

IN DARKNESS ALL CATS ARE GREY

Every night hordes of people can be found walking, marching or wandering around the park. They seem to be stuck at the edge, continuously tracing the periphery, a permanent accentuation of the park's shape, forever highlighting the bushes and trees that surround it. Only treading the path separating the city from the park.

They are from all walks of life. And Augustus knows it. Every night he takes meticulous notes of these passers-by. He sets up his office at the north entrance, always impeccably dressed, in a suit and tie, neat and tidy. His hair styled literally with a fine tooth comb. He brings with him a table and a little stool, a folder of paperwork, a small pen and a rubber stamp.

Although he has often heard it said that it is inside the park that one finds happiness – true happiness – Augustus has never felt like going in. He has been a civil servant all his life and he is more than comfortable with rigid bureaucratic routine. His pleasure is found right there, at the entrance of the park. August makes efficient inventories of the people who pass by. He never wastes time with distractions or gossip, but just rigorously records the names, ages and the ambitions of those who are looking for a way in. It is thanks to Augustus' thorough research that we receive accounts of the people who circulate the park: real bodies, bodies that are whole, bodies in themselves, bodies that remain whole.

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Jerome, an avid philosopher and etymologist, has been covering the circuit around the park for over four years. Every night he takes the same route without ever finding an entrance. But he doesn't lose heart. On the contrary, he only has to re-read a part of the ancient texts and his hope is rejuvenated. According to what is written, the sky hovers over no park as peaceful, cheerful and attractive as this one, in it there are no concerns, no effort, no work. Well, for Jerome, to live in such a place would not be a problem. In his eyes, laziness and refusal of productivity are fine qualities.

- In the beginning was *otium* [idleness] – Jerome explains – from the Latin *otium*! Only after that does the word *negotium* [business] come into play,

nec otium – nec being negative and indicating time with no leisure. In other words, we assume that *otium* [idleness] was time for leisure, but it was business that came to take the place of idleness. We only need to look at the Romans to understand, they woke up when they wanted, lounging at the bath houses where they would stay until the end of the day, exercising their bodies, enjoying the saunas and stretching for hours at the poolside. This was where they discussed politics and business. Businessmen today would undoubtedly say that the Roman Empire was doomed to fail - Jerome tells us.

Well, the Empire did fail. Not to mention that idleness was only possible by exploiting others. Small details Jerome omits from his philosophy:

- Now, it is precisely because of that idleness – he continues – that the arts were cultivated! That science was discovered! That philosophy and the humanities were invented! So the poet said:

*Soft laziness sheltering us
From evil wanting and a thousand foolish things...
Because of you, how many evil deeds
Did I not do.*

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But pleasurable laziness is hated by many. Doctor Clare spends entire nights on the outer edge of the park, disturbed by what she can and cannot see behind the bushes. She thinks Jerome's ideas are very dangerous for the youth of today. She spies through the bushes, believing she can see orgies of bodies with ravenous sexual appetites, tremendous indifference, fatigue and boredom. A consequence of the lack of work.

-“If I manage to get into the park” – she thinks out loud – “I would prescribe a few things... anti-masturbation corsets for the boys; instructive books and films for the girls, no horse riding, unchaperoned walks or novels. And chastity belts, of course!”

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It is thanks to Augustus' thorough research that we know of these people from all walks of life, who hope to enter the park. There are also those wandering around starving. And, as we know, hunger

is the strongest fire. They tell us about ..

- The fish in the park's lake- already roasted, boiled or fried, to suit your taste! Roasted pigs trot around with a knife in their backs, so whoever feels hungry can easily cut off a slice of bacon. And the chickens, scratching to and fro, are baked and drizzled with gravy. And they self advertise: Hot chicken! Hot - hot chicken!

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Augustus has noticed that for some years now the number of individuals whining that the park only allows entrance to losers and tramps has grown into a deafening chorus. They complain that the park has only let in those who have completely abandoned their virtues and decency. They say the park is now so depraved that it even gives money to those who fart. Apparently, whoever burps three times and does gets out a ginormous fart makes a fortune. Mary is one of the complainers, she says the park is no longer what it used to be, that now it is a filthy disgrace, driving out everyone that is upright, honest, well behaved and hard-working.

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The entrance of the park is even quite easy to find, but for reasons unknown to us, few people can find it – it's one of those mysteries... And those who do, begin to adopt very strange behaviour. This happens especially at the southern entrance of the park, where there is always a large crowd, all glued to each other. They are whole bodies, bodies in themselves, bodies that remain whole. They march and march but get nowhere. With one exception: when the first cry of an owl is heard, the group moves a little further. One step every night. Other than that, they march and march but never leave the path surrounding the park. We don't know why. The clothes of those who march and march have long borne witness to the traces of the trek of time – shoes with holes in them, jumpers made of rainwater... In their hands they carry torches.

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*Knock knock!
Who's there?*

*Olive!
Olive who?
Olive you!*

This is Cleo, there is not much to say, Except that she is a nice girl. She dreams about entering the park, like all the others, for the most part. She knows the way does not have to be as hard as they say. The important thing is to remain positive, optimistic and the rest will follow. And if there can be a bit of fun along the way, then all the better! It always helps to pass the time. She knows that a park that claims to be so easy-going can't be so hard to get into. It's only logical. On her way around the park she amuses herself by humming, admiring the view, and when in the mood, making jokes about the other entrance seekers:

*Once upon the time of twats, I saw
a one-legged man
run faster than a fast horse.
I then saw a wandering axe
cut a tree in two.
I then saw the fallen tree
Get up again.
I then saw a plough plough
Without a horse, without a cow.
I then heard the fish making so much noise
that it reached the sky.
I then saw two crows
reaping the wheat.
I then saw two mosquitoes
Making a bridge.
I then saw a mouse
building a huge wall.
I then saw an evil horse get up
and speak disjointed truths.
I then saw two goats
turn on an oven.
I then heard a chicken speak:
- it has been proclaimed:
- A thunderous fart
has been proclaimed!*

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A good scholar of these verses might conclude that each of these characters represents one of the many individuals circling the park. Especially the last verses, yes, those describing the fetid anal wind, because there is an idiot who wonders around every night, farting with every step he takes.

It's Donald, a sly and opportunistic twat who claims to be the first man to have entered the park, even though he doesn't even know where the entrance is. He is smart to spread this rumours, because it creates insecurity in those he meets. But Donald is also a little mad: can you believe the guy gets spell bound by the shards of glass he finds on the ground as he laps the boundary of the park? Perhaps it is the reflection of the moon, or just his stupidity, that fixes him to the spot, frozen, staring at the glass.. "With a bit of luck, well polished" – he thinks – "they could even look like diamonds". Perhaps it is also the Moon that conjures up visions of exotic treasure: rare birds flying through the park, naked women, spices and colourful silks, riches falling from the sky. He sees wondrous things and exclaims:
- "My dear, your lover has finally arrived!"

And, having said that, he tears off his clothes and runs naked like an fool, peeing like a dog at every tree and bush outside the park.

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Francis comes from afar, and has never had much luck. He wasn't taught to read and write, everything he knows about the park he learnt by word of mouth. Of course a tale always grows in the telling - Francis knows this well - experience is the best teacher. But the essence is still there. The park symbolises his freedom —the end of a life of work and slavery in the city. Francis walks around the park every night with the hope of being able to get in. But often his fatigue is so great that he falls asleep on the cold path. And every night the same nightmares loom over his hope.

- "I constantly dream that to enter the park I have to knock down the trees that appear in my way. Then I take my axe and walk and walk and walk until I find a clearing closed off by several trees – one is so big, bigger than ever seen in my life. I decide that this is precisely the one I should cut down. Even though the wood is very hard, I manage to cut it down. But the moment the tree falls down, it rises up again and the trunk sticks back to the stump. This always amazes me. And I keep trying.. When I finally manage to cut the tree, the whole story starts again. The tree keeps repairing itself. At that point I start to get terrified, I panic and start to swing the the axe into the tree like a maniac. Even when my

arms burn with pain, my hands become covered in callouses and I'm dripping with sweat... no matter what I do every time the tree falls, it immediately rises up again. And, while this happens, I hear laughter in the distance. Every time I wake up from that dream, I feel sad... Perhaps it's a premonition warning me of the uselessness of what I'm doing. In this moment the day breaks and I have to get back to the city. – ends Francis.

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Apparently, Joey never felt the urge or desire to go into the park himself. He was interested in living off those who wandered around it, it did not matter how. Ever since he was a child, Joey had no trouble devising wicked plans, whether involving theft, exploitation or lies.

He saw these misdemeanours as acts of kindness since, since according to him, everyone would be happier if relieved of their everyday luxury goods - from the latest iPhone to their trendy branded clothes... and so on. Joey was committed to freeing everyone from their capital sins, and considered his actions, acts of mercy - he thought of himself as a saint. He lived of these gains, with such piety and sobriety, that, he was saintly, all right!

Once he met Mary, who we already know, that pious woman dressed in black and veiled, as tradition dictates. Her chastity and virtuousness were such that the most glamorous item of her wardrobe was the little rosary she carried in her hands. Well then, Joey, who paid special attention to the subject of geology, immediately realised that the rosary this humble lady was carrying was made of emerald, jacinth and diamond crystals. Joey, who considered himself a saint, thought right there and then that an ostentation such as this rosary did not suit such a humble lady. And so, to save her from this sin, he set to the mission of convincing her to donate that little rosary to his continuous charitable work. For he was a saint after all!

- "My dear lady, how happy I am to see such a pious, humble person at the doors of this park. How happy I am to have your company. Because this work, this mission, entrusted to me by the apostle of Rome, in Rome, is very solitary and strenuous. Do listen my friend, for I have been inside the park and God has given me the wisdom to tell you

what exists behind these gates. Listen to my words for I will tell you about those who walk inside it and you will see how important our prayers and charitable work are.

I can tell you that at the centre of the park, next to the lake, there is a beautiful abbey full of tall, young, lively monks. But do not let yourself be fooled, my lady of great charity, for every single day the young monks, after eating and drinking at ease – for they do not see that as a sin – they take to the air, flying and playing like birds in the sky. Miraculously they can fly, and there is no bird as fast as these monks of noble spirit, thanks to the large flapping sleeves and cowl of their habits. When the abbot sees them fly, he feels a great satisfaction! But, in the middle of those exercises, he calls them for vespers. When the monks do not come down but start to fly even higher, the abbot grabs a young girl, turns her white buttocks up and beats on them like a drum, a call for the monks to come back. When they understand, they make a low flight towards the girl, pinching her buttocks. Only after these exercises do they enter the monastery, thirsty, and go straight to the refectory. There is also another abbey nearby, but for nuns. God grant that you may never have to be disgraced by the presence of those people. When they are hot, the young nuns get a little boat and head towards the lake. They play with the oars and the rudder until they are far from the bank and undress. Then they drop into the water swimming and frolicking. In seeing this, the young monks become aroused. They get up, take flight and quickly arrive near them - forgive my language, m'lady - "to teach them a little prayer". With a lot of vigorous legs going up and down, and up and down, the monk with the greatest control of "his cowl" will, without a doubt, receive more "attention to his prayers". My dear lady, my mission is to guard any entry through this gate so that no one is defiled by such vices. Regarding those who are already on the other side, all we can do is ask God to renew the spirit of those sinners. Whatever donation you may leave with me, as long as given with honesty and charity, will be welcomed by me, a poor saint who was lucky enough to carry out such honourable penance.

And in saying this, this thief and scoundrel, his eyebrows far too pious, stretches his arm to the little rosary.

- "My holy man, I thank you for all your charity, for protecting me and warning me of the sin that's

going on in there. May this rosary serve you for many prayers."

To which Joey replies:

- "Amen, in the name of the Holy Charity."

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As August tell us, those who try to enter the park are from all walks of life. From those who went in and came back to tell the tale, only these rhymes have survived:

Inside the park, tender smiles and glowing mouths rise from behind the bushes.

Tender smiles and glowing mouths rise from behind the bushes.

Real smiles, whole smiles, smiles in themselves, smiles that remain whole.

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