

A GOOD OMEN, PERHAPS ...



That night the moon rose early in the indigo blue sky, and its thin sickle was immersed in a halo of finely spun light that made it seem much larger than usual, and very delicate. A cops owl called from the silent village, and the wind held a promise of rain.

Sleep came late, with swarms of confused events that seemed repetitions of ancient dreams. Then the dogs began to rummage in their quarters, small noises of scratching and yawning, many paws in motion on the terracotta tiles, a playful little row with a snarl: daybreak tunes.

The morning was clear and very cool, and in the high mountains to the north towering clouds gathered like big white sheep and slowly descended the slopes. For a long time he saw them coming, and when they finally enclosed him he seemed surprised, because his field of vision withdrew into itself without notice, and every sound was subdued.

On the edge of the garden stood a long row of palm trees, their high crowns always alive with rustling or the chirps of many small birds that lived between the sharp spines and fed on the yellow dates which the trees bore. Now he could still see their vague outlines, but they seemed unreal, like an image in a faded old mirror. Thus overcame him a sensation of loneliness, a feeling as if the planet consisted only of the house and the garden, and beyond it the world disintegrated into a colorful carpet of loosely woven strands.

And he thought: at the Dawn of Man people must have felt often as I feel now, confronted with an often disturbing remoteness in a realm without conceivable limits, yet blessed with coherent fables and reliable legends. And he wondered how far the path could still reach, and where he wandered right now, and when the next sign might appear to encourage his steps.

Just then a shrill scream broke the silence, and a seagull swept out of the white emptiness and sailed slowly into full view.

Her appearance was so unexpected and implausible that for a moment a hint of the supernatural befell him. A magical intent in her sudden appearance, herself a messenger from an only imagined dimension? But she was also a part of this world, and whatever her secret might be, her unquestionable reality was overwhelming enough. He had sometimes seen seagulls moving far into the mountains, especially in winter, when the sea was in uproar and fell wild on the cliffs and hunting more difficult. But never before had he met one in his own realm, so high, so near the heavens.

She landed beside the almond tree, and the dogs stood stiff and stared. Then one began to run, but not so fast as if chasing the ball, but slower, capable to change course in case the newcomer proved dangerous. The rest followed at a safe distance.

The gull peered out of bright, impertinent eyes and in the very last moment took wing with a languid, unsurpassed elegance: perfect master of time and element. She sailed across the garden, landed, rose again as the dogs followed noisily, now at top speed, flew back to the almond tree, flew up again, and repeated the game several more times.

It was an improbable sight, as if an extremely aerodynamic angel were leading a troop of merrily yelling woodland devils, all coal black and earthbound forever.

Then he wanted to be a dog as well, to share into their pure and childlike delight, so free from past and future, so much closer to God than all human conjectures could ever reach.

In the midst of the last chase the gull suddenly rose high into the air, fell sideways to gain speed, and moved silently into the mist. The dogs came back panting, shook the wetness out of their furs, looked at him with shining eyes, and finally marched to the kitchen in anticipation of breakfast.

But he stood a moment longer, strangely moved.

What a miraculous event to start the day!

A good omen, perhaps ...

Later the fog became thinner, and soon the sun stood high above the land. Trees and bushes were wet with bright dew, and the leaves shone like polished emeralds. A scent of thyme hung in the clear air, and the world seemed young and refreshed.