

ND
CLASSIC



CRONOPIOS

and FOMOS

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Translated from Spanish by Paul Blackburn

**cronopios
and famas**

J u l i o C o r t á z a r

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A New Directions Classic

This book contains the following assortment:

THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL

UNUSUAL OCCUPATIONS

UNSTABLE STUFF

CRONOPIOS AND FAMAS

cronopios and famas

**the
instruction
manual**

The job of having to soften up the brick every day, the job of cleaving a passage through the glutinous mass that declares itself to be the world, to collide every morning with the same narrow rectangular space with the disgusting name, filled with doggy satisfaction that everything is probably in its place, the same woman beside you, the same shoes, the same taste of the same toothpaste, the same sad houses across the street, the filthy slats on the shutters with the inscription THE HOTEL BELGIUM.

Drive the head like a reluctant bull through the transparent mass at the center of which we take a coffee with milk and open the newspaper to find out what has happened in whatever corner of that glass brick. Go ahead, deny up and down that the delicate act of turning the doorknob, that act which may transform everything, is done with the indifferent vigor of a daily reflex. See you later, sweetheart. Have a good day.

Tighten your fingers around a teaspoon, feel its metal pulse, its mistrustful warning. How it hurts to refuse a spoon, to say no to a door, to deny everything that habit has licked to a suitable smoothness. How much simpler to accept the easy request of the spoon, to use it, to stir the coffee.

And it's not that it's so bad that things meet us every day and are the same. That the same woman is there beside us, the same watch, that the novel lying open there on the table starts once more to take its bicycle ride through our glasses. What could be wrong with that? But like a sad bull, one has to lower the head, hustle out from the middle of the glass brick toward the one nearest us, who is as unattainable as the picador, however close the bull is to him. Punish the eyes looking at that which passes in the sky and cunningly accept that its name is cloud, its answer catalogued in the mind. Don't believe that the telephone is going to give you the numbers you try to call, why should it? The only thing that will come is what you have

already prepared and decided, the gloomy reflection of your expectations, that monkey, who scratches himself on the table and trembles with cold. Break that monkey's head, take a run from the middle of the room to the wall and break through it. Oh, how they sing upstairs! There's an apartment upstairs in this house with other people in it. A floor upstairs where people live who don't know there's a downstairs floor and that all of us live in the glass brick. And if suddenly a moth lands on the edge of a pencil and flutters there like an ash-colored flame, look at it, I am looking at it, I am touching its tiny heart and I hear it, that moth reverberates in the pie dough of frozen glass, all is not lost. When the door opens and I lean over the stairwell, I'll know that the street begins down there; not the already accepted matrix, not the familiar houses, not the hotel across the street: the street, that busy wilderness which can tumble upon me like a magnolia any minute, where the faces will come to life when I look at them, when I go just a little bit further, when I smash minutely against the pie dough of the glass brick and stake my life while I press forward step by step to go pick up the newspaper at the corner.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO CRY

Putting the reasons for crying aside for the moment, we might concentrate on the correct way to cry, which, be it understood, means a weeping that doesn't turn into a big commotion nor proves an affront to the smile with its parallel and dull similarity. The average, everyday weeping consists of a general contraction of the face and a spasmodic sound accompanied by tears and mucus, this last toward the end, since the cry ends at the point when one energetically blows one's nose.

In order to cry, steer the imagination toward yourself, and if this proves impossible owing to having contracted the habit of believing in the exterior world, think of a duck covered with ants or of those gulfs in the Straits of Magellan *into which no one sails ever*.

Coming to the weeping itself, cover the face decorously, using both hands, palms inward. Children are to cry with the sleeve of the dress or shirt pressed against the face, preferably in a corner of the room. Average duration of the cry, three minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO SING

Begin by breaking all the mirrors in the house, let your arms fall to your side, gaze vacantly at the wall, *forget yourself*. Sing one single note, listen to it from inside. If you hear (but this will happen much later) something like a landscape overwhelmed with dread, bonfires between the rocks with squatting half-naked silhouettes, I think you'll be well on your way, and the same if you hear a river, boats painted yellow and black are coming down it, if you hear the smell of fresh bread, the shadow of a horse.

Afterwards, buy a manual of voice instruction and a dress jacket, and please, don't sing through your nose and leave poor Schumann at peace.

INSTRUCTIONS ON or rather EXAMPLES OF HOW TO BE AFRAID

In a small town in Scotland they sell books with one blank page hidden someplace in the volume. If the reader opens to that page and it's three o'clock in the afternoon, he dies.

In the Piazza Quirinal in Rome, there is one spot, unknown even to the initiated after the nineteenth century, from which, under a full moon, the statues of the Dioscuri can be seen to move, fighting against their horses as they rear back.

At Amalfi, where the seacoast ends, there's a jetty which stretches out into the sea and night. Out beyond the last lighthouse, you can hear a dog bark.

A man is squeezing toothpaste onto his brush, all of a sudden he sees the tiny figure of a woman lying on her back, coral sort of, or a breadcrumb that's been painted.

Opening the door of the wardrobe to take out a shirt, an old almanac falls out which comes apart immediately, pages falling out and crumbling, and covers the white linen with millions of dirty paper butterflies.

There was a story about this traveling salesman whose left wrist began to hurt him, just under his wrist watch. When he removed the watch, blood