

NIGHT CROSSING

A Radio Play

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M: I belong to the secret cult of Vladimir Nabokov. This explains my loneliness, perhaps.

I worship the author, his insane genius. I've grown friendly with John Francis Shade and Charles Kinbote. I know the hiding place of the Crown Jewels.

Not many share this passion. Few have heard of Nabokov. Fewer still of me. This is my cross.

The mind's interior is my jail. The days pass monotonous inside the lock; ceaseless pulsing red reminds of time's passage. Gazing out through pupil peepholes at the world, longing for outside. No one knows the plight, no visitors break the tedium. If eyes could be read, the locked man trapped could be seen. Framed in the iris. But he is not. Can not, will not.

A shrivelled homoculus drives my body's machinery. Enthroned and imprisoned in the skullcap, I turn the wheels that move me through the day. People see me passing through: the impassive glide of an unsinkable ship. They cannot see the captain. They see me but they do not.

My guards allow no escape, no means to signal. I cannot flag help. My signal flares detonate in the dark emptiness of my skull, seen by no rescuers. I move the levers for speech. I wonder if I am heard.

I wonder now if I am heard. I am speaking to a microphone, broadcasting my despair, but I hear no response. Words fall into the void. Perhaps the sound is not lost. But the words...

How can I tell who listens? My jailers certainly have taken precautions, ensured no disruption from the loose words my lips dribble. I have no cheering throng before my podium. I am denied even hostile auditors: I face Silence. I speak without certainty. Does one hear me? One is sufficient. But I cannot know.

I listen intently. I am listening now. Pressing my tired ear against the speaking-tube, listening for sounds of the outside filtering into my skullcap cell. I hear nothing.

Nothing.

I wonder.

W: I wonder if anyone sees me.

M: If I hear nothing, am I heard?

W: Truly sees me. Or does their gaze stop at the surface?

M: I am a prisoner in the shell of myself.

W: I look at their eyes, and I wonder.

M: I wonder.

W: I watch their gaze travel across me. I want to cry. Cry out. This is not me!
What you are seeing is not who I am!

M: I sigh and listen on.

W: I am a thinking person. A member of societies of honor. A dancer. An artist.

M: People never see.

W: You see only my body. You can't see my self. I know what's visible. A woman. Attractive/unattractive as you decide, hair/eyes that either match your fancy or do not. You see a figure that pleases you. Or you do not. How can I —

Can you read my mind so plainly on sandal-revealed toes? Can you hear my thoughts by pressing lips to hand? Can you feel the people I love when you embrace me?

You feel straps under fabric.

Why must my frown of concentration be attractive? I am not my seeming self. I am not your leer-seeing idol: I am a member of the cult of Vladimir Nabokov. Kinbote's queen, Shade's daughter. A lonely person, struggling. Alone.

You do not recognize me riding here on the subway. You cannot see the paperback in my purse. You cannot hear the sunset in my mind, the beauty of my ideals. You see a woman beside you, and cease to think.

M: I am condemned alone. I commute invisible beneath the ground. My eye catches no one, no one wonders, no one hears.

W: I dream of my perfect pair, out there lurking. A fellow cult member, a friend of Zembla. It is a dream. At open mic I record my self, and no other.

M/W: *[Together]* The crown jewels are hidden in Taynik.

W: No one else knows.

M: No one ever will.