

ALSO BY KEVIN KERRANE  
DOLLAR SIGN ON THE MUSCLE:  
The World of Baseball Scouting

ALSO BY BEN YAGODA  
WILL ROGERS:  
A Biography

THE  
ART  
OF  
FACT

A HISTORICAL ANTHOLOGY  
OF LITERARY JOURNALISM



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it. I couldn't look at anyone for more than a second, I didn't want to be caught listening, some war correspondent, I didn't know what to say or do, I didn't like it already. When the rain stopped and the ponchos came off there was a smell that I thought was going to make me sick: rot, sump, tannery, open grave, dump-fire—awful, you'd walk into pockets of Old Spice that made it even worse. I wanted badly to find some place to sit alone and smoke a cigarette, to find a face that would cover my face the way my poncho covered my new fatigues. I'd worn them once before, yesterday morning in Saigon, bringing them out of the black market and back to the hotel, dressing up in front of the mirror, making faces and moves I'd never make again. And loving it. Now, nearby on the ground, there was a man sleeping with a poncho over his head and a radio in his arms, I heard Sam the Sham singing, "Lil' Red Riding Hood, I don't think little big girls should, Go walking in these spooky old woods alone. . . ."

I turned to walk some other way and there was a man standing in front of me. He didn't exactly block me, but he didn't move either. He tottered a little and blinked, he looked at me and through me, no one had ever looked at me like that before. I felt a cold fat drop of sweat start down the middle of my back like a spider, it seemed to take an hour to finish its run. The man lit a cigarette and then sort of slobbered it out, I couldn't imagine what I was seeing. He tried again with a fresh cigarette. I gave him the light for that one, there was a flicker of focus, acknowledgment, but after a few puffs it went out too, and he let it drop to the ground. "I couldn't spit for a week up there," he said, "and now I can't fucking stop."

## From *Another Day of Life*

RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI



Writing for the Polish Press Agency from 1958 to 1980, Ryszard Kapuściński covered twenty-seven revolutions and coups in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. In such books as *The Emperor* (1978), which deals with the overthrow of Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Kapuściński evokes psychological atmosphere by blending journalism with autobiography. *Another Day of Life* (1976) begins with a personal note: "This is a book about being alone and lost. In summer 1975 my boss . . . said, 'This is your last chance to get to Angola. How about it?' I always answer yes in such situations."

Earlier that year, a new government in Lisbon had granted independence to all Portuguese colonies. In Angola a power vacuum led to civil war, abetted by outside support for various factions. The Soviet Union and Cuba backed the MPLA; Western powers supported either Holden Roberto's FLNA or Jonas Savimbi's UNITA. Adding to the chaos in Luanda were gangs of PIDE, the Portuguese political police.

Kapuściński's account (the first chapter of which follows) focuses less on factional fighting than on the mind-set of white colonists trying to leave the country with as many of their possessions as possible. The "city of crates" is an unforgettable emblem of people owned by things. And around the edges of the story, as Luanda descends into a "cosmic mess," is the sensibility of a Kafkaesque journalist, ever attentive to the ironic and the absurd. This selection is translated from Polish by William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand.

—K. K.



For three months I lived in Luanda, in the Tivoli Hotel. From my window I had a view of the bay and the port. Offshore stood several freighters under European flags. Their captains maintained radio contact with Europe and they had a better idea of what was happening in Angola than we did—we were imprisoned in a besieged city. When the news circulated around the world that the

battle for Luanda was approaching, the ships sailed out to sea and stopped on the edge of the horizon. The last hope of rescue receded with them, since escape by land was impossible, and rumors said that at any moment the enemy would bombard and immobilize the airport. Later it turned out that the date for the attack on Luanda had been changed and the fleet returned to the bay, expecting as always to load cargoes of cotton and coffee.

The movement of these ships was an important source of information for me. When the bay emptied, I began preparing for the worst. I listened, trying to hear if the sound of artillery barrages was approaching. I wondered if there was any truth in what the Portuguese whispered among themselves, that two thousand of Holden Roberto's soldiers were hiding in the city, waiting only for orders to begin the slaughter. But in the middle of these anxieties the ships sailed back into the bay. In my mind I hailed the sailors I had never met as saviors: it would be quiet for a while.

In the next room lived two old people: Don Silva, a diamond merchant, and his wife Dona Esmeralda, who was dying of cancer. She was passing her last days without help or comfort, since the hospitals were closed and the doctors had left. Her body, twisted in pain, was disappearing among a heap of pillows. I was afraid to go into the room. Once I entered to ask if it bothered her when I typed at night. Her thoughts broke free of the pain for a moment, long enough for her to say, "No, Ricardo, I haven't got enough time left to be bothered by anything."

Don Silva paced the corridors for hours. He argued with everyone, cursed the world, carried a chip on his shoulder. He even yelled at blacks, though by this time everybody was treating them politely and one of our neighbors had even got into the habit of stopping Africans he didn't know from Adam, shaking hands, and bowing low. They thought the war had got to him and hurried away. Don Silva was waiting for the arrival of Holden Roberto and kept asking me if I knew anything on that score. The sight of the ships sailing away filled him with the keenest joy. He rubbed his hands, straightened up, and showed his false teeth.

Despite the overwhelming heat, Don Silva always dressed in warm clothes. He had strings of diamonds sewn into the pleats of his suit. Once, in a flush of good humor when it seemed that the FNLA was already at the entrance to the hotel, he showed me a handful of transparent stones that looked like fragments of crushed glass. They were diamonds. Around the hotel it was said that Don Silva carried half a million dollars on his person. The old man's heart was torn. He wanted to escape with his riches, but Dona Esmeralda's illness tied him down. He was afraid that if he didn't leave immediately someone would report him, and his treasure would be taken away. He never went out in the street. He even wanted to install extra locks, but all the locksmiths had left and there wasn't a soul in Luanda who could do the job.

Across from me lived a young couple, Arturo and Maria. He was a colonial official and she was a silent blonde, calm, with misty, carnal eyes. They

were waiting to leave, but first they had to exchange their Angolan money for Portuguese, and that took weeks because the lines at the banks stretched endlessly. Our cleaning lady, a warm, alert old woman named Dona Cartagina, reported to me in outraged whispers that Arturo and Maria were living in sin. That meant living like blacks, like those atheists from the MPLA. In her scale of values this was the lowest state of degradation and infamy a white person could reach.

Dona Cartagina was also anticipating Holden Roberto's arrival. She didn't know where his army was and would ask me secretly for news. She also asked if I was writing good things about the FNLA. I told her I was, enthusiastically. In gratitude she always cleaned my room until it shined, and when there was nothing in town to drink she brought me—from where, I don't know—a bottle of mineral water.

Maria treated me like a man who was preparing for suicide after I told her that I'd be staying in Luanda until November 11, when Angola was to become independent. In her opinion there wouldn't be a stone left standing in the city by then. Everyone would die and Luanda would turn into a great burial place inhabited by vultures and hyenas. She urged me to leave quickly. I bet her a bottle of wine that I'd survive and we'd meet in Lisbon, in the elegant Altis Hotel, at five o'clock in the afternoon of November 15. I was late for the rendezvous, but the desk clerk had a note from Maria telling me she had waited, but was leaving for Brazil with Arturo the next day.

The whole Tivoli Hotel was packed to the transoms and resembled our train stations right after the war: jammed with people by turns excited and apathetic, with stacks of shabby bundles tied together with string. It smelled bad everywhere, sour, and a sticky, choking sultriness filled the building. People were sweating from heat and from fear. There was an apocalyptic mood, an expectation of destruction. Somebody brought word that they were going to bomb the city in the night. Somebody else had learned that in their quarters the blacks were sharpening knives and wanted to try them on Portuguese throats. The uprising was to explode at any moment. What uprising? I asked, so I could write it up for Warsaw. Nobody knew exactly. Just an uprising, and we'll find out what kind of uprising when it hits us.

Rumor exhausted everyone, plucked at nerves, took away the capacity to think. The city lived in an atmosphere of hysteria and trembled with dread. People didn't know how to cope with the reality that surrounded them, how to interpret it, get used to it. Men gathered in the hotel corridors to hold councils of war. Uninspired pragmatists favored barricading the Tivoli at night. Those with wider horizons and the ability to see things in a global perspective contended that a telegram appealing for intervention ought to be sent to the UN. But, as is the Latin custom, everything ended in argument.

Every evening a plane flew over the city and dropped leaflets. The plane was painted black, with no lights or markings. The leaflets said that Holden

Roberto's army was outside Luanda and would enter the capital soon, perhaps the next day. To facilitate the conquest, the populace was urged to kill all the Russians, Hungarians, and Poles who commanded the MPLA units and were the cause of the whole war and all the misfortunes that had befallen the distressed nation. This happened in September, when in all Angola there was one person from Eastern Europe—me. Gangs from PIDE were prowling the city; they would come to the hotel and ask who was staying there. They acted with impunity—no authorities existed in Luanda—and they wanted to get even for everything, for the revolution in Portugal, for the loss of Angola, for their shattered careers. Every knock at the door could mean the end for me. I tried not to think about it, which is the only thing to do in such a situation.

The PIDE gangs met in the Adao nightclub next to the hotel. It was always dark there; the waiters carried lanterns. The owner of the club, a fat, ruined playboy with swollen lids veiling his bloodshot eyes, took me into his office once. There were shelves built into the walls from floor to ceiling, and on them stood 226 brands of whisky. He took two pistols from his desk drawer and laid them down in front of him.

"I'm going to kill ten communists with these," he said, "and then I'll be happy."

I looked at him, smiled, and waited to see what he would do. Through the door I could hear music and the thugs having a good time with drunken mulatto girls. The fat man put the pistols back in the drawer and slammed it shut. To this day I don't know why he let me go. He might have been one of those people you meet sometimes who get less of a kick from killing than from knowing that they could have killed but didn't.

All September I went to bed uncertain about what would happen that night and the following day. Several types whose faces I came to know hung about. We kept running into each other but never exchanged a word. I didn't know what to do. I decided right off to stay awake—I didn't want them catching me in my sleep. But in the middle of the night the tension would ease and I'd fall asleep in my clothes, in my shoes, on the big bed that Dona Cartagina had made with such care.

The MPLA couldn't protect me. They were far away in the African quarters, or even farther away at the front. The European quarter in which I was living was not yet theirs. That's why I liked going to the front—it was safer there, more familiar. I could make such journeys only rarely, however. Nobody, not even the people from the staff, could define exactly where the front was. There was neither transport nor communications. Solitary little outfits of greenhorn partisans were lost in enormous, treacherous spaces. They moved here and there without plan or thought. Everybody was fighting a private war, everybody was on his own.

Each evening at nine, Warsaw called. The lights of the telex machine at the hotel reception desk came on and the printer typed out the signal:

814251 PAP PL GOOD EVENING PLEASE SEND

or:

WE FINALLY GOT THROUGH

or:

ANYTHING FOR US TODAY? PLS GA GA

I answered:

OK OK MOM SVP

and turned on the tape with the text of the dispatch.

For me, nine o'clock was the high point of the day—a big event repeated each evening. I wrote daily. I wrote out of the most egocentric of motives: I overcame my inertia and depression in order to produce even the briefest dispatch and so maintain contact with Warsaw, because it rescued me from loneliness and the feeling of abandonment. If there was time, I settled down at the telex long before nine. When the light came on I felt like a wanderer in the desert who catches sight of a spring. I tried every trick I could think of to drag out the length of those séances. I described the details of every battle. I asked what the weather was like at home and complained that I had nothing to eat. But in the end came the moment when Warsaw signed off:

GOOD RECEPTION CONTACT TOMORROW 20 HRS GMT TKS BY BY

and the light went out and I was left alone again.

Luanda was not dying the way our Polish cities died in the last war. There were no air raids, there was no "pacification," no destruction of district after district. There were no cemeteries in the streets and squares. I don't remember a single fire. The city was dying the way an oasis dies when the well runs dry: it became empty, fell into inanition, passed into oblivion. But that agony would come later; for the moment there was feverish movement everywhere. Everybody was in a hurry, everybody was clearing out. Everyone was trying to catch the next plane to Europe, to America, to anywhere. Portuguese from all over Angola converged on Luanda. Caravans of automobiles loaded down with people and baggage arrived from the most distant corners of the country. The men were unshaven, the woman tousled and rumpled, the children dirty and sleepy. On the way the refugees linked up in long columns and crossed the country that way, since the bigger the group, the safer it was. At first they checked into the Luanda hotels but later, when there were no vacancies, they drove straight to the airport. A nomad city without streets or houses sprang up around the airport. People lived in the open, perpetually soaked because it was always raining. They were living worse now than the blacks in the African quarter that abutted the airport, but they took it apathetically, with dismal resignation, not knowing whom to curse for their fate. Salazar was dead, Caetano had escaped to Brazil, and the government in Lisbon kept changing. The revolution was to blame for everything, they

said, because before that it had been peaceful. Now the government had promised the blacks freedom and the blacks had come to blows among themselves, burning and murdering. They aren't capable of governing. Let me tell you what a black is like, they would say: he gets drunk and sleeps all day. If he can hang some beads on himself he walks around happy. Work? Nobody works here. They live like a hundred years ago. A hundred? A thousand! I've seen ones like that, living like a thousand years ago. You ask me who knows what it was like a thousand years ago? Oh, you can tell for sure. Everybody knows what it was like. This country won't last long. Mobutu will take a hunk of it, the ones to the south will take their cut, and that's the end of it. If only I could get out this minute. And never lay eyes on it again. I put in forty years of work here. The sweat of my damn brow. Who will give it back to me now? Do you think anybody can start life all over again?

People are sitting on bundles covered with plastic because it's drizzling. They are meditating, pondering everything. In this abandoned crowd that has been vegetating here for weeks, the spark of revolt sometimes flashes. Women beat up the soldiers designated to maintain order, and men try to hijack a plane to let the world know what despair they've been driven to. Nobody knows when they will fly out or in what direction. A cosmic mess prevails. Organization comes hard to the Portuguese, avowed individualists who by nature cannot live in narrow bounds, in community. Pregnant women have priority. Why them? Am I worse because I gave birth six months ago? All right, pregnant women and those with infants have priority. Why them? Am I worse because my son just turned three? Okay, women with children have priority. Huh? And me? Just because I'm a man, am I to be left here to die? So the strongest board the plane and the women with children throw themselves on the tarmac, under the wheels, so the pilot can't taxi. The army arrives, throws the men off, orders the women aboard, and the women walk up the steps in triumph, like a victorious unit entering a newly conquered city.

Let's say we fly out the ones whose nerves have been shattered. Beautiful, look no further, because if it hadn't been for the war, I'd have been in the lunatic asylum long ago. And us in Carmona, we were raided by a band of wild men who took everything, beat us, wanted to shoot us. I've been nothing but shakes ever since. I'll go nuts if I don't fly out of here at once. My dear fellow, I'll say no more than this: I've lost the fruits of a life's work. Besides, where we lived in Lumbala two UNITA soldiers grabbed me by the hair and a third poked a gun barrel right in my eye. I consider that sufficient reason to take leave of my senses.

No criterion won general approbation. The despondent crowd swarmed around each plane, and hours passed before they could work out who finally got a seat. They have to carry half a million refugees across an air bridge to the other side of the world.

Everybody knows why they want to leave. They know they'll survive Sep-

tember, but October will be very bad and nobody will live through November. How do they know? How can you ask such a question? says one. I've lived here for twenty-eight years and I can tell you something about this country. Do you know what I had to show for it in the end? An old taxi that I left sitting in the street.

Do you believe it? I ask Arturo. Arturo doesn't believe it, but he still wants to leave. And you, Dona Cartagina, do you believe it? Yes, Dona Cartagina is convinced. If we stay till November, that'll be the end of us. The old lady energetically draws a finger across her throat, on which her fingernail leaves a red mark.

People escaped as if from an infectious disease, as if from pestilential air that can't be seen but still inflicts death. Afterward the wind blows and the sand drifts over the traces of the last survivor.

Various things happened before that, before the city was closed and sentenced to death. As a sick person suddenly revives and recovers his strength for a moment in the midst of his agony, so, at the end of September, life in Luanda took on a certain vigor and tempo. The sidewalks were crowded and traffic jams clogged the streets. People ran around nervously, in a hurry, wrapping up thousands of matters. Clear out as quickly as possible, escape in time, before the first wave of deadly air intrudes upon the city.

They didn't want Angola. They had had enough of the country, which was supposed to be the promised land but had brought them disenchantment and abasement. They said farewell to their African homes with mixed despair and rage, sorrow and impotence, with the feeling of leaving forever. All they wanted was to get out with their lives and to take their possessions with them.

Everybody was busy building crates. Mountains of boards and plywood were brought in. The price of hammers and nails soared. Crates were the main topic of conversation—how to build them, what was the best thing to reinforce them with. Self-proclaimed experts, crate specialists, homegrown architects of craters, masters of crate styles, crate schools, and crate fashions appeared. Inside the Luanda of concrete and bricks a new wooden city began to rise. The streets I walked through resembled a great building site. I stumbled over discarded planks, nails sticking out of beams ripped my shirt. Some crates were as big as vacation cottages, because a hierarchy of crate status had suddenly come into being. The richer the people, the bigger the crates they erected. Crates belonging to millionaires were impressive: beamed and lined with sailcloth, they had solid, elegant walls made of the most expensive grades of tropical wood, with the rings and knots cut and polished like antiques. Into these crates went whole salons and bedrooms, sofas, tables, wardrobes, kitchens and refrigerators, commodes and armchairs, pictures, carpets, chandeliers, porcelain, bedclothes and linen, clothing, tapestries and vases, even artificial flowers (I saw them with my

own eyes), all the monstrous and inexhaustible junk that clutters every middle-class home. Into them went figurines, seashells, glass balls, flower bowls, stuffed lizards, a metal miniature of the cathedral of Milan brought back from Italy, letters!—letters and photographs, wedding pictures in gilt frames (Why don't we leave that? the husband asks, and the enraged wife cries, You ought to be ashamed!)—all the pictures of the children, and here's the first time he sat up, and here's the first time he said Give, Give, and here he is with a lollipop, and here with his grandma—everything, and I mean everything, because this case of wine, this supply of macaroni that I laid in as soon as the shooting started, and then the fishing rod, the crochet needles—my yarn!—my rifle, Tutu's colored blocks, birds, peanuts, the vacuum and the nutcracker, have to be squeezed in, too, that's all there is to it, they have to be, and they are, so that all we leave behind are the bare floors, the naked walls, *en déshabille*. The house's striptease goes all the way, right down to the curtain rods—and all that remains is to lock the door and stop along the boulevard en route to the airport and throw the key in the ocean.

The crates of the poor are inferior on several counts. They are smaller, often downright diminutive, and unsightly. They can't compete in quality; their workmanship leaves a great deal to be desired. While the wealthy can employ master cabinetmakers, the poor have to knock their crates together with their own hands. For materials they use odds and ends from the lumber yard, mill ends, warped beams, cracked plywood, all the leftovers you can pick up thirdhand. Many are made of hammered tin, taken from olive-oil cans, old signs, and rusty billboards; they look like the tumbledown slums of the African quarters. It's not worth looking inside—not worth it, and not really the sort of thing one does.

The crates of the wealthy stand in the main downtown streets or in the shadowy byways of exclusive neighborhoods. You can look at them and admire. The crates of the poor, on the other hand, languish in entranceways, in backyards, in sheds. They are hidden for the time being, but in the end they will have to be transported the length of the city to the port, and the thought of that pitiful display is unappetizing.

Thanks to the abundance of wood that has collected here in Luanda, this dusty desert city nearly devoid of trees now smells like a flourishing forest. It's as if the forest had suddenly taken root in the streets, the squares, and the plazas. In the evenings I throw the window open to take a deep breath of it, and the war fades. I no longer hear the moans of Dona Esmeralda, I no longer see the ruined playboy with his two pistols, and I feel just as if I were sleeping it off in a forester's cottage in Bory Tucholski.

The building of the wooden city, the city of crates, goes on day after day, from dawn to twilight. Everyone works, soaked with rain, burned by the sun; even the millionaires, if they are physically fit, turn to the task. The enthusiasm of the adults infects the children. They too build crates, for their dolls and toys. Packing takes place under cover of night. It's better that way, when no

one's sticking his nose into other people's business, nobody's keeping track of who puts in how much and what (and everyone knows there are a lot of that sort around, the ones who serve the MPLA and can't wait to inform).

So by night, in the thickest darkness, we transfer the contents of the stone city to the inside of the wooden city. It takes a lot of effort and sweat, lifting and struggling, shoulders sore from stowing it all, knees sore from squeezing it all in because it all has to fit and, after all, the stone city was big and the wooden city is small.

Gradually, from night to night, the stone city lost its value in favor of the wooden city. Gradually too, it changed in people's estimation. People stopped thinking in terms of houses and apartments and discussed only crates. Instead of saying, "I've got to go see what's at home," they said, "I've got to go check my crate." By now that was the only thing that interested them, the only thing they cared about. The Luanda they were leaving had become a stiff and alien stage set, empty, for the show was over.

Nowhere else in the world had I seen such a city, and I may never see anything like it again. It existed for months, and then it suddenly began disappearing. Or rather, quarter after quarter, it was taken on trucks to the port. Now it was spread out at the very edge of the sea, illuminated at night by harbor lanterns and the glare of lights on anchored ships. By day, people wound through its chaotic streets, painting their names and addresses on little plates, just as anyone does anywhere in the world when he builds himself a house. You could convince yourself, therefore, that this is a normal wooden town, except that it's been closed up by its residents who, for unknown reasons, have had to leave it in haste.

But afterward, when things had already turned very bad in the stone city and we, its handful of inhabitants, were waiting like desperadoes for the day of its destruction, the wooden city sailed away on the ocean. It was carried off by a great flotilla with which, after several hours, it disappeared below the horizon. This happened suddenly, as if a pirate fleet had sailed into the port, seized a priceless treasure, and escaped to sea with it.

Even so, I managed to see how the city sailed away. At dawn it was still rocking off the coast, piled up confusedly, uninhabited, lifeless, as if magically transformed into a museum exhibit of an ancient Eastern city and the last tour group had left. At that hour it was foggy and cold. I stood on the shore with some Angolan soldiers and a little crowd of ragtag freezing black children. "They've taken everything from us," one of the soldiers said without malice, and turned to cut a pineapple because that fruit, so overripe that, when it was cut, the juice ran out like water from a cup, was then our only food. "They've taken everything from us," he repeated and buried his face in the golden bowl of the fruit. The homeless harbor children gazed at him with greedy, fascinated eyes. The soldier lifted his juice-smearred face, smiled, and added, "But anyway, we've got a home now. They left us what's ours." He stood and, rejoicing in the thought that Angola was his, shot off a whole

round from his automatic rifle into the air. Sirens sounded, seagulls darted and wheeled over the water, and the city stirred and began to sail away.

I don't know if there had ever been an instance of a whole city sailing across the ocean, but that is exactly what happened. The city sailed out into the world, in search of its inhabitants. These were the former residents of Angola, the Portuguese, who had scattered throughout Europe and America. A part of them reached South Africa. All fled Angola in haste, escaping before the conflagration of war, convinced that in this country there would be no more life and only the cemeteries would remain. But before they left they had still managed to build the wooden city in Luanda, into which they packed everything that had been in the stone city. On the streets now there were only thousands of cars, rusting and covered with dust. The walls also remained, the roofs, the asphalt on the roads, and the iron benches along the boulevards.

And now the wooden city was sailing on an Atlantic swept by violent, gale-driven waves. Somewhere on the ocean the partition of the city occurred and one section, the largest, sailed to Lisbon, the second to Rio de Janeiro, and the third to Capetown. Each of these sections reached its haven safely. I know this from various sources. Maria wrote to tell me that her crates ended up in Brazil—crates that had been part of the wooden city. Many newspapers wrote about the fact that one section made it to Capetown. And here's what I saw with my own eyes. After leaving Luanda, I stopped in Lisbon. A friend drove me along a wide street at the mouth of the Tagus, near the port. And there I saw fantastic heaps of crates stacked to perilous heights, unmoved, abandoned, as if they belonged to no one. This was the largest section of the wooden Luanda, which had sailed to the coast of Europe.

Back in the days when the erection of the wooden city had barely begun, the merchants had the biggest headaches. What could they do with the merchandise of all kinds that lay in the shops and filled the warehouses to their cobwebbed ceilings? No one could imagine a crate capable of accommodating the inventory of the leading wholesaler in Luanda, Don Castro Soremenho e Sousa. And the other wholesalers? And the thousand-strong clans of specialist retailers?

In addition, the whole import trade was behaving as if somebody was playing with less than a full deck. European firms—didn't anybody read the newspapers back there?—were shipping back-ordered merchandise to Luanda, oblivious of the fact that flames of armed conflagration were licking at Angola. Who now needed the complete sets of bathroom equipment shipped yesterday by Koenig and Sons GmbH, Hamburg? Who could suppress a chuckle at the arrival from London of an order of tennis balls, rackets, and golf clubs? As if for the sake of irony, a big shipment of insecticide sprayers came in from Marseilles—ordered by the very coffee planters now fighting for seats on flights to Europe.

Don Urbano Tavares, the proprietor of a jewelry shop on the main street,

can feel content despite the mad unhappiness everywhere. When he chose his line of work years ago, he hit the bull's-eye. Gold always sells, and what's left fits easily into carry-on luggage. Lively action marks his business now. But not only gold is booming. People are rushing above all to food shops, because there is less and less to eat. Jostling crowds fill clothing and shoe stores. Watches and miniature radios, cosmetics and medicine are selling—small, light items that can be useful in the new life in countries beyond the sea.

A visit to a bookshop on Largo de Portugal leaves a sad impression. It is empty. Dust has settled in a gray layer on the old counter. Not a single customer. Who wants to read books now? The soldiers bought up the last pornographic magazines long ago and took them to the front. What's left—stacks of masterpieces mixed with the most second-rate reading matter—interests no one. Scribblers can draw an important lesson in modesty here. Immortal classics and page-turner romances are equally unattractive to the refugees for a simple reason: Paper is heavy.

A shop bearing the pious name Cruz de Cristo also stands empty. The specialty of the house is selling and renting wedding dresses. The owner, Dona Amanda, sits motionless for hours, unoccupied, among a crowd of similarly unmoving mute mannequins bewitched by some invisible fairy. There are enough dresses to furnish one of those mass weddings still popular in Mexico to this day. All white, right down to the ground, but each one cut differently, each one splendid in its baroque wealth of flounces and lace. What does Dona Amanda look forward to? One need only glance through the display window at her downcast, gloomy face. The time for joy and weddings has passed and left Dona Amanda surrounded by the unneeded props of an extinguished epoch.

Better luck (if that's the right word—I doubt it) attends Don Francisco Amarel Reis, owner of the Caminho ao Ceu (Road to Heaven) firm, concealed discreetly in a side street at the edge of the city center. His specialty: crosses, caskets, foil flowers, funeral accessories. These days there are many deaths, since fear, despair, and frustration lead people to the grave. There is a multitude of tragic automobile accidents here because the general atmosphere of rout, defeat, rage, and entrapment turns every susceptible driver into a beast. So we have funeral after funeral.

I am writing about people to whom Dona Cartagina introduced me. The old lady was the guardian spirit of the hotel and she wanted to arrange everything. She was the only person interested in Dona Amanda's gowns, because she was conjuring up a vision of the wedding of Maria and Arturo. She argued with Don Francisco about the cost of Dona Esmeralda's funeral, because Dona Esmeralda wouldn't come out of her coma. Only to the bookstore did I go alone, because I like to spend time in the company of books.

We buried Dona Esmeralda in a cemetery on a steep slope above the sea. The cemetery is as white as if covered by eternal snow. Needlelike cypresses, almost dark blue in the sunlight, shoot up heavenward out of the snow. The

gate is painted blue, a warm and optimistic color in this case, suggesting that those who come here march heavenward like the saints in Louis Armstrong's song.

The next day Don Silva, the crotchety miser with the suit full of diamonds, left. Later I took Maria and Arturo to the airport.

Now several planes a day—French, Portuguese, Russian, and Italian—were flying. The pilots would get out and look around the airport. I watched them, amazed at the thought that only a few hours before they had been in Europe. I looked at them as at people from another planet. Europe—that was a distant, unreal point in a galaxy whose existence could be proved only by complicated deduction. They flew out in the evening. The overloaded machines crept to the runway, gained altitude with difficulty, and disappeared among the stars.

The nomad city without roofs and walls, the city of refugees around the airport, gradually vanished from the earth. At the same time, the wooden city deserted Luanda and waited in the port for its long journey. Of all the cities on the bay, only the stone Luanda, ever more depopulated and superfluous, remained.

That was the beginning of October. The city was becoming more desolate each day. Starting in the morning I wandered the streets without aim, without purpose, until the crushing heat drove me back to the hotel. At noon the sun beat against my head; it became so close and hot that there was nothing to breathe. Summer was beginning and the gates of a tropical hell were opening. Water was running short because the pumping stations were situated on the front lines, and after each repair they were destroyed again in the course of the fighting. I walked around dirty, needing something to drink so badly that I came down with a fever and saw orange spots before my eyes.

More and more merchants closed their shops. Black boys drummed with sticks on the lowered metal shutters. Restaurants and cafés were already out of action; chairs, tables, and folded umbrellas stood around on the sidewalks and afterward disappeared into the African slums. From time to time some car would drive through the empty streets, running the red lights that kept functioning automatically, God knows for whom.

At about this time, someone brought news to the hotel that all the police had left!

Now Luanda, of all the cities in the world, had no police. When you find yourself in such a situation, you feel strange. On the one hand everything seems light, loose, but on the other hand there is a certain uneasiness. The few whites who still wandered the city accepted the development with foreboding. Rumors circulated that the black quarters would descend upon the stone city. Everyone knew that the blacks lived in the most awful conditions, in the worst slums to be seen anywhere in Africa, in clay hovels like heaps of smashed cheap pottery covering the desert around Luanda. And here stood the luxurious stone city of glass and concrete—empty, no one's. If only they

would come peacefully, in an orderly way, with their families, and occupy what was abandoned and vacant. But according to the terrified Portuguese who passed themselves off as experts on the native mentality, the blacks would burst in, swept up in a madness of destruction and hatred, drunk, drugged with secret herbs, demanding blood and revenge. Nothing could hold back that invasion. Exhausted people with shattered nerves, unarmed and at bay, talk and dream up the most apocalyptic visions. Everyone is lost and it will be the most hideous death—stabbed to death in the streets, hacked with machetes on their own doorsteps. Those with more presence of mind propose various kinds of self-defense. One says to extinguish all the lights and keep watch in the darkened city. Another says the opposite: Turn on the lights even in empty houses, because only numbers, massed numbers, will be able to scare off the blacks. As usual, no argument prevails and at night the city looks like a curtain full of holes—here a fragment of some scene shines through, then around it nothing can be seen, then there's another fragment, then everything is covered. Dona Cartagina, who more from habit than necessity is cleaning the vacant rooms on my floor (I'm all alone there now), pauses in her sweeping to listen for the sinister rumble of a crowd, the harbinger of our doom, approaching from the black quarters. She freezes just like a village woman in the field listening for thunder. Then she crosses herself solemnly and goes on cleaning.

All the firemen have left! Now no one will save the city from fires. At first, people cannot believe that the firemen have deserted their posts, but to convince themselves they have only to visit the main engine company on the shorefront boulevard. The gates of the station are standing open. Inside sit the big red-and-gold fire engines with ladders and hoses. The firemen's helmets sit on shelves. There isn't a living soul. Of course the FNLA will find out about this, and all it will take is one bomb dropped tomorrow in place of the leaflets. All Luanda will go up like a matchbox. The rains have stopped, the city is sun-baked and dry as sawdust. If only there isn't a short circuit, if only some drunk doesn't get careless. Later the soldiers get one of the pumpers running and use it to carry water to the front. Since it is easy to spot from a distance, it is hit, runs into a ditch, and stays there.

All the garbagemen have left!

At first, nobody noticed. The city was dirty and neglected, so people assumed that the garbagemen had flown to Europe a long time ago. Then it turned out that they had left only the day before. Suddenly, no one knew from where, the garbage started piling up. After all, there was only a handful of residents left and they were so apathetic and inert that no one could accuse them of carrying out such mountains of garbage. Yet mounds of it began piling up on the streets of the abandoned city. It appeared on the sidewalks, in the roads, in the squares, in the entranceways of townhouses, and in the extinct marketplaces. You could walk through some streets only with great effort and disgust. In this climate the excess of sun and moisture

accelerate and intensify decay, rot, and fermentation. The whole city began to stink, and anybody who had a long walk through the streets to his hotel picked up that stench, too, and other people spoke to him from a distance. In general, people distanced themselves from each other even though, in the situation to which we were condemned, it should have been the other way around. Dona Cartagina closed all the windows because the putrid air that blew in was unbreathable. The cats started dying. They must have poisoned themselves collectively on some carrion, because one morning dead cats were lying everywhere. After two days they puffed up and swelled to the size of piglets. Black flies swarmed over them. The odor was unbearable. I walked through the city dripping with sweat, holding a handkerchief to my nose. Dona Cartagina said the prayers against pestilence. There were no doctors, and not a single hospital or pharmacy remained open. The garbage grew and multiplied like the rising of a monstrous, disgusting dough expanding in all directions, impelled by a poisonous deadly yeast.

Later, when all the barbers, repairmen, mail carriers, and concierges had left, the stone city lost its reason for existing, its sense. It was like a dry skeleton polished by the wind, a dead bone sticking up out of the ground toward the sun.

The dogs were still alive.

They were pets, abandoned by owners fleeing in panic. You could see dogs of all the most expensive breeds, without masters—boxers, bulldogs, greyhounds, Dobermans, dachshunds, Airedales, spaniels, even Scotch terriers and Great Danes, pugs and poodles. Deserted, stray, they roamed in a great pack looking for food. As long as the Portuguese army was there, the dogs gathered every morning on the square in front of the general headquarters and the sentries fed them canned NATO rations. It was like watching an international pedigreed dog show. Afterward the fed, satisfied pack moved to the soft, juicy mowed grass on the lawn of the Government Palace. An unlikely mass sex orgy began, excited and indefatigable madness, chasing and tumbling to the point of utter abandon. It gave the bored sentries a lot of ribald amusement.

When the army left, the dogs began to go hungry and slim down. For a while they drifted around the city in a desultory mob, looking for a handout. One day they disappeared. I think they followed the human example and left Luanda, since I never came across a dead dog afterward, though hundreds of them had been loitering in front of the general headquarters and frolicking in front of the palace. One could suppose that an energetic leader emerged from the ranks to take the pack out of the dying city. If the dogs went north, they ran into the FNLA. If they went south, they ran into UNITA. On the other hand, if they went east, in the direction of Ndalatando and Saurimo, they might have made it into Zambia, then to Mozambique or even Tanzania.

Perhaps they're still roaming, but I don't know in what direction or in what country.

After the exodus of the dogs, the city fell into rigor mortis. So I decided to go to the front.