

Encounters

He was there all alone leaning against a dirty sandstone wall, fogged by a shroud of memories, stretching out his arm begging for mercy. His whitish beard stood out against the bronze complexion of his skin, as rough as shrivelled cardboard, and the sky-blue tints of his eyes cast a sparkling light of restless pride on his face.

In his early fifties or more, he already looked like an old, battered wreck, swept away by dreadful, unrestrainable storms. In next to no time, he appeared before me unexpectedly, but I tried to shrink away from him instinctively. It was then that an eerie light seemed to be shining in his eyes. Struck, I stood still staring at him as if dazed by thunder echoing soundlessly through my thoughts.

A boy offered him a cigarette which he drew on shaking. The dull puff of the smouldering glow lit up his face for a moment and a strange, tight feeling of anxiety crept over me. Sudden memories dragged me into a churning whirlpool, stirring my mind like the breath of a blade. I felt as though I had always known him, as though we had already shared shards of some ancient life. The longer he stared at me, the tighter the grip of that impression grew in me. Swiftly I shook off any indifference by allowing my recollections to widen the leak. But hard though I

might try, nothing rippled the smooth surface of oblivion.

With my soul gnawed at, I unsheathed a note of great value which I dumped in his hand unceremoniously. The man looked me in the eye, just blinking imperceptibly as a way of thanking. Then he lumbered away with weak unsteady steps. All of a sudden, I lost sight of his dark face, the outrage of his torn clothes, and the cruel axe of fate slashing mercilessly at his stooped head. He was just like the shadow of an old tired king slowly fading away in the night.