

Mirt Komel

A K I L E S

translated from the Slovene by Gregor Timothy Čeh

Anger

The early hour was unleashed upon the waking, leaving behind a scar on the skin of the soul, a bruise of wisdom in the finger joints, and gunk in the eye forever thickening and dissolving.

Someone had once somewhere denied something: there is no justice in the world if you don't fight for it yourself, and in doing so justify it; no truth if you don't figure it out yourself, think of it in your mind and express it with words; no beauty if you don't yourself become aware of it, give in to it and forget about yourself. Who said this? It wasn't me, it wasn't you, but it did occur to him that it could also hold true for himself, if only he managed to open his eyes and start seeing this justifiably beautiful world the way it really is.

Leo indeed opens his eyes, but the first thing he becomes aware of is neither the beauty of the world nor the way it really is. His gaze slides along the folds of the sheets, undulating all the way to the edge of the bed where they vanish across the precipice beyond which there is nothing but a low bedside table. Standing in the middle of it is a red lamp that sometimes happily glows away but never illuminates anything. Next to it, a bunch of keys, lining up like soldiers along the curve of the metal ring ruled by the decorative fob which is in fact a bottle opener shaped like a wonderful Corinthian helmet. Beside the keys, not by chance, a bouquet of fragrant sweet violets that he had picked right at the end of yesterday's journey, as if cutting down the youngest with a sword, sending their mortal souls to the palaces of the underworld, throwing their bodies to the dogs to gorge on, carrion for the vultures, a feast for rotten worms, honouring the all-decomposing ravages of time.

When he turns the other way to stir the hand that was still asleep, he sees also her slowly waking up in the morning twilight next to him, murmuring contently. Her, his goddess, his lioness, his only one, his reason for waking up from the sleep of the dead, his big 'yes' to life and 'why not' to death. Were it not for her, everything

would be different. She pulls back the heavy blanket, far too thick for this autumn season, freeing her tiny feet from the sheet that still smells of her, of him, of both of them. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she stretches like a cat, the thin fabric of her T-shirt pulling tightly over her curves and her long black hair falling over her bare shoulders. She stands up. He follows her with his gaze as she pulls on her tiny slippers after a few steps, uses her paw to press the handle, leaving the door half ajar, and shuffles through the dining room into the kitchen.

His sleepy gaze follows her every step of the way, as in the semi-darkness she turns past the messy dining table, as her step slows down at the kitchen counter, and as she takes all she needs from the sink and the cupboard. As he watches her brew the first coffee of the day in a small tin *cezve*, one foot tucked behind the other, gently rubbing it with the bare arch, a relentless lust arousing as he follows the gap where her thighs meet at the back. As he lifts his leg to turn the sheet into a tent temple to the onanistic ritual and finish with the hand what the imagination had begun, the door to the next room opens.

Out comes a blond head; the blond head doesn't see that Leo can see him from the bedroom through the gap, what the blond head can see is that she, standing in the kitchen making coffee with her back turned towards him, cannot see him, so he can shamelessly scratch his crotch as he walks through the dining room towards the bathroom. Leo's lust instantly turns into wrath: if he could, he would get up, walk up to the blond head, kick him in the balls, punch him in the face, and then knee jerk him in the stomach, he imagined; and if he had a sword upon him, he would first slice off his ears, then his nose, so those doggy eyes of his would pop out with fear, then he would gouge them out for even daring to look at her in that lustful manner.

But no, he mustn't. For her he would beat him up. For her he mustn't do it. He is here at her place merely as a guest. And she rents a room from this guy who, as a student of nineteen with faint bumfluff on his chin instead of a beard, already owns his own flat. A flat just like one she would wish for but he cannot give her. It doesn't help that this guy of course doesn't own the flat she loves so much through any efforts of his own. He inherited it from his late grandmother. He knows, she knows, everyone knows, but nobody mentions unless the blond head mentions it

himself, how much his grandmother loved him, how he loved his grandma, how he visited her every weekend, flattering her with sweet talk, withholding all his weaknesses.

That's how things are: those who have will have even more – those who don't... never will.

He doesn't say anything. He prefers to stay silent. What does he care for such trivial matters that are, at the end of the day, a part of a far greater machinery against which he is fighting? Instead of the face-to-face battle, one that awaits him today anyway, he gets out of bed, pulls on his worn jeans, fashionable quite a while ago, dons his plain black T-shirt without any slogans or logos. Barefoot he makes his way across the creaky parquet floor through the dining room to the kitchen, where he embraces his lioness from behind. She is making the coffee and he strokes her bare forearms up and down with his little finger, sending a tingle through her body, pressing his torso against hers, back and forth. She is hot, the water is boiling, and from the bathroom comes the sound of someone flushing the toilet, so she apprehensively pushes him away with her backside so she can finish making the coffee.

Two defiantly predisposed gazes meet in the dining room but they do not utter an 'a!' or 'uh!' or '*en garde!*', merely the courteous 'morning.' Just as well that their paths lead past each other, one on his way to the bathroom, the other going back to his room, for otherwise they might lead to a morning scuffle over who should move out of whose way. It is well known how many fights have already been caused by crossroads supposedly guarded by Hecatana and Hermoses (strange names – he, he!), where you can meet all kinds, from the living to the dead and the un-dead in between, from your own father to Papa Legabiter, all the way to the Dedevel himself (terrible name – hu-hu!)

In the bathroom he urinates standing up, hating the mere idea that someone else has just been sitting on the seat – the warmth, unpleasant to the touch – then he washes himself the best he can. He doesn't need to freshen himself up, it's not in his nature, spoiled because he is naturally handsome. But to those to whom the gods have granted beauty, let them also give wisdom, and to those they have denied

beauty, at least give wisdom. He brushes his teeth, sliding here and there, up and down, until blood appears along his gums. A reminder.

Before leaving the bathroom he stands closer to the mirror, inspecting the bags under his eyes, almost purple, despite the colour a far cry from the beauty of the violets he had stolen for her, his goddess, from the flower box mounted at the ground-floor window of the unsuspecting neighbour across the street.

He returns to the dining room where the coffee is ready for him to enjoy with his beloved, now already changed into a comfortable one-piece dark purple, almost black garment that reaches from her knees up to her neck, breathing beneath which are her breasts that his lustful fingers still want to reach.

As, veiled in smoke, she draws on her cigarette, it seems to him that she also loves him, though he is not entirely certain whether he could pluck away at all the purple petals of that bunch of violets to know for sure: she loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not, she loves me.

All that he knows is that he loves her.

Beloved

Beloved is what she felt like but it was strange that her first thoughts as she woke up were not intended for her lover – at least not the one lying next to her – but the bouquet of roses that he had left for her on the bedside table. Just for her.

Her eyes still closed, she imagines living in the town she so loves waking up in. Ljubljana, the most beautiful town in the world that has all the good sides of the best metropolitan cities, from cafés and patisseries to taxis, shops, parties and drugs but simultaneously, due to its small size, doesn't suffer from excessively high numbers of cars, rubbish, beggars, junkies, priests, lawyers, judges, politicians and generals.

It feels as if these thoughts are not hers, as if they have come goodness knows from where, from radio and television transmitters, wireless internet frequencies or even spaceships of which she dreamed of during the night, arriving on our planet Terra: floating triangles that filled the purple sky with their bright whiteness, but the oddest thing was that there was no drama about it, nobody was

alarmed by them, neither the populace nor the army; everything went on as normal, then all of a sudden came an extermination of humanity in order to save nature – the children must die so the mother survives – a strangely reassuring feeling that probably contributed to the good mood that engulfed her as she woke up.

Dea, that's enough childish daydreaming, you're not some sleepy star, and even less a pious little Miss Devotion, so you don't want to waste the time you won't have enough of during this day anyway, she thought to herself. Lifting herself up on her elbows she looks across his shoulder, wrapped in the sheet and covered with the colourful bedspread: her gaze, still unfocused at this morning hour, pauses for a moment on the poster from the latest TV series called *Vilablanca* – how often had she wished she had the courage of Blanca, the heroine of the series played by her favourite Girdin Bergwoman – then it drops down to the roses lying on the bedside table under the golden lamp, in the same place she had found them when she returned to the flat late last night, almost the morning hours.

A peculiar feeling of guilt puts her in a bad mood as she looks at the darkened leaves in the half light and remembers how she had more or less crept into the flat, quietly pushed open the door to her room and found him naked and asleep in her bed: she had wanted to wake him up, tell him that it was over, as she had often wanted to do before, but then she spotted the flowers he had brought her, just for her, and, like she had done so often before, she changed her mind – thinking about it means changing your mind about it, she kept repeating to herself and kept changing her mind whenever she thought about it, caught in the crossfire between head and heart.

It is a cold morning, so after a little stretching in her night shirt, she puts on a pair of tight leggings she uses at home and her slippers, and shuffles along to the bathroom. Blindly she reaches for the light switch to turn on the light but the switch isn't where it should be, so she feels along the wall until eventually discovering it. The whiteness of the tiles is so bright that her eyes hurt, making her feel as heroic as Sacrotez freeing himself of his chains to step out into the open from the torch-lit cave but, his eyes unused to daylight, the bright glow of the sun – the embodiment of good or beauty? – blinds him. She smiles, satisfied with herself and her rendition of Plato's allegory, then she pulls her leggings down to her knees, sits on the toilet

and whilst there considers how funny it is that even philosophers and emperors must go to a place like this on foot.

At the sink she washes her hands with soap and with clean palms rinses her face which seems terrible but is in fact no more beautiful or ugly than any other face gazing at itself in the mirror in the morning. 'I'm not a morning person,' she kept repeating to herself in her sleepy head, having often thought about having the phrase tattooed or at least printed on a T-shirt, the possibility offered by a leaflet in her letter box down on the ground floor that creaks as at the postman is stuffing the morning post into it at that very moment: adverts, bills, adverts, pills. She reaches for the tweezers to pluck a hair or two from her eyebrows but instead picks up her toothbrush, squeezing onto it a couple of centimetres of minty toothpaste, brushes her teeth, front, back, top and bottom, all around, spits out the toothpaste-saliva mix, and rinses her mouth. Doing it all properly, just as she had been taught when she was a little girl, when the world was still beautiful and simple, the deceitful serpent of growing up having not yet entangled her into labyrinthine questions about good and evil, those one is unable to escape until the day one dies – Alahah only knows if even then – not even if you follow Ariadnenthread.

From the bathroom she does not return to her room where he is still fast asleep but walks through the other door that leads to the dining room. Halfway to the kitchen she turns around and through the door that she had clearly forgotten to close yesterday, sees that her lover is in fact not asleep at all but is tossing and turning in bed. She smiles at him with her clean white teeth, then thinks about last night, how she did not feel like making love when she got home but, after taking a quick shower to sober up and wash away the spirit of the evening that she would have preferred to forget, gave in to his sleepy embrace anyway. It was all making her uncomfortable, especially because she was still dizzy from all the things she had taken, so instead she simply stops thinking about it in the same breath she wipes away the coffee stain from the kitchen counter.

She puts the silver coffee pot on the hob and while waiting for the water to boil washes the cups in the sink, to reveal the decorative design in the base depicting stars embraced by the arcs of the moon. Leaning with one hand on the counter, holding the spoon in the other, ready to perform the magic with which water turns

into coffee, he suddenly surprises her, standing right behind her. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he then slips his right hand in between two of the buttons on her night shirt and holds her breasts; rough but warm, she thinks to herself but before giving in to him totally, the water in the pot grumbly starts to boil, as if disapproving of such activities, so she pushes him away with her backside, and he wanders off to the bathroom. Lost in thoughts, she automatically dips the spoonful of coffee into the boiling water, and another, to make it strong, for it really is early and the day ahead is going to be a long one and – although she doesn't know it yet, but in a way does – full of twists and turns that will eventually, unavoidably bring her back here, to the very beginning.

In the dining room she places the coffee on the wooden, antique, oval table surrounded by old fashioned wooden chairs, finding a spot somewhere among the newspapers and cigarette packets, in order that the pot doesn't touch either the ashtray or the battered old box that originally contained something entirely different to the chocolate biscuits now inside. Mmm, she opens the lid, takes one, replaces the lid, then opens it again, takes another, before eventually returning to her room. In the large, free-standing mirror she checks her shoulder-length, platinum-bleached hair, wondering whether she should leave it to grow longer or cut it shorter, much shorter, and perhaps change it to a different colour, possibly even red. *He* would certainly like red, she thinks to herself. She changes into her one-piece black and white dress, tight-fitting from the neck all the way down to the knees, still warmly wrapped in the same black leggings, over which she has pulled a pair of ivy-green cotton socks.

Returning to the dining room, she sits on one of the wobbly stools behind which on the roughly plastered wall hangs a large poster of the gold-enwrapped kiss on a lawn filled with colourful flowers as imagined by Gushtal Clint as he swung between Emilia Vögel and Red Hilary.

She lights a cigarette, takes a deep draw – lifting her legs high so her entire body almost curls up into a ball – then she exhales, wrapping herself in smoke that turns into various images that would stay with her all day: me, him, a yes, a no, a step, dance, another, a kiss, escape. Finishing her cigarette, she stubs it out, pulls the dress right down to her ankles, places her head on her knees, swaying back and forth

for a few seconds of calm before the memory of the previous night pushes its way back into her consciousness. How on earth did I get myself into this?

Her lover appears from the bathroom and only now does she notice that he is once again wearing his worn jeans and his even more worn black T-shirt, items he had been fond of back when they first met. It's actually no longer black but a kind of washed-out beige, and she cannot help herself laughingly commenting, 'Oh, come on! Don't you have anything else to wear? I bought you a new T-shirt. At least that one's black, really black.' Not only the T-shirt, she was constantly buying him new things in the hope she might clean him up a little, but he has not given in, then or now. He just smiles sourly – but says nothing.

In a half-embrace on the wobbly chair that was in serious danger of collapsing under the weight of the both of them, they smoke and drink coffee, and she tells him about her dreams. When she finishes, he says, 'Flying triangles hovering in the air and then punish humanity, hmm, it reminds me of the *Old Testable* where God's lalangels appear often to punish human and prehuman sins, as mentioned in the *First Chronic Book* that speaks of how Davidoff did wrong in counting the population and then 'saw God's lalangel stand between the heavens and the land with a bare spear in his hand.'

She never liked anyone rationalising her dreams so brutally. They continue smoking in silence, drinking their coffee – well, he finishes his, she leaves half of hers – partly because she feels uneasy, partly because she really is in a hurry. She extinguishes her cigarette carelessly in the overflowing ashtray that nobody has emptied, pulls on her leather boots in the hallway, her thick patchwork coat a mix of all shades from white to blue with purple in between, like her dress reaching from her neck to her knees, and she is ready to leave immediately.

'Kisses, darling, see you!'

Cheerfully she runs down the stairs only to return a few seconds later, having forgotten her single strap denim shoulder bag, its exterior full of brooches, but for which she has not got the time to check everything inside it; her phone was in her pocket, her keys also, so what is left in the bag must be, lipstick, hand cream, pills, weed, tobacco, rolling papers, filters, tampons, bills, a leaflet, a brochure, a notebook, a biro, a fountain pen, a pencil, a sketch pad, a laptop, petals. She doesn't

say anything else when she leaves for the second time, just waves and sends kisses as if acting in some silent film where the scene cuts from her closing the door behind her, straight to a few floors lower as if she didn't even have to walk down all those flights of stairs.

At ground level she opens her mail box, looks through all the stuff in it, bills, adverts, adverts, and a flyer warning residents about the raccoons in the nearby park, after which she hurries along, breathing in the cold morning air, not noticing the paper heart that had since yesterday been lying on the bench outside her block of flats.

Dressing gown

Dawn was long supposed to herald the new day but the prevailing darkness outside is so thick that the first rays of the sun have not yet touched the ground, merely faintly illuminating the atmosphere above us, unable to defeat it.

Beaten by yesterday's efforts, he had fallen asleep fully dressed in the comfortable armchair by the window where he now awakes. Still incapable of fully waking up, unable to fall back asleep, especially not in a sitting position. Waking up is important, so it might not be a bad idea to do a dress rehearsal, he thinks to himself. With great effort he moves through the semi-darkness of the flat into the bedroom. Here he is glad to change into night ware in order to lie on the bed for a while in more suitable attire before he needed to get up for real.

Sleep eludes him at the same speed as the finish line in the paradox of the arrow that can never catch up with the tortoise. He glances towards the old-fashioned alarm clock that tick-tocks here on the battered bedside table. Its hands, unlike his little fingers, glow in the dark, but not its dial, so he has to guess from the way the shorter is on the *heel* of the longer that it must be going from Beethon's Fifth in C minor to his pastoral Sixth in F major. That's the key in which rhythmic hexameter verses line up in his head:

Thetis the Nymph most divine dips her son in the Styx's cold water,

All but his heel she immerses, hoping to make him immortal.

It now feels as if he is no longer supine on his bed. Lying to himself that he is resting on a bed of grass, autumnally yellow like his teeth, exposed as he smiles to the sun, the one and only in the vast blueness of the sky, arching across the entire rural landscape, ending with the flow of the stream indifferently trickling past him. Here, people are gathering around him – simple people, good people – who care little about the fact that thick, dark storm clouds are already gathering in the distance.

All of a sudden he is back in his bed, various disconnected thoughts intermingle, entangling his consciousness into a pondering knot of question marks that dance with balletic lightness across the surface of otherwise incredibly profound questions over which wise beards have for centuries been scratching their bald heads. ‘Why the left heel?’, ‘Why a tortoise?’, ‘Why me?’, ‘Why you?’, ‘Why is it so cold?’, ‘Why didn’t I go to bed earlier?’, ‘Why can’t I be bothered to get up?’ ‘How come she loves *me*?’

Despite everything – and in spite of nothing – he lifts himself up to sit on the side of the bed, ties his long greying hair with an elastic band, puts on his worn brown slippers and then dons his dressing gown, its embroidered patch depicting a gold Corinthian helmet. He switches on the light to at least bring some brightness to this dark feeling that permeates him both inside and outside, while love whistles in the sails of his spirit, flapping about in tatters just like his dressing gown. He shudders when he senses with all his being the jolt of Time, stretching from the about-to-be past towards the past future.

He stands up and goes into the kitchen, itself a continuation of the dining area. Breakfast is a cigarette standing up at the window, even before taking a sip of tap water. Inhaling deeply affords him a pleasant dizzy sensation in the head while he looks out through the frosted glass, long not cleaned. Out, into the maddened world that has at this morning hour yet to begin rushing around. Shining through from behind those same clouds that scared him so much yesterday with their purple vortex are a few rays from the sun, a few shadows, boding no good but, fortunately – or unfortunately – also nothing new.

The cigarette initiates the peristalsis of his internal organs, but in the bathroom he brushes his teeth before sitting on the toilet. At least he can think with

clean teeth, even if his thoughts are not clean, 'Me... her, her... me.' He rests his heavy, slightly balding head on his hand, supported by his elbow on the knee, soon benumbed by the weight of his thoughts, 'I can't even believe it, but still, it's true, that's how it is, everything turns in circles, just so and no different, for there is no other possible outcome but this: that not only the world but also time itself is circular. Which is in fact so impossible that it is not even possible to imagine it.'

After he does in the bathroom everything he needs to other than coming to any conclusion in his own thoughts, where he keeps returning to the same place, he goes back to the kitchen. In the sink he starts dismantling his Italian Bionetti stovetop coffee maker. He unscrews it, rinses the top and bottom parts (without a sponge or soap, of course, merely with water and his fingers), he shakes the compacted dregs of the coffee from the cone-shaped filter into a special biodegradable bag for organic waste (he is, after all, a decent citizen and always filters and separates) – then reverses the same movements with the coffee maker, almost as if winding back a film: fills the bottom part with hot water, puts the filter cone back in place, fills it with a spoon, or, why not, two spoonfuls of finely-ground Ilyich coffee, screws on the top part, and places the pot on the ceramic hob (he is a modern consumer so this is a single-touch hob).

All this banging around the flat wakes up the fluffy black and white cat that was asleep on the chair under the dining room table, safely tucked away as if in a half-opened drawer. Much sleepier than him, the cat elegantly drops to the floor, stretches for a long time, yawns, and then in a mixture of yawning and meowing, lets out its characteristic 'Mprrrreow!' with which it lets him know that he is happy that his master is up but that he also wishes to eat. 'What is it, Ulysses? – he had this name because even as a kitten, he had liked to hide under a woven woollen blanket – 'Are you hungry again?' His master obeys by filling his ceramic bowl with Brixois cat biscuits, also changing his stale water. The ungrateful feline does not start eating until he crouches down next to it, strokes it all over (cat creatures are masters of making us do what they want through apparent subordination, as a sadist is slave to his own slave through the satisfaction he derives from her).

While his cunning cat enjoys its crunchy bites, the smell of coffee wafts through from the kitchen, accompanied as usual by the whistling of the coffee pot that draws his attention.

A cup of coffee. Alone. Long gone are the days when he would have one with Mother. And another. His father also long gone. Why had he left home, his father, his mother's kitchen, if not to lose himself in a world that even God himself has abandoned? Just as in maths minus and minus give a plus, or like a hole drilled into emptiness creates a fullness, so too his double loss perhaps signifies a kind of finding. In the meantime, Ulysses has already had his meal and begun cleaning himself, starting with his whiskers, continuing with his hairy balls, and concluding with those loving eyes that look at him, as if to say, 'Look how pretty I have made myself just for you,' and a subtitle that says 'be grateful to me that I am so grateful to you.'

Cup of coffee in hand and an unlit cigarette, he sits at the table in the dining room that doubles up as a kind of study, surrounded by book cases, shelves buckling under the weight of the double rows of books. He lights the cigarette, takes a sip of coffee and glances along the closest shelf, filled with various titles: Planto's *Monologues*, JW von Getty's *Prose and Fantasy*, GG Virontes' *Litters, Poems and Half-verses*, Novartis's *One Thousand and One Aphorisms*, V M Dostoyanski's *Crime Without Punishment*, Ivan Stolstoy's *Peace and War*, G W H Heckel's *Phonology of the Mind*, Carl Maraks's *Captain Capitul*, Federico Niente's *Thus Wandered Moroaster*, Teen Highdigger, *Being and Age*, J R Sart's *Being and Emptiness*, Frank Kahka's *K*, Chane Choice's *Vulisses*, Samo Deker's *Mollyjoy*, Laddi Nabocky's *Polita*, Andrew Brettanof's *Hyperrealism*, Jack Yeklan's *Kinesics of Psychoanalysis*, Daniel Pinch's *Beauty of Nighmares*, Vojslav Žekži's *Pandemic of Perversions*, Horuki Murasami's *Hard-boiled World*. He picks up Choice's *Vulisses* to read a passage that he had, damn it, underlined ('dibble, dabble, idiot'). He thinks about it, preferring instead to reach for Vironte's poems where he finds one that strongly reflects yesterday's events, inspiring his spirits, 'She walks in style...'

Carefully, so as not to disturb the cat that had in the meantime jumped onto his lap, where it turned round and round a few times before settling down, purring contentedly and falling asleep, he reaches across the table to the chair with his worn

shoulder bag. Pulling it towards him he places it on the chair at his side and opens it – all with one hand, his other still stroking the cat – in order to find his pen and notebook. He uses this to jot down all manner of things (thoughts, half-thoughts, poems, prose, recipes, concepts). Finding a blank page in among the multitude of ones he has already filled, he tests the pen to make sure the ink hasn't dried. It drips onto the page and he dips the tip into the largest blot, which flows from a smudge into writing:

*I keep telling myself, never again,
but with so much at once, tis all in vain.*

Creating the first two lines in the rhythm of the beat of his heart, the rhyme coming to him without a second thought – but here the inspiration ends. He fiddles with the pen for a little while further, waiting for a gift from heaven, but when he sees that it just isn't there, he puts everything back into the bag. 'Forget it,' he thinks to himself. 'Nothing today, either.' But thinking about it he changes his mind, 'Well, at least this is something, whatever it is, it's more than nothing, for one is indeed better than none, you can't create a rhyme with a single lazy line – but two are at least marginally better than one.'

He gets through the rest of the cigarette and what is left of his coffee glaring into the emptiness – well, not quite emptiness, but out of the window onto the parking lot where his neighbours are already going about their business (a pot-smoking loner who despite all is never late for work, clearly taking his lighting technician job seriously; a single mother with two children she drops off at school on her way to the bakery where she does work she doesn't like; a pair of retired sisters who like each other so much they still live together and are setting out on their morning stroll before Mass; a man and a woman who don't like each other and are, as every morning, each getting into their own car to drive off, each to their own job). Glaring back at him out of this void into which he stares is Time, when he suddenly realises that he too should slowly set off.

Ulysses is not very happy to be moved to the next chair, and lightly bites his hand before defiantly moving to another chair, one he has chosen, exactly like the one on which he had been placed.

He takes two eggs from the fridge, one looking very much like the other, and an onion and some liver left over from the previous day. He greases the frying pan with olive oil, placing it on the hob, still warm from making coffee. Then he chops up the onion and half the liver that he marinates with cumin, wrapping the rest up in cling film and replacing it in the fridge. He switches on two hobs, a pot of water to boil on one, heating up the oil in the frying pan on the other. Into the water he puts one of the eggs, into the pan the chopped onion, frying it until it is ready. He removes the frying pan from the heat, waits for it to cool down a little before adding the liver and replacing it onto the hot hob. He cracks the other egg over the liver, taking the boiling pot off the hob before the fried liver is done.

The smell of frying attracts the domesticated beast that has long forgotten it was once a beast and also, it seems, the grudge it had against this ape of a master who had so rudely moved him to another chair. 'MeeAoooWww' he trills in the kindest voice he can muster, scrounging for food by pulling at his master's pyjama trousers with his claws. 'Ulysses, stop it, you'll get some when it's done,' he tells him. The cat enjoys his piece with the same pleasure as his royal cook who carefully turns the liver, egg and onion onto a sliced bun, satisfied with himself as if he had just invented the sandwich. Despite knowing that the sandwich was in fact already invented by *the* Lord Sandwich who, shot of better things to do in his rainy realm, after endless attempts at various combinations – a piece of bread in between two slices of ham, a slice of bread buttered on the wrong side, and so on, - eventually, in a flash of genius, invented the invention of the century.

After breakfast, he rinses the plate, washes the coffee cup, empties the ashtray and goes to the bathroom. He looks at himself in the mirror. 'You're old, old mate, you're old.' He doesn't have a clue who this person standing opposite him is, even less so after he dons his slightly too big and definitely too grey trousers, a T-shirt and a dark blue sweater, a black jacket of a neat, thickly-woven Italian cut, puts on his leather shoes that have chafed him often enough that he should have long found a new pair but has not been able to find a pair that did not rub.

'Have fun, Ulysses, happy dreams! Have a bit more of your food, and behave while I'm out!' he calls out to the cat as he puts on his time-tested trench coat, sticking into its deep pockets his wallet, change for the coffee machine, an old-fashioned mobile, his worn leather notebook, the failing ink pen, an army lighter, a half-empty packet of cigarettes, an elegant cigar cutter, and the hardboiled egg which had in the meantime dried and cooled.

With even more question marks in his head than he had had when he woke up, at the door he also dons his leather gloves and warm hat, finally ready to step outside and face what we call the world.