

amorphous continuum

by: Vahid Norouzalibeik

"If only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost."

Did you wonder why you picked up this story? What made you do that? Could it have been the title, a recommendation from a friend, or just simple curiosity? Or might you have been guided by an unseen force that seemed to urge you to visit another world? Did you pick this up to read, or did it pick you up? Don't get shocked if the text starts to read you while you proceed. And, of course, all characters appearing in this text are expected to be fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living, dead or to-be-dead, is purely coincidental, the writer assumes.

There are times when history blows past, leaves you straggling and flustered, blinking as if you have grit in your eyes. Adso, a young graduate from college, was born in 1904 in a village near Warsaw. His ambition was to write but he couldn't write yet because he only knew as much as words did. Adso had gone off to Paris to medical school but was quitting college, leaving his studies unfinished. He had been offered a teaching position the same day he turned in his resignation paper. Yes, he was determined not to stay, in a world that did not slow but kept moving. Like the writer of the best parables, Adso was longing to become a messenger of dolls. Among all failures in the world, that of a writer looked most appealing to him.

From the time he was thirteen Adso had been ashamed of his appearance. It was then that he started growing taller than the other boys. He was also awkward as well as tall and he was too thin. By the time he was twenty he was fully convinced that his appearance was really a terrible phenomenon, a faulty painting. That was the main cause for his eagerness to study medicine and gain extraordinary power to manipulate the original because of his strong beliefs in it. He had been too much concerned with form before: "What an artistic failure; a deficient translation," were his words with the poor mirror.

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Magic and art and how all of us long for both were Adso's favorite topics when he conversed with Nora who was a year behind him in high school. She was waiting for him and they had exchanged letters, telegrams and even silence ever since the two had separated. They had last met in a late afternoon near the lake when Adso was insisting that "meaning is part of the universe" and Nora objecting that "meaning and universe are the same." Nora offered an understanding nod – so fake and ridiculous enough to mean otherwise. Adso's voice, suddenly soft and resigned, said: "It's my mess." He was missing all these dialogues and moments with Nora, all the nonsense that now became so vital for him. Then there was the slow uphill walk home. They went into the cafe to have dinner and because of the dark, the crush, the noise, the violent noise, they seemed to be swallowing some of all the noise and darkness with their food. They had both thrown up that night because of a food poisoning or, as Adso names it, 'language-poisoning' as a side effect of their earlier talks.

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"Adso?" Nora said.

"What's wrong? What do you need?"

Nora was sitting close to him, holding a pair of his pants in her lap; she was sewing up a ripped hem.

"Hill, heel, heal and he'll are the same yet different," Nora continued.

"They are not, angel of wonderlands. You are lost," replied Adso. She opened her mouth to speak more but all she did was take in air. The rest of their conversation was passed over in a meaningfully absurd silence. Into the abrupt silence came the chiming of a church bell.

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Nora had married the first time – a ridiculous, immediately ill-fated marriage – mostly to please her parents. In one of her letters to Adso she said she saw marriage as a cage she wanted desperately to stay out of. She described to him in the blackest colours the barbarity of her husband, and ended by declaring that her whole hope depended upon his friendship and amiability. She also mentioned she was reading a romance about a woman who had gotten herself into a romantic triangle. She was almost afraid to find out how it ended. Light reading. She had always liked light reading, about real, involved people. Adso laughed at this. Laughter always killed fear in him.

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Lying there trying to sleep, a little light coming through the curtain from the street, Adso planned things and remembered things and sometimes just listened to sounds and looked at the

light and the dark. "Rain is falling," he observed. "Rain or something." Of course, Adso was trained to weep in private. His eyes were often full of tears like someone who had lived in Dublin in 1905. He thought of himself as a hero who was going back from the dead. He couldn't sleep. Mixed feelings of joy and terror captured him while he was looking again at the carpet that lay there gazing at him. Adso was doomed to tolerate them all.

He was imploring something to shape the formless world he always thought himself to be imprisoned in. Was it a death sentence? He wondered what was beyond the prison-house he felt himself trapped into. "What if they were more creative writers," Adso muttered to himself when thinking of forces writing the chapters of the book of Man's destiny.

At last he gathered the courage to go back to bed, and lay wrapped in his robe and shivering, in the full light, which he refused to turn out. It often happened that at night he got up and started to wander through the sleeping room. Less than two hours later, waking from his sleep, he saw Nora with her typewriter and some shining keys on it in the corner of the room. He waited for this vision to fade. It often happened, now, that his memory failed or that he re-created events and things he remembered and placed them where they did not actually exist. Nora needed his company and Adso needed hers, and you could tell that from her letters. Adso could alleviate her depression, her anxieties and they could start endless conversations from their childhood memories to language, art and philosophy. They could expand the "No ideas but in things" which Nora used to quote as words of conclusion. Adso's last letter to her contained a declaration of love; it was tender,

respectful, with parts copied word for word from a passage of an Italian novel. But Nora did not know anything of the Italian language. "Extremely thrilled would Nora be by my unexpected return," Adso assured himself. He was not sure if he was quite delighted, though. Often the only certainty he was certain of was uncertainty.

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Adso had kept Nora's letters under his pillow, arranged in chronological order and tied together. Nora's last letter to him was still lying on the desk right next to the 19th century Gustav Schwab's poem "The Horseman and Lake Constance." Except for a poem there was no extra word in that letter. It was a recent poem by Williams:

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox
and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast
Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

Adso's restlessness heightened after reading these words again. He couldn't wait to see Nora, talk to her and probably ask her for more clarification. But he soon changed his mind: "Art has that much to do with clarification that life has to do with salvation."

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It was cold. The snow was lying on the branches of trees. The walls of the room were dark; the windows shaded. There was a small scratched green desk with a mirror above it into which Adso looked again and again. He also looked into the three long mirrors on the three doors of the closet. He realized that the image that confronted him was accurate. That was a never-ending range of reflections. Adso had an obligation, a voice and all he needed was a pen. His response to Nora's last letter consisted of a few words – more important for him to be in Latin than in other languages: *stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.*

He was wishing that the schoolmaster had not yet seen his resignation paper.