A TRANSLATION OF "THE DOG WHO SAW GOD,"
"THE SEVEN MESSENGERS," AND "THE SEVEN FLOORS"

BY DINO BUZZATI

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THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Dino Buzzati was born in 1906 and has published several novels as well as other collections of short stories. *Il Deserto dei Tartari* (The Tartar Steppe) is his only novel that has been translated and published in English. His other works are: *L'invasione degli Orsi in Sicilia* (The Invasion of the Bears in Italy), *Il Crollo della Baliverna* (The Ruin of the Constable), *Il grande Ritratto* (The Great Portrait), *Un Ancora* (One More), *Il Colombre* (The Pigeon), *In quel Preciso Momento* (In that Precise Moment), and *Un Caso Clinico* (A Clinical Case).

Dino Buzzati is a well-known Italian writer who can easily take a place with Verga, D'Annunzio, and Moravia as one of the most prominent and representative of contemporary authors in Italy. He, like many other Italian writers, is most adept at the novella or short story, and his themes are basically existential. His characters are often overpowered by fear and insecurity; and one is struck by the similarity between the world they inhabit and that of Kafka's characters, for alienation is one of the central issues in his stories.

Buzzati's characters undergo a frightening series of experiences which lead to feelings of insecurity and estrangement. They often begin to notice the disparity between actions and words in those around them; their world seems devoid of cause-and-effect relationship; there are no visible reasons for the actions of others, and they begin to suspect that
even their reasons for acting are invalid. Their world becomes absurd and unreal, and they are overcome by exhaustion, and helplessness, as they feel more and more incapable of affecting any real change in their situation or even of communicating their condition.

The first story, The Dog Who Saw God, is both cynical and humorous. The opportunism of the central character, the baker, is exposed very skilfully as he and the other inhabitants of the city of Tis become enslaved by their secret fear of a dog, who they think is, in some sense, divine. Afraid to admit their fear to each other, but also afraid to renounce allegiance to the dog, they find themselves imprisoned by their superstition and ignorance. There is an interesting conflict in the story between the people's reverence for the dog and their shame that they would alter their behavior merely because of a dog.

The second story, The Seven Messengers, is the shortest of the three stories and is most characteristic of Buzzati. It is very similar to The Tartar Steppe. The central character leaves home and security behind to enter a world that gradually becomes so strange it seems unreal. The hero is finally overcome by exhaustion, feeling totally estranged from all that seems familiar.

The Seven Floors has much in common with The Seven Messengers in that the action in both leads to gradual alienation. The hero in this story is subjected to the world inside a famous hospital. He is well cared for, and sincere attempts
seem to be made to cure him. Incidents become gradually more disturbing, however, as he is moved and handled against his will and in violation of his original doctor's orders. He becomes frustrated and eventually resigned, as he is totally unsuccessful in having any voice in how he is to be treated or what floor he is to be placed on.

Buzzati's style is difficult to duplicate in English because of its simplicity. He presents details without comment and often in a very abbreviated form. Much of the dialogue contains subtle irony and sarcasm; this is sometimes less strong in translation.

Dino Buzzati, despite the shortcomings of this translation, needs to be made available in English because any study of modern Italian literature is incomplete without him. The stories in this translation are taken from: Sessanta Racconti (Sixty Stories) by Dino Buzzati (Verona, Italy, 1968).
THE DOG WHO SAW GOD

Simply for pure malignancy the old, rich baker of the City of Tis bequeathed his estate to his nephew Defendente Saporri with one condition; for five years, every morning, he was to distribute to the poor, in a public place, fifty kilograms of fresh bread. The idea that the huge nephew, the first of misbelievers and blasphemers in a country of excommunicates, would have to dedicate himself, in full view of the public, to such a good deed, must have given the old uncle many secret laughs before he died.

Defendente, the only heir, had worked in the ovens since he was a boy, and he had never doubted that the bakery would go directly to him. That condition exasperated him. But what could be done? Disregard this opportunity to enjoy the grace of God? The baker felt that would be a bad choice. Because of the local public he chose the entrance hall of the court-yard that opened behind the furnace. Here one could see him every morning at an early hour come to weigh the coarse bread, exactly as the will prescribed. He piled all in a huge basket and then distributed it to the greedy mob of poor ones, accompanying the offering with bad words and irreverent jokes directed at the dead uncle. "Fifty kilos a day," he would say. "He is foolish and immoral."

The executor of the will was the notary Siffolo who would come frequently in the morning at an early hour to enjoy the spectacle, although no one knew of his presence, nor was
it really necessary. No one would have been able to maintain
fidelity to the agreement better than the beggars. In any
case Defendente was able to devise a remedy. The large basket
which held half of the allotted fifty kilos at one time came
to be placed in the shelter of the wall. The baker had
secretly cut a small window in the wall that could not be
noticed when closed. Saporì would personally begin distribution
of bread, then he would go, leaving his wife and a boy to finish
the work. He would say that the oven and the store needed him.
In reality he would hurry to the cafe, place himself in a
chair, open a window on a level with the pavement of the
court-yard near where the basket was placed. Then he would
open the little, straw window in the side of the basket and
take as much bread as was possible. The level in the basket
in this way rapidly went down. But how were the poor ones to
understand? They would all take the bread so rapidly that it
seemed logical to them for the basket to empty quickly.

In the first days, Defendente's friends purposely
awoke early in anticipation of admiring him at his new task.
They would stand in a group at the door of the court-yard and
observe him as they laughed and joked. "How God will repay
you," were their comments. "You are preparing a place for
yourself in heaven. Hooray for our philanthropist."

"Curse the soul of that rotter, that uncle of mine!" he would answer them, throwing the bread into the midst of
the beggars that snatched at the offerings, and he sneered
at the thought of his beautiful trick to deceive those ungrateful ones together with the soul of his dead uncle.

II

In the same summer an old hermit called Silvestro, knowing that there was very little feeling for God in that city settled himself near there. One-tenth of a mile from Tis there was, on a lovely hill the remains of an old chapel made mostly of stone. Here Silvestro located himself, finding water in a nearby fountain, sleeping in a corner away from the main part of the chapel, eating plants and fruit and many days he would climb atop a large rock to kneel and contemplate God.

From up there he could see the houses of Tis and the roofs of the nearer, isolated cottages. But he waited in vain for someone to appear. His warm prayers for the souls of those lost ones went up to heaven without bearing fruit.

Silvestro, however, continued to adore the Creator, fasting and talking nonsense with the birds when he was sad. No man came. One evening it is true, two boys spied him from a distance. He called to them amiably, but they ran away.

III

But at night-time the farmers in the area began to notice strange lights in the direction of the abandoned buildings. It could have been a forest fire, but the light was white and throbbed softly. One of the baker's workers
went one evening out of curiosity to see the light. Halfway there, however, his motorcycle broke down. Who knows why he did not continue on foot. He returned and said that a halo of light poured from the hermit's building and it wasn't a light from a fire or a lamp. Without difficulty the people concluded that it was the light of God.

Also, from Tis on some nights the reflection could be seen. But the coming of the hermit, his extravagances, and then his strange nocturnal light could not shake the indifference of the people who had always regarded religious things from a great distance. In general conversations the topic was discussed as though it had been an accepted thing for a long time. They did not attempt to find an explanation, and the phrase, "The hermit is making the light," became as common as the question, "Will the wind blow tonight or will it rain?"

It was this profound indifference that left Silvestro in perpetual solitude in spite of his sincerity. The idea of making a pilgrimage to visit him would have been to the people of Tis simply ridiculous.

IV

One morning Defendente Saporì was distributing the bread to the poor when a dog entered into the court-yard. Apparently it was a stray beast, very large, tame and with shaggy fur. He squeezed between the beggars in order to reach the basket, got hold of a piece of bread and ran off very quickly. Not like a burglar, but like someone who has come to take that which is his.
"Hey, there Fido, you ugly brute," Defendente howled, inventing a name; and he threw a rock as the dog retreated. "There are already too many beggars here. We don't need a dog on top of them." But the animal was already out of range.

The same scene occurred the following day: the same dog, the same maneuver. This time the baker followed the dog to the street, throwing rocks without hitting him.

The beauty of it was that the dog returned punctually every morning. It was marvelous how the cunning of the dog was never lacking. Because he always knew the right moment, he never really even needed to hurry. The missiles launched at him never reached the mark. Every time there would be a chorus of laughter from the peasants, and every time the baker would fly into a rage.

Infuriated, the next day Defendente placed a club on the ground near the entrance to the court-yard. It was useless, perhaps because the dog mixed with the throng of poor ones who enjoyed the joke and had no reason to want to betray the dog; the dog was able to enter and leave unpunished.

"And also today he has been successful!" advised several beggars who had stationed themselves on the road. "Where, where?" asked Defendente jumping with anger from the hiding place. "Look, look, there he goes!" they indicated, smiling at the misery of the baker which delighted them so.

The dog really had in some way come in and left, taking the bread between his teeth. He was moving off at a loose, disjointed gait, tranquil as one who has a clear conscience.
Would he simply blink at this? No, Defendente would not tolerate these jokes. Why couldn't he follow the dog the next time he came to steal more of the bread. Perhaps the dog is not really a stray, but has a home somewhere; perhaps he has a master from whom Defendente could be reimbursed. Without trying something new, nothing would happen. In order to try and take care of that ugly dog, Sapori had not gone into the cafe until it was too late during the last few days. As a result, he had obtained much less bread than usual, and this was costing money.

Even the attempt to outsmart the beast with poison bread, left at the entrance to the court-yard, had no success. The dog had sniffed it for an instant and immediately had gone to the basket, or at least that is what the reports had been.

V

In order to be sure of success Defendente Sapori had placed a bicycle and a gun down the road a short ways near a doorway: the bicycle to follow the beast and a gun to kill him if there was no master to reimburse him. It only hurt him that that morning the basket would be emptied for the benefit of the poor only.

From what direction and in what way did the dog come? It was certainly a mystery. The baker with his eyes wide open was so far unsuccessful in even seeing him. The dog passed later than usual placidly with the bread between his teeth. From the court-yard the sound of laughter reached him.
The baker waited, thinking that after a short time the dog would have to stop. He thought also that after a brief distance he would turn in at some house. And instead nothing. His bread between his teeth, the dog trotted along the wall and did not stop for even a sniff or to relieve himself. Where, then, would he stop? Saporì looked at the gray sky. It would not amaze him at all if it began to rain, he thought.

They passed the small piazza of Saint Agnese, the elementary school, the station, and public lavatory. They were now at the edge of town. Finally they were past the football field and came into the country. Ever since they had left the court-yard the dog had not once looked behind him. Perhaps he did not realize that he was being followed.

Now Defendente had to abandon the hope that the dog had a master who could answer for him. He had to be a stray dog. One of those beasts that infested farms of the area, killing the chickens, chasing calves, scaring the old people and finally ending up in the city spreading filth and disease.

Perhaps it would be best to simply shoot him. But in order to shoot, he would have to stop, get off the bike, and get the gun off his shoulder. It would take too long because the dog without even accelerating his speed would be out of range by that time. Saporì continued the chase.
VI

The dog ran and ran; then the woods began. The dog left the road for a path that cut off to the side and then into another even more narrow but smooth and manageable. How much ground had they already covered? Perhaps eight or nine kilometers. And why didn't the dog stop to eat? What was he waiting for? Or was he taking the bread to someone? Then the dog began to cover the ground more rapidly, and when he turned onto a very narrow foot path, the bicycle could no longer follow. Fortunately the dog had to slow his speed a little because of the steep incline. Defendante jumped off of the bike and continued by foot, but the dog bit by bit outdistanced him.

Already exasperated, he stopped to try and shoot the dog when, on top of a bare slope, he saw a great stone and on top of the stone a man was kneeling. Then he remembered the nocturnal lights, all of that ridiculous hoax. The dog trotted placidly up through a narrow meadow.

Defendante, the gun still in his hand, stopped fifty yards away. He saw the hermit interrupt his prayers and jump down from the rock with extraordinary agility toward the dog, who wagged his tail and who deposited the bread at his feet. Brushing away the dirt, the hermit tore off a small piece and with a smile gave the rest to the dog who quickly carried it away.
The hermit was small and thin, dressed in a kind of frock, his face seemed friendly and not without a childish type of cunning. The baker then went up to the hermit, having decided that it would be worthwhile to make his acquaintance.

"Welcome, brother," Silvestro said, seeing him walk up. "What brings you out here? Perhaps you are out hunting?"

"To tell the truth," Saporì answered harshly, "I am hunting a certain . . . a certain ugly beast that every morning . . ."

"Oh, it is you?" interrupted the old hermit. "So it's you that provides me with this wonderful bread every morning?" . . . "A bread of this quality I did not know I deserved."

"Good? You better believe it's good! Fresh from the ovens . . . I know my trade my dear man . . . but it is not right to steal my bread."

Silvestro bowed his head almost to the ground. "I understand," he said with a certain sadness. "You have a right to complain, but I didn't know . . . I would like to say that Galeone will not go into the city any more . . . I will always keep him here with me . . . even a dog should not have to feel remorse . . . You will not see him again, I promise you."

"Good," said the baker a little calmed. "Since it's like that, the dog can still come. Because of my uncle's will I am obligated to give away fifty kilos of bread every day . . . I have to give it to the poor, to those bastards who neither
work nor have skill they could put to use. If one loaf in reality arrives here, I am neither poorer nor richer."

"God will repay you, brother . . . will or no will, you are doing a work of mercy."

"But I do it very willingly."

"I know why you speak like this . . . There is in you men a certain kind of shame . . . It makes you tend to show yourselves to be worse than you really are, and so goes the whole world."

The bad words Giuseppe had prepared did not come up. He was embarrassed, disillusioned and did not feel angry. The idea that he was the first and the only one in all that area who had visited the hermit attracted him. If, he thought, a hermit is what he really is, nothing but good can really come of it. Who, after all, can really see the future? If he made a secret friendship with Silvestro, who knows but someday it might give him a certain advantage. For example, imagine that this old one accomplished some kind of miracle, then the populace would become infatuated with him, from the big cities would come cardinals and prelates, they would organize ceremonies, processions and feasts. And he, Defendente Saporì, the favorite of the new saint, envied by the whole town, could for example become mayor. Why not in the final analysis?

Silvestro then said, "What a beautiful gun you have."

And with a certain grace he took the gun. In this way,
Giuseppe was uncertain how to return to the valley again, because the hermit kept on looking at the gun,

"Aren't you afraid to be walking around with this gun loaded?"

The baker regarded him suspiciously. "I am no longer a small boy!"

"That is true," Silvestro continued, quickly returning the gun. "Is it true that it is not impossible to find a place in the churches of Tis on Sunday? I have heard it said that it is not crowded."

"It is as empty as the palm of your hand," the baker answered with open satisfaction. Then he continued, "We are a little hard!"

"And at mass, how many are there just at mass? You and how many others?"

"Thirty, I would say, on a good Sunday and at Christmas there are about fifty."

"And tell me, are the people of Tis blasphemers, generally?"

"They blaspheme Christ constantly without even bothering to burn a candle for their sin."

The hermit looked at him and bowed his head. "You believe then there are very few that give themselves to Christ."

"Few?" insisted Defendente, sneering inside himself. "They are a bunch of heretics . . ."
"And your children. You take them to church often . . ."
"I have dedicated them to Christ, confirmation first
and communion second."
"Really, even communion."
"Yes, also communion. My second oldest understands
quite well, but the youngest . . ." But here he interrupted
himself, thinking that he might say something too gross.
"You are then a wonderful father," the hermit commented
gravely. (But why did he laugh like that?) "Return to me again
brother, and now go with God," and he made a small gesture as
though to bless him.

Defendente, lacking the proper culture, did not know
how to respond. Before he had thought to simply bow slightly
and tip his cap, but now he made the sign of the cross.
Fortunately there was no one there to witness it, with the
exception of the dog.

VII

The secret alliance with the hermit was a beautiful
thing, but as a result the baker lost himself in his dreams
of becoming mayor. In reality there were things which made
it necessary for him to keep his eyes open. Already the
distribution of the bread had discredited him because the
people of Tis felt he was doing it to make up for his sin
and be pure. And now if someone would have seen him make the
sign of the cross; but no one had fortunately. Apparently no
one had followed him on his ride, not even the furnace servant. But he would never be able to really be sure. And the thing with the dog, how was he to solve it? He could not decently refuse him the daily bread, but giving the dog bread in view of his friends would lead them to believe he had some kind of plan for something.

Because of this the next day, before the sun was up, Defendente posted himself near a house on the road leading to the hill. When Galeone appeared, he called him with a whistle. The dog remembered him and came. The baker had the bread in his hand and put it on a piece of wood near him. There under a bench he put the bread and indicated to the beast that here is where he would find the bread.

In fact Galeone came the next day to get the bread on the board. Defendente was not seen, nor did he see any farmers.

The baker went every morning to deposit the bread on the board before the sun was even up. Also the dog, now that the days were getting shorter with the coming of autumn, was easily lost in the early morning shadow. Defendente Saporl lived very tranquilly and decided to once again take back some of the bread destined for the poor, through the small window in the basket.

The weeks passed and winter arrived, bringing a few yellow flowers around the windows and making it common to see chimneys smoking all day. The people wrapped up against the
cold often went for morning walks and often there would be a light skiff of snow on the hill.

One bright and starlit night, from the north, in the direction of the old abandoned chapel, there shone a light like none of the people had ever seen before. In Tis there was an alarm spread through the town. People jumped out of bed, opening their shutters, calling from one house to another, and some gathered in the street. Then when they understood that it was one of the lights from Silvestro's chapel, or nothing more than the light of God come to greet the hermit, men and women bolted their shutters and crawled back under the covers a little disillusioned and cursing the false alarm.

The next day a rumor went throughout Tis to the effect that the hermit had died in the night and some of the men should go up to bury him.

Because the burying was required by law, it was decided that the sexton, a mason and two labourers would go up to bury the hermit, accompanied by the priest Don Tabia, who had simply preferred to ignore the presence of the hermit in his parish. They carried a coffin for the dead man up the hill on a cart drawn by a little, overburdened ass.

The five found Silvestro on the snow, with his arms folded in a cross and his eyes closed, in the manner of a real saint. In front of him sat the dog Galeone, who was crying.
The body was put in the coffin and while the priest recited the funeral prayers they buried him. At the head of the grave they placed a cross of wood. Then the priest and the others returned, leaving the dog to cry above the grave. No one in the whole town asked for any kind of explanation.

The dog did not appear the rest of the day. The morning after when Defendente went to put the bread under the bench, he found the bread still there from the day before. The bread was dry and stale, and ants had already begun to carve tunnels into it. The days passed, and soon Sapori no longer even thought about the dog.

X

But two weeks later, while Defendente was playing cards in the cafe with the chief of police and Bernadis, a young boy looking intently at the street exclaimed, "Ha! The dog." Defendente jumped to the window and cursed silently when he saw an ugly, thin dog going down the street, stumbling from one side to the other almost as if he were looking for something. He was dying of hunger. The hermit's dog, the one Sapori remembered, certainly was bigger and more powerful than this one. But who knows what a beast might look like after two weeks without food. The baker felt he knew the dog. Perhaps after he had remained for a long time above the tomb crying, he had surrendered to his hunger, abandoning his master to go and find food.
"In a short time that one will be dead," Defendente said laughing, to show his indifference.

"Could it not be him?" Lucioni said with a smile, folding the paper.

"Who?"

"Could it not be the hermit's dog?"

Bernadis, catching on a little late, grew strangely animated. "But I have seen this dog before," he said. "I have seen him in this area, and it seems to me that he belongs to Defendente."

"Me? And how would he have become mine?"

"If I am not mistaken, it seems to me that I have often seen him around your bakery shop," said Bernadis.

Defendente felt uncomfortable and said, "There are many dogs running around and he could have been about my shop, but I certainly don't remember him."

Lucioni nodded his head as if in perfect agreement, and then said gravely, "Yes, yes, it has to be the hermit's dog."

"And why," asked the baker, "why then does it have to be the hermit's dog?"

"It all makes sense, understand. The thinness, for example—he stayed several days on top of the grave. Dogs always do that kind of thing...then he became extremely hungry...and here he is in the city."

The baker remained quiet. Soon the beast stopped
at the cafe and for an instant stared at the three men through the glass door. The baker blew his nose.

"Yes," said Bernadis, "I would swear that I have seen him before. More than one time I have seen him at your shop," he continued, looking at Defendente.

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the baker, "but I do not remember..."

With a little smile Lucioni said, "If I had a dog like that I wouldn't trade him for all the world."

"Rabies," said Bernadis, alarmed. "Do you think he is rabid?"

"Rabid! How? But no one would give me a dog like that. A dog who has actually seen God!"

"How has he seen God?"

"Is he the dog of the hermit? Was he not with the hermit when those lights came? Everyone knows what those lights were! And the dog, was he not with him? You think he has not seen them? You think he slept through such a spectacle?" and he laughed loudly.

"Nonsense," said Bernadis. "Who knows what those lights really were? They were something other than God. Even last night I saw them..."

"Last night, you say?" said Defendente with a vague hope.

"With my eyes I saw them. They were as strong as
before, but they were clearer."

"You can never be sure. Last night?"

"Yes, last night, for God's sake. The same identical lights...perhaps God will make the lights again tonight."

Lucioni, with an expression beyond description, said, "And who can say, who can say that the lights last night were not for him?"

"For him, Who?"

"For the dog, surely. Perhaps last night, instead of God in person it was the hermit who came down from heaven. He waw him on top of the grave and said, 'But look at my poor dog...' and then he came down to tell him not to think of it any longer, but that he had mourned long enough and to go and find food for himself."

"But if he is the dog we saw," insisted Bernadis, "I say that I have seen him often at the baker's shop."

XI

Defendente returned now, greatly confused. What a disagreeable development. The more he tried to convince himself that it was not possible, the more they convinced him that it really was the hermit's dog.

There was much to be anxious about. Should he continue to give bread to the dog every morning? He thought,
"If I cart off the provisions, the dog will return to steal the bread in the square, and then, how can I stop him? A dog who, willingly or not, has seen God? And what do I know of these mysteries?"

These were not simple things. First of all, did the spirit of the hermit actually appear to Galeone the night before or not. And what could he have said to him? Could he have bewitched the animal in some way? Perhaps now the dog understands our language in some way. Who knows that someday he won't even begin talking. Perhaps someday Galeone will be telling a great deal about the people of Tis. And he, Defendente, had already been ridiculed enough. Perhaps the dog is about right now, fully aware of the fear that he, Defendente, was experiencing.

Before going inside, Defendente checked the board. The bread of fifteen days was now gone from under the bench. Evidently the dog had come and carried it away, ants and all.

XII

But the next day the dog did not come to get the bread, nor did he come on the third morning. This was what Defendente was hoping for. Silvestro's death destroyed every illusion he had of using their friendship to his own advantage. Therefore, it was now pointless for him to continue feeding the dog. It was because of this that the
baker was happy to see the bread from several days past still under the bench.

He was once again saddened when, after three more days had passed, he saw Galeone again. The dog was walking through the square, but he no longer looked the way he had through the window of the cafe. Now he was beautiful, his legs were straight, he did not sway, his coat was less shaggy, his eyes were alert and he carried his tail well over his back. Who had fed him? Sapori watched him secretly, but the people passed by indifferently as though the beast did not even exist. Before midday the baker deposited a large loaf of bread with a piece of cheese under the bench. The dog did not come to get it.

Day by day Galeone became healthier; his coat began to shine again, and it was brushed smooth like the dog of a gentleman. Someone was taking care of him and perhaps several at the same time. Each one could be doing it without the knowledge of any of the others. Perhaps they were afraid the dog had seen too many things or perhaps they were hoping to obtain the grace of God in this economical way without having to risk the ridicule of their friends. On the surface the people of Tis appeared the same, but perhaps when night fell many were trying to ingratiate themselves with God by offering delicious mouthfuls to the dog.
Perhaps for this reason Galeone no longer came to the bench to get bread; today he probably had already had better. But no one ever spoke of it; even the idea that the hermit had by chance come was soon forgotten. And when the dog took to the street, the glances of the people passed over him as though he was one of those stray dogs who infest all cities of the world. And in silence Defendente worried about how he had had a good idea and now others more audacious than he were seizing the opportunity and using an undeserved advantage.

XIII

Whether he had seen God or not, Galeone certainly was a strange dog. With a politeness that seemed human he went from house to house in the square, the cafe, and the kitchens, staying for some moments without moving, observing the people. Then he went on in silence.

What was there behind those eyes? The people of Tis imagined every probability as Galeone looked at them almost as if he were trying to divine their thoughts. Often people would walk away from the dog, unable to resist. It was common for the people to beat and kick stray dogs, but with this one they did not dare.

Little by little some began to feel that there was a kind of conspiracy going on, but no one had the courage
to speak out against it. Old friends looked each other in the eye, seeking in vain for a silent confession. In fact, everyone looked at each other in the hope of finding an accomplice. But who would be the first to speak out?

Only Lucioni, unflinchingly and without restraint, could bring up what was on everyone's mind:

"Ha! Here is our brave dog who has seen God!" he would announce when he saw Galeone. And he would laugh while he looked at each one present.

The others would usually act as though they had not understood. Pretending to believe different explanations they would doff their caps with an air of congeniality, saying, "These are nothing but stories; it is ridiculous. They are only the superstitions of old women," And they would put an end to the thing as though it were a stupid joke.

However, if Bernadis were there, his reply would always be, "But that is not the hermit's dog. I tell you that he is a dog from Tis. For years he has been around here; I see him on all the Saint's days hanging around the bakery shop."

XIV

One day not long ago, Defendente was in the Cantina for the sole purpose of taking back some of the bread from
the peasants. Outside in the court-yard the shouts of the peasants could be heard along with those of his wife and the shop boy. Defendente opened the grate of the window and the small opening in the basket. His expert hand was soon putting a good deal of bread into a sack at his side. While he was closely involved in this, he saw a dark movement in the shade of the basement out of the corner of his eye. It was the dog.

"Galeone, Galeone," he began to babble in a sweet, amiable tone. "Here boy, here take it..." and he threw a loaf of bread to the dog. But the beast did not even look at it. Just as if he had seen enough, Galeone turned slowly and went out, leaving the baker alone with a horrible feeling of guilt.

XV

A dog who has seen God can probably perceive many things. Who knows what mysteries he has learned? And the people looked at each other as though hoping for some show of support, but no one spoke.

One man finally spoke. "And is this really only something I have imagined?" he asked himself. "Do the other ones really think nothing of it? Or are they merely making a pretense of believing nothing."

Galeone, with an extraordinary familiarity, passed
from one place to another, entering in the stores and shops. When he was least expected, there he would be sitting in some corner surveying the scene and sniffing the air. Even at night, when all the other dogs slept, his shape could be seen outlined against a white wall, with his characteristic disjointed gate. Did he not have a house in which to lay down and go to sleep?

The people no longer felt alone, not even when they were in their houses with the shutters closed. They became used to hearing a rustle in the grass, a soft cautious tread on the gravel of the street or a muted nearby bark. These were the sounds of Galeone, who was not rabid nor mean. He was merely patrolling the city.

"All right, it doesn't matter; perhaps I am mistaken," said the banker after arguing madly with a lady for twenty cents.

"At least for this time I do not want to make a big thing of it. The next time however..." announced the baker's wife. Rather than fire the shop boy she gave him a second chance.

"I think she is in all respects a lovely lady..." concluded Mrs. Birenza, in contrast to what she had said at an earlier time about the mayor's wife.

"Crunch; crunch; crunch" was the noise Galeone always seemed to make as he passed by. When the drunken
men in the tavern heard that sound they would quickly try to sit up straight and appear sober.

Galeone appeared once, not long ago in an office where Federici, the bookkeeper, was writing an anonymous letter advising his boss that Rossi, the accountant, was keeping company with subversive elements.

"I know what you are writing," those two meek eyes seemed to say.

Federici politely motioned toward the door, "Out, out, you beautiful dog, out."

He did not dare to hurl the insults which came to his mind at the dog. He waited with his eyes on the door, listening intently to see if the dog really had left, then, because he thought it prudent, he threw the letter into the fire.

At another time Galeone appeared at the foot of the steps leading to the small little apartment with the beautiful floral design on the front. Soon the steps began creaking under the feet of Guiclo, the gardener, father of five. Two eyes shown in the dark.

"But isn't this the place..." exclaimed the man in a loud voice when he saw the dog, almost sounding as though he were sincerely irritated at the mistake. "In the dark I always make this mistake. This is not the house of the notary!" and he left hurriedly.
The dog would often give a long whine near the wall of the bakery shop at just the right time. After Defendente heard that, he would decide to forget about trying to take some of the bread back for that day and would go to the cafe simply to try and figure out how the dog could know everything. He knew that if somehow the dog revealed his secret, all the inheritance would go up in smoke. On those days, Defendente would return to his shop with an empty sack under his arm.

How long was the persecution to last? Was the dog never going to leave? And if he were to remain in Tis, how long would he go on living? Or was there some way to get rid of him?

XVI

The fact is, that after years of negligence, the church was once again nearly full. At Sunday mass old friends encountered one another.

Some had an excuse ready. Many said that with the cold the church was the only place one could get warm; it has thick walls, etc. And another would say, "Father Tabia is a dedicated man. He promised to give me some seeds from those Japanese snap dragons--you know, those beautiful yellow ones. If he doesn't see me once in a while in church he will think I have forgotten..."
Still another person said, "Do you understand, Mrs. Erminia? I want to make a mantle of imperial lace like that one there on the altar of the Sacred Heart. I cannot take it home with me and therefore I have to come to church to study it... and it is not very simple."

Father Tabia listened, smiling, to the explanations of friends to one another, as they tried to make a semblance of being proper.

There was no one present without an excuse. Signora Ermelinda, for example, was unable to find someone to teach her daughter the music of the Benediction, and so they came to church to listen to it being played by the organist. The new bride made an appointment to meet her mother at church to say that her husband stayed away from home too much. Even the doctor's wife who was walking in the square only minutes before explained that she sprained her ankle and had come into the church only to sit down.

At the pulpit, Father Tabia stood astounded, looking at the huge crowd, trying to find words to say.

On the hallowed ground in front of the church Galeone was taking advantage of a well earned opportunity to rest. At the end of the mass he seemed to note each one of the people coming out of the church. The people slipped quickly away to their houses, but no one was out
of sight of the dog before they seemed to feel his eyes on their back like two points of fire.

XVII

Even the appearance of a dog only vaguely similar to Galeone was enough to give some a start. Wherever there were groups of people, at the market or the public walkways, the dog would seem to go unnoticed, but in secret, when alone, he would be called by affectionate names and offered cakes and other good things to eat.

"Oh, how good it once was!" the men would often exclaim without specifying why. There was no one who did not understand what was meant. The beautiful times were when they were able to be pigs; when they could, for example, stay in bed until midday on Sunday.

Now the shopkeepers used very light paper in measuring out their wares in order to give a fair weight, and the master no longer beat his maid. Venariello, the policeman, slept on the station platform in the sun, wondering if all the thieves were dead. Now no one spouted off with the blasphemy that once was so common, without first looking behind them to see if there wasn't a dog around.

But who dared rebel? Who had the courage to give Galeone some veal with arsenic? This was the secret desire of all. Even providence seemed to side with Galeone.
Someone needed to see that Galeone had an accident.

One night there was a storm with lightning and thunder that almost seemed like it would end the world. Defendente Saporri thought he heard something above the noise of the thunder, below in the square. It must be a thief.

He jumped out of bed, grabbed his gun in the dark, and looked below through the slats of the shutters. There were two odd looking men that were trying to open the doors of the warehouse. With a flash of lightning, he also saw in the middle of the square a big black dog. It had to be Galeone who had come to scare the thieves.

He whispered to himself that this was a grand opportunity, and slowly opened the shutters. He aimed the gun at the dog and waited for another flash of light. From the first shot there was complete confusion. The baker began to holler, "Thief, thief!" as he shot again into the dark.

There was a sound of running in all the houses, then shouts, and opening doors as frightened men, women and children went to help. Then a voice called from the square, "Shame, Defendente, look, you killed a dog."

In this world it is easy to make mistakes, especially on a night like that, and it did seem to be Galeone. Defendente did not even go to see him, stretched
out and still in a pool of water, stone dead. He did not
even move his legs. Defendente came down, simply to see
if the warehouse had been broken into. He said goodnight
to everyone and went back to bed.

"Finally," he said, preparing himself for a
beautiful dream, but he did not close his eyes once.

XVIII

In the morning two boys carried the dead dog away
and buried him in a field. Defendente did not ask about
the dog and the incident seemed to pass without a great
deal of talk.

Who would tell him the facts? That evening the
baker hurried to the cafe where everyone stared at him, but
quickly withdrew their gaze, so that he would not be
alarmed.

"You did some shooting last night, huh?" said
Bernadis, after a few greeted Defendente. "A big battle
at the bakery last night, eh?"

"Who could have known what it was?" Defendente
answered, without giving it any importance. "They wanted
to break into the warehouse, those thieves. I fired two
shots blindly, and those that were there got hit."

"Blindly?" Lucioni said, "And why did you take it
upon yourself to shoot without knowing who or what was there?"
"In that darkness! What do you think I could see? I heard a racket below at the door and I shot into the dark at the noise."

"And you sent a poor dog who had done nothing bad to the other world."

"Oh, all right," Defendente said, sunk in thought, "I killed a dog. Who knows how he got in; to me he was not a dog."

There was a brief silence while everyone looked at Defendente, then Trevaglia, the man who owned the stationery store, moved toward the door to leave.

"Good night, gentlemen." And then, saying each word slowly and deliberately, he said, "Good evening also to you, Mr. Saporri."

"I am honoured," he answered, and turned his back to him. What was the imbecile trying to say? He had done everyone a favor; he had killed the hermit's dog. I freed them from a nightmare and now they stick up their noses. What has become of these people; at one time they really were sincere.

Bernadis, in a very awkward way, attempted to explain: "See, Defendente...some say that it would have been better if you wouldn't have shot the dog..."

"And why, do they think I killed him on purpose?"

"On purpose, or not, they say it was the hermit's
dog and they say it would have been better to leave him be... you know how people gossip."

"And what do I know of the hermit's dog? They want to make me the executioner; they are nothing but idiots," and he tried to laugh.

Then spoke Lucioni, "Be calm, be calm... who said that it was the hermit's dog? Who started this rumor?"

"But they didn't know him," Defendente said, and raised his shoulders.

Bernadis interrupted, saying, "They say it was him, the hermit, in the form of the dog. They say it really was him with a coat of white fur and with those sinister eyes."

"White and black?"

"Yes," answered one of those present.

"Above all, big with a heavy, thick coat?"

"Precisely."

"They say it was the hermit?"

"Yes, in the form of his dog."

"And look there, there is your dog!" exclaimed Lucioni motioning toward the street. "He seems more healthy and alive than before."

Defendente became as white as a statue of chalk. With his disjointed gate, Galeone moved up the street. He stopped for a moment and looked at the men in the cafe,
then he went tranquilly on up the street.

XIX

Why did the peasants feel that each morning they were receiving more bread than usual? Why were the offering boxes of the church, which had remained for years and years without one penny, now overflowing? Why were the children, who until now had missed school at every opportunity, now attending school voluntarily? Why did the grapes stay on the plant until they became ripe and were harvested? Why did the children no longer throw rocks and hard gourds at the old Martino's humped-back? Why these and many, many other things? No one would confess why. The inhabitants of Tis are rustic and simple and never from their mouths could one hear the truth; that they were afraid of a dog. Not that they were afraid of being bitten, but that the dog would judge them badly.

Defendente was like a man eating his own poison. He was a slave. Not even at night was he able to relax and breathe normally. What load the presence of God was to one who did not desire it. And God's presence was not an uncertain thing. He did not stay apart in the church between the incense and the ceiling, but went up and down from house to house in order to convey his message through a dog. A little tiny piece of the Creator; a tiny breath
had penetrated Galeone and through his eyes one could see him judging and taking account.

When would the dog become old? When would he at least lose his strength and be forced to remain quietly in a corner? Immobilized by the years, he would not be able to cause so much annoyance.

And the years, in fact, did pass. The church was full, even on week days. The young girls no longer went along the porches after midnight, laughing with the soldiers. Defendente's old, wicker basket became unbound from use and he bought another one, renouncing the use of the secret little window (he no longer had the courage to take the bread from the window since Galeone was around). And Venariello now slept on the platform of the police station, sunk down in a wicker chair.

The years passed and the dog, Galeone, grew old. He always marched slower with exaggerated stiffness until one day he came down with a special kind of paralysis in his posterior and he was unable to walk anymore.

As luck would have it, the accident happened in the square, while he was asleep on the sidewalk of the church. Below this the ground fell steeply away. The wall cut off the large and small streets and ended at the river. The position was the most privileged because of the unobstructed view and was hygienic because the beast could
take care of his bodily needs below the wall on the sloping plants, dirtying neither the wall nor the square. It was, however, an open position, exposed to the wind and without protection from the rain.

Also, at times, naturally, no one made a show of noticing the dog that howled and barked, upsetting everyone. The sickness of the stray dog was not an edifying spectacle. Those present guessed that it was his strong pains which made him cry out. They felt that an upswing in his courage revived their courage also.

The dog could not move, not even one meter. Furthermore, he would have to be given something to eat under the watchful eyes of everyone. Who, first of all, would have dared to confess a secret alliance with the beast? Who would do this, knowing first of all that he would be exposed to ridicule? Because of this, the hope that Galeone would die of hunger was widespread.

Before dinner the people walked along the sidewalk of the square, speaking of indifferent things like the new dental assistant, the hunt, the price of wood, and the latest film that had arrived in the city. And they skimmed over with their gaze the face of the dog that, panting, hung slightly below the edge of the wall. Their gaze moved above the infirm beast, remaining mechanically on the majestic panorama of the river, so beautiful in the sunset. About
8 o'clock some clouds came from the north; it began to rain and the square remained deserted.

But in the fullness of the night, under the insistent rain, there were shadows along the houses as though the scene were made especially for a dark plot. Timid and shy, some prepared themselves for a fast run to the square. Lost in the darkness of the doorways and entrances, they waited the proper occasion. The lamps at this hour gave little light, leaving vast areas of darkness. How many shadows were there? Perhaps one hundred. They had brought things to eat for the dog but they all would do anything to keep from being recognized.

The dog did not sleep; on the line of the wall against the dark bank of the valley were two green and phosphorescent points. And from time to time there was a brief howling which re-echoed in the square.

It was a long maneuver. The time came to try; the beret of a cyclist let down over the face appeared along the wall. One finally took the risk to reach the dog. No one came out in the night to recognize him; all were already afraid for themselves.

One after the other at long intervals to avoid encountering each other, they deposited something on the wall of the church. And the howls ceased.

In the morning one found Galeone asleep under a
strong, impermeable covering and on the wall near him every
good thing from God: bread, cheese, pieces of meat, even
a bowl full of milk.

XX

The people of the village thought they could revive
the paralyzed dog, but it was only a brief illusion. From
the top of the wall the eyes of the beast dominated a great
part of his appearance. At least a good half of the
inhabitants of Tis found themselves under his control. And
who could know how severe his looks were. Also, the houses
on the outskirts of the village were subject to the
vigilance of Galeone; his voice could be heard even there.
And now, how could they once again take the stature of a
time gone by?

It meant an admission that the dog was the reason
for the changed lives and the confession of those nasty,
secret superstitions that many had had for years.

The same Defendente, the baker, who was excluded
from the vision of the beast did not repress his famous
blasphemy when he thought of the dog's struggle to
recuperate from the window of the cantina.

Galeone ate more now than he had before and, not
moving at all, he became fat like a pig. Who knew how
much more he had eaten. With the first cold, the hope was
again born in some that it would break him. Because the
tarp was torn he was exposed to the wind and he always
seemed to be in a bad temper.

But also at times that malignant Lucioni destroyed
every hope. One night in a restaurant, he told a story of
sorrow. He said that on a night many years ago, his hunting
dog became rabid after having spent the night below the
snow and he had had to help him with a single gun shot.
It made his heart cry even now to remember it.

"And that ugly dog," it was always Bernadis who
touched on the unpleasant arguments, "that ugly brute with
the paralysis on the church wall. that some imbecile
continues to provide for. I say, is there not the same
fear with this ugly dog?"

"But what does it matter if he is rabid," exclaimed
Defendente, "when he can no longer even move himself."

"And who told you that?" hollered Lucioni!
"Hydrophobia multiplies the strength. It would not amaze
me if he began to jump like a deer."

Bernadis said in the interval, "O.K., and so what
now?"

"Oh, I, myself, could not do it. I always bring
along a good friend" and Lucioni pointed to a peasant
behind him.

"You! You!" said Bernadis. "You that has no
children. If you had three babies like me, I am sure you would care to do it."

"I heard what you said. Do you think you will do it now?" The chief of police laid the barrel of a gun on the counter.

XXI

How many years had passed now since the death of the hermit? Three, four, five, who could remember any more? On the first of November a wooden cage to protect the dog was almost ready. Much money was donated and it was becoming evident that this was a business of no little account. This was even being said in the government chambers of the community. And no one had advanced the simpler proposal of killing the dog or transporting him elsewhere.

The carpenter, Stefano, was put in charge of constructing the cage in a way so that it could be attached to the top of the wall. It was painted in red so that it would not clash with the color of the face of the church, which was bright red brick.

"What indecency, what stupidity!" everyone said to demonstrate that the idea had come from the others. The fear of the dog that had seen God was no longer a secret.

But the cage was never used. On the first of
November one of the baker's workers was coming to work at four in the morning, and he always went by the square. He saw at the foot of the wall a black immobile hulk.

"And what has happened now?" asked Defendente, seeing him enter all upset.

"He is dead, he is dead!" blabbered the boy hurriedly.

"Who is dead?"

"That dog, the sick dog...I found him on the ground, he was hard like a rock."

XXII

Did the people of Tis breathe easier? Did their faces show great joy? That annoying piece of God was finally gone, it is true, but now there was much time to think of it. How to begin to live as they had before. In those years the young people had taken a different attitude. The mass on Sunday was, after all, only a form of recreation. And even the blasphemy, who knew how to do it any more, now it was like only a dream, false and exaggerated. It seemed before like it would be a great relief, but instead there was nothing.

And then, if they were to have again the accustomed liberty of before, was it not like confessing the whole thing? There were many hidden difficulties, and now to put
the disgrace of the whole soul out in the sun would be just too much. A town that had changed their lives because of the respect of a dog. Until then they would have laughed at the restrictions.

And in short, where to bury the beast? In the public garden? No, no, never in the heart of the town; the people had had enough of it. In the sewer? The men looked at each other, the one and then the other; no one dared pronounce it.

"You are not considering the regulation," the community secretary noted, saving them from the embarrassment.

Cremate him in the furnace? And then the danger of infection would be avoided. Bury him in the country? But in what part? Who would want to consent? Then they began to question; no one wanted the dead dog on their land.

And why not bury him near the hermit? He was closed in a little casket. The dog who had seen God came, then, to be carried on a cart to the old hill. It was on Sunday and several used the pretense of taking a ride. Six, seven carts full of men and women followed the little casket. And the people forced themselves to be cheerful. Certainly, even though the sun was shining, the field caught in the coldness and the trees without leaves did not make a beautiful sight.
They arrived at the chapel, got down from their carts and went on foot toward the ruins of the old church. The children ran ahead.

"Mama! Mama!" they hollered, looking below. "Hurry! Come and see!"

They hastened past to reach the tomb of Silvestro. Since that day long ago no one has ever returned up there. At the foot of the wooden cross, right on the grave, lay a little skeleton. Snow, wind and rain have worn it down, making it white and delicate like a filigree. The skeleton of a dog.
THE SEVEN MESSENGERS

I had gone to explore the kingdom of my father; day in and day out I went farther and farther from the city, and the letters that reached me were becoming more and more rare.

I had begun the trip when I was scarcely more than thirty years old and soon more than eight years had passed. To be exact it was eight years, six months, and fifteen days of uninterrupted travel. I believed on leaving that in a few weeks I would easily reach the confines of the kingdom. Instead I have continued to always encounter new people, and new lands, and everywhere people speak the same language as I. The people always say they are my subjects.

It sometimes occurs to me that the compass of my geographer is insane and that we are not going south, but simply proceeding continuously in circles. In this way we are not increasing the distance that separates us from the capital city. This could explain the reason why we have still not reached the border of my father's land. Sometimes the doubt torments me that this border does not even exist; that the kingdom simply extends without any limit and therefore no matter how much ground we cover we can never arrive at our destination.

I soon realized while travelling that I was over thirty. Too late perhaps. My friends and even those who I only knew derided my project saying it was a useless way to spend the major years of my life. Actually very few of even my faithful friends consented to my leaving.
Although I was a rash person, I was very concerned with being able to communicate with my dear ones during the trip. Because of this I chose from the horsemen of the escort seven of the best to serve as my messengers.

Unconsciously I believed that to have seven messengers was a bit excessive, but I soon realized that they were hardly ridiculous. Not one of them ever fell ill, nor was caught by robbers, nor ruined one of the horses. All seven served me with a tenacity and devotion that is difficult to equal and can never be adequately rewarded.

To easily distinguish them I arranged their names alphabetically in the following order: Alessandro, Bartolomeo, Caio, Domenico, Ettore, Frederico, and Gregorio.

I did not wait until we were a great distance from my house to use them. I sent them much earlier; Alessandro left at the end of the second day of the trip after we had travelled over eighty kilometers. The next evening, in order to secure continuous communication for myself I sent the second, and the third the following day, and then the fourth, the fifth, and so on. I did this consecutively until the evening of the eighth day when Gregorio was to leave, but the first had not yet returned. He reached us on the tenth evening while we were staying at a camp for the night in an uninhabited valley. I realized then that Alessandro's speed was less than what we had anticipated. We had thought that proceeding alone, with one of the best horses, he would be
able to cover a distance twice ours in the same time; instead, he had only been able to make time and a half. In one day we advanced forty kilometers and he covered seventy, but no more.

The others were able to cover only the same amount. Bartolomeo left for the city on the third evening of the trip. He rejoined us on the fifteenth. Caio left on the fourth and returned on the twentieth. It was soon evident that it was only necessary to multiply the day of departure by five to know when the messenger would return.

As we went farther from the capital, the time between departure and arrival became longer and longer. After fifty days of travel the interval between one arrival and the next naturally began to lengthen. At first I had seen them arrive about every five days. This interval soon became twenty-five, and in this way the voice of my city seemed to be always getting more and more feeble. Before long many weeks were passing without any word.

After we had been travelling for six months and had already crossed the Fasani mountains, the interval between arrivals increased to better than four months. Now they brought me distant notices in envelopes crumpled and stained with moisture from the nights spent in the open.

As we proceeded further, I tried vainly to persuade myself that the passing clouds above me were the same as those of my home, that the sky above the distant city was not different than the blue dome which hung over me as a child,
that the air was the same, the gusts of wind were no different, the voice of the birds was no different, and I was simply making them seem strange.

Forward, forward you vagabonds. We will go together across the plain, I said, telling myself that the confines cannot be far. I incited my men not to rest and not to talk in a discouraged tone. Four years had already passed since my parting. What an unending job. The capital, my house, and my father were made strangely remote, so that I almost ceased to believe they existed. Twenty months of silence now passed between the successive appearances of the messengers. They brought me curious letters yellowed from time. In them I found forgotten names, ways of speaking that are unusual, and sentiments that I cannot understand. The following morning, after a solitary night of rest, while we began moving again, the messenger departed in the opposite direction taking to the city the letters I had spent a good deal of time preparing.

Now eight years and a month have passed. This evening I was eating alone in my tent when Domenico entered. He was smiling even though his face was twisted with pain. It has been almost seven years since I have seen him. For all this time he has traveled across prairies, woods and deserts, changing horses who knows how many times to bring me that packet of envelopes that now, for the first time, I do not even have the desire to open. He has already gone to sleep and will depart again tomorrow at dawn.
He will depart again for the last time. In the notebook I have calculated that if all goes well, I continuing my journey and he his as we both have been, it will not be possible to see Domenico again. I now am seventy-two; I am beginning to feel tired, and it is probable that death will get me first.

About twenty-four years earlier Domenico unexpectedly came on the fires of my camp one night and simply asked why I had covered so little ground since his departure. Like this evening the good messenger entered my tent with the yellowed letters of the year, full of absurd notices of a time already passed. He stopped at the threshold of my tent, between the two soldiers with dead torches, immobile, looking at me in the same way as I sat on my straw bed.

Still I want you to go Domenico, and do not tell me I am cruel. Take my last salutation to the city where I was born. You are the survivor binding me to the world that at one time was also mine. The most recent messages have informed me that many things have changed, my father is dead, the crown has passed to my older brother, I am considered lost, and they have constructed tall buildings of marble where earlier there were oaks, under which I used to go and play alone. But it will always be my old country.

You are the last tie I have with them, Domenico. The fifth messenger, Ettore, will reach me, God willing, between one year and eight months; it will not be possible then to
depart again because there will not be enough time to return to the city. After you, then silence, Oh Domenico, it is even worse that finally I will not see the longed for confines.

I suspect that the frontier does not exist; at least in the sense that we are used to thinking of it. There are no walls of separation, not in the dividing valleys, nor in the mountains that stop the passage. Probably I passed the frontier without even knowing it, and I will continue to go forward ignorantly.

Because of this I intend for Ettore and the other messengers after him, when they have reached me again, to no longer take the road back to the capital. I want them to go before, to precede me, in order that I may know beforehand of that which awaits me.

An unusual anxiety has begun to bother me at times in the evening, and it is no longer regret because of the joy I left, as I had felt in the first part of the trip. It is above all an impatience to see the unknown ground toward which I direct myself.

I have gone noticing, and until now have confided to no one, noticing that little by little as we advance toward the improbable goal an unusual light shines in the sky which has never appeared to me before, not even in my dreams. Like the sky, the plants, the mountains, and the rivers that we cross seem to be made of a different essence than that of home. Even the air is strange and seems to foretell things which I do not even know how to explain.
A new hope draws me further on tomorrow morning toward those unexplored mountains that the darkness of the night is hiding. Once again I will break camp, while Domenico disappears over the horizon to take my useless messages to the very distant city.
After a full day of traveling by train Giuseppe Corte arrived one March morning at a city where there was a very famous hospital. He had a slight fever, but he wanted just the same to walk the street from the station to the hospital, carrying his small bag.

Even though he had only a mild sickness, Giuseppe Corte had been advised to turn himself in to the celebrated sanatorium where nothing was treated but this single malady. There was a very excellent medical staff and the most up-to-date and efficient equipment.

When he saw it from a distance, he recognized it because he had seen it in a public newspaper. Giuseppe Corte was highly impressed. The white seven story building marked off in regular continuous lines gave an appearance vaguely similar to a hotel. Surrounding the building was a wall of high trees.

After a general examination, before a more meticulous and accurate examination, Giuseppe Corte was put in a gay room on the seventh and highest floor. The windows were clear and clean as were the walls, the chairs were of wood and the cushions were recovered in gay colored cloth. The view opened on one of the most beautiful quarters of the city. All was tranquil, hospitable, and reassuring.

Giuseppe Corte put himself quickly to bed, and, turning on the little lamp above the pillow, he began to read a book that he had brought with him. After a short
time an orderly came in to ask if there was anything he wanted.

Giuseppe Corte did not want anything, but he purposely began a conversation with the young man, wanting information about the famous hospital. In this way he learned of the strange characteristics of the hospital. The sick were distributed floor by floor according to the seriousness of their illness. The seventh, that was the highest floor, was for the lightest cases. The sixth was for the cases which weren't serious, but at the same time were not to be neglected. At the fifth floor they cured the somewhat serious afflictions, and the order followed this organization from floor to floor. On the second floor were the extremely grave cases, and on the first were those for whom it was useless to hope.

This singular system above all quickened the service, but also prevented one slightly sick person from being disturbed by the nearness of another in agony, and it guaranteed a homogeneous atmosphere on every floor. On the other hand, every cure could be effected in a perfectly graduated manner.

From this he derived that the sick were divided up into seven progressive classes. Every floor was like a little world by itself, with its particular rules and with its special traditions. Also in this same manner every floor was entrusted to a different doctor. They were all very similar, but with
some precise differences in their methods. The general
director, however, ran the institute with a unique and
fundamental direction.

When the orderly had left, Giuseppe Corte seemed to
sense that the fever had disappeared. Once again he turned
to the window and looked out, not to observe the panorama of
the city, even though it was new to him, but in the hope that
he would discern, through the windows, other sick ones on the
lower floors. The structure of the building, with one wing
facing the other, permitted one to take general observations.
Above all, Giuseppe Corte concentrated his attention on the
windows of the first floor that appeared to be a great
distance from him, and seemed to him to be askew. But he
could not see anything of interest. Over most of the
windows the grilled shutters were tightly barred.

Corte soon saw that at a window to the side of him a
man was looking out. The two looked at each other a long
time with looks of sympathy, but they did not know how to
break the silence. Finally Giuseppe Corte found the courage
to say, "Have you also been here for just a short while?"

"Oh, no," the man replied. "I have been here two
months already. . . ." Silence followed these last remarks
and then, not knowing how to continue the conversation the
man went on, "I was looking below for my brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes," he explained patiently. "We entered here
together, into this lonely, strange house, but my brother has
gotten worse and I think he is already at the fourth."

"At the fourth what?"

"At the fourth floor," he explained, pronouncing the two words with a certain expression of commiseration and of horror, that left Giuseppe Corte more than slightly amazed.

"But is it all so very grave on the fourth floor?" he asked cautiously.

"Oh, God," sighed the other slowly shaking his head. "I am no longer so desperate, but there is little reason to be happy."

"But then," spoke up Giuseppe, with an involuntary smile like one who has narrowly avoided a tragedy that he had not known of. "But then if on the fourth floor there are the very grave cases, what then do they put on the first floor?"

"Oh, on the first floor are the ones who are definitely dying. Down there the doctors no longer have anything to do. There is only the priest who does any work. And naturally... ."

"But there are very few on the first floor," Giuseppe Corte interrupted, as though he were permitting himself a certain confirmation. "Almost all the rooms are closed down there."

"There are few there now, but yesterday morning it was full," answered this unknown man with a subtle smile. "Of those put down there, some are soon dead. Don't you see that on the rest of the floors all the shutters are open. But excuse me," he turned around, "it seems to me that it is beginning to get cold. I will return to bed. Good-by and good health to you."
The man moved from the window sill and the window banged shut, then he turned on a light for himself. Giuseppe Corte stayed a while longer at the window, looking at the shutters on the first floor. He looked at them with an intense morbidity, trying to imagine the secret gloom of that terrible first floor where the sick ones were confined to die. He felt relieved to know that he was so far from there. The darkness of evening soon descended on the city and one by one thousands of the windows of the sanatorium became illuminated. From a distance it would be possible to mistake it for a building where a great party was being held. Only on the first floor, down below the wall, were there many, many windows that remained dark.

The result of the general medical exam reassured Giuseppe Corte. He always was inclined to expect the worst. He was already prepared to receive a severe prognosis, and it wouldn't have surprised him if the doctor had told him that he must be assigned to a lower floor. His fever in fact had given no hint of vanishing in spite of the fact that his general condition remained very good. Instead the doctor gave him cordial and encouraging words. There was a beginning form of sickness, he said, but it was light and in two or three months all would probably be passed.

"And therefore I will remain on the seventh floor?" Giuseppe Corte had asked at this point.
"But of course, naturally!" the doctor had replied, cordially putting one hand on his shoulder. "And where did you think you would go? To the fourth perhaps?" he asked smiling, as though he were alluding to a most absurd idea.

"It is better like this, it is better like this," answered Giuseppe. "You know when one is sick one tends to always imagine the worst."

Giuseppe Corte, in fact, remained in the room to which he was originally assigned. He came to know some of his companions of the hospital, in those rare afternoons when he was allowed to get up from his bed. He followed scrupulously the doctor's orders. He did everything to rapidly grow better, but in spite of his efforts his condition seemed to remain the same.

Ten days had passed when Giuseppe Corte was visited by the head doctor of the seventh floor. He had come in a friendly manner to ask a favor. The day before yesterday a lady with two small children had entered the hospital. Two rooms were empty besides Giuseppe's, but she wanted the third. Therefore would he not consent to transferring to another room that was very similar?

Giuseppe Corte, not wanting to make difficulty for anyone, consented to the change. He might like the change and even get a more agreeable nurse, besides for him one room was the same as another.
"I thank you from my heart," said the head doctor with undisguised reverence. "From a person like you this cavalier attitude does not surprise me. In about an hour, if you have no objections, we will proceed with the relocation. You realize that you need to go down to the next floor below," he said in a tone that seemed to imply he had merely forgotten a minor particular. "This is because on this floor there are no other rooms open. But this is absolutely a temporary situation," he hurried to specify, seeing that Giuseppe Corte had raised himself to a sitting position with his mouth open in an attitude of protestation, "an absolutely temporary situation. When there is another free room, and I believe it will be in two or three days, you can return to the top floor."

"I must confess," said Giuseppe Corte, smiling, so that he would not appear to be a baby, "I must confess to you that I don't particularly like a relocation of this kind."

"But this relocation does not have a medical reason; I understand very well what you are saying. It is only a courtesy for this lady who would rather not be separated from her children. For charity," he said smiling openly again. "Do not think that there is any other reason."

"I do not," said Giuseppe Corte, "but it seems to me to be a bad omen."

Giuseppe passed to the sixth floor in this manner, and even though he understood that this relocation did not correspond with a change for the worse in his condition, it
discomfitted him that between him and the normal, well people there hung an obstacle. On the seventh floor, the floor of arrival, there was, in a certain way, a greater trust among the people. There one could almost consider himself in an extension of the normal world, but on the sixth one entered into the more authentic atmosphere of the hospital. The attitude of the doctors, of the sick, and the way the symptoms of the sick were read were very different. There one could find assembled some of the truly sick, even though they were not in a really grave condition. From his first conversations with those nearest him in the room, with the personnel and with the orderlies, Giuseppe Corte was told that in that area the seventh floor had come to be considered a joke reserved for sick dilettantes, affected more by a whim or caprice than anything else. It was only on the sixth floor they said, that the hospital really began.

Giuseppe Corte soon was made to understand that for him to return to the seventh floor would be extremely difficult. Even though according to the severity of his disease this was the floor he should occupy, he was certain to encounter some difficulty in trying to return here. In order to return he had to set in motion a very complex machine, and he had a very minimal amount of force. There was no doubt that if he had not whispered something, no one would have thought to transfer him again to the higher floor of the "almost well."

Giuseppe Corte decided that he would not change his purpose by giving in to the pressures of a well-established
custom. To his companions in the same area he spent a great deal of effort to specify that he found himself with them only for a few days and that he had voluntarily come down to their floor as a favor to a lady. He also explained that as soon as a room was free he would return above. They listened to him without interest and showed very little conviction.

Giuseppe's conviction found confirmation in the new doctor. He also admitted that Giuseppe Corte could very well be assigned once again to the seventh floor. The doctor said that his case was absolutely only a slight one, and he gave him many definitions to explain the importance of this, but in reality if he stayed on the sixth floor Giuseppe Corte would perhaps be able to receive better care.

"Let us not begin with these stories," Giuseppe interrupted intentionally at that point. "You told me that the seventh floor is my rightful place, and I want to return there."

"No one said anything to the contrary," answered the doctor. "My point was given not as a doctor but simply as a true friend. I repeat to you that your case is a slight one, and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that you are not at all sick. On the other hand, however, I can distinguish from other analogous forms certain major complications. I will explain; the intensity of your sickness is minimal, but considering the amplitude of the destructive process of the cells...." It was the first time that
Giuseppe Corte had heard deep inside himself that sinister expression. "The destructive process of the cells is in the very beginning stages, perhaps it has not even started yet. It tends, however, notice that I say only tends, to strike vast portions of the organism simultaneously."

One day he was told that the general director of the hospital, after holding a long consultation with his colleagues, had decided to make a change in the subdivisions of the sick. The rank of everyone of them -- this was how it was referred to -- came to be lowered one point. He was told that on every floor the sick were to be divided, according to the gravity of their case, into two categories, (this subdivision was to be made effective by the respective doctors and was only for use within the hospital). The inferior of these two categories was to be relocated on a lower floor. For example, the half on the sixth floor with conditions that were considered to have more advanced cases, would have to pass on to the fifth floor, and the sicker ones from the seventh floor would pass on to the sixth floor. The news made Giuseppe happy because in this relocation, his return to the seventh floor could be made more easily.

When the orderly explained this to him, it raised his hopes, but he was in for a great surprisre. It was true that he was to be moved, not, however, to the seventh floor, but to the floor below. For reasons that the orderly could not explain he was put in the "more advanced" class of those on
the sixth floor and because of this he had to go down to the fifth floor.

After the first surprise was passed, Giuseppe Corte went into a fury; he screamed that they had cheated him, that he did not want to hear any talk of another relocation to a lower floor, that he would return to his home, that the orders were orders, and the administration of the hospital could not so impudently change the diagnosis of the doctors.

While he kept on hollering, the doctor arrived to transfer him to the floor below. He talked to Giuseppe to attempt to calm him, saying he did not want to see the fever go up again and that what had happened was at least partially a misunderstanding. He explained once again that if Giuseppe Corte were put on the proper floor it would be the seventh, but he added that with his case there were certain different signs that were entirely unique. In reality then your case could be considered in certain ways to belong on the sixth floor, given the extent of the contagious manifestations. Probably the secretary of direction, that had called just this morning wanting to know the exact clinical position of Giuseppe Corte, had made a mistake in transcribing the order. Perhaps even the directors had read his chart and thought he has a doctor who is an expert, but who is also too indulgent. The doctor in short wanted Giuseppe not to be alarmed and to undergo the transfer without protesting; that which counted was the sickness, not the place in which the sick one was located.
The doctor was not sure how long Giuseppe Corte would have to report for a cure. He had not yet shown any signs of improvement. The doctors of the lower floor had a great deal of experience. He was dogmatic in saying that the ability of the doctors was less on the higher floors. It would be better for him finally, if he would go to the lower floor. The room was above all comfortable and elegant. The view was equally spacious; only from the third floor and below was the view cut off by the wall of trees.

Giuseppe Corte, weakened by the continuous fever, listened to the meticulous justifications with a growing exhaustion. At the end of this discourse he no longer had the energy nor the desire to react in opposition to the transfer. And without further protest he allowed himself to be carried to the floor below.

The only consolation Giuseppe Corte had, and it was a poor one, was that when he found himself on the fifth floor, he realized from the reports of the doctors and from the sick that he was, in that area, the least ill of all. On that floor at least, he was able to consider himself the most fortunate of all. But on the other hand it tormented him to think that now two barriers hung between him and the world of normal people.

The summer went on and the air became very hot, but Giuseppe Corte no longer moved, as he had in the first days, to look out the window. Even though he seemed to know his fear
was nonsense, just knowing how near the first floor was made him shudder, and it was because of this that his shutters were constantly closed.

His condition seemed stationary. After three days on the fifth floor, a kind of eczema manifested itself all around his left leg, and it gave no hint of being reabsorbed in the succeeding days. It was an infection, the doctor told him, absolutely independent of the major sickness. It was a disturbance that could effect the healthiest person in the world. In order to be sure that it would be eliminated in a few days, they would begin an intense cure using X-rays.

"And can you not have the X-rays here?" asked Giuseppe Corte.

"Certainly," answered the doctor amicably. "Our hospital is complete with everything. There is only one inconvenience..."

"What?" inquired Giuseppe Corte with a vague presentment.

"It is inconvenient to find a way to say it," the doctor said hurriedly. "I want to say that the installation for the X-rays is on the fourth floor, and I consider it necessary to treat you three times a day."

"And therefore we cannot do it?"

"Therefore, it would be better, until the eczema is gone, for you to go to the lower floor."
"Enough!" Giuseppe hollered, exasperated. "I have already had enough of going down! If I must go to the fourth, I will not have the treatment."

"It's up to you," said the doctor considerately so as to not irritate Giuseppe, "but how are we supposed to cure you? It is forbidden to go to a lower floor three times a day."

The ugly part of it was that the eczema, rather than vanishing, was slowly growing and getting worse. Giuseppe Corte was unable to find a comfortable position in his bed and continued to toss and turn. This difficulty irritated him for three days until he finally yielded. He spontaneously cooperated, allowing the doctors to use the prescribed cure by consenting to the transfer to a lower floor.

There below Giuseppe noticed, with hidden pleasure, that he was an exception. The other sick ones were unquestionably in a very sick condition and could not leave their beds for even an instant. He instead was allowed the freedom of walking from his room to the treatment room with the compliments and marvel of the other sick ones.

Once again he outlined with precision and a great insistence that his position was a very special one. He was a patient who really should be on the seventh floor, but had come to find himself on the fourth.

When the rash was gone, he intended to return upstairs. He did not have an absolute reason for being there, but was sure that he should really be on the seventh floor.
"On the seventh, on the seventh!" exclaimed the doctor smiling when his first examination was over. "You sick people always exaggerate. First of all, you should be content with your condition. When I see the clinical charts of so many I know that you do not have an exceptionally sad situation. But about this talk of the seventh floor, excuse my brutal sincerity, but there is a certain difference. You are one of the cases which show the least illness, but you are still sick."

"And therefore, and therefore," said Giuseppe Corte, getting himself immediately into a temper, "on which floor would you put me?"

"Oh, God, it is not easy to say when I have only seen you for one short visit. In order to decide that, I would have to run examinations for at least a week."

"All right," insisted Giuseppe, "but before long you will know."

The doctor, in order to placate him, concentrated a moment in meditation, shaking his head again and again, and said slowly, "Oh, God! Only to content you now, but we could in reality put you on the sixth! Yes, yes," he went on as though trying to persuade someone. "It would probably go well on the sixth."

The doctor thought he could make the sickness easier in this way. Instead the expression on Giuseppe's face showed dismay. Giuseppe perceived that this new doctor evidently more able and honest felt that it was evident that he should be placed on the sixth floor, not on the seventh. He realized
that the doctors on the other floors had merely appeased him. This doctor, however, would assign him to the sixth floor and perhaps even to the inferior half of the sixth. The disillusionment exhausted Giuseppe Corte. That evening the fever went up.

The stay on the fourth floor marked the most tranquil period for Giuseppe Corte since he entered the hospital. The doctors were very gentle, attentive and cordial. They remained with him often just to discuss some of the topics and issues of the day. Giuseppe Corte discussed voluntarily his solitary life as a lawyer and a man of the world. He found that he was coming to trust more and more the men of the hospital and that the affairs of the world were becoming clearer to him. He truly became interested in public affairs. Invariably the arguments would always fall back on his malady. The desire for improvement was becoming for him an obsession. The X-rays were enough to arrest the spread of the skin rash but did not eliminate it. Every day Giuseppe Corte talked for along while with the doctor and always tried to demonstrate great strength and well-being during these conversations. It was somewhat ironic that he never succeeded.

"Tell me, doctor," he said one day. "How is the destructive process of my cells going?"

"Oh, what ugly words!" the doctor jokingly rebuked him. "Where did you ever hear them? They are not good, they are not good, above all for a sick one! I do not want to ever hear them again."
"All right," Giuseppe said obediently, "but in this way you are not answering me."

"Oh, I will answer you very soon," the doctor said courteously. "The destructive process of the cells, to repeat your horrible expression, is in your case, minimal. Absolutely minimal. But I would define it as being stubborn."

"Do you want to say stubborn or chronic?"

"Don't make me say that which I have not said. I want to say simply stubborn. Most of the other cases are like this. Light infections often require long and energetic cures."

"But tell me, doctor. When can I hope for an improvement?"

"When? Predictions in this case are most difficult, but listen." He began again after a brief pause for meditation. "I understand that you have a real mania to become well... If I were not afraid of making you angry, do you know what I would say?"

"Tell me, tell me, doctor..."

"All right. I will answer the question in a very clear way. If I was afflicted with this exact same sickness, I would assign myself to this sanatorium, which is probably the greatest in the world, and from the first day I would assign myself to one of the lower floors. I would assign myself directly to the..."

"To the first?" Giuseppe suggested with a strong smile.

"Oh, no! To the first, no!" the doctor answered in an amused way. "Not that!" But to the third or to the second
certainly. On the lower floors the cure is much better. There it is guaranteed that the machinery is more efficient and complete, and the personnel are more competent. You know who the soul of this hospital is?"

"Is it not Professor Dati?"

"Yes, it is Professor Dati, and he is the inventor of the cure that we practice here. He is also the leader of the internal establishment. He is the head doctor between the first and the second floor. It is from there that his leadership is directed. It is my opinion that his influence actually does not go beyond the third floor. Beyond that his orders are sometimes not followed too closely and lose their consistency. The heart of the hospital is below, and below is where you must go if you want the best care."

"But in short," said Giuseppe Corte with a trembling voice, "then you are advising . . . "

"I want to add one thing," the doctor continued unperturbed. "I will add that in your case particularly you need to pay close attention also to your eczema. It is a thing of no importance in the beginning, but is above all annoying and in the long run may destroy your morale. And you know how important serenity of spirit is to achieving a cure. The application that I have made of the X-rays has been only halfway successful. The reason? One could say that it is simply a severe case, but it could also be said that the rays are not intense enough. Moreover,
on the third floor the ray machines are much more potent. The probability of curing your eczema would be much better then; understand that one the recovery has begun, the most difficult part is done. When you begin to get up once again, it is then difficult to go backwards by getting worse. When you feel for sure that you are better, nothing will stop you from going up again from us or even higher still. After us, you could go to the fifth, the sixth, even the seventh."

"But you think this could accelerate the cure?"

"But there can be no doubt. I have already told you what I would do if I were in your shoes."

Discourses of this kind the doctor carried on every day with Giuseppe Corte. The time finally came when the sick Giuseppe, tired from trying to cure the eczema, notwithstanding his instinctive reluctance to go down, decided to follow the advice of the doctor and transfer himself to a lower floor.

He noticed immediately that there was a certain gaiety among the doctors, and among the orderlies, as though there was down there a great pleasure taken in curing the sick. It followed that day by day this happiness became greater, and Giuseppe Corte, out of curiosity, asked the orderly why they were all so happy.

"Oh, you don't know?" answered the orderly. "In two days we are going on vacation."

"How are you going on vacation?"
"But yes! For fifteen days the third floor will be closed and most of the personnel will go away to enjoy themselves. The rest will be sent to various floors."

"And the sick? What will become of them?"

"It is very simple. From two floors we will make one only."

"How? Will you join the sick of the third and of the fourth?"

"No, no," answered the orderly, "of the third and of the second. Those that are here will have to go below."

"They must go to the second?" asked Giuseppe Corte, pale like a dead man. "I must descend then to the second floor?"

"But certainly. And what seems so strange? When we return in fifteen days, you will return to this room. It doesn't seem to me that there is anything to be frightened about."

Instead Giuseppe Corte had a mysterious instinct---was taken by a cruel fear. But he knew that he could not prevent the personnel from going on vacation. Knowing that the new treatment with the more intense rays was working well, the eczema was almost completely reabsorbed, he did not dare make formal opposition to this transfer. He persisted, however, by placing on the door of his new room a paper with the words, "Giuseppe Corte of the third floor, here only for the interim." This resulted in many thoughtless jokes from the orderlies.
A similar occurrence could not be found in the history of the sanatorium, but the doctor did not oppose him, thinking that in a nervous temperament like Giuseppe Corte was in, a little opposition could produce a grave shock.

He was prepared to wait fifteen days, not one more nor one less. Giuseppe Corte counted them with an avid obstinace, resting for hours immobile on his bed with his eyes fixed on the furniture. On the second floor the furniture was not so modern nor gay, but had greater dimensions with more solemn and severe lines. Once in a while he would move his eyes because he seemed to hear from the lower floor, the floor of the dying ones, the area of the "condemned," vague rattles of agony.

All of this naturally helped to depress him. The minor serenity seemed to have helped the sickness; now, however, the fever was going up and his general condition was becoming more grave. From the window, it was now full summer, and the windows were almost always open. He did not see the roofs nor even the houses of the city, but only the green wall of trees that encircled the hospital.

After seven days, one afternoon around two, the head orderly and three subordinates entered his room unexpectedly. They had with them a wheel chair. "We are ready for the transfer," he said in an agreeable way.

"What transfer?" Giuseppe Corte asked with a strained voice. "I am not to return to the third floor for three days."
"What third floor?" said the head orderly as though he did not understand. "I have here the order to move you to the first floor. Look here." He showed Giuseppe the stamped form for the transfer to the lower floor, confirmed by the same Professor Dati.

The terror, the infernal rage of Giuseppe Corte exploded then into long, irritated shouts that reechoed throughout the hospital. "Help, help for heaven's sake," cried the patients. "We are sick and do not feel well." But he wanted something else to calm him.

Finally, the doctor came who was the head of that part of the hospital, a genteel man with a great deal of education. He saw the confusion, was told what the trouble was and began to explain to Giuseppe. Then he turned angrily to the head orderly, saying a mistake had been made. He had put them in an awkward position and a great deal of confusion because he had come to the perplexity of everyone. Finally, turning to the patient, he said that it was their fault, in a very courteous tone and offered his profound apologies.

"Unfortunately, however," began the doctor, "unfortunately Professor Dati left on a brief vacation one hour ago, and he will not return for another two days. It will be he who will apologize to you first, I guarantee you. I don't understand how this could have occurred."

Then a shaking began to take hold of Giuseppe Corte. The capacity to master himself had left him, and the terror of his situation had overwhelmed him completely. Fear had
overwhelmed him completely. His cries resounded sadly and desperately throughout the rooms.

He reached the last floor in this way because of a terrible mistake. Because of the strict guidance of the doctors and supposedly for the severity of his sickness, he found himself on the first floor of the dying. The real reason he was there was because he had consented to go to the sixth, rather than the seventh floor. The situation was so grotesque that in certain instances Giuseppe Corte seemed to almost laugh without stopping.

Just the same in bed, while the hot afternoon passed slowly over the city, he looked at the green of the trees through the window, with the impression that he had arrived in an unreal world. It was all absurd, white sterilized walls, chilly like a mortuary inhabited by white figures without souls. He began to think that the trees which he seemed to see through the window were not really green; he ended by convincing himself noting that the leaves did not even move in the wind.

This agitated him so much that he called the orderly and asked him if one's eyes became myopic from lack of use in bed. The orderly began to calm him then. With a reassuring, authoritative tone he told him that the trees certainly were green and that the leaves moved ever so slowly with every breath of wind.

After the orderly left, a quarter of an hour passed in complete silence. Six floors, six terrible walls, because
of a formal error now hung over Giuseppe Corte with a terrible weight. In how many years, yes, we need to speak in years, in how many years would he be able to once again go up to the brink of that precipice?

But how did the room all of a sudden become dark?

It was only full afternoon. With a supreme effort, Giuseppe Corte, who seemed like one who is paralized by a strange torpor, looked at his watch on the night table beside the bed. It was three thirty. He turned his head to the other side of the room and saw the shutters closing, obedient to a mysterious command, falling slowly, closing the passage to the light.