

(1970), El libro (1978), Crónica de la intervención (1982), Inmaculada o los placeres de la Inocencia (1989). His literary production comprises more than fifty volumes of fiction, plays, and criticism.

Carlos Semprun-Maura

BRANDY BLUES

(Le Bleu de l'eau-de-vie)

Translated by

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A bedroom. PETER is lying on the bed. He has on pants and an undershirt, and sandals on his bare feet. On a small table, next to the bed, a bottle of scotch, glasses and cigarettes. There is a knock at the door. A second knock. The knock is repeated several more times. PETER sits up, irritated.

ALAN (*offstage*): Peter? Peter, are you there? It's me...Alan!

PETER: Yes?

ALAN: It's me. Can I come in?

PETER: Yeah. (*ALAN enters.*)

ALAN: Hi!

PETER: Hi.

ALAN: Did I wake you?

PETER: What time is it?

ALAN: Noon.

PETER: Noon? What a bad time.

ALAN: A bad time? Why?

PETER: It's like a... void. Eight o'clock, ten o'clock, two o'clock, five o'clock. Now those are times that make some sense. But noon? It's nothing. It's a void. It's not morning. It's not afternoon. What in the hell can you do at noon.

ALAN (*smiling*): You can have lunch. There are people who eat lunch.

PETER (*skeptical*): Yeah. (*Pause. ALAN sits down. PETER looks at him, smiling.*) What do you want?

ALAN (*startled*): Me? Nothing... I was in the neighborhood, so I dropped in...

PETER: You dropped in?

ALAN: Am I disturbing you?

PETER: No, not at all, not at all. What is it you want?

ALAN (*surprised*): Well, nothing. What's the matter?

PETER: I don't know what's so surprising. Why wouldn't I think that you might drop in to say-- or ask me--something in particular?

ALAN: Could be. But no, I just dropped in, that's all. I was in the neighborhood. So I said to myself, why not go up and see Peter? I... We could have a cup of coffee...chat a bit...

PETER: I don't think I have any coffee here.

ALAN: Can't we go out?

PETER: Not now. At noon all the cafés are packed. I don't like packed cafés. I like cafés when they're empty, with just the regulars, the guys who sit there looking at their fake-leather appointment books and yawning. Now it's the lunch crowd. Secretaries, salesgirls, clerks from the police station. It reeks with 'em. So, to change the subject, how's the job going?

ALAN (*smiling*): It's going okay.

PETER: So what are you grinning about? You playing hooky?

ALAN: It's noon. I'm not working.

PETER: That's true. That's why I don't like this time. All the working people take over the streets, the cafés... There's no way you can get any peace and quiet. Now, don't you want to tell me why you came?

ALAN (*disconcerted*): I came because I wanted to.

PETER (*ironic*): That's really nice.

ALAN (*as if he had not heard*): If I'm bugging you, I'll leave.

PETER: No, man, no. You're not bugging me at all. I'm just curious, that's all. And besides...and besides...I thought maybe you had something to ask me...something *important*. That you might *need* me. To be *useful*, you see. That's all it is really. (*Suddenly.*) Say, you want me to pay back your money?

ALAN (*dryly*): Peter! That's not even funny.

PETER: Hey, what's with you today? It's perfectly normal. You're not rolling in dough, as my sister would say. You've got a job that makes you sick. A little family to support... Well, you *could* have one. I know what it's like, man! It's no fun every day, right? Admit it! Sometimes, in the morning you'd just like to throw in the towel, wouldn't you?

ALAN (*entering into a kind of complicity*): You're telling me!

PETER (*playing the game*): And what can you do to get out?

ALAN (*delighted with the old game*): There's no way...no way. Let me tell you, I've quit jobs a bunch of times.

PETER: Oh, yeah? And after that?

ALAN (*still playing*): After that? I starved, then I borrowed money, and then, when nobody would lend me any more, I found another job.

PETER: So that's it. There's no solution. That's what I always say. There's no coffee either, not here. But there's scotch. You want some?

ALAN: Now? Well, why not?

PETER: That's it...why not? Why, there'll be a time for drinking scotch. (*He gets up, takes the whiskey, and hands a glass to Alan.*) I don't have any ice. Fridge is broken. That okay?

ALAN: Sure. Bottoms up!

(PETER serves himself a full glass of whiskey. Up to the end, he will drink constantly. As soon as his glass is empty, he will refill it. ALAN will nurse the first glass.)

PETER (*pacing up and down*): You know what they've found out? That alcohol causes cancer, too. Even nature likes to moralize. What do you think about that, you left-wing intellectual?

ALAN (*joking*): I think that medical science will make great progress in the cure of cancer.

PETER: Yes, medical science will make great progress. But will it make progress so we can drink more and more--or to keep us from drinking? How are you?

ALAN: Me?

PETER: Yes, you.

ALAN: In what way?

PETER: What do you mean, in what way? In every way. We haven't seen each other in a long time. Since you're here, I'm taking advantage to find out what's new with you. You doing okay?

ALAN: We saw each other last night. Don't you remember?

PETER (*intrigued*): Last night? We haven't seen each other...

ALAN: You don't remember. Of course you were drunk as a skunk.

PETER: Last night?

ALAN: Oh, it must have been about two in the morning.

PETER (*still astonished*): Two in the morning? And I was drunk?

ALAN: Oh, yeah, completely out of it.

PETER: I don't remember.

ALAN: That's not surprising.

PETER: I don't remember. Did we have a long drunken conversation?

ALAN: No.

PETER: That's good. I hate long drunken conversations. Say, do you believe it?

ALAN: What?

PETER: That alcohol causes cancer?

ALAN: I don't know.

PETER: That would really be something, wouldn't it? Alcohol causing cancer, marijuana giving you leprosy. And so on. Science and sin, inseparable. Are you sure I can't do something for you?

ALAN: Oh, stop! *(He lights his pipe.)*

PETER: I would have liked to, anyway. I swear. I'd like to do something for you. For other people, in general. To participate in community activities, work for charity, you know. Life doesn't have any meaning otherwise.

ALAN: Stop the bullshit.

PETER: You still smoking that damned Irish tobacco?

ALAN: Yes. *(Mildly surprised.)* You recognize the aroma?

PETER: You're kidding! You're the only one who'd smoke stuff like that. You used to smoke "Sobranié." Talk about being a snob. Stalin's favorite Georgian tobacco. But you bought the name brand, Dunhill's, no less!

ALAN (*laughing*): You're way off. "Sobranié," that's like "Virginia": it's just a name for a kind of tobacco. It doesn't mean much. (*Sniffing his pipe.*) Personally I think this tobacco smells great.

PETER (*abruptly*): What did we talk about last night?

ALAN (*momentarily disconcerted*): Huh? Oh...we didn't talk. You were punching some guy around. Then they kicked you out of the bar.

PETER (*stunned*): Me? I was punching some dude?

ALAN (*lightly*): Well, sort of... When you took a bottle to smash him in the face, I got kind of scared. You could have killed him. Luckily, you were separated. And they kicked you out the door.

PETER: You must have had a good laugh.

ALAN: I was part of the peace-keeping force. To separate the combatants. When they kicked you out the door, I followed you out to the sidewalk. But you got in a cab and left. You'd almost say the cab was waiting for you. I found that... strange. Don't you have bruises? Those were some pretty rough blows.

PETER: No. (*Pause.*) Are you sure you didn't make that story up?

ALAN (*shocked*): Make it up? Of course not. You really don't remember?

PETER: And this morning, as a loyal friend, you've come to see for yourself. I could need something. Arnica, for instance. Those bastards in the drugstores, why is it they don't sell arnica any more? They do it deliberately, you know. Always out for a buck. Now there's a scandal somebody ought to blow the whistle on. When arnica was so pretty! So, working on a boy scout badge? (*ALAN takes a sip of whiskey without answering.*) Yes, uncalled-for

dirty trick, and not even funny. Because, at heart we like each other. Don't we like each other? After all, I mean, we've been friends. In case of a tough blow, we know we can count on one other. You're not used to drinking whiskey in the morning, huh?

ALAN: No, why?

PETER: You drink it as if it were a laxative. One night he sees me trading punches in some dive and sure enough, the next day, he has to come checking up on me.

ALAN: You're a pain, you know.

PETER (*stopping short and facing Alan*): Unless someone asked you to drop by and see how I was?

ALAN (*vaguely uncomfortable*): Who would have asked me to do that?

PETER: Oh, anybody. My sister, for instance. She's been worried about me lately. She keeps telling me, "Peter, you can't live like that." But you can see that I do, I tell her. But she's a mystic, my sister is. She's decided that you can't live like that and all the evidence to the contrary can't convince her.

ALAN: I can't imagine your sister sending somebody else. She'd come herself.

PETER: You never know. You could take turns at guard duty. Well, you see, I didn't think I was still up to barroom brawls. That proves that I'm still far from being a...zombie. The hollowed-out old trunk's still standing.

ALAN (*pause*): Was there really a cab waiting for you outside the bar? Or was it coincidence?

PETER: A cab? What cab? I don't ever take cabs.

ALAN: Besides, you wouldn't remember. Of course not.

PETER: That's it. I don't remember. You still working for the same old rag?

ALAN: Still am. Why change? They're all the same damn thing.

PETER: Man, you'll have me crying. And what do you write about?

ALAN: I hardly write at all. (*Making a joke of it.*) I'm editorial assistant for the business section.

PETER (*pretending to be impressed*): The business section?

ALAN (*laughing*): Yes, business.

PETER: And you're happy?

ALAN (*cheerful*): Not at all.

PETER: That's what I said to myself. Business may be the secret, the mainstay of society, but for you it's an escape. Yes, it is. You were a political journalist, that's what you were. Ultraliberal. A bit of a Trotskyite around the edges, right? And there you are hiding out in the business section, as technical support at that. You do the layout for other people's articles: stuff like that, don't you? It's a cop-out.

ALAN (*cheerful*): It's nasty to twist the knife in the wound.

PETER: You see I always had you pictured as a reporter out of a Hollywood movie: lucid and cynical, but underneath it all always ready to get fired up over a just cause. You've already got the pipe and the tweed jacket. All you need is the woman.

ALAN: The woman?

PETER: In the movies there's always a woman who pushes the lucid and cynical reporter into getting fired up over a just cause. Until he's ready to lose his job and good salary at the big, rotten daily press and end up buying some little, independent paper in the boonies.

ALAN: There's no woman. That's why I'm still working for the big, rotten daily press.

PETER (*ironic*): Come on, come on.

ALAN: What's that supposed to mean: come on, come on?

PETER: We're friends, we're adults, we can face the truth.

ALAN: Cut the crap.

PETER: I haven't said anything yet.

ALAN: We're friends, we're adults, and I don't understand a word.

PETER: So what?

ALAN: What I said: cut the crap.

PETER: I've always wondered if you ended up sleeping with my sister.

ALAN: What does Nicole have to do with it?

PETER: Nothing. I remember one day when I surprised you in her room. We were out in the country, on vacation. Remember? I wanted to steal some cigarettes from my sister. You pulled away from each other...your faces all red. But there are signs that don't lie. Even if the window was open. You, of course, have always denied it. But you, you're a sly devil. She denied it, too. Just think. Corrupting the morals of your younger brother's buddy--eight years younger at that. It's not the kind of thing that people want to admit happens in the best of families.

ALAN: You seem to want to believe your little story.

PETER: Me? It doesn't mean squat to me.

ALAN: You'd never know it. You talk about it all the time. As if you absolutely had to believe that I slept with your sister. Sorry, but it never happened.

PETER (*doubtful*): Yeah... So she wasn't the one who told you to come?

ALAN: No.

PETER: "Dear Peter. He's in such bad shape. First of all, he drinks. And then he doesn't do anything. He finds everything disgusting. He's really out of it. Something has to be done. If he won't work, at the least he ought to take care of himself. There was a time when he had a bit of talent as a poet. A gift of sorts. With perseverance... and effort... he could have... who knows? Maybe written some pretty poems. A... little book of verse." (*In a tone of complete ridicule.*) That's what my sister would say.

ALAN: A world without books would be an even worse place, right?

PETER: Wrong.

ALAN: Why?

PETER: I don't read.

ALAN: Maybe you don't, but...

PETER: I'm talking about myself. I only talk about myself. I'm modest. Nevertheless, I should so much have liked to participate in a common enterprise... given myself fully to a cause. Why don't we organize some barricades where we can die while striking a dramatic pose? I've always been fascinated by people standing on their barricades during, how shall I say, critical moments in history. During the Paris Commune, for example--or in Spain say, in 1917. And getting photographed in action. It's wonderful, isn't it? One changes the world while never failing to get pictures to impress the grandchildren. We were there. Look, here's a photo of Pepe in the process of changing the world.

ALAN: If that's all there was to it...

PETER: Oh, not with me, not with me. Your little act of being a bitter and disillusioned revolutionary--doesn't mean squat to me. If you believed in world revolution when you were twenty, that's your problem. Tough shit!

ALAN (*laughing a little, then*): And you, you didn't believe?

PETER: Me? I always believed that whenever there was some guy up on a platform, yelling out speeches at masses of clods who were standing there, listening to him with their mouths wide open, and applauding like crazy... That somebody should shoot the guy on the platform. Even if he did wear a beard. Have a drink!

ALAN (*making a face*): It's a weak image. You've lost your touch. You used to come up with jolting images.

PETER: It's not the touch I'm missing. It's the revolver. Well, then, where were we?

ALAN: With respect to what?

PETER: Out with it! What do you want?

ALAN (*lightly*): You'll know soon enough. (*Changing his tone.*) You think it's that strange that I would drop in to see you? That hurts. We were friends, after all. And we go back a long ways. It's true that you had a gift. I remember some poems you wrote in high school. There was one I especially liked, "Brandy Blues." Remember?

PETER: Alcoholic even then. (*Pause. He drinks.*) "Brandy Blues." Don't remember.

ALAN: Really? How can you forget poems you wrote as a teenager? It was about "dying from living one's death" and stuff like that. Very deep. (*He snickers.*)

PETER: You wrote poems in high school, too.

ALAN: No. My thing was short stories.

PETER: It's the same difference.

ALAN: No way. It's not at all the same. Poetry doesn't take you anywhere. Short stories take you to journalism.

PETER: Nothing to be proud of. Are you sure my sister didn't ask you to come visit her drunken brother?

ALAN: You're obsessed by that.

PETER: "A good friend, an old but ever renewing friendship, can only help *in his condition.*"

ALAN: Wouldn't you like to go have lunch with me? I'm hungry.

PETER: Lunch? Bah! I couldn't swallow a thing, no matter what. I just got up.

ALAN: You can watch me eat. We'll reminisce about our school days, our old girlfriends, and I'll recite some of my poems for you. (*Joking.*) Life has its good moments, what the hell! You shouldn't let them slip by.

PETER: Impossible. Just the thought of burning grease makes me queasy. And I detest watching other people eat when I don't. I have my meals very well organized, you see. I eat once a day. An early supper, when the restaurants are still empty. I like being the only customer in a dining room. The grease is still fresh; it doesn't stink so much. I can even talk to the waitress. Sometimes she'll even stand by my table while I eat. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see her protective black dress. (You know what a woman dressed in black means in a Mediterranean culture?) But if you're hungry, go ahead.

ALAN: Yes.

(He doesn't move. The silence becomes more and more uncomfortable. PETER paces back and forth. ALAN smokes his pipe. They give each other surreptitious glances.)

PETER: What are you waiting for? Get going!

ALAN: Oh, I can wait another few minutes.

PETER (*in a slightly irritated tone*): I can't bear the thought that you're standing there, dying of hunger. Please get yourself something to eat.

ALAN (*smiling*): You're kicking me out?

PETER: Bug off!

ALAN: Do you often get into bar brawls?

PETER: Never.

ALAN: Except yesterday.

PETER: It wasn't me.

ALAN: Was so!

PETER: It wasn't me. Besides last night I didn't go out. It must have been somebody who looks like me, somebody who hangs out in bars, who has a drink too many and picks fights with people. Not my style at all. Me, I was here. I have witnesses, well one witness. The neighbor on the second floor. She's a whore. A professional, you'd better believe. We have an advantageous arrangement. At least for me. For her, who knows. She still can't do a complete Andalousian. You know what that is?

ALAN: No. Do you?

PETER: Of course. For a whore, not to know that, can you imagine? I have to teach her. (*He laughs.*) A dumb broad if there ever was one. You seen Laura lately?

ALAN: 'Scuse me? Have I seen...?

PETER: That's right. Laura.

ALAN: Yes.

PETER: Well then?

ALAN: Well then, what?

PETER: Well then, how is she?

ALAN: Okay.

PETER: You don't sound very sure. She's not okay?

ALAN: Yes, she's fine.

PETER: She's like a rock, that woman. Right?

ALAN: I don't know.

PETER: Oh, yes. A rock. An oak. You see her often?

ALAN: No.

PETER: You ought to. What's become of her?

ALAN (*in a sarcastic, bitter-sweet tone*): Sometimes she asks about you.

PETER (*ironically*): Not really? Laura? For her I'm under a tombstone, and she can just walk away. (*He laughs.*) What's

hilarious about Laura is that you're all convinced I'm sad because she left me. But it's the other way 'round. She left me because I'm sad. And when I say sad, I mean a disaster! A living disaster, man, I swear to you!

ALAN: That's not what she told me.

PETER (*drily*): My word, you actually talk to her? What did she say?

ALAN: That you threw her out the door, kicking her behind all the way.

PETER (*laughing*): She said that? It was for her own good. Word of honor! I could feel homicidal urges coming on. To protect her from me, I asked her to leave. It was time to take stock, as they say. (*Changing his tone to greater sincerity.*) It was unbearable, you understand? Unbearable. When I'd come home drunk, she'd pretend not to notice. She was smiling, at four o'clock in the morning, hair neatly combed, wide awake. "Did you have anything to eat?" Me, I could hardly walk. I was hanging onto the furniture, vomiting in all the corners. She would run around behind me, with a scrub rag or a brush, what do I know? Always smiling. "Would you like some coffee?" She'd trail me around for hours before getting me to bed, her face always serious and calm, basically quite satisfied with herself. Look, look what I good wife I am! I wanted to kill her. What's become of her?

ALAN: Sometimes she asks about you.

PETER (*a bit surprised*): You already said that.

ALAN: Yes, I already did. I'm repeating it. I thought you might be pleased.

PETER (*genuinely surprised*): Me?

ALAN: No? Generally people are pleased to know that others think about them, ask about them, and so forth. Right?

PETER: You jerking me around?

ALAN: As for me, that would please me. If someone's asked you how I am, please tell me. You see, I like it when someone asks about me.

PETER (*distrustful*): Yeah...

ALAN: Besides, she not only asked me about you, but she more or less suggested I stop by to see you.

PETER: Laura? She asked you to come see me? For what? She's worried about my health? She's afraid that I'll shoot myself?

ALAN: Nothing quite so melodramatic. Why would you shoot yourself? You have a relaxed old life, don't you?

PETER (*lying down on the bed, his legs in the air*): There. One relaxed old life.

ALAN (*pretending to be suddenly disturbed*): If something's not going right, let me know, please! You know that...

PETER: Know what?

ALAN: Well... that... if I can do anything for you... You see what I mean.

PETER (*deliberately*): Not at all. What do you mean?

ALAN: You're putting me on. You understand perfectly well what I mean.

PETER: So she's the one who asked you to come? That's what I was saying to myself.

ALAN: You said what to yourself?

PETER (*standing up, on the bed.*): When you brought yourself here a bit ago, that you have the disgusting face of someone who has to fulfill a mission.

ALAN (*laughing, but a bit annoyed*): Thank you. But it's not exactly that, not really. I mean... of course, Laura has asked me twenty times to stop by to see you, but it's, that is... if I came today it's because I wanted to. So there. It's a coincidence, if you like.

PETER (*falling back on the bed*): Oh, I don't like that, I don't like that, I don't like that at all. Don't talk to me about Laura. I have no desire to talk about Laura with you.

ALAN: So let's not talk about her.

PETER (*ironically*): Let's talk about God.

ALAN: I haven't degenerated that much.

(Pause.)

PETER (*after staring at Alan*): What does Laura want?

ALAN: Nothing much, just that matter of the telephone.

PETER (*sincerely dumbfounded*): The matter of the telephone?

ALAN: Right. The matter of the telephone. Nothing serious, as you see.

PETER (*yelling*): WHAT MATTER OF THE TELEPHONE?

ALAN: Why are you screaming like that?

PETER (*in a bad mood*): Spit it out, okay?

ALAN: Why are you so rattled? You're usually so calm. In the old days, that used to make me so angry, you and your poker face that you tried to...

PETER (*approaching him menacingly*): Are you going to tell what's this business about the phone, dammit?

ALAN (*with a slight laugh*): As if you didn't know! After all, you're the one doing the calling, right?

PETER: Me? Who do I call?

ALAN (*either surprised in turn, or pretending*): Well, Laura, of course. Who else could it be?

PETER: Me? Telephone Laura? You nuts or something?

ALAN: If you don't want to talk about it, we won't. What I've been saying about it...

PETER: Listen... listen... sit down. (*Alan is already seated.*) Catch your breath, relax, try to get hold of yourself, and tell me, in a nutshell, what this story of the telephone is all about.

ALAN (*looking at Peter flabbergasted*): What game are you playing? If somebody has some explaining to do, it's you. That's how it seems to me. Right?

PETER (*making an effort to control himself*): It's possible... it's possible. But all in due time. Pretend that I don't know anything and tell me the story from the beginning. So, it seems that I phone Laura?

ALAN (*snickering*): So it seems, indeed.

PETER: And then?

ALAN: Then what? Do you think that it's pleasant to be awakened every night by the phone ringing?

PETER (*more and more dumbfounded*): Every night? Laura claims that I call her every night?

ALAN: For the past month, yes. Around three or four in the morning.

PETER: That's a lie. Besides, I don't have a phone. Or at any rate the service is disconnected. I haven't paid the bill.

ALAN: There are public phone booths everywhere, you know.

PETER: But I haven't called her! I've never called her!

ALAN (*after a pause*): It's strange... that Laura would invent those phone calls. Right? Why would she make up such a stupid story? I'll have to ask her.

PETER: She asked you to come talk to me about it?

ALAN: Yes. It's a nutty story, isn't it? Laura says to me, "Listen. You should go see Peter, try to found out why he's harassing me like this. (Those are her words.) Why he calls me every night." Put yourself in her position. It's unpleasant enough after all to be awakened every night by the phone. Now she waits for you to call her before she goes to bed so she won't get woken up, you understand.

PETER (*flatly*): It's not me.

ALAN (*shrugging his shoulders*): I'll tell her.

PETER: Why does she think it's me?

ALAN: She recognizes your voice. You know, she's not really angry, but... she's perplexed. And since she barely sleeps any more... it rattles her.

PETER: But I don't identify myself? I... or rather, "he" doesn't say: "This is Peter. Lovely night, isn't it?"

ALAN: No. You don't say, "This is Peter. Lovely night, isn't it?" But your voice is unmistakable on the phone. No way to confuse it.

PETER: Nevertheless, it's not me. I've never phoned Laura.

ALAN: It's strange that Laura would make up this story. What I'm saying is, what does it mean, in your opinion? Because, after all, if one time you were drunk and you called her, for a joke, without realizing what time it was, that's certainly not a reason for her to send me to talk to you. Right? That kind of thing can happen when you're drunk. (*PETER looks at him somberly.*) I mean, to play jokes that you don't remember in the least the next day. I recall one time you had me convinced that I'd pushed Tony into the river and he'd drowned. It was the biggest scare of my life. I couldn't remember if it was true. I was drunk the night when--according to you--I'd committed the crime. Until Tony showed up fresh as a daisy. Maybe you call her when you're drunk and you just don't remember?

PETER: I thought you were hungry.

ALAN: Gee, that's true. I'd forgotten. The pleasure of your company, no doubt. You've been making yourself so scarce lately. By the way, how do you live? What do you do with your day?

PETER: I get up. I go to bed. In between, I'm bored. And you?

ALAN: About the same. Except, of course, that I'm a paid slave. My time's not my own, like yours.

PETER: You wouldn't know what to do with it. The art of pushing minutes in front of you, like billiard balls, is a difficult one. And, man, you're always being stalked by angst. You, in my place, you'd already have started building castles from match sticks.

ALAN (*laughing*): Maybe. So you do absolutely nothing with your time? Aside from drinking, of course.

PETER (*ironically*): Of course. Aside from drinking.

ALAN: What did Nicole have to tell you yesterday?

PETER: Yesterday? I didn't see her yesterday. It was two or three days ago. At any rate, Nicole never has much of anything to say.

ALAN (*smiling*): She doesn't give you little sermons?

PETER (*looking at Alan in silence*): What are you trying to suggest?

ALAN: Me? Nothing at all. Simply that your sister called me, yesterday. In passing she said she'd just left you. She thinks you drink a lot. Well, you know what I mean.

PETER (*after a pause*): You're a shithead to have agreed to it.

ALAN: To have agreed to what?

PETER: This stupid little conspiracy. My sister's in on it, I'm sure, and maybe Laura, and you're the one elected to carry it out. Shut up! Let me talk! You came to give me some spiel in the purest Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde mold, about how I fight every night in bars and call Laura--and what else?--without having the slightest recollection! Oh, all for my own good! White lies, just to scare me so that I'll agree to be detoxed. Shut up, I said! It's my sister's obsession. She's been wearing my ears out for weeks. "My dear Peter. It has to be done! Oh, I know that the very day you leave the clinic you'll start to drink again, but at least your body will be in better shape..." Subtle dialectic of the alcohol cure so that the body can last a few extra months! Soak it up, dry it out, soak it up! Where the hell do you fit in?

ALAN (*laughing*): Well, old pal, I've been asking myself where you got this story of a conspiracy! That's really something! Your sister asking me... I confess that I would never have thought of that.

PETER: Really? That cracks me up.

ALAN: But since you're talking about your chronic binges, I might just as well ask you something... that's intrigued me since I got here. Don't get mad, but why do you drink?

PETER (*stunned*): What do you mean "why"?

ALAN: No, it's true. You haven't stopped drinking since I got here. You've already drunk four or five scotches. I'm sure you'd have drunk less if you'd been alone. With alcoholics, it's just the opposite. They hide to drink. In front of their families, they drink cokes, and when everybody's back is turned, they add rum. There's a guy like that at the newspaper: he's always drunk but nobody ever sees him drink. You, on the other hand, you show off. As if you wanted to play the alcoholic role.

PETER (*delighted*): You mean you're accusing me of not being a real alcoholic?

ALAN: Oh, I'm not accusing you of anything. I never accuse anyone of anything. I'm just curious, that's all. (*Joking.*) Perhaps you have a desire to be an invalid?

PETER: That's an interesting idea. Would you repeat it, please?

ALAN (*in the same tone*): There are people like that, who enjoy being sick. So others will take care of them. If they're healthy, nobody notices 'em. They're just shadows moving back and forth. But if they're sick, people feel sorry for them, and tuck them into bed at night, and fix them hot water bottles. And the invalids smugly resign themselves and let themselves go, while the whole family gravely watches by their bedsides. They finally feel as if they exist. But, of course, in your case... we can't say that nobody notices you.

PETER: It's funny that you haven't had better luck with women.

ALAN (*surprised*): I don't get the connection.

PETER: That way of yours, of keeping your feet solidly on the ground. With a steady gaze and your chin up. Women adore that, you know.

ALAN (*ironic*): And even so, I'm not a Don Juan--like you?

PETER: Who, me? No! Besides, I've been reconciled to that for a long time now. Have you ever seen anything stupider than a womanizer? But without being a Don Juan, one can still have good or bad luck with women. Or with one woman in particular, if you prefer.

ALAN: What are you driving at?

PETER: Have you been lucky with women?

ALAN (*after a brief pause*): Still that same old story?

PETER: What old story?

ALAN: Doesn't matter.

(Pause.)

PETER (*with gusto*): So? Tell me everything: Have you already picked the clinic? What color is it?

ALAN: The clinic?

PETER: For my cure?

ALAN: I don't give a damn about your cure! After all, you ought to know if you want to be detoxed or not!

PETER (*joking*): I see... The modern method. "We'll force you into facing your responsibilities. You make the decision. You have to decide voluntarily if you want to seek help..." Well, shit, no way. Voluntarily I decide not to go. I hereby decree that I shall choose the slow and charming decline of drunkenness. So there. Besides, I detest hospitals. The smell of cadavers. Augh!

ALAN: Well, that's perfect. Nobody's talked about a cure except you. And as for your nocturnal phone calls, the good news is that Laura is having her number changed. It'll take a while to do. In the meantime, try to call her less often.

PETER (*yelling*): I don't call her!

ALAN (*perhaps pleased at having angered him*): Okay, okay. You don't call her. Laura's making it up. Maybe that's symptomatic, huh? That she's inventing this story about phone calls. As if she had an unconscious desire for you to call her. Perhaps not exactly the same way that she tells it, but you know what happens when the subconscious mixes things up, right? Everybody knows that.

PETER: What's wrong with you?

ALAN: 'Scuse me?

PETER: I find you strange. Since you came through that goddam door--where, I might add, the people I'm expecting never show up, and I'm not saying that to bug you, man, you know how it is--since then, I've found you strange. Come on, tell me what's up! We're pals, right? Friendship, man, friendship, that's the only thing that counts. So? You unhappy? You feel like you've wasted your life?

ALAN: Everybody's life is wasted. So you say.

PETER: So I say. Or said. Back in my first stage, if you like. Back when I believed in a system of inverted values. But now... wasted with respect to what? It doesn't make sense. Wrong side or right side, it's all the same. I'm not a part of it.

ALAN (*smiling*): You're certainly bitter. So, there's no solution?

PETER: You could always throw yourself in the river...

ALAN: Why don't you do that?

PETER (*looking at him for a moment in silence and then giving a short laugh*): I swim too well.

ALAN: A bullet to the temple? No? How about hanging... They say it gives you an erection, complete with orgasm. A beautiful death, don't you think?

PETER (*a short pause, followed by an ironic smile*): You'd like to see me hang?

ALAN: Not at all. Quite the contrary. You can see, I'm joking. If it were serious, you could at least believe our friendship would keep me from kidding about it.

PETER: Besides, why kill oneself when we're going to croak anyway. And then, I rather like watching myself disintegrate little by little. It's an intellectually stimulating spectacle.

ALAN: You're disintegrating?

PETER: I'm not?

ALAN: You're the one who said it.

PETER: Yes, I'm the one who said it. So, just why did you come?

ALAN: Well, old pal. Nostalgia, you believe in nostalgia. We don't see one another anymore. And for ten years we saw each other practically every day. We chased girls, got drunk, stayed out all night, and above all, above all, we talked. We talked and didn't stop talking. Remember? Afternoons, whole evenings, in cafés or in the street, talking. Dreaming up a thousand projects, trips, adventures. But they're not what's important. With the passage of time... what remains is a certain feeling. And suddenly, bam! We don't see each other anymore. Maybe I missed you.

PETER (*insultingly*): Are you sure you're not putting the make on me?

ALAN (*annoyed*): Oh, shit!

PETER: Now there's the first intelligent thing you've said since you got here.

(Pause.)

ALAN: So your sister gave you another of her little sermons yesterday?

PETER: I already told you it wasn't yesterday. It was two or three days ago. I remember distinctly.

ALAN: It was yesterday. She remembers distinctly, too. She's got excellent reasons to.

PETER: Did I maybe break a bottle over her head? Just trying to stay in shape?

ALAN: That's not it. What am I going to tell Laura?

PETER: That I have fond memories of our life together.

ALAN: That true?

PETER: What the hell difference does that make to you?

ALAN (*laughing*): None, of course. Now, about the telephone, what am I going to tell her?

PETER: She should take it off the hook... or have it temporarily disconnected. Or maybe she should buy one of those machines that automatically record conversations. She should have got herself one of those a long time ago. They're supposed to be very useful. She could

listen to the tapes during breakfast. Just what am I accused of having said to her, by the way?

ALAN: You really want to know?

PETER: But of course I want to know!

ALAN: (*after a brief hesitation*): Hmm... insults...

PETER: Insults? Such as? Slut? Bitch?

ALAN (*looking at him with a curious expression*): Precisely. Slut. Bitch. Whore. Who's fucking you now? Garbage like that. You get the idea. Oh, your vocabulary is rather limited. It's funny, isn't it? When you're usually so verbose.

PETER: It sounds a bit too conventional to be true.

ALAN: Therefore it isn't.

PETER: How's that?

ALAN: You prefer that it be true?

PETER: Oh, I don't prefer anything at all.

ALAN: As you please. You don't call Laura; you didn't get into a fight in a bar last night. Your sister made up a story. We won't talk about it anymore. Let's talk about you. How have you been living lately? Having a lot of trouble keeping yourself in scotch?

PETER: Not a lot. When Sis's check is late, I sometimes have to swipe a bottle here or there. Nothing serious.

ALAN: Ah yes. There's Sis's check.

PETER: You're not trying to make me feel uncomfortable somehow?

ALAN (*quickly*): Not at all, not at all! Just for a moment there I was wondering how you manage, just to eat and drink. I'd forgotten about Sis's check.

PETER: You'd have lent me money otherwise?

ALAN: Maybe, yes...

PETER: If you're that anxious, man, you don't have to deny yourself the pleasure. I have lots of debts, you see. I owe a bunch of dough to Madeleine, for example.

ALAN: Madeleine?

PETER: Yes, the neighbor on the second floor. You've already forgotten my neighbor on the second floor? My alibi for last night? The one that proves to me you're lying?

ALAN: It must not have been you. It surely was somebody who looks like you. And who was wearing my jacket, besides.

PETER: Your jacket?

ALAN: Yes, the one you swiped from me.

PETER: Oh, you bastard! You gave it to me!

ALAN (*laughing*): Agreed... So her name's Madeleine. And just what can't she do complete yet?

PETER: An Andalousian.

ALAN: And what's that?

PETER: What good is it for you to know? You're not going to talk about it in the business section, are you?

ALAN: Certainly not... it was just a matter of personal curiosity. (*Pause.*) Are you sure she really exists, this Madeleine?

PETER: She exists. Go see for yourself. Knock, go in, and say to her: "Show me the beauty mark on your right thigh." If she's got one, that's Madeleine. And if she doesn't, she's still Madeleine.

ALAN: I see. The sort of woman who arrives in the middle of the night? After you've carefully prepared yourself by the Arabian method. She passes through the wall. Sideways. She enters. But she still doesn't know how to do a complete Andalousian.

PETER: She does now. Besides it isn't at all like that. Our relationship is strictly business. I admit, of course, that she's extended me credit. Quite an accomplishment, wouldn't you say?

ALAN: I think you're quite capable of moving a prostitute with a heart of gold. How did you meet her? You ran into her on the stairs and there were sparks?

PETER: We ran into each other on the stairs and I asked her, "How much?"

ALAN: As sordid as that? You've changed. You used to have such romantic adventures with women. And when no women were there, you made them up, invented them. The Sonia game. Remember?

PETER (*pensive*): The game I'm playing with Madeleine leaves indelible traces.

ALAN (*ironic*): Really? (*Friendly, in a natural tone.*) You changed suddenly, three years ago. Before that, you were a happy guy, you moved about, you saw people. I won't say that you led a "normal" life, because that doesn't mean anything, does it? But at any rate, you led a different life. Something must have happened to you, before your marriage to Laura. The marriage was strange after all. A sort of game maybe, or a refuge, or both. But it didn't solve anything. You continued to burn your bridges, with your friends in particular. Even with Laura, whom you didn't see anymore.

PETER (*interrupting*): Did so. I did see her. I saw only her, and it was absolutely nauseating.

ALAN: So? Did something happen? Don't you want to talk to me about it?

PETER: You're really cute, you know, in your role of charitable friend. Yes, man, I swear you are. A little ridiculous maybe, but not without charm.

ALAN (*after a pause*): Okay. You don't want to talk about it. So let's not. Tell me, why do you call her?

PETER (*violent*): I do not call her!

ALAN: You're sick! I've heard you myself.

PETER (*after a pause*): Have you been sleeping with her for a long time?

ALAN: That's not the issue!

PETER: Sorry to wake you up, too, man. But you realize I had no way of knowing.

ALAN (*agitated*): That's not the issue! It was last week. We were playing poker. At Laura's. It must have been three in the morning... or a bit later... the phone rang.

PETER (*smiling*): And then?

ALAN: Laura picked up the receiver... and handed it to me.

PETER (*same tone*): A real Hitchcock. And then?

ALAN: I already told you.

PETER: Insults?

ALAN: Insults.

PETER: Whore? Slut? Bitch?

ALAN: Things like that... and worse...

PETER: It's very interesting. These phone calls, do they have an effect on your relations?

ALAN (*trying to remain calm*): It was during a poker game! You don't believe me? There were three other people in the room. Of course, we didn't tell them the name of the maniac who was yelling obscenities over the phone... but they heard your screams, too!

PETER (*sweetly*): Do you realize that you've always been attracted by my women? As soon as I had a girlfriend, you'd fall in love with her. First there was my sister, then Sonia... and now Laura! It's rather morbid, don't you think? I know I mean a lot in your life, but still!

ALAN: I don't give a damn about your dumbass women!

(PETER jumps up and hits Alan full force. Prolonged pause.)

PETER (*with a little laugh*): Sorry... but I just can't have my women insulted.

(PETER obviously does not believe what he's saying. He has been looking for an excuse to hit Alan.)

ALAN (*trying to remain calm*): And now what? Do we exchange cards and arrange a duel in the woods?

PETER: Why not? It's as good a pastime as any other! But while we're waiting, let's have a drink.

(PETER pours himself another one. He seems quite pleased to have hit Alan. Strangely enough, ALAN also seemed secretly satisfied.)

ALAN: You must not be as much in control of yourself as you'd like it to seem, because you spend your time hitting people without any reason... like last night. You maybe expected me to hit you back? A nice little brawl to kill time?

PETER: As a matter of fact, that's true. Why didn't you hit me back?

ALAN: I don't beat up on sick people!

PETER: Aha! I'm sick. Oh, I know that you don't mean cancer. Poor guy, what game are you playing? Who sent you here to clown around? Go back to your business section and leave us in peace!

ALAN: Us?

PETER: Yes, of course. Us. The other and I. I and my shadow, the monkey on my back. My dark double. The criminal who lurks within me and comes out at night to alarm good mothers who lie dreaming of vast prairies. You've no doubt remarked that good mothers always dream of vast prairies? It must have some connection with mammary glands, or worse yet...

ALAN (*looking at him dubiously and then*): During the day, it's still okay, at least for now. You show off, you make speeches--to yourself if no one else is around. You have a drink. No doubt you do go out to a restaurant from time to time. You look at shop windows. You help old ladies cross the street. Whatever. You while away the minutes, the hours, and the day passes. But at night, something snaps. Why?

PETER: Indeed... Why?

ALAN: At night you pull stunts that you don't remember the next day.

PETER: Really? And you think that's serious?

ALAN: Do you even know what you do at night?

PETER: I don't have a very precise plan for my nights. For my days either, for that matter. I just take things as they happen. Always drifting along. You know how I am.

ALAN: Can you remember even one of your nights?

PETER: I can remember several. I also have some childhood memories if they would be useful to you.

ALAN (*stubborn*): Last night, for instance? Where were you after they kicked you out of the bar?

PETER (*openly mocking*): No doubt in some church. Right? It's what I usually do after killing somebody in some dive. The silence... the peace... the cool marble against my burning brow. In spite of being an atheist, I long for purity; say man, don't ever forget that!

ALAN: You obviously don't remember. You don't remember anything. That's why you made up this Madeleine, just like Sonia the other time. Listen, Peter, you have to face things squarely.

PETER (*same tone*): That's all I do! All my life, that's all I've done: face things squarely. In profile, they might have looked prettier, but I know my duty, and I resist the temptation of looking at profiles: I face things squarely... directly... like a man!

ALAN (*tired*): Yes, okay... You're joking. You try to get out of it by joking. You've always known how to weasel your way out. And why not, since it works. Since your sister takes care of you and feeds you, your friends worry about you, and I came to... (*He falls silent.*)

PETER: To what? To console me? To offer me a friendly shoulder... and share with me the weight of the world? Here I was, in my cosy little nest, happily preparing myself to confront a new day with resignation and goodwill. A day, you really don't know what a day means until you do nothing. That's when each minute recovers its original density. Are you sure you're not going to be late? I wouldn't want to be the cause, however indirect, of a reprimand from your supervisors!

ALAN: Okay. Alright. I won't insist. (*Pause.*) I don't give a damn about your health, you understand? Doesn't mean a damn thing to me. If you've decided to become an alcoholic, that's your business! Only... after all... why torture Laura? I don't understand.

PETER: She want a divorce? She can have it. People should never get married in the first place. Love can't survive all that paperwork. Not to mention greasy cooking and cavities. And

other things I won't say. The only woman a guy should marry is his mother. That way, he can at least be sure that there'll never be more than one. What was your mother like? No problems there? Wait, let me remember. Your mother... Wasn't she a fat little woman with glasses, and rather stupid? Or maybe that was my mother. As for me, you see, I'm a drunkard--a good-for-nothing, as we say in the country. I could almost be a vagabond if I weren't so lazy, but with my mother, I always behaved like a gentleman. Not one inappropriate gesture. And for good reason. And to think that I was condemned to love that fine woman... but so boring, so boring. I really had trouble getting used to it.

ALAN: Nevertheless you went to her funeral... and all the way back to your hometown at that.

PETER: Yes. Shouldn't I have?

ALAN: I said it like that...

PETER: You said it like that... just to let me know that you aren't fooled, that under by cynical exterior I have a big heart. Actually, you see, I was drunk, and my sister--with the help of Hector, her husband, and Laura--forced me into a car and took me there. Hector, just as proper as you please, was behind the wheel. Dressed all in black, as if he were driving the hearse. I threw up four times during the damn trip. And I swore I'd get even with Laura. Strange, isn't it? Why Laura? Innocence personified! How can you blame the cows for watching the trains go by? But you didn't come here to talk about my family life.

ALAN: Why not?

PETER: Anyway, it's funny. You obviously came here with a particular purpose. Man, I could feel it the minute you came through the door. And after making comments about my nefarious deeds, you seem to expect me to confide in you about something or other. But I don't have a thing to tell you, word of honor. I like you, that's all. You really piss me off, but I like you. You're a revolting little bourgeois radical, but I like you. You're a "leftist" who works for disgusting tabloids. At Saturday night parties, between two waltzes, when you become sentimental--the way non-alcoholics do when they drink--you, yourself, call them the "rotten press." (Why are you looking at me like that? Don't you waltz?) But it doesn't make any difference, your well-ordered little life. Other people might criticize, but I like you. We can't control our feelings. Oh, I almost forgot. You have no taste in clothes, but just the same, I forgive you. If anything, it only makes me like you more. Your jacket, today, is downright ugly, but we'll let it pass. So, I have nothing to tell you. Except that you

lead a stupid life, that you're getting fat, and that for an hour now you've pissed me off for reasons that are murkier than ever. But it doesn't matter; it's a pleasure to see your ugly mug. Have a drink, go on! You should get to the newspaper soused--part of your journalist image from Hollywood movies; they'll appreciate you more for it. Maybe they'll even give you a raise, thrust you into writing editorials. A promotion. You can shake your head: the problems of underdevelopment, the growth rate, the G. N. P.! There's nothing you can't handle! You know. You're on the inside track! Believe me! You should get there soused, cuss out your editor-in-chief--who no doubt deserves it or he wouldn't have the job--and then you go home to bed. Tomorrow you'll write your letter of resignation and you'll take the opportunity to insult the bossman again. But, in a dramatic turn of events, the owner of your rag--and just who is that? Some bank no doubt? Ah, yes, banks... banks are gobbling up everything! In short, the owner of your rag not only refuses your resignation but is so delighted with the way you insulted the editor-in-chief, that they fire him and give the position to you. All the great journalists began their careers like that. You ought to know. Of course, you'll hesitate a moment before accepting, because when you sent your letter of resignation, you had imagined yourself moving in here, to share my life of debauchery and drifting--an old dream, isn't it, you son of a gun? But the attraction of printer's ink and the smell of lead in the early morning will be too strong. You'll drop your old pal, the non-mystical tramp, and you'll happily climb the black marble steps of success! Shit! After that, I need a drink...

ALAN (*delighted*): I don't know if you realize it, but that's almost word for word the speech you made to me almost ten years ago, when I accepted my first job in the "big rotten press."

PETER (*another glass in his hand*): And he extends his big, brotherly hands, to offer me his syrupy friendship. I really don't give a damn! What game are you playing? You want to see me on my knees? You want to drag me across the ground while I call out for help? Once again you're playing the farce of the charitable friend: the devoted, comforting, solid good guy? Poor jerk! Listen, be nice. You see, there's a door over there. You get up, you open it, and you go out. Ok? Come back in a year or two! I'll be pleased to see you. We'll have a drink, we'll talk politics... and it'll be just perfect. In a year or two. But now, I'm bushed. Scram!

ALAN: After all, it isn't Sonia, is it? It's not because of her?

PETER: Oh, shit! What on earth do you mean by that story again?

ALAN: Didn't it all start because of Sonia?

PETER: But if... well, sure. It's because of her. I'm like a tree that's been struck by lightning. Empty. Destroyed. Afterwards, nothing had any meaning. So there. You happy? Then, go away!

ALAN: After all, it isn't because of a woman who never existed? Who was only one of your pranks back then? For a year you had us all dangling about that ravishing woman that none of us had ever seen. We were all jealous. The black-eyed blonde you said you had to protect from the sun. After a year she left and you put a bullet in your heart. Wonderful! What a beautifully sad love story! What a simply marvelous story, until I discovered, quite by accident, that there never was a Sonia! A wonderful hoax. (*For the first time, he's nasty.*) If you think about it, you've gone downhill, Peter. Now all you're capable of inventing are prostitutes next door. You've fallen into neorealism. Or worse yet, you're not inventing a thing and you're sharing Nicole's check with a common whore who screws you once a month and gets a glass of scotch from you for a tip. You're disintegrating, all right, but in a petty way. I never believed that alcohol produced genius, but in your case, it takes away the little bit of imagination that you sometimes succeeded in putting into your life... You're in the process of becoming a shabby lunatic, the neighborhood psychopath who insults his ex-wife over the phone! Alcohol doesn't enhance you; it's simply in the process of making you sick--stupidly, ridiculously sick and aggressive, like a mangy dog... Is that what made you crack, three years ago? The discovery of your mediocrity?

PETER (*pensive*): Take a breath, man, you're going to choke from talking so fast. As for me, like Galileo facing the Inquisition, I can only say: "But she does move." I refer, of course, to Sonia.

ALAN: Sonia? You mean to say that...

PETER: Exactly. I mean to say that. You're jealous, huh, you ugly bastard? A woman you've never seen, doesn't that beat all. You'd like to know all the dirt, rub your nose in it? Have me tell you in detail? Well, I don't want to. I don't want to talk to you about Sonia. Not then, and not now. She was tall and beautiful and she passed through the streets of this city. That's all you need to know. You've always lived by proxy, do you realize that? My love affairs, by proxy. Life and other people's happenings, by proxy--that's the dirty job of a journalist. British, by proxy, with your ugly jackets and your stinking tobacco and your imported shoes... and what else? Incest by proxy with my sister! What else? (*He doubles up in pain, his arms pressed against his abdomen. He turns around slowly. He is visibly suffering.*)

PETER: Your future wife. The woman who, from waiting for you, has developed flaming night fevers... and zits at the corners of her mouth. The woman who languishes, drenched in sweat in her great peasant's bed where she sleeps alone, poor thing, her breasts swollen with the promise of mother's milk... just like old bossy! Can you see yourself, at the wheel of a green station wagon, going for a spirited Sunday drive in the southeastern suburbs? I can. White shirt. Conservative tie. Jacket carefully arranged on a hanger and placed on the clothes hook by the left rear window. A pipe in your mouth. You will say: Angelica, it's time to reinvent parent-child relationships... and off you go! To the western highway. And, by the way, (*Making a leap over to Alan.*) I forgot...

(He punches Alan again.)

ALAN (*surprised and angry, yells*): Holy shit! What in the...

PETER: Oh... oh... oh... I hadn't paid you back for the blow you gave me a few minutes ago...

ALAN (*same tone*): Me? You idiot! You jerking me around?

PETER: Exactly. You couldn't have forgotten it, after all? Hitting the guy who's been your best friend since we were in knee pants, you can't forget that! It really hurt me, you see; that's why I delayed in hitting you back... and when I say delayed, man... what I should say is hesitated. But I felt that you regretted hitting me, like that, without any reason. Then I said to myself: I'm going to hit him back, and then it will be over... cancelled out. You want to have a drink? To seal our refund friendship? On second thought, I don't believe there's poison in the scotch. Just a simple intestinal problem on my part. (*He laughs, still agitated.*)

ALAN (*agitated*): I've about had enough, Peter! I've about had enough of your insults... of your blows... I came... to talk to you about... (*loud*) the only subject that interests you, about YOU! The miserable things you do, when you're soused, and that you don't remember! I understand why you're afraid to face the truth. You're... you're... Do you know what Nicole told me yesterday?

PETER: Somewhere over by the municipal building there's a market where they sell cherries for two cents less per pound...

ALAN (*looking at him for a moment in silence*): One day... a long time ago... We must have been 14 or 15... we were sitting on a bench in the park. We must have been cutting class. You

declared, assertively, that if you decided to, you could become a great criminal. A GREAT CRIMINAL! Do you remember?

PETER (*natural tone*): Oh, no! If one had to remember all the idiot things one said on park benches...

ALAN: Basically what's important isn't this particular declaration about crimes that you could or could not commit... the "anything goes" attitude is rather passé, isn't it? What's important is that you were convinced, and you succeeded in convincing some of us, that whatever field you chose... you were going to do GREAT THINGS! That your life, no matter what, was not going to be a life "like everybody else's." Now you have never, never done anything that wasn't miserable, painfully trivial. Oh, let's talk about your life of "debauchery and drifting"... little slobbery drunkard that they kick out of bars and who blubbers over the trash bins!

PETER (*interrupting, sarcastically*): Alan... Alan... Alan... my word, what a tone, what hatred in your voice...

ALAN (*drily*): Nicole was here yesterday. She told me the story. It was about seven o'clock. She knocked. No one answered. The door was open; she came in. You were sitting on that chair over there (*Gestures.*).. arms hanging at your sides... pale... mouth open. There was vomit on the floor. It stunk. She talked to you. You didn't answer. She went over to you. Then you grabbed her and said horrible things to her. (Those are her words.) It took her a moment to understand what you wanted. YOU DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HER. YOU CALLED HER MADELEINE AND YOU WANTED TO RAPE HER!

PETER: That would really surprise me. That fat cow!

ALAN: Don't even imagine that she was shocked. Don't try to put it in terms of I don't know what incestuous tendencies! Your sister isn't concerned about that. What "the fat cow" is worried about is you. She's sure that you didn't even recognize her. You looked at her without seeing her. You tried to rip her dress. She had to defend herself... she shoved you away... oh, not very hard, but you fell down. She stayed an hour watching you, sprawled on the floor, livid, like a corpse. Then you started snoring peacefully. So she got up. Are you listening? She got up. Cleaned the room and--irony of ironies--left you a bit of money on the table before going home. (*PETER smiles. ALAN, furious, yells.*) Don't you believe me? Oh, that's too easy! Call her! Go ahead! Call her, if you've got the guts!

PETER (*after a pause; he's shaken but almost manages to hide it*): Why did you come?

ALAN (*resuming his tone from the beginning*): To talk a bit with you. About everything and about nothing... about life passing by... about monotonous, ephemeral days... About nostalgia for seaside cliffs and the impossibility of accepting things as they are and the impossibility of changing them... Do you recognize yourself?

PETER (*tired*): Not really.

(*Pause.*)

ALAN: You shouldn't drink.

PETER: I know. I shouldn't drink.

ALAN: Of course we both know now, you and I, that we had too many illusions for you. But even so. Alcohol is turning you into an idiot.

PETER (*in his sarcastic tone from the beginning*): Oh, we mustn't exaggerate. I can still count to five.

ALAN (*once again turning nasty*): A retard, if you prefer.

PETER: I certainly do! It's much nicer, retard than idiot...much nicer... It has a country sound.

ALAN: So?

PETER: So what?

ALAN: Don't you have anything to say?

PETER: Good God, no. What do you want me to say? It certainly isn't my fault if for years you thought the world revolved around me, is it? Now you're disillusioned... and angry with yourself... I quite understand, but whose fault is it? I ask nothing of you, Alan, NOTHING. I've never asked you for a thing. No doubt that's what makes you sick, isn't it?

ALAN (*rancorous*): Do you remember Nicole's visit yesterday?

PETER (*sighing*): Why did you come?

ALAN: I think that's clear enough.

PETER: As a matter of fact, not very. Even when you try to make me believe that you want to protect my sister and my wife.

ALAN: She's not your wife anymore!

PETER: No, oh no! Thank God! I threw her out the door, kicking her behind all the way. And that's what I'm going to do with you in a minute.

ALAN: And what good will that do you?

PETER: None. Just for pleasure. I like kicking people. What is it you propose?

ALAN: How's that, what I propose?

PETER: I feel that you have an important proposition to make to me.

ALAN: No proposition. (*Sarcastic in turn.*) I came to inform you, as a friend, that alcohol isn't doing a thing for you, that you're making pitiful phone calls at night... and all the rest.

PETER (*interested*): And what's the rest?

ALAN: All the rest... all that you do drunk and that you forget afterwards.

PETER: I do a lot a things drunk that I forget afterwards?

ALAN: We've talked about some of them. Because I imagine that you weren't very lucid when you assaulted Nicole?

PETER (*same tone*): I assaulted whom?

ALAN: Are you kidding me?

PETER: No, no, I swear. It's just, you see... I have to tell you something. I... how should I say? For some time now, I forget everything. You think it's the alcohol?

ALAN: If you're going to act like that, I might just as well leave.

PETER (*drily*): I've already fogotten that you came.

(ALAN crosses to the door but stops. He can't leave. He still has a trump card to play. He comes back toward Peter.)

ALAN: Laura is *really* going to divorce you.

PETER: That's good.

ALAN: I advised her to record your telephone calls. That should facilitate the divorce. She bought an answering machine.

PETER: They say they're very useful.

ALAN (*ambiguously*): You don't need anything?

PETER: I don't need anything.

ALAN (*same tone*): Are you sure?

PETER: You want to give me a present?

ALAN: No. I'd like to show you something.

PETER: Is it really necessary? I wouldn't want you to be late for work.

ALAN: Cut it out. Listen to this. I'm sure it will interest you... I assure you that I can't wait to see the face you'll make...

(He turns on the tape recorder. We hear two voices, talking on the telephone. One is obviously Alan's [Voice I]. The other might be Peter's.)

VOICE I: Hello... Hello... Who's on the phone? (*Pause.*) Hello! (*Pause.*) Is this a joke? (*Pause.*) Hello?

VOICE II: Alan?

VOICE I: Yes.. Who is it? *(Pause.)* Hello? *(VOICE II mutters something incomprehensible.)*
Hello? I don't understand... Who's on the phone?

VOICE II: Peter.

VOICE I: Peter? What is it?

VOICE II: I have to talk to you. Something terrible has happened to me.

(PETER, in a brusque gesture, throws the tape recorder against the wall.)

ALAN *(ironic):* That bad?

PETER: Get the hell out!

ALAN: The evidence is there. Recorded. All your crap...

PETER *(interrupting):* Get the hell out! Dirty bastard!

ALAN *(backing away slowly toward the door):* I'm leaving you. You can listen to it later. Alone.
You'll see. It's even worse than everything I told you, worse than everything you imagine...

PETER: That's it, already! Get out and leave me in peace! Your shenanigans leave me cold. Don't forget to close the door on your way out.

ALAN: I'm going, I'm going. I'm sure you'll listen to the tape. You couldn't resist. And then, old pal, all the scotch in the world won't be enough.

PETER (*sincere*): Why are you doing all this? Why are you going to such trouble? Why are you trying in such a ridiculous way to get even?

ALAN (*snickering*): Guess.

(He leaves, slamming the door. PETER remains motionless on the bed, looking at the little tape recorder lying on the floor. Then, with a sigh, he gets up, goes over to the tape recorder and picks it up as the lights go down.)

THE END

Carlos Semprun–Maura (b. Madrid 1926 , d. Paris 2009) was a bilingual writer of novels, essays, newspaper articles, and plays. His father served as a diplomat for the Spanish Republican government during the Civil War; the family hence left Spain in 1936. Semprun Maura returned clandestinely during the Franco years to fight against the dictatorship. With the advent of democracy, his work in Spanish appeared in major publishing houses and newspapers in his native land. His theatre, however, was written in French.

Reluctant to spend his energies trying to get his work staged, Semprun–Maura created most of his plays for the distinguished radio series "France Culture". Many of these texts deal with Spanish themes. The play included in this issue, *Le Bleu de l'eau de vie (Brandy Blues)*, however, relates to French reality. Directed by Roger Blin in 1981, the play was a critical and audience success. It opened at the Petit Odéon, then moved to the Petit–Montparnasse in 1982. It has been staged at Off–Avignon Festival and in 1990 was revived in Paris.

Two friends, who had shared leftist ideals in their youth, meet again. One has seen the idealism of 1968 evaporate in a materialistic world; the other has sold out to the establishment. In

2008 Semprun Maura was invited by various periodicals to return to that famous Paris spring on its fortieth anniversary.

Phyllis Zatlin is professor emerita at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her areas of specialization include contemporary theatre and play translation. Among her translations from Spanish and French that have been performed and/or published are works by J.L. Alonso de Santos, Jean Bouchaud, Jean-Paul Daumas, Eduardo Manet, Francisco Nieva, Itziar Pascual, Paloma Pedrero, and Jaime Salom. Her book *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation* has recently been translated to Korean. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild and the Sociedad General de Autores y Editores.

