CAMILO JOSÉ CELA

THE HIVE

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Chapter One

DON'T let's lose our sense of proportion. I'm sick and tired of telling you it's the only thing that counts."

Doña Rosa comes and goes between the café tables, bumping into the customers with her enormous backside. Doña Rosa often says "Hells bells" and "I'll be beggared." For Doña Rosa her café is the world, and everything else revolves around the café. Some people claim that Doña Rosa's little eyes begin to sparkle when spring comes and the girls go in short sleeves. I think this is sheer gossip; for nothing in the world would Doña Rosa ever sacrifice a solid five peseta piece, spring or no spring. What Doña Rosa likes is simply to drag her great bulk about between the tables. When she is alone, she smokes cigarettes at nincty centimos the packet, and from the moment she gets up to the moment she goes to bed she drinks *ojén anis,* whole glasses full of the best. And then she coughs and smiles. When she is in a good mood, she sits on a stool in the kitchen and reads novels or serials, the bloodier the better: it's all grist to her mill. Afterwards she cracks jokes and tells people about the murder in the Calle de Bordadores or the murder on the Andalusia Express.

"Navarrcte's father was friendly with General Miguel Primo de Rivera, so he went to him, fell on his knees and said:

'General, sir, for God's sake reprieve my son!' and Don Miguel, though he had a heart of gold, told him: 'My dear Navarrets, I can't possibly do it, your son must pay for his crimes on the scaffold."'

"They were men, those fellows," she thinks. "It takes guts."

Doña Rosa's face is covered with blotches: it always looks as if she were changing her skin like a lizard. When she is deep in thought, she forgets herself and picks strips off her face, sometimes as long as paper streamers. Then she snaps out of it, begins to walk up and down again, and smiles at the customers, whom at heart she loathes, showing her blackened little teeth encrusted in filth.

Don Leonardo Melendez owes the shoeblack thirty thousand pesetas. The shoeblack, who is a heron—exactly like a bloated, rickety heron—had been saving money year after year only to lend it all to Don Leonardo in the end. It serves him right. Don Leonardo is a smart fellow who lives on tick and on business projects that never come off. Not that they turn out badly; they simply don't come off at all. Don Leonardo wears resplendent ties and puts brillantine on his hair, so heavily scented that you smell it from afar. He has the airs and graces of a grandee and an immense poise, the poise of a widely experienced man. I don't believe he is so very experienced, but he certainly carries himself like one who has never gone short of a bank note in his wallet. He treats his creditors like dirt, and his creditors smile at him and pay their respects, at least outwardly. Someone or other actually thought of suing him and dragging him to court. but the fact remains that so far nobody has fired the first shot.

Don Leonardo has two favorite tricks of speech; he likes to use a little French word now and then, such as *Madame* and *rue* and *cravate,* and he likes to say: "We, the Melendez.. ..

Don Leonardo is an educated man who makes it obvious that he knows a good many things. Every day he plays games of checkers; he never drinks anything but white coffee.

If he sees someone at a near-by table smoking American cigarettes, he asks them courteously: "Could you help me out with a cigarette paper? I wanted to roll myself one, but now I find I've run out of paper."

Upon which the other confesses: "Sorry, but I don't use them myself. If you'd like one of these.. ."

Don Leonardo then looks doubtful and waits a couple of seconds before answering: "Oh, well, let's smoke light tobacco for a change. Not that I'm partial to the weed, you know,"

Sometimes the guest at the other table only says: "I'm afraid I've no cigarette papers on me." And then Don Leonardo is left with nothing to smoke.

With their elbows on the scaly marble of the round tables, the customers watch the proprietress go past almost without seeing her, while they ponder over this world which, alas, has not been all it might have been, this world in which everything has gone wrong bit by bit, though no one can ever quite understand why; perhaps because of some small thing without the least significance. Many' of the marble tops were once tombstones in an old churchyard abandoned long ago; on some, a blind man passing his fingertips along the lower side of the table may still decipher the lettering: "Here lie the mortal remains of Señorita Esperanza Redondo, who died in the flower of her youth" or "R.I.P. His Excellency Señor Don Ramiro López Puente, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Public Works."

The customers of cafés are people who believe that things happen as they do because they happen and that it is never worth while to put anything right. At Doña Rosa's they all smoke and most of them meditate, each alone with himself, on those small, kindly, intimate things which make their lives full or empty. Some lend a vague air of dreamy recollection to their silence; and some review their memories with rapt faces wearing the look of a poor suffering beast, an affectionate, pleading, weary

beast: their foreheads resting on their hands and their *eyes* full of bitterness, like a sea in dead calm.

There are certain evenings when the conversations between the tables die down, conversations about new kittens, or the food situation, or the little boy who died and there is someone who cannot remember him—"But don't you remember?"—the little boy with fair hair who was very sweet and rather thin, always wore a fawn hand-knitted sweater, and must have been five or so. On those evenings the heart of the café has an uneven beat, like a sick man's, and the air seems to get thicker and greyer, though now and then a cooler breath pierces it like a flash; no one knows where it comes from, but it is a breath of hope that opens, for a few seconds, a little window in each shuttered spirit.

Don Jaime Arce, with all his impressive maimer, gets bills of exchange presented to him all the time. In the café everything is common knowledge, even though it may not seem so. Don Jaime applied at a bank for a credit, got it, and signed a few bills. Then what happened, happened. He made a business deal, was cheated and left without a penny, the bills were presented for payment, and he said he could not meet them. Don Jaime Arce is undoubtedly an honest man who has bad luck in money matters, simply bad luck. Admittedly he is not a hard worker, but then he has never had a chance. Others quite as lazy as he is, or even worse, have made thousands out of a few lucky coups, met their bills, and are now riding about in taxis the whole day long and smoking good tobacco. Tilings did not turn out that way for Don Jaime, on the contrary'. He is looking round for a job and cannot find anything. He would have taken on any work, the first that came along, but nothing has cropped up that would seem worth while; and so he spend his whole day in the café, his head against the plush back of the seat and his eyes on the gilt scrolls of the ceiling. Sometimes he will hum snatches from a musical comedy, beating time with his foot. As a rule Don Jaime is not thinking of his

misfortune; in fact, he usually thinks of nothing at all. He looks at the mirror and asks himself: "Now who invented the mirror?" Or he stares fixedly, almost insolently, at someone and wonders: "Has this woman any children? She may be a virtuous; old spinster." Or: "How many consumptives are in tin's café just now?" Don Jaime will roll himself a very thin cigarette, no thicker than a straw, and light it. "Some people are artists at sharpening pencils to a point as sharp as a needle, and it never breaks off." Don Jaime changes his position; one of his legs has gone to sleep. "What a mystery this is: thump-thump, thump-thump, and so on all one's life, day and night, summer and winter—the human heart."

At the back of the café. by the stairs leading up to the bilhard room, there usually sits a silent lady who lost her son a month ago. The boy's name was Paco. He was studying for the post-office exams. People at first said he'd had paralysis, but later it came out that he'd died from something different. He'd had meningitis. It was quickly over, and anyway he lost consciousness at the beginning. He already knew by heart all the place names of Leon. Old Castile, New Castile, and part of Valencia (the province of Castellón and about half the province of Alicante); it was a great pity he died. Now his mother is left alone, as her other son. the elder one, is knocking about in the world and nobody knows where he is. In the afternoons she comes to Doña Rosa's café, sits down by the foot of the little staircase, and stays there during the dead hours to warm herself. Since her son's death Doña Rosa lias been very affectionate towards her. Some people get pleasure out of being kind to those in mourning. They seize the opportunity' to give advice, or to recommend resignation and fortitude, and have a very' good time. Doña Rosa likes to comfort Paco's mother by telling her that it is better that God took him than it would have been if he had lived on as a half-wit. The mother then looks at her with an acquiescent smile and agrees that, of course, if one comes to think of it, Doña Rosa is right.

Paco's mother is a widow by the name of Isabel, Doña Isabel Montes de Sanz. She is still rather good-looking; her short cape is somewhat threadbare. Apparently she comes of a good family. People in the cafe on the whole respect her silence, and it rarely happens that some acquaintance of hers-mostly one of the women coming back from the ladies room-leans over her table and asks: "Well, how is it, are you beginning to buck up?"

Doña Isabel will smile but hardly ever answer; if she feels a little brighter than usual, she glances up at her friend and says: "You look very pretty' today, dear." Much more frequently, however, she never says a word; a wave of her hand on leaving, and that is all. Doña Isabel knows that she belongs to another class or at least to another walk of life.

An unmarried woman who is getting a bit long in the tooth calls the cigarette boy: "Padilla!"

"Coming, Señorita Elvira."

"A Triton." She searches her bag stuffed with tender, indecent old letters, and puts thirty-five centimos on the table.

"Thank you."

"Thank you."

She lights the small cigar and, with a faraway look puts out a billow of smoke. Shortly afterwards she calls again: "Padilla.

"Coming, Señorita Elvira."

"Did you give him my letter?"

"Yes, Señorita."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing, he wasn't at home. But the maid said I shouldn e worry', she'd give it to him at suppertime without fail.

Señorita Elvira says nothing more and goes on smoking. Today she feels a bit funny, she has the shivers and everything she sees seems to dance in front of her eyes. Señorita Elvira leads a dog's life, the sort of life that wouldn't be worm living if one looked closer at it. She is doing nothing, certainly; but because she does nothing, she has nothing to ea either. She reads novels, goes to the café, smokes from time to time a small cigar, and is ready for whatever may fall into her lap. The trouble is that windfells are few and far between, and nearly always bruised and maggoty at that.

Don José Rodriguez de Madrid won one of tire smallest prizes in the lottery at the last draw. His friends tell him: "You've had luck, haven't you?"

Don José has always the same answer, which he seems to have learned by heart: "Bah, a lousy forty pesetas."

"There, there, old boy, don't start explaining, we're not going to ask for a share in it."

Don José is a magistrate's clerk and seems to have some nice little savings. People say, too, that he married a rich wife, a girl from La Mancha who died soon afterwards, leaving all she had to Don José, and that he was in a great hurry' to sell her four vineyards and two olive groves because he said the country air was bad for his respiratory tracts and the important thing was to look after one's health.

At Doña Rosa's café Don José always orders the common *ojén anis;* he is neither a snob nor one of those poor devils who go in for white coffee. The proprietress regards him with something like sympathy because they' have this affection for the drink in common. *"Ojén* is the best there is in the world; it is tonic, diuretic, and an aid to digestion; it is blood-building and banishes the specter of impotence." Everything Don José says is apposite. Once, some years ago, shortly after the end of the Civil War, he had words with the violinist. Nearly everyone present maintained that the violinist was in the right, but Don José called the proprietress and said: "Either this impudent, rascally Red is kicked out at once, or I never set foot in this place again."

Upon this, Doña Rosa gave the violinist the sack, and that was the last anyone heard of him. The customers who had taken the violinist's side began to change their minds and ended by declaring that Doña Rosa had done quite right, that

one had to be firm and set a warning example. "You never know where you might end up with this sort of effrontery." In saying this, the guests assumed a grave, judicious, somewhat apologetic air. "It's impossible to do anything right or worth while if there's no discipline," they were saying at the tables.

At the top of his voice a man already advanced in years tells a story about a joke he played on the notorious Madame Pimentón nearly half a century ago.

"That stupid fool thought she was playing me for a sucker. Some hope! I stood her a glass or two of white wine, and when she left, she bashed her face against the door. Haw, haw! She bled like a stuck pig. And all she said was Oh, la la, oh, la la,' and off she went spitting out her guts. Poor wretched soul, she was drank all the time, you really couldn't help laughing."

From the neighboring tables, faces look at him in something like envy. They are the faces of people who smile, blissfully at peace, in those moments when they succeed in thinking nothing at all, without being quite aware of it. People are toadies out of stupidity, and at times they smile though they feel at the bottom of their hearts a boundless aversion, an aversion they have difficulty in restraining. It is possible to go to the length of murder out of flattery; surely more than one crime of violence has been committed to save face, to make up to somebody.

"That's the way to deal with spongers of her sort. We mustn't let them get the better of decent people like us. Just as my old father used to say: Tf yon w[ant grapes, come and get them—and you'll get it!' Haw, haw! The dirty old bitch didn't turn up there again, no fear."

A fat and glossy cat is running about between the tables. A cat full of health and good cheer, a pompous, self-important cat. It makes its way between a woman's legs, and the woman jumps.

"You blasted cat, get out of here!"

The teller of the story gives her a gentle smile: "But, madam, the poor cat—what harm has it done to you?"

A long-haired youth writes verse in all this hubbub. His mind is far away, he takes no notice of anything around him; it is the only way to write fine verse. If he were to look right or left, his inspiration would elude him. This thing called inspiration must be rather like a little butterfly, deaf and blind, but luminous; otherwise many things would have no explanation.

The young poet is composing *a* long poem entitled "Fate." He had his doubts whether he should not call it "This Fate," but after consulting various better-established poets, he finally decided that it was best to call it "Fate," without any trimmings. It was simpler, more evocative, more mysterious. Also, calling it plain "Fate" would make it more suggestive, more- how to put it?—more indefinite and poetic. In this way it would not be clear whether fate as such was meant, or a particular fate, an undecided fate, a tragic fate. a blue fate, or a violaceous fate. "This Fate" would have tied it down too much and left less scope for imagination to take wing in free, untrammeled flight.

The young poet has been working for months on this poem. By now there exist some three hundred finished verses, a carefully laid out dummy of the future edition of the work, and a list of potential subscribers who will in due course be sent a leaflet with a subscription forai. in the hope that they will sign it. He has also chosen the type for the printer (a simple, clear, classical type one can read with ease—in a word, Bodoni) and drafted the copyright and subscription notice. TWO doubts, however, still harass the young poet: whether or not to put *Laus Deo* below the colophon and whether or not to take it upon himself to write the biographical note for the blurb on the dust jacket.

Doña Rosa is certainly not what one would call sensitive.

"And it's no news *to* you what I'm telling you. If I want

wasters around I've got quite enough with that no-good, my brother-in-law! You're very green still, d'you hear me? Very green. A fine thing that would be! Whenever have you seen a fellow without education or morals coming to this place, puffing and blowing and stamping about as if he was a real gent? What's more, I'll take an oath that it won't happen while I've got eyes in my head."

Doña Rosa has drops of sweat on her brow and her hairy upper lip.

"And you there, you booby, slinking off to get the evening paper! There's no respect or decency in this place, that's all there is to it. One day I'm going to give you a proper thrashing if my monkey's up. Has one ever seen such a thing?"

Doña Rosa pins her small rat's eyes on Pepe, the old waiter who came to town from the Galician village of Mondoñedo forty or forty-five years ago. Behind her thick lenses, Doña Rosa's eyes resemble the startled eyes of a stuffed bird.

"What are you looking at? What are you looking at like that, you fool? You're just the same as you were on the day you came here. Not even God Almighty Himself could make you people lose your farmyard smell. Come on, wake up, and let's have no more trouble. If you'd more guts. I'd have slung you out in the street long ago. D'vou hear? I'll be beggared!"

Doña Rosa pats her belly and changes her mode of address.

"Now come, come, man ... everybody to his job. You know, we mustn't lose our sense of proportion, hells bells, or the respect. d'you get me, or the respect!"

Doña Rosa lifts her chin and takes a deep breath. The little hairs of her mustache quiver as though in challenge, jauntily and yet ceremoniously, like the black little horns of a courting cricket.

A kind of sorrow floats in the air and sinks into men's hearts. Hearts do not ache, and so they can suffer one hour after the other, for a whole lifetime, while we none of us ever understand with full clarity what it is that happens to us.

A gentleman with a white goatee feeds bits of bun soaked in white coffee to a swarthy little boy sitting on his knee. The gentleman's name is Don Trinidad García Sobrino, and he is a moneylender. Don Trinidad's youth had been turbulent, full of complications and distractions, but when his father died, he told himself: "From now- on you'd better be careful, Trinidad my lad, or youll land yourself in a mess." So he devoted himself to business and a well-ordered life and ended by being rich. It had been the dream of his life to become a deputy in the Cortes; he considered it no small distinction to be one of five hundred among a people of twenty-five million. For some years Don Trinidad cultivated a few third-rankers in Gil Robles's party, in the hope that they would make him a deputy-; he did not mind for what constituency, having no predilection for any specific region. He spent money on entertaining them, contributed to the propaganda fund, was patted on the back, but in the end was neither nominated as a candidate nor even taken along to the informal circle of the Big Boss. Don Trinidad had some moments of bitterness and mental crisis, and finally turned himself into a follower of Lerroux. He seems to have done quite well in the Radical Party, but then came the Civil War and with it the end of his not very brilliant and rather brief political career. Nowadays Don Trinidad keeps aloof from the res *publica,* as Don Alejandro Lerroux put it on a memorable day, and is content to be left in peace and not reminded of the past while he continues to apply himself to the lucrative business of lending money at interest.

In the afternoons he takes his grandson to Doña Rosa's café, plies him with food, and stays quiet, listening to the music or reading his paper, interfering with no one.

Doña Rosa leans against a table and smiles. "Anything new, Elvira dear?"

Señorita Elvira sucks at her cigar and tilts her head just a little. Her cheeks are creased and her lids rimmed with red as if she had weak *eyes.*

"Did you settle that thing?"

"What things?"

"The affair with ... *f*

"No, it didn't work. He went round with me for three days, and after that he made me a present of a bottle of hair lotion."

"Some people have no conscience at all, my dear."

"Well—so what?"

Doña Rosa comes closer and speaks almost in her ear. "Why don't you make it up with Don Pablo?"

"Because I don't want to. After all, Doña Rosa, one has one's pride."

"I'll be beggared! We've all got our weaknesses. But what I say to you, Elvira dear, is this—and you know I always want the best for you—what I say to you is that you were well off with Don Pablo." "

"So-so. He asks a lot. And what's more, he's a dribbler. I loathed him in the end—but what can you do about it?—he made me feel quite sick."

Doña Rosa affects the sugary, persuasive voice of good advice: "You should have more patience, Elvira dear. You're still a little girl."

"You think so?"

Señorita Elvira spits under the table and wipes her mouth with the inside of a glove.

A printer by the name of Vega who has made money—Don Mario de la Vega is his name—is smoking a colossal cigar that looks as if it were part of an advertisement. The man at the next table tries to ingratiate himself.

"That's a fine cigar you're smoking there, my dear sir."

Vega answers gravely, but without looking at the man: 'Yes, its not too bad, it cost me a cool five pesetas"

The man at the next table who is a smiling, an undersized little man, would like to say something such as, "I wish I were in your shoes," but he has not the courage; fortunately, shyness shuts him up at the last moment. He looks at the

printer, smiles his meek smile, and says: "Only five? I'd have thought at least seven pesetas."

"No, five it was, plus thirty centimos for the tip. That's quite good enough for me."

"Yes, indeed."

"What d'you mean? I don't think one's got to be a millionaire like Romanones to smoke this sort of cigar."

"Not a millionaire, no, but . . . you see, I couldn't afford one, and most of the people in this place couldn't either."

"Would you like to smoke one?"

"Well . . ."

Vega smiles, almost as though he regrets in advance what he is going to say. "Then work as hard as I work."

And the printer gives a violent, a colossal guffaw. The smiling undersized man at the next table stops smiling. He turns red and feels that his ears begin to burn, his eyes to smart. He looks down because he doesn't want to notice how the whole café stares at him; at least, he imagines that the whole café is staring at him.

While Don Pablo, a miserable fellow who sees everything upside down, is grinning over his tale about Madame Pimentón, Señorita Elvira drops the butt of her cigar and stamps on it. Now and then Señorita Elvira has the gestures of a real princess.

"What harm was that nice little cat doing you? Puss, puss, puss, come here!"

Don Pablo glances at the woman.

"And cats are such intelligent creatures! They're more reasonable than certain people. They're animals that understand everything. Puss, puss, puss, come here, come here. . . ."

The cat walks away without turning its head and disappears into the kitchen.

"I've a friend who's got money, he's a man with a lot of influence, don't you think he's one of those fellows without a penny to their name, and he has a cat called Sultan. That cat's a marvel."

"Is it really?"

"Ill say he is. 'Sultan,' my friend says, 'Sultan, come here?' And there he is, waving his beautiful tail that's just like a plume. 'Sultan, off with you,' he says, and off he goes like any great gentleman. I don't think there are many cats like him, he must be the Duke of Alba of the cat world. My friend loves him like his own child, but then he's a cat you can't help being fond of."

Don Pablo lets his eyes wander round the café. For an instant they meet Señorita Elvira's. Don Pablo blinks and turns his head.

"And then, cats are so affectionate. Have you noticed how affectionate they are? Once they get fond of a person, they go on being devoted to him all their lives."

Don Pablo clears his throat and makes his voice sound grave and important. "Their example might serve as a lesson to many human beings."

Don Pablo takes a deep breath. He is pleased with himself. The fact is that the bit about "their example might serve" and so on has been a smash hit.

Pepe the waiter returns to his comer without saying a word. Once in his own domain, he puts one hand on the back of a chair and gazes at himself in the mirrors, as though at something very odd and strange. He sees himself fullface in the nearest mirror, he sees his back in the mirror on the rear wall, and his profile in those at the corners.

"What that damn old witch needs is somebody to slit her open one fine day. That old saw! That dirty old whore!'

Pepe is a man with whom things soon blow over. He is content to mumble a little phrase he would never have dared to say aloud.

"Bloodsucker! Old swine! Eating up the bread of the poor!"

Pepe is very fond of using sententious expressions in his moments of bad temper. Afterwards his mind begins to wander, and soon he has forgotten all about it.

Two little boys, five to six years old, are playing at trains between the tables, wearily and without any enthusiasm. When they are going towards the back of the café, one is the engine and the other the carnages. On the way back to the entrance they change places. Nobody takes any notice of them, but they go on stolidly, joylessly, running backwards and forwards with immense seriousness. They are a pair of thoroughly logical disciplinarians, two small boys who play at trains though it bores them stiff because they have decided to have fun, and, to have fun, they have decided that come what may they are going to play at trains the whole afternoon. If they don't get any fun out of it, it is not their fault. They are doing their best.

Pepe watches them and says: "It's going to fall, yon are."

Pepe has lived in Castile for half a century and speaks Castilian, but he still translates every word directly from his native *gallege.* The children answer: "No, we won't," and go on playing at trains, without faith, without hope, and even without charity, as though carrying out a painful duty.

Doña Rosa enters the kitchen.

"How many ounces of chocolate have you put in, Gabriel?"

"Two, madam."

"There you are! There you are! Who could afford that? And on top of it, all those rules and regulations about wages, and overtime and whatnot. Didn't I tell you in so many words to put in an ounce and a half, and no more? But it's no good talking plain Spanish *to* you, you people don't want to understand and that's that?'

Doña Rosa takes breath and resumes her attack. When she breathes, it is like a steam engine, panting and puffing rapidly, with her whole body shaking, and a hoarse whistle in her chest.

"And if Don Pablo thinks it isn't thick enough, he can take his wife and go where they'll give it to him stronger. A nice thing that would be! The cheek of him! That mean old beggar

doesn't seem to know that if there's one thing we aren't short of here it's customers, thank the Lord. If he doesn't like it, he can lump it, it wouldn't be our loss. Who do they think they are—royalty? His wife's a poisonous snake and I'm fed up with her. Yes, I'm fed up to the teeth with Doña Pura, that's what."

Gabriel warns her, as he does every day: "They may hear you, madam."

"Let them hear me if they like, that's why I'm saying it My tongue isn't fur-lined, so what? The thing I can't understand is how that stupid old brute luid the face to give Elvira the go-by, and she an absolute angel, with no thought in her head except how to make him happy. And then he puts up like a lamb with Doña Pura, that old mischief-maker who's exactly like a fat snake and always laughing up her sleeve behind people's backs. Well, as my old mother used to say, God rest her soul:'We live and learn."'

Gabriel tries to straighten out the mess. "Would you like me to take out some of the chocolate I put in?"

"You know for yourself what you ought to do as an honest, man, as a man who's got his wits about and isn't a thief. When you feel like it, you know perfectly well what's good for you."

Padilla, the cigarette boy, is talking with a new customer who has just bought a whole packet of tobacco.

"Is she always like that?"

"Yes, but she isn't so bad. She's got a strong temper all right, but she isn't really bad."

"But she called the waiter over there a fool." ..... ,

"Goodness, that's nothing. Sometimes she calls us perverts and Reds,"

The customer cannot believe his eyes and ears, "And you don't mind, then?"

"No, sir, we don't mind."

The new customer shrugs his shoulders.

"Well, well. .. ."

The cigarette boy walks off to make another round of the place. The customer is left to his thoughts.

"I don't know who is worse, that dirty old walrus in her black dress or this bunch of boobies. If they only got together one day and took hold of her and gave her a good walloping, she might see reason. But not they, they wouldn't dare. In their heads they're sure to call her names all day long, but outwardly—what we've seen just now. Out with you, you fool, you wretch, you thief.' And they're delighted. 'No, sir, we don't mind.' I can sec it all. My word, what people! That's the way it goes."

The customer goes on smoking. His name is Mauricio Segovia and he works at the Central Telephone Exchange. I mention all this because he may turn up again. He is a man of thirty-cight to forty, with red hair and freckles. He lives a long way off, in Atocha, and it was by pure chance he came to this part of the city. He was following a young girl who suddenly turned a corner and disappeared through the first doorway before Mauricio had made up his mind to speak to her.

The shoeblack is calling out: "Señor Suárez! Señor Suárez!"

Señor Suárez, who isn't a regular customer either, gets up from his seat and goes to the telephone. He walks with a limp, not of the foot but from higher up. He wears a fashionable suit of a light color and a pince-nez. He looks about fifty and might be a dentist or a hairdresser. If one looks closer, one might well take him for a traveler in chemical goods. Señor Suárez has all the signs of an extremely busy man, one of those who say in a single breath: "A *café exprès,* nothing with it; send me the shoeblack; and, boy, get a taxi for me."

When these very busy men go to the barber's they have a shave, a haircut, a manicure and a shoeshine, and a look at the paper. Sometimes, in saying good-by to a friend, they announce: "From such-and-such an hour to such-and-such an hour I'll be at the café, then I'll have a look in at the office, and

in the evening I'll drop in at my brother-in-law's. You'll find the numbers in the telephone book. Now I must go, I've still a lot of small tilings to see to." With such men you can tell at once that they are the conquerors, the outstanding figures, the men used to giving orders.

Señor Suárez talks quietly into the telephone, in the high-pitched, rather affected voice of a pansy. Ilis jacket is a little too short and his trousers are tight-fitting like a bullfighter's.

"Is that you? . . . Naughty, very naughty! You are a tease. . . . Yes .. . yes. ... All right, just as you like. . . . Good-by, precious. . . . He, he, you're always the same. Bye-bye, ducky, I'll pick you up in no time."

Señor Suárez walks back to his table, smiling. Now his limp has something tremulous about it, something shivery': it is an almost lustful limp, coquettish and provocative. He pays for his coffee, asks for a taxi, gets up as soon as it arrives, and leaves, holding his head high like a Roman gladiator, oozing satisfaction, radiating bliss.

Some people follow him with their eyes until the revolving door swallows him up. No doubt there are persons who attract attention more than others. You recognize them by the sort of little star that marks their foreheads.

The proprietress makes a half-turn and goes to the counter. The nickel-plated coffee machine bubbles away, producing cups of *café exprès* ceaselessly, while the cash register, coppery with age, never stops tinkling.

Several waiters with flabby, sorrowful, sallow faces, enveloped in worn-out dinner jackets, are standing there, the edges of their trays resting on the marble, and waiting for the manager to hand them the orders and the small gilt or plate counters which represent the change.

l'he manager puts the telephone back and hands out what the waiters ask for.

"So you've been gossiping again, as if there wasn't any work to do."

"I was only ordering more milk, madam."

"What, more milk? How much did they bring us this morning?"

"The usual, madam, sixty litres."

"And isn't that enough?"

"No, I don't think that will see us through."

"This place is worse than a Maternity Hospital. How much more did you order?"

"Twenty litres, madam."

"Won't there be some left over?"

"I don't think so."

"What d'you mean, 'you don't think'? I'll be beggared! And if there is some left, eh?"

"There won't be—at least. I believe so."

"Yes, 'I believe,' it's always 'I believe.' It's easy enough to say that, but what if there is?"

"You'll see, madam, there won't be any left. Look how full the place is."

"Yes, of course, 'Look how full the place is, look how full the place is.' That's quickly said. But why? Because I'm fair and give good value; if not, you'd see where they'd all go to. They're a lousy lot."

The waiters look at the floor and try to escape notice.

"And you there, put a bit more pep into it. There are too many straight coffees on those trays. Don't people know we have buns and sponge cake and tarts? No, they don't, and I know why. You're quite capable of not telling them on purpose. What you'd like is to see me mined and selling lottery tickets in the street. But you'll be damned first. I know who I'm dealing with. A nice lot! Now come on, get along. And pray to any saint you like that I don't lose my head."

The waiters march away from the counter with their trays. With them, it's like water off a duck's back. No one gives Doña Rosa a glance. Not one of tliem gives Doña Rosa a thought either.

A man of the sort who put their elbows on the table—you remember?—and rest their pale foreheads in their hands, Öieir eyes sad and bitter, their expression almost timorous, such a man is speaking to the waiter. He attempts a meek smile, looking like a lost child that begs water at a house on the road side.

The waiter wags his head and calls the server. The server goes up to the proprietress.

"Madam, Pepe says the gentleman there won't pay."

"Well, it's up to him to get the cash any way he can. If he doesn't get it, tell him it'll come out of his pay packet and that's all there is to it. It really is the limit!"

Tire proprietress adjusts her lenses and looks »round.

"Which one is it?"

"The one over there, with the steel-rimmed spectacles."

"What a type! That's a good joke, that is. And such a face, too. Tell me, what's his reason for not wanting to pay?"

"Well, you see ,. . he says he's come out without money."

"Now that's the last straw! In this country we've got more rascals than we need."

The server speaks in a thin voice without looking Doña Rosa in the eyes: "He says he'll come and pay as soon as he's got it."

The words that come from Doña Rosa's throat sound like brass.

"They all say that, and then what happens is that for one who comes back a hundred clear out, and out of sight, out of mind. Don't talk to me. If you breed ravens they'll peck out your eyes. Tell Pepe he knows what to do: Into the street with the fellow, but gently, and when he's got him out there on the pavement, two good kicks where it hurts most."

The server ambles off, when Doña Rosa calls out to him: "Listen, tell Pepe to remember the face."

"Yes, madam."

Dona Rosa stays to watch the spectacle. Luis, still carrying his milk jugs, goes up to Pepe and whispers in his ear.

That's all she says. For my part, God knows. . . ."

Pepe goes back to Ure customer who rises slowly. He is a small man, stunted, pallid, and feeble, who wears spectacles framed in thin wire. His jacket is threadbare and his trousers frayed. He covers his head with a dark-gray felt hat, its ribbon grease-stained, and clutches a book in a newspaper cover under his arm.

"If you wash I'll leave you this book."

"No, no. Look here, get out into the street and don't make more trouble and upset for me."

The man walks to the door, followed by Pepe. Thcy both go out. It is cold, and people are hurrying past. Newsboys are crying out the evening papers. A tram comes down the Calle de Fuencarral, clattering sadly, tragically, almost lugubriously.

The man is not a nobody, not one of the *hoi polloi,* not a vulgar man, one of the herd, an ordinary, standardized human being: he has a tattoo mark on his left arm and a scar in the groin. He is well read and translates a little from the French. He has assiduously followed the trends of intellectual and literary life, and would be able to quote by heart, even now, some of the essays published in *El Sol.* As a young man he had a fiancée who was Swiss, and he used to write futurist poetry.

The shoeblack is talking to Don Leonardo Meléndez. Don Leonardo says: "We, the Meléndez, an age-old line connected with the most ancient families of Castile, were once upon a time the masters of lands and lives. Today, as you see, we're practically in the middle of *la rue."*

The shoeblack feels admiration for Don Leonardo. The fact that Don Leonardo has robbed him of his savings seems to be something that fills him with awe and loyalty. Today Don Leonardo is affable with him, and the shoeblack takes advantage of this to frisk around him like a little lap dog. There are days, however, when he is less lucky and Don Leonardo treats him like dirt. On those days of misfortune, the shoe-

black approaches him submissively and addresses him quietly, humbly.

"Anything new, sir?"

Don Leonardo does not trouble to answer. The shoeblack is not discouraged and persists.

"Terribly cold today, sir."

"Yes."

The shoeblack smiles. He is happy and would gladly give another thirty thousand pesetas for the response he elicited.

"A little more polish, sir?"

The shoeblack kneels down, and Don Leonardo, who hardly ever gives him a glance, peevishly puts his foot on the iron footrest of the box.

Not today. Today Don Leonardo is in a good mood. No doubt the draft project for the floating of an important limited company is taking shape in his mind.

"There was a time, mon dieu, when it was sufficient for one of us to look in at the Exchange to make everybody stop buying or sell as soon as they saw what we were doing."

"That was something, wasn't it, sir?"

Don Leonardo purses his lips in an ambiguous grimace while his hand draws hieroglyphs in the air.

"Have you got a cigarette paper?" he says to the man at the nearest table. "I'd like to roll myself one with cut tobacco, but I find I've run out of papers."

The shoeblack keeps quiet and pretends not to have heard: he knows his place.

Doña Rosa comes up to Elvira, who has been watching the scene between the waiter and the man who did not pay for his coffee.

"Have you seen, dear?"

Señorita Elvira tarries a little with her answer.

"Poor Rosa, she's had nothing to eat all day, Doña

"What, are you going all romantic on me, too? Then we've had it. Nobody could have a softer heart than I have, I assure you, but that's too much."

Elvira does not know how to reply. The poor girl is a sentimentalist who took to a loose life so as not to starve to death, or at least not quite so soon. She has never learned to do any work and, what is more, she is neither pretty nor accomplished. At home, as a small girl, she knew nothing but abuse and disaster. Elvira came from Burgos and is the daughter of a dangerous fellow called, in his lifetime, Fidel Hernández. Fidel Hernández killed his wife Eudosia with a cobbler's awl, was sentenced to death, and garroted by Gregorio Mayoral, the public hangman, in 1909. All he said was: "If I'd done her in with Bordeaux mixture, God himself wouldn't have known."

Elvira was eleven or twelve when she was left an orphan; she went to Villalón to live with her grandmother, who went round the parish with the collection box for St. Anthony's Loaf. The poor old woman had a hard life, and when they had garroted her son, she began to waste away and died soon after. The other village girls had their fun with Elvira, pointing at the gibbet and telling her: "On one just like this they strung up your father, you nasty thing." One day, when Elvira could stand it no longer, she ran off with an Asturian who had come to sell sugar almonds at the village fair. She stuck to him for two long years, but as he nearly broke her back with the drubbings he gave her, she sent him to hell one day, in Orense, and set up as a whore in the bawdy house kept by La Pelona in the Calle del Villan there she had a friend, the daughter of La Marraca who used to gather faggots in the field of Francelos, by Rivadavia, and had twelve daughters, every single one a whore. From then on, it was all plain sailing for Elvira, let's put it like that,

The poor girl is somewhat embittered, but not overmuch. She has good instincts and, timid though she is, a remnant of pride,

Don Jaime Arce, bored with doing nothing but gaze at the ceiling and think sheer drivel, lifts his head from the back of the scat, and explains to the silent lady who watches life pass by from the foot of the curling staircase that leads up to the billiard room: “All humbug . . . bad organization . . . mistakes as well, I don’t deny it. But that is all, believe me. The banks do not function properly and the notaries, with their officiousness and precipitate methods, barge in before the time and create an entanglement that nobody could make head or tail of.”

Don Jaime’s face expresses a worldly-wise resignation.

“And so things take their course: writs—complications—the bust-up.”

Don Jaime speaks slowly, with a great economy of words and a certain solemnity. He is deliberate in his gestures and takes care to let his words fall one by one, as though wanting to watch, measure, and weigh their impact. At bottom he is not insincere. The woman whose son died, on the other hand, seems like a nitwit with nothing to say; she only listens, opening her eyes wide in an odd fashion, as if she were trying to keep awake rather than to pay attention.

“Thats all, madam. Anything else, let me tell you, is just bilge.”

Don Jaime Arce is a well-spoken man, even though in the middle of a polished phrase he is apt to use unrefined words such as bust-up” or "shemozzle" or others of the same style.

And now, as you see—a byword. If my poor old mother were to return to this life now!”

When Don Jaime had reached his "let me tell you,” the woman, Boba Isabel Montes, widow of Sanz, began to think of her dead husband as he was when she first knew him, handsome, elegant, very straight in the back, with a waxed mustache, and twenty-thrce years old. A misty wave of happiness drifted vaguely through her head, and Doha Isabel smiled, most discree y, for half a second. Then she remembered her poor little aco and the foolish look on his face when he had meningi s, and turned sad again, abruptly and even harshly.

When Don Jaime Arce opens his eyes properly, after having turned them heavenwards to reinforce his “if my poor mother were to return to this life now,” he becomes aware of Doña Isabel and asks her gallantly: “Are you not feeling well, madam? You look a little pale.”

“Oh, no, it’s nothing, thank you very much. Just one of those ideas one gets.”

Almost against his will, Don Pablo is always looking at Señorita Elvira out of the comer *of his* eye. Though it is all over and done with, he cannot forget their time together. All things considered, she was good, docile, and compliant. Outwardly Don Pablo pretends to despise her; he calls her a dirty prostitute; but inwardly it is different. In his moments of soft whispers and tenderness, Don Pablo used to think: “This isn’t a matter of sex, no, it’s a matter of the heart." Afterwards he forgot this and would have let her die of hunger or of leprosy without a pang. Don Pablo is like that.

"Luis, come here. What’s the matter with that young man?”

"Nothing, Don Pablo, only that he didn’t feel like paying for the coffee he had.”

“You ought to have told me, man. He looked a decent fellow."

“Don’t you believe it. There are a lot of spongers and rascals about.”

Doña Pura, Don Pablo’s wife, says: "Of course there are a lot of spongers and rascals about, that’s quite true. If one only knew them! What everybody should do is to work as God ordains, isn’t it so, Luis?”

“Yes, maybe, madam.”

'There you are. Then there wouldn’t be any problem. The man who works can have his coffee, and a bun as well *if* he feels like it, but the man who doesn’t work. ... Now look here: the man who doesn’t work deserves no pity. The rest of us don’t live on air.”

Doña Pura is very pleased with her speech; it came off very well indeed.

Don Pablo turns again to the woman who had been frightened by the cat: "With those types who don't pay for their coffee one lias to take care, great care. You never know what sort of man you come across. The chap they've just put out in the street may be one of two things—a gifted creature, what you might call a true genius, like Cervantes or like Isaac Petal, or an impudent rogue. I, for one, I'd have paid for his coffee. What does a coffee more or less matter to me?"

"Of course."

Don Pablo smiles like someone suddenly discovering that he has been absolutely right.

"That's the sort of thing you would never find among the dumb animals. Dumb animals are nobler, they never cheat. A dear thoroughbred cat like the one that gave you such a fright just now—he, he!—is God's own creature and all it wants to do is to play, only to play."

A beatific smile lights up Don Pablo's face. If his breast could be opened, his heart would be found to be black and sticky like pitch.

After a short while Pepe comes in again. The proprietress, her hands in the pockets of her apron, her shoulders thrown back, legs apart, calls for him in a dry, cracked voice sounding like the clatter of a bell with a broken clapper.

"Come here!"

Pepe scarcely dares look at her. «What is *it*, madam?"

"Did you kick him?"

"Yes, madam."

"How often?"

"Twice."

The proprietress rolls her eyes behind her glasses, takes her hands out of the pockets, and passes them slowly over her face where the coarse stubble begins to show, not quite hidden by her nee powder.

"Where did you kick him?"

"Where I could. On the legs."

"Well done. That'll teach him. Another time he won't try to steal decent people's good money."

Doña Rosa, her fat little hands on her belly, which is swollen like a goatskin filled with oil, is the very image of the revenge of the well-fed upon the hungry. Rascals! Dogs! Her fingers, like sausages bursting out of their skin, reflect the electric light in beautiful, almost voluptuous glints.

Pepe moves away from his mistress with a humble look. At bottom, though he is not fully aware of it, his conscience is clear.

Don José Rodríguez de Madrid talks with two friends who are playing checkers.

"There you see, forty pesetas, forty lousy pesetas. And then people go round talking their silly heads off."

One of the players grins at him. "It's more than you'd get out of a stone. Don José."

"Oh, well, just a little more. What can you do with forty pesetas?"

"Admittedly, old man, you can't do much with forty pesetas, and that's the truth. But after all, what I say is, everything's welcome but a kick in the pants."

"That's true, too. When all's said and done it didn't give me much trouble to earn them."

The violinist who was fired because he had answered back to Don José would have made forty pesetas last a week. He ate little and badly, he only smoked what he was given, but he managed to eke out forty pesetas over a whole week; no doubt there were others who kept alive on still less.

Señorita Elvira calls the cigarette boy. "Padilla!"

"Coming, Señorita Elvira."

"Give me two Tritons. I'll pay tomorrow."

"All right."

Padilla takes the two cigars from the packet and puts them in front of Señorita Elvira.

One's for later, you know, for after supper."

"That's right We trust you here, you know."

The cigarette boy's smile has a touch of gallantry'. Señorita Elvira smiles back.

"Listen, would you give Macario a message for me?"

"Yes." :

"Ask him to be so kind as to play *Luisa Fernanda."*

The cigarette boy drags his feet towards the musicians' dais. A gentleman who has been exchanging glances with Señorita Elvira for some time now decides to break the ice.

These *zarzuelas* have some pretty tunes, haven't they, Señorita?"

Señorita Elvira agrees with a pout. The gentleman is not discouraged; he interprets her grimace as a sign of sympathy.

"And they are very sentimental, too, don't you think?"

Señorita Elvira rolls her eyes. The gentleman gathers new strength.

■ "Do you like the theater?"

"If it's good..."

The gentleman laughs as if to applaud a wisecrack. He clears h« throat, offers Señorita Elvira a light and resumes: "Of course, of course. And ^ie Pætnres? Do you like the pictures, too?"

"Sometimes. .. ."

The gentleman makes a gigantic effort, an effort that makes him blush to the roots of his hair: "Those dark little cinemas, eh, what about them?"

. Señorita Elvira answers in a tone of dignity' and mistrust. T on^go to the cinema to see the film."

The gentleman beats a retreat.

"Of course, naturally, so do I____ What I said was meant for th y wp' e n°I^n^ course. for those nice voting couples- we ye all been young once. ... But say, Señorita, I've noticed yo Д ,ÜJC Я sm oker; I tWik it's a very good thing if women smoke. You Ψ g thing, naturally. After all, what's wrong with it?

The best thing for everyone is to live one's own life, don't you think? I mention this because, if you'll allow' me—I've got to go now, I'm in a great hurry', but we'll meet another time to continue our chat! If you'll allow me. I'd be delighted ... well, I mean ... to offer you a packet of Tritons."

The gentleman speaks hastily and in trepidation. Señorita Elvira answers with a certain distaste, as one who has the upper hand: "All right, why not? If you're set on it...."

The gentleman calls the cigarette boy, buys the packet and hands it to Señorita Elvira with his best smile. Then he gets into his overcoat, takes his hat, and leaves. But first he says to Señorita Elvira: "Well, Señorita, it has been a pleasure. Leoncio Maestre, at your sen-ice. As I've said, we must meet another time. We may well become very' close friends."

The proprietress calls the manager. Tire manager's name is López, Consorcio López; he comes from Tomelloso in the province of Ciudad Real, a big. beautiful, and very prosperous market town. López is a young man. handsome and rather natty, with large hands and a narrow forehead. He is a little indolent and doesn't give a hoot for Doña Rosa's tempers. "The best thing with that woman," he always says, "is to let her talk, then she stops by herself."

Consorcio López is a practical philosopher and, really, his philosophy is serving him well. Once in Tomelloso, ten or twelve years ago and shortly before his coming to Madrid, Consorcio had refused to marry a girl friend whom he had saddled with twins. Her brother had said to him: "Either you marry' Encarna, or I'll geld you next time I get you in a corner." As Consorcio wished neither to marry' nor to be made a eunuch, he took the next train and departed for Madrid; and the affair must have been forgotten as time went by, for the fact was that they never bothered him again. Consorcio always carried two photos of his twins in his wallet. One was taken when they were a few months old and lying mother-naked on a cushion, and the other on the day of their first

Communion; the second photo was sent to him by his former girl friend, Maru jita Ranero, who by then had become Señora de Gntiérrez.

Doña Rosa, as we have said, calls the manager: "López!"

"Coming, madam."

"How are we off for vermouth?"

"All right for the moment."

"And for *anis?"*

"Not too bad. We're getting short of one or two brands."

"Then let them drink others. I won't go in for extra expense now, I just don't feel like it. The things people expect to get! Now listen, did you buy that stuff?"

"The sugar? Yes, they'll bring it tomorrow."

"At fourteen-fifty, after all?"

"Yes, madam. They wanted fifteen, but we agreed that they'd come down by fifty centimos the kilo because it's a bulk order."

"Good. And now you know, a little sugar in a paper bag with every order, and no second helping for anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yes, madam."

Tire young man who is writing verse licks his pencil and stares at the, ceiling. He is one of those poets who writes poems with ideas. This afternoon he has his idea but not yet his rhymes. He has got a few down on paper. What he is looking for is something to rhyme with *stream,* which must be neither seem nor *team,* He is turning *redeem* and *gleam* round in his mind.

"Im shut up in a stupid armor, in the shell of a common clod. *The girl with the deep blue eyes.* . . . But I want to be strong, more than strong. *The girl, blue-eyed and fair....* Either the work kills the man or the man kills the work. *She of the hair....* To die! To die, just that, and leave a slender book of poetry' behind. How fair, how fair she is!"

The young poet is pale, he is very white and has two pink spots on his cheekbones.

"The girl of the deep blue eyes . .. stream, stream, stream. .. . *The girl, blue-eyed and fair* . . . seem, team, seem, team. *She of the wheat-gold hair* . . . redeem. And *suddenly his free will to redeem.* The girl of the deep blue eyes. .. .*In rapture his free will so to redeem.* The girl of the deep blue eyes. ... *And free again my will I shall redeem.* The girl of the deep blue eyes. . . . *Or turn your face towards the gentle gleam.* The girl of the deep blue eyes... the girl with.... What sort of eyes has the girl? . ; . *And reap the com in golden summer gleam...."*

Suddenly the young man sees the café all blurred.

"Kissing the universe, a golden gleam. That's funny."

He sways a little like a child that gets dizzy, and feels a wave of intense heat mount to his temples.

"I feel rather ... perhaps my mother.... Yes, gleam, that's it, gleam. . . . *Over a naked woman flies a man.* . . . *What a team.* . . . No, not team. . . : And then I shall say to her: 'Never!' ... That's funny. Very funny ..."

At a table in the background, two women, both living on pensions and both smothered in paint up to their eyebrows, are discussing the musicians.

"He's a real artist; I love to listen to him. As my poor dear Ramón used to say, God rest his soul: 'Matilde, just watch the way he brings the violin up to his chin.' There you see how things are in this life; if that young man had somebody to pull strings for him, he'd go far."

Doña Matilde shows the whites of her eyes. She is fat, grubby, and pretentious. She smells and she has a huge dropsical belly .

"He's a real artist, a first-class artist."

"It's quite true. I look forward to this hour the whole day. . He's a real artist, Γ absolutely agree. Whenever he plays the , waltz from *The Merry Widow* as only he can, I feel a different woman."

Doña Asunción has the condescending mien of a sheep.

"Don't you think it was a different kind of music in those days? More refinement, I mean, and more feeling."

Doña Matilde has a son who is an impersonator and lives in Valencia.

Doña Asunción has two daughters: one is married to a derk at the Ministry of Public Works called Miguel Contreras, and the other is unmarried, a reckless creature who lives with a university professor in Bilbao.

The moneylender wipes the little boy's mouth with a handkerchief. He has shining, kindly *eyes* and shows a certain distinction, although he is not really well groomed. The boy has had a mugful of white coffee and two buns and is ready for more. Don Trinidad Garcia Sobrino neither thinks nor moves. Heis a mild man, an orderly man, a man who wants to live in peace. His grandson looks like a little gypsy, thin yet potbellied. He wears a knitted cap and knitted leggings; he is a child who wears a good many warm clothes.

"Is there anything wrong, young man? Are you not feeling well?"

The young poet does not answer. His eyes are wide open and bewildered, and he seems to be struck dumb. A tuft of hair has fallen onto his forehead.

Don Trinidad puts his grandson down on the seat, gets up, and takes the poet by his shoulders.

"Are you ill?"

A few heads turn. Tire poet smiles a foolish, listless smile.

"Would somebody help me to hold him up? It looks as if he d been taken ill."

The poets feet slide, and his body falls under the table,

"bend me a hand, somebody. I can't manage alone."

People get From the counter, Doña Rosa is watching:

"home people like to make trouble. . . ."

The boy knocked his forehead against the table when he collapsed.

"Lets take him to the lavatory. It must be a dizzy spell."

"While Don Trinidad and three or four other guests take the poet to the W.C. so that he should recover a little, Don Trinidad's grandson amuses himself with eating the crumbs of the buns off the table.

"Tlie smell of the disinfectant will bring him round. It must be a dizzy spell."

Seated on the lavatory, his head resting against the wall, the poet smiles as if in bliss. Even though he does not know it, he is happy at heart.

Don Trinidad returns to his table.

"Is he better now?"

"Yes, it wasn't much; just a dizzy spell."

Señorita Elvira gives the two Tritons back to the cigarette boy.

"And here's one for yourself."

"Thanks. That was lucky, wasn't it?"

"Well—better than nothing."

Once Padilla called an admirer of Señorita Elvira's a mug, and she was offended. Since then the cigarette boy has been more respectful.

A tram nearly knocks down Don Leoncio Maestre.

"Idioti"

"Idiot yourself, you poor fool. What are you dreaming about?"

Don Leoncio Maestre is dreaming about Elvirita.

"She's pretty, yes, very pretty. I should say sol And she seems a well-bred girl. . . . Surely she isn't a tart. How can one know? Everybody's life is a novel by itself. To look at, she's a girl of good family who has quarreled with her people. Now she will be working in an office, most probably in one of the syndicates. She's got sad, deliberate features. What she needs is, I think, affection and a lot of petting and somebody to show her his admiration the whole day long."

Don Leoncio Maestre's heart leaps beneath his shirt

"I'll go back there tomorrow. I certainly shall. If she's there it's a good sign, and if not . . . if she isn't ... I must find her."

Don Leoncio Maestre turns up tire collar of his overcoat and makes two little hops.

"Elvira, Señorita Elvira. It's a nice name. I imagine that packet of Tritons must have pleased her. Erery time she smokes one she'll remember me. ... Tomorrow I'll tell her my name again. Leoncio, Leoncio. Leoncio. Perhaps she'll one day call me by a more affectionate name; something based on Leoncio. Leo. Oncio. Oncete.... I'll have *a* glass of beer now, I feel like it."

Don Leoncio Maestre enters a bar and has a glass of lieer at the counter. A girl sitting on a stool next to him gives him a smile. Don Leoncio turns his back to her. To tolerate that smile would be like a betrayal, his first betrayal of Elvirita.

"No, not Elvirita. Elvira. It's a simple name and a very pretty name."

The girl sitting on the stool addresses him from the rear.

"Would you give me a light, misery?"

Don Leoncio almost trembles as he lights her cigarette. He pays for his beer and humes out into the street.

"Elvira .. . Elvira ..."

Before Dona Rosa leaves the manager, she asks: "Have you given the musicians their coffee?"

"Not yet."

"Then give it to them now. They look exhausted."

Tire musicians on their dais drag out the final notes of a piece from Luisa Fernanda, the lovely hit that begins:

"Among the oak woods
Of my Extremadura
Lies my little house
Quiet and secure."

Before it they had played the *Moment Musical,* and before «rât something from *The Girl with the Bunch of Roses,* the

number about the "pretty girl from Madrid, flower of the fair."

Doña Rosa walks over to them.

"I've told them to bring you your coffee, Macario."

"Thank you. Doña Rosa."

"Not at all. You know I never go back on my word. A promise is a promise with me."

Oh, I know. Dona Rosa."

"So there."

The violinist, who has the large, bulging eyes of a weary ox; is looking at her while he rolls himself a cigarette. He purses his lips as though in scorn, and his hands are unsteady.

"And you'll get yours too, Seoane."

"Good."

"Well, well. You don't exactly waste words, I notice."

Macario intervenes to pour oil on troubled waters.

"The fact is, he's got stomach trouble, Dona Rosa."

"That's no reason for being so dull, I should say. The manners of some people. . . . When one's got to tell them something, they kick, and when one's doing them a favor they ought to be pleased with, all they say is 'Good,' just as if they were noble lords. My foot!"

Seoane keeps quiet while his colleague appeases Doña Rosa. Then he asks the nearest guest: "What about that young boy?"

"Recuperating in the Gentlemen's. It was nothing."

Vega, the printer, offers his tobacco pouch to the flatterer at the next table.

"Go on, roll yourself a fag and don't snivel. I was once worse off than vou are. And d'you know what I did? I got down to work."

'That's a great thing."

"Of course, man, of course, work—and no thought for anything else. And now, as you see, I can afford my cigar and my drink every afternoon."

The other makes a movement with his head which means exactly nothing.

"And if I told you that I want to work and can't find anything to work at?"

"Nonsense. There's only one thing needed for working, and that's to want to. Are you quite sure you want to work?"

"Goodness, yes."

"Then why don't you carry luggage to the station?"

"I couldn't. I'd crack up in three days. I'm a graduate ..."

"And what good has it done you?"

"Not much, I admit."

"What's wrong with you, friend, is just what's wrong with a lot more people. They sit about in a café in comfort, twiddle their thumbs, and never do an honest stroke of work. Then one day they fall down in a faint like the sissy they've just carried indoors, and that's that."

The graduate gives back the printer's tobacco pouch and does not contradict him. "Many thanks."

"Don't mention it. Are you really a graduate?"

"Yes, sir. On the curriculum of 1903."

"Good, then I'll give you a chance so you don't have to end up in a poorhouse or in the queue for leftovers at a barracks. Do you want to work?"

"Yes, sir. I told you so already."

"Come and see me tomorrow. Here's my card. Come in the morning before twelve, say at half past eleven. If you want to, and can do it, you may work for me as a corrector. The one I had was a good-for-nothing, and I had to chuck him out only this morning. He was not exact."

Señorita Elvira takes a sidelong glance at Don Pablo. Don Pablo is lecturing a youngster at the adjoining table: "Bicarbonate is good stuff and perfectly harmless. The only thing is, that doctors won't prescribe it because nobody goes to a doctor just to be given a prescription of bicarbonate."

The youth nods without paying much attention and looks

at Señorita Elvira's knees, which show a little beneath the table.

"Don't look over there and don't play the fool. I'll explain to you later, but don't put your foot in it."

Don Pablo's wife, Doña Pura, is deep in conversation with a friend, a stout woman bedecked with jewelry who scratches at her gold teeth with a toothpick.

"I'm absolutely tired of repeating the same thing. So long as there are men and women in the world, there will always be affairs. Man's the fire and woman's the tow, and so things happen. What I told you about the platform of the forty-nine tram is the sober truth. I don't know what the world is coming to."

The stout lady absent-mindedly breaks the toothpick between her teeth.

"Yes, I agree with you, there isn't much modesty to be found in these days. It all started with mixed bathing, you may be sure. We weren't like that before. . . . Now they present a young thing to you, you shake hands with her, and you're left all of a tremble the whole blessed day. After all, you may catch something you haven't got."

"True enough."

"And I think the cinemas are much to blame, too. People sitting there higgledy-piggledy and in the pitch dark, that can't come to any good."

"I quite agree with you, Doña Maria. What's needed is better morals, otherwise we poor decent women will pay for it."

Doña Rosa picks up the thread where she dropped it.

"And what's more, if you've got a stomach-ache, why don't you ask me for a pinch of bicarbonate? Have I ever refused you a pinch of bicarbonate? Anyone would think you haven't got a tongue in your head."

Doña Rosa turns round and raises her shrill, unpleasant voice above all the conversations going on in the café: "López! López! Send some bicarbonate for the violinist!"

The server leaves his jugs on a table and brings on a plate half a glass full of water, a coffee spoon, and the sugar bowl of nickel-silver in which the bicarbonate is kept

"What have you stopped using trays?"

"That's how Señor López gave it to me, madam."

"All right, all right Put it down here and clear off."

The server ranges everything on the piano and goes away.

Secane fills the little spoon with the powder, throw's back his head, opens his mouth, and in it goes. He chews it as if he were munching nuts, and washes it down with a sip of water.

"Thank you, Doña Rosa."

"Now do you see, do you see how little it costs to have manners? You've a stomach-ache, I send for bicarbonate, and everything's all right. We're here to help one another, but the fact is we can't because we don't want to. That's life."

The children who were playing at trains have suddenly stopped. A gentleman is explaining to them that they ought to behave more politely and quietly, and thev watch him with, curiosity, not knowing what to do with their hands. The older one, Bernabé, is thinking of a boy next door, more or less his own age, who is called Chús. The younger one, Paquité, is minking that the gentleman smells from his mouth. "It stinks like rotten rubber."

Bernabé is tickled as he remembers a funny thing that hap pened to Chús with his aunt. "Chús, you're a pig not to change your pants till you've got them all mucky. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Bernabé holds back his laugh on remembering this; the gentleman would be furious. "Oh, no, auntie, I'm not. Dad makes his pants too mucky too." it was enough to laugh oneself to death, Paquité spends a little while in deep thought.

Uh, it's rá rotten rubber his mouth smells. It smells of ieu cabbage and of ^eet. И I was that gentleman, I'd stuff a melted candle in my nose. Then I'd talk like cousin Emilita,

through the *dose;* they'll have to operate on her throat.'

Mamma says when she's had her operation she won't have her idiot face any longer and she won't sleep with her mouth open. I But perhaps she'll die when they operate on her. Then they'll put her in a white coffin because she hasn't got tits yet and л doesn't wear high heels."

The two ladies who live on pensions lean back on the seat and have a good look at Doña Pura.

The two old parrots' ideas about the violinist still float in the air like roving bubbles.

"I can't understand how it is that such women exist—she's just like a toad. She spends her whole time tearing people's reputations to pieces, and then she doesn't even see that the only reason her husband stands her is that she's got some money left. That Don Pablo there is a twister, a nasty bit of work. If he looks at a woman it's just as if he was stripping her with his eyes."

"Yes, indeed."

"And the other one, that Elvira, she's got a crust, too. What I mean to say, it isn't the same as with your girl, Paquita, who leads a respectable life when all's said and done, even if her papers aren't in order; that creature over there's a different thing, she spins round like a teetotum, from one to the next, squeezing a little money out of every one to fill her stomach."

"And another thing* Doña Matilde, you can't compare that nobody, that Don Pablo, with my daughter's friend who's a real professor of psychology, logic, and ethics and a perfect gentleman."

"Of course I don't. Paquita's friend has got respect for her and keeps her happy; and as far as she's concerned, he's handsome and agreeable and so she lets him love her, that's what she's made for, after all. But these hussies have no conscience and all they know is how to open their mouths to ask for something. They ought to be ashamed of themselves."

Doña Rosa carries on her conversation with the musicians. Her whole fat, bulging little body inflated, she shivers with joy as she makes her speech: she is like a civil governor.

"So you've your troubles? Tell me, and if I can, I'll fix them for you. So you think you're doing a good job, standing up here and scratching the fiddle as God meant you to? All right, here I am at closing time to pay you your five pesetas, and we're quits. Everything's all right if we're all friends together. Why d'you think I'm at Swords' points with my brother-in-law? Because he's a tramp who goes whoring round, twenty-four hours a day, and then comes home to get his free supper. My sister's a damn fool to stand for it but she's always been like that. Now if it were me. . . . For all his beautiful eyes, I wouldn't let him trail round the whole day lifting skirts and pinching bottoms. Not me! Now if my brother-in-law were to work like I do, and if he were to put his back into it and bring home something at least, it would be another story. But it suits him better to soft-soap Visi, simple fool that she is, and to have a good time without doing a stroke."

"Yes, I see."

"So that's it. That guy's a misbegotten drone, he was born to be a pimp. And don't you imagine I say this only behind his back, the other day I told him just the same to his confounded face."

"Well done."

"Well done indeed. What's that beggar take us for?"

"Is that clock right, Padilla?"

"Yes, Señorita Elvira."

"Will you give me a light? It's still early."

The cigarette boy gives Señorita Elvira a light.

"You look happy, miss."

"Do you think so?"

"Well, it looks like it to me. I'd have said you're cheerier tonight than other evenings."

"It isn't all gold that glitters."

Señorita Elvira has a weak, sickly, and almost depraved air. The poor girl does not eat enough to be either depraved or virtuous.

The mother of the dead boy who was studying for the post office says: "Well, I must go now."

Don Jaime Arce rises with great courtesy and says, smiling: "Your devoted servant, Señora. Till tomorrow, by God's grace."

The lady moves a chair out of the way. "Good night and keep well."

"And the same to you, Señora. At your service."

The widowed Isabel Montes de Sanz walks like a queen. In her threadbare little cape, more for show than for use, Doña Isabel looks like an elegant courtesan past her prime who has lived like the proverbial grasshopper and has saved nothing towards old age. She crosses the room in silence and glides through the door. In the glances that follow her there is everything but indifference; there may be admiration, envy, sympathy, mistrust, or tenderness—who knows?

Don Jaime Arce no longer thinks of mirrors, or of virtuous old spinsters, or of the number of people with T.B. within the café (approximately 10 per cent), or of artists at pencil-sharpening, or of blood circulation. In the last hour of the evening Don Jaime Arce falls prey to a sleepiness that bemuses him.

"What are seven times four? Twenty-eight. And six times nine? Fifty-four. And nine times nine? Eighty-one. Where is the source of the Ebro? At Reinosa in the province of Santander."

Don Jaime Arce smiles, satisfied with his self-examination; while his fingers pull cigarette stubs to shreds, he repeats under his breath: "Ataulph, Sigerich, Walia, Theodored, Turismond. . . . I bet that imbecile there doesn't know the list of the Visigoth Kings!"

That imbecile is the young poet who emerges, white as chalk, from his rest cure in the W. C.

"As *running water blurs the gentle gleam. ...*"

Doña Rosa has gone in mourning, no one knows for whom, ever since she was a very young girl, which was many years ago; she is dirty and is hung with diamonds worth a fortune. Every year she grows a little fatter, nearly at the same rate at which she accumulates money.

She is a very rich woman. She owns the house with the café, and in the Calle de Apodaca, the Calle de Churruca, the Calle de Campoamor, and the Calle de Fuencarral dozens of tenants tremble like schoolboys on every first of the month.

"The more you trust them," she likes to say, "the more they take advantage of you. They're wasters, regular wasters. If there weren't honest judges in the world, I don't know what we'd cometo."

Doña Rosa has her own ideas about honesty'.

"Straight accounts, my dear, straight accounts, and no tempering."

She has never let anyone off a penny and never admitted payment in installments.

"Why is there such a thing as a law of eviction," she would say, "unless it is applied? The way I see it, the law exists so that it is respected by everybody, first of all by myself. Anything else would be the Revolution."

Doña Rosa is a shareholder in a bank, where she drives the whole board mad, and according to the gossip in the district, she has trunks full of gold hidden awav so carefully that they weren't found even during the Civil War. ' .

The shoeblack has finished cleaning Don Leonardo's shoes.

Here you are, sir."

Don Leonardo looks down at his shoes and gives him a cigarette from 3 ninct\ centimos packet.

I hank you very much, sir."

Don Leonardo pays no fee for the service, he never does. He P®mi ts h. D L shoes to be cleaned in exchange for a small gesture, on sonardo is so mean that he rouses abject admiration in imbeciles.

Each time the shoeblack wipes Don Leonardo's shoes he remembers his thirty' thousand pesetas. At bottom he is delighted to have been able to help Don Leonardo out of a fix. On the surface it irks him a little, next to nothing.

"The gentry are the gentry, that's as clear as daylight. Nowadays things are a bit upside down, but you can still tell a gentleman-bom at the first glance."

If the shoeblack were an educated man, he would no doubt be a reader of Vasquez Melia's traditionalist writings.

Alfonsito, the messenger boy, is back from the street with the newspapers.

"Now look here, kid, wherever have you been to for the paper?" .....

Alfonsito is a sickly child of twelve or thirteen with fair hair and a constant cough. His father, who was a journalist, died two years ago in King's Hospital. His mother, who used to be a finicky young lady before her marriage, took to cleaning offices in tire Gran Via and having her meals in the soup kitchen of *Auxilio Social.*

"There was a queue for it, madam."

"Of course, a queue! It's simply that people now queue up for the news, as if they hadn't anything more important to do. Come on, give me the paper."

"They were out of *Infamaciones,* madam. I've brought you *Madrid."*

"Never mind. What d'you get out of them anyway? Tell me, Seoane, do you understand why there's so much government fuss and bother all over the world?"

"Well..."

"Now listen, there's no need for you to pretend. If you don't want to say anything you don't. Goodness me, all that secreey!"

Seoane smiles, with the bitter face of a dyspeptic, and says nothing. Why speak?

"As if *I* didn't know what's behind all Uris silence and

smiling—as if I didn’t know very well what’s going on had. You don’t want to know? All right, it’s your business. I tell you one thing: it’s the facts that speak. And how!"

Alfonsito leaves copies of *Madrid* at various tables.

Don Pablo produces his coppers.

"Any news in it?"

"I don’t know, sir. You’ll see for yourself."

Don Pablo spreads the paper on the table and reads the headlines. Over his shoulder Pepe tries to pick out the news.

Señorita Elvira beckons to the boy.

"Let me have the house copy when Doña Rosa’s finished withit."

Doña Matilde, who has a chat with the cigarette boy while her friend Doña Asunción has gone to the toilet, comments scornfully: "I can’t see why they want to find out about everything that’s going on. As long as we’re left in peace . .. don't you agree?"

“That’s just what I always say, madam.”

Doña Rosa reads the war news.

“They’re going back a long way, it seems to me.... Well, if they come out on top in the end it’s all right. D’you think they'11 come out on top in the end, Macario?”

The pianist looks doubtful.

“I don't know, it’s possible. If thev invent something that works.”

Doña Rosa stares at the piano keys. Her face is sad and has a faraway look, she seems to be talking to herself, thinking aloud.

“The trouble is, the Germans—who are gentlemen as true as God made them!—the Germans relied too much on the Italians, who are more afraid than a herd of sheep. That's the long and the short of it.”

Her voice sounds thick and her eyes, behind her glasses, appear veiled and almost dreamy.

“If [illegible] have told him: 'Don’t vou trust them, [illegible] shadow, [illegible] those Italians are [illegible]lightened of their own

Doña Rosa heaves a gentle sigh.

“What a fool I am! If I’d been face to face with Hitler I wouldn’t have dared to raise my voice, not even that. . . ”

Doña Rosa is worried about the fate of the German armies. Every' day she studies the *communiqué from Hitler’s* headquarters and associates, through a series of vague forebodings she dare not try to see clearly, the fate of the Wehrmacht with the fate of her café.

Vega buys himself a paper. His neighbor asks: “Any good news?"

Vega is an eclectic. "It all depends for whom.”

The server continues to say “coming” and to drag his feet along the floor of the café.

“If I were face to face with Hitler, I’d be frightened out of my wits, he must be a most frightening man. He's got a look in his eyes like a tiger.”

Doña Rosa heaves another sigh. For a moment her enormous bosom makes her throat disappear from sight. “He and the Pope must be the two most frightening men there are." Doña Rosa taps on the piano lid with her fingertips.

“But after all, he must know what he’s doing, that's what he’s got his generals for.”

For an instant Doña Rosa keeps quiet, then her voice changes: “Right.”

She lifts her head and looks at Seoane: “How’s your wife getting on with her trouble?”

“She’s pulling through. Today she seems a bit better.”

"Poor Amparo, and she’s such a good soul!"

“Yes. it’s true, she’s having a bad time.”

“Did you give her those drops Don Francisco told you about?”

“Yes, she’s taken them. The worst of it is that she can’t keep down anything, she throws it all up.”

“Good Lord!”

Macario softly touches the keys and Seoane picks up his violin.

“What next?”

"'Ld verbena,'don't you think?"

"Come on."

Doña Rosa steps from the platform as the violinist and the piania, with the expression of resigned schoolboys, break into the din of the café with the familiar old bars, so often—on, God, how often-repeated and repeated:

"Where to in your Manila shawl, my pretty?
Where to in your printed cotton dress?"

They play without their notes. They don't need them.

Like an automaton Macario thinks: "And then ill tell her: 'Look here, my girl, there's nothing to be done. With a miserable five pesetas for the afternoon and another five for the night, and two coffces—well, I ask you!' Then she'll answer, sure enough*. 'Don't be silly. You'll see: with your ten pesetas and with a few lessons I can get. .. .' Really, Matilde is an angel, nothing short of an angel."

Macario smiles inwardly and very nearly smiles outwardly as well. Macario is an undernourished sentimentalist who celebrated his forty-third birthday a few days ago.

Secane stares vaguely at the customers of the café and thinks nothing. Seoane is a man who prefers not to think. All he asks for is that the day may pass rapidly, as quickly as possible, to be over and done with.

Half past nine strikes on the old clock with its tiny figures that shine like gold. The clock is an almost sumptuous piece. It was brought here from the Paris Exhibition by a hare-brained, penniless young marquis who courted Doña Rosa way back in 1905. The little marquis, whose Christian name was Santiago and who was a grandee of Spain, died in his early youth of consumption, in El Escorial; and the clock stayed on the wall above the café counter, as if in remembrance of the hours that passed without bringing a man for Doña Rosa and a daily hot meal for the man who died. Such is life.

At the other end of the café Doña Rosa has words with a waiter, waving her arms about. Somewhat treacherously, the other waiters watch the scene in the mirrors, with hardly any interest.

Within half an hour the café will be empty. It will be like a man who has suddenly lost his memory.