

very inadequate transcription of the sounds which Cucoanes emitted continually, varying them all the time in such a way that a few minutes later I asked myself whether he was still trying to pronounce the same word. And suddenly I understood: *Vox populi!* I cried out these words and I saw he brightened up; he stooped a little, smiled and put his hand on my shoulder. He repeated again, with renewed vigour: "*Borx . . . breinx . . . kretinx(?) . . . tues . . .*" It wasn't difficult to guess that he was referring to another phrase which also began with 'vox'. And I cried: "*Vox clementis in deserto*"? He nodded eagerly, beaming with happiness. And, moving away from us, he reached in a few strides the knoll in front of the lorry. He raised his arms towards the sky, presenting a frightening, prophetic figure. He started to speak, to cry, to plead, to sing, addressing himself to the valleys and mountains. In the meantime, the end approached. I cannot express in words what I thought or felt. But I saw our driver, silent, growing pale, unable to tear away his eyes from my friend's dressing-gown, billowing in the morning breeze. I climbed into the lorry and started to unload. The driver and I worked for about ten minutes at this task and all the time Cucoanes continued to address the forest and the sky. Maybe he was praying—maybe he was cursing. Who could tell?

I moved towards the hilltop and began to call him with all the lung-power I could muster. At last he heard me. He descended—docile, like a child, bent his knee and placed his ear close to my face. I told him, shouting, that everything had been unloaded from the lorry; that we had to find a place for the tent, some spot among the bushes, for we had no time to lose. I had to return with the lorry to Bucharest before lunchtime. I still had things to buy before I could come back—as soon as possible, one or two nights later . . . He would have to wait for me from the second night onwards, at a certain hour, somewhere around this spot. I'd signal with a lantern and also call him with a strong motor-horn.

I went on talking for about five minutes. I began to feel extremely tired from roaring out every word, repeating them several times. Suddenly he shook his head to show that he didn't understand me. Then he embraced me, lifting me up in his arms as if I were a child and spoke several words of which I understood nothing. He clapped the driver on the back and the three of us, laden, descended into the valley. I picked a spot which seemed to be as if created for the lair of an hermit. A grassy place, encompassed between a steep incline rising towards a wooded ridge and a valley just above the spring. Cucoanes signalled to us that he did not need our aid to pitch his tent. He gave me several packets of cigarettes to open. Then he sat down on a rock, gathered the loose folds of his dressing gown around his knees which had been uncovered, and started to sing a chant which he improvised—a song of solitude, a song of mountain loneliness.

I had barely arrived home, exhausted by five hours in the lorry, when I began to scan the morning papers. I realized that my friend had become the sensation of the day, more important than the greatest political events. His photo—dating from the time when he was normal or perhaps from the first days of his macanthropy—was published on the front page, accompanied by articles about his mysterious disappearance, essays and

interviews by and with the medical notables. The case was beyond doubt unique but did not stretch beyond the limits of scientific explanation, declared the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in front of the reporters. The foreign correspondents had cabled some days earlier sensational stories which had aroused everywhere the greatest amazement. Many famous reporters announced their departure for Roumania to meet and interview the 'macanthropic phenomenon'.

In the evening I rang the number Cucoanes gave me and made a date with Lenora, telling her that I had something important to say. I hadn't met her yet and was surprised when she arrived. She had a broad forehead, bronze hair and a straight nose, belonging to some earlier century; but her eyes were searching, almost cheeky—eyes which intimidated those who looked into them. She mastered her emotion with difficulty as she opened the envelope which I handed her and cast her eyes on the first page of a long letter. But as she probably found it painful to read it under the gaze of a stranger, she folded it and put it in her bag; then, absentmindedly, she started to turn the rest of the papers. These consisted, I think, of a last will and testament, some other official documents, a bundle of banknotes and some photographs.

"Where is he?" she demanded suddenly, pushing back the papers into the envelope.

I explained to her hesitantly that I was bound by the promises I had made, but that, for the moment, 'he' was better off wherever 'he' was. She listened, looking at me with incredulous eyes.

"How tall is he now?" she interrupted me with an impatient gesture.

"Hard to say. At dawn he was about ten or eleven feet—maybe more . . ."

She closed her eyes and bit her lips without saying a word.

"And what's worse, he can't talk any more . . . It's almost impossible to understand him . . ."

"I understand him!" cried Lenora with passion. "I'll understand him whatever he's going to turn into! I know him. I can guess all he says. I can guess it from his lips, his eyes . . ."

She was silent for a few moments, her eyes dimmed with tears; then she offered me her hand.

"The next time I'll come with you. I'll ring you tomorrow morning."

I did not protest. Basically, I told myself, this young girl was right. Even if Cucoanes would suffer seeing her again and then parting from her for ever, he'd suffer even more if he left things as they stood now. The great difficulty was the means of communication—something had to be devised to replace speech. Perhaps a big blackboard and chalk . . . I made a note to buy these things and once I got home, I went to sleep, thinking of the happy surprise that awaited Eugen.

I wasn't able to leave next day nor the following evening. Some things I couldn't find; others, like the giant boots I had ordered, weren't ready. Above all, the driver of the lorry wasn't available until the day after next; and I felt reluctant to trust anybody else with our secret. In the end we were only able to leave four nights after I had left Cucoanes for the first time in the mountains.

It had been raining and we had to cover a good part of the way