

could die in peace; even though she was trying to control her selfishness, for it was apparent she could not conceive loving someone who was interested in her enormous wealth. Undoubtedly, once he became sane, he would appreciate wealth, he would covet it and he would no longer continue loving her for love's sake, but for the sake of money. Then, she lost consciousness.

*Ready? Do we pull now?
We can't see anything
Here they come. Come up slowly. Slowly,
so that she doesn't get hurt.
Then we shall bring the little fool.
Little moron, can you hear us? Did you
tie her well?
She is coming up. Just a little bit more.
Pull evenly, a little bit harder.
Yes, "Ha-Ha" . . . I tied her well . . .
From the waist?
What?
Pull her up more. She is almost at the top of
the well?
We can't see . . . It's dark . . .
Did you tie her well?
Yess . . . from her neck . . . it was I, "ha-ha" . . .
I tied her . . . from her neck . . .*

Mrs. Danielou would love her little fool more than anything in the world, beyond life itself, in the instant of eternity.

Translated by Nina Guilbert

DANIACHEW WORKU / ETHIOPIA

The Voice!

A dusty provincial road zigzagged across the hillock; the tops of the houses, trees, gardens, and animals in the area were covered with dust. Some of the trees were covered with more dust than others: the cactus and the *wanza*

trees which abound in the place. One got the impression that here were the remains of a bombed city or ash-towers which by miracle were still holding up their height above the ground; and the *besanna* and the *wayera* were merged into dense and gloomy masses, so much so that they looked like rows of monotonous slum buildings. The people too looked like they were also covered with dust—a sort of blighting and baneful atmosphere seemed to enshroud them. Over all this, a black mist of dust hung, unmoving; and beneath it, squatting in the bushes, appeared the scattered huts.

Halfway up the hillock, some three huts could be seen beside a compound of two other bigger mud huts; one of the small huts which once housed a farmer and his wife was now vacant, and of the other two, one belonged to a farmer with a large family and the other to a handsome young man who had been married for a little over a year. The compound, of course, was the landlady's.

The young man was really handsome—black and handsome with aristocratic features—high open forehead, straight and sharply outlined nose, and candid eyes—had even a kind of stereotyped air of conceit and arrogance about him. In his general makeup, however, there was something disturbed, tortured and sort of whimpering. Nobody knew exactly how old he was except that people said he was about twenty-five. He came to this district with his father when he was probably between the ages of five and eight.

Five years later his father died from, it was rumored, total exhaustion of the body. For three days he had to suffer before he gathered strength enough to puff off his soul . . . Like his son, though not as dark, he was considered to be handsome. It was even said of him that there wasn't a girl in the neighborhood who hadn't attempted to win him over; but due to some unforeseen circumstances, he had been a kind of virtual prisoner. The landlady had taken him in, giving him no chance to mix either with the servants or the neighbors, especially if they were of the female sex. His life was tightly scheduled: during the day, he worked like a donkey—clearing ground, farming, cutting grass for the cattle, and sometimes even gathering firewood for the evening; and during the evening he shut himself up or rather the lady shut him in, in her private room or better still, they shut themselves in, to do, God knows what . . .

The servants were jealous of the landlady, and as a result there were all sorts of rumors in their quarters. Some said he helped her with rubbing her body when she took her bath; others said he did something with massaging her with some kind of medicinal ointment which was supposed to reduce the thickness of the neck, the hips, the legs and all those parts which were supposed to be the pride of a woman. And still others contended that he was doing a simple job of carrying or, if you prefer, holding the legs of the lady on his shoulders, stroking them gently until she had gone to sleep. And under all of these, of course, there flowed the undercurrent of unspoken

rumor that the lady was allowed as many as five men a day by her doctor who happened to be also her confessor, and that this one man was doing the work of all.

Well, each of the servants must have filled one or more of the above offices and must have known about them from experience; or, perhaps, they were simply jealous and had wanted to chatter about whatever came to their mouths. The deceased, whatever the actual office he was engaged in, had come to this village from God knows where—probably from some province, having had to leave it for a murder he had committed and needing an obscure place to hide; or, perhaps, a tyrant had snatched away his wife and he was running away from all those things that might remind him of her. Whatever the reason might have been, he came there—he was there, and died while at the beck and call of the lady, leaving behind him the young boy.

During the lifetime of the father, the boy was entrusted to the care of the servants, along with the daughter of the lady—a smart cute girl of the same age. All the servants loved him, especially the female servants. They even gave him more attention than the girl. All of them took turns with him; they looked after him by turns; they slept with him by turns. And each of them did something to him and made him promise never to utter a word about it to anybody, including his father, whom he rarely saw.

It was perhaps out of love; but it was difficult to tell from what they were doing to him. Some kissed him to the point of swallowing him whole . . . kissed him until his teeth were flecked with blood and his lips swollen to the point of bursting open; some touched him very delicately in various parts of his body and made him shudder, gasp, and utter a cry of pain; and some had even succeeded making him convulsively go into some deep and unheard-of kind of sobbing; and still others had put him on their bellies and wiggled their bottoms below; while a very few of them had the temerity to rape him . . . and on top of it all, each of them, every time they did it, made him promise to keep it secret.

He kept his promise. But as time went on he found it hard to talk at all. He developed a fear that he might say the wrong things and that in doing so he might antagonize them to the point of bringing accusation upon himself for something he hadn't done, ruining his favorable position with the landlady. But still he kept his promise; he kept everything secret. Of course, he had one day dug the earth and had shouted everything into it; but that wouldn't count.

The seven years following his father's death had brought a lot of change in him. He had grown up to be quite tall and amazingly like his father; he had also developed a way of walking which was very much like his father's . . . a hesitant type of long stride. And the lady certainly couldn't help noticing these changes.

In her time she had had her share of child rearing. She had eleven children: two had died; one had run to some other province after having killed a servant in a quarrel . . . and nobody knew whether he was alive or dead; two had joined the army and never came to visit her except once or so every two or three years; one was in a school in some far-off monastery; two of her daughters were safely married; and it was only the last one, mentioned earlier, who was living with her.

Her husband had died long ago, and it was in fact after his death that she had started to gain weight at a terrific rate. She always liked to talk and her favorite subjects could be boiled down to four. They were: her project to open a drinking place, where people could not only drink but also dance, where she could dance as well, as it would improve the figure; her many children, and how good a mother she was; her husband, and how kindly and hardworking he had been; and once in a while, especially in the presence of those who she considered should know, such as the young man, about her confessor, how understanding and encouraging he was and how he almost always took all the burden and prayer upon himself as long as she had a dollar or two for his service . . . And to hear her talk about these things every day, either directed to him or to others, had been the fate of the young man.

He had patience and tolerance . . . he heard her all right . . . He heard her with complete indifference, showing no inclination to either agreement or disagreement . . . But underneath such indifference he had slowly grown more and more bored and more and more withdrawn into himself. And the landlady was not slow to find out; she found out his boredom and withdrawal; she realized that it was no longer easy to keep him idly engaged at home. She immediately ordered that he take his father's occupation in the farm.

At the farm, the young man proved hardworking and energetic. He brought in more of *tef*, wheat, and maize after every season of harvest. He came, in fact, to be known as the ablest of farmers in the area.

Fathers from the neighboring villages openly proposed their daughters to him either when they came together for group work, as during harvest time, or when they met him in the road. They dropped hints that he was always welcome in their houses; they invited him for meals and even went out of their ways to do him some other good service.

At the same time, the girls also had their parts to play. They purposely drove a goat, a sheep, or a calf to where he might be farming, weeding, or resting for midday meal, and came as if they were looking for it. He, however, didn't seem to care for them or if he did, it was at least very hard to say since he very very rarely spoke. Even when the girls took up courage and asked him questions, he simply grunted, nodded or pointed at the thing if he happened to see it.

From the little he had told the servants about his mother it was very difficult to say whether he had loved her or not. She seemed not to have allowed him to talk, protesting that he had developed a foul tongue and that he had learned only swear words and bad words, and telling him that he wasn't as yet ready to talk to decent people. She seemed also to have told him that he was handsome and that people would be satisfied by simply looking at him . . . always adding, of course . . . "but your soul, your voice is like your father's . . . it has a sour and biting edge to it." She had even called out one day while he was trying to sing with his playmates, "No . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . n . . . my dear . . . the beauty of the voice is not given to our house!" He was painfully cut short and never attempted to open his mouth again in songs either on that day or any other. He had told them that he still heard her voice "No . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . n . . ." with the exception of "my dear" which was somehow swept away by some kind of wind before he heard it; or when he heard it, it was no more than congested words! He had told them too that during those days he had been so vexed with his mother for the outrageous exposure she had put him to in front of his playmates that he had to voice his grievance by soiling his clothes with mud during the day, breaking his plate during the evening, and even by burning his *mamma*.*

However those days had had their own usefulness. They had made him see himself in perspective. They had made him focus his inner self onto his "wholeness" . . . his voice.

He had focused his inner self upon his voice. He had focused it upon his voice and had come to realize at least some things about it. He had focused his inner self upon it and had come, most of all, to realize its potentiality. He had focused upon its physical nature and had found out that it had developed inertia, a kind of restraint. And he had focused it upon that restraint, and to his not great dismay, he had found out that it was in actuality nothing but a fear of his voice printed in him. And very recently he had focused it on the print of this fear and had found out that it was due to the experience he had had of his father's voice which was exactly like his.

The picture was clear to him. He was a man now. He was faced with finding a solution to this voice. There was no reason for him to want to suppress it every time he wanted to talk. And besides he would profit nothing by doing so but lose whatever the fruit of his life might be . . . his I—But then how could he go about it . . . that was the rub . . . How could he forget his past? How could he convince himself that the truth lay in that voice? . . . the voice he feared! . . . If only he wouldn't become trapped in his emotions; if only he wouldn't hear his mother's "No . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . n . . ."; if only he wouldn't hear his father's hard voice shouting, com-

* A kind of tower from which crop-pests are chased.

plaining, and accusing people for the slightest wrongs done to him and to others—be it against a small boy or a helpless old man, as long as he thought himself to be right; if only he wouldn't hear the servants shaking their index fingers and sharply reminding him, "mind you . . . not to any one . . . not to any soul" . . . or, "it's between you and me . . . only . . . not to a soul . . . never never to any one . . . I repeat it again . . . never . . ."

Well, well! . . . all this, all right . . . But what could he do about all this? Is there any way out? . . . "The lady is getting older and more mature . . ." Very well, but would she allow him to have his own home . . . you know if she would he might get married and leave her . . . and then . . . perhaps he might even look for an opportunity to find a solution to his voice. "And the landlady is no fool!"

She sure was no fool! She was in fact surprised at his sudden growth and development. She had even feared the idea that he might get married and leave her . . . and had given thought to him now for some time. "But she loves him you know . . . it might be out of love . . ." Yes! She loved him perhaps even more than her children . . . as much as she loved her wealth. She had spoken about him to her confessor and had hinted at the possibility of his being one of her heirs. But she had also realized that that wouldn't be strong enough to keep him with her. She had to take a tangible step.

And a step she took against the advice of her confessor. She decided on marrying him to her daughter. There had never been any visible love affair between her daughter and the young man; but then such a trifle wouldn't stand in the lady's way. She had called him immediately to her room and had told him about her decision. As usual, he had sat for some time with his arms crossed and his hands tucked under his armpits and had left her room without so much as uttering a word. Without an iota of doubt about the fact that he had consented she went and arranged for the marriage feast; and the young man got married after about a month and had been made to settle not far from her. A year later, he was blessed with a *macchietta* son.

The marriage, at least from what the wife made it look, didn't turn out to be a bed of roses. Certain things about him became more and more intolerable. She had been used to a lot of talking, discussing things out. But in her new home there was nothing like that; she found it to be exactly the reverse . . . a place of silence. During a whole evening, even if she were talking on various topics that might interest him, he simply nodded and remained quiet and indifferent.

He would sit on the earthen floor at the fireplace opposite her, from time to time blinking at the blaze and poking the fire with a piece of wood, and would go on staring at her. Staring at her . . . once in a while, the silence was disturbed by the cry of the baby, the scamper and squeak of rats or by some kind of clinking of earthenware by the fireside. He would stare at her! He would stare at her between the thighs. He would in fact go to the extent

of placing her legs at the right places; and she would allow him because it gave her the feeling that she was with somebody after all. At times, she would even purposely put her legs together for him and he would go on putting them apart . . . with a kind of shrug and a kind of hard puffing sound from his nose. At other times, she would put out the flame carefully so that he wouldn't look into her; and thus transfixing herself in the gloom, she would enjoy his irritation and his hurry at breaking more sticks for the fire and the way he went down on his knees before her knees to blow on the sticks to start the fire.

But then such times were always difficult for her. He never raised his head immediately: every glint was a light for him; every coming up and dying of flame, every sputter, a kind of hope; every cracking of a stick and the flight of embers to her thighs, a strong suppressed gush of abrupt and half-indrawn kind of broad smile of Ahha . . . ahha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . And then when the stick caught fire, he would make some sort of snorting noise and begin starting with bulged and shining eyes into her and would jump on her, his mouth puckering in a little unheard cry . . . a little struggle would ensue but she would give in, fall back on the ground before him, sometimes sobbing and clasping him round his hips.

That had become almost like a kind of food for him . . . a kind of food without which perhaps he thought he wouldn't live. And for her it had become nothing more than an exhausting act. She knew she wouldn't go on like that since it became more and more apparent that his only interest was mainly that . . .

She thought it wise to tell her mother and she did so. She told her about it again and again and always telling her about the different things he did to her, emphasizing his brutality. Her mother, therefore, first and foremost decided to make him talk; for she thought that that would release his pent-up energy. She devised various ways but she had almost failed when one day on New Year's Eve . . . when the family and some guests were gathered together for a feast, it dawned on her . . . perhaps encouraged and affected by the promising and joyful air in the room and the bright holiday atmosphere which permeated all around . . . to beg her son-in-law in the name of all those present . . . to start talking to people . . . Before this of course the usual chatter was there . . . she had talked about her husband . . . about how good a mother she was . . . about her children . . . and that she might even get a medal for having been God's instrument for bringing into the world so many . . . and so . . . quite suddenly and unexpectedly she rose from her seat and opened her mouth:

"In the name of all of those present . . . in the name of the Virgin Mary, our mediatrix . . . in the name of all the saints, and especially in the name of Kullebbe Gabriel, the healer . . . Abuye Tsadiku who can shatter mountains . . . and in the name of Saint George who appears in times of need

and trouble, I beseech you . . . take us into your confidence . . . or at least talk to us . . . say something . . . something . . . anything . . . but say something . . .” she paused and continued “. . . by those heroic bones of your fathers and grandfathers . . . your mothers and grandmothers . . .” she paused longer, but there was no stir, movement or sound from around her, it seemed all eyes were riveted on the young man—and the lady started again, this time rather pitifully “. . . at least give some consideration to an . . . a woman standing and begging you . . .”

The young man slowly cleared his throat and said almost inaudibly “My voice sounds like the sound made by a stone dropped in a deep well.”

“Be it as it may . . . that wouldn’t worry us . . .” cried the lady feeling encouraged.

“It’s dry,” he added.

“It wouldn’t do us any harm; don’t worry about that,” she encouraged.

“It’s sour and biting!” he continued.

“Anything! . . . Anything! Anything is better than such as your silence!” uttered the lady with a sort of feeling and perturbed spirit. “Anything . . . any . . .” she was saying again when the young man began, still with a low tone . . .

“How . . . how . . .” and staring at her . . . “How . . . how big . . . I mean . . .” he continued looking at her hip . . . “how wide would be . . . that . . . that . . . that . . . gate . . . that had opened . . . for eleven . . . heads! . . . I mean . . . I . . . mean . . . yours!” he added quickly.

The lady immediately hunched up her shoulders, withdrew her contorted face into it, began to shake and shiver as though with ague, darted her eyes from her daughters to her guests . . . and gave a sharp sound as if something pierced her heart and seared her soul, wimpling into her seat as words dropped from her lips “. . . biting . . . s-our . . . sou-r . . . so-ur . . .” and tears clogged her throat.

“Eleven children . . .” the young man started again.

“No . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . no . . . n . . .” uttered the lady, the sounds wafting away to a great distance every time she uttered them.

“. . . and different sizes of heads at that . . .” he continued.

“Help me . . . fffffriends . . . help me . . . sssssour . . . no . . . nno . . . no . . . no . . . nnnnnnnno . . . not the word.”

“. . . and like my boy’s . . . with such large shoulders . . .” he went on unmindful of what was going on . . .

“SShut up! SShut up . . . Shutupshutupshutupshutupshutup!” the lady shouted then, half rising from her seat, almost completely forgetting herself, and collapsing into her wicker chair again almost as immediately.

The guests one by one had left the house, but the husband of one of the daughters of the lady who had come for a visit and who happened to be there had remained behind and had started openly calling the young man

bad names; he had even seemed ready to jump on him and rap him in the teeth if ever the young man took it to his head to fight . . . the young man also seemed ready, for he was giving some kind of challenging snorts, when in the meantime their wives came to their rescue, after having accompanied their mother to her bedroom.

The landlady never for a long time forgave him for what he had done to her pride. She had even gone to the extent of canceling his name from her testament when one day something happened.

She was at what you might call a barn-in-the-open; and she was alone. The barn was not far from her compound. And so, she was at ease. A lot of trees grew about the area and the spot where she was was surrounded by a kind of bush. Many trees were cut from around the pits, leaving the spot for the digging of more underground pits. Stumps surrounded by yellowish and at some places white splinters were still all over the place. At some places, especially at the newly cut trees, they were collected into heaps to be carried home and burned; at others they were at exactly the places where they had fallen when the trees were cut down. A roof of a dilapidated barn was seen, rotting on its mud walls which had long ago given way beneath it, at the side of the footpath leading to the pits.

It was a hot and windy day that would see men, beasts, and plants, each in its own dusty way, mercilessly burning and curled up from the heat and pining for some rain.

The landlady was out to take out a bucketful of maize from one of the pits. She had opened one and had taken out what she wanted, and was about ready to cover it when she saw the young man coming towards the spot. In a flash, she knew what she had to do. She poured back what she had taken out and went down for it the second time, exposing her hips and legs indifferently.

The young man was approaching and he had expected nobody there, especially at that time. He was almost at the spot when a whirlwind caught up with him from behind, drove past him, twirling dry leaves from under his feet in a sudden and short sweep and hurled them up skyward. He closed his eyes, and for a fraction of a second, his outer garment fluttered in the wind making him feel that he was flying, and then almost instantly . . . he opened his eyes . . . and he saw two legs, legs shaking as if in trouble . . . legs that were opening and closing methodically and tantalizingly. He walked closer; stood astraddle of her contemplating her legs with a sort of concentrated air of inquiry . . . his face opened . . . he grunted . . . shrugged his shoulders a little . . . uttered his abrupt "ahha . . . ahha . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . hhhhhhhhaaa" . . . was seized with a tremendous something . . . opened his translucent eyes wide . . . with a certain glimmer . . . a certain flash. . . .

Some more weeks passed; the lady went to call on her young son-in-law

. . . the wife of the neighbor with a large family, a middle-aged woman with five kids, had come over for coffee . . . coffee was being served . . . and the women were talking as usual, when the old lady, eyeing him all over, turned and asked her daughter:

“Is he still not talking? . . . after all we’ve gone through!”

“Ahha . . .hhha . . . ha . . . hahahahaha . . .” came the answer from the young man instead . . . eyeing the neighbor’s wife and pointing her out to the lady.

Translated by the author

COSTAS TAKTSIS / GREECE

Small Change

“That’s my spit! You just make sure you don’t hang around in the street.”

She never really spat, only said she did, but the point of the threat was clear: you were to get back *before* the spit dried up.

How fast it dried up was a matter she alone determined according to the circumstances, according to her mood. Sometimes, it dried up before you could say jackrobinson, you flew out like a bird, and got back like one too, but the spit had dried up already, and she was waiting at the door with belt in hand.

Other times, you got back from the errand she’d sent you on, and at the sight of the house when you turned the corner, you began to shake all over, something snapped inside you, your knees gave, instead of going forwards, your legs went sideways, backwards, forwards, sideways, backwards. . . . You asked yourself furiously what had made you forget the time, what devil had made you stop and gape at the kids dragging the blackbird along by its leg, whether it was worth getting such a whipping for a piece of entertainment that had just *chanced* along your way, and in which you had not even taken any part, and which, to top it all, already belonged to the past, whereas the hour of judgment, the moment when accounts would have to be settled, was approaching inexorably with every step you made towards the door.

But often your fears were groundless. You went in, trembling like a man being led to his execution, and suddenly, from the expression on her face, saw that the spit had not dried up yet, and your chest heaved in relief and,