privy to a vision beyond the lip of death, but merely are offered a derangement of the

senses produced by chemicals. Our modern pleasure is that one is witnessing not a miracle but miracle-in-a-theater.

"And the Fire Abated"

The tale is told:

The rabbi of Kalev once spent the Sabbath in a nearby village as the guest of one of the Hasidim. When the hour to receive the Sabbath had come, someone suddenly screamed, and a servant rushed in and cried that the barn in which the grain was stored was on fire. The owner wanted to run out, but the rabbi took him by the hand. "Stay!" he said. "I am going to tell you a story." The Hasid stayed.

"When our master Rabbi Zusya was young," said the zaddik, "he stoked the stoves in the house of the Great Maggid, for this duty was always assigned to the youngest disciples. Once when he was saying the psalms with great fervor just before the coming of the Sabbath, he was startled by screams from within the house. Sparks had fallen from the stove which he had filled with wood, and since no one was in the living room, a fire had started.

"Zusya!" he was reproached. "There's a fire!"

"No matter," he replied. "Is it not written: And the fire abated!" At that very same moment the fire abated."

The rabbi of Kalev fell silent. The Hasid, whom he still held by the hand, did not dare move. A moment passed and someone called in at the window that the fire in the barn had gone out.

Mood is the earth of the miracle, its garden, its terrain. The mood created by a fire is always in some part Satanic. One senses an avid implacable relentless impatience, a greed to consume, a determination to destroy the material before it, indeed a lunatic intensity within the fire to appropriate the Time which is embodied in the object which is burning. That is why a fire in a fireplace offers comfort. The fire in this case is smaller than ourselves; the material it consumes, the Time it accelerates, are subservient to the mood of calm and benevolence with which we study the fire. We have the ability at any moment to put it out. We are not confronting the force of the devil but rather devil-in-a-theater. In effect, we are dealing with a commonplace miracle. We invoke the supernatural power of fire, but we control it. To primitive man fire was of course always a miracle, a dangerous miracle. He did not know, he could not know—for he had not yet codified the resources of fire—that he would necessarily be able to control it in every contingency. So he approached

fire with profound respect, and prayed to various spirits as he put out a fire in order that the demons in the flame be not offended. How natural for him to assume that the intensity of the fire came from the rabidity of the evil contained within the material. By this understanding, it is not insignificant that the grain of the Hasid catches on fire. The grain is his hoarded wealth, his greed, his covetousness. If his heart has been impure and his plans for what he will do with the money he obtains from the sale of the grain are unholy, then the grain—by this unspoken logic—becomes filled with everything which is evil in the Hasid's soul, and so begins to smolder, then bursts into flame. The Hasid is ready to run to the barn, the rabbi restrains him. When the Hasid pauses to listen to the speech of the rabbi, he is in effect ready to relinquish his wealth. So what has been evil in him expires, and what has been heat for the flame in the grain is now cooled. Thus might go the religious logic. The question is whether this logic is utterly without foundation in the real. For philosophically is it not as plausible to assume we have a spirit which is communicable to other people and to the very properties of our environment as it is to assume that spirit does not exist or is not communicable? And is it not equally or almost equally comfortable to assume that a fire may be extinguished by a dramatic shift in mood? Let the burden fall on the philosopher who would prove that the existence of a fire can never be affected by a mood.

1963

1962 for Responses

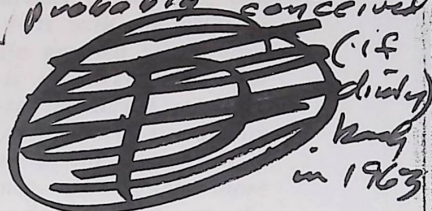
THE TENTH PRESIDENTIAL PAPER

2572

(put in 1997 for GATT Minorities)

Explanation - The Gospel According to the Son was probably conceived

~~EXPLANATION~~



READ

• The Commentary Columns: "Responses and Reactions I, III, IV"

• A Review of The Blacks

~~The modern American politician—read: the Democratic or Republican liberal—often begins his career with a modest passion to defend the rights of minorities. By the time he is successful, his passion has been converted to platitude.~~

Minority groups are the artistic nerves of a republic, and like any phenomenon which has to do with art, they are profoundly divided. They are both themselves and the mirror of their culture as it reacts upon them. They are themselves and the negative truth of themselves. No white man, for example, can hate the Negro race with the same passionate hatred and detailed detestation that each Negro feels for himself and for his people; no anti-Semite can begin to comprehend the malicious analysis of his soul which every Jew indulges every day.

~~For decades the Jews have been militant for their rights, since the Second War the Negroes have emerged as an embattled and disciplined minority. It is thus characteristic of both races that they have a more intense awareness of their own value and their own lack of value than the awareness of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant for himself. Unlike the Protestant of the center, minorities have a nature which is polarized. So it is natural that their buried themes, precisely those preoccupations which are never mentioned by minority action groups like the Anti-Defamation League or the NAACP, are charged with paradox, with a search for psychic~~

extremes. To a Protestant, secure in the middle of American life, God and the Devil, magic, death and eternity, are matters outside himself. He may contemplate them but he does not habitually absorb them into the living tissue of his brain. Whereas the exceptional member of any minority group feels as if he possesses God and the Devil within himself, that the taste of his own death is already in his cells, that his purchase on eternity rises and falls with the calm or cowardice of his actions. It is a life exposed to the raw living nerve of anxiety, and rare is the average Jew or Negro who can bear it for long—so the larger tendency among minorities is to manufacture a mediocre personality which is a dull replica of the manners of the white man in power. Nothing can be more conformist, more Square, more profoundly depressing than the Jew-in-the-suburb, or the Negro as member of the Black Bourgeoisie. It is the price they pay for the fact that not all self-hatred is invalid—the critical faculty turned upon oneself can serve to create a personality which is exceptional, which mirrors the particular arts and graces of the white gentry, but this is possible only if one can live with one's existential nerve exposed. Man's personality rises to a level of higher and more delicate habits only if he is willing to engage a sequence of painful victories and cruel defeats in his expedition through the locks and ambushes of social life. One does not copy the manner of someone superior; rather one works an art upon it which makes it suitable for oneself. Direct imitation of a superior manner merely produces a synthetic manner. The collective expression of this in a minority group is nothing other than assimilation.

To the degree each American Jew and American Negro is assimilated he is colorless, a part of a collective nausea which is encysted into the future. The problem in a democracy is not to assimilate minorities but to avoid stifling them as they attain their equality. If the Jews and Negroes attain a brilliant equality with the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and the Irish Catholic, then America will be different. Whatever it will become, it will be different from anything we can conceive. Whereas if the Negro and Jew are assimilated into the muted unimaginative level of present-day American life, then America will be very much like it is now, only worse. The problem is similar to the difficulty in dealing with juvenile delinquents—one can pacify them by any one of a number of unimaginative programs and be left with a human

material which is apathetic if indeed not anchored to moronic expectations; or one can search for arts which transmute violence into heroic activity. An inflammation or rent in the body can heal in such a way that the limb or organ offers new powers of coordination which did not exist before; equally the inflammation can subside to a chronic leaden dullness of function.

So with minorities, one must look for more than the insurance of their rights—one must search to liberate the art which is trapped in the thousand acts of perception which embody their self-hatred, for self-hatred ignored must corrode the roots of one's past and leave one marooned in an alien culture. The liberal premise—that Negroes and Jews are like everybody else once they are given the same rights—can only obscure the complexity, the intensity, and the psychotic brilliance of a minority's inner life. ~~For example,~~

~~The pieces which follow involve certain preoccupations of the minority, but what they have to say about Jews and Negroes is special, for they deal with the extreme ends of the spectrum. The Hasidim embodied the most passionate and individual expression of Jewish life in many centuries, the Negro as actor, or to anticipate the next paper, the Negro as heavyweight champion and contender is certainly as exceptional. But the argument of existential politics might be that one never understands a people or a time by contemplating a common denominator, for the average man in a minority group is no longer a member of that minority—he is instead a social paste which has been compounded out of the grinding stone of the society which contains him. He is not his own authentic expression. By this logic, the average Negro or Jew is not so much a black man or a Semite as a mediocre ersatz Protestant. That does not mean he is altogether an inferior man of the center, in his suppressed nerve, in his buried heart, exist the themes which the exceptional man of the minority can embody. So a responsible politician, a President, let us say, professionally sensitive to minority groups, cannot begin to be of real stature to that minority until he becomes aware of what is most extraordinary in a people as well as what is most pressing and ubiquitous in their need. The Jews have staggered along for centuries wondering to their primitive horror whether they have betrayed God once in the desert or again twice with Christ: so they are obsessed in their unconscious nightmare with whether they belong to a God of righteousness or a~~

How
large
and
searing
is this
inner
life!

—to
take
one
overpowering
example—

Devil of treachery—their flight from this confrontation has rushed to produce a large part of that mechanistic jargon which now rules American life in philosophy, psychoanalysis, social action, productive process, and the arts themselves. The Negro, secretly fixed upon magic—that elixir of nature which seems to mediate between God and Devil—has never made his peace with Christianity, or mankind. The Negro in the most protected recesses of his soul still does not know if he is a part of mankind, or a special embodiment of nature suspended between society and the gods. ~~As the Negro enters civilization, Faust may be his archetype, even as the Jew has fled Iago as the despised image of himself.~~*

Responses and Reactions I

Disraeli once made a speech in Commons to the effect that the most damaging mistake a conservative party could make was to persecute the Jews. since they were naturally conservative and turned to radical ideas only when they were deprived of an organic place in society. The statement is certainly not without interest, but may grasp no more than a part of the truth. It is more likely the instinct of the Jews to be attracted to large whole detailed views of society, to seek intellectual specifications of the social machine, and to enter precisely those occupations which subtly can offer institutional, personal, and legislative possibilities to a man of quick wit and sensible cohesive culture. The precise need of the essentialist, the authoritarian, or the progressive is to have a social machine upon which one can apply oneself. Later, having earned sufficient and satisfactory power, one may tinker with the machine. It is small wonder that the four corners of modern Protestantism are pegged on Judaistic notions, upon a set of social ideas given bulk and mass only by a most determinedly circumscribed conception of heaven, hell, divine compassion, and eternal punishment. For modern man, Judaeo-Christian man, the social world before him tends to become all of existence.

Yet if the Jews have a greatness, an irreducible greatness, I wonder if it is not to be found in the devil of their dialectic.

* Not Shylock. Iago.

which places madness next to practicality, illumination side by side with duty, and arrogance in bed with humility. The Jews first saw God in the desert—that dramatic terrain of the present tense stripped of the past, blind to the future. The desert is a land where man may feel insignificant or feel enormous. On the desert can perish the last of one's sensitivities; one's end can wither in the dwarf's law of a bleak nature. Or to the contrary, left alone and in fever, a solitary witness, no animal or vegetable close to him, man may come to feel immensely alive, more portentous in his own psychic presence than any manifest of nature. In the desert, man may flee before God, in terror of the apocalyptic voice of *His* lightning, *His* thunder; or, as dramatically, in a style that no Christian would ever attempt, man dares to speak directly to God, bargains with Him, upbraids Him, rises to scold Him, stares into God's eye like a proud furious stony-eyed child. It may be the anguish of the Jew that he lives closer to God and farther away than men of other religions; certainly it must be true that the Jewish ritual leads one closer to the family, the community, to one's duty, but does not encourage a transcendent vault into the presence of any Power or Divine. It is even possible the Orthodox ritual may have evolved out of some sense in the Community that the Jews had better not dare a rhapsodic and *personal* communion with God, not by themselves, not divorced from ritual, not alone, precisely not alone because they had such voracious instincts and such passionate desires for ecstatic union that they might burn with madness and destroy the race. Given their sober gloomy estimate of reality, they would find malaise and nausea in any communion with God which was too private. It would seem a condition somewhat obscene. This tension may even have helped to create their humor. "What ~~of the kinder~~ if I dance naked in the streets?" *happens to the children*

Responses and Reactions III

Before the Coming of the Messiah *

The Baal Shem said:

"Before the coming of the Messiah there will be great

* *The Early Masters*, p. 82. (See footnote on page 152.)

abundance in the world. The Jews will get rich. They will become accustomed to running their houses in the grand style and moderation will be cast to the winds. Then the lean years will come; want and a meager livelihood, and the world will be full of poverty. The Jews will not be able to satisfy their needs, grown beyond rhyme or reason. And then the labor which will bring forth the Messiah, will begin."

Yet to our knowledge, no Messiah was brought forth from the concentration camps. Or were a hundred delivered to die with the victims, secret Angels of Death?

It is possible the Jews will never recover from the woe that no miracle visited the world in that time. Perhaps that is why we are now so interested in housing, in social planning, interfaith councils, and improvement of the PTA in the suburbs. Perhaps that is why half of the American Jews have fallen in love with a super delicatessen called Miami, and much of the other half have developed a subtly overbearing and all but totalitarian passion for the particular sallow doctor who is their analyst. Perhaps that is why we have lost the root. And have the lust to build a world of plastic surfaces whose historic root is urea.

From the Look-Out of Heaven *

At a time of great anguish for Israel, Rabbi Elimelekh brooded more and more on his griefs. Then his dead master, the maggid of Mezritch, appeared to him. Rabbi Elimelekh cried out: "Why are you silent in such dreadful need?" He answered: "In Heaven we see that all that seems evil to you is a work of mercy."

To die before one's time in a gas chamber may offer the good fortune that one does not have to live beyond one's time and be kept alive by medicines which do not reach the disease but only deaden the pain. In a gas chamber one loses one's life and conceivably saves one's death. If there is eternity, and we possess a soul which can either carry through life into death, or perish in life and never reach eternity, then the real need for a Messiah would appear in that part of the world, or history, where souls are becoming dead rather than lives being lost. By this logic, there would be more unconscious demand for the Messiah in a country at peace than a city at war.

* *The Early Masters*, p. 112.

The logic is unassailable if God has no need of Time and merely studies the way we save our souls or lose them. But if there is any urgency in God's intent, if we are not actors working out a play for our salvation, but rather soldiers in an army which seeks to carry some noble conception of Being out across the stars, or back into the protoplasm of life, then a portion of God's creative power was extinguished in the camps of extermination. If God is not all-powerful but existential, discovering the possibilities and limitations of His creative powers in the form of the history which is made by His creatures, then one must postulate an existential equal to God, an antagonist, the Devil, a principle of Evil whose signature was the concentration camps, whose joy is to waste substance, whose intent is to prevent God's conception of Being from reaching its mysterious goal. If one considers the hypothesis that God is not all-powerful, indeed not the architect of Destiny, but rather, the creator of Nature, then evil becomes a record of the Devil's victories over God. It is not so comforting a postulation as the notion of God Omnipotent able to give us Eternal Rest, but it must also be seen that if God is all-powerful, the Jews cannot escape the bitter recognition that He considered one of His inscrutable purposes to be worth more than the lives of half His chosen people. Indeed this recognition may have paralyzed the organized religious spirit of the American Jews. The Catholic Church becomes more powerful every year, the American Protestants have produced several existential philosophers of importance—who have come to a consideration of the mysteries of anxiety—but the conventional Jews in America, which is to say the ones who are formally attached to the religion, build new synagogues which look like recreation centers and go to them because it would make their mothers happy. *Angst* is left to the mechanical formulations of the analyst who now leans less on Freud and more on Equanil.

The Teaching of the Soul *

Rabbi Pinhas often cited the words: "A man's soul will teach him," and emphasized them by adding: "There is no man who is not incessantly being taught by his soul."

One of his disciples asked: "If this is so, why don't men obey their souls?"

* *The Early Masters*, p. 121.

2579

"The soul teaches incessantly," Rabbi Pinhas explained, "but it never repeats."

If God and the Devil are locked in an implacable war, it might not be excessive to assume their powers are separate, God the lord of inspiration, the Devil a monumental bureaucrat of repetition. To learn from an inner voice the first time it speaks to us is a small bold existential act, for it depends upon following one's instinct which must derive, in no matter how distorted a fashion, from God, whereas institutional knowledge is appropriated by the Devil. The soul speaks once and chooses not to repeat itself, because to repeat a message is to give the Devil in one's psyche a chance to prepare a trap. People repeat the same message over and over in order to employ a Satanic principle—the audience before them must be deadened by the monotony of making the same response, or must reveal—by the separate ways in which the question is answered—some protected corner of their nature.

For the Sake of renewal *

Rabbi Pinhas said: "Solomon, the preacher, says: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' because he wants to destroy the world, so that it may receive new life."

Not all destruction destroys. Not all construction creates. If the world, seen through the eyes of Marx, is the palpable embodiment of a vast collective theft—the labor which was stolen from men by other men over the centuries—then one need not retire in terror from the idea that the power of the world belongs to the Devil, and God needs men to overthrow him.

The entrance of the Devil into aesthetics is visible in a new airline terminal, a luxury hotel, a housing project, or a civic center. Their flat surfaces speak of power without vision, their plastic materials suggest flesh without the unmanageable details of blood.

The Secret of Sleep †

Rabbi Zusya's younger son said:

"The zaddikim who, in order to serve, keep going from

* *The Early Masters*, p. 124.

† *The Early Masters*, p. 252.

sanctuary to sanctuary, and from world to world, must cast their life from them, time and again, so that they may receive a new spirit, that over and over, a new revelation may float above them. This is the secret of sleep."

Can it be that insomnia is the rage of the Devil determined not to let us sleep long enough to receive a new spirit and thus be curious enough to defy our pact with him again? Or can insomnia also be the anger of the Lord who knows that the new spirit he provides in sleep will be handed over to the Devil in the morning? On those occasions when we do not know if it is God or the Devil we must fear, do we not have insomnia with *Angst*, does not madness insinuate itself? There is a suggestion to go out on the street and look for the adventure One or the Other is demanding. Most of us stay home. All right then, so we die of cancer, goes the sigh in the wind of our small depleted courage.

With the Evil Urge *

Once, when Rabbi Pinhas entered the House of Study, he saw that his disciples, who had been talking busily, stopped and started at his coming. He asked them: "What were you talking about?"

"Rabbi," they said, "we were saying how afraid we are that the Evil Urge will pursue us."

"Don't worry," he replied. "You have not gotten high enough for it to pursue you. For the time being, you are still pursuing it."

Responses and Reactions IV

Through the Hat †

Once Rabbi Mikhal visited a city where he had never been before. Soon some of the prominent members of the congregation came to call on him. He fixed a long gaze on the forehead of everyone who came, and then told him the flaws

* *The Early Masters*, p. 132.

† *The Early Masters*, p. 142. (See footnote on page 152.)

in his soul and what he could do to heal them. It got around that there was a zaddik in the city who was versed in reading faces, and could tell the quality of the soul by looking at the forehead. The next visitors pulled their hats down to their noses. "You are mistaken," Rabbi Mikhel said to them. "An eye which can see through the flesh, can certainly see through the hat."

Reading faces is a frontier art. An honest face may be either honest or a masterpiece of treachery. Consider this: every inanimate form in nature is the record of a war—the shape of a stone reflects the obduracy of the material versus the attrition of the elements. Whereas the meaning of the forms in a man's face or body is more complex. An honest mouth hints of battles taken against everything dishonest in the world and in oneself, but an honest mouth cannot necessarily be trusted, for humans have the ability to displace the psychic war within themselves. A man can influence the growth of his features, the shape of his body, he may be able to transpose the revelation of his personal forms from the surface of his skin to the function of his organs. An actor can cultivate an honest mouth and suffer in exchange a bad digestive system. An honest man can let his mouth go slack in order to protect the well-being of his stomach. The art of reading faces depends on more than an instinct for the language of forms; one must also be able to sense the dialectic between a face, a temporary mood, and the formal character of the man before one. It is this instinct upon which Mikhel was obviously depending. So a hat could bother him little. Obviously, he would "see *through* the flesh."

The Story of the Cape *

A woman came to Rabbi Israel, the maggid of Koznitz, and told him, with many tears, that she had been married a dozen years and still had not borne a son. "What are you going to do about it?" he asked her. She did not know what to say.

"My mother," so the maggid told her, "was aging and still had no child. Then she heard that the holy Baal Shem was stopping over in Apt in the course of a journey. She hurried to his inn and begged him to pray she might bear a son. 'What are you willing to do about it?' he asked. 'My husband is a poor book-binder,' she replied, 'but I do have one fine thing I shall give to the rabbi.' She went home as fast as

* *The Early Masters*, p. 286.