



Giovanna Marini sings Partono Gli Emigranti  
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from the album Nostra Patria E' il Mondo Intero

while

a family of four crosses all the way from stage left to stage right,  
a mother, father, and two kids,  
looking directly at the audience and smiling--  
we don't know why--

and a clown enters carrying a brief case,  
hurrying to work,  
and he exits on the opposite side.

EDMUND enters,  
hesitantly,  
a leather bound book in his hand,  
looks around,  
sees a café table, goes toward it,  
looks around to make sure no one else wants it,

sits,  
takes out his book and his pen,  
and begins to write in his diary.

A waiter comes out and gives EDMUND a cup of coffee.

He writes for a few moments,  
hesitates,  
write a little more,  
stops,  
puts down his pen,  
looks up,  
speaks.

EDMUND

I am just now becoming aware  
of the first moves of an illness that is sounding me out,  
choosing its ground.  
One moment it's my eyes,

floating specks,  
double vision;

then objects appear cut in two.

Every evening  
a painful spasm in the ribs.

Sometimes, on the sole of the foot,

an incision,

a thin one, hair thin.

Rats gnawing at the toes with very sharp teeth.

A burning feeling in the eyes.

A heightened awareness of sound:  
the noise of the shovel

tongs near the hearth  
the screech of doorbells

a spider's web on which work begins at four in the morning.

Great flames of pain furrowing the body,  
cutting it to pieces  
lighting it up.

I have decided to keep a diary....

[he picks up the diary,  
leafs through it,  
looks at a page or two,  
looks up again]

No general theory about pain.  
Each sufferer discovers his own,  
and the nature of pain varies  
like a singer's voice  
according to the acoustics of the hall.

Pain, like grief, like life itself,  
will take the world apart.  
Until, finally,  
as everyone comes at last to see on their deathbeds,  
a life is not so much a narrative  
with a beginning and a middle and an end  
as it is a constellation of vivid moments.

Clever  
the way death reaps and gathers its harvests.

But what somber harvests.  
Whole generations don't fall at once;  
That would be too sad, too visible.  
But bit by bit.  
The meadow is attacked on several sides at the same time.  
One day, one will go;  
The other, some time after;

One must reflect, glance about oneself,  
to notice the empty spaces,  
the vast contemporary killing.

[Music.

Track one of The Rough Guide to the Music of the Balkans  
from World Music Network (UK)  
that is: Djeli Mara--Saban Bajramovic/Mostar Sevdah Reunion,  
in which a man sings plaintively.

Djeli Mara--Saban Bajramovic/Mostar Sevdah Reunion  
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A five year old girl wanders out on stage alone.

She dances a while,  
and then

as the music gets a little less plaintive, a little more party-like

she is joined by others, one by one,  
until, finally, there are six or eight dancers on stage.

An eruption of dance.

Djeli Mara--Saban Bajramovic/Mostar Sevdah Reunion  
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Emerging from the group,  
a woman in a red dress does an energetic, sexy solo.

Djeli Mara--Saban Bajramovic/Mostar Sevdah Reunion  
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Finally, everyone dances out.

Silence.

The clown crosses back and out.

EDMUND has been writing in his diary, stops,  
looks up.]

EDMUND

The memory of my first visit to Doctor Guyon.  
He examined me;  
Contraction of the bladder;  
A somewhat nervous prostate,  
in short, nothing.  
And this nothing was everything that was beginning:  
The Invasion.

At first, oversensitiveness to noises,  
excessive sensitivity of the skin,  
diminution of sleep,  
and spitting of blood.

And also, from that time on,  
A prickling in the feet, burning, sensitiveness.

Strange pains;  
great furrows of flames cutting apart and searing my carcass.  
The dream of the keel of a boat, so fine and so painful.  
Burning in the eyes. Horrible reverberating pain.

And in all these pains,  
There is always the impression of a skyrocket,  
Rising and rising and bursting in my head into a spray.

[the solo dancer in the red dress enters;

she holds a portable computer in one hand,  
with ear pieces in her ears;

and we hear the music she hears:

Nina Simone singing Ne me quitte pas?

or

Crystal Gayle singing Is There Any Way Out of This Dream?

or

Tom Waits singing Broken Bicycle?

or

Tom Waits and Crystale Gayle singing Picking Up After You?

Nina Simone or Crystal Gayle or Tom Waits

Nina Simone or Crystal Gayle or Tom Waits

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Nina Simone or Crystal Gayle or Tom Waits  
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Nina Simone or Crystal Gayle or Tom Waits

and she dances to the music in her hand,

a slow, romantic dance,

and then, she dances out.

Her dancing might overlap with EDMUND speaking,  
both toward the beginning and toward the end of her dance.]

EDMUND

Intolerable pains in my heel.

I pass half the night with my heel in my hands.

The divine lulling of the nights  
When I take morphine, but do not sleep. The black opaque waves,  
No longer sleep just bordering on consciousness,  
But oblivion.

What a bath!  
What delight when you plunge in!  
Feeling oneself caught up and rolled by the waves.  
The awakening of the garden,  
The blackbird;  
The pattern of his song on the pale light of the windowpane;  
It is as though it were drawn by the point of his beak, full of warbles.  
In the morning, pain and twinges  
But the brain is clear, perhaps keener, or simply rested.

My legs have the sensation of slipping away  
And gliding along lifelessly.

I am thinking of the little house on Russell street.  
I resist for a long time.  
And then I go.

Relieved as soon as I get there.  
Calm.  
A garden.  
A blackbird singing.  
My leg is as though cut off with a scythe.  
No pain.  
Terror.

Lack of direction of one's movements in the dark.

Pain glides everywhere,  
In my vision,  
In my sensations and my judgment;  
It is like an infiltration.

This suffering  
which is always new for us  
becomes an old story for those around us,  
even for those who love us the most,  
even for ourselves.

Eyelids closed.  
Deep pits opened up to the right and left.  
Five minute snatches of sleep  
The anguish of nightmares in which you slide and tumble-  
Vertigo, the abyss.

[A chamber orchestra enters, and we expect they will play, but they quickly put  
together two cafe tables and have lunch

while we hear Yat-Kha, the Tuvan group from South Siberia,  
with Albert Kuvezin, singing Love Will Tear us Apart

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and

a guy breaks a dozen wine bottles into a wooden box on the cobblestones,  
puts his face into the pile of broken glass,  
has another guy stand on his neck to press his face down into the glass-  
and, while we were all expecting some miraculous trick to avoid being cut, he  
stands up with a lacerated forehead  
[for the actor's sake,  
there is a trick to this, a support system inside the box]-

while the French family of four again crosses  
all the way from stage left to stage right,  
looking directly at the cafe audience and smiling-  
we don't know why

and the clown with the brief case crosses again

and a teen age girl hands out fliers for some other show]

EDMUND

In the baths,  
How thin I look!

What a funny little old man I have suddenly become.  
I have leaped from forty-five to eighty-five.  
Forty years that have dropped out of my life.

At the baths, my cabin neighbors:  
A little Spaniard, a Russian general.  
Thin bodies, feverish looks, narrow shoulders.  
Invalids' wheel chairs pulled about.  
Steam cabinets.  
Mr. B., sometimes in the wheeled chair,  
Plump, white skin, healthy appearance;  
At other times, he has to be carried, held up, shuffling along.  
Noises from the showers, deep-sounding voices....  
What sadness all this gives me,  
This physical life that I can no longer lead.  
Poor birds of the night,  
Beating their wings against the walls,  
With open eyes that cannot see....

The to and fro of patients.  
Eyes either feverish or lifeless.  
The fellow  
asleep in the sun  
infested with flies.  
Mr. C---  
who lives with a noise perpetually in his head  
like the whistle of a locomotive  
or rather  
like steam escaping.

And to see my neighbors eat is appalling;  
Mouths without teeth,  
Affected gums,  
The toothpicks in the decayed molars,  
And those who eat on only one side  
and roll about what they have in their mouths,  
And those who chew their cud,  
And the gnawers.  
All those jaws functioning,

Those gluttonous and haggard eyes  
never raised from their plates,  
Those furious glances at the dish slow in coming.  
And the painful digestions,  
The two toilets at the end of the corridor,  
Side by side,  
So that one can hear all the groans of constipation  
Or the rich splash and the rustling of the paper.  
Horror, oh, the horror of living.

The striving to walk straight,  
The fear of being taken with one of those shooting pains  
that glue me to the spot  
Or wrench me and make me lift my leg like a knife grinder.

In the courtyard  
The coming and going of the patients.  
A procession of diverse maladies,  
Each more sinister than the rest.  
Burning or expressionless glances.  
And the sparkling light of the blue sky.

The little Spanish woman with hair combed flat and well oiled  
Looking anywhere from twelve to sixty years old.  
A red dress, long earrings,  
a long yellow head resting on the knucklebone of a hand,  
On her little chair.  
At night she sleeps sitting up.  
Is afraid of the rats.

Silhouettes of old men on crutches  
along the country roads between the high hedges.  
The mathematics professor who has the same illness as I.  
I think of him,  
I can see him pushing his feet along,  
One after the other,  
Pretty well done in and staggering;

Like walking on ice.  
I pity him.  
The maids say he urinates in bed.

A tragic scene in the pool, rapid, mysterious.  
A terrified voice calling the attendant:  
Cheron! Quick!  
(a crescendo of terror)  
Quick!....Quick!....  
And everybody with voices shrill with fear:  
Colard! Cheron! Quick!....Quick!....

Pain has a life of its own.  
In the morning my hands are obstinately curled up  
on top of the sheet  
like dead leaves.

What are you doing right now?  
I am suffering.

My suffering reaches to the horizon  
And fills everything.

Antony and the Johnsons' Rapture  
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[while  
a guy enters,  
burned to charcoal from head to foot,  
barely able to walk,  
slips to the ground  
writhes

a boy with Downs Syndrome comes down center

a guy enters wearing a crimson prom dress  
comes downstage,  
enjoys his look,  
and leaves

a woman standing  
a man throws himself repeatedly to the floor  
finally she does, too  
but at last she leaves  
leaving him to go on until he is exhausted

a woman in a beautiful black dress enters  
and paces while she smokes  
she is angry, hostile  
as though challenging anyone's right to challenge her smoking  
or her being there  
and, in the end, she just turns upstage and rushes out

little guy in dunce cap walks in and around

another woman in an elegant black dress  
with a blood red face  
does a wild wild dance  
and smears red lipstick all over her face  
and then throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over  
she becomes covered with dust  
as she kicks and writhes wildly on the ground on her back  
like a cockroach frantic on its back

guy on a leash hopping up and down

the charcoal crip staggers out

EDMUND begins to speak before all these actions have finished]

EDMUND

Now

it's impossible for me to go down a staircase without a handrail,  
Or to walk on waxed floors.

At times I lose the feeling of a whole part of my being-

The lower part;

My legs get fuddled.

My hands persist in curling up in the morning on the sheet,  
Like dead leaves, without sap.

From time to time, I have a memory of my active life,  
Of happy times.

For instance, the coral fishermen,  
in the evening,  
among the rocks.

What happened to the summer days  
we went to the seashore  
and rowed out onto the water in an old skiff to swim  
stood up in the boat naked and shouting  
tied rags around our heads like turbans  
and cooked turbot on the beach  
I saw you



when you wore the softest cotton nothing of a nightgown  
lying amid tousled sheets  
your sweet, sweet shoulder.

Xavier Aubryet has died.  
At the end his hands were shriveled up but still useful.  
He was blind at the end.  
He died,  
Groping his way in the dark.  
Sharp pains.  
He was indignant that no one bothered about him.  
But I would like to be alone for a year in the country.  
To see no one but my wife.  
The children might come once a week.  
I should like to live burrowed into the earth  
Like a mole,  
All alone.

Moral and intellectual growth through suffering--  
But only up to a certain point.

Today I have reached the point  
Where I no longer desire to get well-  
Just to keep on going.

The loss of feeling and hardening of the body  
Caught, as it were, in a sheath of wood or stone,  
Is like the mythological sensation,  
And the invalid changes little by little,  
As the paralysis mounts,  
Into a rock or tree,  
Like a nymph of the metamorphoses.

Impossible for me to go down the front steps alone.

I am now motionless.  
And what next?

My distress is great.  
And I am weeping as I write.

Yesterday evening,  
Toward ten o'clock,  
Several minutes of atrocious anguish in my study.  
Quite calm, I was writing a letter-  
The white sheet of paper, all the light of the lamp concentrated on it,  
And the room and table plunged in shadow.  
My wife came in, put down a book or something on the table.  
I raised my head, and  
From that moment on for two or three minutes,  
I lost all notion of things.  
I must have looked very stupid,  
Because my wife explained to me,  
In answer to the question on my face,  
What she had come to do.  
I didn't understand her words and no longer recall them.  
The horrible thing is  
I didn't recognize my study.  
I knew that I was in it, but I had lost all sense of place.  
I had to get up, get my bearings,  
Feel the bookcase and the doors,  
And say to myself, "That's where she came in."  
Little by little, my mind awakened,  
My faculties came back into place.  
But I recall the acute sensation of the whiteness of the letter I was writing,  
Gleaming on the black table.

[Funeral march music of a brass band.

Giovanna Marini's All'Arie Al'Arie  
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Giovanna Marini's All'Arie Al'Arie

or

Hora Arabeasca from the album Gili Garabdi

The cast comes through all in black in mourning,  
some of them carrying bouquets of flowers,

swaying from side to side in time to the music,

slowly, a stop-start sort of movement as they walk,  
possibly taking several steps forward, then one back, before going on,  
stopping as they lean left, as they lean right....]

EDMUND

If I were to go blind  
if the gods were to tell me  
I could see only one more sight  
before I would be deprived of light forever  
the last thing I would wish to see

I like to see a woman  
when she's not expecting to be seen  
and in places where ordinarily  
she would not be seen at all

when she's at her dressing table  
pulling the hair back from her forehead  
putting color on her cheeks  
the rouge and the mascara  
the eyeshadow of a deep green  
the scarlet lipstick

when she's asleep in bed  
when she's sitting alone in a cafe  
standing alone by the table in the laundry room  
pulling up her stocking  
taking a moment to look out the window at the street

these moments are, for her,  
moments of complete oblivion

Since I have been ill, I can no longer stand seeing  
My wife or children lean out of a window.  
And if they approach a railing  
Immediately my hands and feet begin trembling.

[People rush, or run, in, go in a circle,  
and out again  
while we hear wild, wild music:

Sirba Moldoveneeeasca Fanfare Ciocarlia  
Sirba Moldoveneeeasca Fanfare Ciocarlia  
Sirba Moldoveneeeasca Fanfare Ciocarlia  
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from the album Gili Garabdi

The five year old girl,  
eating an ice cream cone, smiling,  
sitting in a red wagon pulled by her father.

A golf cart, driven like crazy by a caddy,  
while, in the back,  
a couple embraces passionately.

A couple being pulled along on a picnic blanket  
with food and a champagne bottle in a bucket,  
and she is drinking and drinking and drinking the champagne.

An electric wheelchair-  
a man driving,  
a woman sitting on the handlebars,  
she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over.

A skate board,  
with a woman lying on her back on the skate board  
as a man twirls it round and round in ecstasy.

A silk sheet, with silk pillows,  
she lying back in her lingerie  
he taking photos of her.

A man and woman on a bicycle built for two-  
one peddles while the other eats pizza.

As many of these vignettes as there are vehicles with wheels.



When a woman sleeps  
then she is defenseless  
then, if she is naked  
and the covers have come down around her waist  
and one arm is outside the covers entirely  
the fingers of her hand completely motionless  
then it is possible to draw her with red chalk  
to render her body  
as though nothing stood between her skin and the air  
between her skin and the atmosphere of the whole world  
no clothes  
no blouse, no undergarment yes  
but also  
no thought of any sort  
no shame  
no pose  
no manner  
no attitude  
no demeanor  
no reticence  
or no flirtatiousness  
no hiding and revealing at the same time  
no resistance  
no provocation  
her body is being put to no use  
it makes no suggestion  
nor does it refuse anything  
it is completely naked  
it is beyond sexual  
beyond merely enticing or arousing  
it has the allure of her very soul  
this is how naked she is when she is asleep  
she is transporting



[The solo dancer in a red dress enters

Then, after a few moments of her moving in silence, music is added

Willie Nelson singing What a Wonderful World?

Willie Nelson singing If My World Didn't Have You?

or

Willie Nelson singing Wind Beneath My Wings

Willie Nelson singing Wind Beneath My Wings

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then a guy enters

another guy enters

people join in from every direction

VERY old guy in print house dress and clogs]

EDMUND

In fact, I hadn't thought to find her there

she took me by surprise

pulling up her stocking

entirely naked otherwise

except for some piece of clothing around her neck

or it might have been a scarf

she was otherwise entirely naked

smooth skin

strong wrists pulling up her stocking

she was concentrated on her task

and didn't see me in that moment

that I first saw her

entirely naked

the space between her legs obscured by her forearm

her face a study in concentration

as we all concentrate so seriously

on the most trivial of things in our lives

and seem to meet the more momentous events

with vacant looks

indifferent or inattentive

or preoccupied with other thoughts

as the great dramas in our lives occur

but, as usual, with the trivial things in life

she was all determination

pulling up her stocking

a blue stocking it was

she had red hair

and I fell in love with her at once

I wanted her

I wanted her as one wants a companion for all of life

not just a woman with whom I longed to make love  
although, to be sure, that, too  
but more than that  
a friend for my entire life  
she had such intelligence in the way she held her body  
such gentleness  
such suppleness and, it even seemed to me, such wit  
such focus  
such an ability  
to give herself to the moment at hand  
such clarity and simplicity and ease of purpose  
such grace  
all those qualities one hopes for in oneself  
and hopes  
by living in close proximity to another  
one might somehow acquire by familiarity.

From now on  
I have decided not to think about my illness  
But to turn back out to the world I love.  
To turn back to my life.  
I have decided not to keep a diary of my illness any longer.  
This will be my last entry.  
From now on, I should like to do nothing but scatter happiness.

[After a time, EDMUND joins in the dancing.

At first he dances solo,  
then maybe he dances with the woman in the red dress.

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EDMUND, finally, is standing aside,  
watching the others.

2 guys jump up and down  
up and down  
up and down  
mostly harmoniously, and happily, not competitively

a headless accordion player enters,  
and plays along with the music  
[that is, his jacket and shirt and tie cover his head]

women swoon and faint in a dozen ways  
sometimes solo  
sometimes in unison

sometimes, some of the dancers sit at the café tables,  
so they are performers and audience both

a guy walks through with a lamb at the end of a rope

a guy in a dress with a red crown of flowers returns,  
comes downstage and smokes his cigarette, smiling  
just that, no more, and is happy

a guy snaps his fingers  
for one of the women to come and sing for him  
as he does a narcissistic dance  
and  
finally  
a striptease to her singing

other such performance pieces in the midst of the dancing

EDMUND quietly leaves without our noticing just when.

And only, finally, after a while  
does everyone else dance out, too,  
or leave with one another in couples,

or simply quietly leave  
until only the woman in the red dress is left onstage.

The woman in the red dress picks up her shawl or sweater  
from the back of a café chair  
and slowly, contemplatively walks out.

And we are left with a spotlight on EDMUND's diary on the café table.]

The End.

NOTE: Edmund's text in *Memory Palace* is taken from, or inspired by, Alphonse Daudet's *La Doulou*, the journals he wrote in the last years of his life, translated by Milton Garver, and the paintings of Toulouse Lautrec. And the composition of the piece as a whole is greatly inspired by the work of Pippo del Bonno.

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