Henry's second novel, written, like his first, under a pen name, had done well. It had won prizes and was translated into dozens of languages. Henry was invited to book launches and literary festivals around the world; countless schools and book clubs adopted the book; he regularly saw people reading it on planes and trains; Hollywood was set to turn it into a movie; and so on and so forth.

Henry continued to live what was essentially a normal, anonymous life. Writers seldom become public figures. It's their books that rightly hog all the publicity. Readers will easily recognize the cover of a book they've read, but in a café that man over there, is that... is that... well, it's hard to tell—doesn't he have long hair?—oh, he's gone.

When he was recognized, Henry didn't mind. In his experience, the encounter with a reader was a pleasure. After all, they'd read his book and it had an impact, otherwise why would they come up to him? The meeting had an intimate quality; two strangers were coming together, but to discuss an external matter, a faith object that had moved them both, so all barriers fell. This was no place for lies or bombast.
Voices were quiet; bodies leaned close together; selves were revealed. Sometimes personal confessions were made. One reader told Henry he’d read the novel in prison. Another that she’d read it while battling cancer. A father shared that his family had read it aloud in the aftermath of the premature birth and eventual death of their baby. And there were other such encounters. In each case, an element of his novel—a line, a character, an incident, a symbol—had helped them pull through a crisis in their lives. Some of the readers Henry met became quite emotional. This never failed to affect him and he tried his best to respond in a manner that soothed them.

In the more typical encounters, readers simply wanted to express their appreciation and admiration, now and again accompanied by a material token, a present made or bought: a snapshot, a bookmark, a book. They might have a question or two they hoped to ask, timidly, not meaning to bother. They were grateful for whatever answer he might give. They took the book he signed and held it to their chest with both hands. The bolder ones, usually but not always teenagers, sometimes asked if they could have their picture taken with him. Henry would stand, an arm over their shoulders, smiling at the camera.

Readers walked away, their faces lit up because they’d met him, while his was lit up because he’d met them. Henry had written a novel because there was a hole in him that needed filling, a question that needed answering, a patch of canvas that needed painting—that blend of anxiety, curiosity and joy that is at the origin of art—and he had filled the hole, answered the question, splashed colour on the canvas, all done for himself, because he had to. Then complete strangers told him that his book had filled a hole in them, had answered a question, had brought colour to their lives. The comfort of strangers, be it a smile, a pat on the shoulder or a word of praise, is truly a comfort.

As for fame, fame felt like nothing. Fame was not a sensation like love or hunger or loneliness, welling from within and invisible to the outside eye. It was rather entirely external, coming from the minds of others. It existed in the way people looked at him or behaved towards him. In that, being famous was no different from being gay, or Jewish, or from a visible minority: you are who you are, and then people project onto you some notion they have. Henry was essentially unchanged by the success of his novel. He was the same person he had been before, with the same strengths and the same weaknesses. On the rare occasions when he was approached by a reader in a disagreeable way, he had the last weapon of the writer working under a pseudonym: no, he wasn’t XXX, he was just a guy named Henry.

Eventually the business of personally promoting his novel died down, and Henry returned to an existence where he could sit quietly in a room for weeks and months on end. He wrote another book. It involved five years of thinking, researching, writing, and rewriting. The fate of that book is
not immaterial to what happened next to Henry, so it bears being described.

The book Henry wrote was in two parts, and he intended them to be published in what the publishing trade calls a flip book: that is, a book with two sets of distinct pages that are attached to a common spine upside down and back-to-back to each other. If you flick your thumb through a flip book, the pages, halfway along, will appear upside down. A head-to-tails flip of the conjoined book will bring you to its fraternal twin. So the name flip book.

Henry chose this unusual format because he was concerned with how best to present two literary wares that shared the same title, the same theme, the same concern, but not the same method. He'd in fact written two books: one was a novel, while the other was a piece of nonfiction, an essay. He had taken this double approach because he felt he needed every means at his disposal to tackle his chosen subject. But fiction and nonfiction are very rarely published in the same book. That was the hitch. Tradition holds that the two must be kept apart. That is how our knowledge and impressions of life are sorted in bookstores and libraries—separate aisles, separate floors—and that is how publishers prepare their books, imagination in one package, reason in another. It's not how writers write. A novel is not an entirely unreasonable creation, nor is an essay devoid of imagination. Nor is it how people live. People don't so rigorously separate the imaginative from the rational in their thinking and in their actions. There are truths and there are lies—

these are the transcendent categories, in books as in life. The useful division is between the fiction and nonfiction that speaks the truth and the fiction and nonfiction that utters lies.

Still, the custom, a set way of thinking, posed a problem, Henry realized. If his novel and essay were published separately, as two books, their complementarity would not be so evident and their synergy would likely be lost. They had to be published together. But in what order? The idea of placing the essay before the novel struck Henry as unacceptable. Fiction, being closer to the full experience of life, should take precedence over nonfiction. Stories—individual stories, family stories, national stories—are what stitch together the disparate elements of human existence into a coherent whole. We are story animals. It would not be fitting to place such a grand expression of our being behind a more limited act of exploratory reasoning. But behind serious nonfiction lies the same fact and preoccupation as behind fiction—of being human and what it means—so why should the essay be slotted as an afterword?

Regardless of meritorious status, if novel and essay were published in a sequence in one book, whichever came first would inevitably cast into shadow whichever came second.

Their similarities called for novel and essay to be published together; respect for the rights of each, separately. Hence, after much thinking on Henry's part, the choice of the flip book.

Once he had settled on this format, new advantages leapt
to his mind. The event at the heart of his book was, and still is, profoundly distressing—threw the world upside down, it might be said—so how fitting that the book itself should always be half upside down. Furthermore, if it was published as a flip book, the reader would have to choose in which order to read it. Readers inclined to seek help and reassurance in reason would perhaps read the essay first. Those more comfortable with the more directly emotional approach of fiction might rather start with the novel. Either way, the choice would be the reader’s, and empowerment, the possibility of choice, when dealing with upsetting matters, is a good thing. Lastly, there was the detail that a flip book has two front covers. Henry saw more to wraparound jacket art than just added aesthetics. A flip book is a book with two front doors, but no exit. Its form embodies the notion that the matter discussed within has no resolution, no back cover that can be neatly, patently closed on it. Rather, the matter is never finished with; always the reader is brought to a central page where, because the text now appears upside down, the reader is made to understand that he or she has not understood, that he or she cannot fully understand, but must think again in a different way and start all over. With this in mind, Henry thought that the two books should end on the same page, with only a blank space between the topsy-turvy texts. Perhaps there could be a simple drawing in that no-man’s-land between fiction and nonfiction.

To make things confusing, the term _flip book_ also applies to a novelty item, a small book with a series of slightly changed images or photographs on succeeding pages; when the pages are flicked through quickly, the illusion of animation is created, of a horse galloping and jumping, for example. Later on, Henry had plenty of time to dwell on what cartoon story his flip book would tell if it had been this other type: it would be of a man confidently walking, head high, until he trips and stumbles and falls in a most spectacular fashion.

It should be mentioned, because it is central to the difficulties Henry encountered, to his tripping and stumbling and falling, that his flip book concerned the murder of millions of civilian Jews—men, women, children—by the Nazis and their many willing collaborators in Europe last century, that horrific and protracted outbreak of Jew-hatred that is widely known, by an odd convention that has appropriated a religious term, as the Holocaust. Specifically, Henry’s double book was about the ways in which that event was represented in stories. Henry had noticed over years of reading books and watching movies how little actual _fiction_ there was about the Holocaust. The take on the event was nearly always historical, factual, documentary, anecdotal, testimonial, literal. The archetypal document on the event was the survivor’s memoir, Primo Levi’s _If This Is a Man_, for instance. Whereas war—to take another cataclysmic human event—was constantly being turned into something else. War was forever being trivialized, that is, made less than it truly is. Modern wars have killed tens of millions of people
and devastated entire countries, yet representations that convey the real nature of war have to jostle to be seen, heard and read amidst the war thrillers, the war comedies, the war romances, the war science fictions, the war propaganda. Yet who thinks of "trivialization" and "war" in the same breath? Has any veterans' group ever made the complaint? No, because that's just how we talk about war, in many ways and for many purposes. With these diverse representations, we come to understand what war means to us.

No such poetic licence was taken with—or given to—the Holocaust. That terrifying event was overwhelmingly represented by a single school: historical realism. The story, always the same story, was always framed by the same dates, set in the same places, featuring the same cast of characters. There were some exceptions. Henry could think of *Maus*, by the American graphic artist Art Spiegelman. David Grossman's *See Under: Love* also took a different approach. But even with these, the peculiar gravity of the event pulled the reader back to the original and literal historical facts. If a story started later or elsewhere, the reader was inevitably marched back in time and across borders to 1948 and to Poland, like the protagonist in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*. And so Henry came to wonder: why this suspicion of the imagination, why the resistance to artful metaphor? A work of art works because it is true, not because it is real. Was there not a danger to representing the Holocaust in a way always beholden to factuality? Surely, amidst the texts that related what happened, those vital and necessary diaries, memoirs and histories, there was a spot for the imagination's commentary. Other events in history, including horrifying ones, had been treated by artists, and for the greater good. To take just three well-known instances of artful witness: Orwell with *Animal Farm*, Camus with *The Plague*, Picasso with *Guernica*. In each case the artist had taken a vast, sprawling tragedy, had found its heart, and had represented it in a nonliteral and compact way. The unwieldy encumbrance of history was reduced and packed into a suitcase. Art as suitcase, light, portable, essential—was such a treatment not possible, indeed, was it not necessary, with the greatest tragedy of Europe's Jews?

To exemplify and argue this supplementary way of thinking about the Holocaust, Henry had written his novel and essay. Five years of hard work it had taken him. After he had finished, the dual manuscript was circulated among his various publishers. That's when he was invited to a lunch. Remember the man in the flip book who trips and stumbles and falls. Henry was flown over the Atlantic just for this lunch. It took place in London one spring during the London Book Fair. Henry's editors, four of them, had invited a historian and a bookseller to join them, which Henry took as a sign of double approval, theoretical and commercial. He didn't see at all what was coming: The restaurant was posh, Art Deco in style. Their table, along its two long sides, was gracefully curved, giving it the shape of an eye. A matching curved bench was set into the wall on one side of it. "Why don't you sit there?" one of his editors said, pointing to the
middle of the bench. Yes, Henry thought, where else would an author with a new book sit but there, like a bride and groom at the head table. An editor settled on either side of him. Facing them, on four chairs along the opposite curved edge of the table, sat an editor on each side of the historian and the bookseller. Despite the formal setting, it was a cozy arrangement. The waiter brought over the menus and explained the fancy specials of the day. Henry was in high spirits. He thought they were a wedding party.

In fact, they were a firing squad.

In the normal course of things, editors flatter writers into seeing everything that’s wrong with their book. Every compliment hides a criticism. It’s a diplomatic way to proceed, meant to improve a book without crushing its author’s spirit. And so it started, after they had ordered their lunch and small-talked a little, the advance of the complimentary adjectives disguising imperative suggestions, like Birnam Wood moving on Dunsinane Castle. But Henry was a clueless Macbeth. He just wasn’t hearing what they were saying. He laughed and waved their increasingly pointed questions aside. He told them, “You’re reacting exactly the way readers will—with questions, comments and objections. And that’s how it should be. A book is a part of speech. At the heart of mine is an incredibly upsetting event that can survive only in dialogue. So let’s talk!”

It was the bookseller, an American bookseller in London, plain-spoken and nasal-sounding, who finally grabbed Henry by the lapels, so to speak, and forced his point upon him clearly and roughly. “Essays are a drag,” he said, speaking. Henry supposed, of his retail experience on both sides of the Atlantic but perhaps also of his critical experience reading them. “Especially if you’re taking on a sacred cow like the Holocaust. Every few seasons a Holocaust book comes out that bangs on the heart chords”—that’s how the bookseller put it—“and goes planetary, but for every one of those there are crates of others that end up being pulped. And with your approach—and I don’t just mean the flip book thing—I also mean this idea you have where we’re supposed to throw our whole imagination at the Holocaust—Holocaust westerns, Holocaust science fictions, Holocaust Jamaican bobsled team comedies—I mean, where is this going? And then you also want to do it as a *flip book*, which is normally just a gimmick, in the same section as the joke books, and, I don’t know, it strikes me that your flip book might just be one big flop book. Flip-flop, flip-flop, flip-flop,” he finished, as the first course arrived, an array of tiny dishes with morsels of over-the-top delicacies on them.

“I hear you,” Henry replied after blinking a few times and swallowing what felt like a large goldfish, “but we can’t always be taking the same approach. Shouldn’t the very newness of it, both in the content and in the form, in a *serious* book, attract attention? Won’t it be a selling point?”

“Where do you see the book being displayed?” asked the bookseller, as he chewed on his food with an open mouth. “In the fiction section or the nonfiction?”

“Ideally both,” Henry replied.
"Not going to happen. Too confusing. Do you know how much stock a bookstore handles? And if we have to worry about turning the book every which way so the right cover is facing out, we'll never see the end of it. And where are you going to put the bar code? It always goes on the back cover. Where do you put a bar code on a book with two front covers?"

"I don't know," said Henry. "On the spine."

"Too narrow."

"On the inside flap."

"Cashiers can't be opening the book up, looking for it everywhere. And what if the book is plastic-wrapped?"

"On a little wraparound band."

"They tear and fall off. And then you don't have a bar code at all—a nightmare."

"I don't know then. I wrote my book on the Holocaust without worrying about where the fucking bar code would go."

"Just trying to help you sell your book," said the bookseller, rolling his eyes.

"What I think Jeff is pointing out," interrupted one of Henry's editors, coming to the rescue, "is that there are certain problems, practical and conceptual, with the book that need to be addressed. For your own good," she emphasized.

Henry tore a piece of bread and furiously swiped at a tapenade made of olives that came from an exclusive grove of six trees in a remote corner of Sicily. He noticed the asparagus. The waiter had expounded at great length on the sauce, its culinary sophistication, the refinement of its ingredients, on and on. By the sounds of it, one lick of the stuff and you had as good as earned a Ph.D. Henry stabbed an asparagus, wiped it in the pinkish drizzle and stuffed it in his mouth. He was too distracted to taste anything but green mushiness.

"Let's take a different approach," the historian suggested. He had a friendly face and a soothing voice. He tilted his head and peered at Henry over his glasses. "What's your book about?" he asked.

Henry was thrown into confusion. An obvious question, perhaps, but not one that he could answer so easily. That's why people write books, after all, to give full answers to short questions. And the bookseller had rankled him. Henry took a deep breath and collected himself. He tried his best with the historian's question. But his answer came out in stammers and meanders. "My book is about representations of the Holocaust. The event is gone, we are left with stories about it. My book is a new choice of stories. With a historical event, we not only have to bear witness, that is, tell what happened and address the needs of ghosts. We also have to interpret and conclude, so that the needs of people today, the children of ghosts, can be addressed. In addition to the knowledge of history, we need the understanding of art. Stories identify, unify, give meaning to. Just as music is noise that makes sense, a painting is colour that makes sense, so a story is life that makes sense."

"Yes, yes, perhaps," the historian said, brushing Henry's
words aside, staring at him harder, “but what’s your book about?”

A buzz of nervousness shook Henry on the inside. He tried another tack, to do with the idea behind the flip book. “Fiction and nonfiction are not so easily divided. Fiction may not be real, but it’s true; it goes beyond the garland of facts to get to emotional and psychological truths. As for nonfiction, for history, it may be real, but its truth is slippery, hard to access, with no fixed meaning bolted to it. If history doesn’t become story, it dies to everyone except the historian. Art is the suitcase of history, carrying the essentials. Art is the life buoy of history. Art is seed, art is memory, art is vaccine.” Henry could sense that the historian was about to interrupt him and he hurried along incoherently.

“With the Holocaust, we have a tree with massive historical roots and only tiny, scattered fictional fruit. But it’s the fruit that holds the seed! It’s the fruit that people pick. If there is no fruit, the tree will be forgotten. Each of us is like a flip book,” Henry pursued, though it didn’t follow from what he was just saying. “Each one of us is a mixture of fact and fiction, a weaving of tales set in our real bodies. Isn’t that so?”

“I get all that,” the historian said with a trace of impatience. “But once again, what is your book about?”

To that third iteration of the question, Henry had no answer. Perhaps he didn’t know what his book was about. Perhaps that was the problem with it. His chest rose as he breathed in heavily and sighed. He stared at the white tablecloth, red-faced and at a loss for words.

An editor broke the awkward silence. “Dave has a point,” he said. “There needs to be a tighter focus in both the novel and the essay. This book you’ve written is tremendously powerful, a remarkable achievement, we all agree on that, but as it stands now, the novel lacks drive and the essay lacks unity.”

The waiter arrived, Henry’s constant saviour during that catastrophic lunch, bringing a new dish, the pretext for a change of topic, forced gaiety and grim eating, until another editor, or the bookseller, or the historian, felt the professional urge—and perhaps the personal one—to take up his or her rifle, take aim at Henry, and shoot again. That was the whole meal, a blundering lunch from the frivolity of over-refined food to the dismemberment of his book, Henry quibbling and squabbling, they reassuring and wrenching, to and fro, back and forth, until there was no more food to eat and nothing left to say. It all came out, wrapped in the kinder words: the novel was tedious, the plot feeble, the characters unconvincing, their fate uninteresting, the point lost; the essay was flimsy, lacking in substance, poorly argued, poorly written. The idea of the flip book was an annoying distraction, besides being commercial suicide. The whole was a complete, unpublishable failure.

When at last lunch ended and he was released, Henry walked out in a daze. Only his legs seemed to be working. They set him off in an unknown direction. After a few minutes he came upon a park. Henry was surprised at what he found there. In Canada, where Henry was from, a park is
usually a sanctuary of trees. This London park was not like that. It was an expanse of the loveliest grass, a symphony of green. There were some trees, but they stood very tall with high branches, as if they were mindful of not getting in the way of the unbridled grass. A round pond gleamed in the centre of the park. The weather was warm and sunny and people were out in great numbers. As he wandered about the park, Henry awoke to what had just happened to him. Five years of work had been consigned to oblivion. His mind, stunned into silence, sputtered to life. *I should have said this... I should have said that... Who the fuck was he...? How dare she...?*—so the shouting match in his head went, a full-blown anger fantasy. Henry tried to call his wife, Sarah, in Canada, but she was at work, her cell phone off. He left a rambling, heartbroken message on their voice mail.

A moment came when the tense muscles twitching in Henry's body and the emotions seething inside him came together and spoke in unison: with his fists clenched in the air, he lifted a foot and stamped the ground with all his might, at the same time letting out a choked-up sound from his throat. He hadn't consciously decided to act out like this. It just happened, a snap expression of hurt, fury and frustration. He was near a tree, the soil around it soft and bare, and the impact of his foot-stamping was thunderous, certainly to him, and a couple lying nearby turned his way because of it. Henry stood, amazed. The ground had trembled. He had felt the reverberations. The earth itself had heard him, he thought. He looked up at the tree. It was a giant

tree, a galleon with its sails in full rig, an art museum with its entire collection on display, a mosque with a thousand worshippers praising God. He gazed at it for several minutes. A tree had never before been so soothing to him. As he admired it, he could feel the anger and distress draining from him.

Henry looked at the people around him. Lone individuals, couples, families with children, groups; of every race and ethnicity; reading, sleeping, chatting, jogging, playing, walking their dogs—people varied yet at peace with one another. A peacetime park on a sunny day. What need was there to talk about the Holocaust here? If he found some Jews amidst this peaceable gaggle, would they care to have him gore their beautiful day with talk of genocide? Would *anyone* care to have a stranger come up to them whispering, *“Hitlerauschwitzsixmillionincandescentsoulsmygodmygodmygod”*? And hell, Henry wasn’t even Jewish, so why didn’t he mind his own business? Everything is context, and clearly the context was wrong. Why write a novel about the Holocaust today? The matter is settled. Primo Levi, Anne Frank and all the others have done it well and for all time. “Let go, let go, let go,” Henry intoned. A young man in sandals walked by. *Flip-flop, flip-flop, flip-flop* went his feet, like the bookseller’s damning conclusion. “Let go, let go, let go,” Henry intoned.

After an hour or so, he made his way to the edge of the park. A sign informed him he was in Hyde Park. The irony struck him. He had entered the park like Mr. Hyde of
Stevenson’s tale, deformed by anger, wilfulness and resentment, but he was leaving it more like the good Dr. Jekyll.

Henry realized then what answer he should have given the historian. His flip book was about having his soul ripped out and with it, attached, his tongue. Wasn’t that what every Holocaust book was about, aphasia? Henry remembered a statistic: fewer than two percent of Holocaust survivors ever write about or testify to their ordeal. Thus the typical approach of those who do speak about it, so precise and factual, like a stroke victim who’s learning how to speak again and who starts with the simplest, clearest syllables. For his part, Henry now joined the vast majority of those who had been shut up by the Holocaust. His flip book was about losing his voice.

And so Henry left Hyde Park no longer a writer. He stopped writing; the urge left him. Was this a case of writer’s block? He argued later with Sarah that it wasn’t, since a book had been written—two, in fact. It was more accurate to call it writer’s abandonment. Henry simply gave up. But if he did not write, he would at least live. A stroll in a London park and an encounter with a beautiful tree at least taught him that useful lesson: if you are pitched into misery, remember that your days on this earth are counted and you might as well make the best of those you have left.

Henry returned to Canada and convinced Sarah they needed a break and a change of scenery. The lure of adventure won her over. In short order, she quit her job, they filled out papers, packed up their things, and moved abroad. They settled in one of those great cities of the world that is a world unto itself, a storied metropolis where all kinds of people find themselves and lose themselves. Perhaps it was New York. Perhaps it was Paris. Perhaps it was Berlin. To that city Henry and Sarah moved because they wanted to live to its pulse for a time. Sarah, who was a nurse, got a work visa and found employment in an addictions clinic. Henry, a resident alien, a rightless ghost, went about filling the parts of his life that were now empty of writing.

He took music lessons, reviving memories (but, alas, few skills) of playing as a teenager. He first tried his hand at the bassoon, but the double reed and the crazy arrangement of the finger holes defeated him. He returned to the clarinet, whose emotional range, from the riotous to the stately, he had not suspected when he was younger. He found a good teacher, an older gentleman, patient, intuitive and funny. The man told Henry that the only native talent needed to play music well was joy. Once, when Henry was labouring on Mozart’s clarinet concerto, the teacher interrupted him and said, “Where’s the lightness? You’ve turned Mozart into a heavy, black ox and you’re ploughing a field with him.” With that, he picked up his own clarinet and produced a burst of music that was so loud, clear and brilliant, a wild storm of gyring notes, that Henry was stunned. It was an aural version of Marc Chagall, with goats, brides, grooms and horses swirling about in a multicoloured sky, a world
without gravity. Then the teacher stopped playing, and the sudden emptiness in the room nearly sucked Henry forward. He looked at his own clarinet. The teacher must have seen the expression on Henry’s face. “Don’t worry,” he said. “It’s just a question of practice. You’ll be there in no time.” Henry got back behind his black ox and plodded on. His teacher smiled and closed his eyes and nodded, muttering, “That’s nice, that’s nice,” as if Henry’s ox had taken flight.

Again capitalizing on buried youthful knowledge, Henry signed up for Spanish lessons. His mother tongue was French, and the good fortunes of his childhood, his being the son of roving Canadian foreign service officers, had led him to learn English and German with complete fluency. Only Spanish had not fully fit into his brain in those young learning years. He had lived in Costa Rica as a child for three years, but had attended an English school. On the streets of San José, he learned the outer form of Spanish, its colour, but not the canvas that supported it. As a result, his pronunciation and idioms were good, while his grammatical knowledge was not. He sought to remedy this lack by taking lessons with a dreamy Spanish graduate student who was doing a Ph.D. in history.

That Henry had chosen to write in English raised a number of eyebrows in his native land. It was, he explained, un hasard. If you go to school in English and in German, you learn to think in English and in German, and then you naturally start to write in English and in German. His first creative scribblings—highly personal efforts never meant to see the light of publication—had been in German, he told bemused journalists. Its crunchy pronunciation, clear phonetic spelling, secret-code grammar and architectural syntax endlessly pleased him. But as he grew more ambitious, he explained, it became patently absurd for a Canadian writer to be writing in German. Das ist doch verrückt! He switched to English. Colonialism is a terrible bane for a people upon whom it is imposed, but a blessing for a language. English’s drive to exploit the new and the alien, its zeal in robbing words from other languages, its incapacity to feel qualms over the matter, its museum-size over-abundance of vocabulary, its shoulder-shrug approach to spelling, its don’t-worry-be-happy concern for grammar—the result was a language whose colour and wealth Henry loved. In his entirely personal experience of them, English was jazz music, German was classical music, French was ecclesiastical music, and Spanish was the music from the streets. Which is to say, stab his heart and it would bleed French, slice his brain open and its convolutions would be lined with English and German, and touch his hands and they would feel Spanish. But all this, as an aside.

Henry also joined a respected amateur theatre group. Under an inspired director, the group took its endeavours very seriously. Those were some of Henry’s fondest memories of the city, those weeknight rehearsals in which he and his fellow amateur actors slowly brought Pinter and Ibsen and Pirandello and Soyinka to life, leaving their lives at the door and becoming, as best they could, someone else on-
stage. The fraternity among these dedicated thespians was priceless, and the reaching for emotional heights and depths, for experiences that were vicarious but powerful, was highly instructive in the way great art can be. With each play Henry felt he had lived an extra life, with its attendant portion of wisdom and folly.

After their move, it happened on a few occasions that Henry awoke in the middle of the night, tiptoed out of the bedroom to the computer, and summoned his book onto the screen to wrestle with it. He shortened the essay by half. He hunted down rogue adjectives and adverbs in the novel. He reworked some scenes and sentences over and over. But no matter what he tried, it was still the same doubly flawed book. In a few months, the fruitless urge to revise and resuscitate went away entirely. He even stopped replying to emails from his agent and editors. Sarah suggested gently that he was perhaps depressed. She encouraged him to keep busy. And though this is jumping ahead—and telling an entirely different story—Sarah in time became pregnant and brought into Henry’s life a first child, a baby boy, Theo. Beholding him, astounded as he’d never been before, Henry decided that his son would become his pen and by force of being a good, loving father he would write a beautiful life story with him. If Theo was the only pen Henry ever wielded again, so be it.

Still, art is rooted in joy, as his music teacher had pointed out. It was hard after rehearsing a play, or practicing a piece of music, or visiting a museum, or finishing a good book, for Henry not to ache for the access he once had to creative joy.

To keep himself busy, Henry involved himself in a last venture, one that took up more of his daylight hours and in a conventionally more serious way than any other, and this was his work in a café. Actually, it was a chocólería, which is what caught his attention in the first place. Coffee was also served, and it was good coffee too, but the Chocolate Road was primarily a fair-trade cocoa cooperative that produced and retailed chocolate in all its forms, from white to milk to dark, in various degrees of purity and in a wide range of flavours, in bars, boxes and hot-chocolate powders, in addition to cocoa powder and chips for baking. Their name-brand produce came from farm cooperatives in the Dominican Republic, Peru, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Panama and was sold in an increasing number of health food stores and supermarkets. They were a small but growing business, and their chocólería, which was half chocolate mini-market, half hot-chocolate establishment, was their headquarters. The place had a nice feel to it, with an embossed tin ceiling, rotating art exhibits, good, usually Latin music and a southerly exposure so it was often lit up by sunlight. As it wasn’t far from where Henry and Sarah lived, Henry often went there to read his paper and sip on rich hot chocolate.

One day he saw a sign posted in a window: HELP WANTED. On impulse, he inquired. Henry didn’t need a job, in fact he couldn’t work legally, but he liked the people at The Chocolate Road and he admired their principles. He applied,
they were intrigued, they agreed that he would be paid in shares, and, lo, Henry became a small shareholder in a chocolate concern and a part-time waiter and general helper. Sarah was amused and puzzled; she chalked it up to Henry doing research. Quickly his self-consciousness at serving strangers vanished. In fact, he enjoyed being a waiter. It was a moderate form of exercise and it allowed him to observe briefly but constantly the behaviour and dynamics of people, whether solitary drinkers, couples, families, or groups of friends. His hours at The Chocolate Road went by pleasantly.

To complete the picture, Sarah and he adopted a small puppy and a kitten from an animal shelter, neither of them remotely purebred, just bright-eyed and vigorous. The first they named Erasmus, the second Mendelssohn. Henry was curious to see how they would get along. Erasmus proved rambunctious, but easy to train. He often came with Henry on errands. Mendelssohn, a lovely black feline, was a more retiring creature. If strangers visited, she disappeared under the sofa.

That was the life Henry and Sarah constructed for themselves in that great city. They thought they would live there for a year or so, an extended holiday, but they weren’t inclined to leave after the first year; nor after the second, and then they stopped thinking about when exactly they would leave.

During their time in the city, Henry’s earlier existence as a writer was not entirely forgotten. Reminders gently knocked on the door of his consciousness in the form of letters. By the most roundabout routes, often months after their writers had posted them, he continued to receive letters from readers. A reader in Poland, for example, would write to him care of his publisher in Cracow. After a time, his Polish publisher would forward it to his Canadian literary agent, who would send it on to him. Or a Korean reader would write to him at the address of his British publisher, who would re-expedite the letter, and so on.

Letters came from Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and all other corners of the former British empire, but also from across Europe and Asia, their writers of all ages and stations, the English varying from the confidently refined to the sublimely butchered. Some of those who wrote to him must have felt they were writing a message in a bottle and tossing it into the ocean. But their efforts were not in vain. The solicitous winds and currents of the publishing world steadily brought the letters to Henry.

Some would more accurately be described as packages. They might contain an introductory letter from a high school teacher and a series of earnest essays written by her students about his novel. Or they might contain a photograph or an article that the sender thought might interest Henry. But more typically they were proper letters, typed or handwritten. The typed ones, composed on a computer, were generally more elaborate and discursive, small essays
sometimes, while the handwritten ones tended to be shorter and more personal. Henry preferred the latter. He liked the personal art of each writer’s handwriting, some nearly robotic in appearance and ultra-legible, others jagged scralls that nearly defied comprehension. It always astonished him how twenty-six highly conventionalized glyphs could find such varied expression once a living hand set to write them down. Was it Gertrude Stein who said that language was alphabet in disorder? Page layout was another source of interest in handwritten letters, sometimes of concern, as in the cases where the lines of prose were spread over the page like vegetation on ground of uneven quality, spaced out here but bunched up there, often towards the bottom of a page, where the writer was running out of room but still needed to say the essential, hence the sentences that crawled up the side, like the roots of a plant in a too-small pot. Doodles and small drawings were regularly included, art traded for art, his for theirs. Many letters contained questions. A reader had a question, or two, or three.

Henry answered each and every letter. He had a printer make a folded, invitation-size card for him. The front displayed colourful elements from the jacket artwork of various international editions of his book. This card presented two advantages. It was a personal token that the reader might appreciate, and it limited how much Henry could write to a maximum of three small pages: the two inside faces of the card and its back. That allowed for replies long enough to please his readers and short enough to please him.

Why did he reply to so many letters? Because though his novel belonged to his past, it was fresh to every reader who read it and that freshness came through in their letters. To remain silent in the face of kindness and enthusiasm would have been rude. Worse: it would have been thankless. It was gratitude, then, that got Henry into the habit every week of taking the time here and there to sit down and write back to readers. He found he could produce five or so replies without strain wherever he happened to be, in a café or during a lull at The Chocolate Road or at rehearsals.

Henry ignored personal queries, except if the writer was quite young, but he willingly discussed his novel. The questions or comments were often the same. Soon he could reel off standard responses, with easy variations to fit the tone or angle of a particular letter. Henry’s novel featured wild animals, and many letters came down to questions about them, about real animals and figurative animals. Readers assumed he had training in zoology, or at the very least a lifelong passion for the natural world. He replied that he had the same broad affection for nature that any sensitive inhabitant of this planet has, but no outstanding interest in animals, no abiding love for them that might be called a character trait. The use of animals in his novel, he explained, was for reasons of craft rather than of sentiment. Speaking before his tribe, naked, he was only human and therefore possibly—likely—surely—a liar. But dressed in furs and feathers, he became a shaman and spoke a greater truth. We are cynical about our own species, but less so about animals, especially
wild ones. We might not shelter them from habitat destruction, but we do tend to shelter them from excessive irony.

Henry often used the same lighthearted example in his replies: if I tell a story about a dentist from Bavaria or Saskatchewan, I have to deal with readers’ notions about dentists and people from Bavaria or Saskatchewan, those preconceptions and stereotypes that lock people and stories into small boxes. But if it’s a *rhinoceros* from Bavaria or Saskatchewan who is the dentist, then it’s an entirely different matter. The reader pays closer attention, because he or she has no preconceptions about rhinoceros dentists—from Bavaria or anywhere else. The reader’s disbelief begins to lift, like a stage curtain. Now the story can unfold more easily. There’s nothing like the unimaginable to make people believe.

Letters came from the postal ether and his replies returned to the postal ether. It was rare that Henry’s satchel didn’t contain his little author kit: cards, stamps, envelopes and a batch of letters from readers.

And then one winter day Henry received a large envelope from not so far away. It came from within the city, he saw, looking at the return address, but it had travelled the usual circuitous route, in this case via his British publisher. It was clearly from a reader, and one who had much to say, he noted with a sigh, as he felt the thickness of the envelope. He added it to his pile of mail.

He opened it a week later at home. The letter was mostly a photocopy of a short story by Gustave Flaubert, “The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator”. Henry had never heard of it, had only ever read Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. He was perplexed. He flipped through the story. It was longish and several sections were highlighted in bright yellow. He put it down, wearied at the effort he was being asked to make for a stranger. Perhaps this would be one reader whose letter he would ignore. But while making himself a coffee, he changed his mind. The question niggled at him: why would a reader send him a short story by a nineteenth-century French writer? He went to the study to look up the word *hospitator*. He found it in the full Oxford, the small print bulging under the magnifying glass: “one who receives or entertains hospitably.” Well, if he was being invited . . . He sat down at the kitchen table and picked up the story again.

It started:

Julian’s father and mother lived in a castle on the side of a hill in the middle of the woods.

The four towers at the corners of the castle had pointed roofs with lead cladding, and the foundations of the walls stood on rock outcroppings that fell away steeply to the bottom of the moat.

The stones of the courtyard were as clean as the paving stones in a church. Gargoyles in the form of dragons with their heads facing downward spat the rainwater into the cistern . . .
Within... tapestries in the bedchambers gave
protection from the cold... cupboards were bursting with
linens... cellars piled high with casks of wine...

So, a fable set during the Middle Ages. Henry pulled off
the paper clip that held the story together and looked at the
next page. Here was the lord and master:

He would stride through his castle, always wrapped in a
cloak of fox pelts, dispensing justice to his vassals...

And here the mother, with the answer to her prayers:

... very fair of skin... After many prayers, she bore a
son.

... great rejoicing... a feast that lasted three days and
four nights...

He read on:

One night she awoke and saw in a ray of moonlight...
the shadowy figure of an old man... a hermit... without
moving his lips:

“Oh, mother, rejoice, for your son will be a saint!”

Farther down the page, the father also hears a predic-
tion:

... was outside the postern gate... suddenly a beggar
appeared before him... a Gypsy... stammered these
incoherent words:

“Oh! Oh! Your son!... Much blood!... Much glory!... Always blessed by fortune! The family of an emperor.”

The son, Julian:

... looked like the baby Jesus. He cut his teeth without
ever crying.

... his mother taught him to sing. To teach him
courage, his father lifted him up onto a big horse...

A learned old monk taught him the Holy Scriptures...

... the lord of the castle gave feasts for his old
companions in arms... they would share memories of the
wars they had fought... the terrible wounds... Julian
cried out with delight as he listened to them... his father
had no doubt that he would one day be a conqueror. But...
when he came out after the Angelus... the bowing
paupers... would reach into his purse with such
modesty... his mother truly expected he would one
day be an archbishop.

... in the chapel... no matter how long the service...
on his knees on his prie-dieu... hands joined in prayer.

Henry then came upon an indication of his reader’s intent
in sending him the story, some paragraphs the reader had
neatly and precisely highlighted in yellow concerning young Julian:

One day during mass, he looked up and noticed a little white mouse come out of a hole in the wall. It scurried along the first step to the altar, ran back and forth two or three times, then fled the way it had come. The following Sunday, he was troubled by the thought that he might see the mouse again. It did come back, and every Sunday he would wait for it and would become irritated, until he came to hate it and resolved to rid himself of it.

Having closed the door and sprinkled crumbs of cake on the stairs, he stationed himself in front of the hole with a stick in his hand.

After a very long time, a pink muzzle appeared, followed by the rest of the mouse. He hit it lightly with his stick and was astounded to see the small body lying there motionless. There was a drop of blood on the stone floor. He quickly wiped it up with his sleeve and threw the mouse outside, and said nothing to anyone.

The next page contained another section that was brought to his attention:

One morning as he was walking back along the rampart, he saw a fat pigeon basking in the sun on top of the battlement. Julian stopped to look at it. There was a breach at this place in the castle wall and his hand fell on a broken piece of stone. He swung his arm and the stone hit the bird, which plummeted into the moat.

He scrambled down after it, scratching himself on the underbrush, searching everywhere, more lively than a puppy.

The pigeon, its wings broken, was suspended quivering in the branches of a privet bush.

Its refusal to die irritated the child and he set about to wring its neck. The bird’s convulsions made his heart beat faster, filling him with a wild, tumultuous joy. As the bird finally stiffened, he felt faint.

That was the connection, then, in his reader’s mind: animals, the killing of. Henry was not shocked. The animals in his novel were not sentimental caricatures. Though used for a literary purpose, they were wild animals, which he attempted to portray with exact behavioural accuracy, and wild animals kill and are killed in a routine way. He intended his story for adults and he allowed himself all the animal violence it required. So a mouse and a pigeon killed by a child exploring the limits of life, getting a feel for death—that was nothing to ruffle him.

He turned the pages. Julian becomes a relentless hunter, with his reader’s faithful highlighter as witness:

... preferred to hunt on his own, with his horse and his falcon ... would soon fly back, tearing apart some bird ... ... took herons, kites, crows and vultures in this way.
... loved to sound his horn and ride behind his dogs...
the stag... as the dogs tore at its flesh...

On misty days... go deep into a marsh... geese, otters
and wild ducks.
... slew bears with a knife, bulls with a hatchet and wild
boar with a spear...
... basset hounds... rabbits... rushed at them...
broke their backs.
... a mountain peak... two wild goats... approached
barefoot... plunged a dagger...
... lake... beaver... his arrow killed it...

Then came a longer section that his reader had marked
out:

Then he entered an avenue of tall trees whose tops
formed a kind of triumphal arch leading into the forest. A
deer leapt out of a thicket, a buck appeared in a clearing, a
badger emerged from a hole, a pheasant on the grass
spread its tail, and when he had slain them all, more deer
appeared, more bucks, more badgers, more pheasants, and
blackbirds, jays, ferrets, foxes, hedgehogs, lynx, an infinite
variety of animals, more numerous with each step he took.
They circled around him, trembling, gazing at him with
gentle, pleading eyes. But Julian had not tired of killing,
and again and again he drew his crossbow, unsheathed his
sword and thrust with his knife, thinking of nothing,
remembering nothing. He lived only for the instant, a

hunter in an unreal landscape where time had lost all
meaning and where everything was happening with
dreamlike ease. An extraordinary sight stopped him short:
a small valley shaped like an amphitheatre and filled with
deer. The animals were huddled together, warming one
another with their breath, which hung like a cloud in the
surrounding mist.

The prospect of such carnage left him breathless with
joy for several minutes. He dismounted, rolled up his
sleeves and started to shoot.

At the whistling of the first arrow, all the stags turned
their heads in unison. Gaps appeared in their ranks,
plaintive cries rose up, and a great agitation ran through
the herd.

The lip of the valley was too high for them to cross.
The hillsides enclosed them and they leapt about
frantically, trying to escape. Julian kept aiming and firing,
and the arrows fell like rain. The frantic stags collided,
bucked and climbed upon each other; their antlers became
entangled and they collapsed together in a writhing mass
of flesh.

Finally they all died, stretched out in the sand, their
nostrils foaming and their entrails spilling out as the
heaving of their bellies gradually subsided. Then all was
still.

Night was falling, and beyond the woods, in the space
between the branches, the sky was as red as a pool of
blood.
Julian leaned against a tree. Wide-eyed, he surveyed the enormity of the massacre, unable to understand how he had managed to do it.

On the other side of the valley, on the edge of the forest, he saw a stag with a doe and a fawn.

The stag was huge and black, with massive antlers and a white beard. The doe, pale as the dead leaves, was grazing the grass, and the spotted fawn trotted along beside her, sucking on a teat.

The crossbow hummed again. The fawn was killed instantly. Its mother, looking up at the sky, gave a deep, heart-rending, almost human cry. Beside himself, Julian shot an arrow straight to her breast and brought her to the ground.

The great stag had seen him and it leapt forward. Julian fired his last arrow at the beast. It pierced its forehead and remained stuck there.

His reader's quoting ended there, so to speak. The neon yellow was turned off and the story left to continue on its own. This was curious, because the very next line mentions that the stag was not killed by Julian's last arrow. The stag rather strides up to him, faces him down, and to the sound of a distant bell breaks into speech and damn's him with a curse:

"Accursed! Accursed! Accursed! One day, cruel heart, you will murder your father and your mother!"

This element in the story, surely pivotal, did not seem to arouse the curiosity of his reader.

Henry continued skimming through the story. After hearing the stag's curse, Julian forsakes hunting, leaves his parents and wanders the world. He becomes a mercenary, a very capable one, and much military mayhem ensues, costing the lives of many men from many nations, but winning Julian the affection and gratitude of the Emperor of Occitania, whom he had saved from the Caliph of Cordoba. As a reward, he receives the hand of the emperor's daughter. One of the prophecies about Julian, pronounced to his father, has now come to be: he is of the family of an emperor. But none of this seemed to hold his reader's attention.

One last section was marked in yellow, two paragraphs describing longings simmering below the surface of Julian's otherwise contented conjugal life:

Dressed in crimson, he would stand at a window leaning on his elbows, remembering hunts of years gone by and wishing he could ride across the desert after gazelles and ostriches, lie in wait in the bamboo for leopards, cross forests filled with rhinoceros, climb to the summits of the most inaccessible mountains the better to take aim at eagles, and sail the seas to ice floes to fight the white bears.

Sometimes in a dream he would see himself as our father Adam in the Garden of Eden among all the beasts: by stretching out his arm, he would make them die; or they
would file past him two by two in order of size, from elephants and lions down to stoats and ducks, like the day they boarded Noah’s ark. From the shadows of a cave, he would throw javelins at them, never missing his mark; more animals would come; the slaughter would go on and on.

Precisely there, at a semicolon, his reader stopped, not caring to light up the last sentence of the paragraph, short though it was:

Julian would wake from his dream, his eyes rolling wildly.

The rest of the story passed without comment, the essential part of it, in fact, how Julian comes to kill his parents, as predicted by the stag; and, even more importantly, how a life of sorrow, abnegation and service to others leads him to become the saint announced by the title of the story. No, his reader stayed with the animals and their bloody fate. Of Julian and his redemption, he seemed to have no interest.

Erasmus was yelping, demanding his walk. Henry had phone calls to make, lines to work on, a costume that needed to be found in a vintage clothing store. He put the story down.

He returned to the story a few days later during an afternoon lull at The Chocolate Road, paying attention to the story as a whole rather than just the parts highlighted by his reader. There was a curious imbalance in the story, with one key element left hanging and unresolved. The dual character of Julian, compassionate yet murderous, made sense in the story’s human realm. In his mercenary days, for example, his deeds are violent but they take place within a moral framework. So, “in turn he came to the aid of the Dauphin of France and the King of England, the Knights Templar of Jerusalem, the Surena of the Parthian army, the Negus of Abyssinia and the Emperor of Calicut,” and it is implicit that these varied sovereigns deserve his assistance, and thus the need to kill so many enemies. The righteous nature of this spilled blood is made explicit on the same page: “He liberated nations. He rescued queens held captive in towers. It was none other than he who slew the Viper of Milan and the Dragon of Oberbirbach.” It is clear that those who oppressed nations and put queens in towers were of the same loathsome ethical stature as the Viper of Milan. The human violence, then, is directed by a moral compass, navigating Julian on a path of lesser evil in which, if there needs to be killing, it is better that those killed be culpable “Scandinavians covered in fish scales . . . Negroes armed with round shields of hippopotamus hide . . . Troglohytes . . . Cannibals,” rather than noble dauphins, kings, and Knights Templar of Jerusalem. And this, the use of the compass of
morality in times of violence, made sense. Indeed, it is precisely at such times that it must be used.

After Julian kills his parents, slaying them as they sleep in his own bed, mistaking them for his wife and a lover, not knowing that his wife has invited them to rest there, he is keenly aware of the enormity of what he has done. Remorse overwhelms him. His moral compass is spinning.

It is set straight by the end of the story. Julian takes in a horribly disfigured leper who is cold and famished, giving him not only food and shelter, but his own bed, lying naked on top of him—"mouth to mouth, breast to breast"—to give him all the warmth he Christianly can. The leper proves to be Jesus Christ. When the Lord rises in the sky, taking with him the redeemed Julian, what is being represented is the triumph of Julian's blood-spattered moral compass pointing true north. Two modes of seeing the world, one narrative, one religious, are juxtaposed by Flaubert and given their most popular and synonymous conclusions: a happy ending and a sinner saved. All that made sense, fitting the conventions of a traditional hagiography.

But the murder of the animals made no sense. It found no resolution, no reckoning, within the framework of the story, and religiously it fell into an embarrassing void. Julian's pleasure in the pain and extermination of animals—described at greater length and in far more detail than the killing of humans—is only tangentially involved in his damnation and salvation. It is for killing his parents that he wanders the earth forlornly and it is for opening his heart to a divine leper that he is saved. His stupendous hunting carnage only provides the great stag that curses him. Otherwise, the slaughter, a wished-for extinction of animals, is a senseless orgy about which Julian's saviour has not a single word to say. The two of them ascend into eternity, leaving behind quantities of animal blood to dry in silence. This ending seals a reconciliation between Julian and God, but it leaves burning and unredeemed an outrage against animals. This outrage made Flaubert's story memorable, but also, Henry felt, baffling and unsatisfying.

He flipped through the pages one last time. He noticed again how his reader had highlighted in bright yellow every instance of animal massacre, from a single mouse to all the creatures of Eden. That was equally baffling.

The envelope contained more than just the story. Another paper clip held together a second sheaf of pages. It seemed to be an extract from a play, title unknown, author unknown. Henry's guess was that it was the work of his highlighting reader. Lethargy overcame him. He returned Flaubert and the play to their envelope and put it at the bottom of his stack of mail. There was fresh cocoa stock that needed sorting at the back of the store, he remembered.

But over the course of a few weeks, as he dealt with other readers' mail, the envelope reached the top again. One evening Henry was at rehearsal. The theatre where his amateur troupe put on its plays was a former greenhouse for a large horticultural business—hence the name of the company, the Greenhouse Players. A versatile stage had been
built and the rows of shelves for potted plants had been replaced by rows of comfortable seats, all thanks to a philanthropist. The precept that location is the key to the success of a business applies to art, and even to life itself: we thrive or wither depending on how nourishing our environment is. This converted greenhouse was a striking setting for a theatre, allowing one to view the world while walking a stage (or, more prosaically, to glimpse the cold outdoors while coddled within the warmth and intimacy of the indoors). There Henry was sitting one evening, in front of a stage and witness to some artful hamming, and it occurred to him that this moment was as good as any to glance at his Flaubert reader’s theatrical effort. He pulled it out and read.

*(Virgil and Beatrice are sitting at the foot of the tree. They are looking out blankly. Silence.)*

*Virgil:* What I’d give for a pear.

*Beatrice:* A pear?

*Virgil:* Yes. A ripe and juicy one.

*(Pause)*

*Beatrice:* I’ve never had a pear.

*Virgil:* What?

*Beatrice:* In fact, I don’t think I’ve ever set eyes on one.

*Virgil:* How is that possible? It’s a common fruit.

*Beatrice:* My parents were always eating apples and carrots. I guess they didn’t like pears.

*Virgil:* But pears are so good! I bet you there’s a pear tree right around here. *(He looks about.)*

*Beatrice:* Describe a pear for me. What is a pear like?

*Virgil:* *(settling back)* I can try. Let’s see... To start with, a pear has an unusual shape. It’s round and fat on the bottom, but tapered on top.

*Beatrice:* Like a gourd.

*Virgil:* A gourd? You know gourds but you don’t know pears? How odd the things we know and don’t. At any rate, no, a pear is smaller than an average gourd, and its shape is more pleasing to the eye. A pear becomes tapered in a symmetrical way, its upper half sitting straight and centred atop its lower half. Can you see what I mean?

*Beatrice:* I think so.

*Virgil:* Let’s start with the bottom half. Can you imagine a fruit that is round and fat?

*Beatrice:* Like an apple?

*Virgil:* Not quite. If you look at an apple with your mind’s eye, you will notice that the girth of the apple is at its widest either in the middle of the fruit or in the top third, isn’t that so?

*Beatrice:* You’re right. A pear is not like this?

*Virgil:* No. You must imagine an apple that is at its widest in the bottom third.

*Beatrice:* I can see it.

*Virgil:* But we must not push the comparison too far. The bottom of a pear is not like an apple’s.