

BEGIN-ING

HE REMEMBERS the gray light that filled the courtyard beyond the classroom's high windows, he remembers the persistent smell of pee that hovered around his classmates and that perhaps was due more to the poorly washed floor and the sticky dampness of the desks than to the undergarments and childish incontinence of the students, he remembers the agreeable friction, the light granulation of the paper under the lead of his pencil, he remembers the sense of a fever than ran through his cheeks and upper body, the sense of urgency, of desire, of imperious need, he remembers that the teacher passed very close to him and watched him, but without comment, without bothering him, aware that he had broken through the moorings of scholastic discipline, that he was no longer listening, that he was no longer leaning on the required exercises, aware deep down that something extraordinary was happening and that it was better to respect the flow of it, for it's unusual that a five-year-old boy, barely literate, escapes all institutional constraint in such an open way, unfolds the inside of a notebook cover, and starts to pour out a story unlike any other, and he remembers that after having blackened the interior space, the virgin space of a first notebook cover, after having filled it with his awkward, wobbly, disorderly handwriting, he seized a second notebook cover, then a third, determined to pursue his composition whatever the cost, suddenly no longer obeying the instructions or conventions, freeing himself from all authority, and first and foremost neglecting the authority of the teacher who grazed him and who paused above him for a beat, curious to see what he was doing, for he was jealously concentrated on his task, engrossed in the effort that his narration demanded, and he also remembers the images that formed and crystalized in his mind, the dialogues of adults that took place there and that he didn't know how to transcribe, he remembers the jungle, the forest, the clouds that seemed to reflect the fires, he remembers the animals, the cries, the children who ran, terrorized, dressed in tattered oversized jackets, and he remembers the heat that pricked his eyes, the hot passion that he tried

Writers

to overpower by forming the letters as quickly as possible and by lining up words that he had never used until then, for he was still very little, in a phase of his existence where everything was new, speech, emotions, images, dreams and reality, knowledge, and in fact he remembers the impression of naive triumph that brought him towards the idea that he had just entered into the world of stories that one invents oneself, and also the idea that he was creating a more complex text than he should have been able to naturally at his age, and for that he felt a clearly proud joy, and also he remembers that he had decided not to stop when faced with the obstacles that written language accumulated beneath his fingers and to keep in mind that the top priority wasn't to execute feats of perfect spelling to please the teacher but to lay down the text torrentially, to lay it down ignoring all other considerations, to make it exist despite the abrasion of standards and the grammatical approximations that he suspected would be numerous, and moreover he didn't have an inward goal of offering up this text for the reading pleasure of adults, and even less, of course, as reading material for his classmates, most of whom still had trouble deciphering words of more than two syllables, and he remembers, too, that this certitude of making the text exist for himself, of working for no audience, that this conviction had given him strength from the moment he had begun to spread himself on the pages of the first notebook cover, and also he remembers that this happened in October, and that in the courtyard, while the morning light was growing steadier, a peculiar rain started up, a gossamer rain, like there used to be ages ago, in autumn, a soft rain, or more like a snow composed of thousands of long webs from minuscule spiders, and at the same time he remembers the name of the teacher and of a few of his classmates, mainly girls, and in response to the question that he was just asked again by a scratchy, crazed voice, and which was accompanied by a smack to the head, he says:

"I don't remember. I don't remember anything. My mind is empty."

Several seconds of incredulity follow on the part of his interrogators, then another slap, this time right in the face.

There are two of them, a man and a woman, and they take turns. After the slap, the woman repeats the question in a shrill voice. The

interrogation started ten minutes ago. It is being led in violation of all common sense. What do they want to make him confess? He can't figure it out and he concerns himself with it as little as possible. He's in their hands and he doesn't want to cooperate, he has never cooperated with inquisitors, and even if these ones are more or less his own kind, even if they belong as he does to a category that is intellectually, socially, and concretely wretched and rotten, he returns to his old tactics of dissidence. He pretends to understand nothing, but moreover, he forces himself to understand nothing so that his idiocy takes on greater authenticity. He tries to feel profoundly passive and stupid. He remains in the presence of screaming and mistreatment, of course he can't deny that, but at the same time he floats at a distance from the real, at a distance from everything. He has turned inward where possible, in one of his latest moments of fear, perhaps not very solid but very far from the present and even from the past, he has taken refuge in a moment from his childhood. Ages ago, he perfected this technique of intimate evasion, he put it into practice when he found himself in police stations, he continued to adopt it during his trials, in front of his judges, then much later in the presence of psychiatrists, and now that he's confronted by his insane comrades, by his insane comrades who have gone on a rampage, he figures that it's better to barricade himself there once again, in the depths, at the source, far from the atrocious world of adults. People rough him up, people want to make him talk, want him to tell them what they want to hear. He lets them beat him and get angry, he floats elsewhere, in a secret piece of elsewhere, he drifts there, in an elementary school classroom, far away.

He remembers that, while with his left hand he held steady the notebook cover he was writing in, he sensed in the background, around him, the rest of the class, hardly more than twenty-five children, twenty-six or twenty-seven perhaps, but fewer than thirty, among them Linda Woo, Eliane Schust, Mourma Yogodane, his three girlfriends, accomplices in the schoolyard and accomplices in the cabinets, as well as little Jean Doïevode, son of the man who was shot, sitting right behind him, a smart kid despite his age, six years old tops, never out of ideas for phantasmagoric or subversive plots, but who

was quietly dozing off that day, no doubt drugged by the thick October air, by the silence of this October morning, and, if he sensed the nearby presence of beings who were a part of his life, of his friends, he also felt on him the weight of the teacher's surveillance, for even if she had accepted his plunge into writing, into his written exploration of a parallel universe where school no longer existed, even if she had judged it wise not to intervene, she was careful not to let her deviant attitude be remarked, and not to let it drag the other students into his no-man's-land, and he also remembers the color of the sky beyond the window, a color of sad wool, a sky that still seemed heavy with the morning's fog, with a hint of azure that timidly pierced the gloom, and he remembers the gossamer threads, the rippling filaments, the hairs of such extreme fineness that they could not be seen if backlit, but whose silvery whiteness would stand out in perfect clarity when they floated in front of the leaves of the trees in the courtyard, when they slowly flew in front of the chestnut and linden trees, he remembers that for an instant he almost let himself be distracted by the silky texture of the air outside, by this miraculous rain, for, while burning with a violent excitement that demanded he neglect any mental activity besides writing, he still held an interest in the strange things of the world, in the supernatural phenomena against which adults' confidence would waver, and the autumnal apparition of the gossamer was among these, about which some had told him that they were traces of a migration of microscopic spiders, while others hesitated, then spoke more willingly of the hair of angels and associating their sudden, massive appearance with the passage, in the smallest hours of the night, of cosmic vessels that had come from who knows which constellations, inhabited by creatures that had no wish to forge relationships with humans and subhumans but that observed them and judged them, while still others, like Jean Doïevode's mother, reported that scholars disagreed on the subject, that some had determined that the origin of the angels' hair was certainly vegetal, not animal, thereby eliminating the spider hypothesis, and that furthermore Lamarck's theory hadn't really been refuted, in which he maintained that what we had here was a sort of crystallization of droplets of fog, for it was true that once they touched the

ground the threads quickly dissipated, evaporated, sublimated, and so he remembers that for an instant, instead of being completely inhabited by the images that his mind and his fingers did their best to translate, with only a child's words, he had been tempted to lift his head to follow the evolutions of this ghostly cloud, but that the next moment he easily resisted the temptation, and that he returned to his writerly work, and he also remembers the sentence that he was finishing at the exact moment when his concentration briefly waned, he sees in front of him again his rough handwriting, the lines that refused to keep their horizontality, he feels again the faint warmth of the soft pencil, black, around which he clenched his fingers, and the feeling of pride and inevitability that burned in the backs of his eye sockets, as though embers glowed beneath his skull, he leans anew on the cardboard-colored paper, yellower, in any case, than the paper inside his notebook, thicker, and he effortlessly reads this bit of text, *Suddenly they herd eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee it was the red poleece who were leaving the forest with the lion the boa the giant turtel and suddenly they saw the plane that had flied that morning and that disapeered and the red poleece had told them that the wite poleece had killd all the forest animals all the children and the ants told them that the plane had drowned in the see that was stormy, he remembers this sentence and the images that jostled in his mind, and the warm intoxication that flowed through him at the thought that he was in the midst of writing a story, of writing what had to be written in exactly the way it had to be written, he remembers this satisfaction that accompanied him even while he was writing laboriously, choppily, because his fingers hadn't yet mastered the elementary reflexes and codes, he remembers this intimate boastfulness that was superimposed on the artisanal pleasure of composing and that warmed him, and the inexplicable feeling that he was examining himself from the exterior, sympathetically, from on high, like an adult could have done, like the teacher, for instance, must have done when she froze over his shoulder, for he heard her walk up behind him and stop, and he remembered the teacher's name, which had been in shadows until now, Madame Mohndjee, Frau Mohndjee, and he said:*

"I can't answer you. My memory is empty. They emptied my

memory with their electric shocks. I no longer have any memories at all."

Once again they beat him. A deluge of punches, slaps, kicks in the shins, the calves. He goes from one side to the other, they've tied him to a wheelchair, he can't dodge anything, they push him up against the wall, they abandon him, they start up again. They've slipped into white coats that they have stolen from medical personnel, but even with closed eyes, you couldn't mistake them for psychiatrists, or even police officers disguised as psychiatrists. Their odor, their wild eyes, and their nervousness betray them. They are nothing but two mental patients who have seized power in the special penitentiary clinic. Their sole authority is that of violence. They are determined to get him to confess that he has contacts with parallel universes, with aliens, that since his birth he has been a double agent, that he pretends to be insane like them, that he knows the list of the next to be struck down, that when he wrote books he inserted secret orders into all the chapters, invitations to a secret and criminal practice of patience, they want him to recognize that he prepares the transformation of humans into spiders. This is the sort of misdeed that they wait for him to confess. All of this is accompanied by mental confusion, by whispered asides and muttering, which makes the interrogation indistinct and even grotesque. He knows that they were brought in on charges of violent insanity, that they are murderous, uncontrollable, and since the beginning, he resigned himself to consider that, like them, he has experienced one more painful phase in his interminable journey of imprisonment and hospitalization, and that, even if everything suggests that this will be the last, it's better not to attach too much importance to it.

The man in the white coat was condemned for a series of political assassinations that he carried out in his youth, and was then transferred, after twenty-eight years of high-security prison, into the world of special psychiatry. He is fifty-seven and he will never again leave this establishment unless it's in a coffin. He hasn't understood a thing about the outside world in a long time, his mental filters are encrusted with grime and no longer send him anything to interpret his surroundings besides motifs of rage and dread. After having made

himself master of the place and having slit the throats of the medical actors who, according to him, intended to exterminate all of the residents and replace them with clay statues, he decided not to continue his evasion, contenting himself instead with tasks of immediate management. He delegated the responsibilities of defending the building to a team of experienced cannibals. As for him, he oversees sorting the survivors, leads the interrogation of suspects, and pronounces summary judgments. His roommates are the most threatened, for he's had years to learn not to trust them. He's already eliminated two of them. His name is Bruno Khatchatourian. The shaved spots for the electroshocks are visible on his skull.

The woman in the white coat is named Greta, nobody knows her last name. She's a relatively new resident, her stay at the special hospital began ten months ago, but she's been here long enough to gain Bruno Khatchatourian's trust, enough, at least, for him to become her lover and listen with sullen enthusiasm to her suggestions of murder. She was sentenced for horrible attacks; she couldn't integrate into the normal correctional environment and the prisons finally washed their hands of her by entrusting her to the special doctors. The personnel often claimed that she was the most dangerous patient in the women's wing, and that her moments of apparent tranquility hid a cunning fury, ready to overflow at the first opportunity. Greta actively helped Bruno Khatchatourian and several others in the bloodiest episodes of the insurrection that has just taken place. She now presides over the operations of sorting and investigation, slapping her own aberrant accusations on top of Bruno Khatchatourian's suspicious constructions. Her hair must have been a beautiful raven black once, but now it flies in every direction when she agitates and gesticulates, and a good deal of black has ceded its place to a dirty gray, disagreeable, almost powdery.

In the chief doctor's ravaged office, above the bodies of the doctor, the doctor's assistant, and two guards, the dialogue between Greta and Bruno Khatchatourian begins again. Both of them use a nightmarish tone, and sometimes they stammer, overwhelmed by tics, by their internal fears that they refuse to express and that twist their mouths, ravaged also by their poor knowledge of the ins and outs

of their own discourse. There are even moments when they lose the thread to such an extent that they forget they're in the middle of investigating the morality of one of their toughest co-detainees.

"First of all, the moon must not go down," says Greta.

"Which?" asks Bruno Khatchatourian.

"The moon," says Greta. "The night moon. It must not go down. It didn't catch fire. The stinking moon."

The one that stinks like the old dairy farm," Bruno Khatchatourian confirms.

"Yes, like the old dairy farm," exults Greta. "The old cow pails, the leeches in the ditch. They've tried everything. It didn't catch fire. It doesn't smell like fire. It never smelled like fire."

"And when it's gone down?" stammers Bruno Khatchatourian.

"It won't go down!" Greta says angrily. "It stinks! It stinks like old lady Philippe's apron!"

"That old bitch," hazards Bruno Khatchatourian. "It must not go down!"

"You don't understand," Greta sneers. "Old lady Philippe's apron. That bitch's apron. If she waves it under our noses, we're fucked!"

They get closer to him. They jostle him. Bruno Khatchatourian hits him on the chest. He takes a boxer's stance, reels troublingly, seems to concentrate in order to drive a final, terrible strike into his solar plexus, but in the end, he misses.

"And you," he asks his prisoner, "Do you know her, old lady Philippe?"

"Nobody knows her," says Greta. She's the one who killed me, that bitch. When I was little. She had made a pact with the authorities. She shook her apron under my nose."

"This guy, he knows her," suggests Bruno Khatchatourian.

Greta paces the room. Her hair flies around her.

"She killed me, that old bitch," she repeats. She shook her nasty old apron under my nose. I was so young. She was with the others. They all killed me."

"This guy, too, he made a pact with the authorities," Bruno Khatchatourian takes up again.

He accompanies his affirmation with a kick to the wheelchair.

The chair slides half a meter, it's going to hit the wall. The prisoner lets out a groan.

"We're going to waste him," Greta promises. "We won't even wait for the moon to go down or not. Then we can kill the ones that are left, and my parents, and ... My parents, those bastards ... They made a pact with old lady Philippe. They're just like him ... We'll kill them all!"

"He teamed up with our parents," mumbles Bruno Khatchatourian. "With the dark forces. With the demons."

"With the demons that piss on the moon," Greta finishes. "With the capitalist demons and the demons that stink."

"Will you confess, yes or no?" screams Bruno Khatchatourian.

"With the capitalists, with old lady Philippe," Greta roars.

They come back to him, they beat him.

He accepts the bad luck cheerfully, and he waits, almost tranquilly, for their rage to reach a new level and for them to waste him. He knows the end is near, and rather than taking stock of his existence, rather than invoking the last decade passed in exile, marked by a long, monotonous chain of fights and days of prostration, or what preceded the universe of special medicine, a life of guerrilla warfare, unpublished or badly published novels, and confinement in a high-security neighborhood, he prefers to take refuge in Frau Mohndjee's classroom.

An October morning.

The daylight that remains in the courtyard like an unfinished dawn.

A gray day, bluish gray.

The odor of his classmates' pee, the whiffs of pee and mops that swirl around the desks, around the floor that's washed every evening and that, in autumn, doesn't dry.

Behind the windowpanes, thousands of mysterious filaments that drift in the absence of wind.

Madame Mohndjee, Frau Mohndjee who walks up and down the aisles separating the students, who dictates elementary calculations to her students and who carefully ensures his neighbors don't distract him, who scolds Jean Doïevode when he starts to fidget behind

him, who even borrows a fourth notebook cover from among Jean Doïevode's belongings and places it next to him, so that he can continue his work uninterrupted.

He remembers this initial session of literary creation, he remembers that in the first notebook cover he had written the number *One* and that he had added a title, *Beginning*, having the hazy intuition that a day would come when the question of the ending would be asked, but later, much later, and about that he remembers this intense feeling of no return that propelled him forward, that authorized him or rather forced him to reject the law of the group, the law of the class, and instead of doing calculation exercises with the others, pushed him to fill a third, then a fourth notebook cover, and he remembers that the moment he numbered them, then, when he smoothed them with the palm of his hand before pouring out text, he was filled with a wave of exaltation due very clearly to the fact that he was hereby adding a new tome to the work that he had undertaken, to this work that seemed immense to him, and he remembers that as he began writing the fourth volume, and while the intoxication grew stronger, he had encountered the questioning gaze of Mourma Yogodane, and that he had returned to his task without responding, and of Mourma Yogodane he remembers the contact of her teeth on his tongue, because far from the adults, in a sphere entirely real but private, unknown to adults, the children of Frau Mohndjee's class surrendered regularly to sexual experiences, several children anyway, who made up a small clique in which he was included, composed primarily of Mourma Yogodane, Jean Doïevode, Linda Woo, and Eliane Schust, and he remembered that from time to time they closed themselves into the cabinets and that there they developed, moreover without emotion, the foundation of their childlike eroticism, without emotion and simply with curiosity, above all with the impression of accomplishing something that was necessary but that didn't do much for them, perhaps aside from the minor euphoria of having acted like adults away from the adults, and suddenly he remembers at once the sexuality of the cabinets and the sentence with which he started the third volume of his work, *Twelve years later they comed back they bringed some poizened food to kill the boa the giant turtel*

and the marshuns and they seed that the trees around the village was red and that in the streets the poleece was ded the marshuns killd them, he remembers at once the faulty spelling of this childish phrase, word for word, and the contact of Mourma Yogodane's teeth with his tongue, for one of the clandestine activities to which they devoted themselves in the cabinets consisted of licking one another's teeth, each one in turn and with no other pleasure than that of a job completed, and he remembers other practices that didn't elicit their enthusiasm either and in which they cavorted in silence, not moving any more than was necessary and without the thought occurring to them that they were breaking prohibitions, having no idea of prohibitions or of taboo, having only in mind that they were not comfortable in the hardly welcoming semi-darkness of the cabinets, but that, despite it all, their behavior responded to natural and indisputable demands, which is why, sixty years later, he remembers with no embarrassment and no shame that Eliane Schust dropped her panties in front of him and that he sniffed her behind, that Linda Woo crouched in front of him and spent a long time, thoughtfully and without commentary, examining and handling his genital organs, and that one day Jean Doïevode peed in his mouth, and he remembers that at the moment when Mourma Yogodane's questioning gaze met his, the memory of these sessions in the cabinets came to him, but that he pushed them away, conscious that in no case could he allow his imagination to waver, conscious that he mustn't at any price, even for a second, desert the narrative outpouring that he had launched into an hour earlier and of which he imagined neither interruption nor conclusion, and shortly after that the recess bell had rung, and he remembers that, while the classroom emptied, his classmates glanced at him, saying nothing and looking surprised, for one thing because he continued to write without getting up or even lifting his head, for another because Frau Mohndjee wasn't getting angry with him, wasn't making any remark, and on the contrary encouraged the students to leave without bothering him, explaining in a low voice to Jean Doïevode that he shouldn't pull on his sleeve or his hair and that he needed to remain in the room alone, away from the world, entirely alone with the story he was writing, and in this way he was

able to take advantage of total solitude for a good fifteen minutes, while in the courtyard the students shouted, bickered or chased one another, played, and he remembers that he made better and faster progress and that before the end of recess he had started on a fifth notebook cover, shamelessly stolen from Jean Doïevode's stash, and that this fifth volume began with a development of insects, *And the children turned around and sawed in the sky the marshuns that wanted to clime on the bees of the forest on the wasps but they didnt manage and they killd them and the hornets arived and they surrounded the marshuns and the children cried wah wah wah wah wah to make them get away and the giant buterflies was ded too, and he remembers that at the end of recess, while the students flowed around him to take their places once again, everyone glanced at him on the sly, as though taking care not to be in contact with him, and that he thought then that he was sick, that the fever that burned in his face perhaps had another origin than the internal fire of writing, and that perhaps he had caught one of those terrifying illnesses whose existence adults often mention, and whose symptoms were unknown to him at the time, let alone the spelling, poliomyelitis, typhoid, skeletal tuberculosis, plutocratic greed, the plague.*

Next to him, trailing a stinking wake of sweat and blood, stirring up the stench that their victims had emitted before dying, for the doctor and the doctor's assistant had fouled themselves when they understood that they wouldn't survive, Greta and Bruno Khatchaturian are losing patience. Once again they throw themselves on him and shove him, they hurl his wheelchair against the wall, they slap him as hard as they can. Once again they threaten to execute him if he doesn't cooperate. They haven't read any of his books, but they nonetheless haven't forgotten that he has the reputation of someone who, for ten years, has stood up to the police with weapons and explosives. His aura impresses them. He has directed commandos who carried out justice, who shot down enemies of the people while the whole world thought that egalitarian theories were as outmoded as after the Berlin Wall came down. They would like it, in the end, if he came around to their side, whether by admitting that he's been, for a thousand years, a clandestine leader of dark forces, or by tracing for

them a strategy that could lead them to final victory. They don't really know, in the end, whether he's an ally to convince, or an enemy. They would like above all for him to help them to drive the dark forces out from the asylum, to prepare a list of spies, they want him to rid the world of the last nurses, of Martians, of colonialists, and of capitalism in general. They want him to make a clear decision about the capitalists that piss on the moon, about the cooks in the cafeteria, about old lady Philippe.

"I don't know," he murmurs from time to time. "I can't seem to collect my thoughts. I don't know who old lady Philippe is. I have never seen her here. Perhaps it's another story."

They rough him up, they circle around him, stepping over the bodies or sometimes stumbling on them, and they shout, they get angry, they grab his wheelchair and bash it against the cupboard, against the table, against the walls. They mutter, they scream. They torment him, but irregularly, and sometimes they once again give the impression of having forgotten that they're interrogating him. All of a sudden they start to converse or fight as if no witness were present. The dialogues have no rhyme or reason, and they're frightening.

"Old lady Philippe is on the brink of savagery," says Greta.

"That old bitch," moans Bruno Khatchatourian. "What the hell does she have to do with anything? Are you afraid she'll come down with the cannibals? Are you afraid she'll come with the pissing moon?"

"You don't get it," Greta says angrily. "Old lady Philippe is with my parents. She's going to kill them. She's going to kill everyone. She's going to kill the nurses."

"And this guy, has he been conspiring with the nurses?" asks Bruno Khatchatourian as he hits the prisoner.

"As surely as two and two are four," exclaims Greta. "He's a spy for old lady Philippe. He conspired with that bitch, with my parents, with the nurses and with the authorities."

She slaps him and she abandons him, she goes from one side to the other, stammering and kicking the bodies of the doctor and assistant. Or she heads to the window, grimaces at the outdoors, and does an about-face. Her grizzled hair flies about with her, behind her,

disorderly, fluttering, flying.

She comes back towards him, towards the wheelchair.

"In any case, you're fucked," she says.

She starts to laugh cruelly. She plays with a stapler that she has picked up from the doctor's desk. She hits him in the head with it, but without trying to break his skull.

"It's not even about old lady Philippe," grumbles Bruno Khatchatourian. "This guy conspired with the Martians. He conspired with the Martians, end of story."

He punches the prisoner. He hits him in the head, in the neck.

"With the Martians and with your parents," Bruno Khatchatourian says, worked up. "We'll make him spit out the truth. He's a bastard like the others."

"He doesn't want to rid us of the Martians," says Greta. "He's been protecting them since he was a kid. He protects them like an old hen warming her brood."

"He has them in his belly and in his mind," says Bruno Khatchatourian.

"He's hatching them," shouts Greta. "He's got old lady Philippe, too! In his belly and in his mind, he's got old lady Philippe, too!"

"They've done nothing but kill us since the beginning!" shouts Bruno Khatchatourian, indignant.

They take up the beating again. They work on him for half a minute. He wavers on his seat and stays quiet.

He is lucid enough to understand that he has very little chance of making it out. The two lunatics have already amply shown that they could put anybody to death at the slightest change of mood. They have made terror reign since the morning, since they took power. Behind them, a large stream of blood, with them, a handful of furious insurgents, cannibals ready for anything, and a few murderous patients as delirious as they are. In front of them, nothing. He knows that they're not susceptible to reason and that it's better, rather, not to engage them in any discussion. Each sentence addressed to one or the other of them is received as a taunt if it doesn't coincide perfectly with their apocalyptic conception of the world. It's highly likely that suddenly, without warning, they'll drag him into the common room

and lock him up with the other patients, with the hostages, in the room with all the lowered iron shutters, in the room where they've already emptied three canisters of alcohol so that they can light it on fire in case of any outside intervention. They could also very easily cut the interrogation short and kill him with a chair or shards of glass, as they did when they wasted the watchmen and the personnel. Their takeover is too far along, things have gone too far.

Their takeover is too far along.

The special psychiatric establishment is a battlefield.

Things have gone too far.

No retreat is possible.

One can just make out, in the distance, the brouhaha of police sirens, the megaphone announcements that the officers repeat as they negotiate with the group of knife-wielding schizophrenics, with the cannibals lurking near the guardhouse, and he supposes that the emergency situation specialists are now studying tactics to regain control of the site, but deep down he knows that the police won't intervene in time to save him, and that neither Greta, nor Bruno Khatchatourian, nor he will be alive when the operation is complete.

"The police," stutters Bruno Khatchatourian. "D'you hear?"

"Eh," he says.

"We hear them," says Bruno Khatchatourian. "They're getting closer."

"We're on the brink of savagery," says Greta. "We're strong. We have the situation well in hand. They won't dare to do anything to us."

"And what do we do if they put the moon before the cattle?" asks Bruno Khatchatourian.

"If old lady Philippe shakes out her apron, we set the whole thing ablaze," boasts Greta. "She is in the palm of our hand. Now she's so small. We just close our fist and she disappears."

"If they get close, we'll say that we have their leader," suggests Bruno Khatchatourian.

"They're blowing their horns," says Greta. "They're blowing the horns of the apocalypse. They don't scare us. We can also spew out the apocalypse."

"All they've gotta do is provoke us," splutters Bruno Khatchatourian.

"You don't get it," laments Greta, exasperated.

"They have extraterrestrials," says Bruno Khatchatourian. "We have their leader. They can't do anything to us."

"We're on the brink of savagery," Greta grimaces again. "They better not come close, the bastards."

They move more and more quickly, more and more nervously in the medical office, whose dimensions now seem cramped, for they pace every which way, and no matter what they do, they run into an obstacle. Every four or five steps they hit a wall, a piece of furniture, a body, or even their prisoner, tied to his wheelchair and trying not to see them.

He smells their odor of dirty clothes, of insane grime, of insane sweat, of blood.

The fatal moment is approaching and he has no illusions about it, but he refuses to become sad or frightened, he doesn't want to grieve uselessly at the idea of the coming execution, he doesn't want to ponder the absurdity, he refuses to deplore the death that will be inflicted on him by these fellow detainees struck by delirium and murderous rage, a situation he could have imagined in books, sure, or visualized in a romance, but that he hadn't foreseen for himself, and he seeks to overcome his disappointment at having to die so stupidly, at the hands of former comrades or other peers, perhaps less clear than he is on the ideological map, but close, in the end, plunged into an identical unhappiness, sharing with him the exclusion, the hallucinations, and the solitude of madness, and refuses too to dwell on the hateful hope that he caressed a few moments earlier and that still subsists in him in traces, in the form of violent scenes at the end of which the police save him, scenes of rescue that end in embraces with the enemy, with the enemy soldiers, whose uniforms stink of military leather, frying oil, gunpowder, and blood, and it's why he delights neither in the images of his own death, nor in those of his highly unlikely deliverance, and with that eliminated, he once again pushes aside the temptation of seeing the main episodes of his failed life flash by, he doesn't want to project internally the solemn and

grotesque film that will resume its course of writer and combatant, of artist-warrior having wandered endlessly in a lost war, in the territories of a war crowned by collapse and by nothingness, a radical struggle against capitalism, against the military-industrial machines, and against the intellectual buffoons of the capitalists, he doesn't wish to relive, for these extreme minutes, the lost battles, the wasted decades, the uninterrupted chain of defeats and betrayals, of arrests, of evasions, of incarcerations, life in prison, life in the camp, the terminal confinement in the system of special psychiatric establishments, and, at the same time, he wants to forget once and for all his work as a writer, so irregular and so derisory, his books, published or not, whose titles he has already forgotten, whose interconnected stories he cannot evoke except as an indistinct and graceless mass, but something resists in his consciousness, and he realizes that his mind continues to stir up a literary project that he never abandoned and that aims to regroup all of his texts, to crystalize them in a final story and even a final sentence that will put an end to the ensemble, and even a final word that will respond to the first word of the very first story, to this "beginning" placed like a title on the first notebook cover, and he remembers that at the time when he was still writing, during a period when he hadn't left writing behind for the straight-jacket, he had dreamed of concluding his literary edifice, of course in a novelistic context where it would be demanded, with the word "finished" or "end," and then of withdrawing himself for good from the worries of written language, then he told himself that the project was childish, and in any case too formalistic and too pretentious, and that not having been able to write "finished" or "end" on a final page before his death is just one more defeat, a tiny, unimportant personal defeat, a microscopic defeat, and he turns his thoughts back to that October morning in Frau Mohndjee's classroom, he prefers finding himself there, at the beginning, and he sees himself again, during recess, in the empty room, feverishly molding a child's confused, inexplicable, hermetic and foundational story, and he comes back to the very first minute of his fever, and suddenly he remembers that when he got that first word down, with a brown colored pencil to which he later preferred a simple graphite pencil, he remembers that

as he wrote "beginning" he had the ephemeral but vertiginous sensation that he was actually continuing something and that, without managing to formulate it or understand it, he was walking along a passageway that connected him to a past life, a past existence, and he remembers that this passageway that he hadn't even really glimpsed vanished as quickly, and he also remembers the assurance with which he stripped the notebook and the workbook of their paper notebook covers, as if it were a matter of course, with an artisanal gesture that had long been a part of his daily life, even defining his daily life since the beginning of time, taking a notebook cover with the intention of tracing fictions upon it, smoothing the paper with the palm of his hand and instantly opening up a path, instantly saying in wobbly letters and wobbly words, *In a faraway country there is very mean black people that ar savages*, and he remembers the colors of the exercise notebook, muted crimson and muted garden green, and the illustration that was on the first page, a little boy and a little girl seen from behind, marveling at the technical progress and the comfort offered by bottled propane and butane, and he also remembers that on the back of the notebook cover there were multiplication tables, and that on the flaps appeared once again the model house, the little girl leaning over a cooking pot and the model gas tanks, and he recalls the odors of the paper, the parquet still wet with dirty water, the scent of the pencil that he clenched in his fingers, the scent of wax and the mop and his desk, but now he tries in vain to recall the images that possessed him before and during recess, he can't manage to recall the images anymore, perhaps because he's distracted by the growing rumor of the present, perhaps because the torrent of reality suddenly inflates around him and catches up to him, for on the lawn, below the medical office, he hears shouts, whistles and explosions, and while he's in the middle of telling himself that neither the workbooks, nor the notebook covers, nor his life have had any particular meaning in the world, he senses Greta and Bruno Khatchatourian running all over the room, panicked, panting, and he remembers another sentence of the text written that day, *so they sawed that the forest animals was skared and they ran away between the trees and the see and they sayed to the village children to close their eyes and they killed*

them and when the red poleee came out of the forest they shouted attack attack and they killed them, and this sentence has hardly reached his memory when Greta grabs the hammer that she used to break the doctor's skull this morning, Greta brandishes the hammer and she uses it to break the windowpane and to pound on the window in the direction of the commandos who are galloping on the lawn, Greta is nothing more than a harpy in the middle of shards of glass, upturned furniture, cadavers, and the powerful stench of blood and teargas, and this harpy screams, she screams that old lady Philippe won't have the last word and that in any case it will end, and he feels a wave of satisfaction pass over him, he thinks that his life has obeyed, despite everything, a certain logic, that the loop is closing basically well, despite circumstances to the contrary, and Greta approaches him, she brings her hammer down on his clavicles, on his skull, and she kills him, and with an inhuman voice of murderous rage, again and again she screams it will end it will end it will end.

Ah, he thinks. And she, once again, she screams: It will end.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WITHOUT MARTA AND Boris Bielouguine, who plucked me from the vamp that I had unhappily fallen into along with the bag containing my manuscript, I never would have been able to carry out my literary enterprise and give the final version of *A Meeting at the Boyols'* to my editor. So here I insist on warmly thanking Marta and Boris, two exquisite people who knew, with great presence of mind, to go and find the salvific ropes and boards, as well as the blanket with a lovely Scottish pattern under which I was able to regain my spirits.

I also won't forget, this goes without saying, Ravial and Edma Lawashee, whose precious advice helped me as I prepared my journey into Amazonia, and their friend Dolmar Dong, who generously hosted me in his hacienda when, my plane having been re-routed, I landed in Buenos Aires.

Thanks also go to Miliya Forbane, who, during the going-away party, allowed me to touch and kiss her delicious breasts, which inspired the end of *Mlatelpopec in Paradise*.

Grad Litrif and his companion Lioudmila introduced me to the aid of the Marbachvili archives, and thanks to their intervention I was able to access the notebooks of Vulcain Marbachvili, from which I was able, for my story *Long Ago to Bed Early*, to copy several sentences before the earthquake struck that engulfed the archives. My thanks to these three people, and apologies to the archivist, as I was fully unable to locate either her name or her body in the rubble.

My novel *Going-Away Party* owes a tremendous amount to the following people, whom I thank with all my heart: Oliouda Alayomian, Sam Lee-Ouravienko, Dream Lifchitz, Biela Kamaleya, Meehi Ijjanal, Lola Gavarakis, Tiryane Balafron, Idiyine Taramezian, Irina An, Irina Nirvanian, Kirioucha Galbar, Dodnaya Drandz, Meema Anstadt, Solonia Karakassian. Without their help, sometimes perfunctory and limited, sometimes, on the contrary, substantial, I could not have completed my writing project. May they all know that my gratitude towards them is great and forever inalterable.

Thank you to Grigoria Balsamian who was the first to suggest