

out: some time or other I'll have to escape, whatever the way, and grapple with Him, by myself. I know that I won't be on the winning side, but I also know that He's going to lose something in the battle.

Nedjeljko Fabrio

The Infernal Dominican

My lord the king, on my life and your
grace, truly do I tell you that of all worth
and beauty there is nothing dearer to me,
nothing that my eye has longed for or that
has cleaved to my heart or exalted my mind
than the devil that beguiles mankind.

Barlaam and Jozafat, 17th century
Dubrovnik manuscript

Whenever I happen to be in that area, I make haste to visit the island; you might actually say that it's because of the island that I do visit the region, at the bottom of Europe, in the south of Croatia.

The island is like all the islands of the region: conical, rocky right down to the sea, but otherwise packed, the crickets, the swifts, the soft magnolias and blown dandelions, with the bell-tower of the Dominican church planted high on the very peak of the island, dark blue in winter, then again yellow. To get to the church at all you have to climb, wind, twist round the deformed old stone housings, but the sky peering in patches of azure from slashes in the walls draws you constantly on and at the top, when you have arrived at the small stone terrace in front of the church, you are given up to the sky it-

self. Because at the top there is nothing any longer: the actual sheer infinity of the firmament, scrawled over from time to time by a gull or some other bird, with a cross thrust in it.

Deep down below you the sea wrinkles, the altitude is appalling and everything that fell or sank into the sea ages back is down there before you quite clearly on the bed. Until the sea depths quite overpower both your gaze and the looming heights. The impoverished eye will see down there just smashed bottles, pieces of rope and machines, tin cans, battered pots and pans, and yet the eye that is attuned to the imagination sees cannonry and galleons, banners and lanterns, rudders, Venetian cannonballs and fallen local saints. Both the one and the other are right: the property of the sea smoulders under the light blue veil of the heights, and the depths and time.

The church is visited only by the most determined, others being put off at the very beginning of the climb by the heat (for no one comes in winter), the steepness, uncertainty about how much of the way remains to be covered. You go upwards, round about, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, sometimes there are steps, sometimes there simply aren't any, and you do long jumps until they are there again, the abraded staircase sometimes for no reason at all bypassing the houses and storehouses of the labourers, sometimes coming back, retreating and so on in the same way right until the very last step that lands those travellers who have persisted on the terrace at last.

It was built by the Dominicans, at the same time as the church, some time back at the end of the 14th century, or more accurately at the beginning of the 15th, when their bloody persecutions of the Bogumils were already memories, if not legends.

It was not the fabric of the church that attracted me to that area, although inside it was covered with drawings of the devil and charitable miracle workers, and still less was I attracted by the terrace, surrounded by those two small circular bulwarks that separated it from the two blue infinities. It was the Dominican, my Dominican, who held court there, that I hastened to. The last of the ordines mendicantes, if not the very last, who earned their daily bread among the people, by preaching and begging, as they had of yore.

When I emerged, hale and hearty, on the terrace, there was a well-known sight awaiting me: in his white, stark white robe, with his hood on his head, turned towards the depth above and below him, my Dominican was standing, at the very edge of the bulwark and in the shadow of the cross, silent. It was a sunny day, summery, but it was still very early, and there was no one around to ooh and aah, wander about and take pictures. It was enough for me to take one step on the terrace for him to recognize me, to turn quickly round to me, and just at that moment the sun came out above the cross, and the Dominican's white robe and hood shone out so that I dazzled from the sheer strength of the light. Not even while we were greeting each other and asking the usual questions about health and life could I get

my sight back. I had been absent a long time, in dark and meagre rooms, and it would take me time to get used to the brightness and the light.

He supported me, and as we chatted, I decided to go inside till I felt better. The cold of the ante-chamber of the church, and then of the relatively long stone nave with its arched vault (memory played inside me), and in the end of the sacristy, did not however bring my sight back, but I put my trust in my guide and followed him blindly, stumbling here and there over a prayer stool, a pew, the fat, tall wax candles, an alms box.

And we did not stay long even in the sacristy: there were some slightly younger brothers (as I decided from listening, from the way they behaved) moving to and fro, guffawing, paying no heed to our attempt to find a place, win a corner of peace and solitude. "Let's go into the library," said the Dominican, and in a moment the heavy door of the room with its stagnant air closed softly behind us. An odour previously unknown washed over me. Since things were still fuzzy, my Dominican gave me a gentle push over to an oval chair, putting the broad flat wooden seat underneath me. "Incunabula, missals, breviaries," he laughed aloud over me, while he was sitting down himself, wanting thus to help me out in my unaccustomedness. "We could have come here at once, but it's alright, alright," he said and got up in a moment, laughing all the while, and repeating that alright, alright. That's how he had been as long as I had known him: restless, talkative, one of us, at home with us. There was no need for me to say anything. I knew very well, now, as al-

ways when we met, when I came this way, to the island, on my raids on the Dominican church, on him, in fact, on my Dominican, that he would take over the conversation. The well-nigh tangible silence of the room was broken only by the creaking of the clock.

"Oh, yes, my good fellow, do you know that Medoro stayed here too?" he asked me, without lowering his voice, walking up and down the library, while I was able to follow him only hit and miss. "Yes, yes," he repeated, and then, at once: "And that's no small matter. On the contrary, on the contrary." And now he began to yell: "Medoro, Medoro, my good fellow, have you any idea who Medoro was?"

No, it wasn't possible to tell a lie to my Dominican, even if one had wanted to. If you give someone the lie direct, even if they are black devils, the lie doesn't seem to be a lie, it fades away, loses its life on the way, and arrives at the person you originally intended it for as a lie completely blandly, insignificantly. But a lie directed to my Dominican would have remained on the way over from me to him just a lying lie of a lie and nothing else. And a lie has to be just that: something above and beyond. And so I said "No".

"You don't know who Medoro was?" laughed the Dominican, sitting down in front of me again. "No?"

As when a little brook heartened by the deep lake in its rear begins to flow the bolder for its endeavours, so I dipped into the waters that seemed to me to be common to us and, though hesitantly, tried an independent course. And so I said: "Why, yes, I think

I know, I think I know who Medoro was.”

The Dominican burst into shrewish laguhter again and walking down the room burst out: “Let’s hear, then, my good fellow, let’s hear who *your* Medoro was.”

And I fell silent again, but the trough once hollowed out at the foot of the mighty lake had to drive the water on, the more so since my interlocutor by that repetition of “let’s hear, let’s hear” simply deepened the trench again and sent the water on in a well known direction. And collapsing in the face of the force of his pressure, I said rapidly and telegraphically: “The robbers, when they hung Pinocchio, on the tree, mad they couldn’t rob him, then a good fairy, at his cries for help, sent a dog to his aid.” I had begun to flow more calmly, broadly. “That dog’s name was Medoro.”

The silence lasted while you could have counted to five. A tide of joy arose in me at the exactitude of my answer. And then the Dominican’s victorious mockery rushed over me, blocking and damming everything. “That’s the kind of Medoro you’d like, you, would you?”

Of that little streamlet that had set off so swaggeringly into the world nothing remained.

“I shall tell you about Medoro, my dear fellow, I. Your story is what they say out there, but I shall tell you the truth. *I always only tell the truth, we all tell the truth, and they, those who are not us, lie to you.* Right?” He panted and sat down on a chair.

Ponderously, replete with water, the lake shifted in its depths, and I knew that my river-bed no long-

er existed below it, and that for his vigorous flow and course it was not even necessary, neither now nor before. I would be quiet, leave it to him.

“That was the time, my dear fellow, when the honour of a city and the respect in which it was held were measured by the size, beauty and accuracy of the municipal clock. From one end of the known world to the other, people journeyed just to experience, patiently and ecstatically, at the foot of public clock towers, I repeat, their size, beauty and accuracy. For the sake of the clocks, the shabby piles of the aristocracy and the shacks of the artisan were moved aside, and the squares themselves were located and built, paved and polished, with the idea that some time or other a clock would adorn them from on high. A more or less round field, divided into twice times twelve divisions that were the hours, and a single hand. How little it seems, but for many it was a mere dream. “Anything at all, but a clock at any rate!” would sigh the citizens of impoverished quarters when in summer nights of muggy sleeplessness the moonshine would flood over the crenellated walls, the cupolas and roofs, for it was easy to build palaces, squares, views, fountains, bridge over them and soften their outlines with parks, but for a clock, yes, for a clock, my dear fellow, you needed the most excellent smiths and craftsmen, very rare in those days, you needed pure gold and copper, to say nothing of meticulously cast iron.

Circumstances decided that Medoro should apprehend the passion of his time, *l’esprit de l’époque*, as his fellow Frenchmen would say, as a man of maturity and, into the bargain, a locksmith and

metalworker, although one should not pass over the fact that he had very early on to the wonderment of his parents made the tour of at least the very best known European gathering places of the worshippers, one might almost say, the devotees of the municipal clock.

That this was the case was due to the unhappy and completely disordered life of Medoro's father. For he had neither any land anywhere, to occupy himself with, to settle down on it, nor any particular profession. Medoro, luckily, was an only child, and with the father's little art as a metal worker (there was no skill to talk of here) the three of them were able to make ends meet from village to village, make use of the privy. Before long Medoro was the one who bound the wheels of field carts, shod mares, sharpened scythes and bill-hooks, put bolts in gates and greased locks with various oils. On one of these journeys both of his parents fell sick and Medoro used the long stay in a city to take the master's examination of the locksmiths' guild.

The suppleness with which he did his task, and his complete absorption in the job that, under his fingers, smoothly turned into a harmonious, usable, exact work, aroused unconcealed enthusiasm in even the most inveterate of master craftsmen. "Hands from God," said some shaking their heads, while "devilish fingers" pouted others. He was offered all sorts of things: including the head place in the forge of the Fort, and overseer of the local armoury, and making the silver and even the golden ornaments and decorations and - he, Medoro, more with clenched teeth than unbridled tongue simply refused

them all. And then some again said "Man of God!" and others: "Work of the devil!" But Medoro settled down to his new work, behaving again like a mere novice, a nobody. He had had occasion, you see, to observe in the gentlemen who thronged to him clocks, table clocks, nothing much outside, but unfathomable inside.

Perhaps it was a shiver of sorrow for his youth, or honest, industrious solitariness, the unmarried life, memories of the long past dusty journeys to fill his ears and eyes full of tall and often pompous clocks, his first grey hairs, whatever, but Medoro gave himself up body and soul to clocks. As when a gardener plants and raises from the root thousands and thousands of trees and then discovers that one trunk, that one tree for which in the end it is worth living and, like a solaced traveller, steps firmly out across the remaining desert to meet it.

And he did travel: on foot, with his stick, by coach, sledge, on a mule, by ox-train, winter and summer, through gorges and along sandy white bays of the sea. In Magdeburg he went in search of the records of the German bishop and chronicler Thiethmar, who had written of Gerbert the Abbot that it was only by gazing at the stars that guide the mariners that he built his clocks. In Milan he wondered at the first mechanical clock, then went down to Padua where the famous clock of Jacopo Dondi boomed out. Under the palace towers of Paris he enthused for days over the clock of the Lotharingian Henrick Wick. Nobody however could tell him where and in whose palace lay hidden the water clock that the caliph of Baghdad Haroun al Rashid had in far-off

807 given to the son of Pippin the Little, King Charles the Great. And this clock too, they said, struck, and had moving figures into the bargain. But Medoro travelled on, clockmakers being free artists in that period anyway. He travelled, became ever more famous, wiser, and greyer.

The terrible winter of the year 1434 prevented Medoro travelling to Moscow. Every living thing froze up – birds, rivers, frivolous armies. It was heavy of heart that he gave up, for he would never see a public clock with thirty bells on one of the towers of the Kremlin. He was comforted, too big a word for the Moscow-yearning master-craftsman, by the famous Gothic clock of Philip the Good of Burgundy, which Philip in person was anxious to show Medoro among the few and first. And there was something for him to see, for along with three moving figures, the clock was driven by a spring. The question of the secret of how to get from clocks in towers or big clocks in rooms to little pocket or table clocks was thus solved once and for all. Although a special guest and a rare bird at the court of Burgundy, Medoro could not get the name of the court clock-maker out of the pale, skeletal and always black-clad Philip the Good.

Going around looking for mechanisms that would strike out the time, Medoro quite forgot about time itself. When he was far away on his travels studying clock mechanisms and inventions, his parents died, gave up the ghost, alone, with not a word about their son, apart from what was known to everyone, that he was studying and studying clock mechanisms and inventions. On these journeys, my dear fellow,

Medoro went round this area too. I found, not so long ago, drawings of his on the law of mechanics in the clock-making that had always been such a special draw to him. When it was that he came by here, and on what errand, the dear Lord alone knows, yes, yes, my dear good God.”

The Dominican laughed and went on walking at large around the hollow room.

“Perhaps when Trogir Cathedral was being built? He probably thought there would be some marvel of a clock in these southern regions, that ought to be visited and committed well to memory for the novelties in their construction. But it seems that the Turks and the plague soon sent him back again to Europe. Although, if you look a bit more closely at the tower of the cathedral in Trogir, especially at the stone square to its right, the sea side, the bell tower seems to have been built for a clock, a real, magnificent Medoro clock.

On this journey to the West, Medoro was met by magnificent news, something he had been dreaming about his whole life long. Louis XI, the son of Charles VII of the house of Valois, made an offer to Medoro, straight out, to have him build, in his kingdom, the most luxurious, the highest and the biggest municipal clock of all times, the clock of clocks. The Clock of Louis XI, as the French king could already see it, most majestic in his imagination.

One really ought, my dear fellow, to pause a little on this really royal offer to see how far human arrogance goes, vengefulness, the thirst to compete, which doesn't exist here among us, for we are all

like each other inside and out, we do and think the same.

Well then, this bitter enemy of the feudal magnates, Louis XI, intended to break them not only militarily, with victory and retaliation, which worked out pretty well for him in his battle against their Ligue du bien public, but to destroy them so they could never fight again, assiduously, consistently, one after the other. He did this by a move that was superlatively cunning and worthy of a real ruler: giving the cities powerful privileges, amply fortifying their trades, crafts and arts. The cities were then inundated with scientists and artists invited from all over the world, builders and other inventors, and among them our Medoro, while even the distant Greeks came to be teachers in the municipal schools. Broken up so they were bare individuals, in constant feud with each other, hating each other, weak about the purse-strings anyway (especially after their military defeat) and with still more wretched days on the horizon – the magnates vanished from everyday life as the blue fly quits the racehorse when it is pushed into a gallop. Louis had free hands and was graced with divine rights, but his cities had the money and fame.

It was sheer chance that the hatred of the king should, outside his own country, light just upon a Burgundian. King Louis XI made war against Duke Charles the Bold, and what with the death of the duke and the mighty military successes of the French, he was the first to be able to annex Artois, Picardy and of course Burgundy to his own feudal power and the kingdom of France by right of conquest.

Medoro, in all truth entirely unintentionally, but nevertheless in detail and not without sadness and despair in his voice, told him more than once about the behaviour of Philip for Good at the feast held at the Court of Burgundy in honour of that Gothic clock that had for the first time used a spring as the source of its movement. In the string of names that Medoro, in the gallery of the inventors and creators of clocks, carried throughout his life, which he worshipped and studied, which went from Berosos the Babylonian, from the Greek philosopher Anaximandras and the Roman Consul Papirius Cursor, that one name, the inventor of the spring of the Gothic clock of the Court of Burgundy was to remain forever a secret. A secret even for a man like Medoro.

“Damned Burgundian puppy,” said Louis to Medoro in a rage, and continued his wars against the countrymen of Philip’s Charles the Bold still more ardently. And since God and the devil protect the enterprising and the intrepid quite equally, not much Seine had passed through Paris before the Frenchman had annexed Anjou, Maine and Provence. “All I have to do is wave the Louis XI Clock under the hateful and carping Burgundians’ noses and the tale will be over,” repeated the king of a great and ever bigger France to his courtiers.

And if the times had by chance been different, more like our times, today’s times, not a living soul would have invested much hope, let alone sheeps’ bladders full of louis d’ors, in Medoro. For Medoro arrived at the French court a decrepit old man, with trembling hands and milky vision. But, as I told you, knowledge and spirit were valued, not the signs that

the fragile body gave to the naked eye and the superficial mind.

Medoro refused servants and new clothes, cooks and grooms, drawers and scribes, and if he spent a sou it was only on the manuscripts of some pathetic and ignorant clockmakers (he knew from a glance at them) that he bought up from sheer charity in the second class clockmakers' shops of remote Paris that were languishing in bankruptcy. They didn't of course recognise Medoro in Medoro, although all France was buzzing of him with pride.

In autumn, a taciturn Medoro rode out of Paris with his closest attendants to a city that he had himself chosen with the greatest of care. On mules travelled trunks containing all the grand collected and printed knowledge about a device that only ostensibly simply measured and struck the time.

Just at that moment somewhere above us there was a new clanging of a clock.

By spring he would be finished with the drawings and ground plan, thought Medoro in his saddle, for the building of a suitable tower, and the following autumn he should be able to start work on the clock itself, and by the spring after that, if the Omnipotent grant it, it should start to work. 'To the honour of France and Louis XI,' – the King saw him off in person.

Medoro kept vigil that rainy autumn in the abandoned wing of a convent of the Poor Clares in north-west France. In a nearby town he would, in spring, in March, start on the building of a splendid tower.

Medoro's crew lazed away the whole of that blessed autumn, burlesquing their master, bleary eyed and stammering, in the nearest tavern, gazing into the air and muttering calculations into his beard, far from a good glass and a woman's behind, more and more bent and worn out, long haired and bony fingered. "From hunger, the devil take him," added the crew, who were kept short of a mighty surplus of money. When it rained cats and dogs he would go down by road to the city and alone in the middle of the meadow, which was to become a city square the moment he winked his eye, measuring things and prancing round the bushes, drawing with his fingers across the stormy sky as if he were casting spells and doing magic. Some people thought he was that kind of man, and kept feeble children out of his way.

This was what it was all about. The pendulum of Medoro's mighty clock was to be hidden in the tower so that it would be invisible to the eye of man. The cogged wheels of the movement that counted the passage of the pendulum and were linked to the drive of hands would not stand vertically, as was the case of all the public clocks so far seen in the world, but would be fastened to the firm ground of the attic of the tower's cupola. Only in that way, Medoro rambled, whipped by the southern wind from the sea, will I be able to build up the Louis XI machine. The indicating mechanism would show the time not with a bronze plate and hands, but with figures and groups of figures that he would have made in life size on the rim of a flat circle that with joints and wheels

and levers would be driven by the the main wheel of the movement. And since the actual mechanism of the clock was to be placed under the very cupola, this was to have an artistically shaped opening in which, according to the time of day or night, a certain figure or group of figures would appear.

In his cogitations, Medoro paid special attention to the materials from which he would build his clock: from copper he would make his wheels, crowns and anchors; of gold, his escapement wheels; of iron, his screws, levers, axles, spirals, springs and cogs, while the bearing of the flat ring that was to bear the figures would be of silver.

The workings of the clock, magnificent in their unparalleled treatment of Medoro's set of methods, concealed from the curious, were to be crowned by the appearance of the figures that would steadily and silently slowly slide into the high opening of the cupola, day and night. The hours of day would be indicated in order by a milker, a ploughman, a shepherd girl with her sheep, noon by a penitent pair found at prayer, the evening hours by a herdsman, a tavern-keeper, a granny at the fire, and midnight by the black devil.

The cupola itself was to be made of glass. On fine days and nights the figures would walk in their peaceful march with the magical lighting of the sky, adorned sometimes with the stars, sometimes with the playful clouds. For the benefit of those who would seek the tower and its time at night and from a distance, Medoro had decided to light a fire in a special brick-built housing in the machinery.

Calculations of the number of cogs in the drive of the dial, the influence of heat on the movement of the clock, the rayment of the very variegated figures and groups of figures, massive tables full of crooked signs and numbers – all this had been readied by spring.

Nothing was left of Medoro but skin and bone. And when the tower was built and below it a square smoothed in exact black and white marble squares (both kinds had been brought from the south, the white from Hvar and the black from Paros), he himself got under the cupola and started with the most important of all the works: the building of the clock-work mechanism.

After a few months of work on the base of the cupola you could already make out a vast toothed wheel from the centre of which reared up cogs and levers and these again on their own account branched left and right, little by little encircling their constructor on all sides.

And he, Medoro, lost in the heights of the cupola and absorbed in the gold, silver, brass and iron of his astonishing machine, filed and forged, struck with his great hammer and softened the bearings with melted silver, measured with pendulums and weird devices, prodded, sweat-drenched, bearded, neither hungry nor thirsty, stumbling over filings, over devices of the device, diving invulnerable under razor sharp sheaves of unidentifiable levers and assemblies of pulleys. A long, tattered robe fluttered behind him, there being a ferocious draught whipping through the uppermost openings of the tower, and

with the remaining skirts he would wipe dry the rain driven by the wind into the by now so many housings of the mechanism that it was not clear whether he was drying the device at random or caressing it. At night, perched on an opening in the cupola, he would gaze fixedly at the night and the workmen, the masons and builders, the carpenters and painters deep below him would covertly cross themselves.

Towards the end of the second winter since Medoro and his lads had ridden into it, the town was already in a completely celebratory mood. Everything was going completely according to the master's schedule. The Louis XI Clock, the new marble square, the magnificent city tower, the guests who kept on visiting the region would spread its fame throughout the country, throughout the wide world. And when the news broke about the meticulous preparations being made to greet His Majesty – the day when the most magnificent clock mechanism in the world was to be started up was just a matter of patience and the Ruler's good will.

On the verge of a new spring, just as had been promised to the Court, Medoro brought the work to its final end and goal: the cupola was glazed, the pendulum was moved right to the side by the strength of the muscles of twenty smiths, and the release lever fixed, the bearings and cogs greased where necessary, the statues of the tower were placed in their positions, the fire for the light all ready to be ignited.

The number of completed figures mounted on the framework of the cupola grew as well: some were in scarlet, in damask (shot with gorgeous arabesques)

or dalmatic (the deacons announcing the Hail Maries), and some even in rags, but all with speaking eyes, solid, caught in motion, there as if real.

First and foremost in this was the figure representing black midnight, the devil. He seemed to have grown up without help from the master's hands, almost without the master's eyes, which hardly saw anything any longer. And if they had, they would have noticed how the devil was shaped by himself, according to his own taste and measure, and became just what he was supposed to be, Satan, a tangible devil, but still immobile, and in the company of angels, shepherds, beturbaned traders and pipers (for the morning hour).

A few times, it did happen though that Medoro touched him, and on a later occasion the devil himself put out what people call a hand, but bemused and running around the cupola (the poor chap had already completely lost his head) the master didn't even notice this, let alone remember it. And when he had distributed the last figures and groups of figures at their precisely designated places around the moving rim we have already described, Medoro noticed how the devil himself, without any assistance from the master, took up the position that was allotted to him in the procession of the scenes.

And so the day arrived.

A real spring day: sunny, blue, limpid. The royal train was settled under a gaudy awning located at the end of the gleaming square, right opposite the tower and the opening that, at the King's sign, would begin to figure forth the time. The citizens, travel-

lers, vagabonds, the envoys of many a kingdom and empire, adventurers and priests, perfectly turned out cavalry and in front of them the arquebusiers, harlots, children, alchemists and scientists, historians and poets, admirals, cardinals and simple wine-swillers, imprisoned Burgundians, all having flocked, my dear fellow, from the world at large and from France, all rowdy and restless at the very edge of the square, upon which no one but the King himself could step.

Up above, under the cupola that was blue from sky and glass, crouched Medoro, waiting until the King, once comfortably seated upon a transportable throne, should give with his royal hand the agreed upon signal. Once again the craftsman made the rounds of the work of his whole life and being, figure by figure, on all four and twenty of their places, checked the release lever of the pendulum and returned, content, trembling and tiny under the star of his almighty machine that was about to shine, returned to peer for the agreed upon motion of the King, which the loaded wide-throated cannon would at once confirm to the whole world.

While Medoro, the lock-smith and clock-maker remained, until the very last moment, a real hermit in his clothing and footwear, soiled with the oils and greases of the machine, sprinkled with a hoar of iron and lead shavings, infirm of step, his gray hair starting up and his face burned, however much he was politely and indefatigably begged from the highest place more than once not to do that, for it was not at all suitable to the hour and the honour, Louis XI, of the house of Valois, spry and dandified, alighted from his quivering white horse and kinged it over to

the comfortable violet throne.

Just as when lightning flashes through a thick forest and a dead silence ensues, so the King's gesture with his hand erased in an instant the whispering, murmuring and movement of each and every one.

The very same moment the cannons roared.

Medoro ran blindly to the bolt. He pulled it out with all the remaining strength of his sinewy weight. Deep in the tower he heard the first stroke of the pendulum. The cogged fly wheel moved by one and then another tooth, and after it the whole of the mechanism, tooth on tooth, tooth on tooth. And then it was time for the moving rim, the figures and the scenes to give a gentle shake and quietly start their from now eternal procession.

And now, among the first squeaks of the levers and clattering of the cogs, it seemed to Medoro that something was not quite right. One of the figures, it seemed, down there, was leaving the rim, as if it had sagged, and he felt nervous that because of the shaking it might slip off the flat bearing. Scolding his own inattentiveness Medoro stepped into the machinery, staring in front of him at the figure opposite him that was now clearly rocking.

At first he did not feel the cogs of the machinery firmly trapping the tatters of his robe between the teeth, and when at the next step he wanted to walk over the escapement wheel – it pulled him roughly. Movement by movement the unstoppable mechanism brought him closer to the figure of black midnight that loomed up out of Medoro's blindness. And all at once the dreadful unthought of suspicion

that nevertheless stirred up some kind of memory came true: the devil himself, not as he had imagined him, stood face to face with him, laughing aloud, and waiting for him patiently.

With his last sight, Medoro saw one of the taut, brilliant sharp spirals at the height of his own throat, coming up to him stretched, quietly, oiled, according to his own calculations.

A frightful cry broke from the cupola, an old man's cry, seeming to be suddenly cut short by something, and the square shuddered in the long silence. At the very edge of the splendidly ornamented opening, Medoro's head appeared, stayed there a second or two, and plunged down the tower, tumbled bleeding over to the King's very feet and expired.

And then at the opening the devil, hale and hearty, appeared to the multitude, and went off to meet it."

My sight had now come back to me completely.

Yes, in that white, hooded Dominican robe, lit by the amber beams that had suffused the library, before me stood the devil, Medoro's devil. And, as before, he was laughing. He placed what people usually call a hand on my what people usually call a shoulder and said sweetly: "That was Medoro, my dear fellow."

I too laughed, silkenly, to the library, the monastery, the island, the world I had just got to know, jofully, excitably, easily; for after all it was for him, for my Dominican, that I made haste to visit the island whenever I should happen to be in this country, at the bottom of Europe, in the south of Croatia.

There was just one child, not long ago, who, seeing me, groaned out: "The devil!" But they didn't believe him.

They still haven't, the idiots.