

'Why?'

'Why should I pay for an abortion? An abortion is nothing.'

'You must know that nothing's free.'

Since her whole heart was wanting to be a knight, she handed over the money and prayed to the Moon, 'Suck her, Oh Lady mine, this vassal heart in this first encounter; let not Your favour and protection fail me in the peril in which for the first time I now find myself.'

Then she lay down on the hospital bed in the puke green paper they had given her. Having done this, she gathered up her armour, the puke green paper, again started pacing nervously up and down in the same calm manner as before.

She paced for three hours until they told her to piss again. This was the manner in which she pissed: 'For women, Oh Woman who is all women who is my beauty, give me strength and vigour. Turn the eyes of the strength and wonderfulness of all women upon this one female, the female who's trying, at least you can say that for her this female who's locked up in the hospital and thus must pass through so formidable an adventure.'

One hour later they told her to climb up pale and green-carpeted stairs. But she spoke so vigorously and was so undaunted in her being that she struck terror into those who were assailing her. For this reason they ceased attacking the knight-to-be: they told her to lie down on a narrow black-leather padded slab. A clean white sheet covered the slab. Her ass, especially, should lie in a crack.

'What's going to happen now?' Don Quixote asked.

## JEAN GENET THE THIEF'S JOURNAL

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translated by BERNARD FRECHTMAN

Brno—or Brünn—is a city in Czechoslovakia. I arrived there on foot, in the rain, after crossing the Austrian border at Retz. Some petty thefts in stores kept me going for a few days but I was without friends, astray amidst a nervous people. I would have liked, however, to rest a while after my turbulent trip through Serbia and Austria, after my flight from the police of those countries and from certain accomplices who were out to get me. Brno is a wet, dismal city, oppressed by the smoke of factories and the color of stones. My soul would have relaxed there, grown languid, as in a room whose shutters have been drawn, if only I could have gone a few days without worrying about money. German and Czech were spoken in Brno. There was a kind of war going on among rival groups of young street singers. A group which sang in German invited me to join them. There were six of us. I took up the collection and handled the money.

Three of my companions played the guitar, one the accordion and the other sang. One foggy day, as I was leaning against a wall, I watched the group as they gave a concert. One of the guitarists was about twenty years old. He was blonde and was wearing a plaid shirt and a pair of corduroy trousers. Beauty is rare in Brno; I was charmed by his face. I stood and looked at him for a long time and I caught him exchanging a smile of understanding with a fat, pink-cheeked man who was very conservatively dressed and was holding a leather briefcase. As I walked away, I wondered whether the young men realized that their companion made himself available to the city's rich queers. I walked away, but I made it my business to see them a number of times at various street corners. None of them were from Brno.

except Michaelis Andritch, the one who became my friend. His gestures were graceful without being effeminate. As long as he was with me, he never bothered with women. I had the surprise of seeing for the first time a homosexual whose bearing was manly, even somewhat blunt. He was the aristocrat of the troupe. They all slept in a cellar, where they also cooked their meals. Of the few weeks I spent with them there is nothing much to tell, except of my love for Michaelis, with whom I spoke Italian. He introduced me to the manufacturer. The man was rosy and fat, yet he did not seem to put much weight on the earth. I was sure that Michaelis felt no affection for him; nevertheless, I pointed out to him that theft would be more beautiful than prostitution.

"Ma, sono il uomo," he said to me arrogantly.

I doubted it but pretended to believe it. I told him about a few thefts and said that I had been in prison: he admired me for this. In a few days, with the help of my clothes, I became a glamorous figure to him. We pulled off a few jobs and I became his master.

I shall allow myself a certain coquetry and say that I was a clever thief. Never have I been caught red-handed, in flagrante delicto. But the fact that I know how to steal admirably for my earthly profit is unimportant; what I have sought most of all has been to be the consciousness of the theft whose poem I am writing; in other words, refusing to enumerate my exploits, to show what I owe them in the moral realm, what I build with them as a basis, what the simplest thieves are perhaps dimly seeking, what they themselves might achieve.

"A certain coquetry...": my extreme discretion.

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Almost always alone, though aided by an ideal companion, I crossed other borders. My emotion was always equally great. I crossed Alps of all kinds. From Slovenia to Italy, helped by the customs men, then abandoned by

them, I went upstream, along a muddy torrent. Fought by the wind, by the cold, by the thorns, by November, I gained a summit behind which was Italy. In order to reach it, I affronted monsters hidden by the night or revealed by it. I got caught in the barbed wire of a fort where I heard the sentinels walking and whispering. Crouching in the shadow, my heart beating, I hoped that before shooting me they would fondle and love me. Thus I hoped that the night would be peopled by voluptuous guards. I ventured at random upon the road. It was the right one. I sensed it by the feel of my soles on its honest ground. Later on, I left Italy for Austria. I crossed fields of snow at night. The moon cast my shadow. In every country that I left behind I had stolen and had known prisons. Yet I was not going through Europe but through the world of objects and circumstances, and with an ever fresher ingenuousness. All the wonder I beheld made me uneasy, but I hardened myself further so as to penetrate, without danger to myself, their customary mystery.

I quickly realized it was difficult to steal in Central Europe without danger because the police system was perfect. The paucity of the means of communication and the difficulty of crossing the borders, which were excellently guarded, prevented me from fleeing quickly, and my being a Frenchman made me all the more conspicuous. I noticed that very few Frenchmen in foreign countries are thieves or beggars. I decided to go back to France and there pursue—perhaps even limiting my activity to Paris alone—a thief's destiny. The idea of continuing my way around the world, committing more or less important larcenies also tempted me. I chose France out of a concern for depth. I knew the country well enough to be sure of giving stealing all my attention and care, of handling it as if it were a unique substance whose devoted craftsman I would become. I was twenty-four or twenty-five at the time. In pursuit of a moral adventure, I sacrificed dispersion and ornament. The reasons for my choice, whose meaning is revealed to me only today because I have to write about it, were not clearly apparent. I think that I had to hollow out, to drill through, a mass of language which in my mind would be at ease. Perhaps I wanted to accuse myself in my own language. Neither Albania, Hungary or Poland, nor India or Brazil would have offered me such rich a matter as France. Indeed, theft—and what it involved

in it: prison sentences, along with the shame of being a thief—had become a disinterested undertaking, a kind of active and deliberate work of art which could be achieved only with the help of language, my language, and which would be confronted with the laws springing from this strange language. In a foreign country I would have been merely a more or less clever thief, but, as I would have thought of myself in French, I would have known I was a Frenchman—a status that allows none to survive—among foreigners. To be a thief in my own country and to justify my being a thief who used the language of the robbed—who are myself, because of the importance of language—was to give to being a thief the chance to be unique. I was becoming a foreigner.

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I know the extraordinary calmness one feels at the moment of performing the theft, the feat that accompanies it. My body is afraid. In front of a jeweler's window: as long as I'm not inside, I don't think I'm going to steal. No sooner do I get inside than I'm sure I'll come out with a jewel: a ring or handcuffs. This certainty is expressed by a long shudder which leaves me motionless but which goes from the back of my neck down to my heels. It peters out at my eyes and dries their lids. My cells seem to be transmitting to one another a wave, an undulating movement which is the very substance of my calm. I am alive with thought from my heels to the back of my neck. I accompany the wave. It is born of fear. Without it there would not be this calm in which my body bathes—which my body attains. I have to be very careful not to flee. When I leave the store, it is very difficult for me to run, or even walk fast. A kind of elastic holds me back. My muscles are heavy and tight. But a sharp vigilance directs them into the street. I cannot see Lucien in that kind of situation. Would he falter? And what happens during a burglary? When I have broken the lock, as soon as I push the door it thrusts back within me a heap of darkness, or, to be more exact, a very thick vapor which my body is summoned to enter. I enter. For a half hour I shall be operating, if I am alone, in a world which is the reverse of the customary world. My heart beats loudly. My hand never trembles. Fear does not leave

me for a single second. I do not think specifically of the proprietor of the place, but all my gestures evoke him in so far as they see him. I am steeped in an idea of property while I loot property. I recreate the absent proprietor. He lives, not facing me, but about me. He is a fluid element which I breathe, which enters me, which inflates my lungs. The beginning of the operation goes off without too much fear, which starts mounting the moment I have finally decided to leave. The decision is born when the apartment contains no more secret spots, when I have taken the proprietor's place. And this is not necessarily when I have discovered the treasure. Guy almost always sits down and eats in the kitchen or the looted drawing room. Some burglars go to the can after ransacking a place. I won't have Lucien undergoing such rites. His is not a religious nature. When the treasure has been discovered, I have to leave. Fear then invades my body. I would like to hasten everything. Not hasten myself, not go more quickly, but act in such a way that everything is magically sped up. To be out of here and far away. But what gestures shall I make in order to go more quickly? The heaviest, the slowest. Slowness brings fear. Not only my heart but my whole body is now beating. I am one enormous temple, the throbbing temple of the looted room. I have sometimes preferred to sleep there for an hour behind a door so as to calm down rather than go out into the street and be off, for though I know that I am not being followed, I shall zigzag in and out, I shall take certain streets, I shall retrace my tracks. After a rapid theft, the experience is even more more exciting: I go more quickly, I accelerate; the sections making up the broken lines are shorter. It is as if I were being carried away by the speed itself with which I perform the theft. I wouldn't put up with Lucien's exposing himself that way. His bearing isn't furtive. In his movements and behaviour there is, as it were, a slight hesitation, a holding back, comparable to the moist mouths of most Americans. Lucien is modest.