

FLESH, SPHERES, GRAY EYES

BESIDE THE SEINE



Incredible the first animal that dreamed of another animal. Monstrous the first vertebrate that succeeded in standing on two feet and thus spread terror among the beasts still normally and happily crawling close to the ground through the slime of creation. Astounding the first telephone call, the first boiling water, the first song, the first loincloth.

About four o'clock in the morning one fourteenth of July, Pollo Phoibee, asleep in his high garret room, door and windows flung wide, dreamed these things, and prepared to answer them himself. But then he was visited in his dream by the somber, faceless figure of a monk who spoke for Pollo, continuing in words what had been an imagistic dream: "But reason—neither slow nor indolent—tells us that merely with repetition the extraordinary becomes ordinary, and only briefly abandoned, what had once passed for a common and ordinary occurrence becomes a portent: crawling, sending carrier pigeons, eating raw deer meat, abandoning one's dead on the summits of temples so that vultures as they feed might perform their cleansing functions and fulfill the natural cycle."

Only thirty-three and a half days earlier the fact that the waters of the Seine were boiling could have been considered a calamitous miracle; now, a month later, no one even turned to look at the phenomenon. The proprietors of the black barges, surprised at first by the sudden ebullition, slammed against the walls of the channel, had abandoned their struggle against the inevitable. These men of the river pulled on their stocking caps, extinguished their black tobaccos, and climbed like lizards onto the quays; the skeletons of the barges had piled up beneath the ironic gaze of Henri de Navarre and there they remained, splendid ruins of charcoal, iron, and splintered wood.

But the gargoyles of Notre-Dame, knowing events only in the abstract, embraced with black stone eyes a much vaster panorama, and twelve million Parisians understood finally why these demons of yesteryear stick out their tongues at the city in such ferociously mocking grimaces. It was as if the motive for which they were originally sculptured was now revealed in scandalous actuality. It was clear the patient gargoyles had waited eight centuries to open their eyes and blast twaa! twaa! with their cleft tongues. At dawn they had seen that overnight the distant cupolas, the entire façade, of Sacré-Coeur appeared to be