

The Disenchanter

There were broken lights overhead in that new morning under the ground. Each time the car bounced, a lamp started to blink, and the passengers opened their eyes. For a moment, perhaps they remembered why they were here and who they were, before going back to their dreams. The rumbling train sent them dozing off. Or maybe, the smell and the heat together had a soothing effect. Sitting with unknown people was reassuring. Going to the office was a pleasure. And all concerns and worries were nothing, in the slow movement of the engine. That was the daily existence of the employees I was now invited to join and into which I was desperately trying to blend.

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My previous occupation had little if any relation to my new condition as a clerk. However, I found many common points between them. In both cases, my parents were proud of their son, who was going to defend his country, and later bring money to his family despite his likely traumas. In both jobs there was the pressure and the power of authority, and the gap between officers and subordinates. I had discovered the smell of others in the trenches, which were as dark and loud as the rumbling metro was. Holding a gun had been as boring as using a pen. Friends were as rare on the battleground as in the office. In my first days as Mr Dlunt's employee, I carefully took notice of all these differences, and although it was a relief not to fear death anymore, my days were not as different as they had been before, when I was posted at the frontier. But after a month, I realised something was missing.

After twenty-one days and almost as many paper files, one afternoon, I did something I had never done since my return: I looked up and glanced outside. I noticed the sky and the buildings, which were respectively blue and grey, and I went back to my papers. But a moment later, the absurdity struck me. Through the window, I had seen the sky and some buildings, but nothing more. At school, before war, there was not just grey and blue through the window of the classroom. There was much more than commonplace figures and colours. I was going to glance again outside, but I heard my employer's steps in the corridor, and I conscientiously went back to my papers. At 7, I left my unfinished work and brought home an uncomfortable feeling about how much the outside world had been altered.

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My family house had been much unchanged for five years. The most significant difference was my brother's departure, which had made some additional space: I was supposed to be glad to be granted the bigger room left by my little brother, who, as an artist, had needed much more space. In his absence, I had the difficult task of representing our family in the neighbourhood. According to Mr number 6 my sacrifice was worthy. Mr and Mrs number 9 made few and evasive comments, but they watched me with the greatest pity. Mrs number 14 had hardly heard about the war. And my parents were still trying to make their minds up about it. Most of my friends had gone after my departure. Few were back in the country, and fewer in the city. My clerical duties luckily left me some free time that I spent wandering in the streets no matter how much I liked being with my family.

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In my childhood, I had enjoyed walking in the forest or in the city, among the trees or on the tarmac. I had never felt lonely though. The very first time I had decided to go away never to come back was after being unfairly punished by our mother, who always took sides with my brother. That very same day, in the afternoon, I opened the door and walked out. I kept walking for two hours, soon leaving the city to enter the neighbouring forest. I remembered I had wanted to blend into the scenery. However, for a short while, at sunset, I had felt some presence in the silence of Nature. The wind was rustling differently, and the dead leaves were now falling meaningfully. The branches were like giant claws above me, or maybe they were hands inviting me to set off on a new path. Although animals were discreet, I remembered I had heard their secret words. But amongst these shadows, I had never felt afraid. I had the sensation, which has never left me since that day, that everything around me was deeply linked with my feelings. I had sensed an exclusive relationship with the world

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outside, and I was now able to model it as I wished. Every child finds one day that they can't always get what they want and that people are not forced to obey them. But that evening, I discovered that my mind was superior to matter. It was not only a product of my imagination: at my demand, the bushes in front of me moved apart, and the trees lined up to show me the way. Even shades were respectfully kneeling down as I went out of the forest. I joined the city, and the street-lamps emitted lights that blended into the moon. My mind made concrete malleable. White and black blocks sank under the tarmac and emerged repeatedly, like giant piano keys. The roads were dangerous dark rivers, bordered by sidewalks, which were welcoming islands. And the cars themselves were coming to life, the wild beasts of the jungle I had created. When I came back home, five hours after I had left, I paid little attention to my mother's panic and my father's anger: what I had found on that journey was my special ability to marvel over the smallest details of our existence. The following days and years I improved my talent: I was soon able to distinguish a boat lost on a pool of water, a blade hidden inside a bug shell, and to make the sky open itself to reveal unknown colours. All these inventions were born out of the mind of a great and meticulous composer who had pursued his vocation even in his adulthood. I had always been said to be a dreamer. But who could ever have imagined, what was taking shape in the back of my mind?

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It was to reconnect with that joy that the first days I was back I decided to wander in my dream world again. After my conscription I had had no time to spend on my little purpose. My mind had always been busy, occupied with pain and restlessness, and it needed to recover. But during the new walks I undertook, I found no peace nor pleasure. The world outside was still full of sounds and details. There was still the forest after the city, and there were trees and street-lamps to guide my steps. But the inanimate world did not respond, as it should have done. It did not give any trace of life. It did not send any call. I would roam the woods, the streets, until dusk, feeling but the coldness of the wind.

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However, I could not give up my search for fantasy. My little escapes soon appeared to be unsatisfying and I decided to use my time for other purposes. I started to spend my free afternoons at the city's main library, for the only books my family had kept were not engrossing enough. Through my childhood, if I had been an absent-minded pupil and a temperamental son, reading was one of the very few activities that had totally captured my attention. Soon my parents had become worried about their young boy's solitary activity and they had acted accordingly. Each time I found the door locked, books, of any kind, slowly became a substitute. At first, I was quite suspicious of their so-called entertaining potency, for my mind was the source of the purest imagination. But slowly, as I was left alone with them more often, I managed to alleviate my boredom. Through reading, I discovered the complete significance of my power. I was now able to domesticate the world of abstractions. All I had to do was only to think, imagine stories, characters, countries, that escaped from books and appeared in the real world. I was truly turning books into reality. They offered me people to speak with, territories to explore, and all of them were new parts of my growing kingdom. Reality itself was revealed to be nothing but another book, composed of white papers and black ink. And as I was able to close an unattractive book and to put it away in my bookcase, I learned how to make reality gradually disappear behind the new physical laws I created. However, I have to confess that I have never been sensitive to the authors' hidden messages, or to the true meanings of their works. I considered books only as sources and patterns for my imagination, not as authorities to obey. I was the only one who was able to decide the senses and roles of fictions. I changed the characters, the adventures and the ends of many stories. Words themselves were assigned new definitions. A new language was emerging to tell the never-heard tales. And, with books in my hands and a glance through the window together with my marvellous imagination, I recreated the universe as a whole.

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Libraries, through their bleak atmosphere, were therefore the places where my mind would thrive. At first, I hesitated to read again the books which I had the most explored as a child in the long afternoons I had spent between the shelves, for they were certainly now empty of all their substance. I started with the few promising volumes I had not yet devoured. I flipped through the pages, like a starved beast. I delved into the stories, the words and the authors' visions. I walked with the characters through their adventures, and I sought the senses man could hardly feel in his terrestrial life. I was looking for all that had made me a peculiar child. But, after a few hours sitting at a table with my spoils, I only felt I was bored. I found qualities in these books, but they were nothing more than the same old stories, written in elaborate but trivial styles. I was frightened, but I quietly stood up and slowly took my favourite ones, which I had enjoyed in the past. I read them, and everything was there: not only the substantial fictions proposed by the narrators, but all the creations they had given rise to. The heroes I had imagined were still travelling through the pages and the lands I had generated. The world I had shaped was still there, exactly as it had been before I had left it. Browsing through those books I renewed with my former fantasy and the young boy inside the library. I tried to blend into them. I was not trying to reconnect with my childhood: my intentions were far from what common people could experience by finding their old toys in the attic. It was not a question of remembering, but a question of acquiring again what I was now denied. I wanted to return to myself.

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I contemplated my past masterpieces for hours, relieved like an exile back in his homeland. However much I yearned for them, I was unable to reconnect with them. Because I had experienced it as a child, I knew there existed a secret link between creations and their author: they are remains of our very own impressions that we decide to eternalize. And in these papers, I only found a vague familiarity. As I was exploring them, my works were like the cousins I had left for years. I was trying to revitalize our old relation with them, but there was like a wall of glass between us. I was not their creator anymore, but a spectator submerged in an amazing, yet foreign culture. I was not able to play with them. These old stories denied access to my mind, or maybe, my imagination had nothing to say to my former friends. At first, I did not want to admit that evidence. In the library, I managed to forget about the world outside, and I tried to retrieve the ancient reflexes of the young boy who used to transfigure books into reality. Despite the resilience of my previous works, I meant to use them to draw again, on the blank sheet of my thought, the adventures, heroes and worlds that I needed now. They gave me no response, but I was still focusing on the reality I wanted to create. I conceived new stories with a superhuman effort. But all the fictions I managed to imagine were wasted, tasteless, and unoriginal. They were only simulacra of my previous readings, instead of being the transcendences of all my feelings. With the approaching darkness I was forced to face it: during my whole childhood, I had been the guardian of a precious power, which was to model destinies and things, as they should have been. It had been neither leisure nor duty. It had been my nature to do so. I had found no glory, but the smartest pleasure I could ever experienced. For an unexplained reason, I was now missing it, and my existence was as empty as it had been at the frontier. Sitting at a table full of coloured books, I was hardly different from the ordinary readers who are content with pathetic fictions. These pieces of papers seemed to have nothing to do with me anymore, and I had to leave them to avoid a second defeat. Like a forsaken child, I was in the most vulnerable position, and a feeling of shame came over me. I slowly glanced around. Nobody was there, though. I consciously replaced the books on the shelves and left the library, five minutes before the announced closing time.

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Outside, in the street, the crowd was marching on, a few meters away from me. They were so numerous. I could feel they were approaching, and I was just before them. They were here for me. The marvellous world I had been building for years had abandoned me. I had

found nothing but a closed door on my spiritual life. Their steps were coming closer. Someone had decided my childhood should end, and cut my wings. Days spent in the recreated nature were over. There was no **shelter left for me** to hide **in**. I could now hear their conversations. After being the most gifted child, my destiny was to join the **pack**, and to blend into daily life without taking a look back. Such an existence would be painless. It **wouldn't** take too much time before my emancipation. I had no choice. **I could feel** their breaths on the nape of my neck. I turned around and faced them all, my arms outspread to claim:

"I surrender! Take me with you! Let your torrent carry me out!"

My sentence was suspended. In front of me, I found nothing but a young and familiar face, staring at me with suspicious, yet amused eyes.

"You should be more discreet, when you're back home, said my brother with severity and delight. Unfortunately, books **gave** you away, and the library is closing, so you have nowhere to go. Would **it be too much of a trouble** to **give** some news?"

We walked together. But behind us, I knew they were still roaring and waiting.

Several times my brother and I **had** been said to have complicated **relations**, **and indeed** we had **hardly** talked to each other for years. Most of the time we **would** meet at family reunions, with other distant cousins, and our **exchanges** were short and polite. I felt totally satisfied with that situation, despite our parents' shame. For some unexplained reasons, my brother sometimes wanted to do extra-activities with me, and I **joined** him in playing collective sports or on trips in sparsely populated regions. Though I rather liked these moments, I had been too busy **those** last days to reconnect with him. And so **had** he. I **told him about my past few** years and, **when I admitted I was now a little bit bored**, he warmly invited me to his new **studio**.

Since our childhood, he had always been the handy one. Some of his drawings **were** still covering the walls of our parents' house, and **he had been quite successful** since his glorious first years. He was the artist **in** the family. As he showed me, he was now the owner of a small and quiet **storehouse** he was using as a **studio**. **There** his inspiration was allowed to **strike**. He felt really excited about his new life and **gave me abundant details about it**.

"...As I've perhaps already told you, I haven't **been** painting for a few months. I received an important commission from the city, and I'm now working on **a** new monument. I have already done **a** few drafts."

Various geometrical forms sculpted in small blocks of marble occupied the **storehouse**. In a corner, other blocks were waiting to be **carved**, and behind them, **stood the hugest one**, I recognize I have always been a little bit sceptical about my brother's **career**. We both share a passion for altering matter, but if his works **are** at first sight more sustainable, their impact **is** unquestionably limited. He **can** only torment marble, colours and canvas, whereas I intend to **restructure** the universe. Furthermore, his subjects and aesthetic choices **are** **questionable**. Each time I have been asked to give my opinion about his recent makings, I **generally am** moderate and evasive, **for which he has firmly reproached me**. However, I cannot deny his organizational skills: his life **is** entirely focused on his works thanks to the small funds he has patiently raised. **A** clerk would hardly bear the comparison.

"You know, I understand why you've been so silent. Even if I've been discharged from the army, I can conceive how painful those years were."

I nodded. He was conventional but sincere, as his **creations were**. And contrary to **what he thought**, I **had** never been resentful of **him**. **Being diagnosed with a breathing problem** was not a better situation. I **refrained from** ask how he was able to work so hard, with **his condition**, as I did not want to **probe into** his artistic secrets.

"I don't expect you to tell me how it was. You've seen horrible things. You're probably despairing of men. **And** of the future."

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I had only vague convictions about these notions. **Deep within**, I felt sorry to find **that** the idea of war itself **was not** so terrible.

“Now you’re back to the civilian life you must feel a little bit lost. The city has dramatically evolved since **you left**. You feel that nothing is the same, don’t you?”

I said the world had not changed so much. I was glad to be back. My new life was mainly a matter of routine. I wished him the very best luck in his projects.

This was when my brother showed great insight.

“You need some rest, and no one seems to notice it. And your work at the office won’t give you any companionship. **Such confined place**. That’s not life. You **had** better try something more meaningful.”

I **had** never thought my brother could approach my secret **in the slightest**. I quietly listened to him.

“Working on the monument takes me a lot of time. I can manage to do it all myself, but it’s really exhausting. I need someone with experience to do some paperwork, help me organize myself, and above all, **I need** an impartial and critical eye. I **could** be wrong, but being in a studio, watching some artistic works and saying to your boss he is wrong **wouldn’t be** so awful, **would** it?”

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I was about to become the secretary of a future world-**famous** artist, my beloved brother. With vanity, I remarked I needed a salary to live, and I said that I did not want to **reduce** his insecure income sources.

“I will pay you generously. I will even be able to help our parents too. But for that I have to finish **the commissioned work** in time.”

“Office routine is quite comfortable, you know.”

“It won’t bring you any fresh air. And I’m not talking of a job, but of leisure. I would even **give you tips** about painting or sculpting, if you want it. You have to quit that past, and do something entertaining, right now.”

In our childhood, I remembered my brother as quite a **considerate** boy, always inquiring about my long wanderings. He probably had developed his skills thanks to the absence of a playmate in his early years. He had accepted my mockeries of his burgeoning masterpieces with seriousness and humility. But, if he had always been **highly sensitive**, he had always refused to let me play with his toys. We concluded the contract, and then we spent a few minutes talking and joking about the desolate city we were now going to embellish.

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I left him after we **had** both **done an impersonation** of my employer **receiving** my resounding resignation. In the streets, the crowd was gone, and looking for another isolated prey **elsewhere**. I confessed my pride was not intact. I was again the employee, and dependent **on** my brother’s success. My distress was clearly perceptible otherwise he would not have proposed the job to me with such enthusiasm and tenacity. I was a wounded little bird a good-hearted man **had** saved. But being in permanent contact with some artistic creations, even if they **lacked inspiration**, was certainly good to cure my sickness. Mostly, using my brother’s tools excited me: if I was not able to distort reality as a whole anymore, I should start **afresh** by learning **the basics**. With a piece of paper and his elaborate instruments, I would soon nourish my fantasy in quite a rudimentary way, before I could let it flourish again. To know how to draw was now the only way of regaining my power, even if I always refused that **easy way out**. It was my new resolution. **As I came back home, through the moonlit blocks**, I had the **brand** new feeling that **I** was about to find **an answer to my distress**. **Halfway across** a deserted **street**, I looked up to the windows of a neighbouring building. And for the first time, I saw it.

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Maybe I should mistrust my senses for they **were** useless at that moment, and words are not **relevant either**. But **they are all what I have left**. On the **windowpanes**, a **fleeting**, dark shade swiftly overshadowed the reflection of the moon. For **a moment**, I believed it was the

product of my mind, that my **abilities** were back, and a **flicker of** hope flared. I wanted to joyfully run to my vivid creation, but **I felt hamstrung**. I **put** one foot **in front of the other**, but I was not moving anymore, as if I was **in** the palm of a gigantic cold hand, which was **gradually closing upon me**. I was about to open my mouth to scream, to yell **for help**, but I instinctively remained quiet: what was happening was **my own concern only**, and no one else should be involved. I was contemplating my legs vainly, **shaking** with fear and excitement, when a strange sensation ran through my spine. I first believed I was **shivering with cold** but when it **felt stronger**, I came up to understand that something was **creeping** inside me, **up along** my backbone **on its way** to my mind. I could feel it was searching for something, as if small claws were **stuck into** my neck. It was like the kisses of a mouth sinking its teeth inside me. With my hands, I tried to tear it off, whatever it might be, but my nails found nothing but my own **irritated** flesh. **Briefly**, I had the idea of cutting myself with no regard to the pain, but as I was touching the nape of my neck I **realized** nothing was crawling under my skin. **Although** the sensation was becoming fiercer and fiercer, it was purely virtual and **it was** only my fingers **that** had **lacerated** my tissues. I believed I was the victim of **some** hallucination, that my **unbridled** imagination was now **out of control** and wanted to mislead me. I tried to be rational and think it was but a vain illusion. Then, the sensation started slowly to weaken. I calmed down, and looked at my feet. They were numb, of course. I was relieved. I raised one of them. But it did not **respond**. My legs wildly wobbled and I fell on my knees. **It hurt**. The dream did not cease. I could not **get** up anymore. I **had** read, **experienced**, and conceived various adventures, in which human reason found how frail and poor its concepts were. I had even thought about much more impressive and outstanding effects than a paralysis of the lower part of the body. But none of them had ever reached **such a** high, **dreadful** and exquisite degree of reality. It was back. Something again was **slithering inside me**, but I did not feel **the groping** anymore. The sensation was now smoothly circulating, a warm blood-like fluid. It promptly reached my head. Its presence was **now** more discreet, less invasive. That kind of intrusion was less unusual, however. It had to work harder if it wanted to really trouble me again. And slowly, the void invaded me. I was still feeling my arms, my legs, and my whole body. But my head was **dangling** like a dead branch in winter. My brain was sluggish while my mind desperately tried to remerge. Images, remembrances, colours and sounds, all were unfolding in a loud and kaleidoscopic magma, before freezing and vanishing out. My very self was **consumed** in a dull fire. In my semi-consciousness, I managed to form the idea that it was not the void that was flooding inside myself, but my own soul that was hastily obliterated, in that warm and merciless sensation. It was draining me, **indiscriminately** absorbing the joys and the sorrows, the **true** and the **untrue**. Nothing would remain of my mental life. I was about to be an empty creature, and I could not **flee**. Desperately, I looked up to find **some** help, **some** cure. I tried to focus on the street, on the road and on the buildings around me, to catch **some** picture to impregnate myself with. But none of them resisted the massive evaporation. **In** a last effort, I glanced at the windows on which the **reflection of the** moon had disappeared. There was **a shadow**, something to **hold** my eyes. I **had paid** little attention to it before, but now, I could notice it had a precise and definite form. I **strained** my eyes to **better see**, and, as I was about to catch it, I suddenly lost it.

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I **desperately tried to recapture the vision through the window**. It was not there anymore. I **looked up** to the dark sky, and then **lowered my eyes** to the ground. **It was nowhere to be found**. **Quite a familiar and friendly feeling softly overwhelmed me**. The picture I **had** caught **from** the street **did not vanish** anymore. I could **see clearly what surrounded me** without **mixing colours** and shapes. My mind was still full of memories and I **could now vividly remember** my past inventions. I was sitting in the middle of the road with a skinned knee. I quietly stood up, raised a foot, and came back to my house where I covered my leg with a bandage and found some rest.

I woke up in the middle of the day and started to write (down) my resignation letter. I called my brother about our further arrangements and we chatted on about our warm reunion last night. The sun was cast its wan light on the window. I reached my bathroom, and absently glanced at the mirror. Suddenly my fist punched into my reflected shoulder. I hurriedly grabbed my real shoulder, before turning round to catch sight of the intruder. It was gone again. I had never believed in nightmares and bad dreams. I would imagine horrors, demons and abominations that haunted the dull reality. I invented monstrosity for the need of my fictions. What our rational culture defines as the unconscious results of our anxiety are not innocent delusions, but the sheer darkness one has to face one day. So I believed, as I remembered every moment of the night before. My pain and my fear had had the filthy taste of reality. I was said to be the imaginative kind. No one would ever fantasize such a loss. Lonely people are always trying to make their lives more interesting, appealing. Cursed existences have nothing to offer but revulsion. I mistrusted my senses, and I believed sight to be the most pernicious of them. But I could not deny that in the mirror It had followed me. It had only been an indistinguishable and colourless shape, as it presented itself last night. Though it was smaller, for it was able to settle on my shoulder, I felt its power to harm was entire. It had come back to complete its work, to take control of me. But it had not expected me to be waiting for it. When it had released its hold, I had sensed it had not gone, and I had stayed on my guard. I had felt that it had returned in the morning, and, coldly, I had laid a trap for it. My intuition was right: for an unexplained reason, my follower was oddly afraid of being seen. However, my second assumption was disclaimed: breaking my mirror did not make it disappear, and I nearly caught one of its limbs by turning round. It was not one of those creatures that only live and appear in glasses or mirrors, creatures that I had joyfully imagined in my childhood. But It was able to backstab me. Its existence took place in this world. It had certainly understood I knew some of its secrets. It was now anywhere, preparing its new offense, looking for a new way to lay hold of me. I had only met It the previous night, but I could feel how determined It was. I might have stumbled and hit my glass because of a wrong move. My bleeding knee and fist could easily find natural causes. But even in the days I had spent in the trenches I had never seen a wound like the dark and translucent scar on the nape of my neck. I carefully examined it with my fingertips in my broken mirror. Only my shuddering skin remained: for some two inches, all the flesh under the mark was missing. It had left a void within me after our first encounter. If It was able to think, this was a kind of warning, intimidation, or a symbol of doom. It was late, and I had to go to the office before the end of the day. I dressed my injuries and went out. I had a black shirt on, and before leaving the house, I turned up the collar of my jacket.

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Outside, I only met a few and isolated passers-by. The crowd was eerily avoiding me. It probably felt that a more dangerous predator hunted me and it knew it should not get in-between. The wind was less cold when it blew on my face and I was sure that trees and lamps slightly moved apart as I passed by. I did not show any sign of panic: but I could not remove my eyes from the windows along the way. In the underground I stared at the image of an anonymous passenger reflected on the car window, before he cautiously left me alone. But it did not show up. At my former workplace, where my letter was politely read and my explanations carelessly listened to, I took advantage of a short break in the resignation process to examine again what I knew of It. It was physical, and had, at least, some consciousness or instinct. I could hardly remember its form: not only had it always vanished, but there was also something like a screen between my knowledge and the memory I kept of its apparition. It was a nameless creature that had chosen me for its prey. Last night, It had tried to drain my remembrances and fantasies, my sorrows and joys, in a voracious impulse. I had to acknowledge that very fact: It was after my mind.

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I was invited to **dispose of my few belongings**, and I found myself alone behind my desk. Its intentions were unclear. If I was proud of my powerful imagination, my boundless ability to marvel, what made my mental life so unique was not there anymore. I was a simple human with his own **fantasies**, but **I was the one It had chosen**. Perhaps I was the only one who was able to discern It, or who could believe in its existence. Something in me had lured It and It now refused to leave. I had been a gifted child, then a dull man. I was now a beast trying to survive. My employer **bade** me goodbye and **wished me** all the best without noticing that I was contemplating the buildings and the sky outside, in the room where my fall had begun. **I was said to be a man of few words**, and **indeed** I was never interested in sharing my secrets. **My gift had been my only concern. The new role destiny gave me would be as well.** On **my way home, windowpanes only sent back my own reflection.**

Sitting **in** the metro station with a **fragment** of my bathroom mirror inside my hand, I knew **there was no point** waiting for a new apparition. It would now only descend upon me in a moment of weakness, when my defences **might** fall. I **had no idea** why It **had not come** in my sleep. **Was it because I had been unable** to remember my dreams since the war? **Or was it** because it was afraid of the real nightmares? I blamed war for **my depression**, but war **had inspired fear** to survive. Only **the void** could defeat **the void**. And what if I decided to relive **that time**? I moved away on an isolated bench and closed my eyes. If I could not recreate the world as a whole, I was still able to conceive the sensation of reality. I tried to remember the dust and the mud I **had known** in the trenches. I concentrated to make a dark and gloomy field appear and to recapture the smell and the noise that my nose and ears had endured. My **memories took over and the station receded into the background**. I **could feel** the wind of the desert on my face, and not the wind provoked by the underground trains. I opened my eyes and found myself surrounded by my former regiment. I had not built many relationships during **those** years and I was not surprised that everybody around was ignoring me. But I was not back to meet the green **army** uniforms again. What I had **borne** there, in a hole, eight feet under the ground, had been an infamy that was second to **none**. **But the other soldiers' cries of pain** or the repeated explosions over us had become as normal as the daily viscous food. **Having nobody to talk to** had not been a major **concern** and I **had withstood the** waiting between two earthen walls without suffering from fear or boredom. I **had been** the best recruit for that passive job. But **there**, for the very first time, I had felt my power was vain. I had never tried to make the reality of war obey my imagination. I had never had the idea of **denying** it, of deconstructing its explosions, deaths and despairs. I had been paralysed, not by a simple fear, but by a feeling of complete emptiness. "My imagination is obsolete here" had been the only idea **present to** my mind in **those** years. It had been as if I had penetrated a disenchanted field where fantasy **did not have** its place. I **had been** incapacitated by pure, unspeakable terror. And it was to reconnect with that terror that I wanted to relive **those** years. If it was still following me, I would **then** be able to face it. I would **plunge** it into the abyss that war had **left** inside me. But for the moment, despite the screams and the blasts around me, I found nothing comparable with that sensation. The machines were violently roaring above my head, guns were firing, but nothing was **surging up**. I sat down and waited. Maybe the void I had experienced had been too extreme to be reproduced **in** memory, although I surpassed myself to recreate the atmosphere of a soldier's life. I **paid attention to the slightest** detail: not only the moist heat and the burning smell, but also the texture of every object. I respected the withered skin of the humans as well as the dark metal of the equipment. I picked up a helmet from the ground: it was glittering like true steel. My power was gone, but my imagination was intact. The glitter dimmed. Something was getting **hold of me** in my back. I started. I improvised my defence with haste. I took the fragment of my mirror and saw what was behind me. It was coming again. It certainly wanted to take advantage of my condition, as I was deeply sunk into deep remembrance. However, It did not vanish. I felt nothing on the

Supprimé : would

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : ignored

Supprimé : spleen melancholy/

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : had not

nape of my neck. It was just a formless and dark haze floating above my shoulder. For a moment I believed I was mistaken. But slowly emerging from the haze, here was the same limb I had nearly caught that morning. It was my visitor, indeed. But It seemed less aggressive than before. Despite my distress, It was not trying anything against me. I did not feel its presence though. The haze was gradually dissipating, and other limbs were appearing in the same manner. I ignored why It had chosen to search me in so weakened a form. I took another look into the mirror where the haze had nearly vanished. I understood. I crashed the fragment between my fingers and went back to the metro station. The voices of the army ceased. There was no dust anymore. The only noise was the roar of the trains. Only a thin streak of blood remained in my hand. I quickly found a seat near a car window and went back home. It was only in my bed that I felt my heart beating again.

The following day I wrote down everything I knew about my enemy. Previously, I had stated that It was after my mind; that It refused to be seen. But the previous day I had discovered what one would rather ignore. When I had seen it in the fragmented mirror, I had reckoned It wanted to attack me while I was exploring my war memories. But It could not do so. It was part of that very memory. I had met It for the first time at war, but I had not noticed its existence. When I had summoned the whole war atmosphere in the metro station, I had unconsciously reproduced its former appearance. This was how It had been when It had hunted me for the first time. It had been born during the war, and It had chosen me at that time. Maybe It was itself a pure figment of my imagination, which had decided to live on its own. However, the question of its creation was not my main concern. I was used to stories and creatures. I knew their properties. The dark haze I had seen was now making sense. It was not its weakened form. Here It was as It had been at the beginning of its existence. The emerging limbs had revealed something was coming from the darkness of that haze. In order to survive in this disenchanted world, It had needed to feed off something. It had used me to sustain itself. It had felt my special ability to recreate reality and had followed me since then. It had drained me. Gradually It had taken away my sense of wonderment. War had not been responsible for my loss of imagination. My real opponent was far less concrete and much more powerful. It was like a disease, a virus that I had acquired in a dangerous country plagued by death and sorrow. Back home, I had not been cured and I had let It grow. Today It was more powerful than ever. Its faculties were terrible: It could not only absorb my mind, but also immobilize me, trace and find me. And It knew I had seen It. I could not say if It had self-consciousness, or if It was a creature driven by its instinct for self-preservation. These were only details. In other times, I would have studied the characteristics of that creation with interest and joy. But now I needed to survive. It had consumed all my inspiration. I was unable to turn my few inventions into reality anymore. I was an average boy again. And It had never ceased to gain force. I saw its limbs, which were angular like arms and uncanny like tentacles, but they were only a glimpse of its whole appearance. It might be gigantic now and could easily annihilate me. But It had never revealed itself until yesterday. Despite its power, It had never ceased to hide. I was only a simple human being, but It forbade me from seeing It entirely. It had eaten my mind silently. It had quickly vanished when I was about to catch It. It was certainly not used to frontal assault, otherwise It would have easily slain me. Last night It had tried to complete its work and had displayed its powers. But it had failed. It had been hasty and unprepared. Something had forced It to change its plans. Its existence deeply depended on its faculty to devour. Perhaps, on the day of its attack, It had realized I could counter it. I had ceased to be the hunted one. I should understand its strike meant deep panic. It was not over. I could defeat It. But I had to find how. One of my actions had caused It great pain and anger and I had not been conscious of it. I reviewed everything I had done. That day I had spent most of my time in the library, desperately seeking my lost imagination. The books could be the answer: I might have randomly read how to destroy creatures of its kind

Supprimé : live by its own power? Live

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : to see

without **being aware of** it. I had read thousands of stories, and I could have **missed** a plot where the main character had to face something of its kind. But I had stayed alone **in** the library, like an easy target, and It had waited **after** **nightfall** to launch its attack. It was not linked with the contents of the books. Maybe, as the caretakers of our memory and fantasy, books were building a vast barrier protecting myself from its persecution. But if they were, they would be a simple shield between It and **me**. What had alarmed It could only be purely offensive. Something was threatening its existence, and for a moment, during that day, it had been in my hands.

The phone rang. My brother was calling me. He was glad I had resigned, and asked me if **I minded coming right away to fill** out some paperwork **for him**. He urgently had to make some orders **the following** morning and was facing difficulties. He seemed a little bit embarrassed. I warmly accepted his **suggestion**. I was eager to start my new job. My brother showed signs of surprise, but he liked my enthusiasm and said he **would be** waiting for me. I **hung** up the phone. **I still failed to find an answer to my question**. But destiny had just given me a **hint**.

As I **reached** my brother's place, I tried to understand how he could have frightened **off** my visitor. He was an artist of common imagination. He had always shown little interest in the disturbing dreams shared by common men. Needless to say his creations were inoffensive. But he was **holding** the secret of my release without knowing it. It was late, and only **his studio windows** were illuminated. He welcomed me with a smile, said again how sorry he was to **put me through all this**, and then gave me the papers. I read them and saw they were quite easy to fill. I told him they would take **some** time to be done, but I intended to stay here the whole night if necessary. **He appreciated my zeal**. He wanted himself to finish a sketch **that** night and proposed to work beside me. We both sat down at the same desk, opposite each other. He was frantically drawing and rubbing out, with a pile of white papers next to him. I was writing on his documents as slowly as possible, looking up **and** around. My brother had no idea of what I had really endured. The answer could not be directly linked with him. **It was to be found in** the **studio** itself. In this place, there was something that was noxious for It. **Here was the answer**. The naked walls **sent no message**. **We were surrounded by some of my brother's works, sculptures and paintings**, but none was **much worth**. I knew It was **lurking** there, waiting for me to surrender.

Supprimé : keeping

"You seem uninspired." My brother was watching me. "I never thought **paperwork** could be so unexciting."

I shrugged. I told him it was not the most fascinating activity, but it had to be done anyway. My brother continued.

"Speaking of activity, are you still interested in learning some tips about painting or drawing?"

I was, indeed. But I had other priorities. I made **a** few jokes about younger brothers who always want to **outshine** their elders. He did not look disappointed. We both stayed silent. About half-an-hour passed. There was still nothing around that would help me. Then my brother **looked at** the table **in an irritated manner**. **He appeared to be** missing something. He **surveyed the room** and sighed. I asked him what **the matter was**.

Supprimé : irritatingly

Supprimé : ?

"I can't find some of my pencils. I must have left them at home."

I hazarded they might not be so necessary.

"I absolutely need them. The one I'm using is not thin enough to complete the last details. Look for yourself."

He gave it to me and stood up.

"It **won't take me long. I will be back shortly**."

Then he looked at his paper and smiled.

"And don't try to finish it before **I'm back, will you?**"

And before I could protest, he **was gone**. I had always **welcomed** solitude. Despite his good will, my brother could hardly help me **defeat** my intruder. But I had secretly believed his presence **alone** could repel It, for a few minutes at **least**. **Now that I was alone**, I **needed to defend myself**. Darkness **slowly invaded the room**. I contemplated his drawing: it only consisted in a couple of circles and squares and was far from **being finished**. **However**, the figures looked quite thin. On a blank paper I traced a few lines with his pencil. It seemed suitable to draw elaborate pictures. Even I would be able to make something out of it. I started to draw two parallel lines, and then I gradually curved them. It looked like a kind of road or of arm. Or a kind of limb. I shivered. I could not but associate my drawing and the image I had kept from it. I wanted to see where my hand was leading me. I drew other lines and gave them the same form. I was quite proud of the result, though I was a bad illustrator. Then I tried to finish it by representing the whole creature. However, the pencil was becoming less effective. Its marks **on the paper were** less and less **visible**. I was soon unable to draw anymore. Perhaps my brother **had been** right to **go and fetch** other tools. **Suddenly I was thrilled**. On the sheet, my drawings were fading **away**. Lines were disappearing like wicks consumed by fire. After a few seconds, my sheet was completely blank. I had been used to all kinds of phenomena and I **should** hardly **have** been surprised by anything **irrational**. But at **that** very moment, I was **strangely filled** by an unknown excitement. I tried to draw the same figures **again**. They disappeared in the same manner. Any other mortal would have sunk **into** deep terror. But it had been a long time since I had experienced such delight. Everything was now making sense. I realized how to counter It. It had always been hiding, backstabbing me, rather than **confronting me**. I had been unable to understand why, and I even had the idea to protect **myself** from its appearance. But that was what I needed against It. **It had always prevented me from** seeing its image because It knew how dangerous that was. It was a creature born from my most repressed nightmares. It had survived by devouring my fantasy and **neutralizing** my power to reconstruct reality. But It was facing a great danger: if someday, I would manage to catch its image and to reproduce it, I would **give form to** a figure coming out from the abyss of the human mind. Something that was pure imagination would become real. It would be the return of my power. What It had taken **from** me would be restored. Its apparition in our world would announce its death. That was why the few drafts I had made had disappeared. It had felt It was about to be represented and its picture tried to **evade me**. It was not afraid of my brother or of the workshop itself. But that evening, it had understood, that if, by **regularly** visiting my brother, I would start to draw, or paint, I would be able to capture **it through its very** image. It was the reason **for its rapid** but vain attack. Our confrontation was about to end. But I had to act quickly. It had felt **that** I had tried to draw It. It was certainly seeking how to defend itself and to take me **out** at last. I had little time to find another way of reproducing its picture. The pencil and the paper were too fragile and versatile. I needed a more rigid, hardened material than the **graphite lead**. I took a look around. The blocks of marble were still there. Only a few of them were not carved yet. There were some of my brother's tools here and there. I had never sculpted before. I coldly headed to the **hugest** block.

Until facing the ten-foot slab, I had no idea **where to start**. But as soon as I came close to the marble I grabbed a chisel and hit it with fury. I **stabbed** the base of the block. The dust **fell all over** my feet. I **had not suspected** that my arm could **bear** such an effort. My gestures were precise and merciless. I was acting with **unprecedented accuracy**. I was driven, not only by hope or despair, but also by a deeper and unknown power. My instinct had nothing to do with it. A small shape was promptly released from the stone: it had the form of a gigantic human leg. My visitor had never really had a **precise** lower body, so I chose to give it the most basic aspect. I knelt down to refine my work. I felt an awful pain, right in my abdomen. **In front of me**, the leg had just **lifted** off the ground and **kicked** me. I **was thrown** backwards. I got up, watching my new task. It was its last effort, indeed. It had understood what I was

Supprimé : greeted

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : only

Supprimé : could

Supprimé : frilled

Supprimé : in

Supprimé : He

Supprimé : ??

Supprimé : itself with its

Supprimé : fast

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : carbon mine

Supprimé : largest?

Supprimé : was covering

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : did not suspect

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : left

Supprimé : knocked

Supprimé : ?

trying to do. It knew its image would involve its death. But it was harder to dissipate marble than lines of pencil. That is why It had decided to allow itself to be trapped in that sculpture. It was waiting for me to give It legs and arms, or any weapons to slay me afterwards. The attack of the leg seemed to be a message. But I was not fooled. It was a sign of despair. Its hours were numbered. If I managed to **finish** the sculpture I would annihilate It. **This** was our last meeting. I absolutely had to **remain out of the leg's reach and pursue my work**. The block was large enough. I hit the marble again, as hard as I could. The leg was vainly stretching in my direction. I quickly released a second leg, which instantly **came alive** and **aimed at** me. I dodged it. I looked up and watched what I had done: there were two legs emerging from the marble, swinging in the air. It was as if a pale and gigantic man was imprisoned in the marble, struggling to release himself. But It was not. It was desperately trying to return to its origin, to leave **matter** for the void. It **refused to be created**. **But I** had to make the upper part of the body. There was no other alternative. I dashed to the block and **chiselled** it again. The legs wildly pushed me away, but I promptly got up and **resumed to my work**. Ten times I was thrown to the ground, ten times I **carved** with a vengeance. When I felt I had a broken rib, the torso was nearly finished: I was facing a large and protuberant belly, shaking as if it wanted to flee away on its legs. But it was still sealed by its back to the rest of the marble. The hardest part was just beginning. It was now time to give It arms. I could not sculpt them if the legs were still charging **at** me. I needed a safer place. I forgot about my pain, and I ran at the mutilated figure. Its feet missed me. I **gripped** the right knee, clambered over it and climbed. I was now hanging on top of **its** chest. It furiously quaked to make me fall but I held on. With the chisel, I traced the form of a limb and excavated it. I did not know if it was in man's might to work as hard and as hastily as I was doing. But surviving all these injuries was far from what a body could **commonly** endure. With fear, I completed the arm. It started to move and came to life. But it was far more dangerous than I had expected it. With its hand it instantly grabbed my **hip** and **smashed** it. It was not pushing me away anymore, but trying to kill me once and for all. Despite the pain, I was still able to cling on to the sculpted marble. I started to carve the other side. When It realised I was still able to sculpt, it released its embrace and caught my leg instead. I let out a scream when I felt it had broken it. But its inaccurate movements made me understand I still had a chance: It was completely blind, as the random striking of its legs had revealed. I had to finish It before It could find my head. The second arm was not yet over, when it came to life and came out the marble itself to grasp my other leg. I hung on to the top of the block with my hands and all my remaining strength. They were both trying to pull me, to tear my limbs away. It was taking my body before I could give It one. I felt in my mouth the taste of blood and sweat mixed together. My skin was being scraped against the marble. It was squealing as the arms were dragging me. But as long as I was alive, I had to bear it. With one hand, I began to sculpt its head, as its arms tightened more and more. I had just managed to make the outline of its face when one of its hands suddenly released my leg and started to hit around me. It was a question of seconds. I traced **its** mouth, which opened to shout a ghastly cry of pain. I was driven straight to hell. Its nose, two nostrils **gulping** the air, **had hardly been completed** when its hand flung me violently onto my back. I dropped the chisel. It moved its other hand upward, and they both grabbed my neck and started to strangle me. I gripped its faceless head. A small grin appeared on its mouth. It had felt that my neck was stiffening. Maybe It was able to taste delight. My breath slowly diminished. I was overwhelmed by the coldness of its hands. Everything was slowly freezing around me. Darkness was expanding over me. But I had already faced it before. I had already experienced my most terrible fear. My intruder had spent its lifetime trying to hide and to avoid being seen. But **It was unaware** that I saw the haze. It could not know that, when the haze had vanished, I did not just see its emerging limbs. Behind them, there were two dimmed lights, flickering like dead stars. I raised my hand. It was still counting my

Supprimé : slain

Supprimé : with

Supprimé : again

Supprimé : with

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : slay

Supprimé : at last

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : ache

Supprimé : hold

Supprimé : ?

Supprimé : understood

Supprimé : strike

Supprimé : it

Supprimé : achieve

Supprimé : assumed

Supprimé : hanged up

Supprimé : torn

Supprimé : were more and more tightening

Supprimé : violently

Supprimé : ?

heartbeats. I lifted two fingers. Perhaps It understood what was happening. I pushed my fingers into the middle of its face, as hard as I could, crushing my nails and the marble. I could feel I was digging two holes. A howl, neither human nor animal, came out of the depth of the marble. The mouth curved extremely, in agony. The hands released me. I felt myself sluggishly slipping down to the ground. Before I reached it and closed my eyes, I glanced at It. For a moment, I believed It was also watching me.

Supprimé : excessively?

*

Very few stories have been told about my brother, and most of them are rather exaggerated and false. I believe it is now my duty, not to restore some truths, but to **simply to bear testimony**

My brother is said to be a reserved person and I would hardly deny it. Some people say it was a mistake to send him to war, but he had always been professional and dedicated to his task, whatever it was.

Supprimé : pretend

He had never been a cause of concern for us, except when he **would** disappear into the forest. That is why our parents let him **find a job** as soon as he returned from the frontier. Perhaps he could **have found** a more **thrilling** job, but he never complained about **being** a clerk.

A few days before the events, I met him and felt an uncanny lack of hope in him. First I believed, as other people did, that it was the result of his days spent at the frontier. That is why I **offered** him to work **for me**, so that I might look after him **and help him out**. I was particularly glad **when** he accepted to **be** given some tips about on how to draw. I was sure that creating things would help him outgrow his difficulties, whatever they were.

Supprimé : may

Supprimé : creation

I felt concerned about him and I wanted to keep him by my side. Pretending that I tried to take advantage of a **simpleton** is disrespectful for both of us.

I had never believed he could hurt himself. And that night, when I found him unconscious, surrounded by the debris of the marble, I instantly thought someone had attacked him. Doctors revealed he **suffered** from multiple fractures, which confirmed my opinion. But there was no evidence of an attack, and the investigation concluded he had intentionally made the block fall and break on him. **To my knowledge**, a motionless block can hardly inflict such injuries.

Supprimé : aggression

He never confirmed any of these theories. When he recovered consciousness, there was a great terror in his eyes. He spoke with panic of invisible enemies trying to devour him, then calmed down and said something about victory and peace. He never wanted to say what happened that night. A small scar on the nape of his neck **was** interpreted as a mark of self-injury. All these details were sufficient **to send him to the asylum**, which he has not left ever since, like many former soldiers.

I often visit him. I find him appeased. I find no difficulty having conversations with him, but we never discuss what happened that night. He still likes wandering in the large park of the hospital, and the nurses like him. He is good-tempered and causes no **problem**. However, he no longer shows any interest in learning how to draw or paint, or **learning** anything else. I feel quite disappointed, despite his good health.

In his room, I only found a paper on which he had written what seems to be the **rough** draft of a story. It was apparently talking about how to defeat an omnipotent foe. Someone else would have believed he was confusing reality and fiction. But I think **it** was far more complex than that.

I think that knowing what happened that night is meaningless. My brother's **disorder** is far more profound, and I mused over it for a long time. Today, I hypothesize that he, for an unknown reason, has realized how vain, and valueless existence **is**, which plunged him into dreadful **melancholy**, a disease without any real cure.

Supprimé : have meditated about

Supprimé : ? Thought over it? it

Supprimé : was

Supprimé : has realized...is; realized...was

Supprimé : in

Supprimé : had made

Supprimé : enliven

Supprimé : him

I **have** tried many times to **bring him back to real life**. But I consider now his indifference for creation, with a brush or anything else, as irrevocable and definitive.

But despite my evident defeat, I don't regret **what I did**, and I am proud to say today, that I have done everything I could to bring him back toward life.