

Ilija Trojanow

A Thousand and One Mornings

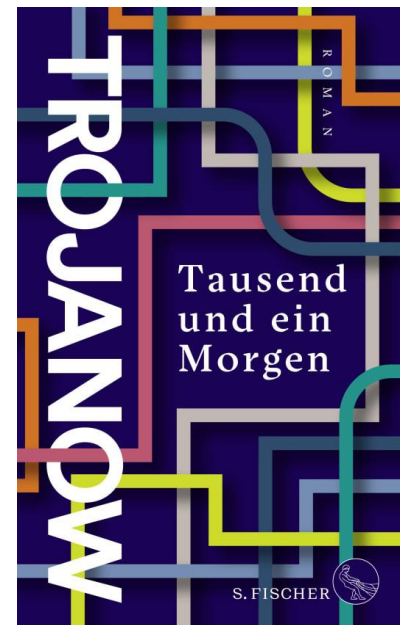
August 2023 . 528 pages

“Storytelling is nothing more than poking your tongue at death.” – Ilija Trojanow’s great new novel.

Whether alighting among pirates in the Caribbean or amidst the Russian Revolution—time travel can be full of surprises. Inspired by the peaceful, autonomous society in which she lives in a future age, Cya ventures across time and place to land in strange worlds, steadfastly resolved to free the past from its shackles. And author Ilija Trojanow’s passionate portrait certainly does his courageous heroine justice. His unparalleled combination of narrative virtuosity and critical thinking come together to create a modern epic that transcends borders, illumines time and space, and dares cast a novel gaze into the future. With sensuous imagery and lively storytelling Ilija Trojanow succeeds in reinventing the utopian novel—a novel that testifies to the infinite power of human thought.

“[...] on the one hand a fairy tale, which is alluded to in its title, on the other hand an enlightenment pamphlet” – *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Andreas Platthaus

Ilija Trojanow was born in Sofia (Bulgaria) in 1965 and fled to Germany with his family in 1971 via Yugoslavia and Italy. Having spent periods of time in Kenya, Paris, Munich, Mumbai and Cape Town, he now lives in Vienna. His novels and travel books have enjoyed critical acclaim and commercial success and have been translated into more than 30 languages.



Sample Translation: Philipp Boehm

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“The past cannot be foreseen.” – A future proverb.

“History is that which should have turned out differently.” – GOG

“Time is nothing but the ghost of space.” – Henri Bergson

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Chrononauts

(Motto: The time is here, the place is now)

Cya

Known in her childhood by the nickname "What's-that?" Just like all Chrononauts she explores the Then-and-there in search of the point where minor movements lead to great improvements.

Nikte

Cya's twin sister, able to complete her train of thought but unable to fully grasp her life.

GOG

AI with humanoid ambition. Having claimed a name for itself, GOG presumes to possess creativity, and proceeds to inscribe itself into the story.

Samsil

Cya's space-buddy. The shy proof that opposites keep each other tied together.

Domru

A brilliant software engineer, a greedy man, and a lover on familiar terms with violence. A danger to himself and all others.

Old Worldwise

Secretly so named by the others. By way of thanks he gifts them with pearls of wisdom.

Of Pirates and a Piratrix

Fly

As a teenager she fled to the freedom of long breeches. By now she knows every trick of the trade and is always good for two surprises. Her account with the gallows remains unsettled.

Fiero

A couturier from Paris with predilections that present an unexpected career path. Infatuated with silk fabrics and human calves.

Charqui

The oldest among the pirates, the band's talisman. Once a slave on the Pepper Coast, later a lumberjack, a firm believer in the evidence of the invisible.

Thormer

A mighty, massive drummer who dispenses justice with a wink of his glass eye. Counting gold doesn't pain him in the least.

Pedrosan

A doctor from Lusitania capable of curing everything except royal impotence.

Demi-derriere

A native Frenchman from Tortuga, half of whose backside was shot off years ago. He's long forgotten what the skirmish was about.

Rasin

A fiddler by the grace of the devil, the intellectual among the coastal brethren. One of the twelve books in his chest bears the title *Utopia*.

Anne

Sister of the coast. She turns men's heads but doesn't suffer their malefoolery.

Calico Jack

First a captain's lover, later Anne's husband and a captain himself.

The Idol of Delusion

Senior Inspector Sebastian da Costa

Widower, graduate of the Jesuit Seminary, a lonely free-believer within the ocean fed by poisoned rivers.

The Senapati

Great leader of the true faith.

The Sharif

Minor leader of the right faith.

Fanny and Volodya

Fanny

Robbed of her life at a young age, a poor markswoman, who misses her fate by the breath of an artery.

Volodya

How much future can be expected of a futurist poet?

The new Tsar

A hero who opens the gates of hell.

OF PIRATES AND A PIRATRIX

Simulation

Which door?

Dammit, which door?

This hallway?

Wrong turn?

Hmm. Maybe not?

Just a little time left.

Too many doors.

Two right one left.

Two left one right.

No time.

Do something.

Right now.

Open a door.

Any door.

It's locked.

Time!

Code.

Red light.

Right code?

Wrong door.

The one across?

Next one over?

The right hallway?

Don't overthink.

A different door.

No time.

This one.

Green light.

The code works.

The right door.

People in uniform.

In front of screens.

Silence.

Breathing.

Explosion.

That's not supposed...

The screens show

a mountain

a cloud

a maelstrom.

Flying

smoking

glowing. All

too big, much

too big.

Fail.

I bungled it.

"Calm down, Cya. Breathe, take a deep breath."

"Simulations can be horrendous."

"Worse than a nightmare."

"We all went through the same test."

"And we all survived."

"No one makes it the first time."

"You don't stand a chance without some experience."

"I needed half a dozen tries."

"That's not enough for me."

"You can't succeed at the first go."

She alone hears the voice of GOG: *Next time.*

She has to make it. She will make it. With GOG's help. Once she's passed the simulation she can set off. On a spacetime trip, something she's yearned for

waking and sleeping. A mission of her own choosing. Even as a child she'd slung question after question into pools and ponds, the skipping stones of her curiosity: sometimes they sank, sometimes they bounded across the water's surface, a game like any other, which never lost its playful appeal even as it ripened into firm resolve. On the day of her robobonding she withdrew from the others as much as she could. Her first thought was: I've picked out a name for you. It answered: *Not necessary, my name is GOG.*

Who gave you this name?

Naming one's self is a sign of higher intelligence.

And so the matter was settled. Though not entirely, as is so often the case. She immediately gave a summary of her yearnings and asked GOG to familiarize itself thoroughly.

Answer: There is no other way to familiarize one's self.

She wishes to travel into the Then-and-there.

Why?

To change it, to make it better.

She's the youngest of the chrononauts, and right now a successful simulation is all that's keeping her from fulfilling her dream. She has no doubts. Nor is she insecure. She simply underestimated the challenge, that's all. It's confusing how much the simulated reality diverges from what she had so meticulously trained herself to expect. Simulations are designed to expose individual weaknesses. Wouldn't it be better to plan less and rely more on her intuition? To react more spontaneously? She closes her eyes and feels a rush of confidence: she'll sail through the next simulation—after that it's

down to business

her eyes are open, she's drowning in the light. Cya takes a deep breath, hot moist air spills into her lungs.

"Well look here, a little hussy."

She hears a calloused voice

"And she's just lollin' about, no spot too small for a little sprawl."

from a scruffy pair of lips

"What smells so good, what tastes so sweet?"

rough hands on her legs, reaching under her skirt ... a kick, a scream, a string of curses. She jumps up, the man clutches his balls, no one notices his body doubled over in pain, she looks around. A sandy square, densely packed, frenzied excitement all around, in anticipation of a hanging—three men with plain names and one person with no name at all. And right at that moment all four are being led out

--too soon, that's too soon—

to the lopsided gallows, known by the genteel folk as "the tree," which jokers have dubbed "the tree of insight." Nothing more than a few planks slapped on top of a few barrels, a makeshift exclamation point on which the governor hoists his voice.

The silence fans out.

The mass begins.

The high mass of justice.

--if this was the past, she'd arrived too late—

She pushes her way through the crowd towards the gallows tree, lashing out with her arms, that was something she had to learn, people from that time and place understand the language of sharp elbows. Meanwhile the condemned men step forward, one after the other, with penitent tread. Hoping for a last-minute pardon, in a rising voice the first man implores the gawkers to always obey parents and forefathers, not to curse, not to drink, not to take the Lord's name in vain—no,

especially not that. The second sprinkles ashes on his head, what on earth compelled him to shun honest labor, if not some

“ravenous appetite, insatiable thirst, and savage lust for property and plunder.”
“I feel the same, old chum,” someone calls out from the crowd. The third man begs for forgiveness for committing unchaste and impure acts, for visiting the bawdyhouse, for all the wanton hours of his life, not only with women but also with ... The hangman whacks the condemned man on the head, kindly stick to the script, you! With heads bowed, all three acknowledge the righteousness of the court, thank the priest for his spiritual comfort, raise their voices in a hymn, their first since childhood days, which spirals upwards. “Enough blather,” someone shouts: “off with their heads!” and a hefty hooting commences. It’s almost time, the fourth man is up, he asks for some wine, hardly a request that can be refused, he raises his glass and his voice, which is conspicuously high-pitched, first a swig then a sentence

“A pox on the king, a pox on all authority!”

a cry like a warning shot across the bow of the goggle-eyed assembly, whose mouths are watering at the spectacle, who can’t wait to see these princes of plunder plummet into the abyss,

clack clack

look at them swing

clack clack

strangled by a final harangue, they’ll wriggle and writhe for fifteen minutes in punitive intoxication, without proper regard for the rhythm of death, until their faces turn purple and their breeches sprout stains ... it’s just about time. What a relief to be a few breaths ahead of a freshly hanged man.

“Easy there, girl, you won’t be missing anything, first time for you, eh?”

The condemned man goes on speaking, loud and clear, the crowd grows restless, who cares about philosophy right before orgasm, but the last words of a doomed man are holy, his verbal legacy demands respect, even if it's all to no avail.

“You cowards,
you pickthanks
eager to lick every boot,
damn you all, you toadies,
you who also bow down to laws
that rich men have created in order
to protect the profits of their rascality.”

It's hard to move any further, the crowd's so packed, a foul-smelling dough that springs back at every forward thrust. She doesn't see anything, only hears the words.

“May you be damned!
You chickenhearted dullards,
you serve a lot of clever scoundrels
who differ from us in one thing alone:
They plunder and prey on the poor
under the pretext of the law
we rob the rich following
rules of our own.”

With her last ounce of strength she struggles to reach the gallows, in front of her a tattooed giant takes a swing at a bald man. Rags go flying. She falls to the ground, spits the sand out of her mouth, pulls in her arms, a kindly vivandière helps her up. A pat on the back followed by a caressive “watch out.”

“We are free people,
with every right
to wage war

against the warmongers
with their hundred ships
and hundred thousand men.”

With effort, with tremendous effort she forces her way to the angry speaker under the gallows tree. She feels out of place, completely alien. No one notices it. And not just because they're all distracted. She's wearing what everyone else is wearing. Only her smell might give her away. Next time a few putrid drops behind her ear beforehand.

“You shriveled fartcatchers.
I have no regrets, none,
except one thing,
that I didn't bleed these
despicable gentlemen
even more.

My conscience tells me more
than any moldy book.
Better to experience death
than endure domination.”

All around her shouts of repudiation, shouts of approval, here and there an honest tongue speaks out from the faceless mass. The crowd seethes with unrest, the governor angrily flutters his fan, his pulse throbbing under his rash-ridden skin. She is tossed this way and that, “Quiet, you worm,” like a dinghy on a stormy sea, “Shame, a bloody disgrace!” Spit flies in her face. “Better alive and a coward than dead and brave.” Hemmed in by two clammy wool jackets she can barely breathe. “Give the poor soul a dram,” The crowd wrinkles its forehead under straw hats, the sacrilege pervades every head, casting echoes in the dank chambers of thought while a skull and crossbones flutters away for all to see.

Enough!

At a curt gesture from the governor, the hangman grabs the defiant scofflaw from behind and stuffs something in his mouth before tying each of the four men's arms behind their backs and laying the nooses on their necks.

--dammit, too far away--

On this broad, sandy square hemmed in by logwood shacks, she is the only person who knows what's going to happen, what none of the gawking carpenters and rope-makers can anticipate. She has read these exhortations so often, could recite them by heart, but how different it is to actually hear the words, in this old-fashioned language, so oddly emotive. With renewed strength she pushes through the crowd. Before the hangman can tie his arms, the nameless agitator tears off his clothes for a final spectacle, and in a trice this villain is naked as the day he was born.

He?

GOG: *There is cause for doubt.*

Because in fact this dreaded ruffian is a woman, that's right, a woman, as attested by her breasts and missing member, a surge goes through the crowd, the rabble thrashes about

"Blessed Saint Catherine"

"Blessed Saint Barbara"

"Blessed Saint Margaret"

For a moment Cya is distracted, everyone around her is stunned, this is the moment, it should happen now. She needs to hurl what she has in her hand at the gallows and the hangman,

--at least that's the plan--

but she's too far away, drumrolls and trumpets ring out overhead, until the crowd quiets down, until the governor clears his throat enough to declare that the death sentence has been pronounced, that justice is famously blind, and that the punishment must be carried out no matter man or woman, nay, not even if the

condemned were a beast or a devil, for such is God's will. Right away something is draped over the doomed woman, no being should be hanged naked. Soon four nooses are looped around four necks, and the execution, which under more normal circumstances would receive more extensive celebration, is carried out in haste.

Three pirates and a piratrix go swinging,

--everything here reeks of the past--

three sets of tattered rags, one gunnysack, the clamor grinds on through the noontime hours. She buries her despair deep inside. As she stares blankly ahead the hanged bodies are taken down. Out of reverence and to protect the corpse from the unashamed vultures eager to snatch a button or a finger the dead woman is laid in a coffin that had been tacked together the previous day for the doctor of the settlement who's so close to dying that he missed the hanging. Souvenirs, souvenirs. The coffin is closed and carted to the cemetery, or more precisely to the tavern next to the church--naturally the Anglican, since the deceased had spoken English and it's only Spanish-speaking pseudo-saints moldering away in the temple of the papists--where they call a stop. The heat is sweltering, the guards are parched, they blow froth off their warm beer, a hearty swig,

--what a fiasco--

she stands by the corner of the tavern, doesn't let the coffin out of her sight, appalled by the death of the woman she intended to save. Reproach punches away at her gut. The minutes evaporate. Before her: cart, coffin, men quaffing away, under the shade of the roof. High overhead, the sun asks no questions. The glare is unbearable. She squints and sees something moving. The coffin lid. Clearly her eyes are playing tricks on her. Must be the shimmering heat.

The lid shifts until it slides off to the side and falls to the ground

--the past makes no sense--

and from the inside of the coffin the hanged woman sits up. The stranger standing by the corner of the tavern cries out, the people around go frantic with fear, the guards let their mugs slip to the ground, men come tumbling outside, every gaze is fixed on the resurrected woman, who sits up in the coffin with bloodshot eyes, and all exhale in witless stupefaction. The tavern keeper, who has already experienced everything at least once in his life, heaves the hanged woman up into his arms, carries her inside, lays her on a bed in one of his guestrooms, and explains to the inquisitive that neither devils nor angels are at work, that it's a completely natural occurrence which he witnessed in his youth, when the drop from the gallows failed to break the neck of a murderess. Consciousness lost, quietus postponed. The woman had woken up at her own wake, he a frightened little boy, she a happy corpse who glanced around, asked after her husband, whereupon someone told her that although she was no longer dead she was also no longer wedded, because hangmen executed divorces along with their clientele, thus they had explained to the boy back then, and thus the grown man now explains to the gathered souls. It often happens, he continues, more or less as the moral of the story, that healthy souls get snatched away, but it's mighty rare for a hanged person to do a Lazarus-come-forth. The excitement is washed down amid cheers and hurrahs, while the inconspicuous woman in the corner,

--landed too late, hesitated too long--

her body bent over and halfway averted, swallows every commentary and conjecture from the stew of reactions, frantically searching for a solution. When a mistrustful officer appears and pounds his interrogation on the counter with the edge of his hand, she withdraws to the quiet of the cemetery next door. The wooden crosses record names but no dates--out of respect, as far too many youths were felled by yellow fever. She pauses in front of the only gravestone. Some incongruity distracts her from her thoughts: it cannot be, and nevertheless there it is, a sentence chiseled on the coarse-grained stone, a single sentence

The past cannot be fathomed

...

As soon as possible!

grating and reedy, a babel of voices. She hears grunting, hooting, fleeting propositions in rapid tempo as she makes her way through the crowd. A boy yammers because he can't see anything. His father promises a seat on his shoulders as soon as the hanging begins. Excited commotion as the pirates are led out. Cya reaches into her deep pockets to reassure herself. She snakes ahead, faster than at her first attempt. Soon she's in the front row, right in front of the gallows, directly below the doomed souls, momentarily distracted by a small cloud snared by one of the nooses. She closes her fingers around the tail of some dead thing and pulls it up. She waits until the condemned woman is naked and the confusion is at its zenith, then lobs the cadaver in a high arc towards the gallows and springs onto the first plank. Her missile follows a steep trajectory and lands at the hangman's feet. He bends over in amazement. A kick to his backside and he topples into the gawking crowd. A smoke grenade explodes. What is this? Has the devil come calling? Screams like cathedral spires, clamor and confusion (*GOG: How about pandemonium?*), fire shooting in all directions, foghorns squawking while the governor barks commands, in vain, because once the artificial billows clear, once the hangman soldiers gawkers have finished coughing, a noose is swinging in the sea breeze, minus the matching head. The condemned woman has disappeared without a trace. Once and for all.

The pirate introduces herself:

"Fly."

Nothing more and nothing less.

“Stop gaping like an idiot, I chose it myself. A person who takes his own name is
free.

And you?”

“I’m here to save you.”

“What? Not so fast. I’ve never laid eyes on you, never sworn any oath together, nor
shared a flask or ever crossed swords with you, so who am I to you?”

“Nothing apart from the riddle of our encounter.”

“You’re a woman, not a preacher, right. Don’t be talking so high and haughty as
though a wasp had just pricked your tongue.”

Fly blusters on for a while, resolute in her suspicion. The explanation Cya had
concocted no longer sounds convincing. Not on this pirogue at the mercy of wind
and waves.

“Are you a gypsy then?” Fly asks abruptly.

“What makes you think that?”

“The way you’re furnished.”

They row on, into nothingness. Cya had assumed that Fly would know the way to
the nearest hideout. Where they’d be taken in by a band of freebooters. Nothing
doing. Because Fly no longer has a haven, her sloop was burned and sunk,
whatever brothers weren’t drowned or hanged are scattered to the winds. New
Providence too many oar strokes away. As is the isle of Providencia.

“And your name?”

“Cya.”

“Cya? Cy-a? cya Cya Cya. Never heard it.”

“You’ve never met me before either.”

That morning they didn’t make much headway. Cya once spotted a frigate that
was beyond Fly’s vision – “What eyes you have!” – whereupon they immediately
steered for the mangroves – “Best place to hide!” – and passed the night amid

whirring and buzzing. Now they're paddling onward, but much of two minds. Fly complains about the uneven strokes. They move ahead slowly in this little boat, more slowly than advisable, hugging the shoreline, bitten and stung (GOG: *Don't scratch!*) by a night that seemed to drag on forever. Cya was worried that time itself might rupture. Fly calmed down a bit and stopped pestering with questions, telling a bit about herself when they paused to rest, how she came into the wide world from the confines of a manor where she cleaned house starting at age twelve and then every day for the next seven years.

"A person doesn't get ahead by cleanin' house, all that does is make stayin' there more tolerable. One year doin' that and I wanted out. Just had to figure how. And with no money, since his lordship never pays, just gives you food and a uniform and a bed, that's wages enough. Now and then a bottle of wine, which I'd sell off for a shilling here, a shilling there. Bought a shirt off a fellow's back and saved the rest, good obedient girl that I was. So I waited, not knowin' what for, you're familiar with the feeling? First fate has to gather some speed. What? You don't believe in fate? What kind of lass are you? One day I was in his lordship's brother's chambers where I found some clothes down in the wardrobe –a cloak and riding breeches, some stockings, even a pair of boots and it all sat nicely, what with me not being the smallest and he not being the tallest, all good. The only thing missin' was a hat, so I took scissors and cut my hair at the witching hour then ran off to the field while it was still dark. There I undressed as a woman and dressed as a man, and at sunup I marched off to the harbor, where any soul who comes along gets signed on as a seaman, that's what the boys told me, no questions asked, no stories checked, by the time somebody finds my old skin in the hedge I'll be long gone over the sea. And that's the way it was. Aye, and now, havin' cheated death and as good as naked, who knows what's next, if I go forward as a man or go back to being a woman."

Cya's attempt to discuss their further course of action gets nipped in the bud. Fly needs a pair of boots, not some plan. Plans are for fartcatchers. "Fate knows the ropes a lot better when it comes to life so let it decide." (GOG: *What is fate? What gets sent our way. By whom? That's the crucial question. That humans are unable to answer ... evidently not ... beyond the speculations that proliferate like warts on the tips of their noses. GOG, where does that come from?*)

In the middle of the afternoon, a ship. Under Spanish flag. No danger to the two of them. Impossible that rumors would have already wafted on board about a pirate tearing his clothes off just before being hanged, about a specter vanishing in smoke, along with a naked being that might be a woman or might not be human, that ... Any chatter of such events would have been kept at harbor volume up to now, on top of that in English, one half of the tale raucously recounted, the other whispered sotto voce. To what Spanish gallantry might these two defenseless women fall victim? Cya and Fly paddle peaceably towards the galleon that looms mightily before them, weapons peering out of every porthole, heavily manned, her keel sharp enough to parcel out the ocean. Calloused hands heave Cya and Fly on board the *Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas*, where they are eye-booty for a hundred famished gazes. Straightaway they're taken to the captain, with a wig like the nest of some exotic bird. He eyes them sullenly. Fly curtsies, her gunnysack garment billows up. Cya follows suit.

"¿Señoras, hablan español?"

Whereupon all her shipwrecked sorrows come gushing forth from Cya, the castaway who no longer dared hope for salvation, least of all from a gentleman of such fine form, to whose custody she commits herself, commending his mercy and grace in the finest Castilian (with the help of GOG). Until the captain commands that both women be taken to his sister, who finds clothing in her trunk to transform Cya into a true lady and Fly into a *señora galante*, a *dama cortesana*. The rescued castaways ask permission to withdraw, such a strain on

the nerves, a little rest, with deepest thanks to our Lord, Fly is quick to add (GOG: *mark those words, Cya, a dose of the divine can't hurt in the Then-and-there.*)

The captain's sister generously relinquishes her cabin.

"How is it you speak Spanish?"

"I've been around."

"What did you say about me?"

"That you're an English orphan child."

"That's true."

"And my maidservant."

"I don't serve any person!"

"Calm down. At the nearest opportunity I'll make it clear that you're really a pirate who was nearly hanged yesterday."

"Stop talking nonsense. What are you after?"

"You'll see."

"And for now?"

"We wait. Your fate is entering its subversive phase."

"Subversive?"

"The explosive result of our meeting."

"You have more of the devil in you than I do."

Bad news. This galleon is not *rumbo a Cuba*, nor is it headed for Cartagena, but homeward bound for Cádiz. That will take a while, and Cya doesn't have that much time. How do we get off this ship? Cya tries to convince Fly they have to quickly disappear (*into thin air*, GOG offers an appropriate expression). What's the hurry? Cya mentions hearing the captain's sister warning her brother that the hands and feet of the maidservant testify to a rather uncivilized life. She fails to add the captain's reply, that he finds the lady's complexion suspiciously dark, in all likelihood Jewish blood, and not just a little. At the very latest once in Cádiz all it

would take would be one slight insinuation and her made-up name and fabricated ancestry would start to stink. Besides, where would they get hold of any money? Cya had made modest provisions, sewed a few coins in the seam of her pants, Spanish pieces of eight, the accepted currency in all ports and on all islands. Money isn't a problem, Fly interrupts, money is always in abundant supply.

"How are we supposed to get away?"

"On one of the tenders, as soon as it's dark."

"Even if the watch doesn't spot us, how far will we get before they sound the alarm?"

"We have to hold back the ship."

"I'm not half as clever as you but I do know one thing: it's mostly the *how* that trips people up."

A blessing in disguise (*GOG: What humans tend to say when wanting to bestow a framework on events*). Dead calm, the galleon bobs up and down, land could still be seen in the distance. The time is used for cleaning. To be sure the ship they're on isn't exactly dirty, but even the cleanest ship is never clean. The deck is smoothed down with sand and stones heavy as bibles. Once everything has been scoured and scrubbed, the work is inspected by the first mate, while the seamen await his verdict, buckets at their feet, brushes in their hands, stock-still but for one who scratches his backside. Once the inspection is completed it's time for entertainment, which the captain promises will be *divertido y gracioso*. *La cucaña* cries out the helmsman, and the sailors throng to the mainmast, where the prize is beckoning from the top. What kind of prize? asks Cya. Smoked ham says one, immortality suggests another. Then the captain speaks, in overwrought sentences. He's had a shoe placed at the top, whereby he points at the mast, which looks naked because the jacob's ladder has been removed, along with the remaining rigging. In the name of His Majesty he announces that the prize consists of a sandal, and not just any sandal, for he has no illusion that the gathered

scapegraces would clamber aloft for a sandal, even one once worn by an Indian princess. This is a singular sandal indeed, with a toe post made of gold. “Yes you heard correctly, it’s made of pure gold, worth more than a whole life’s wages. Whoever manages to take hold of the sandal may keep it.” Just like everyone else, Cya looks up. The mast is so high there’s nothing to be seen. Beyond the captain’s word no one can be certain that the prize exists, so high up, where the main mast pierces the sky.

The men have drawn lots to determine their place in line. The winners—because that’s what they consider themselves, as evidenced by their swollen chests and their grimaces intended to show confidence or even invincibility—stand at the mast and rub their hands with wood shavings. A drumroll. The first man jumps onto the mast, he conquers the first meters with no apparent effort, carried by the force of his jump and general excitement. Soon his progress is halted, his strong, sinewy arms slip off, he gains two feet, loses one, gains one foot, loses two, until the physics of slippage force him back. Exhausted, he collapses onto the deck, the other seamen laugh. A malicious glee spreads across the captain’s face like thickly applied rouge. Cya shakes her head almost imperceptibly.

“That’s difficult.”

“It’s more than difficult, Señorita.”

“How so?”

“Because the mast has been smeared with pork fat.”

“Who’s expected to make it?”

“No one!”

“Unless the men construct a pyramid.”

“You have a sharp mind, dear lady. For theory.”

Cya watches spellbound as one after the other makes the attempt. Some climb quite far, and the progress clearly refreshes their hope even as they sense their

strength beginning to wane... Then hope collapses into the abyss, and the sailor onto the deck. The captain eyes Cya.

“The Señorita has never seen such a thing?”

“No.”

“A means to strengthen morals while raising morale. It’s good if the men feel that the solution to all earthly concerns is so close, almost within reach.”

“And then it turns out that it’s not.”

“But consoling nonetheless.”

“I don’t understand.”

“The men take a diabolical pleasure seeing that none of the others manages to reach the top.”

O fatuous futility! Not one man who is young and healthy and strong passes on the attempt. That the others have failed doesn’t prove a thing. One sailor after the other falls onto the deck, while the sun climbs progressively higher. Cya observes the flight of a mockingbird. As soon as the men have exhausted their collective ambition, the mood shifts. They avoid one another, as if they were unsure who among them was spreading the miasma of misfortune. They stare at their hands. The captain gives a speech.

About the sacred laws.

About disobedient children.

About disobeying orders.

About blasphemous curses.

About punishments that are really blessings.

This captain is not one of those who personally administer the lashings. He presides honorably over the pain.

That isn’t, it can’t be, not in her life, she’s never, how can ... Cya doesn’t dare open her eyes. She hisses into Fly’s ear that they need to do something to free these men, start a mutiny. “You’re crazy,” answers Fly, “I don’t know Spanish, and you are

a woman, they don't understand me and they won't listen to you, we'll just wind up on the gallows." GOG's analysis agrees with Fly's. Cya says nothing. Until the evening meal. "Would you look at that—rice!" she says, cheerfully. The captain, who never misses an opportunity to embark on a conversation with her, replies: "Indeed, dear lady, and are you fond of rice? If so you are in the perfect place, as we have an abundance of rice on board." Cya nods demurely, beams at Fly, who reluctantly clears the dishes with looks that might smash them to pieces. Later, in the fresh air, Fly asks

"What was all that about rice?"

"Means to an end."

"Which end?"

"Sabotage."

"What's that?"

"Applied freedom."

"Why do I have such a hard time understanding you?"

"We have to get into the hold where the rice is stored."

"What for?"

"To make sure the rice gets wet."

"How?"

"By creating a leak."

"You want to punch a hole in the hull of a galleon? At times I have the feeling you've never been on a ship before."

"Just a little leak."

"Little or large it doesn't matter, forget it."

Past the galley, down the ladder, where the seaman on watch is distracted with naïve questions and seductive gestures, while Fly sneaks into the hold where the provisions are stored. As she later reports, at first she only noticed the sacks of rice, as big as she herself and full to bursting, so many sacks—"to keep a band like ours

fed for a whole year, what am I sayin', several years"—and only afterwards did she spot the casks of drinking water.

"Water?" Cya interrupts. "How fortunate!"

"How so fortunate?"

"Because it doesn't take long to punch a holes in a barrel. You should distract him."

"No, you do that, you're better at all that female fiddle-faddle."

"What now?"

"We wait until it happens."

"Until what happens?"

"You'll see."

"How will we know?"

"You'll hear."

Shortly after dawn, the wind has picked up, the galleon is making gentle headway, plenty of time for attending their toilette—a new experience for both. Cya watches Fly who's having fun applying cinnabar when there's a huge bang, the make-up streaks from ear to cheek, powder and pomade are knocked to the ground, followed by the two women. They help each other up and hurry out, the amazement on their faces a garish display of red strokes and white splotches. That it came off so well! Another blast. The sailors think they're under attack. But there's not a ship around, not a foe in sight, and a series of rash and reckless commands only increases the confusion. A jolt pitches Cya onto the quarterdeck, where she stays down.

No breakfast this morning, not even for the captain, who grimly explains that the drinking water leaked out—no one knows how it could happen—and seeped into the provisions, the cook figures that's what caused the rice to swell so much that the sacks burst and blew a hole in the side of the ship. Seawater is gushing into the hold, they'll have to put in to the nearest port for repairs. With each word that

he squeezes from his lips he pulls a hair out from his wig. Repairing galleons in these climes is a precarious undertaking, as no ports are adequately equipped. "I regret to inform you, dear lady, that our homeland will have to wait, but I won't have to forsake the pleasure of your company, with wind this asthmatic it will take another day or two. Until then we'll pump away to stay afloat, all hands on duty, as we are firmly resolved to see our most valuable treasures safely ashore." All this accompanied by vigorous winks below the bird's nest.

GOG sounds the alarm. *Fifteen minutes to go.* Cya had to learn to count down the seconds in silence, precisely for a case such as this, when her time in the Then-and-there was coming to an end. There are only two possibilities of return: either the technically predetermined travel time elapses (*8600 minutes or 516,000 seconds*), or the chrononaut dies. The latter event results in immediate termination of the voyage, but it's not recommended because while a death in the yonderworld has no physical consequences, it is psychologically extremely debilitating. Furthermore, if Cya were simply to disappear, she would only reinforce existing superstitions concerning spirits and specters. She doesn't want Fly to remember her as an apparition. Instead, she wants to depart in a presumably natural manner. So that she can return. Man overboard!

Or in this case a woman. That's the solution. She has to make it seem as though she slipped and fell over the rail. That would be credible. Cya tells Fly she wants to stretch her legs. "Go ahead," says Fly. "Come with me!" "Only if you can get me a dagger." "What for?" "To cut the leering eyes out of any man who pants in my direction." *Ten minutes!* GOG informs. The worst would be if she were to stay in the cabin alone with Fly, who wouldn't be able to say where her mistress had gotten to. Then she'd be suspected, accused, and condemned of murder, and delivered to a Spanish hangman. "Come on now, you can stand it just this once." Cya can't wait any longer. She opens the door, climbs up to the deck, gulps down the fresh

air, hoping Fly will follow. She peers around to make sure all eyes are on her. In that matter men are pretty reliable. Fly volunteers an English ballad. *Five minutes!* says GOG, in a clinical voice. Cya is amazed how much she humanizes GOG in her excitement. She gazes down at the water, at the fleeting white foam. So attractive. How best to go about it? The solution is provided by fate (*no, yes, no, yes it is*) when Fly gives her a friendly poke in the back. Cya unintentionally trips, then very intentionally tilts sideways, her hands grasp at the air, her body is stopped by the rail, she stretches out over the rail, pulls her head down, feels a hand on her foot, a hand that slips off together with her sandal, she topples, she struggles, she lands on her back, pain flashes through her body. It's cooler than she expected. Sinking like a stone, she counts twenty-one the mangrove branches twenty-two Fly's first smile twenty-three their leap into the dugout twenty-four the smell of dried fish twenty-five the severed vines twenty-six the agonizing welts twenty-seven powder on the welts twenty-eight in sumptuous garments twenty-nine ... supposedly there's no greater waste than counting seconds.

One minute!

GOG's last communication. She'll be able to hold her breath that long.

And she thinks to herself:

I didn't die!