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HOPSCOTCH

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY GREGORY
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TABLE OF INSTRUCTIONS

In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all.

The first can be read in a normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56, at the close of which there are three garish little stars which stand for the words *The End*. Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience.

The second should be read by beginning with Chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter. In case of confusion or forgetfulness, one need only consult the following list:

73 -1 - 2 -116 - 3 - 84 - 4 - 71 - 5 - 81 - 74 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 93 - 68 - 9 -104 -10-
65-11 -136-12-106-13-115-14-114-117-15-120-16-137-17-97-18-153-19-
90-20-126-21-79-22-62-23-124-128 - 24 -134 - 25 -141 - 60 - 26 - 109 - 27
- 28 -130 -151 - 152 -143 -100 - 76 -101 -144 - 92 -103 -108 - 64 -155 -123
-145 -122 -1 ia -154 - 85 -150 - 95 -146 - 29 -107 -113 - 30 - 57 - 70 -147 -
31 -32 -132 - 61 - 33 - 67 - 83 -142 - 34 - 87 -105 - 96 - 94 - 91 - 82 - 99
-35 -121 - 36 - 37 - 98 - 38 - 39 - 86 - 78 - 40 - 59 - 41 -148 - 42 - 75 -43
-125-44-102-45-80-46-47-110-48- in - 49-118 - 50 -119 - 51 - 69 - 52 - 89 -

53 - 66 -149 - 54 -129 -139 -133 -140 -138 -127-56 -135 - 63 - 88 - 72 - 77
-131 - 58 -131-

Each chapter has its number at the top of every right-hand page to facilitate the search.

And moved by the hope of being of particular help to youth, and of contributing to the reform of manners in general, I have put together this collection of maxims, counsels, and precepts which are the basis of those universal morals that are so much a part of the spiritual and temporal happiness of men of all ages, states, and conditions, and of the prosperity and orderliness not only of the civil and Christian republic in which we live, but of any other republic or government that the most thoughtful and serious philosophers of the world might wish to contrive.

Spirit of the Bible and Universal Morals, Drawn from the Old and New Testaments Put down in Tuscan by the Abbot Martini with footnotes
Rendered into Castilian by a member of the Regular Clergy of the
Congregation of San Cayetano of this Court With permission Madrid:
Aznar, 1797

Everytime it starts to get cool, I mean in the middle of autim, I start gettin nutty ideas like I was thinkin about what was forein and diffrent, like for exsample how I'd like to turn into a swallow and get away and fly to countrys where it gets hot, or be an ant so's I could get deep into a cave and eat the stuff I stored away durin the summer or be a snake like what they got in the zoO, the ones they keep lockt up in glass cages thats heated so's they don't get stiff from the cold, which is what happens to poor human beans who cant buy no close cause the price is to high, and cant keep warm cause theys no kerosen, no coal, no wood, no fule oil and besides theys no

loot, cause when you go around with bocoo bread you can go into any bar and get some sneaky pete that can be real warmin, even tho it aint good to overdo it cause if you overdos it it gets to be a bad habbit and bad habbits is bad for your body just like they is for youre selfrespeck, and when you start goin downhill cause your actin bad in everythin, they aint nobody or nothin can stop you from endin up a stinkin piece of human garbidge and they never gone give you a hand to haul you up outen the dirty muck you rollin around in, not even if you was a eagLE when you was young and could fly up and over the highest hills, but when you get old you like a highflyin bomber thats lost its moral engines and fall down outen the sky. I jes hope what I been writin down hear do somebody some good so he take a good look at how he livin and he dont be sorry when it too late and everythin is gone down the drain cause it his own fault.

césar bruto, *What I Would Like to Be If I Wasn't What I Am* (Chapter: "A St. Bernard Dog")

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Rien ne vous tue un homme comme d'être obligé

de représenter un pays.

Jacques vache, letter to André Breton

1

WOULD I find La Maga? Most of the time it was just a case of my putting in an appearance, going along the Rue de Seine to the arch leading into the Quai de Conti, and I would see her slender form against the olive-ashen

light which floats along the river as she crossed back and forth on the Pont des Arts, or leaned over the iron rail looking at the water. It was quite natural for me to climb the steps to the bridge, go into its narrowness and over to where La Maga stood. She would smile and show no surprise, convinced as she was, the same as I, that casual meetings are apt to be just the opposite, and that people who make dates are the same kind who need lines on their writing paper, or who always squeeze up from the bottom on a tube of toothpaste.

But now she would not be on the bridge. The thin glow of her face was probably peeking into the old doorways in the Marais ghetto, or maybe she was talking to a woman who sells fried potatoes, or she might be eating a hot sausage on the Boulevard de Sebastopol. In any case, I went out onto the bridge and there was no Maga. I did not run into her along the way either. We each knew where the other lived, every cranny we holed up in in our pseudo-student existence in Paris, every window by Braque, Ghirlandaio, or Max Ernst set into cheap postcard frames and ringed with gaudy posters, but we never looked each other up at home. We preferred meeting on the bridge, at a sidewalk café, at an art movie, or crouched over a cat in some Latin Quarter courtyard. We did not go around looking for each other, but we knew that we would meet just the same. Oh, Maga, whenever I saw a woman who looked like you a clear, sharp pause would close in like a deafening silence, collapsing like a wet umbrella being closed. An umbrella, precisely. Maybe you remember, Maga, that old umbrella we sacrificed in a gully in Montsouris

Paxk one sunset on a cold March day. We threw it away because you had found it half-broken in the Place de la Concorde and you had got a lot of use from it, especially for digging into people's ribs on the Métro or on a bus as you lethargically thought about the design the flies on the ceiling made. There was a cloudburst that afternoon and you tried to open your

umbrella in the park in a proud sort of way, but your hand got all wrapped up in a catastrophe of cold lightning shafts and black clouds, strips of torn cloth falling from the ruins of unfrosted spokes, and we both laughed like madmen as we got soaked, thinking that an umbrella found in a public square ought to die a noble death in a park and not get involved in the mean cycle of trash can or gutter. Then I rolled it up as best I could and we took it to the top of the park near the little bridge over the railroad tracks, and from there I threw it with all my might to the bottom of the gully where it landed on the wet grass as you gave out with a shout in which I thought I vaguely recognized the curse of a Valkyrie. It sank into the gully like a ship into green water, stormy green water, into *la mer qui est plus félonesse en été qu'en hiver*, into the treacherous wave, Maga, as we counted for a long time, in love with Joinville or with the park, embracing like wet trees or like actors in some second-rate Hungarian movie. And it stayed down there in the grass, small and black, like some trampled insect. And it did not move, none of its springs popped out as once before. Ended. Over. Oh Maga, and still we were not satisfied.

Why was I coming to the Pont des Arts? It seems to me that on that December Thursday I had intended crossing over to the Right Bank to have some wine in the little café on the Rue des Lombards where Madame Léonie reads my palm and tells me of trips and surprises. I never took you to have Madame Léonie read your palm, probably because I was afraid that she would read some truth about me in your hand, because you have always been a frightful mirror, a monstrous instrument of repetitions, and what we had called loving was perhaps my standing in front of you holding a yellow flower while you held two green candles and a slow rain of renunciations and farewells and Métro tickets blew into our faces. So I never took you to Madame Léonie's, Maga. You told me so and that is how I know that you did not like my watching you go into that little bookshop on the Rue de Verneuil, where a burdened old man fills

out thousands of reference cards and knows everything there is to know about the study of history. You used to go there to play with a cat, and the old man let you in and didn't ask questions, content to have you get him a book from the upper shelves. You used to get warm at that stove of his with its big black pipe, and you didn't like me to know that you were going to sit next to that stove. But all of this should have been said in its proper time, except that it was difficult to know what the proper time for things was, and even now, with my elbows on the railing of the bridge, as I watched a small, must-colored *péniche*, sparkling clean like a great big beautiful cockroach, with a woman in a white apron hanging wash on a wire strung along the prow, as I looked at its windows, painted green, with Hansel and Gretel curtains, even now, Maga, I wondered if this roundabout route made any sense, since it would have been easier to reach the Rue des Lombards by the Pont Saint-Michel and the Pont au Change. But if you had been there that night, as so many other times, then I would have known that the roundabout made sense, while now, on the other hand, I debase my failure by calling it a roundabout. I raised the collar of my lumberjacket, and it was a matter of going along the docks until I came to where the large shops go on to the Châtelet, passing underneath the violet shadow of the Tour Saint-Jacques, and turning into my street, thinking about the fact that I had not met you and about Madame Léonie.

I know that one day I came to Paris. I know that I was living off loans for a while, doing what the others did and seeing what they saw. I know that you were coming out of a café on the Rue du Cherche-Midi and that we spoke. Everything had been going badly that afternoon because the habits I had brought from Argentina would not permit me to cross from one sidewalk to the other to look at silly items in the dimly lit shop windows on streets I don't remember any more. I followed you grudgingly then, finding you petulant and rude, until you got tired of not being tired and we went into a café on the Boul' Mich' and all of a sudden in between two croissants you told me a whole chunk of your life.

How was I to have suspected that what seemed to be a pack of lies was all true, a Figari with sunset violets, with livid faces, with hunger and blows in the corners. I came to believe you later on, later on there was reason to, there was Madame Léonie,

who looked at my hand which had gone to bed with your breasts, and she practically repeated your exact words : "She is suffering somewhere. She has always suffered. She is very gay, she adores yellow, her bird is the blackbird, her time is night, her bridge is the Pont des Arts." (A must-colored *péniche*, Maga, and I wonder why we didn't sail off on it while there was still time.)

We had barely come to know each other when life began to plot everything necessary for us to stop meeting little by little. Since you didn't know how to fake I realized at once that in order *to* see you as I wanted to I would have to begin by shutting my eyes, and then at first some things like yellow stars (moving around in a velvet jelly), then red jumps of humor and time, a sudden entry into a Maga world, awkward and confused, but also with ferns signed by a Klee spider, a Miró circus, Vieira da Silva ash-mirrors, a chess world where you moved about like a knight trying to move like a rook trying to move like a bishop. In those days we used to go to art movies to see silent pictures, because I had my culture, maybe not, but you, poor thing, didn't understand anything at all about that yellow and convulsed shrieking which had all taken place before you were born, that grooved emulsion in which dead people ran about. But suddenly Harold Lloyd would go by and then you would shake off the water of your dream and would finally be convinced that all was well, and that Pabst, and that Fritz Lang. You used to make me a little sick with your mania for perfection, with your rundown shoes, with your refusal to accept the acceptable. We used

to eat hamburgers in the Carrefour de l'Odéon and we used to go cycling to Montparnasse, to any hotel, any pillow. Then other times we would go all the way to the Porte d'Orléans and we became more and more familiar with the vacant lots beyond the Boulevard Jourdan, where sometimes at midnight the members of the Serpent Club used to get together to talk to a blind seer, a stimulating paradox. We used to leave the bicycles on the street and go in a little way, stopping to look at the sky because it is one of the few places in Paris where sky is worth more than ground. Sitting on a pile of rubbish we would smoke for a while, and La Maga would stroke my hair or hum songs which hadn't been invented yet, absurd tunes broken with sighs or memories. I took advantage of such moments to think about useless things, a practice I had begun some years before in a hospital and

which all seemed richer and more necessary every time since. With great effort, marshaling auxiliary images, thinking about smells and faces, I managed to extract out of nothing a pair of chestnut-colored shoes I had owned in Olavarria in 1940. They had rubber heels and very thin soles, and when it rained the water used to seep in up to my very soul. With that pair of shoes in the hand of my memory the rest came along by itself: the face of Doña Manuela, for example, or the poet Ernesto Morroni. But I rejected them because the game consisted in bringing back only the insignificant, the unnoticed, the forgotten. Trembling at not being able to remember, attacked by those moths suggested by postponement, an imbecile for having kissed time, I finally saw beyond the shoes a can of Sol brand tea which my mother had given me in Buenos Aires. And the little double teaspoon, a mousetrap spoon, where little black mice were scalded alive in the cup of water as they gave off hissing bubbles. Convinced that memory keeps everything, not just the Albertines and the great journals of the heart and kidneys, I persisted in reconstructing the contents of my desk in Floresta,

the face of a girl impossible to remember named Gekrepten, the number of drawing pens in my pencil box in the fifth grade, and I ended up trembling and desperate (because I had never been able to remember those pens; I know that they were in the pencil box, in a special compartment, but I cannot remember how many they were, nor the precise moment when there were two or six), until La Maga, kissing me and blowing smoke and her hot breath into my face, brought me back and we laughed, and we began to walk around again among the piles of rubbish, looking for the members of the Club. It was about that time I realized that searching was my symbol, the emblem of those who go out at night with nothing in mind, the motives of a destroyer of compasses. I spoke about pataphysics with La Maga until we both were tired, because the same thing used to happen to her (and our meeting had been like that, and so many things, dark as a match), always falling into exceptions, seeing herself stuck in huts not meant for people and all this without despising anyone, without thinking we were Maldorors at the end of the trails or Melmoths privileged to wander about. I do not believe the firefly gets any great satisfaction from the incontrovertible fact that he is one of the most amazing wonders of this circus, and yet one can imagine a consciousness alert enough to

understand that every time he lights his belly this light-bearing bug must feel some inkling of privilege. In just this way La Maga was fascinated with the strange mixups she had become involved in because of the breakdown of the laws governing her Ufe. She was one of those people who could make a bridge collapse simply by walking on it, or who could sobbingly remember having seen in a shop window the lottery ticket which had just won five million. As for me, I'm already used to the fact that quietly exceptional things happen to me, and I don't find it too horrible when I go into a dark room looking for a record album and feel in my hand the wriggling form of a centipede who has chosen to sleep in the binding. That sort of thing. Or finding great gray or green tufts in a pack of cigarettes, or