

**Ch.**

Excerpt translated by Romas Kinka

## § Chapter 3

## AFTER THE BATTLE

A feathered demon!

I haven't taken a step out of the theatre since the day I entered it and so you should understand that my recollection of things, settled at the bottom of my memory, after my passing glance at the building into which I had stepped without thinking too much about how I was linking my fate to its walls, its fabric and its spaces, can only be a splinter detached from reality. But if you allow me to base that recollection on imagination (and what memory, if we are to be precise, is not based on imagination?), I could try to guess how it, that feathered demon, could have got inside. After all, I shan't be committing any crime if my guess turns out to be wrong, shall I? The flat, plain eastern façade of the factory with its main door was patched up with large, regular, rectangular windows. I say 'patched up' because some of them were covered with large chipboard panels of different shades, and the glass on each of the three floors in the first half of the day, depending on the weather, reflected various shades of blue, grey or white, because everyone knows that the rays of the rising sun in the morning are still distorted and out of alignment, and it is only when they are climbing towards the culmination of the day that they begin to approach a calm harmony of colours. The factory's flat and smooth façade might have caught the eye because of a hideous-looking piece of protruding tin – two pipes from inside squeezed together through a window and connected by a box reminding one of a small house on wheels and from it on the other side a thicker pipe with a cowl protruding skyward. That at one time this was a ventilation system is clear even to me, Charlie, a simple librarian, having nothing to do with factories, manufacturing, or engineering. However, that's all I can say and that should be enough to confirm my assumption. By the way, all the of the factory's windows were kept closed: as far as I can remember, nobody ever thought of opening them, and I haven't found any other air ducts, although I must admit that I could easily have confused the purpose of one or other of the dozens or hundreds of openings. We lived compactly, as if pickled in a jar and stuffed into the back of a cupboard for the winter - I am not talking about the season, of course, but permanent hibernation, independent of any changes in nature. It would appear that the two pipes I mentioned earlier, regardless of my unflattering description of them, were the only things that carried out a vital function in the building, and therefore of our breathing. Of course, of course, I should be more careful in how I use words like that. I would say this: it was not in the interests of this theatre to sustain life, and that is why it is highly unlikely the thought that fresh air was a matter of life and death for the theatre company

ever entered Mr Director's mind. And what, in fact, would have changed if we had been unable to breathe and not woken up one morning, as if poisoned by carbon monoxide? Would it have changed anything other than the momentary, hopeful joy (or whatever other satisfaction an audience would come for)? In a word, if I am not mistaken, we fed on the air from just those two tin pipes nestled together and emerging from an ocean of resignation as the one and only proboscis for breathing.

I haven't forgotten that feathered demon. With your permission I'd like to return to it now. It, that damned poor excuse for a sparrow, must have alighted on the protruding cowl over the pipe in order to rest, and since it is by nature a foolish and slow-witted creature (I have to say that it's absolutely clear to me why they're called trash animals: they look like cheap cocoa sweet wrappers dropped in the street, and then there is all that flitting around all over the place which is part of their nature. After all, that's the dance of a slave, of a prisoner! Have you ever seen anything more pitiful? I have in mind pity, which can turn only into contempt and not compassion), the creature decided to stick its beak under the cowl, and then, perhaps after smelling smells familiar to its unclean nature, it shot into the pipe and then becoming scared of the enveloping darkness and out of sheer stupidity instead of darting back the way it had come, it thrashed about, raising an echoing din, it went further down the pipes and landed inside the factory, hysterically flapping its sharp-pointed wings against the ceiling of the first floor. I am unable to tell you which of the cats was the first to hear the wings of the sparrow making the sound of someone refused entry to heaven. I would venture to guess it was the cat with the limp or the mischievous striped one. I have to remind you that I had not seen this memorable incident with my own eyes and that is why I can only rely on my imagination but, of course, in naming specific cats, I do rely on some experience in observation. You see, all the cats (there were seven of them at the time) lived according to a strict, ascetic, individual time table, so strict that one might think that they lived only for the purpose of putting it into effect, that that time table was divine guidance with the cats being the devoted and trustworthy executors of its will. It would not be overstating the case to say that behind them their actions – meaningless at first glance, their everyday languorous movements, their royal-like ways of stretching and snoozing, there lay a noble mission to uphold our world order, which we humans, of course, carelessly, irresponsibly, relentlessly disrupt like foaming waves do endless sand dunes. With reference to the hours and the minutes of the day and night I could guess, without even seeing a specific cat, which one was tiptoeing past my room, which one was purring and scratching at my door, and which one meowing persistently as if transmitting a coded message to the outside world from which it had come to carry out its mission. I did not notice that anyone here wore a watch or had a clock hanging on a wall (after all, it was I and no one else who tidied up each of the actors' rooms after their performances, swept all the corners and knew everything about the actors and what they had decided to bring with them into the theatre) because the cats could track how fast the Earth was moving more faithfully than any mechanical or electronic device and one could rely on them. I should add that in the theatre, in the factory, they could keep to their time table better than anywhere else. For things to be in order one needs boredom and resignation. And here was more of both of those things than there was air.

And then suddenly down and out through the pipe burst that creature of the streets capable of driving anyone crazy. It had slipped in as if from another world, a world hostile to cats who are in competition with it, where a bawdy carnival is in full swing and life is bubbling away, because the cause, the purpose and the goal of that world, as far as it is given to me to understand, is one thing and one thing only - chaos. So, when the first cat with its whiskers twitching and its mouth barely open squatted down anxiously and stared at the feathered ball rolling around on the ceiling, it should have been clear to anyone who might have been given the privilege of witnessing this scene in which a battle between God and the Devil was about to begin. I, Charlie, have not been granted the right to express an opinion on who represented which side in this battle that broke out a moment later, although I, of course, do have an opinion. The fact that I initially called that poor excuse for a sparrow a demon should perhaps not lead to hasty conclusions (and in general, my words should not be taken to heart) and does not necessarily mean that I meant to imply that the trash bird represented... well, you yourselves will understand what side it represented, but at the same time I don't wish to remain neutral either because in the eyes of some this might be taken as my indifference. In a word, in confirmation of its stupidity, that poor excuse for a sparrow was thrashing about on the ceiling in the same place for a long time, as if it could not escape the magic circle drawn in chalk around it, so that the cats had plenty of time to come together, their whiskers quivering with excitement in anticipation of the pleasure awaiting them. One of them flew upwards. Then a second and a third. In vain, of course. If nothing had changed, the cats' only chance of catching the intruder would have been to wait for it to wear itself out and having lost its strength to fall down at their feet. For a while, this course of events seemed very probable for all involved, while for the other inhabitants of the theatre, who were not yet aware of what was happening under the ceiling by the ventilation duct, this would have had a good outcome. But for a moment the bird froze into a fist, as if a priest hearing confession had shaken his fist at the sinners staring at him from below and shot over the upturned heads of the cats into the depths of a corridor. The cats, jostling amongst each other like the tangled legs of a hairy spider, started to chase after it.

First, they flew past Paulius's room. No one came out of it to see where all that noise was coming from, and indeed could not have come out, since the room was supposed to be unoccupied (it became clear only later that it wasn't unoccupied but, if you allow me, I'll tell you about that another time, if I don't forget). Probably after realising that it was being chased by a special band of cats, the unkempt feathered creature began flapping its wings even faster. But what good did that do! The cats were out for blood and jumped around the twists and turns in the corridor, sliding, raising a din, and caterwauling at the behest of the instinct that was driving them. Morta with her short hair was the first to poke her head out of her room (if you had been looking at her from the left you would have seen an elongated curved sickle-shaped scar on the side of her head, cutting across her ear), Morta was later to affirm that all she saw was the very puffed up tails of the cats and going back into her room closed the door because, you should understand, she had more important things to do than run after that band of mad creatures (in truth, she was actually more succinct and crude because a woman like Morta with her angular features was incapable of expressing things more softly, but I shan't repeat her words

here). Forgive me but I have to say that she, of course, had no important matters to attend to. If my fragmentary observations are correct, she thought of fewer things to do in the spare time than any other actor in the troupe. To come up with anything to do in a place like this required a measure of imagination. Oh! I didn't mean to say anything by that! Morta, when you came across her, would make out that she was terribly busy – please don't think that I or anyone else tried to catch her unawares, I am simply speaking about everyday situations, that I, Charlie, found myself in because of my specific duties at the theatre. To that end, she did not lack guile. And I mean guile and not imagination because to me a mind full of guile differs from a creative one in that (if we were to come up with an analogy based on the event we're describing) such a mind runs but does not chase after things, if you understand what I have in mind. I would think she would find it more difficult to wait her turn, that is to wait to come on stage, being bored and depressed, because that sort of difficulty often comes from a lack of imagination and not the other way round, as is usually thought. This could be related to her earlier life, although I wouldn't pay too much attention to what I called her 'earlier life' because even if we often do so in order for our actions stuck in the present not seem so terrible and crushing. In that earlier life of hers Morta worked very close to death. That death, I would say, was closer to her than her own body. It would not be incorrect to state that she worked in death, and that is not the same thing as to work, let us say, with death or near death. In death. Morta in death – I hope that no one will have the thought that behind such a horrible juxtaposition of words lies my failed attempt at a joke. (I, Charlie, forgive me for saying so, don't like to joke around, although I can appreciate what a good sense of humour is or at least try to.) You should understand that in the circumstances of working in death an imagination is neither necessary nor desirable. To tell the truth, - and I have come to this conclusion over a short period of time, when I have had the opportunity to observe Morta with her angular features out of the corner of my eye, - it would be too simple to think that people who choose her specialization who have lost their imagination or were not gifted it from birth. My modest guess would be that death itself, when it attaches to you in this way, destroys the ability to have an imagination. Of course, you have every right to disagree with me! You can counter by saying that art comes from a fear of death! That artists are... artists! What foolishness! The imagination of artist only come into full force because they are too far from death and dedicate their whole lives (as being childishly innocent and pathetic) to distance themselves from death. I respect artists, you won't find another person who bows down any lower before them than Charlie, but forgive me, not because of them not understanding that by rushing headfirst from death they are rushing towards it. The further away, the closer they get. Well, perhaps that's not important now. Is it right for me to engage in an argument with you? Death imposes one condition on those who choose to work with it – you must have no imagination. Morta obeyed that rule, she had to, and stopped using her imagination so that she could day after day, spent in a horribly cold, sterile environment, pull bodies turning blue and black from refrigerators, cut through thin layers of skin, open up the chest cavity, allowed death to kiss her, took into her hands hearts wrinkled and rotting like apples, dripped chemical solutions of various colours onto them and waited for a reaction... I can only guess in my naivety whether anyone like me could be allowed to

be so near death and see how it triumphs and reigns. I am far from death and therefore can use my imagination. I can imagine what it meant to Morta to work in death, with the temporarily frozen bodies, wounded, broken, lacking limbs, swollen from the time they spent in water, and, as sometimes happened, badly burned... Allow my imagination to take a step back because death has unexpectedly come close.

The cats unexpectedly came up close to the creature, I have in mind that sorry excuse for a sparrow, when it, exhausted, probably from fear, because that companion of the devil (there, I've said it) had more staying power than the cargo ships that ply the oceans, had alighted on a door handle, not having found in the poor light of the corridor a safer spot to rest. That a door handle is not a ceiling should be clear to everyone. And particularly to the cats. And what happened next led later to the most vehemently argued allegations, so – let me remind you that I'm guessing, only guessing! – I'll give you my version. You must understand that nature, different to culture, grew and developed from the primordial seed of cosmic order and discipline, so one can see with the naked eye that nothing happens in it by chance, arbitrarily. Unfortunately, man has become too detached from nature, drowned in the intoxicating, thick smoke of culture, and is no longer able to see with the naked eye the rather clear rules of nature. Please be good enough to listen to what I have to say so as to avoid any misunderstanding: I, Charlie, am also more in favour of the ecstasy of culture than the sobriety of nature. However, this sympathy, this, if you will, dependence does not preclude one from stating the unpleasant fact about gouged-out eyes, and please don't think I feel superior because of that. On the contrary! To be able to see the world with the naked eye means to be less of a human being, means a punishment, which can be imposed only by... well, is it for me to talk about things like that? Be that as it may, nature grew out of discipline, and discipline – out of nature, in which, for that reason, we will not find easy acquired spoils thrown down at our feet by chance. And so, when that poor excuse for a sparrow grabbed hold of the metal door handle with the claws of its spindly little legs, the cats did not attack it, although even a well-fed pussycat spoiled rotten by its owners could easily have got hold of it, and hopeless creatures like that hardly ever turned up at our building. The cats lined up neatly in an equilateral triangle, huddled together like soldiers in a phalanx, armed with their shaggy fur and their dagger-like fangs flashing through their barely open mouths, and in the front, closest to the door and the handle with that unfortunate feathered creature on it, was the black-furred one-eyed cat, and only then did it occur to me that there was a delightfully strict hierarchy in that unit of holy terrors as well. They were waiting for a command from elsewhere. Please note: I am not saying from above, I am saying from somewhere else. And while waiting for it, the cats and that poor excuse for a sparrow stared at each other so intently that if anyone had been watching the scene (Morta missed her chance, can anyone else be blamed for that?) he would have felt two opposing worlds collide, perhaps in the same way that the Romans and the Barbarians looked at one other when they first met, when civilisation flourished without restraint, and when a strong wind blew bringing with it a foretelling of the painful end to come far too soon. Understand me correctly, I do not know if it is possible to look a bird straight in the eye, because the eyes of these creatures are so empty, so lifeless, so stone-like, that it's hardly worthwhile calling those circles, which somehow resemble yesterday's campfire,

eyes (is that not eloquent testimony as to the kind of creatures we are dealing with?). The eyes of cats are perhaps the cruellest and most pleasurable thing you can experience before you die: their convex glass will never reflect your image but rather the shadow of a pale silhouette that seems to be standing behind you. And now, remembering that unique feeling, I feel a shiver run down my spine. And behind those glass spheres are stored the world's greatest and perhaps only wonders - shining black discs on emerald, amber or copper material, discs transformed by day into compasses showing in what direction Death and Life lie. That's how it looks to me! Do forgive me! You are at liberty not to give in to this feeling. Perhaps you might find that possible. Perhaps.

The seven intrepid warriors tensed up and prepared to leap, muttering to each other in strange guttural sounds. But when the command was given (I, of course, didn't hear it) and they leapt up as one body, the door handle swung down, that poor excuse for a sparrow fluttered up, the door opened, and the cats jumped on the person who had opened the door. It would be logical to assume that the order of nature had been disrupted by the devil himself. However, it was not he but Ignas, who stepped into the corridor dispelling the gloom with the warm light of the room behind him. Or rather, forgive me, he tried to step into the corridor, because the daylight flooded out like a sigh, and Ignas, attacked by the seven cats, fell over on his back, ending up sprawled out on the floor, moaning heavily. From that moment on, the battle between God and the Devil received its first spectator and witness. To tell the truth, between us, I wouldn't put too much stock in Ignas' account. Like all former big bosses, he didn't notice details, and he knew how to exaggerate or downplay his personal role in things with great skill - as the need arose, so when he later complained that one of the cats that had pounced on him had painfully and dangerously dug a claw in an area close to his eye (Ignas grumbled in irritation: the cat had almost scratched his eyeball), I didn't believe it for a moment, although, of course, I refrained from voicing my doubts. To be fair, it should be said that there was indeed a thin red scratch under his left eye, but I had almost no doubt that it had appeared earlier and was connected with some other foolish story, which, forgive me, I had no interest in. Knocked to the floor, Ignas looked like a giant, with six or eight nimble hairy hands sensually grabbing at his swollen belly and the hands then disappearing and leaving him lying there like a ball of ice melting in the sun. But Ignas did not in the least look fat because, seemingly, he had at one time been a keen athlete. Perhaps he had to have been in good shape for the job he did, but have you noticed that we tend to see our bosses as being a little bigger than they actually are? Mr Director, when I give it some thought, although perhaps only in my eyes he did not seem to fit into whatever space he occupied, while at the same time being too small for it.

But none of that mattered. The battle continued, and Julita appeared next to the fallen Ignas, as if she had been close by the whole time, hiding behind the door. Of course, I do not in any way justify any interference in the very delicate affairs of two people, but perhaps you can sometimes ask yourself a question silently, without expecting an answer? For example: had Ignas ever noticed Julita's magically wavy hair? Did the eyes of Julita's direct and biggest boss, hovering over her like a black storm cloud, there's no point in hiding it, see how with her long fingers she brushed her loose curls from her smooth, white forehead? Were those curls mere details that Ignas, her boss, took no

interest in? Or was it the case that for him, as for me, Charlie - and, don't get me wrong, no malice is involved in these words, that they embodied Julita's essence? I ask silently, without expecting an answer. It is none of my business why Julita found herself next to Ignas whenever he needed, how shall I put it, help unconnected with his administrative duties. As far as I was given to understand, Ignas's fragility - I am not lying when I say that I myself gave a name to the condition that from time to time but quite frequently befell that strong man and I am not sure if anyone else in the company would have agreed with me if I had ever ventured to say it out loud - came after a fateful event (Ignas has said so himself), with Julita arriving after that. Well, without anyone noticing, the comforted subordinate became the comforter. And so that at times amusing fragility, that small fragment of everyday life, even if Ignas noticed it (and he probably did not), he noticed it only as a trait belonging to Julita, not to himself.

Julita helped Ignas get up, while he grumbled angrily that he had kicked those good for nothings, and they, with tails between their legs, had scampered off to hide in the corners of the building. No one believed him then and we shouldn't believe him now - the cats hadn't run away - they had changed their tactics. They were forced to do so: that poor excuse for a sparrow had flown off somewhere and the four-legged creatures began to hunt for it, spreading their forces out over the first floor of the factory. It seems as if that invisible good for nothing had taken a large mirror and was playing a game of sunbeams in the tunnels of the corridors - only instead of flashes of sunlight, fast moving, impatient shadows flickered. Here and there they came in and out of view, soundlessly tiptoeing along the walls, sniffing around every nook and cranny and crawling on dusty devices that hadn't been touched in years. If I, perhaps got a little carried away with myself earlier and made some not very nice remarks about artists, I would like to correct that now: artists are like cats, and cats are like artists, because both have the most important quality as part of their talent - empathy. Anyone else would have given up but not these warriors of God. After an hour of exploration, they did not cease in the least in their endeavour but became even more active and expanded their search of the territory: two of them ran down to the ground floor one after the other and squeezed through the curved bridge into the stage well, another two ran up to the second floor and checked to see if any gaps had opened up in the roof, through which the feathered demon could have escaped to the outside with undeserved success, and the remaining three were still snooping around on the first floor, miaowing infrequently and exchanging information. If it were possible to mark the trajectories of their search on a topographical map of the factory, a portrait drawn with a fine graphite pencil would emerge on a sheet of paper. This is the face of tenacity, persistence and divine dedication! This face would smile knowingly when one of the cats, perhaps the one with a limp, suddenly heard a restless fluttering - on the first floor, but further away from where Ignas had experienced the attack by the phalanx. That sorry excuse for a sparrow crossed the first floor's main corridor, turned to the right and went up a flight of gentle steps that led not to another floor, but to some auxiliary room with perhaps some special purpose, a room in the shape and size of a square sandbox. It was empty apart only for a rusty loudspeaker in one corner placed high up, as if it had hidden here from the silence that haunted it. And why did it need to be hung there? What purpose did it serve in a place where the sound

spat out of it would be muffled by travelling down a few steps? But at this moment, the loudspeaker was given a new lease of life, because this creature of the skies, in its attempt to get behind the wide plastic rim, tried to land on it. Or perhaps it had been there for a whole hour, had dozed off, slipped, and, as bad luck would have it, flapped its dishevelled wings in an attempt to regain its balance. Unfortunately, while the cat with the limp – we can't be angry with it, it is a very dependable, very brave creature, perhaps not as agile as the others, but he did have white fur emerging from its belly and blending into the black dripping, as it were, down its back, and when it stood still, you could imagine the white silhouette of a Middle Eastern city on its glistening sides, licked clean, with sharp minarets towering in the cold night sky, a very comforting, very calming panorama – managed to get up the stairs, that poor excuse for a sparrow brazenly cut the air right above the cat's head and with its stiff tail brushed the hair on top of its head (seemingly wishing to make fun of it) between its ears, tensed to catch any sound, and flew off in the opposite direction. The chase began anew.

When Ignas, attacked by God's soldiers, fell over, his moaning carried by the ventilation ducts, the sewage and water pipes echoed far and wide through all of the factory's bloodstream, sounds of varying pitch and mood fell like droplets of mercury from a shattered thermometer, and at least one sound of that moaning, turned into a muffled, indecisive whimper, drifted into pale-faced Vita's room. She was the only one of the female actors to get a room on the second floor. As you can understand, all the actors were in separate rooms, at quite a distance from one other, and if they so desired could avoid meeting anyone else during the day and live surrounded here and there only by tip-toeing cats and their purring. Since the actors were spread out over the factory's large spaces, I began out of an old habit to think of them as books, placed on shelves in a strict order: Morta – was a thin French novel, quite coarse in character, was placed with the modern Western European classics; Ignas - a once acclaimed collection of short stories, widely read for a time, was on the shelf of Russian classics; Vincent - a didactic work pulled out of a damp cellar, yellowing and warped, smelling of mould and pride, which even experienced librarians would put on a different shelf every time; Julita – a collection of Japanese poetry pleasant to touch with a beautiful, timeless cover (unfortunately, very rarely requested by readers, so stuck high up under the ceiling and beginning to yellow from the dust); Paulius... Paulius was an old, thick volume of an encyclopaedia, published as a supplement after the last one with the letter Z; Carl the Less, let's put it this way, was still lying in the book-acceptance section because the librarian hadn't had time to describe it yet, and from the small format of the book you could guess anything; and the pale Vita, to the eye of experienced librarian, and allow me think of myself as that, was more than predictable, she stood out in all libraries as do all books of a similar nature - the most read, with frayed edges, that had once shone brightly, and then later became faded and plagued by constant self-pity, those romance novels that are set aside from the rest of the publications, as if there was the fear that they might pass on the contagion of their pink lightness to the other books. And how can you know that might not be the case, right?

Heavily-built Vita walked like a well-thumbed book with the tatty state of its pages as evidence of that. Perhaps her gait could be described as a little immodest, but, God

forbid, I am not suggesting that it reflected Vita's inner disposition or her life experience up to that point. This would be a fitting place to indulge you a little and let you in on a little secret: librarians live every day mostly dipping sugar cubes in tea, and what I have in mind is not the librarians' love of drinking tea, but of romance novels. They are always the books nearest to librarians, always close to hand, most often touched, their pages turned, caressed, as if the sensuality that emanates from them was transferred to their duties as librarians, and if we were granted an hour to talk frankly, and what after all is there to hide, we would rather, given a free moment, read them ourselves, and if someone were to have the thought to lick a librarian's fingers, they would probably experience the taste of sweetness with impurities sticking to them. And please don't think I'm saying anything against Vita! And what would life itself say, if I can phrase it like that, after choosing a profession, you are obliged to wait tensed up and without rest, and then the next moment you have to, as it were, run at full speed, when you never know what awaits you when a new challenge presents itself, what suffering, pain, and loss you will soon experience, whether you will help an unfortunate person or just wave your arms around, turn to the wall and apologise for not helping? That I, Charlie, did not, as might mistakenly be thought, speak very highly of Vita, was not at all out of a lack of respect for her and her work, but probably out of the helplessness that comes over me every time I look at the architecture on her head: the pale Vita did not very much like to wash her hair, and because of the greasiness it would take on the shape of a cone with the top cut off. She looked, if you'll forgive me for saying so, as if she'd put a vase or a bucket upside down on her head, with her hair falling straight down and the ends curled like meringues. Those short, heavy curls made her head sail through space like a ferry, framed by thick tyres. Looking at this sight, I tell you honestly, I began to wonder whether the hair given to this woman was still bringing her respect. I don't know!

Forgive me for repeating myself – it would be wrong to think that Vita was not a virtuous woman. She was, and her sudden reaction to the events in the theatre, to the incident with the insolent intruder, is a perfect testimony of that. As was her long-held custom, as soon as she heard the muffled notes of someone moaning echoing up to her room, she dashed out into the corridor. To get to the first floor, she had to cross the corridor of the second floor, and she did so in such a way as to not let the urgency of the situation rob her of her dignity: the ferry that was her head sailed swiftly through the twilight, dragging the considerable weight of her body behind it like a load submerged in a river, in the process causing a good amount of noise. What a coincidence (oh, those coincidences! Coincidences are the jewels of our lives, an adornment and a celebration) that the very same day and for the first time Carl the Less dropped by my workshop, which is also on the third floor, next to my little room. I didn't have the slightest skills but let's say that due to circumstances, I worked in that workshop on the various little things, the so-called props, needed for the performances, whenever Mr. Director hadn't ordered from somewhere else, because, you see, there might have been problems sometimes to ask to have them made somewhere else ... well, for all sorts of reasons that aren't worth bothering you with. To tell the truth, we could talk about those times not in the plural but rather than in the singular, I should say, the one and only time when Mr Director, I repeat, we probably should not make anything of it... I don't know, maybe he didn't

get around to it or didn't want to, or couldn't order it, but those things are an important element of the performance, although to say so is almost the same as lying because it was not just an important element of the performance, but the essential element of the last, the very last performance! The final one! The piece of equipment needed for the farewell! And in moments of sadness, when I didn't know where to put myself, when no one could console me, I allowed myself to think that Mr. Director hadn't it ordered it from somewhere else for no good reason but wanted to give me the pleasure and the honour of putting into effect this vision crowning the work of the theatre. Do you understand? Me, Charlie. Could I have refused even though I had no idea how to construct this piece of equipment for the farewell? For a long time, I didn't know what to do, where to start, so the first thing I did that would help me to find the capability was to give a name to the future element of the final performance. I called it The End. And then Carl the Less stepped into the workshop and found me toiling away on the End. On the floor were scattered my amateurish blueprints, I had finished working on the stand, there was the smell of freshly-cut oak, and other materials lying nearby. Carol the Less hadn't come by to say hello (and why would he? We were all inhabitants of the same building, and the habit of greeting one another had slowly disappeared, because greeting people is necessary in a reality in which we, in encountering others, do not know what sort of fate will befall them or us and when, that is to say, in a reality from which divine privilege has been removed, and we, as you will understand, had retained this privilege.) He knelt down beside me and looked carefully at the tools and materials that had been laid out, as if he wanted to get to work immediately. How can I not admire a man whose eyes beg for work? Carl the Less worked tirelessly, and although he did not have a single iota more skill than I, he proved to be an excellent helper, and one without whom, it would seem, it will not be possible to manage without in the future. From that day on, the End became more than just my concern.

After two hours of our working together, Vita came clattering past the workshop and the both of us, Carl the Less and I - oh, how sad and sweet it is to suddenly realise that we two had been so engrossed in our work that we had forgotten where we were and who we were - it was as if we were at a remove from everything else. Some kind of unrest was happening on the other side of our workshop (as you can see, I hadn't even noticed it myself, I've said 'our'). It seemed to me that it wasn't worth paying attention to whatever was happening. Could there be anything more important than what we were doing, than the vision that was being born in our hands, than the End we had begun? But Carol the Less was also Carol the Young, his youthful restlessness could not close his ears to the sound coming from close by and the even more alluring sounds coming from still further away, or at least that's how I understood his intensity at the time: he was still bent over the equipment we were using, not lifting his head, but his slight but strong back was arched and his hands began to squeeze the piece of wood harder, as if it had been turned into a poisonous snake to be strangled. Go and see what's going on, I urged him, and I was a little frightened that my careless words sounded too affectionate, as if they had been spoken by a father, which, my God, I'm even afraid to admit it, would have sounded like... well, it would have sounded like a kind of betrayal. Carl the Less did not care. The Less could not have cared. He didn't know. Perhaps he didn't even hear the

affection I felt because I had the impression looking at things from the side that he hadn't experienced much affection in his life and probably didn't even recognise its shades. Or was it just me who heard tenderness, heard it where in fact it was absent? There is no point in dwelling on it because betrayal is neither diminished nor increased as a result, is it? Betrayal is a fixed quantity by which many things can be measured. Perhaps the tenderness that had slipped out stopped me more than the End that was being made, and I was left there in the workshop, but Carl the Less stood up and walked out quite briskly.

From his later account, I learnt most of what happened in the factory that had been turned into a hunting ground for just that one sorry excuse for a sparrow. Imagination, so to speak, was pushed to one side by the facts. It is true that what the other actors said (they talked about the hunt for several days more) allowed me to see some details, some nuances, in certain instances a different perspective. You wouldn't be interested in listening to the whole story, although I heard from the workshop that the antics went on for about three hours: sometimes the cats' meowing would go up a several octaves and then I was sure they were transmitting messages to their own world, and at other times I would hear such unclear sounds that I would wonder if I wasn't hearing the reply, which was more reminiscent of a reproof or a not very well-intended sermon, and it's not for us to guess who could have been sending the reply. The feathered demon appeared to have so much energy that some of the cats began to flag. The first, it seems, to lower his whiskers, to coin a phrase, was the mischievous striped cat (you have to understand that we work with our hands while cats hunt with their whiskers). Perhaps the others were surprised, having seen the earlier signs of defeat but I had already got to know the seven cats and I could have sworn that it was not tiredness that came over the striped cat but the indolence characteristic of it. Oh, how indolence suits it! And to tell the truth, indolence suits the whole cat species: when they stretch out and lie on their sides, crossing front and back legs, looking at you with heads raised a little and asking why are you so afraid of being indolent, then, and precisely then do I understand that cats are the kings of human beings. Yes, yes, I haven't mixed anything up: the lion is the king of beasts and the cat – of human beings!