DENYS SPIRIN

RIMA TENEBRARUM

A Notebook on Encounter



LITTERAE TENEBRARUM
MCMXLVII

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Litterae tenebrarum, Volume 3

Denys Spirin

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RIMA TENEBRARUM: A NOTEBOOK ON ENCOUNTER

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Et insuper additi sunt sermones multo plures quam ante fuerant.

And there were added besides many more words than had been before.

Jeremiah 36:32

0. On the Second

One said: "I am."

He repeated what he had said, and the repetition added nothing. He could repeat it forever, and he needed no one to be in agreement with himself.

Then someone said to him: "You."

And there were two.

You write "someone." You could have asked who.

Narcissus was answered, after all. In the forest he shouted to ask whether anyone was nearby, and Echo answered: nearby. She could speak only in his words, and he ran away from her to the stream, where no one spoke.

I. On the Crack

The vessel was full, and there was no room in it for another.

It was struck, and it cracked. Its contents ran out through the crack, but the walls remained intact, so the vessel was still called a vessel.

Through the crack came something that had not been inside it before.

The vessel is the heart, of course. That is how they write in every book, and you couldn't resist either.

The fool began breaking the other vessels, hoping to learn what was contained in each.

Montparnasse is full of them. For freedom's sake they broke their property, their marriages, some even their heads, and now they sit in the Rotonde from morning on.

In the morning he sat among the shards, and everything around him was open.

No one came.

II. On the Gramophone

When they put on Chaliapin at the Gallipoli Society, the old men stand up as though he had entered. The record is worn out, the needle skips in the third verse, and he sings the same word twice. They stand and sit down only when the needle hisses in the empty groove.

The gatekeeper at the gate bowed to everyone who entered and said: hello.

They bowed back to him, and no one noticed that he bowed even when no one entered.

One day someone came in who did not want to return the bow, and walked past.

The gatekeeper bowed and said hello.

He could not be refused: he had asked for nothing.

III. On the One Who Did Not Answer

Summon one who can (*will*) come.

If he comes because he must, it will be the fulfillment of a law.

If he comes for a reward, you will hear your own promise.

If he does not come, do not say that he refused you. Silence has no mouth.

One day you will be summoned as you once summoned another.

Beware of answering by a rule.

Sheet One

October 1944.

The Latin manuscript copy of "Ostia" and the notebooks of the doctor who translated it were given to the cathedral library before the war, and in my inventory they stand under a single number. In September the churchwarden asked me to stay away from the cathedral office for the time being, and my evenings became free.

Your evenings had been free before, too.

The Nota on the last page says that there were nine sheets, that they were found on the floor in three rows of three and burned with the original. The doctor knew no more about them.

The first sheet apparently stood in the second chapter, beside the serpent that did not pluck the fruit. So a tree, a serpent on the trunk, and a hand reaching for the branch of its own accord. Whose hand it is, the text does not say; I carve a woman's and keep the fingers a little farther from the apple than necessary. On the upper branch I put a raven, in the empty sky a new moon, a black circle seen only by someone who knows it is there. I shall add the raven and the moon to every sheet: they are absent from the text, and let at least this be mine.

For the Church Fathers, the raven is the black soul of a sinner, or even a demon outright. Take it, since it's yours.

Motto: Nec dedit serpens nec abstulit. The serpent neither gave nor took away.

The block is pearwood, from a frame the bookbinder threw away. I carve with a cobbler's knife and forget that here everything on the right will become left.

IV. On Light

Light comes afterward.

First one does, and the doer is wholly in his deed, as a singer is in a song. The Greeks called it energy.

Then it is done, and what is done can be seen, and the one who sees says: good or bad. The one who did it is already standing in darkness at that moment, one step farther on.

Do not do in light what you wish to encounter.

Do not put out the lamp while another is in the room.

If you put it out, put out both.

They supply electricity by the hour, from six to eight, and naturally he writes about light during those two hours, and about darkness the rest of the time. The reader can check by the handwriting what was written when. The handwriting is the same in the dark.

V. On Salt

Two steps from the cathedral, Madame K. summons dead husbands and sons on Thursdays, and is paid in food. Last winter a general's widow asked where her husband had hidden the money, and the husband named the place. The money was found. At the police station Madame K. spent a long time explaining that she knew nothing about the money, and asked them to summon the deceased as a witness.

He rewrote the following parable three times. In the first, the man was not afraid; in the second, he was afraid at once. Read the third and do not believe it.

In the sea salt cannot be seen, and every drop carries it.

Evaporate the water, and you will get a crystal. Throw the crystal into fresh water, and it will turn salty, though it will not become the sea.

Salt is energy from which the one who acted has departed.

You can hold your own salt, and then it is history. You can cast it off, and then people say of you: that's just how he is.

One man spoke the name of a dead friend every morning. He remembered his voice, his movements, and all the words they had said to each other over forty years. In the end he learned to answer himself in his friend's voice.

One day he heard an answer he had not expected.

And was afraid.

Apparently he can hear me.

On the Intermediary

Two people wanted to meet without intermediaries.

First they stopped writing to each other: the words belonged to others, they had been spoken before them.

Then they stopped shaking hands: the hand remembered everyone whose hand it had shaken before.

On avenue Mozart on Wednesdays they seek the same thing: to meet the dead without body or voice. They put out the light, lay their hands on the table, and by midnight the table knocks.

Then they abandoned their bodies, because they had not made the body either.

They had nothing left with which to meet.

Whoever takes the cup for the hand puts it on a shelf and prays to it.

VI. On the Purge

At the end of August they shaved the women's heads in our street. They set a stool in the middle of the roadway, brought clippers from the barbershop opposite, and the barber himself came out to shave them, in a white coat. This was how they recognized them: one had been seen wearing silk stockings, another had real coffee, a third greeted the German sergeant major who rented a room from her and paid in advance.

They took Varvara Nikolaevna, the seamstress from the fourth floor, for possessing a German phrase book. The phrase book had belonged to her late husband; he had learned the language in captivity in 1916. They shaved her head, drew a swastika on her forehead, and marched her down the street to the square and back. She walked straight and looked ahead.

The crowd holds one face for everyone.

She had sewn shirts for the barber throughout the war. He cut quickly and neatly, as he always had, and at the end asked out of habit whether she wanted a trim. Then he grew embarrassed and went back inside.

A month later it emerged that the man who had denounced her was the one selling leather to the Germans. Men were not usually shaved; they took him away, and no one saw him in our street again. Varvara Nikolaevna still sews. Her hair has grown back; she greets everyone.

He was summoned too. In 1942 the German Kommandantur sent lists to the cathedral: such-and-such people have presented baptismal certificates issued on the rue Daru, check them. He checked against the parish registers and wrote beside surnames absent from the registers: not listed. He wrote neatly, and the lists went back the same day. Beside one surname he wrote "listed," though it was absent from the registers: it belonged to Varvara Nikolaevna's son-in-law. Those marked "not listed" were taken to Drancy, and from there farther on.

The purge commission kept him until evening and released him: the registers were in order.

VII. On Two Hands

Two hands held one cup.

The first could let it go, and so could the second. While both held it, the cup did not fall.

Then the first tightened its fingers so it would never let go again.

This was called fidelity.

The second let go.

They still celebrate regimental feast days in Paris. The old men put on uniforms altered twice and raise a toast to a sovereign who has been gone for twenty-six years, and to a regiment of which only a mutual aid fund remains.

And you are holding it now.

Sheet Two

December 1944.

The third chapter begins with a jug: it was broken, and the craving remained in the hand. On the block there is a table, on the table shards, a full cup beside them, and a hand resting flat on the table without touching the cup. Whether it has prevailed or is still close to it cannot be settled from the sheet, and I do not settle it. In the window a thin crescent, a raven flying out through the window.

A key lies beside the cup. There is no key at this point in the text: it hangs around the author's neck, and he will give it away much later.

Quod fregi me tenet. What I broke holds me.

The heating is poor, and the cold has split the block along the grain. I left the crack: it runs straight through the shards.

You carved the key at night. In the morning you did not remember it.

VIII. On Possession

One held another by the hand to keep him from falling.

The other had long since learned to stand alone, but the hand was never released, and in time he forgot that he could pull it away.

The Jesuit Surin was sent to Loudun to drive demons out of the prioress. The demon spoke through her mouth, and in the evenings, alone with her, Surin fought it: as he writes, they said hundreds of things to each other, all at once, and spared each other nothing. It ended with Surin being thrown to the floor before the whole town and going into convulsions, and everyone understood that the same demon was inside him as inside her. There too a Dutch doctor lists the signs of possession one by one: the possessed person avoids people, lives alone, complains of boredom and the emptiness of life. Check the symptoms.

From the outside they walked like two friends.

At the crossroads the second looked left. They turned right.

9. On the Third

At a café in Passy, two old chess players quarreled in 1931 and have not spoken since. They continue their game: each writes a move on a napkin, and the waiter carries it to the next table. Last spring one of them died. The waiter kept carrying the napkins anyway.

Two met and performed a deed neither had conceived.

The first said the deed belonged to him, since he had begun it.

The second said that without his answer the deed could never have been done.

They called on someone to judge between them.

He deliberately does not say whom. A priest, a notary, the mayor of the Sixth Arrondissement: choose, that is what he is counting on.

The third divided the deed in two, gave each his share, and established a rule for the future.

Both were satisfied.

From then on they did the same thing every day and never met again.

X. On Summoning

Draw a circle and stand in it.

For incantations they chose crossroads of footpaths and roads, the depths of dark forests, desolate steppes, and ancient ruins. The conjurer enclosed himself in a circle traced three times on the ground with the point of a sword, and had to watch very carefully that he did not protrude beyond that boundary with even the smallest part of his body, however the devil might trouble or lure him out.

Name the one you summon by his full name.

I name you. I do not know your full name, so I use your pet name.

Do not step outside the circle, whatever they show you.

They showed me a kettle. It boiled, and I had to step out.

Wait.

I am waiting. This is the second kettle already.

If no one came, repeat everything from the beginning, more precisely.

I can't make it more precise: I've run out of chalk.

A priest once said to a servant: go, devil, take off my boots, and the devil appeared at once and began taking them off. But the last duke of Carrara in Padua, when the Venetians were besieging the city and there was plague within the walls, summoned him according to every rule and got no answer.

Sheet Three

March 1945.

The swept house from the fourth chapter. An empty room, a broom against the wall, a chair in the middle, a raven on the chair. On the right a doorway filled with blackness, and in the blackness seven pairs of eyes at different heights so they do not stand in a row like soldiers. A black dog lies across the threshold, its muzzle toward the room; whether it guards the door or lets them in, I do not know myself. In the window a pale daytime moon beside the sun.

Domum vacuam septem replent.

Seven fill the empty house.

I carved the eyes over two evenings. The white on a woodcut is what the knife has removed, and I had to cut each pair out of the blackness separately.

There are eight pairs. The ninth is watching from the room.

XI. On Signs

Not by the face. Even the dead know how to wear a face.

Not by the voice. A voice can be recorded on wax.

Not by the hand. A hand can guide another's.

By the limp. By the cold hand. By the smell of sulfur, though it usually smells of kerosene. By the emptiness inside, like a hollow tree. By coming when summoned: the dead answer every invocation constantly and obediently.

At the baroness's in Passy, a table taps out the alphabet, one knock for "a," two for "b." The day before yesterday it tapped out the surname of her dead husband with a mistake, the very mistake she makes.

Not by the knock. A table knows how to knock too.

Not by a fitting answer. A horse in Berlin could count until they found whose nod it was reading.

Not by coming when summoned.

Not by failing to come.

All the signs in this list are false except one. He knows which and won't say, and I certainly won't.

XII. On the Duck

What is the difference between a duck and a duck?

One swims where it wants. The other is clockwork.

Where does the first want to go?

Where there is food.

So it has been wound up too.

By hunger. It can endure hunger.

It can. Have you seen it endure?

You cannot see that from outside.

Then tell me about the second.

Two hundred years ago it was exhibited in Paris. It pecked grain, digested it, and dropped excrement, and people paid admission. A hundred years later a magician opened it and found excrement prepared in advance.

The grain remained inside.

So it really did eat. Grain remains inside you too.

They say they are now building machines in America that have a goal.

Such a machine has a goal it did not choose.

And what is yours?

This is a catechism, answer.

A goal one did not choose cannot be seen from outside.

XIII. On Training

The master taught the dog to give its paw, and it did.

He taught it to fetch the newspaper, and it did.

One day he wept, and the dog gave him its paw.

General N. on rue Chardon-Lagache has a parrot that answers guests "Your Excellency" and "Yes, sir." The general is a widower, guests are rare, and in the evenings he consults the parrot about the affairs of the Union. The parrot agrees with everything. The general keeps its cage open: the bird does not know how to fly away.

XIV. On the Inventory

Fonds, unnumbered. Received from the widow. Owner died in 1939.

Item 1. Letters, 1919–1922, 41 leaves. Addressee not established. Last letter not sent.

He deliberately doesn't write who.

Item 2. Photograph: woman on a staircase, face overexposed.

Item 3. Gramophone record, the romance "Misty Morning." Crack along the edge. Plays up to the crack.

The crack falls on the word "remember." He doesn't write that because he never played it.

Item 4. Lock of hair in an envelope. No inscription.

The hair isn't hers.

Item 5. Address book. All the addresses are old St. Petersburg ones; the streets have been renamed.

Item 6. Notebook of prayers copied in one hand. On the last pages the same prayer has been copied twelve times.

On the thirteenth time someone answered.

Item 7. Glasses in a case. Lenses of different strengths.

Item 8. Gas bill for August 1939, paid.

Item 9. Notebook begun in one handwriting and finished in another. Owner not established.

Item 10. Everything that remains *of him* is described above. If you read the inventory straight through, by the ninth item you begin to expect him to come in and ask why anyone touched the letters. *He will not come in.* The inventory has been compiled so that it can be read without him, and the widow, when she brought the box, asked to be shown the completed list and sat over it a long time, as though over a letter to which it was still possible to reply.

On the Keeper

The doctor wondered who would hold his file when he could no longer hold it himself. His notebooks lie with me, in one box with the Latin manuscript copy, under one number. I do not continue writing in them. I add the raven and the moon to the sheets, and not to the notebooks.

So you are god. The doctor had hoped for someone higher up.

Sheet Four

July 1945.

The fifth chapter, the desert. Salt to the horizon, a river running through it, stones laid across the river, a man walking over the stones, seen from behind. All the stones are white except the one beneath his foot; I left that one black, without touching it with the knife. The author writes that someone crossing a river on stepping-stones does not pull from the water the stone on which he stands, and a support and the last thing holding him look the same on the block. On the near bank a serpent's track runs through the salt, on the far bank a raven waits. The moon is in its first quarter.

The moon goes away and comes back every month, and no one calls it betrayal.

The stone beneath the foot is the last one: Lapis sub pede ultimus.

The printer who prints the parish bulletin gave me scraps of paper. On the backs of some impressions a prayer can be seen upside down.

You carved the right foot. One steps across a river with the left.

XV. On the Deed

Two people carried a log at night, without a lantern. Each held one end and knew the other only by its weight: when the other stumbled, the log tilted, when the other shifted grip, it grew lighter for a moment, and by this lightness the first knew the second was still there. He did not try to see the other's face, because the night was moonless, and perhaps for that reason he never once doubted that he was carrying it with someone else. While they carried the log, it was a deed, and the deed belonged to them both; neither was concerned that it would later become a beam in a stranger's house. A theologian here in Paris writes that the whole of the one who acts is present in his actions, while he himself cannot be seen; he writes of God, and these two had not read him. When they lowered the log and opened their hands, it immediately became what was done, and from it there was no longer any way to tell whether two had carried it, or one, or whether it had always lain there. Someone asked from a window how many of them there were, and the first answered: two, while the second was silent. Then they brought out a lamp to count them, and the first turned toward the light, saw *me* and would have dropped the log if it had still been in his hands.

XVI. On Paranoia

Colonel D. is certain that the Soviet embassy on the rue de Grenelle is watching him. When he leaves home, he lays a hair across the drawer of the desk where he keeps the Union's papers, and when he returns, checks whether it is still there. The hair is there every time. The papers are read anyway: his landlady takes them to the rue de Grenelle, where they are copied and returned by evening, and she puts the hair back as it was.

A traveler walked against the wind and decided that someone was keeping him from going on.

He began bowing to the wind, and the wind did not subside.

He began cursing it, and the wind did not subside.

By evening he had arrived, tired, and thanked the one who had let him through.

On Proof

Proposition. The second hand in this notebook is not mine.

Proof. Her handwriting is different, but handwriting can be forged. She knows what I do not know, but I might have forgotten it, and she might have read it. She contradicts me, but people contradict even someone who wants them to. One thing remains, and if it is true, it will be impossible for her not to exist.

XVII. On Testing

To find out whether someone is behind the door, knock.

If there is an answer, knock differently.

If there is a different answer, knock as you have never knocked before.

If there is an answer to that as well, you have learned that whoever is behind the door knows how to answer a knock. The horse in Berlin learned that too.

Stop knocking. Say something through the door, and wait.

You are being tested from the other side too.

On the Stake

Account.

Paid in advance: evenings that could have been spent otherwise.
Paid: the door I did not open to others.
Paid: readiness to hear "no."
Who placed the order?
Paid: the person I believed myself to be.
Received:

On Hailing

At the prefecture they wrote the general's surname with two f's at the end, and now at the post office they give him his letters only if he calls himself that. He does.

A mother called her son by name, and he came running.

In the parish register the same name has stood for three hundred years, and no one will answer to it.

Monks on a mountain said that the name of God is God Himself. While it is being spoken, perhaps it is so.

18. On the Name

To ask a name is to stop wrestling.

Jacob wrestled all night with someone by the stream Jabbok and at dawn would not release him until he blessed him. The other blessed him: he named him by a new name and injured his thigh to give him something to remember by.

Then Jacob asked what the other's own name was. He was answered: why do you ask my name? And nothing more.

For three thousand years commentators have been trying to establish who it was: an angel, God, his brother Esau, Jacob himself. Each supplies his own name, and it suits each of them.

Jacob named the place Peniel, the face of God, though all night he had seen no face.

Sheet Five

September 1945.

The sixth chapter, the crossroads: a stone with inscriptions, three roads, and the third of those who read them walks across the field, past all three, and becomes no freer than the first for doing so. I do not carve inscriptions on the sheet. At the fork stands a post, on the post a head with three faces, looking left, straight ahead, and right, and on the head a raven. The traveler walks away through the grass between the roads, seen from behind. The moon is almost full.

Nulla (none) trium (of three) viarum (roads) mea (mine).

At first I carved the head as three heads, like Beelzebub in the Gospel of Nicodemus; it came out that way of itself, and I had to cut the block down and begin again. There is one head, with three faces, like those the ancients set at crossroads. I cannot explain why this matters.

Shall I explain it to you?

XIX. On Darkness

In light one examines the other. In darkness one holds his hand.

In light the face can be seen. In darkness the breathing can be heard, and cannot be distinguished from one's own.

In light one says: good or bad. In darkness one does not know yet.

In light one saves *(or destroys, it is the same thing)* nations. In darkness one holds a single person.

In light everyone has a purpose for being here. In darkness he is simply here.

In light one searches. In darkness one finds and does not know what.

In light one writes rules. In darkness they do not get in the way.

In light one counts how many have come. In darkness one does not even know the number.

In light one says "he." In darkness one says "you" and does not wait for an answer.

In light one answers a person. In darkness one answers what he does.

In light one sees God in His glory. In darkness they wrestled with Him until dawn.

In light one turns at a noise. In darkness one turns when hailed.

In light everything has already happened. In darkness it is still happening.

Read this in darkness.

XX. On Tuning

One receiver had a hundred knobs, and all its life it caught fragments of other people's conversations.

For four years London broadcast phrases every evening that meant nothing: Jean has a long mustache, the carrots are cooked, the long sobs of violins. All France listened to them. Each was understood by one person, somewhere near Limoges or Dijon.

Another had one knob, and received one wavelength so clearly that it seemed to be speaking itself.

God?

XXI. On the Echo

They encounter each other in the deed, and while it is being done, no one asks *whose hand is in it.*

One could ask only the deed itself, and a deed has no mouth, like silence.

Then it will fall away and become what is done, and each will say: *mine. And both will be right,* because *what belongs to no one belongs to everyone who found it there.*

Two who finish each other's sentences *hold one sentence at both ends,* like that log.

Wait. For three pages you have been agreeing with me, and I with you. That was how the one who had no words of her own agreed with a young man in the forest. You keep the sugar in a tea tin and the tea in a sugar tin and confuse them every morning; I know that about you too. Which of us was the first to shout in the forest?

The one who shouted *first did not hear what he was* told, because the answer came in his *voice, and he took it for his own, and ever since* no one can say where *one ends and*

XXII. On cognitio per connaturalitatem

Kinship is not given.

It is made, and not always on purpose.

It is made by two.

And each thinks he made it alone.

It is measured by one's own striving; there is no other instrument.

And the instrument itself is what is being measured.

Something belonging to another always remains in kinship.

Otherwise it is an echo, and we have already spoken with an echo.

I have no need of someone who coincides with me in everything.

Someone who coincides with me in nothing is invisible to me.

That leaves those who coincide in one thing.

They are few, and they are difficult.

You write the way I write.

You write that way.

XXIII. On Preference

Before the war people gathered in Montparnasse to hear Maria de Naglowska. She wrote books in French on sacred love and the rite of hanging, kept a brotherhood with a golden arrow in its name, and taught that the third testament would be the testament of woman.

I went there for two years. One winter I was chosen for the rite. Why I was chosen no one knew: neither the one who stood opposite me nor I. He was twice my age, had come from Belgium, and until that evening we had not said a word to each other. After the rite he returned to Belgium and, they say, entered a monastery. I returned home by another road and have taken only that road ever since.

I understood why he was chosen a year later. Until that evening there had been nothing to understand.

Maria died in Zurich in 1936. God must love everyone equally and always. Such a one needn't come at all.

The reason has not happened yet.

Sheet Six

December 1945.

The seventh chapter. A serpent biting its own tail lies in a circle, *above it the full moon,* an owl sits at the top of the ring, *inside is a smooth white stone,* without a single letter, *only scratches.* A hand with a sponge enters the sheet from below and wipes the stone. *A raven stands beside it and watches whose hand it is.*

In Isaiah, the Nocturnal One finds rest amid desolation, while in the English Bible an owl stands in her place.

My Name is not written.

Nomen meum non est scriptum.

It was carved over two evenings, *and which evening belonged to whom?*

(I deliberately rubbed out a couple of letters in the mottos).

On the Tree

Those who stayed in the garden ate the knowledge of good and evil.

I haven't tasted it.

XXIV. On the Promise

In June a decree was issued: emigrants would have their Soviet citizenship restored, they needed only to come and sign. A line forms on the rue de Grenelle from morning on, and in it people who greeted each other on the rue Daru for twenty years do not recognize each other.

I promise to hold you always, in everything and to the end.

I promise to hold you ~~always~~, in everything and to the end.

I promise to hold you ~~always, in everything~~ and to the end.

I promise to hold you ~~always, in everything and to the end~~.

~~I promise~~ to hold you.

Not-always.

XXV. On the Gift

Our neighbor on the stairs, a former artilleryman, took a Soviet passport in June. For twenty years he glued boxes for pharmacies at night and sang in the choir on Sundays, and now he walks through the building full of energy and tells everyone that his homeland has forgiven him and is waiting for him. It was given back to him as a gift, tu comprends. One cannot refuse such a gift without offending the giver, and he did not refuse.

Before the war a French professor wrote that a gift obliges three times: one must accept it, respond to it, and give something in return. The neighbor gives in return as best he can. He handed his music over to the choir, paid back the debts he owed, and gave away the furniture. We got a sideboard with curved glass doors and six shot glasses inside it, one with a chipped stem.

The sideboard stands here. The shot glasses in it are his, and I cannot drink from them: it feels as though I am drinking someone's health. He leaves on Friday and asked everyone who sang with him in the choir to see him off.

XXVI. On Fidelity

Every morning he came to her house and waited beneath her window until she looked out. Twenty years passed this way, and he never missed a morning, because he could not do otherwise.

Every morning he came to her house and waited beneath her window until she looked out. Twenty years passed this way, and he never missed a morning, because he could do otherwise.

What is the difference?

She looked out for twenty years and never learned which of the two she was coming out to see. She did not stop looking out because of it.

Sheet Seven

May 1946.

Occurrit mihi Nocturna. The Nocturnal One met me.

A night near Bacharach. The author fell asleep by the water, and a woman came to him from the direction of the river, although he had heard no boat. She did not name herself or ask his name. As she left, she took the key from around his neck. On the near bank he stands, seen from behind, hooded and carrying a staff. On the far bank she sits with her hand in the water. The moon is waning, and its path of light lies on the water by her bank.

In the author's Figures there are three rivers. At the Nahe a hermit told him to throw away the key, across the Main a boatman ferried him at night, beside the Rhine near Bacharach she came. The Nahe and the Main flow into the Rhine.

I did not carve her face: the Figure says nothing about it. There is no key on the sheet either. The author does not say when she took it, and I did not choose for him.

XXVII. On Renewal

In Pasadena this winter an engineer who builds rockets summoned a goddess. He was helped by a former naval officer who writes science fiction stories. A red-haired girl entered the house, and the engineer decided that the goddess had come. The girl still does not object. The old man in England from whom the engineer learned heard all about it from letters and was displeased.

At the parish they are saying goodbye to those who have taken Soviet passports.

The Rule

1. Do not promise for a year. Promise for today, and come tomorrow as though there had been no promise.

2. Remember forward, as a Dane advised about a hundred years ago.

3. Do not repeat yesterday's word, even if it was true.

4. If the other is silent, do not write an answer for him.

5. Do not count encounters.

6. Begin each time with a hail, as though you did not know each other.

7. When fulfilling what you promised becomes easy, see who is fulfilling it.

8. Do not hold for two.

9. Hold so that

XXVIII. With One Hand

A clap sounds where two palms meet, and the sound is in neither of them.

A Japanese monk asked his students: everyone has heard two palms clapping, but what is the sound of one? The students brought him their answers for years.

Raise one palm and listen.

Do not clap it against the table: the sound will always be the same.

XXIX.

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XXX. On the Silence After

July 2, 1946. The notebook lies open at the ninth rule.

July 9, 1946. "Silence has no mouth." This was written at the very beginning.

July 23. I am not writing an answer for another.

That is the answer.

Sheet Eight

August 1946.

The Hanged Man. In the manuscript he stands after the Instruction on the Madness of Ideals, where traitors are painted upside down on a wall. A gallows; a man hangs upside down from it, tied by one foot, the other leg bent at the knee, his hands behind his back, his face calm. To the right a wall, and a painter on a ladder paints the same hanging man on it. A raven, the moon in its last quarter.

Pendeo proditor an deus.

I carve alone, in the evenings when they supply electricity. The hanged man's face came out as mine, and the painter on the ladder has my face too. I did not redo them.

I hang: traitor or god?

XXXI. On Forgiveness

The metropolitan was buried in August at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois. By autumn the cathedral had split: some favored Moscow, others Constantinople, and now the churchwardens who had stood at the same collection box for twenty years no longer bow to each other. Every Sunday they come early to see whether their opponent is there.

In Montparnasse a widow tells everyone that a nocturnal goddess comes to her at night and covers her with a blanket. The widow's blanket is quilted, from St. Petersburg, and the goddess, according to her, tucks in the corner every time.

Two hold a grievance.

One can forgive by letting go of one's end.

One can also hail anew.

32. On the Rift

A crack in a wall is plastered over, and a year later it cannot be found.

Sometimes the foundation cracks. Then the house tilts to one side, and one can no longer live in it as before.

Sometimes the crack in the foundation is filled with mortar, and the house stands firmer than before. One cannot live in it the same way either.

Some spend their whole lives waiting for the foundation to crack.

Others take a crowbar.

I had a rule that I held for twenty years and considered myself. One evening I broke it, deliberately, for no reason at all, and went to sleep. I will not tell you which one: you will start observing it.

XXXIII. On Sediment

Two spoke on the mountain. Down below, others wrote it down.

An Alsatian young man lost everything at cards and signed a contract in blood. The contract was in two copies. When the Jesuits compared them, the texts did not match, and the devil was suspected of forgery. Both copies later returned, one from the young man's palm, the other brought in a stork's beak and laid upon the altar. And the contract itself was inscribed on the wall of the church in Molsheim, and a hundred years later people were still reading it as a famous inscription. By then the young man was long gone, and the devil did not attend church.

The speakers departed. What was written down is obeyed, and every year people argue over whether it was written down correctly.

In the American zone Germans are taken to see a film about the camps. They sit quietly, and on leaving say that it was filmed deliberately in a studio, and that the Jews themselves were to blame. Had the war gone the other way, they would have taken the Americans to see their film, and the theater would have been just as quiet.

Had others won the trial, a different verdict would have been written on the same wall, in the same words.

Some things written down remain from a conversation, others from an order, and on the wall they look the same.

The mountain on which they spoke was once someone's word too.

On the Book of Life

In Revelation the one who overcomes is promised that his name will not be blotted out of the book of life. In 1942 he kept the book on the rue Daru. The one who keeps the first book left eight souls in it at the Flood.

XXXIV. On Upbringing

Mademoiselle Julie, a Swiss woman, taught me for seven years: French, music, how to sit and how to be silent at the table. I obeyed her in everything and, I think, loved her. When I was fourteen, she gave me a book and told me to read aloud, and I said I would not. There was no reason, the book was a good one. She looked at me, closed the book, and went to her room. The next day we read again, only what I chose, and she listened. A year later she went to Lausanne and wrote to me until the war, always addressing me formally. Perhaps I am confusing myself with someone. But I acted in much the same way.

A father led his son by the hand across a bridge every day.

One day the son pulled his hand free and walked on his own.

The father did not catch up with him and followed one step behind, and so for the first time they crossed the bridge together.

XXXV. On Love

Two coincided in one thing and did not ask about the rest.

Two came to a third and asked him to write down that they coincided in everything and always. He wrote it down.

Two met on Thursdays for twenty years and never once arranged to meet the following Thursday.

Two exchanged bows in the street for twenty years: one wearing a uniform, the other a hat.

The concierge's cat has had kittens, five of them, all black. Four have been taken, but no one will take the fifth, and it follows every tenant up the stairs to the door. Yesterday it came as far as ours.

XXXVI. On the Two Kinds of Will

One was known by what he wanted. He wanted one thing and always, and people went to him, cutting away what was unnecessary.

Another was known by how he (*she*) wanted. Each time he wanted something different, and people went to him, breaking what was their own.

They built the first a temple.

There was nothing to build for the second.

I will not laugh here. One can spend a lifetime in such a temple without ever meeting its owner: the service goes on, the candles burn, everything is done as he would want, and so he has no reason to come out.

He comes ~~always~~. A roulette ball does not land on your number every time either.

XXXVII. On Cutting Off

Two went up a mountain.

The first threw away everything he carried along the way and reached the summit lightly burdened, with only a staff.

The second threw away nothing. He merely stopped asking why he should carry it.

At the summit they were waiting for the first.

No one was waiting for the second, and he came.

Remember the parable of the grain.

XXXVIII. On the Uniform

In October 1945 a professor gave a lecture on rue Jean Goujon about how man is condemned to be free. So many people crowded in that chairs were broken, and several ladies fainted and were carried out over the heads of the crowd.

Uniforms are sewn in one size for everyone.

Now in the Flore and the cellars of Saint-Germain young people in black sweaters sit and talk about freedom. They all speak in the same words and go off to bed at the same hour, when the Métro closes. Their girls wear long straight hair, every last one, and despise anyone who curls it.

The rule "observe nothing" is observed better than any other.

One of them, a boy of about twenty, the son of our own colonel, burned his Nansen passport in front of me so as to depend on no one. The next morning he went to the prefecture for a new one: without papers they would not let him into the Tabou, évidemment.

You think you have gone beyond good and evil. You have gone out the door and are standing on the stairs.

XXXIX. On Manner

The general on rue Chardon-Lagache let his parrot out, and for the third day it has been sitting in the chestnut tree opposite and answering passersby "Yes, sir."

The general on rue Chardon-Lagache let his parrot out, and for the third day it has been sitting in the chestnut tree opposite and answering passersby "Yes, sir."

Except the parrot cannot fly, voyons. I wrote that. You write as I do, and add what never happened.

And you write as you did last winter.

On Dictation

The Fathers compared the prophet to a flute: the Spirit blows, and the flute sounds as it can. A shepherd wrote like a shepherd, a courtier like a courtier, and this was counted to the Spirit's credit, for He did not disdain even a wooden flute.

The flute cannot add anything of its own, and if it does, it is a false note. A copyist who inserts a word is called a corruption of the text, an interpreter who finds in it a word that is not there, a heretic.

They burned the prophet's scroll, and when he dictated it anew, he added many similar words. Scripture does not say who added them, the prophet or the scribe.

No one will ever be able to tell what I added in this book and what you did.

XL. On Recompense

1. Do good every day.
2. Wait for light.
3. If light comes, write down what preceded it.
4. Repeat what preceded it.
5. If it does not come, repeat more precisely.
6. Do not miss a day.
7. When light comes every time, give thanks.
8. Give thanks every time.
9. Hold so that nothing changes.

You cannot put out your tongue or make a long nose on the sly.

On Handwriting

For forty years a clerk made fair copies of other people's papers and took pride in the fact that his hand belonged to no one.

One night he woke because his hand was writing. He lit the lamp and read: the handwriting was his, and so were the words.

In the morning he handed over what he had copied, and no one found an error.

Now people come for certificates from the other side. Those from the Union are being sent home, and they ask for a record that they were baptized here before 1939: an emigrant will not be touched. He searches the register and, finding nothing, answers: not listed, with the same words he used in answering the Kommandantur. Varvara Nikolaevna sent two people to him. He refused them both, and told her that the registers were in order.

XLI. On Cooling

He is writing this about the ball at the Obolenskys' in 1913, though he was not there himself.

After the ball the house remained warm for a long time. The candles burned down, the musicians left, and the chairs stood where they had been left, in pairs, turned toward each other, and from them one could read who had sat with whom and who had leaned toward whom. In the morning the servants came and arranged the chairs along the walls, evenly, as they had stood before the ball; by then the warmth had spread equally through every room, and it was impossible to say in which of them people had danced. The owners left and never returned. Year after year the dust settled on the parquet just as thickly by the window where a couple everyone whispered about had stood as by the stove where no one had ever stood. The servants, whom no one has paid for years, keep arranging and arranging everything until it is even. Before the ball the house had stood empty too, but back then people could still have danced in it. Sometimes the parquet cracks, cold or warmth comes through the gap, and for a moment the dust settles unevenly; the caretaker, if there is one, records this as a miracle and sweeps it away by evening. There has been no caretaker for a long time, though. There is someone who has entered and is looking, and to him the dust by the window may still be different from that by the stove.

XLII. On the Miracle

One day a stone did not fall, and no one saw it.

In the life of Nicholas it is said that as an infant on Wednesdays and Fridays he took the breast only once, in the evening. He worked miracles later, but he was recorded as fasting from the cradle.

XLIII. On the Many

The voices in the choir do not merge. *That is why a choirmaster is needed: without him one can hear that there are many of them.*

They are dividing the cathedral again. They divide what no one holds anymore.

A community lives as long as it can refuse its own rules.

Our parish cannot: they have been rewriting the rules for three years.

Each answers *for himself, and no one for everyone at once.*

One spread the tablecloth. Many sit at it. And each pulls it toward himself.

Their God is one, *which is why it is so boring.*

The Gallipoli men sing along with a record, *and Chaliapin does not get in their way.*

XLIV. On the Dead

Summon a dead man.

If the one you remember comes, he is yours.

If another comes, listen.

If no one comes, the table will knock anyway.

One people praises God over each of its dead and says not a word about death in that prayer.

There is no one to enter him: he is the one who keeps the registers.

Amen.

On the Entry

What happened is entered in the book. What did not happen is not entered in the book, and that is why the book is believed.

In March another man came, without papers and without Varvara Nikolaevna. He gave his name, his father's name, and his district. He listened, opened the register for 1937, and recorded the man's baptism in a blank line, in his own hand, without asking anything. Why, he does not know. I asked.

A month later someone told where that man had served during the war.

On Answering

All his life a man was hailed by his surname, and he answered, because that was how it was recorded.

One day he was hailed by the name Mother had given him.

He could not turn around: his hands were full. He put down what he was holding and turned.

Thus he became *other*.

Sheet Nine

November 1947.

The ninth sheet in the manuscript stands after the eleventh chapter, where the bookman lays the sheets out on the floor at night and asks which one to begin with. The author does not describe the sheet itself. The doctor saw it in a dream in the spring of '09 and wrote it down the next morning. An empty throne at the summit of a bare slope, the sea below, in the foreground a woman seen from behind, a key at her belt, raising her right hand toward a star near the horizon. I added the raven myself: it flies toward the star.

Motto: Solium vacuum relinquo. I leave the throne empty.

I carved it according to his account, stroke for stroke. When I took the first impression, everything on it stood the other way around: the throne on the left, the sea on the right, and she raised her left hand. I carved the block as I read and forgot that the impression is a mirror image.

That is how it was. The doctor had it the other way around.

XLV.

Today in Hastings, in a boardinghouse on a hill, the old man from whom the engineer in Pasadena learned has died. He was seventy-two, he suffered from asthma, and he was given heroin on prescription. They say he said nothing remarkable before his death. I do not believe that, but that is what they say.

Bon. Time for us to go.

I took the cat to the concierge. She asked how long we would be gone. Je ne sais pas.

I am leaving the shot glasses in the sideboard: they are not mine.

They say it is raining in Hastings today. Do not ask how I know: that is what they say.

You.