

6 ♦ *Making boxes*

It was Sabazius who instigated my taking a part-time job in a cardboard-box factory. I was to work three days a week, for which I would be paid a small wage. Never in my life had I had such an occupation! The owner of the factory, a huge Turk with a scowling face and a mouthful of decaying teeth, looked me up and down, chewed a fat lip, and decided I was okay. My past working history melted away as I looked through the window of the tiny office and saw the conveyor belt and the brown and grey boxes being pushed into shape by a crew of men and women all around my own age. When I returned to the flat, Sabazius was waiting for me.

'Well,' he asked, 'did you get the job?'

I said I had, but the idea of it did not appeal one little bit.

'And why would that be?'

'Isn't it obvious?'

'Ah!' said Sabazius. 'Your pride is hurt.'

'I'm a linguist,' I told him. 'I've travelled the world first-class. What do you expect?'

'I expect you to make boxes,' was his reply. 'It isn't as silly as it looks.'

I shrugged and walked through to the kitchen to make us coffee. 'Have you ever met the owner?'

'Yes,' he shouted back. 'I've known him for many years.'

'Where did you meet?'

'In India.'

'From what I saw of the factory,' I said with sarcasm, 'it might as well be in India!'

When I turned, Sabazius was standing directly behind me. I had not heard him approach.

'There is something I want you to do,' he said, ignoring my surprise. 'I want you to say nothing of your past to anyone who works there. And if they ask you directly, be vague,

avoid the issue, change the subject.'

'Why?'

'Because that is how it must be,' was his reply, 'at least for the moment.'

'But they'll think I've got something to hide.'

'Then let them think it. What does it matter what they think?' He paused, and then he said ominously: 'And watch the Turk carefully, do not anger him, I have seen him kill a man with one hand.'

'In India?'

'Yes.'

'What happened?'

'Nothing happened. He was not suspected.'

'You're telling me that my employer is a murderer!'

'Only technically.'

I asked him to explain.

'The less you know the better,' said Sabazius, taking the coffee pot from me. 'If you have no knowledge of a man's history, you cannot judge him.'

'That's true,' I said, 'but what you've just told me is a slice of history I would prefer not to have known.'

'I only told you so that you would not get into trouble with him. If you do your work, and behave yourself, everything will be fine.'

My future was temporarily laid out. I was to make boxes and assemble them in virtual silence – and not annoy my murdering boss!

The factory, on that first morning, with its slapping overhead belts of canvas and droning generator, produced in me an abject sense of horror. I was out of my mind to do such work! Why had I allowed Sabazius to talk me into it? The Turk, his body a mass of white shirt and braces, pointed to a small lean-faced man:

'That is how it is done,' he said thickly. He pointed out my space. 'You will soon pick it up.'

My training session was over.

Draw the flattened box towards you, slide the flat of your hand inside and turn it up, insert a second hand and push apart, draw the flaps in and bend them until the sliced notches lock, turn the box the other way up, bend the opposite flaps

out and over the sides, twist your body round and lay the box on the conveyor going in the other direction. Within minutes, I had refined the operation and reduced the number of movements required. Within an hour I was an expert. Or so I thought.

A bell rang at ten-thirty.

The conveyor belt stopped, ushering in a deep silence. The lean-faced man looked at me, nodded, said it was a tea-break, and asked if I had a cup.

'I haven't got one,' I said.

'Didn't he tell you?' He meant the Turk.

'Never mentioned it.'

'That was stupid. Better bring one tomorrow.'

A small boy with bright, dark eyes and a swarthy complexion carried in a tray on which were a selection of cups and mugs. The 'boxers' – that's what we were called – took their personal china and returned to their positions quietly. There was not, as I had expected, an agitated buzz of voices, just a murmur of people talking in subdued tones. Were they all afraid of the Turk?

'It's very quiet,' I said to the man.

'It's been like this since I came.'

'Have you worked here long?'

'A few weeks.'

I nodded absent-mindedly and took stock of my surroundings. The walls, bare brick painted with a scratchy white, had small windows near the ceilingless roof. They were all shut. Fluorescent tubes had been suspended above the work benches – two of them were on the blink. At the far end of the factory – some twenty yards away – the Turk sat with his back to us. At his side was the boy.

Incomprehensibly, the bell which had announced the tea-break did not ring at its termination, there was just the sudden whir of canvas above, turning the diminishing cogs linked to the conveyors. We were off again: draw the flattened box towards you, slide the flat of your hand inside and turn it up, complete the process, and then do it again, and again, and again . . .

Sabazius, I should point out, had talked me into doing this kind of work with a very plausible piece of cosmological

reasoning. He had said that to make and assemble boxes, or anything similar, was like taking a holiday from ego consciousness. Unlike more demanding and intricate occupations, where the individual was called upon to exert personality projection, or high technical concentration, to assemble boxes produced in you a state of mind equal to, and sometimes greater than, deliberate meditation. It was, he said, a vegetable state which could be transformed into a glorious exercise of self-discovery. Everything in you was working. The intellectual sense was being held in check by an automatic modicum of concentration; the body in all its aspects was being held in check by a repetition of fluid physical movement; and above all, self, now open to scrutiny by the Central Personality, would slowly manifest, the intensity of its presence growing as the meditation or awareness cycle lengthened through practice.

When I walked out of the Turk's factory that evening, I was depressed but enlightened. My attempts to Identify self had mostly been abortive. Continually, on following the instructions Sabazius had given, I found myself returning from some kind of mental reverie. I had visited the Caribbean, talked animatedly with friends (on important subjects of course!), argued with enemies, dictated attitudes to past subordinates, elevated myself (I?) to numerous stations in the cosmological structure, bought and sold imaginary possessions, returned to my old job with its attendant security, flirted with oriental girls whom I had known, and performed a host of other unmentionable mental contortions; all to escape my basic reason for being in that factory – to know self. I was, to say the least, a monumental flop.

But I knew it!

At the end of three days, through concentrated effort and stubborn alliance with my conscious Central Personality, I managed to intensify knowledge of self and, at the same time, look at the boxes I handled. For something like eight minutes, a scattered eight minutes diffused through a twenty-four-hour internal battle, I glimpsed self. This showed me clearly that I was, most of the time, floating in a semi-conscious dream world of internal and external bric-a-brac. I was a shadow; but a shadow with the possibility of becoming solid. On the Friday

evening, with rain plummeting wave-like against the window, I realized how accurate Sabazius had been, and simultaneously noticed a slight change in my attitude. But this was only a flash of insight (only?), a momentary cognition, or ignition, based on an awareness of mental density. When I attempted to Identify self through this density, the shockwave was intense: a double backlash from self and object which electrified the personality-core. The density, brought about through making the attempt to self-Identify, was each time strengthened, allowing the next attempt – if it were rapidly made – to heighten the self-awareness principle and produce a further state of density, so completing the cycle. But to continue indefinitely with this process was impossible, for at all times other parts of the mind, the sub-personalities and *their* attitudes, brought it grinding to a halt by short-circuiting the subtle psychic action, and dragged me back into awake-dream. As I sat there in my chair thinking of the process, a deep dread overtook me, for if this was the path, the doorway through which one had to push oneself to find self, then I doubted if I would ever manage it. But then I remembered that Alexis Sabazius was a man like myself, albeit a Man of Feeling, yet basically flesh and blood, bone and tissue, cell and atom: a man, but cosmologically restructured through persistence.

I would persist.

My doorbell rang at ten the next morning. I let Sabazius in and finished preparing my breakfast. He seemed in good spirits, but said little. Over lemon tea and thickly buttered toast, I told him my thoughts of the night before.

'You've got it wrong,' he told me. 'To be persistent does not mean straining yourself. You must "allow" with gentleness what is in you to come out. If a baby is pulled violently into the world it suffers damage, and if you are pulled out of it you too will suffer damage. To work, in the sense a Man of Feeling uses it, is to continually *make room* for the "other" to manifest. That is why I said that meditation was living, for to live at all times in the sense of making room is to be deeply involved with self.'

'But it's such a battle of will!'

He nodded understandingly, then he said: 'If you can grasp what I mean by "making room", then you are well on the road

to appreciating the nature of will. Will *is* to make room, not to strain or rupture the mind.' 'Will,' he continued, 'is a battle won, not a battle in progress. It is a battle won because the man who uses it has already won the battle long before. He is triumphant. He no longer has to exercise will; he *is* will. Do you see?' asked Sabazius.

'Clearly.'

'What do you see clearly?'

'That will is dynamic passivity.'

'Excellent!'

I felt pleased with myself.

'Do you know why will must be so?' he asked.

'No.'

'Because it is the purest expression of Elsewhere known to man. When a man masters the medium of will, he is a true creator, not just an interpreter of what is, but a participator in what is self-evident. To *become* will is the final leap in becoming a Man of Feeling, for it is all that he is, gathered up and given to self. He is simultaneously the master of self, yet mastered by self. He is stable and immovable.'

'But how does one approach such a state?'

'There is no approach,' replied Sabazius. 'But if you wish to think in "directions", then the approach to will is identical with the approach to self. I will give you an example. When you draw a perfect circle, the pen or pencil must necessarily start somewhere. But when the circle is complete, the starting point is lost, for it was only a temporary start, an illusion. The circle is man's guide to all truth. So the approach, as you call it, does not exist in cosmological reality. Will has always existed perfect in the man, and only requires to be identified through self.'

'So I have a perfect will now!'

'No, self has a perfect will. That is why you must Identify self.'

'It's very mathematical.'

He chuckled, sipped at his tea. 'It may appear so, but it has nothing to do with progressions as you understand them. Cosmic law is perfect because it is the Will of Elsewhere manifest in Time. But the Will of Elsewhere cannot be directly equated with man's logic of numerical progression, for the Will

of Elsewhere spans that progression in an *ever-comprehending act of will*.'

'Alpha and Omega.'

'Just so.'

I felt suddenly awed by what I had heard. The idea of an 'ever-comprehending act of will' trembled through me, reduced me to silence.

'And that,' added Sabazius, 'is what man interprets as the "presence" of God.'

What I had thought of as removed from me, the distant, incomprehensible Elsewhere of Sabazius, was now in the room – self-evident. From what appeared to be a clinical dialogue had sprung the essence of all things related in perfect harmony. Objects, people, animals; indeed the whole universe moved and had its being within that will. It was all-encompassing, a blistering cosmological bubble ever becoming itself as we, the expression in-universe, returned fully self-willed! From deep inside me arose the words: 'To feel the earth is to witness will ...' I trembled visibly, for although the inner articulation had been mine, the source of that statement was undeniably self. I had, for the second time, heard or experienced self talking in me.

Sabazius stared at me hard, tilted his head in concentration. 'The boxes you have been handling will eventually contain things,' he said, 'but you are not a box, just as I am not a book, and because we are neither box nor book, we must continually make room for the other.'

'What other?'

'Other is the evolving principle of truth.'

'But isn't truth absolute in relation to Elsewhere?'

'Of course not,' replied Sabazius. 'Truth, which I call "other", is an expression of Elsewhere in Time. It evolves within the principle of the *ever-comprehending act of will* continually unfolding itself in Universe. Truth cannot be absolute, just as Elsewhere cannot be absolute; for "absolutism" is man's limited vision theologized.'

'So there is no end to truth.'

He chuckled at my statement, grinned all over as if I had coined a cosmic joke. 'Can you see one?' he asked.

'I can hardly see the beginning of it,' I replied, feeling all that

had happened to me since I had met this extraordinary man gather into one incomprehensible question after another. 'It's breathtaking!'

Sabazius stood up suddenly. 'Did you know that the sun was shining?'

I glanced at the window. 'Do you want to go out?'

'Yes.'

'Where shall we go?'

'Where would you like to go?'

'Hyde Park?'

'I have a better idea,' he replied. 'Why don't we visit the Rhodope Mountains?'

'The where?'

From out of that lined face sprang a dazzling smile. 'The Rhodope Mountains lie above the Thracian plains,' he said. 'They are the home of the Sarakatsáns. I am a Sarakatsán.'

I laughed uneasily. 'That would be very nice,' I said, 'but we'd never get back in time for lunch.'

He was still staring at me.

I said, haltingly: 'I don't understand.'

Taking off his jacket and shirt, Sabazius stood in the centre of the room and raised his hands high above his head; then, drawing in an enormous breath of air he expanded his chest – barrel-like anyway in response – some three or four inches. He then held the breath within him for something like thirty or forty seconds (although it may have been longer), and exhaled it slowly through his open mouth and partially closed throat. He instructed me to do the same.

'What will it do?' I asked.

He did not answer, just waited for me to strip off my shirt and tie. When I had completed the exercises, he showed me a number of other ways to breathe, some simple, some incredibly complicated; then he outlined in what order they should be used, and with what intensity. At the end of an hour I was exhausted and dizzy. I felt curiously displaced, not quite in myself, rather like after having fainted.

'Now,' said Sabazius. 'Lie out full-stretch on the floor, make yourself comfortable, relax your limbs as I have shown you, and allow yourself to drift towards the edge of sleep. But no further!'

I did as he asked.

For some inexplicable reason (inexplicable at the time) he lay down beside me and linked his little finger through mine. 'Imagine yourself drawn up into your head,' he said quietly. 'And don't be alarmed when you lose physical sensation, that is what is supposed to happen. It is perfectly natural.'

We lay there on the floor together, two human beings experimenting with knowledge preprepared, a system of exactitude handed down from out of a misty past. The last thing Sabazius said to me was:

'I am joined to you, so do not be frightened.'

The grey twilight zone of mind entered, I lay perfectly still, and waited. At first there was nothing, just the sound of our shallow breathing; our bodies were so filled with oxygen we hardly needed to breathe. I toppled over the brink twice, but a slight pressure from Sabazius's finger linked me again with that subtle region of balance.

And then my body slowly disappeared!

It was like a kind of numbness, a creeping paralysis which ate me up from the outer extremities until I was only a head; then it rose to my chin, and my nose, and then to my eyes ... and then there was a distinct 'click'!

A tremendous pressure attacked the back of my head, as if part of it were trying to work loose. I felt the top part of my body slowly rise, ever so slowly rise, in a gentle swaying upwards motion until I was standing – or appeared to be standing – on my feet. That's when I remembered I was somehow linked to Sabazius, and on glancing in his direction, saw him standing beside me: a glistening Sabazius!

Freedom!

When I tried to move everything went haywire. I wobbled, fell without falling, felt myself being dragged back, back to, well – I didn't know.

We were still in the room, everything visible; but by some means had transformed ourselves into ... and it was at that point I shook with fear and panic, for at my feet were feet, and those feet belonged to a body, and the body was mine!

I stared at myself. Stared down from somewhere above; finally I looked at the other body, for Sabazius too had sprung out of his physical shell, left himself lying peacefully

on my brown carpet ...

'Come,' said Sabazius.

Still linked by our little fingers we moved across the room and through the window, out into the bright morning sunshine, afloat and splendid, free as birds. When I spoke I could not hear my words; but I knew that I had said them, and Sabazius had heard, for he smiled at me, grasped me by both hands, and closed his eyes.

Blackness.

Bold shining blackness and a sense of incredible speed. A mere second, or the fraction of a fraction of a second, and then light, a dazzling yet soft light coming up from below and stretching out into a horizon of powder blue.

The Thracian plains ... and beyond them, in mighty splendour – the Rhodope Mountains!

out of body