

RICARDO PIGLIA

The Factory

Translated from Spanish by Sergio Waisman

FROM A DISTANCE the building looks like a fortress, rectangular and dark. In recent months the Industrialist—as everyone here calls him—has reinforced the original structure with steel planks and wooden partitions, and he's had two guard towers raised at the southeast and southwest corners of the factory. These turrets look over the plains that extend for thousands of kilometers toward Patagonia and the end of the continent. All the transoms, glass roofs, and windows are broken and haven't been replaced because his enemies would simply break them again. The same goes for the outside lights, the bulbs of the street lamps, which someone has smashed by throwing rocks at them—except for a handful of the tallest lamps, still on that late afternoon, soft and yellow in the twilight. The outside walls are covered by torn, reglued posters and political graffiti, all seemingly repeating the same slogan—*Perón Returns*. Written in different styles by a variety of groups, the posters all show the same smiling face ready as always to come back from anything, they all claim and celebrate the imminent return—or hope for return—of the General Juan Domingo Perón. Flocks of pigeons fly in and out of holes in the walls and the broken windows, and circle above the premises; below, stray dogs bark at each other, or lie in the shade under the trees along the broken sidewalks. Luca hasn't been outside the factory in months, to avoid seeing the landscape and the decrepitude of the outside world. He remains indifferent to everything outside the plant. Echoes and threats reach him, still, voices and laughter and the sound of cars speeding by on the highway, near the fence, on the other side of the factory's parking areas and loading zone.

After ringing the bell several times outside the locked, chained front iron door, and after leaning through a broken window and clapping their hands trying to get someone's attention, they were finally received by Luca Belladonna himself. Tall, polite, oddly dressed in very warm clothes for the time of year—with a large, black-leather cardigan, a gray flannel pair of pants, a thick, leather jacket and Patria boots—he asked them to

come directly up to the main offices. They could visit the factory plant a little later, he told them. They walked down a gallery, where the enclosing glass was broken and dirty, and there were phrases and words drawn along the inside walls, too. Things Luca had written there, he explained, things he couldn't afford to forget.

His bedroom was upstairs, in the west wing of the building, close to one of the old meeting rooms, in a small space that used to be a filing room. It had a foldout bed, a small table, and several cupboards with papers and medicine bottles. Luca chose the room so he wouldn't have far to go when he undertook his calculations and experiments. He could just stay in that wing of the factory, walk down the hallway, and go downstairs to his office. Sometimes, he told them all of a sudden, when he got out of bed and walked down the hallway in the morning, he'd write whatever dream he remembered on the wall, because dreams fade and are forgotten as easily as we breathe, so they have to be written wherever you are when you remember them. The death of his brother Lucio and his mother running away were the central themes that appeared—sometimes successively, other times alternatively—in the majority of his dreams. “They form a series,” he told them. “Series A,” he said, showing them a chart and several diagrams. When the dreams moved on to other subjects, he'd write them in another section, under a different key. “This is Series B,” he said. He repeated that in recent days he'd been dreaming mostly about his mother in Dublin and his dead brother.

There were phrases in ink on the walls, words underlined or circled, arrows relating “one word family” to another.

He called Series A *The Process of Individualization*, and Series B *The Unexpected Enemy*.

“Our mother couldn't stand her children being more than three years old, as soon as they turned three, she abandoned them.” When his mother found out about Lucio's death, she almost traveled back to Argentina, but they had dissuaded her. “She was desperate, apparently, which surprised us, because she'd abandoned our brother when he was three years old, and she abandoned us, too, when we turned three. Extraordinary, isn't it?” he asked.

“Pregnant with *me*,” Luca said, going back to the first person singular. “The other man raised me for three years after I was born, as if he was my father, and I don't even remember him. Not even his face, just the voices I could hear from the stage, he was a theater director, you know? But eventually she left him, too, moved to Rosario, then to Ireland, and I

had to go back to my family house, that's how it was, legally, since I have the same last name as the man who claims to be my father."

Then Luca told them that he'd been looking for a secretary that week, not a lawyer or a simple typist, but a secretary. In other words, someone who could write down what he was thinking and what he needed to dictate. He smiled at them, and Renzi confirmed again that Luca—like a Russian *starets*, or like peasants—spoke in the plural when referring to his projects, and in the singular when talking about his own life. On the other hand, he said that he ("we") had accepted that he ("we") would be appearing in court to request that the money that his father had sent from his mother's inheritance be turned over to him. He had all the documents and records necessary to file the claim.

"We had to hire someone who could take dictation and type up the proofs that we'll be taking to court to reclaim the money that belongs to us. We don't want lawyers, we'll file the lawsuit ourselves, under the law of the defense of inherited family patrimonies."

He was excited about the possibility of *getting out* of his own field for once, and taking a trip into town to defend himself before the law. He walked around the room as he spoke, in a state of great unrest, imagining every step of his defense. He was certain that a secretary would help him expedite his ability to prepare the necessary documents.

So he placed an ad on X10 Rural Radio for two consecutive days, he told them, announcing the opening for a private secretary. Several men showed up from the countryside, hats in hand, calm, bowlegged, horse-riding men, their faces darkly tanned but their foreheads white at the line of their hat brim. They were muleteers, herdsman, horse tamers, out of work because of the recent concentration of the large estancias that was driving small farmers, tenants, and seasonal laborers to search for new jobs. Honorable men, as they said, who'd understood the word secretary as someone who can keep a secret. They'd come and applied for the position, ready to swear, "if it came to it," that they could keep as quiet as the grave. Because, naturally, "they knew our story and our misfortunes," Luca explained. They risked coming to the factory and were willing not to say a single word that they weren't authorized to say. In addition, of course, they'd also do the necessary work, as they told him, turning both ways, looking at the walls and windows, expecting to see the corral where the animals might be, or the land they'd be expected to farm.

But that wasn't it. He wasn't looking for a foreman, or an axe-man, or any of the things you might need in an estancia. He was looking for a

technical secretary, someone who knew the secrets of the written word, someone who could help him face the vicissitudes of the battle in which he saw himself implicated, the long war he was waging against the rough forces of the region.

“Because in our case,” Luca said, “we’re talking about an actual military campaign, we’ve secured victories and suffered defeats. Napoleon’s always been our main point of reference, basically because of his ability to react in the face of adversity.”

Luca stopped and asked if they knew why crazy people, everywhere in the world, always saw themselves as Napoleon Bonaparte. Why, he asked, whenever someone needs to portray a madman, why do they draw someone with a hand tucked into his vest and a bicorn hat on his head? It was true, wasn’t it? A quick sketch of Napoleon, that was the universal way to draw a madman. Had anyone thought of that? Luca asked. I am Napoleon, the *locus classicus* of the classic madman. But why?

“We’ll leave that one stewing,” he said with a sly look in his eye, and escorted them down the hallway and into his office. To return to the question of the secretary, which they had left “pending,” he said.

ALTHOUGH THE MAIN OFFICE was luxuriously furnished, it was much deteriorated, with a layer of gray dust on the leather chairs and the long mahogany tables, moisture marks on the carpets and walls, the windows all broken, and white splotches of pigeon shit on the floor. The birds—not just pigeons, but also sparrows, ovenbirds, *chingolos*, and even a *carancho*—would come in through the roof, land on the iron crossbeams along the roof of the factory, and fly in and out of the building, sometimes building nests in different places of the edifice—all apparently without being seen by the Industrialist, or at least without being considered of sufficient interest or importance to interrupt his actions, or his speeches.

Luca had to place another ad, this time on the church radio station, he told them, the parish station actually, X8 Radio Pius XII. Until finally, after interviewing a number of applicants and fearing that he wouldn’t find anyone, a pale young man showed up who immediately confessed that he’d left the priesthood before being ordained. He said that he’d come to doubt his faith and that he wanted to spend time in the secular scene, as his confessor, Father Luis, had advised him. These were his words. And there he was, dressed in black, wearing his white-banded collar (“clergyman”) to prove he still carried with him “the mark of God,” as he told him. Mister Schultz.

“That’s why we hired him, because we understood that Schultz was, or would be, the right man for our legal task. After all, is justice not based on belief and the written word, like religion? There’s legal fiction, just like there are sacred stories, and in both cases we believe only what’s well narrated.”

Luca told them the young secretary was in one of the offices now, organizing their correspondence and typing up the nighttime dictations, but that they’d be able to meet him soon. Luca had needed a secretary who’d be extremely trustworthy, a believer, a convert in a sense. He had needed a fanatic, someone willing to serve a cause. He had a long conversation with the candidate, whom he finally selected, about the Catholic Church as a theological-political institution and as a spiritual mission.

In these times of disillusion and skepticism, with an absent God—the seminary student had told him—truth resides in the twelve apostles who saw Him when He was young and healthy, in full use of His faculties. One should believe in the New Testament because it was the only proof of the vision of the embodiment of God. In the beginning there were twelve apostles, the seminary student had said—and *one traitor*, we added. This made the seminary student blush, Luca told them, he was so young that the word *traitor* had some kind of sinful, sexual connotation for him. The idea of a small circle, of an exalted and loyal sect, *except* with a traitor infiltrated at its core, an informant who’s not foreign to the sect, but constitutes an *essential* part of its structure—this was the true organizational form of any small society. One must act knowing that there’s a traitor infiltrated in the ranks.

“*There’s a traitor among us*,” the Industrialist told them, smiling. “That should be the basic operational sentence of every organization.” Luca gestured toward the street, toward the graffiti and posters on the walls outside the factory. “That’s what happened to us, because there was a traitor inside our family business who took advantage of the family’s well-being to *squeal*,” he said, again using a metaphor that revealed his origins, as was his habit. Or at least his birthplace.

Luca told them that there were two contradictory tendencies in the teachings of Christ—according to the seminary student—one in conflict with the other. On the one hand, we have the illiterate and dejected of the world, the fishermen, artisans, prostitutes, and poor peasants upon whom the Lord bestowed long and clear parables. For the meek He had not concepts or abstract ideas, but stories and anecdotes. In this line of teaching, arguments were made through narratives, with practical examples from

everyday life, as opposed to the intellectual generalizations and abstractions of the men of letters and the philistines, the eternal readers of sacred texts, the interpreters of the Book.

In the other line, the idea was that only a small group of the initiated, an extreme minority, can lead us to the high and hidden truths. This initiated circle of conspirators, who share the great secret, however, acts with the conviction that there's a traitor among them. They say what they say, they do what they do, knowing they're going to be betrayed. What is said can be interpreted in several different ways, even the traitor doesn't trust the explicit meaning, the traitor is not quite certain what he should or should not denounce. This theological-political version of the eccentric community, the seminary student said, according to Luca, was the classic structure of a secret sect that knows there's a traitor in its ranks, and protects itself by using a language suffused with hidden meanings.

On the other hand, they may have been a sect of mushroom eaters. This would explain why Christ withdraws to the desert and visits with Satan. Those Palestine sects—the Essenes, say—ate hallucinatory mushrooms, they're at the base of all ancient religions. They walked around the desert hallucinating, speaking with God, hearing angels. One could think that the consecrated host was nothing other than the image of a mystical communion tying the initiated of the small group together, the seminarian added in an aside, Luca told them. *Eat, flesh of my flesh.*

Mr. Schultz, Luca's secretary, was more apt to trust the second line of teachings. The tradition of a "convinced minority": a nucleus of faithful, formed activists who are able to resist persecution and are united together by a forbidden substance—imaginary or not—with texts full of secret allusions and hermetic words, as opposed to a rural populism that speaks in the local Spanish with the conservative sentences of so-called popular knowledge. Everyone in small towns takes drugs, in the pampas of the Province of Buenos Aires or the pastures and farmlands of Palestine. It's the only way to survive the elements in the countryside, the seminary student said, according to Luca, adding that he knew as much because he'd heard all about it in the confessional. In the long run, everyone confessed that you couldn't live in the countryside without taking some kind of magical potion: mushrooms, distilled camphor, snuff, cannabis, cocaine, maté spiked with gin, *yagé*, cough syrup with codeine, Seconal, opium, nettle tea, laudanum, ether, heroin, dark pipe tobacco with rue leaves, whatever you can get in the provinces. How else do you explain gauchesque poetry? All those gauchos, high as a kite, speaking in rhymed

verses through the pampas. *That's the law of the land, the man on top does what he wants / The shadow of the tree and its milk is always a menace.* Isn't the apothecary, after all, a key figure of rural life? A kind of general consultant for all ailments, always available, waiting in the doorway at night, ready to deal in tree milk of the cow and a variety of banned products.

The seminary student and Luca understood each other right away, because Luca thought of the restructuring of the factory as if it were a church in ruins that needed to be refounded. In truth, the factory had been born from a small group (*my brother Lucio, my grandfather Bruno, and us*), and in those small groups there's always one person who turns away and sells his soul to the devil. Which is what happened with his older brother, the oldest Belladonna son, Lucio, who everyone called Bear. His half brother, actually.

"He sold his soul to the devil, my brother, influenced by my father. He made a pact, he sold his shares to the investors, and we lost control of the firm. He did it in good faith, which is how all crimes are justified."

Only after the *betrayal*, and after the night that Luca ran out half crazy and had to hide away for a few days—isolated in the Estévez Estancia, in the middle of the countryside—only then was he able to stop thinking in traditional terms, and dedicate himself instead to building what he now called the objects of his imagination.

People accused him of being unreal, of not having his feet on the ground. But he'd been thinking, the imaginary wasn't the same as the unreal. The imaginary was the possible, that which is not yet. This projection toward the future contained—at the same time—both what exists and what doesn't exist. Two poles that continually change places. And the imaginary was this changing of places. He'd been thinking.



WHEN HE HAD HIS NERVOUS BREAKDOWN, nearly a year ago, Luca went to hide out in a country house, where he spent the nights on the front porch—with a lantern as a night-light, and the sounds of the crickets and the distant barking of the dogs until the singing of the roosters at the break of day—reading Carl Jung. He concluded that the *process of individuation* in his life was embodied or expressed in a universe that he was trying to unveil. He had lost his way and was now jumping through a plowed field looking for the road.

When his brother betrayed him, Luca wandered around the roads, aimless, lost. He'd shown up that afternoon at their company's town offices

without telling anyone he was coming, and had surprised his brother in an unannounced meeting with the new shareholders and Cueto, their factory's lawyer. They wanted to hand majority control and decision-making power of the board over to the intruders. He feared, his brother, with the rise in the dollar and with the government's exchange policy, that they wouldn't be able to pay off the debts they'd acquired in Cincinnati. That was where they had purchased the large power tools—a giant steel guillotine shear and an enormous folding machine—which they could see down below, on the floor of the factory, if they leaned over edge of the balcony where they were now walking.

When he saw Luca enter unexpectedly into the offices, Lucio smiled with that smile that had connected them for decades, an intimate expression between two inseparable brothers. They had worked together their whole life, they understood each other without having to say a word—but in that moment everything changed. Luca had left to go to Córdoba to ask for an advance from the head offices of IKA-Renault, but he'd forgotten some papers and had come back to get them, when he walked into the secret meeting. *Oh, evil.* He realized right away what was going on. He didn't speak to the intruders, didn't even look at them. They were sitting calmly around the table in the conference room when Luca entered. They looked at him in silence. He felt that his throat was dry, burning with the dust from the road. "Let me explain," Lucio said. "It's for the best." As if his brother had lost his head, or was under some kind of spell. On one side of the table, Cueto, the hyena, was smiling, but Luca only blew up when he saw that his brother was also smiling like that, blissfully. There's nothing worse than a naïve idiot who does something wrong thinking that it's for the best, and smiles, angelically, proud of himself and his good deeds. "I saw red everywhere," Luca said. He charged toward his brother, who was tall as a tower, and knocked him out of his chair with one punch. Lucio didn't defend himself, which only made Luca angrier. Luca finally stopped and left his brother on the ground. He didn't want to disgrace himself. He walked out, his head spinning, his life in shambles. He understood that his father must have convinced Lucio, that he must have frightened him first and then forced him to listen to—and accept—Cueto's advice.

The next thing he knew, Luca was in his car, driving down the highway, because driving always calmed him down, helped lull his mind. He eventually went to the Estévez Estancia, but he didn't remember what happened between walking in on the meeting and pulling into the country house. Later they told him that Inspector Croce found him prowling

outside their family house with a gun in his hand, looking for his father, but he didn't remember any of that. He remembered only his car lights illuminating the fence of the Estévez residence, the caretaker opening the gate for him and letting him through, reminding him which road to take up to the house. He spent several days sitting on a wooden chair on the porch, staring out at the countryside. He smoked, drank maté, looked at the road surrounded by the poplar trees, the gravel on the road, the birds flying in circles and, beyond, the empty pampas, always quiet. Vague voices reached him from the distance, strange words and screams, as if his enemies had found a way to drive him mad. A few white, liquid lightning bolts flashed in the sky, burning his eyes in the dark. He saw a storm building on the horizon, the heavy clouds, the animals running to take refuge under the trees, the endless rain, a thin blanket of wetness on the grass. His body seemed to suffer strange transformations. He started wondering what it would be like to be a woman. He couldn't get the idea out of his head. What would it be like to be a woman at the moment of coitus? It was a very clear and crystalline thought, like the rain. As if he were lying on the ground, out in the country, and had started sinking into the mud, a viscous feeling on his skin, a warm moisture. Sometimes he'd fall asleep and wake up with the light of morning, find himself sitting on the wooden chair on the porch, not thinking anything at all, like a zombie in the middle of nowhere.

One evening, during those days on end that were all the same in his breakdown in the country house, he went inside to look for a blanket and found a book that he'd never heard of. The only book he found and was able to read during all those days and days of isolation in the Estévez Estancia. A book he found in an old country wardrobe, one of those with mirrors and tall doors—in which one hides as a child to listen to the conversation of the adults—while he was searching through the winter clothes. He saw the book all of a sudden, as if it were alive, as if it were kind of a vermin, as if someone had forgotten it there, for us, for him. *Man and His Symbols* by Carl Jung.

“Why was it there, who had left it? That doesn't matter. When we read it, though, we discovered what we already knew, we found a message directed personally to us. Jung's *individuation process*. What's the purpose of an individual's entire oneiric life? That's what the Swiss Master had asked himself. Jung discovered that the dreams that a person dreams in his life all follow an order, which the Doctor called a dream plan. Dreams produce different scenes and images every night. People who aren't very

observant probably never realize that a common thread runs through their dreams. But if we observe our dreams carefully, Jung says, over a set period of time (one year, for example), and we write the dreams down and study the entire series, we'll see that certain contents emerge, disappear, and come back again. *These changes, according to Jung, can be accelerated if the dreamer's conscious attitude is influenced by the proper interpretation of his dreams and their symbolic content.*

This is what Luca found one night looking for a blanket in an old country wardrobe in the Estévez house, as if it were a personal revelation. He discovered Carl Jung by chance, and this is how he was able to understand and later forgive his brother. But not his father. His brother was possessed. Only someone who's possessed can betray his brother and sell himself to strangers, and let them take over the family business. His father, on the other hand, he was lucid, cynical, and calculating. In secret, for days and days, he had devised a trap — with Cueto, *our legal advisor* — to convince Lucio to sell his preferred stocks to the intruders and hand majority control over to them. In exchange for what? His brother committed the betrayal, terrified of the economic unknown. His father — on the other hand — thought like a man from the countryside who always goes in for a sure thing.

In his isolation, Luca understood the misfortune of men tied to the ground. He achieved what he called *a certainty*. The countryside had destroyed his family, they were unable to escape, as his mother had done, unable to run away from the empty plains. His older brother had known, for example, the happiness of having a mother.

"But before I was born," Luca said, using the first person singular, "my mother was already fed up with country life, with family life, she'd started secretly seeing the theater director who she'd leave my father for, when I was in her belly. My mother abandoned my brother, who was three years old, left him playing out in the patio, and escaped with a man who I will not name, out of respect. She left with the theater director and with me inside of her, when I was born the two of them were living together. But later, when I too turned three, she abandoned me (like she had abandoned my brother) and moved to Rosario, to teach English for Toil & Chat, and then she moved back to Ireland, where she lives now. I always dream about her," Luca added, later, "about my mother, the Irishwoman."

Sometimes, in his dreams, he felt that a certain *suprapersonal* force was interfering in an active, constructive fashion, as if it were following a secret design. This was why he'd been able to build, in recent months, the

objects of his thoughts as realities, and not just as concepts. To produce what he thought directly, thinking not just ideas, but real objects.

For example, a few objects that he'd designed and built in the last few months. There was nothing else like it, no previous models. The precise production of the objects of his thoughts that did not exist before being thought up. The exact opposite of the countryside, where everything exists naturally, where products are not *products* but a natural replica of previous objects, reproduced in the same manner, time and time again.¹ A field of wheat is a field of wheat. There's nothing to do, except plow a little, pray for rain, or for the rain to stay away—the earth takes care of everything else. Same thing with the cows: they walk around, graze, sometimes they need to be dewormed, have someone make an incision if they get a grass obstruction, herd them to the corral. That's all. Luca considered machines, instead, to be very delicate instruments. The machines were there to assist in bringing about new and unexpected objects, each more complex than the one before. He thought he could find, in his dreams, the steps necessary to carry on with the company. He walked ahead in the dark, looking for the configuration of a specific plan in the continuous series of his oneiric materials, as the Swiss Master called it. He liked the idea of them as materials—that one could work with them, as one works with stone, or chromium.

“What we write on the walls is the debris of memory. It's never the dream exactly as we've dreamt it. It's the remains, rather, like the wreckage and gears that survive a demolition. We're using metaphors here, of course,” he said.

Often it was only an image. *A woman in the water with a rubber bathing cap on her head.* Sometimes it was a phrase: *It was quite natural for Reyes to join our team in Oxford.* He'd write these remains and later connect them to earlier dreams, as if they were all part of the same story, discontinuous fragments that needed to be put together. He always dreamt about his mother, he'd see her with her red hair, laughing, in the dirt patio facing the street—and he wasn't satisfied until he could find a natural way to integrate all the images. It was intense work, taking up a large portion of every morning.

The writings on the walls were a tapestry of phrases connected with arrows and diagrams, certain words underlined or circled, connections established, with figures and sketches, and fragments of dialogue. As if a painter were working on the wall, trying to compose a mural—or a series of murals—by copying hieroglyphics in the dark. It looked like a

comic strip, actually, a black-and-white cartoon, including dialogue balloons and drawings assembling a plot.

His hope, then, was to record all his dreams for a year to be able to finally intuit the direction of his life, and then act accordingly. A plan, the unexpected anticipation of what was to come. He'd understood, at last, that the expression *it is written* referred to the results of these recording operations and the interpretation of the materials supplied by personal archetypes and a collective unconscious. His dreams—he'd later confess—were hermetic anticipations of what was to come, the discontinuous elements of an oracle.

For example, the observation deck, which was the opening from where you could see the lights of the bridge and hear the distant voices of the crew members. He wanted to transcribe what they said. Another reason why he needed a secretary, to help him copy everything down. And also why his table of interpretations was designed to read all of his dreams at the same time.

“Come, take a look” he said.

LUCA TOOK THEM to a small room next to the study—his workroom, as he called it—which looked like a laboratory, with magnifying glasses and rulers and compasses and drafting tables and photographs from the different stages of the construction of multiple devices. On one of the desks, to the side, there was a cylinder with a number of small brown wooden tablets—like Venetian blinds, or the mechanical assembly of a series of small Egyptian tablets—each filled with handwriting tiny as fly legs. They were miniature blackboards, on which Luca wrote words and drew images, in different colored pencils, related to his dreams. “The dreams that have already been told are the ones that get transferred to the tablets, in miniature,” he said. The engraved plates could be moved by a series of nickel-plated gears, *like the flapping of a bird's wings*. This made the words change places, allowing different readings of the phrases, at once simultaneous and successive. *My mother in the river, her red hair tucked into a rubber bathing cap. “It was quite natural,” she said, “for Reyes to join our team in Oxford.”* This was just one example of a preliminary interpretation. His mother, in Ireland: had she traveled to Oxford? And those Reyes, how should they be understood? As the kings, the *reyes*, or as the Reyes family? The question was: what does it mean to put different elements in relationship to each other, and thus articulate and construct a possible meaning—and how should this be done?

This was the other filing room. Luca had decided to remove the filing cabinets, as he had done in the filing room upstairs, and placed a folding cot in place of the cabinets here, too, creating another resting place exactly like the one upstairs. Not only was it the same, Luca explained, it actually occupied the exact same location, one on top of the other, in a perfect vertical axis.

“We sleep here, facing a specific direction, always facing the same direction. Like the gauchos who used to ride into the deserted plains and put their saddle in the direction they were supposed to be going, and sleep like that, too, to keep from getting lost in the middle of the countryside. To keep from losing their way, the direction of their route.” After many months of experimenting, Luca realized that it was essential for everything to be exactly the same when he slept at night, every night—even if he slept in different rooms in the factory, wherever his activities might leave him at the end of the day—so the dreams would continue repeating themselves without major alterations.

At that point, a man in overalls appeared, lean, very meticulous-looking. Luca introduced him as Rocha, his main assistant and mechanical technician. Rocha had been the leading machinist in the plant, and Luca had kept him on as his principal consultant. Rocha smoked, looking down, while Luca praised his skills as an artisan and his pinpoint accuracy in all technical calculations.

His older brother’s unexpected death, *in an accident*—Luca said all of a sudden—had actually saved the factory. Two months after the dispute, Lucio called him on the telephone, came to get him in his car, and was killed on the road. What is an accident? A malevolent by-product of chance, a detour in the lineal continuity of time, an unforeseen intersection. One afternoon, standing in the same place where they were now, the telephone—which almost never rings—rang. Luca decided not to pick it up. He walked outside, but came back in again because it was raining (again!). In the meantime, Rocha, without anyone having asked him to do so, had picked up the telephone, as if it’d been a personal call. Rocha was so slow, so deliberate and tidy in everything he did, that Luca had time to walk out of the factory and walk back in, at which point Rocha was able to tell him that his brother was on the phone. He wanted to speak with him, Lucio, he wanted to tell Luca that he was coming by to pick him up in his new station wagon, so they could go get a beer at Madariaga’s Tavern.

Luca had been unable to foresee his older brother’s death because he hadn’t been able to fully interpret his dreams yet, but Lucio’s death was

part of a logical line that he was trying to decipher with his Jungian machine. The event was the result of an axial shift, and Luca was trying to understand the chain that had produced it. He could go back to the most remote times to identify the precise instant when it was produced, an imprecise succession of altered causes.

Luca couldn't stop thinking about the moment right before his brother's phone call.

"We stepped out," he said. "We were here, where we are now, and we stepped out, but when we saw that it was raining we came back in to get a raincoat, and then my assistant, Rocha, a specialized lathe operator and the best machinist in the factory, told me that our brother was on the phone, and we stopped and went back to answer the call. We could've simply not answered, if we'd gone out and *not* come back in to get our raincoat."

That night his brother had called him on a whim, he told him that he'd just thought of it, that he was coming by the factory to pick him up to go get a beer. Luca had stepped out when the telephone rang, but he came back in because of the rain. Rocha, who was about to hang up the telephone and had already told Lucio that Luca was out, saw Luca walk back in, and told him that his brother was on the line.

"Where were you?" Bear asked him.

"I went out to get the car, but I saw that it was raining and came back to get my coat."

"I'm on my way to pick you up, let's get a beer."

They spoke as if everything was the same as always, as if their reconciliation was a done deal. They didn't need to explain anything, they were brothers. It was the first time they'd see each other after the incident of the meeting with the investors in the company offices.

Lucio came to pick Luca up in the Mercedes-Benz wagon that he'd purchased a few days earlier. It had an antiradar system to help avoid speed traps. Lucio used the car to visit a girlfriend in Bernasconi, he could make the trip in three hours, get laid and be back three hours later. "My kidneys, don't get me started," Bear said. Then he said that with the downpour it would be better to take the highway and get off at the Olavarría exit. Then, at the exit, on the roundabout, he got distracted.

"Listen, little brother," Lucio started to say, turning his head to look at him. At that instant, at the bend of the road by the Larguía fields, a light shined on them, appearing brightly out of nowhere in the middle of the rain. It was the high beams of a semi. Lucio sped up, which saved Luca's

life, because instead of hitting them straight on, the truck grazed the rear of the station wagon. Lucio was crushed against the steering wheel. Luca was thrown from the car, but he landed safely in the mud by the side of the road.

“I remember it like in a photograph. I can’t forget the image of the light beaming on my brother’s face, he’d turned to look at me with an expression of understanding and happiness. It was 21:20 hours, 9:20 p.m., my brother sped up and the truck only hit the back of the station wagon, we spun around and I was thrown out into the mud. After my brother was killed, I saw my father at the burial, that’s when he offered me the money from our family inheritance, he had deposited it in an undeclared account in the United States for us. This is what we’re going to explain at the trial, even if it puts into doubt our father’s integrity. Anyway, everyone here knows that’s how it is, everyone deals in foreign currency.² He agreed to send us what we needed to pay off the mortgage and recover the deed to the factory.”

“Let’s go downstairs and check out the installations,” Luca said.



THEY WALKED DOWN the interior stairwell and into the main part of the factory, where they toured the industrial plant and were surprised by the elegance and spaciousness of the building. The indoor garage was nearly two blocks in length, but it looked like a place that had been suddenly abandoned, right before some imminent disaster. A general paralysis had fallen over the steel accumulated there, much like a stroke leaves a man—who has drunk and fornicated and lived life to the fullest until the fatal instant when, from one second to the next, an attack would immobilize him forever—dry and lifeless.

The feeling of sudden abandonment was like a cold draft coming off the walls. Everything seemed to be in a suspended state, as if an earthquake—or the gray, viscous lava of an erupting volcano—had frozen the factory during an average workday, at the precise moment of its freezing. *April 12, 1971.* The calendar with naked women from a tire shop in Avellaneda, the old wooden box radio plugged into the wall, the newspapers covering the broken glass windows: everything pointed to the exact moment when time had stopped. A blackboard hanging by a wire still had the call to assembly from the plant’s internal commission. There was no date on that, but it was from the time of the conflict. *Fellow workers, there will be a general assembly tomorrow to discuss the situation of the*

company, the new conditions, and our battle plan. The electric clock on the back wall had stopped at 10:40 (but was it a.m. or p.m.?).

After a while they were able to discern the signs of Luca's more current activity. Spherical and curved objects set up on the floor, like animals from a strange mechanical bestiary; a device with wheels, gears, and pulleys, which seemed recently finished, painted in bright red and white; a small bronze plate that read: *The wheels of Samson and Delilah*; the diagrams and plans for a monumental construction, fragmented in small, circular models, laid out on a drafting desk. A garage where one hundred workers were once employed, now occupied by a single man.

"We have resisted," Luca said, then switched to the second person singular. "No one helps you," he said. "They make everything difficult. You get taxed before you've even produced anything. This way, please."

He wanted to show them the work to which he'd dedicated his recent efforts. He led them on a path between connecting rods, batteries, and stacked tires, through an alley formed by large containers, and to an opening near the back where they saw an enormous steel structure rising in the air. It was a conical construction, six meters tall, made of grooved steel, resting on four hydraulic legs, painted with a dark, brick-red anti-oxidant paint. It looked like a stratospheric device, a prehistoric pyramid, or like the prototype of a time machine, maybe. Luca called this unsettling, conical contraption *The Viewer*.

"WE CONSIDERED CALLING IT *The Nautilus*, but it's actually the replica of a spaceship, not a submarine. It's an aerial machine; it produces changes in the perspective and viewpoint of what one comes to see. It's a sign of the times: a stationary vehicle that brings the world to us, instead of us having to go to the world."

It had taken him nearly a year to build the pyramid, all the instruments, and the accompanying guides. He took advantage of the technology available in the factory's garage to fold the large sheets of metal. The seamless carapace of the machine, formed without any soldered joins, was the work of a watchmaker.

"It's not finished yet. It's not finished, I don't think we'll have it finished before winter."

He was haunted by the idea that the factory might be confiscated the following month, when the mortgage payment was due. He had received a letter from the courts with a date for a reconciliation hearing, but he'd postponed it because he didn't think that he was ready.

“We received the telegram inviting us to parley a week ago. They didn’t use that word exactly, but that was the meaning of it. They want us to sit down and negotiate, they want to discuss the fate of the confiscated funds. We’ll see what they propose. For the moment we’ve postponed the date. We didn’t write directly to the judge, but to his secretary. We sent him notice that our company needs more time and that we were requesting an extension. They send telegrams or cablegrams, we only write letters.” He paused. “Our father has interceded. My father has interceded, even though I didn’t ask for his help.”



“I DON’T TRUST MY FATHER, he’s hiding something, I’m sure of it. I don’t understand his reasons, and he doesn’t understand the *unfathomable* humiliation that he subjects me to by having to accept that money to save the plant. The factory is my whole life. This place is made with the stuff of dreams. *With the stuff that dreams are made of.* I must be true to this directive.”

This was going to be the basis for his case in the trial. The factory was his great work, it was already built and had proved its effectiveness, so why liquidate? Why make it dependent on loans? He thought these arguments would convince the court.

He was going to bet his life at the trial. Luca had a cause, a sense, and a reason to live—and this was all that mattered to him. This fixed idea kept him alive, he didn’t need anything else, just a little maté to make his hot, bitter infusion to have with some crackers. He was absorbed in his own thoughts for a while, then said:

“We have to leave you now. We’re very busy, our secretary will see you out.” Barely waving goodbye, he headed to the staircase and climbed to the upper levels of the plant.

The secretary, a young man with a strange look about him, accompanied them to the front door. As they walked toward the exit he told them that he was worried about the trial, which was actually a reconciliation hearing. The offer from the prosecutor had arrived. Rather, the prosecutor had communicated to them that he had an offer about the money that Luca’s father had sent him.

“Luca didn’t want to open the envelope with the offer from the court. He says he prefers to go in with his own arguments, and not know those of his rivals ahead of time.”

The secretary seemed alarmed, or maybe that was his normal demeanor. A bit detached, there was a strange, shy air about him. He walked

down the corridor, a few steps behind them, and said his goodbyes at the door. When they crossed the street, Renzi looked back and saw the dark mass of the factory and a single light illuminating the windows of the upper rooms. Luca was looking down from behind the glass, smiling, pale as a specter, following them from the white above, in the middle of the night.

NOTES

¹ “Democritus, in Antiquity, already pointed out that: *Mother earth, when made fruitful by nature, gives birth to harvests that serve as food for men and beasts. Because what comes from the earth must return to the earth, and what comes from the air must return to the air. Death does not destroy matter, it breaks up the union of its elements so they may be reborn in other forms. Very different from industry, etc. . . .*” (Report by Mr. Schultz).

² “I am too curious and too clever and too proud to behave like a victim” (Dictated to Mr. Schultz).