

Dr. Gregor and the Evil One

That night Dr. Kamilo Gregor smoked sixty cigarettes and spoke in a low voice. He drank a lot, but it could not be affirmed that he was drunk. In the Glembay complex Dr. Gregor was a very important and interesting personage. In Moscow, about 1925, he told us of his first meeting with the Evil One.

I met him one July night on board the Greek ship Angeliki, between Piraeus and Salonika, somewhere in the channel near Chalcis. That was twelve years ago. I was still wet behind the ears and thought within the framework of certain ideas. For example, I believed in Hegel along with Garibaldi and Mazzini, and I thought that the Idea of War could elevate human sorrow and grief to a higher, magnetic level and could transform all our human pettiness into one incredible supramundane ecstasy, so sublime that it would justify the shedding of human blood.

It was with this system of thought that I found myself on board the Greek ship *Angeliki*, bound for Salonika. I had just witnessed much bloodshed and suffering, but Hegel's and Garibaldi's ideas somehow remained in my head. It was a warm, starry night. The south wind rocked the *Angeliki* gently and monotonously, but was rising dangerously. On the third-class deck, among the chains and ropes, a little Egyptian Jewess lay dying. The women were wailing and said that she had had a sunstroke. Everything smelled of pitch and tar. He—that is, the Evil One—appeared in the semidarkness. He said that he was a doctor from Smyrna and that the crisis had passed. "The little girl will live."

Thus we became acquainted through the sunstroke of the little Egyptian Jewess. He took me for a Serbian soldier, came up, and began the most ordinary of conversations: he had been born in Epirus, was now employed in Smyrna, had fought as a Greek *komita* around Ioannina during the nineties; Serbian-Greek interests were parallel; Salonika would probably pass into the Serbian sphere of interest (but only if the Bulgarians had their megalomaniac necks broken)—the talk of newly met acquaintances aboard ship during wartime.

At that time my thoughts were something like this: when the masses are inspired by the National Idea, when they fall into a high, clear-sighted ecstasy, when they are carried away by the idea of the Vardar, of the Aegean Sea, of the White Eagles, that will be the great moment. In such a state one makes sacrifices with tears in one's eyes. Throats become dry. At that moment, matter is spiritualized. Matter, organized into a single racial, national state, becomes spiritual, and from the heavy material of earth a star is born.

The smoke from his pipe smelled of honey and figs. He offered me his tobacco, which was of the best English quality, and it was like drinking aromatic tea. He had the nervous hands of a gentleman, and on his left ring finger wore an antique, dark, blood-colored cameo that emitted green phosphorescent rays.

When he learned that I was not a Serb but had been born in Vienna, that I was a Croat studying comparative literature and the history of culture, his conversation became warmer, deeper, and more intimate. We darted and danced over the surface of the conversation like two dolphins darting over the conventional shoals, the conversational shoals of chance co-travelers, but then, suddenly, it seemed that he dived deeply and pulled me with him into the darkness, like a huge lead-colored dolphin, like a black cloud in the windy night.

At first his talk was of the modern, cheap, cosmopolitan humanism of the coffeehouse type, as silly as any Social Democrat editorial. "Science, art, religion—these three are the basis for a higher cosmopolitan civilization. The slaughter of war (this was in 1913) is completely unworthy of the human species. There neither is nor can be any Hegelian Idea that can justify slaughter."

I opposed his higher, literary, decadent skepticism, which was that of a former Parisian student (he had mentioned the fact that he had studied in Paris for five years) with the argument of the National Idea as such.

"How could there be no Idea? Was it not the Kosovo Idea that inspired that old, humpbacked, illiterate woman to appear before the military command with five gold ducats to outfit a son who was not her own, because she had none of her own to give, and that inspired the son to light a candle at Kosovo for the salvation of her soul? What was it that inspired that wretched, barren old woman, if not the Idea, in the metaphysical sense of the word? To serve the Idea as an impersonal unit! The university professor who shouldered a duffle bag on mobilization day, all the young national terrorists who sacrifice themselves completely, all of us who renounce our own ego for the sake of a collective Idea—are we not living proof that Ideas as such actually exist? These are moments of idealistic self-sacrifice. This is the Hegelian Logos in the process of events. These are the ethnic collectives taking part in historical reality, coming out

of chaos. The Hegelian Idea makes its appearance through state organisms, and that is what is now happening to our race. We are!"

"Let me ask you, have you ever killed a man?"

"Why, what do you mean? What a bizarre question! Have I ever killed a man? I myself?"

"Exactly. You yourself. I ask you, have you yourself ever killed a man because of any of your great Hegelian Ideas?"

"No, I haven't."

"Really? You haven't?"

There was a pause. The stars disappeared behind the dark clouds. The *Angeliki* trembled violently and her sides creaked. One after the other, the passengers left the deck in the face of the storm. The wind moaned theatrically among the hawsers. In the glow of his pipe this unknown Greek doctor leaned toward me confidentially and touched me with his hand. To this very day, twelve years later, after all I've experienced, I can still feel the touch of his fingers on my flesh.

"So you have never killed a man! How about that young Albanian at Lookout Point nine fifty-three?"

"Excuse me, it was not I who killed him!"

"No, it was not you who killed him. It was the Hegelian Idea, Mazzini, Garibaldi, that killed him!"

Through the suggestive power of this unknown Greek, drunk with the fumes of his tobacco, I saw at that moment, as though in a delirium, the face of that young Albanian at Lookout Point 953. On guard duty on the Macedonian border, where we naive students were practicing to become conspirators because we had sworn to the Idea that we would kill for it, a vast panorama opened out before us to the south. Standing on guard, I could count up to twenty-three mountain ranges, as in a Japanese woodcut. From below came the roar of dark waters, and in the distant villages in the valley fires twinkled. Down below, Abdul Hamid's counterrevolutionary Albanians had cut up and burned

everything that was Christian. One evening our patrol captured a young Albanian who had killed an old shepherd and raped a girl, and it fell to my lot to shoot him. There had been shootings of this kind before, but as a student I had always been able to extricate myself. Now the eldest in command ordered me to see what it was like to take aim at living flesh.

I refused.

"You won't?"

"No."

"You must!"

"I won't!"

"Won't you?"

It was a dangerous situation. It was the Albanian or me. But it seemed to me that I would get it in the end anyway, and even if I were to shoot the Albanian, it would be too late. Some sense of delay kept me from shooting. Suddenly a revolver shot broke the silence. The shot was fired by a young fellow who had fought with us and to whom I had once given some bacon and cigarettes. Thus I escaped from the situation, and the same night left the guard. I ran from horror.

"Well, who killed that boy? Mazzini, Garibaldi, the Idea, who?"

This question from the unknown Greek upset me terribly. I became nauseated—from the sea, from the wind, from the night, from the oppressive heat, and from his unusually sweet tobacco. I suddenly found myself face to face with a terrible, criminal, dark reality, and it seemed to me that this Greek was a detective who was probing my most hidden secrets. With my hysterical hand, my quiet, trembling voice, my Rilke's *Stundenbuch*, how could I kill a man? I did not know.

Lost in my thoughts, I remained speechless. I could not even find the presence of mind to ask how he knew of this, my most intimate experience at Lookout Point 953, although it was certain that I had never, anywhere, told anyone of it. True, he had said that he had been in Tibet, that he had studied hypnotism,

and one of his first remarks was that I was of the subjective, feminine type and as such would make an excellent medium, but the very fact that he knew all the details of my horrible experience at Lookout Point 953 overwhelmed me. He went on talking for a long time of how it is not the same thing to sit in the second window of the Beethoven Café in Vienna's Alserstrasse and read Rilke as it is to lie on Lookout Point 953, but then the clouds broke, lightning flashed, our ship lurched unbelievably, and I vomited all night.

In Salonika everything reeked of pandemonium, and for seven days there were earthquakes. The earthquake struck daily seven times, and the sea threw up potsherds and dead fish at the foot of an old laurel. Many died of cholera. We drank tea and ate French biscuits—our only food because of the fear of cholera. The south wind blew for nine days and nine nights without interruption. Lice, bedbugs, and ordinary mosquitoes; then the *Traviata* waltz from a restaurant on the quay, all the blessed night. In panic, people slept under the open sky, and a hundred and fifty battalions of Greek infantry, ten batteries, and a whole fleet of six torpedo boats and a man-of-war with 18-centimeter guns protected Salonika from two very weak battalions of Bulgarian infantry. Everything was so completely stupid that we almost perished from boredom beneath a sun of 120 degrees, without the shade of a single green tree, from typhus and cholera, in stench and nausea.

At the eastern end of the city there was a little cemetery, and my only evening walk was to this poor little graveyard where huge, fat jackdaws chirped and polluted the cypress trees above the markers. Greek priests in brocade vestments chanted here every evening over the corpses and loaded them on a barge for Kara Burun.

That day, around nine in the morning, the Greek gentlemen opened fire from their battleships and guns and batteries and torpedoes, and a hundred and fifty thousand Greeks swooped

down upon the Bulgarian battalion. For one whole day a hundred and fifty thousand Greeks massacred a thousand Bulgarians, and even this, the cannonade and slaughter, was comparatively boring. As usual, I had gone to my little cemetery and listened to the fat jackdaws talk in the semidarkness and stared into space. Because a waiter had promised me a cheese pastry that he guaranteed to be disinfected, this pastry took on a much greater importance to me than all those bloody heads put together. I sat in the twilight, thought of the beautiful cheese pastry, and watched the moon as it rose in the east like a green lantern.

Then this happened: a shadow jumped over the stone wall and hid behind a marble tombstone. I could hear a stone slide and fall. The shadow near the tombstone seemed to move unusually fast. Two or three seconds later, four people jumped over the wall. First two, then one, then another Greek. This all happened in complete silence, gently. Knives were drawn, and they began to strike the bent shadow. This probably happened very rapidly, but it seemed to me that they continued to strike for a long time, perhaps for seven thousand years, and I remained speechless, motionless, like a statue.

The murmur of voices disturbed the jackdaws in the cypresses above our heads. There was a flutter of feathers, then peace again. For a long time I remained speechless and motionless, rigid. Perhaps for seven thousand years or more. I don't know where the four disappeared to, and I cannot recall what time it was. The moon was high, and from a café on the beach came the sound of a phonograph. Like a thief I arose and stole away as though in a dream. I recall that between the wall and the tombstone there lay a dark, bloody mass, but I did not have the strength to look at it. I dragged my feet as though I had walked sixty kilometers. An old woman was driving donkeys, and I could hear the water splashing in the barrels.

I lay in a fever for three nights, and later they told me that for three days and three nights I talked constantly with a Greek

from Smyrna. About Hegel, about Ideas, about criminality, about death, and about murder as such. One thing is certain—that my belief in him dates from that night in Salonika. And a person who believes in him, they say, is a Satanist.

Translated by Stanley Frye

The Cricket Beneath the Waterfall

Of late I've been living with the dead, holding long conversations with them, sometimes throughout the night. And I'll let you in on my secret: my conversations with the deceased are infinitely more alive than all the contacts and exchange of words with those around me who are allegedly alive. The doctor who treats me and who, in practicing his profession, takes care of my nerves, stolidly maintains that this is the result of "deterioration." He assures me there is nothing more to it than that. Just a kind of physical exhaustion that will "eventually disappear."

Actually, I don't eat properly nor am I able to sleep; I am irritable and feel physically exhausted. It is quite obvious to me, even without any professional opinion, that my case is truly a case of "deteriorating nerves." But what I cannot understand is how in the world this exhaustion is going to "eventually disappear." On the contrary, it seems to be growing every day—my