

PRECAUTIONARY

Typical. Stranded again. How long have we been waiting? No, don't bother answering, the question's rhetorical. Most probably it's the usual personnel shortages, or a lightning strike, wildcat maybe, at the depot. We'll never know will we? Still we can't hang around here all day in the most likely vain hope, a hope unsullied by expectation, that something will eventually turn up. It never does, I can tell you, and I know this route like my own handwriting. How about you? You heading west? Okay, silly question, we must be going in the same direction or you wouldn't be hanging round here would you? How about walking across to the other line, do you know it? It's over there, through the red and blue light district and then just a few steps beyond that small park with the grassy knoll and shady nooks. What say you hmmm? Aaah, nothing - the silent kind, never talk to strangers, eh? No matter. I have every sympathy. One can't be too careful. Still, with that stout cane of yours and my trusty ashplant we should be able to take on all-comers, should any such comers actually come along and offer the least hint of a threat. Come on, it's not so far and I know the way. I've had to do this before. More than once. Judging from your appearance, not so dissimilar to my own if you'll excuse my saying so, you look prepared for anything these sad streets could throw at you, or indeed us. Enough provisions for a week or more in that bulging shoulder bag I shouldn't wonder! Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, it's just that I can't help noticing that you seem to be set up, kitted out, for some definite mission. Not many people go around in clothes like that in this weather, even though there is a clammy chill, the merest hint of the storm-to-come perhaps, in the air. And, come to think of it, you're probably thinking along the same lines about me! I know I must look grossly, some might say bizarrely even, overdressed, but there are reasons, yes, there are very good reasons. We cross over here by the way and then turn left into that passage; it should save us a minute or two. So perhaps, if appearances are anything to go by, and so often of course they're all we've got to go by, we're kindred spirits you and I. Thinking, living even, along the same lines. You look as if you'd understand well enough why I'm decked out in this way, just as I believe I understand your studied

silence now as we traverse these less-than-thorough-fares in search of the right omnibus to carry us forward. For I too am invariably unresponsive to a stranger's goadings, questions or comments, whether complimentary or no. You may not believe this but I'm actually the silent kind. I prefer, nay, need desperately, to keep my own counsel. But something about your demeanour, a demeanour that is certainly, if you don't mind my saying so, aloof, nevertheless seems to promise simultaneously, as I judge from what I detect as the faintest play of a half-smile around the corners of your otherwise impassive mouth, a certain benevolent tolerance, a forgiving acquiescence hopefully, in the face of the world's strange ways and, more specifically, of myself and my doubtless pathetic garrulousness to which you have unwittingly exposed yourself! Indeed your reticence is already beginning to allay the fears which typically frame every move I make and to persuade me that I might let you into one or two of my little secrets. Besides it may help to while away the otherwise dead time of our cross-city jaunt. You might even be prepared to help me. You look as if you could rise to the occasion, take care of yourself, and maybe me too, should the occasion rise, as I fear such occasions so often do. These pavements are disgusting are they not? Mind that pile of crap. Well done. Sometimes I feel as if I simply have to talk to someone, although not just anyone. You've probably, somewhat ruefully perhaps, realised already that today is precisely such an occasion. It's not exactly that I'm at the end of my tether but more that I need to release some of the tensions that are forever building up inside me willy-nilly though I can never quite put my finger on, let alone smash my fist into, their source. Would that I could! And that, of course, may be part of the problem, my problem, if problem it be. Or perhaps it is the problem itself, the very problem, the problem as she endlessly writes herself large across every available self-widening surface and whatever remains of my self-scattering soul. No matter. I do hope you'll forgive me for sounding off like this, but I can assure you it is, and thus you too are, doing me a big favour. If I can de-pent or maybe down-pent some (pre-)elementary particles of the pent-up as we head for that not-too-distant stop - it's the line's terminus I believe - I will be forever in your debt. You don't object to my engaging you in this way then? Okay, in the absence of even a suppressed sigh I'll take your silence as acquiescence. Unusually for me I've got a warm feeling about you. A 'trust me' aura is beginning to surround your seemingly calm

stolidity. I'll take my chances. We cross over here by the way. Watch out for the kerbstone's surprisingly big step down into the gutter. That's it. Now then! Look! No - look closely I mean, as closely as your obvious astigmatism will allow - see, right here where I'm patting my jacket? It's in there now. Right there where I always like to keep it, over my heart, fitting snugly into the left inside pocket of my padded hacking jacket - my faithful snub-nosed fully-loaded automatic. So far as I know nobody knows it's there. Till now I've never mentioned it to a soul. And, aside from you, I'm sure I never will. In fact this will be the last time I mention it. I only do so now to get it out of the way, to clear the air as it were. It's only there as a comfort, a comforting deterrent, a reassurance, a back-stop, a just-in-case. But I'm as positive as I can be that there will never be such a case, after all there never has been in the past and that's all I've got to go on isn't it? Indeed it's quite likely that there haven't been such cases to date (to my said knowledge that is, only to my knowledge) precisely because it *is* there. Who knows though if things will change drastically in the future? It's exactly this uncertainty about things, the things-to-come (their shape, the specificity of their timing), that calls for the cautionary measures I'm taking. I've got to be on my guard. If things do change for the worse (as I'm all too inclined to believe that they will) then my little back-stop will be the warmly welcoming site where whatever threatening buck comes my way will finally be stopped dead in its tracks (although I don't doubt that, even as we speak (well, while I'm speaking to you), the trackless buck, the buck that leaves no trace of itself or its fabricator, is being developed in some all-too-near but subtly concealed technobunker). Let me assure you though that this has no relevance to anything you and I might discuss, so for heaven's sake don't treat it either as some kind of warning sign of troubles to come or as a personal threat to your good self. No, no need to be on your guard or to adopt an attitude of wary suspicion towards what follows, to be always on the look-out for hints of and pointers to a coming calamity, for there's nothing of that kind here I can assure you. Indeed, the loaded snub-nosed automatic is peripheral to our current concerns, if not even beyond their periphery, a periphery within whose vagrant and finally unfixable limits there is already quite enough, if not far too much, going on for the snub-nosed automatic, loaded or not, to be nothing more than a trivial but nevertheless irritating diversion. Letting you into my little secret though is a first step on my part in creating the

grounds for trust, so that we can make our little cross-city trip together in mutual confidence. And, naturally, I'm hoping that my openness, an openness, I hasten to add, which is completely out of character, will encourage you to reciprocate soon enough. So I'm offering you 'snubby', for that is my pet name for my doubtly companion, as an initial move in the hope that it will draw you into confidence-building (my confidence, that is) revelations about yourself. Who knows, we might even end up out-bidding each other in the confessional stakes through a kind of potlatch of admissions! But in any case I wanted to get 'little snubs' (that's another of its monickers) out of the way early on. The last thing I want is for it to get in the way of, to become a stumbling block for, the emergence of the more substantial and deeper matters that need to come out if we are to rub along with each other on the basis of a mutually tolerant understanding of our little peculiarities. We all have our little quirks don't we? That's why I'm glad to have got, gotten (just in case you're from 'over there') even, it out of the way at this stage, in the hope that declaring it is simultaneously disposing of it so that it won't, with any luck (and surely I'm about due for some), either nag, niggle, or gnaw its annoying little (a little that could, I have to say, given half a chance, grow to considerable proportions) way just below but unfortunately so very very close to the surface of things as they flow past us and we flow through or across them (in much the same way, incidentally, as the quotidian detritus flowed between our legs a moment ago as we stepped across the gutter). With this attempted pre-emptive strike against the indubitably well-founded and all too insidious reputation, a reputation securely grounded on its countless previous successes in other campaigns (campaigns of both a similar and a different hue to our current one), of the aforesaid snub-nosed automatic, the ground (snubs' ground that is) will, with luck (the luck I feel I'm long overdue), have been sliced away from under its very feet leaving it little or no room for manoeuvre or recuperation. Poor thing! But no, you're right, it's hard to feel sorry for it isn't it, given what we know of its past effervescences, its explosive little outings? Don't trouble to answer - it's another rhetorical. Although, given that almost certainly it's been through this kind of treatment (the treatment to which I'm subjecting it here, and in which you are having to collude) many times before, I have to admit, now I'm thinking about it, that it has most likely got, gotten perhaps, a range of subtle and well-rehearsed strategies at its nail-bitten

fingertips, tips that are even now doubtless drumming ever more impatiently on the nearest hard edge desperate to get into the fray, enabling it to re-assert itself, make its typically devastating appearance, at less than a moment's notice, that moment being precisely the moment when we are least expecting it. Thus by trying to rid us both, through my present testimony, of its essential element of surprise (to wit - an innocent-looking and already shabby jacket's concealment of a fire-power ('snubbo') which nobody in or out of their right or any other mind could have dreamed even for an instant was there all along, in place, just waiting for the perfect opportunity, the opportunity of its lifetime (however truncated said lifetime might have turned out to be), the opportunity that offers to it on a plate its reason for being) I am, hopefully, taking away the source of its power as the hidden back-stop of last resort. Lacking now the secret of its multiple (too numerous to itemise) previous successes, namely its essential element of surprise, it can no longer put in its conventionally sudden and thus dramatic appearance at some as yet unpredictable moment of possible cathartic resolution, that moment where the extremity of its contribution (an explosive disintegrative instant in which the infinite delicacy of life's becoming is pulped into oblivion) seems to mark a point of no return (a, if not the, turning point, a, if not the, destiny-defining moment of whatever event-sequence is being set out before us), a life-shattering blow whose caustic effects (the life rubbed out) simultaneously fuses the scattered particles into the ordered terms of a new beginning, a new direction, a direction whose own destiny is defined entirely by this singular explosion. Anyway, be all that as it very well may, the now revealed snub-nosed automatic (a.k.a. 'la snubbia' - sometimes very much a gendered piece of fire-power, especially when it nestles so comfortingly warmly in my hand), whose very chunkiness did leave ever so slight a bulge visible on the jacket's external surface, can be left tucked up snugly but now pointlessly in the cosiness of its own inner sanctum to while away its and our passing moments in complete passivity most likely for the foreseeable future. For although, of course, there can be no absolute guarantees in this (or any other) world, it seems unlikely now (now, that is, that its hidden presence has been revealed) that it will interfere in any drastic (point-turning) way with whatever is to come for us during our urban shamble. Hopefully it's been neutralised. And the same should henceforth apply to the small finely honed double-edged tempered

steel-bladed knife with the very sharp point that sits in its neat tooled and hand-stitched leather sheath strapped, tightly enough to hold it in position, but not so tight that it restricts the blood flow to my already pre-gangrenous lower leg and foot, just below my left knee. It would be the work of a moment when bending down (in order, seemingly, to re-tie a shoe- or boot-lace, or ducking to avoid an intended but triumphantly anticipated blow to my head or upper body) to raise my left trouser leg, itself already slightly raised in the very act of bending, whip out the knife and either make some violent gesture (such as a mock slashing movement with my arm or a lunge at any would-be assailant or even mildly threatening or unsettling other), or, with the knife blade pointing horizontally from my outstretched arm, plunge it into whomever (him/her/them) as a warning, hopefully definitive, not to take things any further. For myself though I like to think of myself as essentially mild-mannered, gentle and peace-loving, but, so sadly, one must be ready for anything these days there being so many mad buggers around. No, in all this I'm simply sticking to Baden Powell's tried and tested life motto that has underwritten for so many years now the life, the way of being, of all good scouts, all citizens-as-good-scouts, among whose numbers I like to count myself on occasions such as this when one has to be on the look-out for whatever nascent or quite explicit threats are trying so pathetically to conceal themselves behind every bush or statue. At any rate the trouser-shielded knife (no sign of it to the casual observer as my trousers are all now, as they always have been, unfashionably baggy for obvious reasons; I steer well clear of skin-hugging drainpipes or even the slightly looser chino-style that tends to hug the shoe just below the ankle) does give me the comfort of a kind of quiescent life insurance policy that could be cashed in at less than a moment's notice should the need ever arise. Certainly on the very odd occasion when I have had to bend down to re-tie a slipped knot in my shoe lace or to pick up something I (or another) had dropped (a coin perhaps or a small stubby HB pencil which I always carry loose in the top (fob) pocket of my jacket (or blazer - the navy blue one with the embossed insignia of my old regiment standing proud on the outside of the same pocket - depending on the weather and/or season) so that I can jot things down as *aide-memoires* on the little pad I invariably carry in one of the jacket's (blazer's) side pockets) and my arm has nudged quite by accident the concealed knife, it has given me a comforting reminder of its reassuringly

steely presence, at the ready, ready-to-hand (or, more precisely, ready-on-leg) as it were, to take on any threat that could emerge quite out of the blue from what, up to that point, might have seemed like the most innocuous of circumstances. To date, fortunately, I have had no direct experience of such threats but my meticulous observation of others, of events in the surrounding encasing world, has convinced me that they are never very far away for any of us, so that a stance of alert suspicion is the healthiest option. Given their absolute unpredictability and the way that the most innocent seeming circumstances can, at the drop of a hat (a hat dropped on a whim or quite accidentally even by that vague but vast and temporarily (or permanently from then on) hatless impersonal force which, as it moves us and moves through us, ensures that we are always completely adrift), flip into their opposite mode and lure one into terror's maelstrom, then the necessity of such suspicion is a matter of simple commonsense to me (a sense that, I believe, truly is in common but which is so deeply buried for the most part in most persons for most of the time that when it does raise its head above the parapet of the daily round is greeted with both horror and large dollops of the very same suspicion of which it is itself made). In fact I cannot for the life of me imagine why everybody is not taking similar precautions to myself, although this may be just a simple failure of imagination on my part. Of course it could be that indeed they are adopting such precautions but are doing it either with such perfected techniques of concealment or in such *blasé* ways that, from all outward appearances, one (I, you maybe) couldn't possibly guess. Now I myself, for clear reasons, have to be pretty careful not to give the game away about my own protective preparations. But any careful observer or tracker of my movements (and there are most likely several of them hereabouts even now - incidentally, don't you look round - it might alert them to the fact that I've been gabbing about them to you) would doubtless pick up a multitude of tiny clues (each perhaps insignificant in itself) alerting them to the dangers of trying to take me on singlehanded; hopefully they will (are) put(ting) two and two together and will (are) back(ing) off. For example they might pick up on the fact that, as you may have already noticed, I'm always either glancing over my shoulder or suddenly jerking my head to the left or right or upward in order to catch a potential hit-man (or -woman even) off his (her) guard. Likewise any minimally responsive tracker would quickly pick up on the way that, whatever the season or

weather, I always dress in a suit or coat with capacious pockets and carry cases, bags, or hold-alls (much like the one you've slung over your shoulder) of one sort or another in my hand or swinging from my shoulder, even on the apparently most casual of outings such as a walk around the block to get a breath of fresh air or a trip to the corner shop for a roll of cling-film. The more observant ones among them might also note that the black ribbon round the base of the crown of my grey felt trilby (I never go out without it) has a slight bulge in it on the right hand side above which a tiny patch of the felt is everso slightly worn and discoloured. On its own each of these (and many others I won't list for, forgive me for mentioning it and in spite of the confidence I'm gaining in you all the time, one can't be too careful even though you are glowing ever more brightly with that pastel-orange 'trust me' aura) is neither here nor there, simply an innocent by-standing addendum to the usual litany of isolated particulars that, seen from a distance, make up the passing and endlessly self-un-ravelling-and-re-ravelling patchwork dross of the common-or-garden life. But taken together (as such things invariably are by any monitor worth his or her salt, a monitor that is, who, in putting two and two together, manages to dissolve the outlines of each of the twos thus casting each of them into arithmetic's abyss) and then drawn out into a coherent (and thus condemned to pure fiction by its very coherence, for the one thing the (so-called) real lacks is coherence) narrative (one, that is, that is constantly seeking to come to life convincingly precisely through the overlapping connections it makes between the real's all too real dispartes), they would, doubtless, give the game, my game (though this metaphor slights the urgency of my driven life-task) away. For that very reason I wasn't going to mention the small holster supported by a hand-made chest harness strapped under my vest beneath my left armpit in which I always carry a neat pistol about the size of one of those cigarette lighters designed to look like a tiny pistol. But it's probably best to try and clear the decks now and get these irrelevant details out of the way so that we can progress to more important matters. And in any case now that I've begun to take you into my confidence I feel more at ease with you than I did at the beginning of our walk. Without quite being able to put my finger on why this might be, I can say that you've begun, with the up-front honesty of your continuing tolerant silence, to engender in me an all too rare sense of trust, and certainly since we've been together I haven't noticed anything to overly

arouse my suspicions. Of course by saying this to you I may inadvertently be letting myself in for something as yet unfathomable (as indeed are virtually all the possible events I try so hard to anticipate and protect myself against) and your seemingly engaged and apparently attentive quiescence (backed up I like to think by just the merest surface hint, the odd lip-flicker now and again, of euphoria, however grudging this might be at a deeper level of your being), your apparently accepting passive silence in the face of my recitation, may indeed be nothing more (or less) than a subtle ploy (and if it is such you've obviously spent many hours, if not years, of rehearsal and preparation in front of a mirror) to worm your way into my confidence. In short, you may be yet another double(multiple)-dealing shyster whom I shouldn't have trusted with even the most minuscule iota of information about myself. For once, however, I'm going with the flow and placing my faith (what few shreds of it remain) for the time being, always only for the time being, in my gut feelings about your current seemingly up-front goodwill. After all, as you've travelled with me thus far without explicit (or, as far as I can make out, implicit) complaint, I hazard that you may well be prepared to go the extra mile for the sake of the main business on the agenda which we (I) have yet barely even hinted at, let alone begun to lay out, and whose details could, just possibly, spring a few surprises for you. Be all that as it may, as I have now committed myself to this highly unusual (for me) course of openness as a way of clearing the ground (or should that rather be void) between us, I should perhaps mention the two pocket-sized grenades (I'm no military historian but I've always assumed, doubtless quite wrongly, that the staple or perhaps founding weapon of the eponymous grenadier guards was a grenade-and-nothing-but-a-grenade (or possibly grenades) and that they were formed as a fully-fledged fighting unit at just that moment in history when a technique for the mass production of grenades had been thoroughly researched and developed (although doubtless in the early days before the technique's perfection (always in any case relative) there would have been numerous faulty grenades that blew up in the faces of the working-class grenade tossers themselves, and who knows what kind of cock-and-bull story was concocted by the top brass to fill the letters of condolence sent, probably months later, to the bereaveds' nearest and dearest (terms like 'gallant', 'for queen and country', or 'that we might live without fear' and so on spring to mind);

but the nagging question surely is whether they were ordered into battle armed only with grenades, knapsacks and uniforms bristling, packed to the gills, with said grenades, walking multi-bomb-zombies as it were, or whether they were equipped with any back-up fire power, a revolver for example, for self-defense during that period, which might be interminable, after they'd exhausted their supply of grenades but before leaving the battlefield when, adrenalin spent and bowels loosened, they would be exposed to enemy fire possibly without any adequate means of defense (or attack)) that I keep in the deep pocket of my right trouser leg where they nestle beneath my outsize handkerchief which serves to muffle the sound of their occasional clunking together (this latter in any case being dependent on my walking speed - the faster the walk the louder and more frequent the clunk). Said grenades lie in place as fall-backs or what I now term 'particular situations weapons' (this is not a technical concept but a phrase I use to cover the exigencies of certain tight, too tight, corners I might find myself caught in which call for quite specific and maybe extreme responses) and can obviously only be put to work when the source of threat is at some distance from myself and when I will have sufficient time to hoick one out, pull the pin, take careful aim, and then lob it as accurately as possible under the prevailing, most likely extremely difficult and tense, circumstances. Naturally I just have to hope that these slightly cumbersome objects (cumbersome that is in the context of everyday activities such as searching in my trouser pocket for loose change for a bus fare or for the protective handkerchief to blow my nose or wipe flecks of spittle from the corners of my mouth) do not form all-too-obvious bulges against the profile of the trouser leg on my upper thigh. Little things like this, if overlooked, can so easily blow one's cover so that strategy (my strategy that is, for just getting by in everyday life, for negotiating the diurnal's barren but endless maze) demands that I live (living here being an almost continuous movement, in close proximity to others, of avoidance and dodging) through an endless and endlessly intense balancing act between setting up and then maintaining and adjusting an appearance of unassuming casual nonchalance. Hopefully, if this works well I just melt into the crowd without attracting any undue attention (the emphasis here is on the undue for I'm all too aware that my ignoring of season in clothing selection does itself elicit some curious looks, but, I hope, not suspicion) while, simultaneously, striving to be hyper-vigilant towards all the

surrounding and the all-surrounding sources of potential threat undoubtedly lying in wait for me even now on the off-chance that at some stage I will be forced to drop my guard for at least a fleeting second. All this calls for a supremely dedicated and continuous concentration which results (paradoxically, for, in the early days of my then still-nascent dedication, I never anticipated this epiphenomenal by-product, exemplar of those unintended consequences of human action that are the very stuff, the meat and two veg as it were, of both the quotidian's tedious cadences and the babble of the psychosociosciences' babelic towers) in such a level of supercharged and heightened awareness about my surroundings that I exist in a permanent euphoria, completely aestheticised. Every sense, being on full (on red that is) alert, picks up not only the signs, traces, residues, of potential threats that my finely honed suspicion is geared to sniffing out, but also the multiple delights and pains of simply living at full stretch and tilt, of absorption in and by the world, of almost, but not yet quite complete (because my suspicion does still manage in the last analysis to maintain its lock-jawed grip) melding with said world, of becoming world's most acutely sensitised antenna. In short, I need to pick up everything, to become the acutest of fleshy receptors that, in a weave of simultaneous decodings and constructings, assembles in less than no time an acutely percipient and grandly systematic *weltanschauung* centred on my wary chary self, a necessarily tractable shifting self made up of hovering scraps each waiting with an egregious eagerness tinged with anxiety (and born, I might add, of sheer nail-biting frustration) to be pushed, repositioned, hither and thither without notice. Some life (you may (or may not)) think! But don't forget that the rewards can be superb, overwhelming even, especially on those sadly all too rare occasions when I seem to have got things just right, when I'm on song, hitting a groove, flying even (though rooted so deeply in the real's friable humus that it and I become an indistinguishable mush and, on rainy days, a mutually cascading torrent), for then my threat-perception level is in such harmony with the spheres that I feel instinctively, quite outside and before any of culture's drably sepia overlays, its ability to carry me through even potentially terminal catastrophes with supreme aplomb. And the possibility of achieving this flowing super-sensitivity is undoubtedly boosted by the added confidence I'm given by the collection of other defensive (and some might say offensive)

weaponry I've managed to pack into my carefully compartmentalised holdall that I sling over my shoulder before venturing outside. Apart from a range of smaller handguns of varying bores (including a silver-plated derringer engraved by the master himself and a vintage but reconditioned mauser) and the parts of a ready-to-assemble powerful high-velocity rifle with telescopic sights for distance work, together with a reserve supply of appropriate ordnance for the range of guns I carry, there are some more basic items both for, hopefully short-term, hand-to-hand face-to-face confrontation, but also in case more intractable problems arise (a knuckleduster, a piece of lead piping, an old but trusty police truncheon, a pair of skin-tight hand-stitched (by the same craftsman who made the knife-sheath - namely myself) chamois gloves, a pack of semtex, a small clock, a pair of pliers and a slightly modified swiss army knife) and things begin to get out of hand or call for unplanned responses. Basically it's a matter of trying, well in advance of any foray amongst the world's multiple threats, to cater for the uncaterable, to, in the words of my, by now late-, philosophy teacher (a bottomless cartesian well of thoughts if ever there was one) to pre- and then out-think (and thus out-flank) the unthinkable long before it seeds a minatory gleam in the eye of some potentially annihilatory cove. Now, you may say, in response to all this, why bother, why go to so much effort to get in first, to forestall he (or she) who undoubtedly is even now seeking to excise the rest of my life through some short sharp and completely-out-of-the-cerulean-azure terminating shock to my life-force (in short my violent and up-coming death) if such an event is dependent on the chance conjunction of an incalculable myriad of typically highly mobile, evanescent even, conditions (the vast majority of which could not even be listed let alone described, nor their intersecting and unsettling trajectories plotted). Yet I have to say, mule-stubborn and incomprehensible though it may appear to you, that I am a firm believer, no, stronger than that, an unshakably committed - for it is the very ground on which I stake my always precarious but fire-storm hardened being - believer in the universe's almost complete interpretability, in the generatively latent ordering hard at work behind every surface, every appearance, every emergent matter-of-fact, so that, with the right decoding machinery and tunnel-visioned commitment everything can, nay will, eventually, be anticipated ahead of the actual moment of its occurrence. Every time I go out, heavily defended as I am,

dressed to kill as it were, I seek to be the living and bold exemplar of this commitment which, fortunately for me, is made easier to practice in my case because it has such a clear focus. For I have felt intuitively from my earliest years that the world has got it in for me. You've probably had the same feeling yourself sometimes, many times maybe, so you'll have an inkling at least of what I've been, am still going, through. Perhaps it was my generalised quiescence and acquiescence, my essential dullness and my easy-come-easy-go-do-with-me-as-you-will passivity that has made me an invitingly available target for the niggling but eventually desperate frustrations that make up so much of everyone's daily round. So many seemed, seem, to need to find a victim who could become the main medium through which they might express the intensity of their helplessness in the face of the world's arbitrary and casual disposal of their, for want of a better word, fate. And there was (and still am) I, apparently supine, seemingly just lying there, here, waiting to be hoofed from post to pillar, picked up, dropped (like a hot or any other kind of painful, distasteful or even bland, potato or rock-cake), to be pulped at will. So from schooldays, or earlier even, I began to pick up, initially haltingly in dribs and drabs, but then in an ever-accelerating learning curve, the hazy outlines of bare life, of what it might be just to be, to be becomingly. The lock-in system gradually hemmed me in, aided by a going-along-with that seemed, seems, essential to my becoming, to my becoming-target that is: I watched open mouthed, pop-eyed, ever-accepting, taking the blows, hard or soft, on the chin and any other available sensate protrusion or intrusion, thus colluding through my benign openness with the world's target practice. I saw that without any effort it was, is, and would always be, my lot to live with, and thus, eventually, to have to find ways of surviving, warding off even, the brutal consequences flowing from my natural way of seeing-and-being, a way I am absolutely helpless to alter. By offering myself as this apparently blank, almost will-less, cypher onto which others could project or impose whatever desperate fantasy they have generated to sustain themselves through the short respite from eternal absence that life seems to be, I present myself to others as the perfect opportunity to get a bit of their own back on things, the chance of momentary, if useless (fatal perhaps should they succeed), empowerment. Thus, having become from late (or maybe even earliest) infancy onwards, the world's butt, I knew that, if I was going to keep going at all, to see things through to their sweetly

bitter end, I would have to develop some strategies of self-protection that, no matter how blatantly victimic I might appear, I had to have in reserve, just out of sight, something(s) that would, should the minatory extreme (that is, my upcoming demise) appear hoveringly on and as my horizon, enable me to turn the tables on my would-be terminator(s). Of course I know just how seductive good victims (victims who wear with victimly panache their victimic hearts on their victimish sleeves) are, how in fact this is one (if not the) of their defining qualities, so I have never attempted to relinquish or deny my inviting passivity, my come-hither blankness. It's just that beneath this dully tranquil oe'rshadowed millpondish surface (as I have somewhat reluctantly revealed to you, perhaps because there is something about you, a gut feeling I have, which I still can't quite locate, that I'm beginning to like and do feel inclined to trust for the time being, whilst knowing deep down that I may be completely mistaken) there now seethes a constantly swivelling mass of agile receptors, tentacular percipients, cranked up to fever pitch, charged with the sole task of feeling for, seeking out and assessing the threat-to-come, always just about to come, without my giving off the merest whiff of any of this febrile activity. Tourniqueted into the no-space between my exterior's, possibly, to some, dullard placidity that limns its way phlegmatically across the screaming blanks of everyday life, and the hyper-writhing within, I maintain a most precariously suspect ever-teetering equilibrium knowing full well that the end could come at any moment, notwithstanding all my so dedicated detective and self-protective efforts. And I know now that it's all down to me! For the site of this plight, the plight that I uniquely am, as it heads inexorably but haltingly, hiccupingly, forwards along its fractal lineless lines, cannot be shared or occupied, let alone taken over, by anybody else. Being entirely my responsibility, my singular plight-flight path wends its own, by now weary, way quite to one side of any cooperation or communal projects. I am, in any case, as you may have guessed, a confirmed non-joiner, simultaneously making and following my own unsharable line, although I do owe debts too numerous to mention to countless others from whom I am always cadging (invariably unknown to them) ruses and tips for getting along, for simply making my way, a way of broken sinuosity, among and across the ruins of life's rune-strewn plains. But none of this second-third-fourth-n-hand (for I've never actually met its authors) advice is set in stone. No, it's as if scrawled with a driftwood twig in the tide-line's wet

sand. The little nostrums are simply available on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, appearing and almost immediately disappearing under the quotidian's effluent flow-tide. Perhaps the only one I cling to through every thinning thickness, one all sources seem to share, is persistence, doggedly dedicated, in the face of all obstacles. The only shared rule for time-serving stalwarts of my inclination is 'keep moving', or, more precisely, 'plod onwards'. You've probably noticed if you're at all observant (which, judging from the glint in your flinty eyes that I noticed almost as soon as we'd met, you certainly are) that once my little forays are set up and I'm out and on my way, I just have to keep going, press on at all costs, not in the service of some other end (such as a pathetic exercise regime (*mens sana in corpore sano* and all that crap) or a shopping expedition), no, far from it, but rather because my dedication to vigilance, keeping watch over the way through, demands this ceaseless movement both as a means of checking every nooked cranny in my hostile, always hostile, territory (and also on the tried and tested assumption that a moving target is, despite the exceptional advances in military hard- and soft-ware, much more difficult to hit than a static one). I'm determined, as far as it is humanly and inhumanly possible to be so densely intransigent, never to be a sitting-, lying-, napping-, or laying-, let alone lame-(although, ontologically speaking, such lameness may indeed be my essential constituent)duck, so I rarely stop to admire the view or look at a mannequin-bedecked window display, no matter how seductively exorbitant its content or bizarre the contorted elongations and contractions of its gender-coded yet brazenly apudic models. My passage through streets broad and narrow, parks, alleys, piazzas, walkways, tow-paths and empty spaces is rather one of casually purposeful drift in which I hope I'm misleading, perplexing, all who may have me in their sights with hostile intent, by making the rhyme and reason of my surface appearance imply one thing, leading, egging even, my would-be predators on to think they can anticipate my very next move and thus move in for the kill, while constantly pulling the wool in front of their eyes and the rug from under their feet at the very last moment through subtle disruptions of whatever emergent order I had just instituted. I become, hopefully, a kind of heightened or hyper-effective dodgeful arter, and this in itself then defines, becomes the inner reason, for my entire movement. It's turning out to be a process of endless deferral in which I appear to be ceaselessly on the verge of arriving at stopping points,

destinations, moments of repose and respite where I could be taken out, but in effect am always putting off such cessations and generating a flow of off-putting shifts, jerks, half-turns, sidesteps, incomplete gestures, nascent stumbles, partial reversals, speedings up, slowings down, changes-of-heart-and-mind, and all set within an apparently perfectly unremarkable gently ambling gait that carries within it an air of almost devil-may-care shallow but nevertheless serenely calm assurance that things are indeed, as ever, entirely at peace between myself and world. Hopefully I exude the absence of the untoward! And if I bring it off, as I seem to have done to date (unless, as yet unbeknownst, there is a slow poisoner at work with access to my inner sanctum and thence to my already pathically-ridden vittels), what a tremendous feeling of satisfaction it generates at the end of the day when I've returned from whatever tortuously routed outing and can, do indeed, relax (as far as I allow myself that is, given that I'm all too well aware that walls have ears and that, in any case, walls no longer provide effective barriers to the sophisticated gadgetry of electronic eavesdropping and observation; after all we've come a long way since the reassuring thicknesses of the Normans' Castle Keep), put my feet up and look back over the days' events, noting both where my practice might have been improved but also where it seemed particularly successful and deserving of a small metaphorical self-administered back-pat. After I have removed some of the heaviest and clumsiest items of my clothing arsenal I can allow myself to almost luxuriate in the memory of the intense euphoria generated by my whole-body vigilance and the catharsis of release from its high tension after my safe return. I thus try to enjoy in the simplest ways this period of tension-release and sensual battery-re-charging before, as bed time approaches, I undertake my nightly check on the complex systems of alarms and warnings that have to be set and activated before I climb into bed. I say climb into bed as if this were all there was to it. But I have devised a circuit of randomly timed alarms audible only to me (I won't give the game away on the technology of this one) that enable me to get up, do rapid checks and, if I feel there's any cause for concern, put the dummy in the bed in my place and kip down between the back of the small settee and the party wall. I seem to be able to manage with very little sleep these days (I say these as if it were a recent phenomenon but, now that I think about it, I realise it's been going on for many years). Indeed the light-headedness that is such a feature of my daily

euphoria may be, partly at least, laid at the door of this lack of sleep. Although, if I am managing well enough without it, I suppose the lack tag or label is not quite appropriate for it seems to imply some kind of perhaps deeper pathology, to be some symptom of a trouble of a different, as yet invisible, unlocatable, even unacknowledged, order. No matter! All I can say is that, at least on the surface of things, this absence of sleep is not only not experienced as a deprivation or a worry it is, rather, a beneficent necessity enabling me both to relax ever so slightly after completing my regular but unpredictably timed checks throughout the wee small hours, and, on returning to 'bed', to drift rapidly into a deep untroubled though necessarily shortish bout of sleep. Somehow this by now deeply etched waking-sleeping pattern of being-here and not-being-here, the alternations of quiescence and sometimes feverish activity, seems to be directly continuous with my daily round, as if there is an unbroken, unbreakable perhaps, thread to follow which guides me through from one twenty four hours to the next. You must have noticed, for example, since we've been on the move together over these last few minutes, how that movement has been characterised by constant variations in the line of flight so to speak. I have noticed, although you've made no comment on this or any other matter so far, that you seem quite keen to keep up with me, to follow my moves with their quirky unpredictable (hopefully) shifts of direction as closely as possible so as, I am presuming, to latch on, without too much delay or without having to ask me to repeat what I've just said, to whatever I'm saying almost as soon as I've said it. And I must congratulate you because you do seem to have managed to stick with me, limpet-like (I hope you'll take this as a compliment) since we met. No, that's wrong isn't it, we've never actually met, never introduced ourselves (although I've tried my best to be sociable without actually going the whole hog and offering you my name) have we? No I'm afraid I've rather forced myself on you, adopted you for the time being, and you, as far as I can make out, have just gone along with things. Am I right? No, no need to answer! Keep on treating my questions as rhetorical if they make you feel uncomfortable round the edges. You've not complained yet nor asked me to slow down or speed up; indeed you seem to be making yourself entirely subservient to my decisions and needs, which I in turn am inclined to take as an implicit, as yet unstatable perhaps, compliment to myself despite my being unable so far to fathom your motives. You won't, I'm sure, be surprised to hear

from what you now know of me that I've harboured, but so far carefully concealed, my suspicions about you from the start. But, to be honest with you, I've decided that someone intent on rubbing me out wouldn't risk giving themselves and their game away by getting as close to me as you have, given all the risks of exposure that entails, especially with the seemingly complete absence of guile that you have displayed. It would be foolish of me to say that I trust you completely. But I am prepared to give you the benefit of any nascent doubts, just as long as I don't start picking up signs that begin to feed into my Doubting-Thomas world-view! And speaking of Thomas, perhaps you're wondering why I still haven't divulged my name. This isn't some pathetically juvenile tit-for-tat on my part just because you haven't, as yet, despite my hinted invitations, graciously introduced yourself. Far from it. No, my preservation, so far, always so far (I make no promises about any future we might conceivably share together), of my anonymity is purely strategic. For when I first buttonholed you I strongly suspected that you were with them (whoever and wherever they were and still, most likely, are) and it seemed like an argentine, if not yet quite golden, opportunity to grasp the nettle by testing out your reactions - hey, skirt that puddle, oh, good lad, just in time eh, I almost didn't see it myself - but, to be frank, you've come through my test so far without a blemish. No, I cannot believe that your well-nigh perfect inscrutability is just an act designed to put me off your scent. Any sea-salt-worthy opponent would have been subtly ingratiating and would certainly have tried with calculated casualness to wrinkle things out of me by some seemingly innocent questions, to have gained some advantage over me by finding out about my habits, movements, plans and intentions, whereas you have been quite content to let me ramble on in my usual (not that you could know its usualness or otherwise) disjointed way. Over the years I've had to learn to test and trust my own judgment and in your case I can find little or no grounds for distrust. You may not have noticed but all the time I was spinning that absurd paranoid tale (about the verity of whose details you must have had your suspicions from the very start) I was glancing across at you and weighing up every aspect of your self-presentation, from insuppressible tics, through character-laden gestures and mood indicators, to the specifics of your obviously dilapidated but carefully cultivated attire (as if you came from but still clung to another place, another era, eras even, judging from the grotesque, if you'll excuse my

forthrightness, admixture of styles you are displaying). My lengthy disquisition as we rambled enabled me to play for time and offered me the opportunity to undertake a thorough visual examination of your potential threat, the result of which is your exoneration - at least for the time being. You are no longer, I hope you'll be glad to hear, a (if not the) prime suspect. You will appreciate that it's most unusual for me to seem to open myself in this way to a total stranger, but sometimes the victim (he or she who knows (as I do) about their own victimhood, who knows that it is their destiny to be a perennial target (moving or otherwise) because of some quite intrinsic force, a sublime (and sublimely impotent) innocence perhaps, or an animal magnetism, that inexorably magnetises the filings of ferocious attacks to itself), knowing himself (in this case, myself) to be such a mark, is gifted out of the blue the opportunity to take the initiative and turn the tables on those (yes, there are often many (literally thousands) working and plotting together on these schemes) suspected of wanting to disappear him or her (me), to wipe her (or him, me) off the face of this or any other earth. And you might note in passing here how I'm borrowing from the contemporary vernacular to try to give added force and relevance, and perhaps the merest mickety-smackerel of spice, to things by transforming 'to disappear' from its traditional intransitive status into something precisely transitive, namely the active expungeing of a subject, a subject thus destined no longer just to disappear, to go quietly off on its own without a trace as it were, but rather to be actively disappeared by another or others as yet, and perhaps forever, unknown and/or unknowable. Indeed, if the victim, living only in and through his or her victimhood, actively and inexorably draws the disappearers towards him- or her-self then the whole issue of responsibility is blown wide open, justice goes out of the window or, even more blatantly, the front door. For the disappearer could in all honesty say, 'I was simply beside myself, your honour, I just couldn't stop myself being drawn into the sway of the so-called victim's powerfully seductive weakness'. But that's a red herring in this context and needn't detain us now. You, then, were, are still as far as I can see, my scintillating table-turning opportunity. You became the mark which, up until our meeting, I had always so resignedly assumed myself to be. As long as you are, or seem to be, prepared to hang on to or put up with my every word, I have, for whatever short but gloriously celebratory period (think of our walk as an outlying event in a

mini-street festival) got the whip hand and you become, nay, I make you, my temporarily indelible mark, though not, I hope, too much of a victim, for in the slightly longer run I intend you no harm (not, obviously, that there's any simple relation here (or anywhere else come to that) between intentions and outcomes). Of course you can leave at any time, nip off into the urban shades; indeed, you've probably been assuming that that was your prerogative all along. But it's interesting isn't it that something seems to have kept you by my side for some time now, something other than the bus terminus which is our common destination, not necessarily against your will exactly, no I wouldn't put it quite as strongly as that, but rather through some faintly gluey yet insubstantial medium, a mild but odd kind of hypnosis, a temporary fixative, of which you seem unaware yet which has bound you so far, always only so far, to the quirky arhythmic syncopations of my own highly driven meanderings. Still, doubtless our ways will part soon enough. It seems most unlikely, for example, that having put up with me on our little perambulation you will choose to sit next to me on the next leg of the journey. Never mind. If I have toyed with you, taken a certain, perhaps unfair, advantage of your fortuitous presence at the bus stop, you shouldn't feel too hard done by for it's been in the service of my life-cause. You've helped me to maintain my ceaseless movement, my pressing onward, sometimes down, sometimes up, but always along, along the line, my line, however disjointed that, this, line (at some level I like to think of it as almost our line even though it is, I believe, finally unsharable) may have seemed to you. For that at least you deserve my thanks. In fact, sadly from my point of view, it may well be that you get the better of the deal, for I'm slowly coming to believe, for as yet obscure reasons, that your upcoming (for we are not so very far from the terminus here) release from our joint (a joining without a trace, I fear, of togetherness) divagation may well coincide with my all-too-early demise, a demise for which I hasten to add no blame could, as far as I can see at the moment, be attachable to you. No, suffer no premature anguish, no quiet grief pangs, on my behalf! Above all, nurture no guilt, no shame, for you will not have been guilty for any upshot-to-come. It's just that I have the vague feeling, an increasingly queasy qualm coming from I know not where, a feeling that is indeed becoming a creeping certainty crawling along beneath and entwined with these very words even as I speak, that my demise is fated, is in the precipitous

laps of gods who, I have a self-swelling foreboding, a soon-to-explode pustule, have already, with little hints here and there, begun to make their intentions all too clear. Glancing around us perhaps you too can make out the encroaching hazy forms, the emerging linear outlines and rules, of their endless end game in which we pawns, yes you no less than I, are being cocooned according to transcendental calculations to which we (well I at least, for I can, finally, only speak for myself) have no access. If it does, at the last (somewhere at or beyond the terminus), seem to you as if you are directly responsible, whatever your heart's desire, for my disappearance, let me assure you right here that you are simply an instrument in a most ancient and eternally repeated ritual. Personally I feel that this is something to be celebrated not mourned, for in a way you will be enacting this, this ending, as both a clearing away (a laying of a ghost) and an opening up in that clearing of a space for beginning again, a beginning that will be different precisely because my cluttersome stumbling block will have been brushed aside as yesterday's dusty detritus. As soon as you put me down, like a faithful but aged nag whose legs gave way under his last burden and is no longer worth his keep (especially, as may well be the case (how would I know!?), when your lushly grassed paddock is already full to bursting with healthy young untamed colts quivering with energy and champing at their as yet bitless bits to be of service), I will, I promise you, vanish without trace, be off and out of your life forever. There'll be no nagging from this quarter I assure you. It will be just as I always expected (though then it was accompanied by an unholy fear which is evaporating and being replaced by an unaccountable exhilaration even now as we are wander parkwards) during that seemingly interminable everyday round of suspicion-filled vigilance that has defined the inner and outer edges of my life to date. As we approach the terminus, I am receiving, somewhat belatedly and from heaven knows where I grant you, the slightest tremulous vibrations, tremellose warnings perhaps, from the catastrophe-to-come - a catastrophe in which I will nevertheless revel. Aaaaagh, catastrophes - I just can't seem to get enough of them! How about you? No, it's rhetorical. For some reason (a certain slapdash carelessness perhaps, concentration on the wrong targets maybe, an over-confidence resulting from too many previous easy successes possibly) I have overlooked these emerging signs. During our walk you've become my blind-spot for things which I would ordinarily have pounced on immediately as almost certain

traces of cunningly concealed threats. I realise I've passed over until this very moment things which are now starting to stare me in the face, to bellow their message from the prefecture's highest podium. So filled with confidence was I by your seeming unwillingness, as we wandered the streets, to get involved or take even the least interest in my provocative (for that is how I thought of them) ramblings that I quite failed to notice that I was not the only one shamelessly seeking to pass as an innocent who wouldn't harm a flea and who would deny, if questioned (even under third or fourth degree methods), the hostile intent of the doubtless highly suspicious objects so ill-concealed about his person. Without inventorying all the little (and not so little) things that I'm only now, as we enter the relieving cool of this secluded park where the dappling shadows of yon venerable pawlonia (incidentally one of the very few in these parts) play lightly across the already parched sward, beginning to sort into an all too familiar pattern that says, if not screams, 'would-be-assailant' (or 'assassin' even) to me. God, I must have been blind - blind and seduced - blind, seduced and thrown completely off my over-determined course, my angst-ridden yet so sweetly scented and careering one-track! How could I have been so prodigally slipshod, so foolish even, so utterly under your spell, so hooked by the charms of your deadpan intransigence? Don't even consider answering - this last was a question directed very much, entirely, to myself! Perhaps I was too wrapped up in my own strategy, in elaborating the detailed logistics of my calculatedly paranoid *recitatif*. Certainly I own up to getting slightly carried away at times. But it was all in the service of trying to draw you out, to elicit some, any, kind of response, to goad you into a reply so that I might the more easily be able to assess your threat coefficient. Somewhere down the line, back there on our way through the urban dross, I lost it, the plot I mean. While you stuck rigidly to your tactic of zero scrutability I became blasé. I've got to hand it to you. I'm impressed. Your apparently complete withdrawal from any kind of involvement or interest in anything I said drew me further and further into the midden of my own carelessness. I've allowed myself to get so caught up in trying to weave the absurd, and as I now realise only too well, absurdly pathetic, if not even bathetic, excesses of my self-styled revelations into an almost believable and consistent narrative that I've steadily lost contact with the reality of our relationship. Adrift in my own meanderings I lost sight of the real terms on which our seemingly

innocently gentle amble through the city's highways and byways is based. And these are the very terms that are now at this so very late (all too late) stage beginning to surface for me as the provocation of an almost unbearable tension. It's becoming clear to me that you have lived within this tension from the start. Yes! That's the nub of your advantage. Till now, so, so sadly, I've been a late starter, forever belated, forever playing catch-up, and somehow I've managed to repress these now undeniable terms. Am I seeing through, or through to, you at last? Am I right in my feeling that, far from being my innocently distant accompanist, your project is so very close to my own, that in some ways, perhaps to a naive observer (are there still such innocents abroad in our info-drowned culture?), we would be indistinguishable? No, don't even think of answering - all my questions are rhetorically directed at myself, at the curse of my own dumb failings. Look, here's that short cut through the park I mentioned to you. We turn in through the gates right here. God, the heat! How're you doing? You seem to be bearing up remarkably well, courgette-cool in fact, especially in the light of your costumery and the mephitic heat wall rising from the cracks in the city's filth-strewn footways. I have to admit that I'm bushed, whacked, almost ready to drop. I'm not sure I can make it over the last few yards without a rest and some refreshments - O for a draught of vintage, eh? No, don't worry, I'll stagger on. See, our path runs alongside this grassy knoll, past the mixed borders (the *agapanthus* (or should that be *agapanthi* ? - no matter...), so subtly backed and complemented by the dense green of the *acanthus spinosus*'s serrate foliage with its serried sentry ranks of flower spikelets, are particularly fine at this time of year I feel) and then downhill through that dense evergreen copse where, thanks to the rampancy of the spotted *aucubus*, light barely seems to penetrate and the vernal and Avernus coincide utterly. What a pity we haven't time to sit and savour springy summer's waning neo-autumnal scents! Never mind, press on we must if we're to get to the omnibus terminus before the last bus departs, eh? You must be rather hot in those thick twill breeches with that curiously fat stuffed off-purple piping down their lateral seams; they could be remnants from the uniform of some long-vanished army. Maybe you're the military attaché (one with civilian aspirations judging from your oatmeal socks and tasselled bumpers) of some tiny forgotten land-locked republic whose till-now-secret mineral deposits could provide the means of establishing a marmoreal-columned embassy

close to the heartless heart of global capitalism's primal flow. Or perhaps you've been given life-long furlough-with-research-bursary-attached (for services rendered and still to be rendered) to enable you to go off and develop your soldierliness imaginatively, to tear it away from the cloistering confines of the barracks, plunge it into the disorder of the civilian-diurnal out of which it may arise, in due course, transmuted into some new, as yet unenvisageable catamilitary post-soldierly form. Aaah, if only... but no, doubtless I'm missing the point and, as usual getting carried away by the mis-takings of an over-optimistic imagination. And, in any case, I'm making far too much of your attire than is warranted by the facts of its banality. Certainly the military elements blend in quite happily with the rag-bag flotsam clearly purchased from the chains of charity shops now dominating Main Street. Well, good luck with your research (if research it indeed be)! If I can be of any small assistance... but perhaps I already have been simply by providing you with a specimen to observe at close quarters yet seen from your chosen infinite distance of non-participation with its hunger for scholarly objectivity - the classic (but profoundly misguided) anthropological field strategy. Professor Evans Pritchard (I assume you're familiar with his work on witchcraft among the Azande...) would, without doubt, have been proud of you. I look forward, if scholar you be, to your doctoral dissertation. Ahaaah, at last, the *aucubus's* cool shade! Not far now, we're almost at the edge of the park. Christ, it's dark in here, especially in contrast to the blinding brilliance we've just left. I don't suppose you've got a torch secreted somewhere in that shoulder bag, I can barely make out the path? Still no response eh? Foreign? Dumb? I suppose this is the right path. Is it a path? Purely rhetorical. Certainly I don't remember it being so overgrown and neglected the last time I passed through here. And there doesn't seem to be anyone around to ask. Perhaps it's like the bus depot, you know, a cut-back in funds, staff redundancies, yet one more symptom of the general collapse of the all-for-one-one-for-all communal vision we thought we used to share and live by, the sad but carefully engineered dilapidation of our environment-in-common. Depressing isn't it? Rhetorical. Oh good, is that a torch you've found? Repeat rhetorical. Extraordinary! They don't make them like *that* any more. Judging from its camouflage paint you must have picked it up from an army surplus stores. Come on then, stop messing around with the handle of your cane, switch the damn torch on and let's see

if we're on the right track. What the... oh my god no, after everything I've... not here, surely not here... it's too ris... someone's bound... christ, what's that in your ha... why, you bast... you'll never get aw... I should hav... so, it's finally come to thi... pathe... nooooo for fuck's sake not tha... anything bu... what harm have I ev... I never dream... not in a million yea... okay, what's the point? No - rhet... I know - this is the point, the very point, end of the lin... I'm all of a trem... beginning to lik... yes, go on, go on, I can ta... ike a ma... not with a whimper... just do i... get it ov... don't drag it out anymo... now, ple... is this it then... rhe... so this is it then... your eyes, your eyes, what the hell are you doing with them... fantastic... oh, great... I'd never have guessed... thank you so mu... what a way to g...