

precise point, the intersection between space and time where the event would spring forth, undeniable in the prominence of its glow; whereas now events come flowing down without interruption, like cement being poured, one column next to the other, one within the other, separated by black and incongruous headlines, legible in many ways but intrinsically illegible, a doughy mass of events without form or direction, which surrounds, submerges, crushes all reasoning.

"You know something, Qfwfq? The closing quotations on Wall Street are down 2 per cent, not 6! And that building constructed illegally on the Via Cassia is twelve stories high, not nine! Nearco IV wins at Longchamps by two lengths. What's our score now, Qfwfq?"

THE DINOSAURS

The causes of the rapid extinction of the Dinosaur remain mysterious; the species had evolved and grown throughout the Triassic and the Jurassic, and for 150 million years the Dinosaur had been the undisputed master of the continents. Perhaps the species was unable to adapt to the great changes of climate and vegetation which took place in the Cretaceous period. By its end all the Dinosaurs were dead.

All except me, -- *Qfwfq corrected*, -- because, for a certain period, I was also a Dinosaur: about fifty million years, I'd say, and I don't regret it; if you were a Dinosaur in those days, you were sure you were in the right, and you made everyone look up to you.

Then the situation changed -- I don't have to tell you all the details -- and all sorts of trouble began, defeats, errors, doubts, treachery, pestilences. A new population was growing up on the Earth, hostile to us. They attacked us on all sides; there was no dealing with them. Now there are those who say the pleasure of decadence, the desire to be destroyed were part of the spirit of us Dinosaurs even before then. I don't know: I never felt like that; if some of the others did, it was because they sensed they were already finished.

I prefer not to think back to the period of the great death. I never believed I'd escape it. The long migration that saved me led me through a cemetery of fleshless carcasses, where only a crest or a horn or a scale of armor or a fragment of horny skin recalled the ancient splendor of the living creature. And over those remains worked the beaks, the bills, the talons, the suckers of the new masters of the planet. When at last I found no further traces, of the living or of the dead, then I stopped.

I spent many, many years on those deserted plateaus. I had survived ambushes, epidemics, starvation, frost: but I was alone. To go on staying up there forever was impossible for me. I started the journey down.

The world had changed: I couldn't recognize the mountains any more, or the rivers, or the trees. The first time I glimpsed some living beings, I hid: it was a flock of the New Ones, small specimens, but strong.

"Hey, you!" They had spied me, and I was immediately amazed at this familiar way of addressing me. I ran off; they chased me. For millennia I had been used to striking terror all around me, and to feeling terror of the others' reactions to the terror I aroused.

None of that now. "Hey, you!" They came over to me casually, neither hostile nor frightened.

"Why are you running? What's come over you?" They only wanted me to show them the shortest path to I don't know where. I stammered out that I was a stranger there. "What made you run off?" one of them said. "You looked as if you'd seen. . . a Dinosaur!" And the others laughed. But in that laughter I sensed for the first time a hint of apprehension. Their good humor was a bit forced. Then one of them turned serious and added: "Don't say that even as a joke. You don't know what they are. . ."

So, the terror of the Dinosaurs still continued in the New Ones, but perhaps they hadn't seen any for several generations and weren't able to recognize one. I traveled on, cautious but also impatient to repeat the experiment. At a spring a New One, a young female, was drinking; she was alone. I went up softly, stretched my neck to drink beside her; I could already imagine her desperate scream the moment she saw me, her breathless flight. She would spread the alarm, and the New Ones would come out in force to hunt me down. . . For a moment I repented my action; if I wanted to save myself, I should tear her limb from limb at once: start it all over again. . .

She turned and said: "Nice and cool, isn't it?" She went on conversing amiably, the usual remarks one makes to strangers, asking me if I came from far away, if I had run into rain on the trip, or if it had been sunny. I would never have imagined it possible to talk like that with non-Dinosaurs, and I was tense and mostly silent.

"I always come here to drink," she said, "to the Dinosaur. . ."

I reacted with a start, my eyes widening.

"Oh, yes, that's what we call it. The Dinosaur's Spring. . . that's been its name since ancient times. They say that a Dinosaur hid here, one of the last, and whenever anybody came here for a drink the Dinosaur jumped on him and tore him limb from limb. My goodness!"

I wanted to drop through the earth. "Now she'll realize who I am," I was thinking, "now she'll take a better look at me and recognize me!" And as one does, when one doesn't want to be observed, I kept my eyes lowered and coiled my tail, as if to hide it. It was such a strain that when, still smiling, she said good-bye and went on her way, I felt as tired as if I'd fought a battle, one of those battles we fought when we were defending ourselves with our claws and our teeth. I realized I hadn't even said good-bye back to her.

I reached the shore of a river, where the New Ones had their dens and fished for their living. To create a bend in the river, where the water would be less rapid and would hold the fish, they were constructing a dam of branches. As soon as they saw me, they glanced up from their work and stopped. They looked at me, then at each other, in silence, as if questioning one another. "This is it," I thought, "all I can do is sell my life dearly." And I prepared to leap to my defense.

Luckily, I stopped myself in time. Those fishermen had nothing against me: seeing how strong I was, they wanted to ask me if I could stay with them and work transporting wood.

"This is a safe place," they insisted, when I seemed to hesitate. "There hasn't been a Dinosaur seen here since the days of our grandfathers' grandfathers. . ."

Nobody suspected who I might be. I stayed. The climate was good, the food wasn't to my taste but it was all right, and the work wasn't too hard for one of my strength. They gave me a nickname: "The Ugly One," because I was different from them,

for no other reason. These New Ones, I don't know how in the world you call them, Pantotheres or whatever, were still a rather formless species; in fact, all the other species descended from it later; and already in those days there was the greatest variety of similarities and dissimilarities from one individual to the next, so, though I was an entirely different type, I was finally convinced I didn't stand out too much.

Not that I ever became completely used to this idea: I always felt like a Dinosaur in the midst of enemies, and every evening, when they started telling stories of the Dinosaurs, legends handed down from generation to generation, I hung back in the shadow, my nerves on edge.

The stories were terrifying. The listeners, pale, occasionally bursting out with cries of fear, hung on the lips of the storyteller, whose voice also betrayed an equally profound emotion. Soon it was clear to me that all of them already knew those stories (even though the repertory was very plentiful), but when they heard them, their fear was renewed every time. The Dinosaurs were portrayed as so many monsters, described with a wealth of details that would never have helped anyone recognize them, and depicted as intent only on harming the New Ones, as if the New Ones from the very beginning had been the Earth's most important inhabitants and we had had nothing better to do than run after them from morning till night. For myself, when I thought about us Dinosaurs, I returned in memory to a long series of hardships, death agonies, mourning; the stories that the New Ones told about us were so remote from my experience that they should have left me indifferent, as if they referred to outsiders, strangers. And yet, as I listened, I realized I had never thought about how we appeared to others, and that, among all the nonsense, those tales, here and there, from the narrators' point of view, had hit on the truth. In my mind their stories of terrors we inflicted became confused with my memories of terror undergone: the more I learned how we had made others tremble, the more I trembled myself.

Each one told a story, in turn, and at a certain point they said: "What does the Ugly One have to tell us? Don't you have any stories? Didn't anyone in your family have adventures with the Dinosaurs?"

"Yes, but. . ." I stammered, "it was so long ago. . . ah, if you only knew. . ."

The one who came to my assistance at that juncture was Fern-flower, the young creature of the spring. "Oh, leave him alone. . . He's a foreigner, he doesn't feel at home yet; he can't speak our language well enough. . ."

In the end they changed the subject. I could breathe again.

A kind of friendliness had grown up between Fern-flower and me. Nothing too intimate: I had never dared touch her. But we had long talks. Or rather, she told me all sorts of things about her life; in my fear of giving myself away, of making her suspect my identity, I stuck always to generalities. Fern-flower told me her dreams: "Last night I saw this enormous Dinosaur, terrifying, breathing smoke from his nostrils. He came closer, grabbed me by the nape, and carried me off. He wanted to eat me alive. It was a terrible dream, simply terrible, but -- isn't this odd? -- I wasn't the least frightened. No, I don't know how to say it. . . I liked him. . ."

That dream should have made me understand many things and especially one thing: that Fern-flower desired nothing more than to be assaulted. This was the moment for me to embrace her. But the Dinosaur they imagined was too different from the Dinosaur I was, and this thought made me even more different and timid. In other words,

I missed a good opportunity. Then Fern-flower's brother returned from the season of fishing in the plains, the young one was much more closely watched, and our conversations became less frequent.

This brother, Zahn, started acting suspicious the moment he first saw me. "Who's that? Where does he come from?" he asked the others, pointing to me.

"That's the Ugly One, a foreigner, who works with the timber," they said to him. "Why? What's strange about him?"

"I'd like to ask him that," Zahn said, with a grim look. "Hey, you! What's strange about you?" What could I answer? "Me? Nothing."

"So, you're not strange, eh?" and he laughed. That time it went no further, but I was prepared for the worst.

This Zahn was one of the most active ones in the village. He had traveled about the world and seemed to know many more things than the others. When he heard the usual talk about the Dinosaurs he was seized by a kind of impatience. "Fairy tales," he said once, "you're all telling fairy tales. I'd like to see you if a real Dinosaur turned up here."

"There haven't been any for a long time now. . ." a fisherman said.

"Not all that long. . ." Zahn sniggered. "And there might still be a herd or two around the countryside. . . In the plains, our bunch takes turns keeping watch, day and night. But there we can trust one another; we don't take in characters we don't know. . ." And he gave me a long, meaningful look.

There was no point dragging things out: better force him into the open right away. I took a step forward. "Have you got something against me?" I asked.

"I'm against anybody when we don't know who gave him birth or where he came from, and when he wants to eat our food and court our sisters. . ."

One of the fishermen took up my defense: "The Ugly One earns his keep; he's a hard worker. . ."

"He's capable of carrying tree trunks on his back, I won't deny that," Zahn went on, "but if danger came, if we had to defend ourselves with claws and teeth, how can we be sure he would behave properly?"

A general argument began. The strange thing was that the possibility of my being a Dinosaur never occurred to anyone; the sin I was accused of was being Different, a Foreigner, and therefore Untrustworthy; and the argument was over how much my presence increased the danger of the Dinosaurs' ever coming back.

"I'd like to see him in battle, with that little lizard's mouth of his. . ." Zahn went on contemptuously, goading me.

I went over to him, abruptly, nose to nose. "You can see me right now, if you don't run away."

He wasn't expecting that. He looked around. The others formed a circle. There was nothing for us to do but fight

I moved forward, brushed off his bite by twisting my neck; I had already given him a blow of my paw that knocked him on his back, and I was on top of him. This was a wrong move; as if I didn't know it, as if I had never seen Dinosaurs die, clawed and bitten on the chest and the belly, when they believed they had pinned down their enemy. But I still knew how to use my tail, to steady myself; I didn't want to let him turn me over; I put on pressure, but I felt I was about to give way. . .

Then one of the observers yelled: "Give it to him, Dinosaur!" No sooner had they unmasked me than I became again the Dinosaur of the old days: since all was lost, I might as well make them feel their ancient terror. And I struck Zahn once, twice, three times. . .

They tore us apart. "Zahn, we told you! The Ugly One has muscles. You don't try any tricks with him, not with old Ugly!" And they laughed and congratulated me, slapping me on the back with their paws. Convinced I had been discovered, I couldn't get my bearings; it was only later that I understood the cry "Dinosaur" was a habit of theirs, to encourage the rivals in a fight, as if to say: "Go on, you're the stronger one!" and I wasn't even sure whether they had shouted the word at me or at Zahn.

From that day on I was the most respected of all. Even Zahn encouraged me, followed me around to see me give new proofs of my strength. I must say that their usual talk about the Dinosaurs changed a bit, too, as always happens when you tire of judging things in the same old way and fashion begins to take a new turn. Now, if they wanted to criticize something in the village, they had got into the habit of saying that, among Dinosaurs, certain things were never done, that the Dinosaurs in many ways could offer an example, that the behavior of the Dinosaurs in this or that situation (in their private life, for example) was beyond reproach, and so on. In short, there seemed to be emerging a kind of posthumous admiration for these Dinosaurs about whom no one knew anything precise.

Sometimes I couldn't help saying: "Come, let's not exaggerate. What do you think a Dinosaur was, after all?"

They interrupted me: "Shut up. What do you know about them? You've never seen one."

Perhaps this was the right moment to start calling a spade a spade. "I have too seen them!" I cried, "and if you want, I can explain to you what they were like!"

They didn't believe me; they thought I was making fun of them. For me, this new way they had of talking about the Dinosaurs was almost as unbearable as the old one. Because -- apart from the grief I felt at the sad fate that had befallen my species -- I knew the life of the Dinosaurs from within, I knew how we had been governed by narrow-mindedness, prejudice, unable to adapt ourselves to new situations. And I now had to see them take as a model that little world of ours, so backward and so -- to tell the truth -- boring! I had to feel imposed on me, and by them, a kind of sacred respect for my species which I myself had never felt! But, after all, this was only right: what did these New Ones have that was so different from the Dinosaurs of the good old days? Safe in their village with their dams and their ponds, they had also taken on a smugness, a presumptuousness. . . I finally felt toward them the same intolerance I had had toward my own environment, and the more I heard them admiring the Dinosaurs the more I detested Dinosaurs and New Ones alike.

"You know something? Last night I dreamed that a Dinosaur was to go past my house," Fern-flower said to me, "a magnificent Dinosaur, a Prince or a King of Dinosaurs. I made myself pretty, I put a ribbon on my head, and I leaned out of the window. I tried to attract the Dinosaur's attention, I bowed to him, but he didn't even seem to notice me, didn't even deign to glance at me. . ."

This dream furnished me with a new key to the understanding of Fern-flower's attitude toward me: the young creature had mistaken my shyness for disdainful pride.

Now, when I recall it, I realize that all I had to do was maintain that attitude a little longer, make a show of haughty detachment, and I would have won her completely. Instead, the revelation so moved me that I threw myself at her feet, tears in my eyes, and said: "No, no, Fern-flower, it's not the way you believe; you're better than any Dinosaur, a hundred times better, and I feel so inferior to you. . ."

Fern-flower stiffened, took a step backwards. "What are you saying?" This wasn't what she expected: she was upset, and she found the scene a bit distasteful. I understood this too late; I hastily recovered myself, but a feeling of uneasiness now weighed heavily between us.

There was no time to ponder it, what with everything that happened a little later. Breathless messengers reached the village. "The Dinosaurs are coming back!" A herd of strange monsters had been sighted, speeding fiercely over the plain. At this rate they would attack the village the following morning. The alarm was sounded.

You can imagine the flood of conflicting emotions that filled my breast at this news: my species wasn't extinct, I would be able to join my brothers, take up my old life! But the memory of the old life that returned to my mind was the endless series of defeats, of flights, of dangers; to begin again meant perhaps only a temporary extension of that death agony, the return to a phase I thought had already ended. Now, here in the village, I had achieved a kind of new tranquillity, and I was sorry to lose it.

The New Ones were also torn by conflicting feelings. On the one hand, there was panic; on the other, the wish to triumph over the ancient enemy; and at the same time, there was the conviction that if the Dinosaurs had survived and were now advancing vengefully it meant nobody could stop them and their victory, pitiless as it might be, could also perhaps be a good thing for all. It was as if the New Ones wanted at the same time to defend themselves, to flee, to wipe out the enemy, and to be defeated; and this uncertainty was reflected in the disorder of their defense preparations.

"Just a moment!" Zahn shouted. "There is only one among us who is capable of taking command! The strongest of all, the Ugly One!"

"You're right! The Ugly One must command us!" the others shouted in chorus. "Yes, yes, full power to the Ugly One!" And they placed themselves at my command.

"No, no, how can I, a foreigner? . . . I'm not up to it. . ." I parried. But it was impossible to convince them.

What was I to do? That night I couldn't close my eyes. The call of my blood insisted I should desert and join my brothers; loyalty toward the New Ones, who had welcomed and sheltered me and given me their trust, demanded I should consider myself on their side; and in addition I knew full well that neither Dinosaurs nor New Ones were worthy of my lifting a finger for them. If the Dinosaurs were trying to re-establish their rule with invasions and massacres, it meant they had learned nothing from experience, that they had survived only by mistake. And it was clear that the New Ones, turning the command over to me, had found the easiest solution: leave all responsibility to an outsider, who could be their savior but also, in case of defeat, a scapegoat to hand over to the enemy to pacify him, or else a traitor who, putting them into the enemies' hands, could bring about their unconfessable dream of being mastered by the Dinosaurs. In short, I wanted nothing to do with either side: let them rip each other apart in turn! I didn't give a damn about any of them. I had to escape as fast as possible, let them stew in their own juice, have nothing more to do with these old stories.

That same night, slipping away in the darkness, I left the village. My first impulse was to get as far as possible from the battlefield, return to my secret refuges; but curiosity got the better of me: I had to see my counterparts, to know who would win. I hid on the top of some cliffs that overhung the bend of the river, and I waited for dawn.

As the light broke, some figures appeared on the horizon. They charged forward. Even before I could distinguish them clearly, I could dismiss the notion that Dinosaurs could ever run so gracelessly. When I recognized them I didn't know whether to laugh or to blush with shame. Rhinoceroses, a herd, the first ones, big and clumsy and crude, studded with horny bumps, but basically inoffensive, devoted only to cropping grass: this is what the others had mistaken for the ancient Lords of the Earth!

The rhinoceros herd galloped with the sound of thunder, stopped to lick some bushes, then ran on toward the horizon without even noticing the waiting squads of fishermen.

I ran back to the village. "You got it all wrong! They weren't Dinosaurs!" I announced. "Rhinoceroses, that's what they were! They've already gone. There isn't any more danger!" And I added, to justify my vanishing in the night: "I went out scouting. To spy on them and report back."

"We may not have understood they weren't Dinosaurs," Zahn said calmly, "but we have understood that you were not here," and he turned his back on me.

To be sure, they were all disappointed: about the Dinosaurs, about me. Now the stories of Dinosaurs became jokes, in which the terrible monsters played ridiculous roles. I no longer was affected by their petty wit. Now I recognized the greatness of spirit that had made us choose to disappear rather than live in a world no longer suited to us. If I survived it was only so that one of us could continue to feel himself a Dinosaur in the midst of these wretches who tried to conceal, with stupid teasing, the fear that still dominated them. And what choice did the New Ones have, beyond the choice between mockery and fear?

Fern-flower betrayed a new attitude when she narrated a dream to me: "There was this Dinosaur, very funny, all green; and everybody was teasing him and pulling his tail. Then I stepped forward and protected him; I took him away and petted him. And I realized that, ridiculous as he was, he was the saddest of all creatures and a river of tears flowed from his red and yellow eyes."

What came over me, at those words? A revulsion, a refusal to identify myself with the images of that dream, the rejection of a sentiment that seemed to have become pity, an intolerance of the diminished idea they had all conceived of the Dinosaurian dignity? I had a burst of pride; I stiffened and hurled a few contemptuous phrases in her face: "Why do you bore me with these dreams of yours? They get more childish every time! You can't dream anything but sentimental nonsense!"

Fern-flower burst into tears. I went off, shrugging my shoulders.

This happened on the dam; we weren't alone; the fishermen hadn't heard our dialogue but they had noticed my angry reaction and the young creature's tears.

Zahn felt called upon to intervene. "Who do you think you are?" he said, in a harsh voice. "How dare you insult my sister?"

I stopped, but didn't answer. If he wanted to fight, I was ready. But the mood of the village had changed in recent times: they made a joke of everything. From the group of fishermen a falsetto cry was heard: "Come off it, get along with you, Dinosaur!" This,

as I well knew, was a mocking expression which had now come into use, as if to say: "Don't exaggerate, don't get carried away," and so on. But something stirred in my blood.

"Yes, I am one, if you care to know," I shouted, "a Dinosaur! That's what I am! Since you never have seen any Dinosaurs, here, take a look at me!"

General snickering broke out.

"I saw one yesterday," an old fisherman said, "he came out of the snow." Silence immediately fell all around him.

The old fellow was just back from a journey in the mountains. The thaw had melted an ancient glacier and a Dinosaur's skeleton had come to light.

The news spread through the village. "Let's go see the Dinosaur!" They all ran up the mountain, and I went with them.

When we had passed a moraine of stones, uprooted trunks, mud, and dead birds, we saw a deep, shell-shaped valley. A veil of early lichens was turning the rocks green, now that they were freed from the ice. In the midst, lying as if asleep, his neck stretched by the widened intervals of the vertebrae, his tail sown in a long serpentine, a giant Dinosaur's skeleton was lying. The chest cavity was arched like a sail, and when the wind struck the flat slabs of the ribs an invisible heart seemed to be beating within them still. The skull was turned in an anguished position, mouth open as if in a last cry.

The New Ones ran down there, shouting gaily; facing the skull, they felt the empty eye sockets staring at them; they kept a few paces' distance, silently; then they turned and resumed their silly festiveness. If one of them had looked from the skeleton to me, as I stood there staring at it, he would have realized at once that we were identical. But nobody did this. Those bones, those claws, those murderous limbs spoke a language now become illegible; they no longer said anything to anyone, except that vague name which had remained unconnected with the experiences of the present.

I continued looking at the skeleton, the Father, the Brother, my Counterpart, my Self; I recognized my fleshless limbs, my lineaments carved in the stone, everything we had been and were no longer, our majesty, our faults, our ruin.

Now these remains would be used by the planet's new, heedless occupants to mark a spot in the landscape, they would follow the destiny of the name "Dinosaur," becoming an opaque sound without meaning. I must not allow it. Everything that concerned the true nature of the Dinosaurs must remain hidden. In the night, as the New Ones slept around the skeleton, which they had decked with flags, I transported it, vertebra by vertebra, and buried my Dead.

In the morning the New Ones found not a trace of the skeleton. They didn't worry about it very long. It was another mystery added to the many mysteries concerning the Dinosaurs. They soon dismissed it from their thoughts.

But the appearance of the skeleton left its mark, for in all of them the idea of the Dinosaurs became bound to the idea of a sad end, and in the stories they now told the predominant tone was one of commiseration, of grief at our sufferings. I had no use for this pity of theirs. Pity for what? If ever a species had had a rich, full evolution, a long and happy reign, that species was ours. Our extinction had been a grandiose epilogue, worthy of our past. What could those fools understand of it? Every time I heard them become sentimental about the poor Dinosaurs I felt like making fun of them, telling invented, incredible stories. In any case, the real truth about the Dinosaurs would never be understood by anyone now; it was a secret I would keep for myself alone.

A band of vagabonds stopped at the village. Among them was a young female. When I saw her, I started with surprise. Unless my eyes were deceiving me, she didn't have only the blood of the New Ones in her veins: she was a Half-breed, a Dinosaur Half-breed. Was she aware of it? No, certainly not, judging by her nonchalance. Perhaps it hadn't been one of her parents but one of her grandparents or great-grandparents or a more remote ancestor who had been a Dinosaur; and the features, the movements of our stock were cropping out again in her in an almost shameless fashion, now unrecognizable to the others, and to herself. She was a pretty, gay creature; she immediately had a group of suitors after her, and among them the most constant and the most smitten was Zahn.

It was early summer. The young people were giving a feast on the river. "Come with us," Zahn invited me, trying to be my friend after all our disagreements; then he immediately went back to swim at the side of the Half-breed.

I went over to Fern-flower. Perhaps the moment had come for us to speak openly, to come to an understanding. "What did you dream last night?" I asked, to break the ice.

She hung her head. "I saw a wounded Dinosaur, writhing and dying. He had bowed his noble, delicate head, and he suffered and suffered. . . I looked at him, couldn't take my eyes off him, and I realized I was feeling a strange pleasure at seeing him suffer. . ."

Fern-flower's lips were taut, evil, in an expression I had never noticed in her. I wanted only to show her that in that play of ambiguous, grim feelings I had no part: I was one who enjoyed life, I was the heir of a happy race. I started to dance around her, I splashed river water on her, waving my tail.

"You can never talk about anything that isn't sad!" I said, frivolously. "Stop it. Come and dance!"

She didn't understand me. She made a grimace.

"And if you don't dance with me, I'll dance with another!" I cried. I grasped the Half-breed by one paw, carrying her off under Zahn's nose. First he watched us move away without understanding, he was so lost in his amorous contemplation, then he was seized with jealous rage. Too late. The Half-breed and I had already dived into the river and were swimming toward the other bank, to hide in the bushes.

Perhaps I only wanted to show Fern-flower who I really was, to deny the mistaken notions she had of me. And perhaps I was also moved by an old bitterness toward Zahn; I wanted to reject, ostentatiously, his new offer of friendship. Or else, more than anything, it was the familiar and yet unusual form of the Half-breed which made me desire a natural, direct relationship, without secret thoughts, without memories.

The vagabond caravan would be leaving again in the morning. The Half-breed was willing to spend the night in the bushes. I stayed there, dallying with her, until dawn.

These were only ephemeral episodes in a life otherwise calm and uneventful. I had allowed the truth about myself and the era of our domination to vanish into silence. Now they hardly ever talked about the Dinosaurs any more; perhaps nobody believed they had ever existed. Even Fern-flower had stopped dreaming of them.

When she told me: "I dreamed that in a cavern there was the sole survivor of a species whose name nobody remembered, and I went to ask it of him, and it was dark, and I knew he was there, and I couldn't see him, and I knew well who he was and what he looked like but I couldn't have expressed it, and I didn't understand if he was answering my questions or I was answering his. . ." for me this was a sign that finally an amorous

understanding had begun between us, the kind I had wanted since I first stopped at the spring, when I didn't yet know if I would be allowed to survive.

Since then I had learned many things, and above all the way in which Dinosaurs conquer. First I had believed that disappearing had been, for my brothers, the magnanimous acceptance of a defeat; now I knew that the more the Dinosaurs disappear, the more they extend their dominion, and over forests far more vast than those that cover the continents: in the labyrinth of the survivors' thoughts. From the semidarkness of fears and doubts of now ignorant generations, the Dinosaurs continued to extend their necks, to raise their taloned hoofs, and when the last shadow of their image had been erased, their name went on, superimposed on all meanings, perpetuating their presence in relations among living beings. Now, when the name too had been erased, they would become one thing with the mute and anonymous molds of thought, through which thoughts take on form and substance: by the New Ones, and by those who would come after the New Ones, and those who would come even after them.

I looked around: the village that had seen me arrive as a stranger I could now rightfully call mine, and I could call Fern-flower mine, in the only way a Dinosaur could call something his. For this, with a silent wave, I said good-bye to Fern-flower, left the village, and went off forever.

Along my way I looked at the trees, the rivers, and the mountains, and I could no longer distinguish the ones that had been there during the Dinosaurs' time from those that had come afterwards. Around some dens a band of vagabonds was camping. From the distance I recognized the Half-breed, still attractive, only a little fatter. To avoid being seen, I headed for the woods and observed her. She was followed by a little son, barely able to stand on his legs and wag his tail. How long had it been since I had seen a little Dinosaur, so perfect, so full of his own Dinosaur essence, and so unaware of what the word "Dinosaur" meant?

I waited for him in a clearing in the woods to watch him play, chase a butterfly, slam a pine cone against a stone to dig out the pine nuts. I went over. It was my son, all right.

He looked at me curiously. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Nobody," I said. "What about you? Do you know who you are?"

"What a question! Everybody knows that: I'm a New One!" he said.

That was exactly what I had expected to hear him say. I patted his head, said: "Good for you," and went off.

I traveled through valleys and plains. I came to a station, caught the first tram, and was lost in the crowd.

THE FORM OF SPACE

The equations of the gravitational field which relate the curve of space to the distribution of matter are already becoming common knowledge.

To fall in the void as I fell: none of you knows what that means. For you, to fall means to plunge perhaps from the twenty-sixth floor of a skyscraper, or from an airplane