Buried Alive

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From the jottings of a madman:

Buried Alive

Translated by Brian Spooner

I can't breathe properly. Tears fall from my eyes. There is a bad taste in my mouth. My head spins. I feel bored, weary, tired out—I can rake up no energy or enthusiasm for anything. I am lying in bed. I have had so many injections my arms are like pincushions. The bed smells of sweat and fever. I look at the clock on the small table beside the bed. It is ten o'clock, Sunday. I look at the ceiling and the electric light hanging in the middle. I look around the room: the wallpaper has red and pink paisley design, and at regular intervals two blackbirds are sitting on a branch facing each other; one has its beak open as though it's talking to the other. This pattern drives me mad. For some reason whichever way I turn I still see it. The table is full of bottles and lint and boxes of pills. The smell of burnt alcohol, the smell of a sickroom fills the air. I want to get up and open the window, but a pleasant laziness pins me to the bed. I want to smoke a cigarette, but I don't feel like it. Less than ten minutes ago I shaved my beard, which had become bristly. I came and lay down on the bed and looked in the mirror; I saw how very weak and thin I've become. It was even an effort to walk. The room's in a mess. I am on my own.

All kinds of strange thoughts keep turning over in my head. It's as though I can see them, but in order to put down on paper the most trivial sensation or the most insignificant passing fancy I should have to recount the whole of my life from start to finish, and that is impossible. These thoughts, these sensations, are the result of the whole cycle of my life, of my way of life, of the ideas I inherited, and what I have seen, heard, read, felt, and thought about. And it is all these things which have created the irrelevant and useless creature I am now.

I roll about on the bed and go aimlessly through the notes I have made on my past. Wild, crazy ideas crowd my thoughts. My neck hurts. Pain shoots through it. My temples are burning. I brace myself. I keep
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the quilt over my eyes and think. I am tired. It would be good if I could open up my skull and take out that soft gray curly mass and throw it away—throw it to a dog.

Nobody can understand it, nobody will believe it—if someone finds he just can't make it in the world, he is told, in effect, to go lay down his head and die. But what if death doesn't want you either, what if death just turns its back on you like everything else... death just doesn't... doesn't want to come!

Other people are afraid of death, I am afraid of my own importunate clinging life.

How horrible it is when death doesn't want you and shies away! Only one thing consoles me. Two weeks ago I read in the paper that someone in Austria had tried to commit suicide thirteen times in various ways, and had gone through all the stages. He tried to hang himself, and the rope broke; he threw himself into a river, and they pulled him out, etc. In the end one day when the house was empty, he made one last try. He took the kitchen knife and cut all the arteries and veins in his body, and this—the thirteenth time—he managed to die.

This cheers me up.

No, suicide is not a thing you decide to do. It is just in some people. It is part of their nature and temperament. They can't get away from it. Fate may rule, but it is I who have made my fate, and now I can't get away from it. I can't escape from myself.

So what is there to do? Fate is stronger than I am.

The ideas that get into my head! As I was lying down there I wished I was a little baby. Old Golin Baji, who used to tell me stories and dribble, was sitting over me. I was lying in bed, tired, just like this, and she would tell me wonderful fairy tales until slowly my eyes would close, and I fell asleep. I can see it even now. Some parts of my childhood I remember very clearly. It is as though it were just yesterday. I realize my childhood is not as far away as I thought. Now I can see straight through my dark, mean, useless life from one end to the other. Was I happy then? No, what a big mistake! Everyone thinks children are
happy. But I remember it all quite well. I was even more sensitive then and very quiet and watchful of others. Perhaps outwardly I would laugh or play, but inwardly the slightest harsh word or the least unpleasantness would occupy my mind for hours afterwards and gnaw away inside me. If only I could rid myself of this temperament. Those who say that heaven and hell are in the mind are right. Some are born healthy and some unhealthy.

I look at the stubby red pencil I have in my hand with which I’ve been jotting down notes in bed. It’s the same pencil I used to write down the rendezvous with that girl I’d just got to know. We went to the movies two or three times. The last time we went it was a talkie, a musical, and in one part of the program a famous singer from Chicago sang “Where is my Sylvia?” I enjoyed it so much that I closed my eyes to listen. His strong attractive voice is still in my ears. The whole audience was rapt. I thought to myself, “This man should never die.” I couldn’t believe it possible that one day this voice would sing no more. The plaintive tone of his voice made me feel sad. At the same time I enjoyed the sadness. The high notes and the low notes, the mistakes and wailing that came from those strings made me feel as though the bow was sliding back and forth over the marrow of my bones; every atom of my being was permeated with their playing; vibrating, I was borne up in the power of the music. In the darkness I rubbed my hand on the girl’s breasts. Her eyes had the look of intoxication. I was in a very strange mood as well, a state of exotic sadness impossible to describe. I kissed the girl’s fresh moist lips. Her cheeks were flushed. We pressed each other close, I did not notice the film. I played with her hands, and she clung tightly to me.

Now it’s as though I dreamt it. It’s nine days now since the last time we saw each other. We had arranged I should go the day after and bring her back to my room. Her home was near the Montparnasse cemetery. The day after, as arranged, I went to bring her. I got off the Metro at the station at the corner of her street. There was a cold wind and the sky was cloudy. I don’t know what made me change my mind. It wasn’t that she was ugly or I didn’t like her. Something just held me back. I didn’t want to see her again. I wanted to rid my life of all emotional attachments. Involuntarily, I went into the cemetery. At the gate a policeman stood wrapped up in his blue cloak. A deep silence ruled over the place. I walked slowly, staring at the gravestones, the crosses
they'd put over them, the flowerpots of artificial flowers, and the grass around and on the graves. I read the names of some of those who had been buried. I felt sorry I wasn't there instead of them. I thought, "How lucky they have been!" I felt jealous of the dead whose bodies had dissolved under the earth. Never before had I experienced such jealousy. It seemed as though death was a happiness and a blessing not easily given. I am not sure how much time passed as I stood staring. All thoughts of the girl had completely gone out of my head. I did not feel the cold. It was as though the dead were nearer to me than the living. I understood their language better. I turned back. No, I didn't want to see the girl again. I wanted to keep clear of everything and everyone. I wanted to despair and die. The stupid thoughts that come into my head! Perhaps I'm talking nonsense.

For some days I had been trying to tell my fortune with cards. Somehow I had found faith in these superstitions. I really would try to tell my fortune. I mean I had nothing else to do. I could not do anything else. I wanted to gamble with my own future. I made a wish that I should finish myself off. It came up. One day I worked it out this way. For three and a half hours I had been telling my fortune by cards. First, I shuffled the pack. I laid down one card face up and beside it five more face down. Then, leaving the first card which was face up, on each of the rest I placed another card face down, and so on until a card face up came onto the sixth pile. Then I had to put black on red and red on black in downward progression, king, queen, jack, ten, nine, etc. Each time I opened a pile by moving the card which was face up, I turned up the next one. The pack which remained in my hand I turned up three at a time, trying to fit the top one on to one of the piles. There must only be six piles. Aces go above the first six piles and start piles of their own with preference. When the cards are favorable, all the cards from the first six piles move easily back to the piles of their suit. I learned this way of telling my fortune in childhood, and I used to pass the time with it.

Seven or eight days ago I was sitting in a coffee house. Two people opposite me were playing backgammon. One of them was telling his red-faced, bald-headed friend, who listened sympathetically with a silly expression on his face and a cigarette hanging under his drooping moustache: "Never, never have I ended up winning. Nine times out of ten I lose." I looked at them amazed. What did I want to say? I don't
know. Later I came out and wandered about in the back streets. Several times I thought of closing my eyes, walking in front of a car, and letting the wheels run over me. But it was a difficult way to die. And how did I know this would bring me peace even so? Perhaps I would not in fact die. It is this thought which drives me crazy. I passed by crossroads and crowded places. In the middle of this ceaseless traffic and the noises of horseshoes, carts, motor horns, and the continual tumult and scuffle, I was completely alone. In the middle of so many millions of people it was as though I was sitting in a wrecked boat, lost in the middle of the sea. I felt I had been turned out of the society of men in disgrace. I could see I had just not been made for life. I brought argument after argument against myself. I walked along at a steady, monotonous pace. I stopped and stared at canvases in shop windows and regretted not having become a painter. It was the only work I liked and enjoyed. "Only in painting," I thought to myself, "could I find some small consolation and comfort." A postman passed me trying to read the address on a letter through his glasses. What did it make me think of? I suppose the man reminded me of Persian postmen. I thought of the postman who used to come to our own house.

Last night, I could not get to sleep. I closed my eyes tightly. Disconnected thoughts and disturbing scenes passed in front of my eyes. It wasn't a dream, for I was still awake. It was a nightmare—I was neither awake nor asleep, but I saw these things. My body was weak and painful, sick and heavy. My head ached. These fearful nightmares kept passing before my eyes. Sweat was pouring from my body. I saw a package of paper open itself in the air. Sheet after sheet peeled itself off. A group of soldiers passed by, but I couldn't see their faces. It was a dark, worrying, spine-chilling night, full of terrible, angry forms. When I wanted to close my eyes and give myself up to death, these startling pictures appeared: a circle of fire like an enormous whirling Catherine wheel, a corpse floating in the river, eyes watching me from all sides. It's very clear in my mind; mad angry forms kept attacking me. An old man with a bloody face was tied to a pillar. He was looking at me and laughing; his teeth flashed. A bat with cold wings flew into my face. I was walking along a dark rope. Under it lay a whirlpool. I kept slipping. I wanted to cry out. A hand placed itself on my shoulder, a freezing cold hand squeezed my throat. My heart seemed to stop beating. Moanings, strange and evil, rose from the depths of the nocturnal darkness, faces, one side of them blank and in shadow, kept
appearing and disappearing. What could I do, confronted with these things? They were both close to me and faraway. I wasn’t seeing them in my sleep because I still hadn’t fallen asleep.

I don’t know whether I have bewitched everybody or have become bewitched myself, but one thought is driving me mad and I can’t contain my laughter. Every now and then laughter catches at the bottom of my throat. In fact, no one has been able to understand what is wrong with me. They have all been deceived. For a week now I have been feigning illness, or else I have caught a peculiar disease. Without wanting to, I picked up a cigarette and lit it. Why do I smoke? I just don’t know. I put the two fingers of my left hand which hold the cigarette to my lips, and blow the smoke out into the air. This is a sort of disease as well.

Now, when I think of it, my body trembles. For a whole week—seriously—I kept torturing myself in various ways. I wanted to get ill. For several days the weather had been cold. First I went under the cold water tap and turned it on. I left the bathroom window open. Now as it comes back to me it makes me shudder. I caught my breath. My back and chest started to ache. I said to myself: “That’s done it properly. Tomorrow my chest will really ache and I shall have to stay in bed. Then I’ll make it worse and finish myself off.” The next morning when I woke up I could not feel the slightest symptom of a cold! Again I took off most of the bedclothes, and when it got dark, I locked the door on the inside, put out the light, opened the window, and sat in the freezing draft. There was a cold wind! I shivered violently, and could hear my teeth chattering. Looking out of my sixth floor window, I saw people walking about in the street below; their black shadows and the passing cars appeared small. I gave my bare body up to the cold and it made me writhe.

Just then the thought came to me that I had gone mad, and I laughed at myself. I laughed at life. I knew that in this big theater of a world everyone puts on an act of some kind until the time comes for him to die. And I had taken up this particular act because I thought it would take me off the scene quickly.

My lips had gone dry. The cold inflamed my body. Again, it was no use. I warmed myself until I was sweating hard, then undressed quick-
ly. Throughout the night I lay on the bed shivering. I did not fall asleep even once. I felt slight symptoms of a cold, but I only had to doze a little and all feeling of illness completely disappeared. I saw this was of no use either.

For three days I had eaten nothing. At night, I undressed and sat in front of the window. I tired myself out. One night I spent until morning running about the back streets of Paris on an empty stomach. I got tired and went and sat on a cold damp step in a narrow alley. It was after midnight. A drunken workman staggered past me. In the dim uncertain light of a gas lamp I saw a man and woman talking as they passed. Then I got up and went off again. On the benches in the streets wretched people without any homes were sleeping.

In the end I had to stay in bed from sheer weakness. But I was not ill. And my friends came to visit me. I made myself shiver in front of them and gave such an impression of illness that they were really sorry for me. They thought I was sure to die by the day after. I told them I kept feeling constricted as though I couldn’t breathe. When they went out I laughed at them. I said to myself that there was perhaps just one role in the world that I was capable of fulfilling: I should have been an actor!

The act of illness I put on in front of my friends who came to see me, in front of the doctors! They all believed I was really ill. To whatever they asked me I said, "I feel desperate." For sudden death could only be attributed to heart failure, whereas trivial chest pains could not kill you all at once.

It was a miracle. Whenever I think of it, a peculiar feeling comes over me. I had been torturing myself for a week. If, when my friends really insisted, I got a cup of tea from the landlady and drank it, I felt all right again. It was terrible, I no longer felt ill at all. Oh, how I wanted to eat the bread they put beside the cup, but I didn’t. Every night I said to myself, "Well, I’m a bed case now; tomorrow I shan’t be able to get up again." I went and got the capsules I had filled with opium powder. I put them in the small drawer beside my bed, so that when I got really ill and could not move, I could take them out and swallow them. Unfortunately, illness kept avoiding me. Once, when I was obliged in front of one of my friends to eat a small piece of bread,
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I felt quite well again, completely well. I was afraid of myself, I was so tough with myself it scared me. It was terrifying. It is incredible that as I write these lines I am quite sane. It is not nonsense or delirium, I can remember it all clearly.

What was this strength I had found in myself? I could see nothing I was doing was any good. I had to get really ill. Aha, there is a deadly poison over there in my bag—instant poison. I remember the rainy day when with great difficulty and a number of lies I managed to buy it. I said I needed it for photography and gave a wrong name and address. It was potassium cyanide. I had read about it in a medical book and knew all about its effects: convulsions, shortness of breath, and painful death—provided the stomach is empty. Twenty grams kills instantly or within two minutes. To keep air from spoiling it, I had wrapped it up in a piece of silver foil, covered it with a layer of wax, put it in a glass jar, and shut the lid firmly. It was a hundred grams, and I kept it like a precious jewel. But luckily I found something better than that. Black market opium. In Paris! I had searched for it for ages. In the end I got hold of it quite by accident. I had read that opium poisoning is far more pleasant than cyanide. Now I wanted to make myself really ill and then take opium.

I opened the cyanide and scraped off about two grams from the egg-shaped ball, put it in an empty capsule, sealed it, and swallowed. I felt nothing. The outside of the capsule which had become slightly contaminated with the cyanide tasted salty. I picked it up a second time. This time I scraped off about five grams and swallowed the capsule. Then I went and lay down on my bed and slept thinking, "Perhaps I shall never wake up again!"

It would be enough to drive any sane man crazy. I felt absolutely nothing. Deadly poison had had no effect on me. I am still alive, and the poison is lying over there in my bag. As I lie in bed I breathe with difficulty, but this has nothing to do with what I swallowed. I have become invulnerable—bronze-bodied, like Esfandiyar in the old fable. It is unbelievable. But I must go. It's useless. My life has no meaning. It's pointless, superfluous. As soon as possible I must get rid of myself and go. This time I'm not joking. However hard I think, there is nothing to make me want to live, nothing and no one . . .

1Esfandiyar was the archenemy of Rostam, hero of the Shahnameh, the Iranian national epic.
I remember three days ago I was pacing up and down my room in a
crazy fashion, from one end to the other. The clothes hanging on the
wall, the washbasin, the mirror in the cupboard, the picture on the
wall, the bed, the table in the middle of the room, the books scattered
over it, the chairs, the shoe that had got put under the cupboard, the
cases in the corner—one by one they passed before my gaze. But I did
not see them. Or I did not look at them. What was I thinking of? I
don’t know. I was just walking up and down. Suddenly I came to my-
self. I had seen this crazy walking to and fro somewhere, and this
thought brought me to myself. I did not know where. Then I remem-
bered—in the zoo in Berlin—It was the first time I had seen wild animals.
Those who were awake in their cages kept walking back and forth like
this, just like this. At that time also I had become like those animals.
Perhaps I thought like them as well. I felt within myself that I was like
them. This listless walking about, circling round myself. When I came
to the wall, I sensed instinctively that there was a barrier in the way
and turned back. Those animals were doing just this.

I don’t know what I’m writing. Tick tock—the clock keeps on and on
with the same noise against my ear. I want to pick it up and throw it
out of the window—this fearsome sound that beats the passing of time
into my head with a hammer!

For a week I had been preparing myself for death. Whatever writings
and papers I had I destroyed all of it. I threw away my dirty clothes so
that after I had gone, when they inspected my things, they would not
find anything soiled. I put on the new underclothes I had bought so
that when they pulled me out of bed and the doctor came and examined
me I would appear presentable. I picked up the eau de cologne bottle
and sprinkled the bed with it to make it smell nice. But since nothing I
did was like other people, I was still not sure of myself. I was afraid of
my own toughness. It appeared this privilege and superiority is not
easily given to anyone. I knew that you can’t die just for the asking.

I took out the pictures of my relatives and looked at them. I imagined
each one as I had seen them. I liked them, and I did not like them. I
wanted to see them, and I did not want to. No, the memories of that
place were too bright before my eyes. I tore up the pictures. No, I felt
no attachment. I judged myself and saw that I had not been an affec-
tionate person. I had been made hard, harsh and weary. Perhaps I had
not been like that. To a certain extent life and fate had made me like that. And I wasn't in the least afraid of death. On the contrary, some peculiar sickness or madness had appeared in me which was slowly and magnetically pulling me towards death. There was nothing new in this either. I've just remembered a story. It was five years ago. One day in Tehran early in the morning I went to Shahabad Avenue to buy some opium from a druggist. I put a three toman note on the counter and asked for two qerans worth of opium. The druggist with his hennaed beard and skull cap praised Allah and the Prophet, looked at me suspiciously, and, as though he was an expert judge of faces or a mind reader, said, "I haven't any change." I took out a two qaran piece and gave it to him and he said, "No, I won't sell it to you." I asked why and he answered, "You are young and innocent. God forbid one day you should take it into your head to take opium." And I did not insist.

No, suicide is not a thing you decide to do. It is just in some people. It is in their temperament, their nature. Oh yes, everyone's fate is written on their forehead, and suicide is born with some. I had never taken life seriously. The world, people—I had always seen it as a silly game, a disgrace, an insane and pointless affair. I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up again and not to dream either. But since everyone thinks suicide is a strange and peculiar thing to do, I wanted to make myself chronically ill, and when I was incapable and on the point of dying, and everyone knew all about it, I would take opium and they would say: "He fell ill and died."

I am making notes in bed. It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Two people came to see me. Now they have gone, and I am alone. My head goes round in circles. My body is comfortable and rested. There is a cupful of tea in my stomach. My body is weak and languid, and has the unhealthy warmth of illness. I heard a good tune on the gramophone. It's just come to me. I want to whistle it, but I can't. I wish I could hear it again. At the moment I don't like life, and I don't dislike it. I am alive without wanting to be, without any interest in being alive. Some extraordinary power is keeping me. In the prison of life I've been bound down under steel chains. If I were dead they would take me to the Paris mosque and give me over to the godless Arabs, and I would die twice over! I can't stand the sight of them.

Anyway, it would not have made any difference to me. After I was
dead, if they had thrown me down a lavatory, it would have been just
the same for me. I would have found peace at last. Only at home they
would have started weeping and wailing and bringing my pictures out,
and recalling all they could remember about me, the same stupid
things they always do. All these things seem silly and pointless to me.
I suppose some people would have made out I was wonderful, others
would have contradicted, but in the end I should have been forgotten.
I was always selfish and detached.

Whatever line of thought I take, keeping on with this life is point-
less. I've become a parasite to society, an obnoxious being, an extra
burden for other people. From time to time my madness recurs. I
want to go away, a long way away, somewhere where I could forget
myself, and be forgotten, get lost, disappear. I want to escape from
myself, go a long way away, Siberia for instance, in those wooden
houses under pine trees, the gray sky, snow, the thick deep snow,
among the muzhiks, go and start my life all over again; or, for instance,
go to India, under the blazing sun, jungles with the trees meeting over-
head, among strange, peculiar people, go somewhere where no one
would know me or understand my language. I want to feel everything
within myself. But I can see I wasn't made the right way for this. No,
I'm lazy and listless. I was born by mistake. I've tried everything and
been rejected. I'm unwanted and I'm stuck. I've given up all the plans
I had for love and pleasure; I've turned aside from everything. So I'm
counted among the dead already.

Sometimes I make big plans. I consider myself capable of absolutely
anything. I say to myself: "Only people who have washed their hands
of life and are fed up with everything can make really great achieve-
ments." Then I say to myself: "What's the use of it? What good will
it do? Madness, it's all madness. No, just kill yourself. Let your corpse
fall down in the middle there. Get going. You weren't made for life.
Give up philosophizing. Your existence isn't worth a thing. There's no
job you're suited for." But I don't know why death turned up its nose.
Why didn't it come? Why haven't I been able to get on with it and get
the peace I wanted? I'd been torturing myself for a week. And that's
how I am paid for it. Poison has no effect on me. It's incredible, I can't
believe it. I've eaten nothing. I've given myself a cold. I've drunk vine-
gar. Every night I thought I'd caught galloping consumption. When I
got up in the morning I felt better than the day before. Whom can I tell
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all this? Not once have I had a temperature. But I haven’t dreamt either. I haven’t smoked hashish. I can remember it all clearly. No, it’s just incredible.

Now that I have written these things down, I feel a bit quieter. It has consoled me. It is as though a heavy load has been taken off my shoulders. How good it would be if one could write everything. If I could get my thoughts across to someone else, if I could say to them... No, there are sentiments, there are things, which it is impossible to explain to another person, which can’t be said. They would laugh at you. Everybody judges other people according to their own ideas. A man’s tongue is defective and weak like himself.

I’m invulnerable. Poison has no effect on me. I ate opium, and it was no good. Yes, I’ve become bronze-bodied. No poison will work on me again. In fact I’ve realized that all the trouble I’ve taken was for nothing. Last night I made up my mind to put an end to this fiasco before the scandal should get out. I went and got the capsules of opium out of the drawer of the bedside table. There were three of them, about the same amount as the usual roll of opium. I picked them up. It was seven o’clock. I sent down for tea. When they brought it up, I drank it. At eight o’clock no one had come to see me. I locked the door on the inside. I went and stood in front of the picture on the wall and looked at it. I don’t know what thoughts were passing through my head, but the picture seemed like a stranger to me. I said to myself, “What has this man got to do with me.” But I recognized the face. I had seen it a lot. Then I turned around. I had no feeling of nervousness, or fear, or pleasure. Everything I had done, and the thing I was going to do—it all seemed useless and pointless. The whole of life seemed a fiasco. I glanced around the room. Everything was in its place. I went over to the mirror in the cupboard and looked at my flushed face. I half closed my eyes, opened my mouth a little, and held my head on one side as though I was dead. Then I said to myself: “Tomorrow morning I shall look just like that. At first, however much they bang on the door no one will answer. Till noon they will think I’m asleep. Then they will break the lock, enter the room, and see me like this.” All these thoughts flashed before me like lightning.

I picked up a glass of water. Quite calm, I said to myself: “These are aspirin.” And I swallowed the first capsule. Then, flustered, I
gulped down the second and third on top of it. I felt myself tremble a little. My breath smelled of opium. My heart beat a little faster. I threw a half-smoked cigarette into the ashtray. I went and got a breath purifying tablet out of my pocket and sucked it and saw myself in the mirror again. I glanced around the room. Everything was in its place. I said to myself: "Well, now it's over. Tomorrow not even Plato can bring me to life again." I put my clothes neatly on the chair beside the bed and pulled the bedclothes over me. The eau de cologne had taken. I pushed the light switch down and the room was in darkness. Low down on the wall and the foot of the bed there was a little feeble light from the window. There was nothing else to do. For better or worse I had got this far. I fell asleep. I tossed about. All I could think was: "For goodness sake don't let anyone come to see how I am and make a nuisance of themselves," although I had told everyone that for some nights I had not been able to sleep, so that they should leave me alone. Now I was terribly curious, as though something fantastic had happened, or as though I was looking forward to a pleasant journey. I wanted really to experience dying. I tried to concentrate, but my ear was constantly listening for noises outside the room. Whenever I heard the sound of footsteps my heart dropped. I pressed my eyelids together. Ten minutes passed, or a little more, and nothing happened. I had occupied myself with various thoughts, but I neither regretted what I had done, nor was I afraid. Then I felt that the opium had started work. At first I felt heavy, then I had sensations of tiredness. This feeling was mostly in my stomach, like the times when one's food hasn't quite digested properly. Next the tiredness penetrated up to my chest and then to my head. I moved my hands and opened my eyes and saw that I was quite componens mentis. I became thirsty. My mouth had become dry. I swallowed with difficulty. My heart was beating more slowly. A little later I felt a warm and pleasant vapor issuing from my body, mostly from the extremities like my fingertips and the tip of my nose. At the same time I understood that I wanted to kill myself. I remembered that for some people this is unpleasant.

I was really amazed with myself. All these things seemed to me childish, insignificant, laughable. I thought to myself that now I felt rested and was going to die with this same feeling. What does it matter that other people are upset, or are not upset, weep, or don't weep? I had very much wanted this to happen, and I was afraid to move or think, lest I should stop the action of the opium. All I was afraid of was
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that (was it possible?) after all this trouble I might remain alive. I was afraid that dying might be painful, and that, in despair, I might shout out or call for help. But then I said: "However painful it might be, opium sends you to sleep, and I shan't feel a thing. I'll just go from one sleep to another, and I can't move or say anything, and the door is locked on the inside anyway!"

Yes, I can remember it well. These are the thoughts that come into my head. I heard the monotonous noise of the clock. I heard the noise of footsteps of people walking about in the hotel. It seemed my sense of hearing had grown sharper. I felt my body was rising. My mouth had become dry. My head ached a little. I suppose I was in something like a coma. My eyes were half-open. Sometimes my breathing would become fast and then slow again. From all the pores of my body this pleasant warmth seeped out. It was as though I was following after it as well. I wanted very much to increase its intensity. I had sunk into an indescribable rapture. I thought of anything I wanted to. If I ate a piece of bread, I felt it would stop the exuding of this warmth. The more comfortably I slept, the better. I took my right hand out from under me, turned over and slept on my back. I was a little uncomfortable, and I turned back to the way I was. The effect of the opium increased. I felt it, and I wanted to get the most out of the experience of dying. Sensations became sharp and heightened. I was amazed that I had not fallen asleep. It was as though my whole existence was exuding pleasantly and comfortably from my body. My heart beat slowly. I breathed slowly. I think two or three hours passed. During this time someone had knocked on the door. I realized it was my neighbor, but I did not answer. I did not want to move an inch. I opened my eyes and closed them again. I heard the noise of his door opening. He washed his hands, whistled to himself. I heard everything. I tried to think pleasant, comforting thoughts.

I thought of the year before. The day I was sitting in the boat. They were playing a mouth organ. The waves on the sea, the gentle motion of the ship, the pretty girl sitting opposite me . . . I became submerged in my thoughts. I chased after them as though I had taken wing and careened through space. I had become light and nimble in a way impossible to describe. The difference is like that when you see a ray of light naturally, and when under the influence of opium you see the same light. Then it is as though the light comes from behind a candelabra or
a crystal prism: it is dispersed through various colors. In this state simple, empty thoughts which come to one take on a fantastic and magical form. Each silly, passing thought becomes fascinating and luxurious. If a view or a landscape comes into your thoughts, it becomes infinitely large. Space swells. The passing of time is unperceived.

By this time I had become very heavy. My senses rolled like waves above my body, but I was conscious of being awake. The last sensations I can remember from the opium dream were these: my legs had gone cold and numb, my body motionless, I felt I was going away and becoming distant. But as soon as this effect came to an end, an endless grief and sorrow overtook me. I felt my senses coming back to their rightful state. It was very difficult and painful. I felt cold. For more than half an hour I trembled violently. I could hear the noise of my teeth chattering. Then came the fever—a burning fever with the sweat pouring off my body. My heart stopped beating. I could not breathe. The first thought that came to me was that everything I had done was undone, useless, and it had not at all turned out the way I had wanted. I was even more amazed at my own toughness. I realized that some dark power, some ineffable bad luck was struggling against me.

With difficulty I sat up in bed, turned the switch, and the light came on. For some reason my hand went straight to the small mirror on the bedside table. My face had swollen. I had no color. Tears poured from my eyes. I felt really desperate. I told myself that at least I had ruined my heart! I turned the light off and fell back on the bed.

No, I had not ruined my heart. Today it is better. It's only the whole and healthy things of this world that are ever bothered by plagues or illness. The doctor came to see me. He listened to my heart, felt my pulse, took my temperature, the usual things all doctors do as soon as they come in. They are the same all over the world. He gave me fruit salts and quinine. He had no idea what was wrong with me. It is beyond anyone what is wrong with me. This medicine is ridiculous. There on the table stand seven or eight types of medicine set out in a row. I laugh to myself. What a theater!

Tick tock. The clock keeps on with the same old noise in my ear. From outside the window comes the noise of claxons and the roar of
motor bikes. I look at the wallpaper. It has slender, deep purple leaves and bunches of white flowers. At regular intervals on the branches two blackbirds are sitting facing each other. My head feels empty, my stomach rumbles, my body is stiff. The newspapers I have thrown on top of the cupboard have fallen in a peculiar way. When I look at them it is suddenly as though they appear completely strange. I seem a stranger to myself. I am amazed I am still alive. Why do I breathe? Why do I get hungry? Why do I eat? Why do I walk? Why am I here? Who are these people I see, and what do they want from me?

Now I know myself well, just as I am without any distortion. I am unable to do anything. I have fallen back on my bed tired and weary. Hour by hour my thoughts revolve, revolve, in the same circles of despair. I am fed up. My existence amazes me. How unpleasant and unwholesome it is to feel one's own existence! When I look in the mirror I laugh at myself. My own face had become for me so unknown, strange, ridiculous . . .

Several times the thought has come to me: I have become bronze-bodied, bronze-bodied like the old hero Esfandiyar—his story has become mine. It was a miracle. Now I believe all sorts of superstition and nonsense. The most amazing thoughts pass through my head. It was a miracle! Now I know that God, with some other abomination, in his eternal tyranny and injustice, has created two types of creatures; the lucky and the unlucky. He looks after the first type and increases the torture and torment of the second. Now I believe that with some people there is some despicable wild power, some angel of misfortune . . .

Now I am alone again. The doctor has just gone. I have picked up my pencil and paper, and I want to write. I don't know what. Either I have nothing to write about, or I have so much that I can't write. This in itself is bad luck. I don't know, I can't cry. Perhaps if I cried I should feel a little better but I can't. I look like a madman. In the mirror I saw my hair all ruffled, my eyes wide open and empty. I think, "My face shouldn't be like this at all." In many people there is a big difference between their face and their thoughts. This makes me even more annoyed. All I know is that I hate myself. I eat, and I hate myself. I walk, and I hate myself. I think, and I hate myself. It won't let me alone. It will give me no peace! No, this was some supernatural power. It was some plague. Now I believe in these things. Nothing has any effect on
me any longer. I swallowed cyanide. Nothing happened. I took opium, and I'm still alive. If a dragon should strike me, the dragon would die. No, no one will ever believe it! Had the poison gone bad? Perhaps I didn't take enough? Was it more than the usual dose? Had I read the amount incorrectly in the medical book? Does my own hand have the property of rendering poison harmless? I don't know. A hundred times these thoughts have come into my head. There's nothing new about them. I have heard that if they put a circle of fire round a scorpion, it stings itself. Isn't there a ring of fire around me?

Opposite the window of my room, on the edge of the black gabled roof, where the rainwater has gathered in the hollow, two sparrows are sitting. One dips his beak into the water, lifts up his head, and the other, huddled next to him, scratches himself. I move, and both of them chirp and fly off. The sky is cloudy. Every now and then a pale sun peeps out from behind the scraps of cloud. The tall buildings opposite, smoke-blackened, mournful under the pressure of this heavy, rainy air. The distant, muffled noise of the city can be heard.

These rotten cards I tell my fortune with, these lying cards that have deceived me, there they are in the drawer. The funniest thing of all is that I still tell my fortune with them!

What can I do? Fate is stronger than I am.

It would be good if you could come back to the world again with all the experience you have gained from your first life, and start it all over again. But what life? Is it up to me? What's the use? Some blind and terrible power rides on our heads. There are some people whose fate is governed by an evil star under which they get crushed and want to get crushed . . .

I no longer have any ambition or any desire to get my own back. Whatever was human in me I have lost, I have allowed to get lost. In life a man must either become angelic or human or animal. I have become none of these things. My life has become lost forever. I was born selfish, conceited, awkward, and helpless. And now it is absolutely impossible for me to turn back and start a new road. It is no longer possible for me to run after these vain shadows, to grapple with life again, to wrestle with it. You who think you are really living, what firm proof
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and logic do you have to offer? I no longer want to forgive, or be for-
given, to go to the left, or to go to the right. I want to close my eyes to
the future and forget the past.

No, I can’t escape my destiny. These crazy thoughts, these feelings,
these passing fancies which come to me—are they true? In any case
they seem far more natural and less fictional to me than my logical
thoughts. I think I am free, but I can’t make the slightest resistance to
my Fate. The bridle round my neck is in Its hands. It is It that drags me
first this way, then that. That’s the baseness, the baseness of life—that
no one can escape It. They can’t shout for help. They can’t fight. Stupid
life!

No, I am neither living nor asleep. I don’t like anything, I don’t hate
anything. I’ve got to know death, I’ve got really used to his company.
He’s my one and only friend, the only thing that cheers me up. The
cemetery at Montparnasse comes to my mind. I don’t envy the dead
any more. I must be considered belonging to their world. I am with
them. I am buried alive . . .

I’m tired. Look at the nonsense I’ve written! I tell myself: “Go and
throw your pencil and paper away, madman, throw them away. You’ve
talked enough nonsense. Shut up, and tear it up. For heaven’s sake,
don’t let anybody ever find it.” How would they judge me? But I have
nothing to keep from anyone. I don’t care about anything. I laugh at
the world and everything in it. However harshly they may judge me,
they don’t know that I have judged myself even more harshly. They
laugh at me, but they don’t know that I laugh at them even more. I
hate myself and everyone who reads this.

These notes were found with a pack of cards in the drawer of his
table. He himself had fallen back on the bed. He had forgotten to
breathe.