

COMRADES

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THE LAD

1966

Bitter liquor: molasses: caramel: malt vinegar: water: firewater: rot-gut: hooch; booze: A dance through baroque palaces filled with clouds weighing less than a glance. Noon-day transparency: blue morning suffused with honey. On the clouds sea shells of all sizes in pastel pinks, blues, greens. The smallest: pretty: delicate: set in ivory boxes and at the bottom of each little box the dancer spinning to the music. Always her: the ivory box full of semen, of shells reeking of the piss of drunks. Soaked in piss, seized, jailed, broken, arrested for an act of folly, beaten: squeal from an informer, punch from a grass, pistol whipping from a soldier: stoolies, narks, killers, bastards.

He was looking at the light, aligned carefully, vertically. The light that filtered through the bars was burning his eyes. Light from the long alley, misty, damp, silent, stinking of old food, of dried shit, of congealed blood. With the background music from the bar ringing in his ears he took a few steps and received the first blow in the face, frantic, insulting, humiliating, agonising.

A second punch filled his mouth with blood. The taste of blood is like liquor, it scrapes the throat and the larynx, becomes molten lead in the oesophagus falling to the stomach like a torrent of lava: gastritis: acidity: diet: ulcer: major trouble. From the first drink he began to see crazy visions. He'd never drunk hard liquor before, this was the first time. All because of the stupidity, demands, pressure, obligation, imposed on them by Rat: / we've got to celebrate the end of the exams / Cooked tripe in a filthy bar reeking of drunks' piss, beer fermented in rats' bellies, puke in every corner, old snacks covered in cobwebs hidden beneath the tables, in the corners, in the doorway. Rat, small, sly, black thing that ran between your feet, that stood on two stout legs, who got pissed from the age of twelve, who led us by the nose almost by force. The blow made him stagger more than usual, he felt that the blood was going down down through his whole intestine, burning his rectum, his colon; his anus closed automatically sphincterised. I can take it. Even if they go on beating me like this with all their strength, with all their hatred, with all the zeal of their hands, feet, rifle butts, I can take it. Where did I end up? In a cheap bar. This is where I'll disappear. The famous disappearances of Easter Week when Rat began to drink: he disappeared into a bar, his mother into the church, and his father into the brothel: text book cases: twelve years old. The second blow didn't hurt so much, his head was numb, his skin was numb, they forced him out of the bar at gunpoint, his head began to spin, the alcohol didn't taste so strong, he assimilated it better. Anyway, it wasn't a blow from a pistol butt, it was a punch. His lip began to swell. We must be fools to let him order us around like this, pressurising us here, forcing us there: Rat isn't one of those who commands, he isn't even any good at fighting, but he's a scoundrel, a bastard with the gift of the gab and dead persuasive / men, real men, drink liquor / I'm falling, this is my third glass and I'm falling off the chair. What a lousy dump! God knows how he gets to know these shitty dives. "Los Gavilanes Bar." Damned rodent, perverter of adults: he pushed the swing door of the bar with all the certainty of an expert, a connoisseur and greeted everyone confidently. A load of foul-smelling drunks, bearded hippies, eyed us, mistrusting,

distrusting, like they were looking at the cops: grasses: fuzz. A long-haired tart served us what Rat ordered / a bottle of Indita rum and a plate of pork scratchings / At a first quick glance, half nervous, half bold, not wanting to get a real eyeful by staring but, nevertheless, fancying my chances, I thought she was a bit of all right. Nice arse, small tits, quite tasty. As the booze hit me, I saw her better: thick moustache and two or three bristles on her chin and skinny legs, like on the pork scratchings. She began to rub against my chair, randy, abusive. I was dead nervous. Then she got bold, rubbed her pubes against my shoulder. That was when all hell was let loose. A hard feverish packet made me rise from the chair and I landed him a good sock to the jaw, pork scratchings, three hairs and all, lousy Indian snout, sodding queer, bloody madhouse. Now I'm going to fall. My head's spinning: like the big dipper. It all went wrong and I can feel the vomit rising. This is the School of Medicine, at least it looks like it. Now I really am falling, don't worry boys, I can take it, don't hold me, I won't say anything. The blow the soldier gave me at the bar door really threw me. Now I couldn't feel my chest or my ribs. The soldier: Indian bastard: Mayan face: had the punch of a mule, the kick of a mare in season, each pistol blow made the earth sway. How does he make the earth move like that? The clouds changed colour, pink, light blue, white, violet. He was hitting me as if all his sex, his life, his soul were in it / Communist bastard / Everything began to go black, black like his mouth, he didn't stop hitting me and cursing me / Communist bastard / Everything black, black, deep, deep. I seemed to be floating in a tunnel of sound. A hollow sound that was unfamiliar to me, that seemed like an interplanetary sea. I felt my body squeezed and gelatinous, deep husky voices came from who knows where: sometimes moans and contractions shook me all over. The sea of time, space, infinity, ejaculated calm into my time tunnel, my secret dark enclosure. It was almost always calm there. I was alone, completely alone but at peace. Sometimes for fun, I would kick the walls of my alabaster sphere. It was the strangest place that I have known. Everything sounded like a bell that was hollow or made of platinum or of salt and from time to time the whole area was

bathed in a viscous, creamy white, aseptic, odourless liquid that was accompanied by moans, peristaltic movements that made me nauseous, little cries of pleasure, long deep, spasmodic, animal cries that disturbed my silence. I don't know when the noise finally settled into my silence. An unaccustomed touch, a prolonged moan and a hollow voice / easy now, señora / took me from my peace. I suppose the noise and the handling enraged me and I began to kick out furiously. Then came the worst part, because my sphere became angry and started to push me out, to expel me, offended, incensed, violent. Him hitting outside and me inside until I dug my heels into the walls that contained me / There's a problem, señora, nothing serious, just that the baby isn't coming in the normal way, head first, it's coming feet first. We'll have to use forceps / Really they wouldn't ever have got me out, but some shiny polished tongs came to the help of my sphere and seized my legs. It was all over. I fell into space and began to turn, to shout, to shriek, to bellow with rage. I've been doing that ever since. Afterwards they threw water in my face, on my chest, on my feet, on to my whole body: whilst an immense deformed being shrieked / it's a boy, a male, another man in the family. You're not much of a man, two or three drinks and you're pissed, lift him up boys you're not much of a man, you're not much of a man, two or three blows and you faint, why did you get into all this? Hit him harder, it's a boy, a little male, congratulations señora / In this new place, full of unknown beings, began the solitude and the prodding, rough things that they passed over my face and body, strange instruments that they put into my mouth so I'd suck the viscous liquid, their hands on my face / wake up, wake up, we've got to get you home / and the water on my face. The sudden, cold, wet contact of the jet of water made me open my eyes, it flooded my nostrils drowning me; they had me lying over a fountain and the jet was falling straight on to my face. I tried to sit up but I couldn't. I didn't have the strength, my head was spinning and the liquid was going up my nose, I felt that my throat was blocked and I was choking. I was desperate, something hot was rising from my stomach / So young and look at the state he's in / voice of some religious old bat: in the distance: someone talking in the distance: straight out of that

Neruda poem: blasted pious old bag / So young and so drunk / At least I wasn't dead. I wasn't drowned, I could hear the fat-arsed, censorious old biddies criticising me. (Someone singing in the distance and she's not with me.) That poem again. I began to come round / I know that fountain, it's not far from my jail, so we must be near the Avenida Centroamerica and 16th Street / My head was rolling, dancing, leaping, spinning like a Ferris wheel, like a roundabout at the fair; I couldn't stand up, the water was forming puddles and my clothing was soaked, the stench of the puddles was getting more rank, it reeked of drunks' piss, a light began to infiltrate high above me, a carefully aligned light, incomplete, divided into strips. I tried to sit up but my body was burning, aching, shivering. They had beaten me all over, there wasn't a single part of my body that didn't hurt. Once again the viscous sensation in my cheeks, when I stuck out my tongue and felt the bitter taste I knew everything / Maya with his rifle butt / I tried to drag myself towards the bars, but I was tied hand and foot, always that feeling of being tied hand and foot, when I gave her the first kiss I knew that we were alone, that there was nobody around, that her grandmother had gone to church and her grandfather was in the rear courtyard and that she wanted it, but still I felt tied hand and foot. I dragged myself to get to the light. But she was my cousin (your children will turn out like pigs, with big heads and bulging eyes) and fear tied me, immobilised me, stopped me from taking her, from possessing her. She put her hands on my shoulders flirting with me, my instant erection stopped me, I had to fuck her, I couldn't stand it any more, I tried to squeeze one of her tits, I lifted my hand slowly but it was tied, then I dragged myself slowly towards the bars of the cell, I was beginning to feel sick again, the miasma that was emanating from the piss started to drive me back into the tunnel, I could hear nothing, my head was hollow, full of worms which began to crawl into my nostrils, into my ears, into my arse, into my eyes, they began to block out the light, the earth full of worms was falling all over my body, I tried to cry out and nothing came from my mouth, a pressure on my abdomen was silencing me, was stopping the sounds on my tongue, my cries grew faint, were lost in the silence. Gradually I was

retreating into my vacuum, calm descended upon me, a vibration came from deep within me, from down in my abdomen, from my belly, from my stomach, perhaps from my colon, heat was rising up through my intestines and was beginning to burn my throat, my larynx was full of bubbles that were fighting to escape, from within came belches that tasted of alcohol, of milk, of piss, of shit, I couldn't breathe any more and my eyes began to water, I could no longer contain the eruption, from my mouth poured a torrent: lava / Bloody hell lads, what a great puke, it almost went on my trousers / He's got that shit all over me. How disgusting! / Wash yourself down in the fountain / Look how they've left the trough of this fountain, we get our water for cooking from there / Call a copper / Those boys are pissed / Take him straight home / Help me to lift him / God this bugger's heavy / Look ... tunnel, voice, half-digested pork crackling ... Take me home and leave me at my door / The tunnel lengthened, shrank, had neither beginning nor end, the lights of the Avenida del Cementerio began to glitter with an unaccustomed velocity, my eyes filled with shadows, with pink and blue seashells, that began attacking my hands trying to bite them. Shells and ivory boxes were falling all around, I pushed them away from my body and played with them, a pair of breasts was calling to me from the bottom of the smallest box but the multitude of shells that were raining down prevented me from squeezing inside to fondle and suck them. The shells filled with blood, with mud, with vomit, then poured out their contents on to me, bathing me, until they were immaculate once more, between them they lifted me on high and raised me to the sun, which fractured into a myriad miniature suns and the stars shattered into millions of refulgent shards that penetrated my brain one by one, invaded my veins and strummed on my nerve chords producing a deep pain that swept through me from head to toe and back again. Excruciating roller coaster. When the first blow smashed my head the light over the bar seemed to shatter. All I felt was Efi beside me firing, that was the last thing I saw amidst the splinters of blinding light that were penetrating to the marrow of my bones, I felt myself falling again / Hold him tight, he's slipping out of my hands / We're almost there. But there's a lot of light round here

/ Yes the old bat's going to see us / worse if she's standing in the doorway waiting for him / Get a move on / The sounds weren't reaching me, I could only guess their voices, their murmurs. I hadn't heard anything for ages. Only a dull intermittent whistling, I had forgotten that sounds existed, had forgotten their texture, their tones, their intensity, their modulations. I didn't know what ears were for any more. Perhaps the first blows had ruptured my eardrums. Perhaps that bloody Maya had left me stone deaf. Or perhaps it was the punches from Napo or the beating they gave me with the hose in the solitary room with the one single light. The light began to filter in slowly, fearfully, through the cracks, stroking them, fingering the bars and the urine on the floor. The light felt no revulsion. But the sounds didn't dare to enter the enclosure full of viscous liquid. There, you didn't need sounds, nor lights, nor parks, nor bars, nor her breasts. There it was all peace, solitude and eternal soothing, calming, beneficent darkness. Damned forceps that force me from my alabaster sphere. Now the void and this silence that crushes my eyes and my throat. Don't speak, you don't need to say anything, just hold me in your arms and kiss me. Me, tied hand and foot and her blue eyes boring into the very depths of my nerves. I felt her whole body clinging to mine hurting me, exciting me, rousing me to erection, making my blood race, then I broke the bonds and blood began to gush from the liquid furrows that the ropes had cut into my wrists, my body began to ache, especially my lower belly and my balls. I had come. I looked at her timidly, ashamed, not daring to say a thing, doing nothing, quiet, stiff like my trousers on which the semen was beginning to dry. She didn't realise what had happened. I felt disgusted. I moved to unstick my penis from my underpants. The cold came through the bars of the cell and I untied my feet. I stood up. I was saturated, soaked in urine, reeking of piss: piss. Water was flowing in and out of my entire body, beyond my control. The water – urine flooded the cell. Each time I lost consciousness they doused me in it to bring me round. The warmth of the urine began to infiltrate my ears, my skin, my eyes, but it was silent or I was unable to hear what it said. Urine doesn't speak or perhaps I don't understand its language, or

what's worse, perhaps that bloody grunt Maya has left me stone deaf for life. Maybe it's because it's very early or very late or because I've had it, or because there's nothing around me and the earth is beginning to fall on to my mouth, filling it with fistfuls of tears, or because those buggers didn't hold me up properly and dropped me when we got to my place or perhaps because in the tunnel there were no sounds or because Maya broke my eardrums or because my mother is going to shout at me when I get home drunk and I don't want to hear her or because when I gave her the first kiss and I came I didn't hear anything or because when I was coming on her an intensely pleasurable heat invaded my body, or because finally I was not born to hear. The fact is I've heard nothing for years.