THE ARTIST AT WORK

Take me up and cast me forth into the sea . . . for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

JONAH i, 12

GILBERT JONAS, the painter, believed in his star. Indeed, he believed solely in it, although he felt respect, and even a sort of admiration, for other people's religion. His own faith, however, was not

lacking in virtues since it consisted in acknowledging obscurely that he would be granted much without ever deserving anything. Consequently when, around his thirty-fifth year, a dozen critics suddenly disputed as to which had discovered his talent, he showed no surprise. But his serenity, attributed by some to smugness, resulted, on the contrary, from a trusting modesty. Jonas credited everything to his star rather than to his own merits.

He was somewhat more astonished when a picture dealer offered him a monthly remittance that freed him from all care. The architect Rateau, who had loved Jonas and his star since their school days, vainly pointed out to him that the remittance would provide only a bare living and that the dealer was taking no risk. "All the same . . ." Jonas said. Rateau—who succeeded, but by dint of hard work, in everything he did—chided his friend. "What do you mean by 'all the same'? You must bargain." But nothing availed. In his heart Jonas thanked his star. "Just as you say," he told the dealer. And he gave up his job in the paternal publishing-house to devote himself altogether to painting. "What luck!" he said.

In reality he thought: "It's the same old luck." As far back as he could remember, he found the

same luck at work. He felt, for instance, an affectionate gratitude toward his parents, first because they had brought him up carelessly and this had given free rein to his daydreaming, secondly because they had separated, on grounds of adultery. At least that was the pretext given by his father, who forgot to specify that it was a rather peculiar adultery: he could not endure the good works indulged in by his wife, who, a veritable lay saint, had, without seeing any wrong in it, given herself body and soul to suffering humanity. But the husband intended to be the master of his wife's virtues. "I'm sick and tired," that Othello used to say, "of sharing her with the poor."

This misunderstanding was profitable to Jonas. His parents, having read or heard about the many cases of sadistic murderers who were children of divorced parents, vied with each other in pampering him with a view to stamping out the spark of such an unfortunate evolution. The less obvious were the effects of the trauma experienced, according to them, by the child's psyche, the more worried they were, for invisible havoc must be deepest. Jonas had merely to announce that he was pleased with himself or his day for his parents' ordinary anxiety

to become panic. Their attentions multiplied and the child wanted for nothing.

His alleged misfortune finally won Jonas a devoted brother in the person of his friend Rateau. Rateau's parents often entertained his little schoolmate because they pitied his hapless state. Their commiserating remarks inspired their strong and athletic son with the desire to take under his protection the child whose nonchalant successes he already admired. Admiration and condescension mixed well to form a friendship that Jonas received, like everything else, with encouraging simplicity.

When without any special effort Jonas had finished his formal studies, he again had the luck to get into his father's publishing-house, to find a job there and, indirectly, his vocation as a painter. As the leading publisher in France, Jonas's father was of the opinion that books, because of the very slump in culture, represented the future. "History shows," he would say, "that the less people read, the more books they buy." Consequently, he but rarely read the manuscripts submitted to him and decided to publish them solely on the basis of the author's personality or the subject's topical interest (from this point of view, sex being the only subject always

topical, the publisher had eventually gone in for specialization) and spent his time looking for novel formats and free publicity. Hence at the same time he took over the manuscript-reading department, Jonas also took over considerable leisure time that had to be filled up. Thus it was that he made the acquaintance of painting.

For the first time he discovered in himself an unsuspected and tireless enthusiasm, soon devoted his days to painting, and, still without effort, excelled in that exercise. Nothing else seemed to interest him, and he was barely able to get married at the suitable age, since painting consumed him wholly. For human beings and the ordinary circumstances of life he merely reserved a kindly smile, which dispensed him from paying attention to them. It took a motorcycle accident when Rateau was riding too exuberantly with his friend on the rear seat to interest Jonas—bored and with his right hand inert and bandaged—in love. Once again, he was inclined to see in that serious accident the good effects of his star, for without it he wouldn't have taken the time to look at Louise Poulin as she deserved.

According to Rateau, it must be added, Louise did not deserve to be looked at. Short and strapping himself, he liked nothing but tall women. "I don't

know what you find in that insect," he would say. Louise was in fact small and dark in skin, hair, and eye, but well built and pretty in the face. Jonas, tall and rugged, was touched at the sight of the insect, especially as she was industrious. Louise's vocation was activity. Such a vocation fitted well with Jonas's preference for inertia and its advantages. Louise dedicated herself first to literature, so long at least as she thought that publishing interested Jonas. She read everything, without order, and in a few weeks became capable of talking about everything. Jonas admired her and considered himself definitely dispensed from reading, since Louise informed him sufficiently and made it possible for him to know the essence of contemporary discoveries. "You mustn't say," Louise asserted, "that so-and-so is wicked or ugly, but that he poses as wicked or ugly." The distinction was important and might even lead, as Rateau pointed out, to the condemnation of the human race. But Louise settled the question once and for all by showing that since this truth was supported simultaneously by the sentimental press and the philosophical reviews, it was universal and not open to discussion. "Just as you say," said Jonas, who immediately forgot that cruel discovery to dream of his star.

Louise deserted literature as soon as she realized that Jonas was interested only in painting. She dedicated herself at once to the visual arts, visited museums and exhibitions, dragged Jonas to them though he didn't quite understand what his contemporaries were painting and felt bothered in his artistic simplicity. Yet he rejoiced to be so well informed about everything that concerned his art. To be sure, the next day he forgot even the name of the painter whose works he had just seen. But Louise was right when she peremptorily reminded him of one of the certainties she had kept from her literary period, namely that in reality one never forgets anything. His star decidedly protected Jonas, who could thus, without suffering in his conscience, combine the certainties of remembering and the comforts of forgetting.

But the treasures of self-sacrifice that Louise showered upon him shone most brilliantly in Jonas's daily life. That angel spared him the purchases of shoes, suits, and shirts that, for the normal man, shorten the days of an already too short life. She resolutely took upon herself the thousand inventions of the machine for killing time, from the hermetic brochures of social security to the constantly changing moods of the internal-revenue office.

"O.K.," said Rateau, "but she can't go to the dentist in your place." She may not have gone, but she telephoned and made the appointments, at the most convenient hours; she took care of changing the oil in the tiny car, of booking rooms in vacation hotels, of the coal for his stove; she herself bought the gifts Jonas wanted to give, chose and sent his flowers, and even found time, certain evenings, to go by his house in his absence and open his bed to spare him the trouble when he came home.

With the same enthusiasm, of course, she entered that bed, then took care of the appointment with the mayor, led Jonas to the town hall two years before his talent was at last recognized, and arranged the wedding trip so that they didn't miss a museum. Not without having first found, in the midst of the housing shortage, a three-room apartment into which they settled on their return. Then she produced, in rapid succession, two children, a boy and a girl. Her intention of going up to three was realized soon after Jonas had left the publishing-house to devote himself to painting.

As soon as she had become a mother, it must be added, Louise devoted herself solely to her child, and later to her children. She still tried to help her husband, but didn't have the time. To be sure, she

regretted her neglect of Jonas, but her resolute character kept her from wasting time in such regrets. "It can't be helped," she would say, "each of us has his workbench." Jonas was, in any case, delighted with this expression, for, like all the artists of his epoch, he wanted to be looked upon as an artisan. Hence the artisan was somewhat neglected and had to buy his shoes himself. However, besides the fact that this was in the nature of things, Jonas was again tempted to rejoice. Of course, he had to make an effort to visit the shops, but that effort was rewarded by one of those hours of solitude that give such value to marital bliss.

The problem of living-space was, however, by far the greatest of their problems, for time and space shrank simultaneously around them. The birth of the children, Jonas's new occupation, their restricted quarters, the modesty of the monthly remittance which prevented them from getting a larger apartment did not leave much room for the double activity of Louise and Jonas. The apartment was on the second floor of what had been a private house in the eighteenth century, in the old section of the capital. Many artists lived in that quarter, faithful to the principle that in art the pursuit of the new can take place only in an old

setting. Jonas, who shared that conviction, was delighted to live in that quarter.

There could be no question as to the apartment's being old. But a few very modern arrangements had given it an original appearance resulting chiefly from the fact that it provided a great volume of air while occupying but a limited surface. The rooms, particularly high and graced with magnificent tall windows, had certainly been intended, to judge from their majestic proportions, for receptions and ceremonies. But the necessities of urban congestion and of income from real estate had forced the successive owners to cut up those over-large rooms with partitions and thus to multiply the stalls they rented at exorbitant prices to their flock of tenants. They nonetheless talked up what they called "the considerable cubic space." No one could deny the advantage. It simply had to be attributed to the impossibility of partitioning the rooms horizontally as well. Otherwise the landlords would certainly not have hesitated to make the necessary sacrifices in order to provide a few more shelters for the rising generation, particularly inclined at that moment to marry and reproduce. Besides, the cubic air-space was not all to the good. It had the inconvenience of making the rooms hard

to heat in winter, and this unfortunately forced the landlords to increase the rent supplement for heat. In summer, because of the great window surface, the apartment was literally flooded with light, for there were no blinds. The landlords had neglected to put them in, doubtless discouraged by the height of the windows and the cost of carpentry. After all, thick draperies could perform the same service and presented no problem as to the cost, since they were the tenants' responsibility. Furthermore, the landlords were not unwilling to help them by furnishing curtains from their own stores at cost prices. Real-estate philanthropy, in fact, was merely their avocation. In their regular daily life those new princes sold percale and velvet.

Jonas had gone into raptures over the apartment's advantages and had accepted its drawbacks without difficulties. "Just as you say," he said to the landlord about the supplement for heat. As for the curtains, he agreed with Louise that it was enough to provide them just for the bedroom and to leave the other windows bare. "We have nothing to hide," that pure heart said. Jonas had been particularly entranced by the largest room, the ceiling of which was so high that there could be no question of installing a lighting system. The entrance

door opened directly into that room, which was joined by a narrow hall to the two others, much smaller and strung in a row. At the end of the hall were the kitchen, the water-closet, and a nook graced with the name of shower-room. Indeed, it might have been a shower if only the fixture had been installed, vertically of course, and one were willing to stand utterly motionless under the spray.

The really extraordinary height of the ceilings and the narrowness of the rooms made of the apartment an odd assortment of parallelepipeds almost entirely glassed in, all doors and windows, with no wall space for the furniture, and with the human beings floating about like bottle imps in a vertical aquarium. Furthermore, all the windows opened onto a court—in other words, onto other windows in the same style just across the way, behind which one could discern the lofty outline of other windows opening onto a second court. "It's the hall of mirrors," Jonas said in delight. On Rateau's advice, it was decided to locate the master bedroom in one of the small rooms, the other to be for the already expected baby. The big room served as a studio for Jonas during the day, as a living-room in the evening and at mealtimes. They could also in a pinch eat in the kitchen, provided that Jonas or

Louise was willing to remain standing. For his part, Rateau had outdone himself in ingenious inventions. By means of sliding doors, retractable shelves, and folding tables, he had managed to make up for the paucity of furniture while emphasizing the jack-in-the-box appearance of that unusual apartment.

But when the rooms were full of paintings and children, they had to think up a new arrangement. Before the birth of the third child, in fact, Jonas worked in the big room, Louise knitted in the bedroom, while the two children occupied the last room, raised a great rumpus there, and also tumbled at will throughout the rest of the apartment. They agreed to put the newborn in a corner of the studio, which Jonas walled off by propping up his canvases like a screen; this offered the advantage of having the baby within earshot and being able to answer his calls. Besides, Jonas never needed to bestir himself, for Louise forestalled him. She wouldn't wait until the baby cried before entering the studio, though with every possible precaution and always on tiptoe. Jonas, touched by such discretion, one day assured Louise that he was not so sensitive and could easily go on working despite the noise of her steps. Louise replied that she was also aiming not to waken the baby. Jonas, full of admiration for

the workings of the maternal instinct, laughed heartily at his misunderstanding. As a result, he didn't dare confess that Louise's cautious entries bothered him more than an out-and-out invasion. First, because they lasted longer, and secondly because they followed a pantomime in which Louise —her arms outstretched, her shoulders thrown back, and her leg raised high—could not go unnoticed. This method even went against her avowed intentions, since Louise constantly ran the risk of bumping into one of the canvases with which the studio was cluttered. At such moments the noise would waken the baby, who would manifest his displeasure according to his capacities, which were considerable. The father, delighted by his son's pulmonary prowess, would rush to coddle him and soon be relieved in this by his wife. Then Jonas would pick up his canvases and, brushes in hand, would listen ecstatically to his son's insistent and sovereign voice.

This was just about the time that Jonas's success brought him many friends. Those friends turned up on the telephone or in impromptu visits. The telephone, which, after due deliberation, had been put in the studio, rang often and always to the detriment of the baby's sleep, who would then min-

gle his cries with the urgent ringing of the phone. If it so happened that Louise was busy caring for the other children, she strove to get to the telephone with them, but most of the time she would find Jonas holding the baby in one arm and in his other hand his brushes and the receiver, which was extending a friendly invitation to lunch. Jonas was always amazed that anyone was willing to lunch with him, for his conversation was dull, but he preferred going out in the evening in order to keep his workday unbroken. Most of the time, unfortunately, the friend would be free only for lunch, and just for this particular lunch; he would insist upon holding it for his dear Jonas. His dear Jonas would accept: "Just as you say!" and after hanging up would add: "Isn't he thoughtful!" while handing the baby to Louise. Then he would go back to work, soon interrupted by lunch or dinner. He had to move the canvases out of the way, unfold the special table, and sit down with the children. During the meal Jonas would keep an eye on the painting he was working on and occasionally, in the beginning at least, he would find his children rather slow in chewing and swallowing, so that each meal was excessively long. But he read in his newspaper that it was essential to eat slowly in order to

assimilate, and thenceforth each meal provided reasons for rejoicing at length.

On other occasions his new friends would drop in. Rateau, for one, never came until after dinner. He was at his office during the day and, besides, he knew that painters work during the daylight hours. But Jonas's new friends almost all belonged to the species of artists and critics. Some had painted, others were about to paint, and the remainder were concerned with what had been, or would be, painted. All, to be sure, held the labors of art in high esteem and complained of the organization of the modern world that makes so difficult the pursuit of those labors, as well as the exercise of meditation, indispensable to the artist. They complained of this for whole afternoons, begging Jonas to go on working, to behave as if they weren't there, to treat them cavalierly, for they weren't philistines and knew the value of an artist's time. Jonas, pleased to have friends capable of allowing one to go on working in their presence, would go back to his picture without ceasing to answer the questions asked him or to laugh at the anecdotes told him.

Such simplicity put his friends more and more at ease. Their good spirits were so genuine that they forgot the meal hour. But the children had a better

memory. They would rush in, mingle with the guests, howl, be coddled by the visitors, and pass from lap to lap. At last the light would dwindle in the square of sky outlined by the court, and Jonas would lay down his brushes. There was nothing to do but to invite the friends to share pot-luck and to go on talking, late into the night, about art of course, but especially about the untalented painters, plagiarists or self-advertisers, who weren't there. Jonas liked to get up early to take advantage of the first hours of daylight. He knew that this would be difficult, that breakfast wouldn't be ready on time and that he himself would be tired. But on the other hand he rejoiced to learn in an evening so many things that could not fail to be helpful to him, though in an invisible way, in his art. "In art, as in nature, nothing is ever wasted," he used to say. "This is a result of the star."

To the friends were sometimes added the disciples, for Jonas now had a following. At first he had been surprised, not seeing what anyone could learn from him who still had everything to discover. The artist in him was groping in the darkness; how could he have pointed out the right paths? But he readily realized that a disciple is not necessarily someone who longs to learn something. Most often,

on the contrary, one became a disciple for the disinterested pleasure of teaching one's master. Thenceforth he could humbly accept such a surfeit of honors. Jonas's disciples explained to him at length what he had painted, and why. In this way Jonas discovered in his work many intentions that rather surprised him, and a host of things he hadn't put there. He had thought himself poor and, thanks to his pupils, suddenly found himself rich. At times, faced with such hitherto unsuspected wealth, Jonas would feel a tingle of pride. "Nonetheless it's true," he would say. "That face in the background stands out. I don't quite understand what they mean by indirect humanization. Yet, with that effect I've really gone somewhere." But very soon he would transfer that uncomfortable mastery to his star. "It's the star," he would say, "that's gone somewhere. I'm staying home with Louise and the children."

In addition, the disciples had another advantage: they forced Jonas to be more severe with himself. They ranked him so high in their conversations, and especially in regard to his conscientiousness and energy, that henceforth no weakness was permitted him. Thus he lost his old habit of nibbling a piece of sugar or chocolate when he had finished a

difficult passage and before he went back to work. If he were alone, he would nevertheless have given in clandestinely to that weakness. But he was helped in his moral progress by the almost constant presence of his disciples and friends in whose sight he would have been embarrassed to nibble chocolate and whose interesting conversation he couldn't interrupt anyway for such a petty idiosyncrasy.

Furthermore, his disciples insisted on his remaining faithful to his esthetic. Jonas, who labored at length only to get a very occasional fleeting flash in which reality would suddenly appear to him in a new light, had only a very vague idea of his own esthetic. His disciples, on the other hand, had several ideas, contradictory and categorical, and they would allow no joking on the subject. Jonas would have liked, at times, to resort to his whim, that humble friend of the artist. But his disciples' frowns in the face of certain pictures that strayed from their idea forced him to reflect a little more about his art, and this was all to his advantage.

Finally, the disciples helped Jonas in another way by obliging him to give his opinion about their own production. Not a day went by, in fact, without someone's bringing him a picture barely sketched in, which its author would set between Jonas and

the canvas he was working on, in order to take advantage of the best light. An opinion was expected. Until then Jonas had always been secretly ashamed at his fundamental inability to judge a work of art. Except for a handful of pictures that carried him away, and for the obviously coarse daubs, everything seemed to him equally interesting and indifferent. Consequently he was obliged to build up a stock of judgments, which had to be varied because his disciples, like all the artists of the capital, after all had a measure of talent and, when they were around, he had to draw rather fine lines of distinction to satisfy each. Hence that happy obligation forced him to amass a vocabulary and opinions about his art. Yet his natural kindness was not embittered by the effort. He soon realized that his disciples were not asking him for criticisms, for which they had no use, but only for encouragement and, if possible, praise. The praises merely had to be different. Jonas was not satisfied to be his usual agreeable self. He showed ingenuity in his ways of being so.

Thus the time went by for Jonas, who painted amidst friends and pupils seated on chairs that were now arranged in concentric circles around his easel. Often, in addition, neighbors would appear at the

windows across the way and swell his public. He would discuss, exchange views, examine the paintings submitted to him, smile as Louise went by, soothe the children, and enthusiastically answer telephone calls, without ever setting down his brushes with which he would from time to time add a stroke to a half-finished painting. In a way, his life was very full, not an hour was wasted, and he gave thanks to fate that spared him boredom. In another way, it took many brush-strokes to finish a picture and it occasionally occurred to him that boredom had the one advantage that it could be avoided through strenuous work. But Jonas's production slowed down in proportion to his friends' becoming more interesting. Even in the rare moments when he was altogether alone, he felt too tired to catch up. And at such moments he could but dream of a new regime that would reconcile the pleasures of friendship with the virtues of boredom.

He broached the subject to Louise, who was independently beginning to worry about the growth of the two older children and the smallness of their room. She suggested putting them in the big room with their bed hidden by a screen and moving the baby into the small room where he would not be wakened by the telephone. As the baby took up

no room, Jonas could turn the little room into his studio. Then the big one would serve for the daytime gatherings, and Jonas could wander back and forth, either chat with his friends or work, since he was sure of being understood in his need for isolation. Furthermore, the necessity of putting the older children to bed would allow them to cut the evenings short. "Wonderful," Jonas said after a moment's reflection. "Besides," said Louise, "if your friends leave early, we'll see a little more of each other." Jonas looked at her. A suggestion of melancholy passed over Louise's face. Touched, he put his arms around her and kissed her in his most affectionate way. She surrendered to him and for a moment they were happy as they had been in the beginning of their marriage. But she shook herself free; the room was perhaps too small for Jonas. Louise got a folding rule and they discovered that because of the congestion caused by his canvases and those of his pupils, by far the more numerous, he generally worked in a space hardly any larger than the one that was about to be assigned to him. Jonas hastened to move the furniture.

Luckily, the less he worked, the more his reputation grew. Each exhibit was eagerly awaited and extolled in advance. To be sure, a small number of

critics, among whom were two regular visitors to the studio, tempered the warmth of their reviews with some reservations. But the disciples' indignation more than made up for this little misfortune. Of course, the latter would emphatically assert, they ranked the pictures of the first period above everything else, but the present experiments foreshadowed a real revolution. Jonas would rather reproach himself for the slight annoyance he felt every time his first works were glorified and would thank them effusively. Only Rateau would grumble: "Weird ones . . . They like you inert, like a statue. And they deny you the right to live!" But Jonas would defend his disciples: "You can't understand," he told Rateau, "because you like everything I do." Rateau laughed: "Of course! It's not your pictures I like; it's your painting."

The pictures continued to be popular in any event and, after an exhibit that was enthusiastically received, the dealer suggested, on his own, an increase in the monthly remittance. Jonas accepted, declaring how grateful he was. "Anyone who heard you now," the dealer said, "would think money meant something to you." Such goodheartedness disarmed the painter. However, when he asked the dealer's permission to give a canvas to a

charity sale, the dealer wanted to know whether or not it was a "paying charity." Jonas didn't know. The dealer therefore suggested sticking squarely to the terms of the contract which granted him the exclusive right of sale. "A contract's a contract," he said. In theirs, there was no provision for charity. "Just as you say," the painter said.

The new arrangement was a source of constant satisfaction to Jonas. He could, in fact, get off by himself often enough to answer the many letters he now received, which his courtesy could not leave unanswered. Some concerned Jonas's art, while others, far more plentiful, concerned the correspondent, who either wanted to be encouraged in his artistic vocation or else needed advice or financial aid. The more Jonas's name appeared in the press, the more he was solicited, like everyone, to take an active part in exposing most revolting injustices. Jonas would reply, write about art, thank people, give his advice, go without a necktie in order to send a small financial contribution, finally sign the just protests that were sent him. "You're indulging in politics now? Leave that to writers and ugly old maids," said Rateau. No, he would sign only the protests that insisted they had no connection with any particular party line. But they all

laid claim to such beautiful independence. For weeks on end, Jonas would go about with his pockets stuffed with correspondence, constantly neglected and renewed. He would answer the most urgent, which generally came from unknowns, and keep for a better moment those that called for a more leisurely reply—in other words, his friends' letters. So many obligations at least kept him from dawdling and from yielding to a carefree spirit. He always felt behindhand, and always guilty, even when he was working, as he was from time to time.

Louise was ever more mobilized by the children and wore herself out doing everything that, in other circumstances, he could have done in the home. This made him suffer. After all, *he* was working for his pleasure whereas she had the worst end of the bargain. He became well aware of this when she was out marketing. "The telephone!" the eldest child would shout, and Jonas would drop his picture right there, only to return to it, beaming, with another invitation. "Gasman!" the meter-reader would shout from the door one of the children had opened for him. "Coming! Coming!" And when Jonas would leave the telephone or the door,

a friend or a disciple, sometimes both, would follow him to the little room to finish the interrupted conversation. Gradually they all became regular frequenters of the hallway. They would stand there, chat among themselves, ask Jonas's opinion from a distance, or else overflow briefly into the little room. "Here at least," those who entered would exclaim, "a fellow can see you a bit, and without interruption." This touched Jonas. "You're right," he would say. "After all, we never get a chance to see each other." At the same time he was well aware that he disappointed those he didn't see, and this saddened him. Often they were friends he would have preferred to meet. But he didn't have time, he couldn't accept everything. Consequently, his reputation suffered. "He's become proud," people said, "now that he's a success. He doesn't see anyone any more." Or else: "He doesn't love anyone, except himself." No, he loved Louise, and his children, and Rateau, and a few others, and he had a liking for all. But life is short, time races by, and his own energy had limits. It was hard to paint the world and men and, at the same time, to live with them. On the other hand, he couldn't complain, or explain the things that stood in his

way. For, if he did, people slapped him on the back, saying: "Lucky fellow! That's the price of fame!"

Consequently, his mail piled up, the disciples would allow no falling off, and society people now thronged around him. It must be added that Jonas admired them for being interested in painting when, like everyone else, they might have got excited about the English Royal Family or gastronomic tours. In truth, they were mostly society women, all very simple in manner. They didn't buy any pictures themselves and introduced their friends to the artist only in the hope, often groundless, that *they* would buy in their place. On the other hand, they helped Louise, especially in serving tea to the visitors. The cups passed from hand to hand, traveled along the hallway from the kitchen to the big room, and then came back to roost in the little studio, where Jonas, in the center of a handful of friends and visitors, enough to fill the room, went on painting until he had to lay down his brushes to take, gratefully, the cup that a fascinating lady had poured especially for him.

He would drink his tea, look at the sketch that a disciple had just put on his easel, laugh with his friends, interrupt himself to ask one of them to

please mail the pile of letters he had written during the night, pick up the second child, who had stumbled over his feet, pose for a photograph, and then at "Jonas, the telephone!" he would wave his cup in the air, thread his way with many an excuse through the crowd standing in the hall, come back, fill in a corner of the picture, stop to answer the fascinating lady that certainly he would be happy to paint her portrait, and would get back to his easel. He worked, but "Jonas! A signature!" "What is it, a registered letter?" "No, the Cachemire convicts." "Coming! Coming!" Then he would run to the door to receive a young friend of the convicts and listen to his protest, worry briefly as to whether politics were involved, and sign after receiving complete assurance on that score, together with expostulations about the duties inseparable from his privileges as an artist, and at last he would reappear only to meet, without being able to catch their names, a recently victorious boxer or the greatest dramatist of some foreign country. The dramatist would stand facing him for five minutes, expressing through the emotion in his eyes what his ignorance of French would not allow him to state more clearly, while Jonas would nod his head with a real feeling of brotherhood. Fortunately, he would

suddenly be saved from that dead-end situation by the bursting-in of the latest spellbinder of the pulpit who wanted to be introduced to the great painter. Jonas would say that he was delighted, which he was, feel the packet of unanswered letters in his pocket, take up his brushes, get ready to go on with a passage, but would first have to thank someone for the pair of setters that had just been brought him, go and close them in the master bedroom, come back to accept the lady donor's invitation to lunch, rush out again in answer to Louise's call to see for himself without a shadow of doubt that the setters had not been broken in to apartment life, and lead them into the shower-room, where they would bark so persistently that eventually no one would even hear them. Every once in a while, over the visitors' heads, Jonas would catch a glimpse of the look in Louise's eyes and it seemed to him that that look was sad. Finally the day would end, the visitors would take leave, others would tarry in the big room and wax emotional as they watched Louise put the children to bed, obligingly aided by an elegant, overdressed lady who would complain of having to return to her luxurious home where life, spread out over

two floors, was so much less close and homey than at the Jonases'.

One Saturday afternoon Rateau came to bring an ingenious clothes-drier that could be screwed onto the kitchen ceiling. He found the apartment packed and, in the little room, surrounded by art-lovers, Jonas painting the lady who had given the dogs, while he was being painted himself by an official artist. According to Louise, the latter was working on order from the Government. "It will be called *The Artist at Work*." Rateau withdrew to a corner of the room to watch his friend, obviously absorbed in his effort. One of the art-lovers, who had never seen Rateau, leaned over toward him and said: "He looks well, doesn't he?" Rateau didn't reply. "You paint, I suppose," he continued. "So do I. Well, take my word for it, he's on the decline." "Already?" Rateau asked. "Yes. It's success. You can't resist success. He's finished." "He's on the decline or he's finished?" "An artist who is on the decline is finished. Just see, he has nothing in him to paint any more. He's being painted himself and will be hung in a museum."

Later on, in the middle of the night, Louise, Rateau, and Jonas, the latter standing and the other

two seated on a corner of the bed, were silent. The children were asleep, the dogs were boarding in the country, Louise had just washed, and Jonas and Rateau had dried, the many dishes, and their fatigue felt good. "Why don't you get a servant?" Rateau had asked when he saw the stack of dishes. But Louise had answered sadly: "Where would we put her?" So they were silent. "Are you happy?" Rateau had suddenly asked. Jonas smiled, but he looked tired. "Yes. Everybody is kind to me." "No," said Rateau. "Watch out. They're not all good." "Who isn't?" "Your painter friends, for instance." "I know," Jonas said. "But many artists are that way. They're not sure of existing, not even the greatest. So they look for proofs; they judge and condemn. That strengthens them; it's a beginning of existence. They're so lonely!" Rateau shook his head. "Take my word for it," Jonas said; "I know them. You have to love them." "And what about you?" Rateau said. "Do you exist? You never say anything bad about anyone." Jonas began to laugh. "Oh! I often think bad of them. But then I forget." He became serious. "No, I'm not sure of existing. But someday I'll exist, I'm sure."

Rateau asked Louise her opinion. Shaking off her fatigue, she said she thought Jonas was right: their

visitors' opinion was of no importance. Only Jonas's work mattered. And she was aware that the child got in his way. He was growing anyway, and they would have to buy a couch that would take up space. What could they do until they got a bigger apartment? Jonas looked at the master bedroom. Of course, it was not the ideal; the bed was very wide. But the room was empty all day long. He said this to Louise, who reflected. In the bedroom, at least, Jonas would not be bothered; after all, people wouldn't dare lie down on their bed. "What do you think of it?" Louise in turn asked Rateau. He looked at Jonas. Jonas was looking at the windows across the way. Then he raised his eyes to the starless sky, and went and pulled the curtains. When he returned, he smiled at Rateau and sat down beside him on the bed without saying a word. Louise, obviously done in, declared that she was going to take her shower. When the two friends were alone, Jonas felt Rateau's shoulder touch his. He didn't look at him, but said: "I love to paint. I'd like to paint all my life, day and night. Isn't that lucky?" Rateau looked at him affectionately: "Yes," he said, "it's lucky."

The children were growing and Jonas was glad to see them happy and healthy. They were now in

school and came home at four o'clock. Jonas could still enjoy them Saturday afternoons, Thursdays, and also for whole days during their frequent and prolonged vacations. They were not yet big enough to play quietly but were hardy enough to fill the apartment with their squabbles and their laughter. He had to quiet them, threaten them, sometimes even pretend to hit them. There was also the laundry to be done, the buttons to be sewed on. Louise couldn't do it all. Since they couldn't house a servant, nor even bring one into the close intimacy in which they lived, Jonas suggested calling on the help of Louise's sister, Rose, who had been left a widow with a grown daughter. "Yes," Louise said, "with Rose we'll not have to stand on ceremony. We can put her out when we want to." Jonas was delighted with this solution, which would relieve Louise at the same time that it relieved his conscience, embarrassed by his wife's fatigue. The relief was even greater since the sister often brought along her daughter as a reinforcement. Both were as good as gold; virtue and unselfishness predominated in their honest natures. They did everything possible to help out and didn't begrudge their time. They were helped in this by the boredom of their solitary lives and their delight in the easy circum-

stances prevailing at Louise's. As it was foreseen, no one stood on ceremony and the two relatives, from the very beginning, felt at home. The big room became a common room, at once dining-room, linen closet, and nursery. The little room, in which the last-born slept, served as a storeroom for the paintings and a folding bed on which Rose sometimes slept, when she happened to come without her daughter.

Jonas occupied the master bedroom and worked in the space separating the bed from the window. He merely had to wait until the room was made up in the morning, after the children's room. From then on, no one came to bother him except to get a sheet or towel, for the only cupboard in the house happened to be in that room. As for the visitors, though rather less numerous, they had developed certain habits and, contrary to Louise's hope, they didn't hesitate to lie down on the double bed to be more comfortable when chatting with Jonas. The children would also come in to greet their father. "Let's see the picture." Jonas would show them the picture he was painting and would kiss them affectionately. As he sent them away, he felt that they filled his heart fully, without any reservation. Deprived of them, he would have

merely an empty solitude. He loved them as much as his painting because they were the only things in the world as alive as it was.

Nevertheless Jonas was working less, without really knowing why. He was always diligent, but he now had trouble painting, even in the moments of solitude. He would spend such moments looking at the sky. He had always been absent-minded, easily lost in thought, but now he became a dreamer. He would think of painting, of his vocation, instead of painting. "I love to paint," he still said to himself, and the hand holding the brush would hang at his side as he listened to a distant radio.

At the same time, his reputation declined. He was brought articles full of reservations, others frankly unfriendly, and some so nasty that they deeply distressed him. But he told himself that he could get some good out of such attacks that would force him to work better. Those who continued to come treated him more familiarly, like an old friend with whom you don't have to put yourself out. When he wanted to go back to his work, they would say: "Aw, go on! There's plenty of time." Jonas realized that in a certain way they were already identifying him with their own fail-

ure. But, in another way, there was something salutary about this new solidarity. Rateau shrugged his shoulders, saying: "You're a fool. They don't care about you at all!" "They love me a little now," Jonas replied. "A little love is wonderful. Does it matter how you get it?" He therefore went on talking, writing letters, and painting as best he could. Now and then he really would paint, especially Sunday afternoons when the children went out with Louise and Rose. In the evening he would rejoice at having made a little progress on the picture under way. At that time he was painting skies.

The day when the dealer told him that, because of the considerable falling-off in sales, he was regretfully obliged to reduce the remittance, Jonas approved, but Louise was worried. It was September and the children had to be outfitted for school. She set to work herself with her customary courage and was soon swamped. Rose, who could mend and sew on buttons, could not make things. But her husband's cousin could; she came to help Louise. From time to time she would settle in Jonas's room on a corner chair, where the silent woman would sit still for hours. So still that Louise suggested to Jonas painting a *Seamstress*. "Good idea," Jonas said. He tried, spoiled two canvases, then

went back to a half-finished sky. The next day, he walked up and down in the apartment for some time and meditated instead of painting. A disciple, all excited, came to show him a long article he would not have seen otherwise, from which he learned that his painting was not only overrated but out of date. The dealer phoned him to tell him again how worried he was by the decline in sales. Yet he continued to dream and meditate. He told the disciple that there was some truth in the article, but that he, Jonas, could still count on many good working years. To the dealer he replied that he understood his worry without sharing it. He had a big work, really new, to create; everything was going to begin all over again. As he was talking, he felt that he was telling the truth and that his star was there. All he needed was a good system.

During the ensuing days he tried to work in the hall, two days later in the shower-room with electric light, and the following day in the kitchen. But, for the first time, he was bothered by the people he kept bumping into everywhere, those he hardly knew and his own family, whom he loved. For a little while he stopped working and meditated. He would have painted landscapes out of doors if the weather had been propitious. Unfor-

tunately, it was just the beginning of winter and it was hard to do landscapes before spring. He tried, however, and gave up; the cold pierced him to the marrow. He lived several days with his canvases, most often seated beside them or else planted in front of the window; he didn't paint any more. Then he got in the habit of going out in the morning. He would give himself the assignment of sketching a detail, a tree, a lopsided house, a profile as it went by. At the end of the day, he had done nothing. The least temptation—the newspapers, an encounter, shopwindows, the warmth of a café—would lead him astray. Each evening he would keep providing good excuses to a bad conscience that never left him. He was going to paint, that was certain, and paint better, after this period of apparent waste. It was all just working within him, and the star would come out newly washed and sparkling from behind these black clouds. Meanwhile he never left the cafés. He had discovered that alcohol gave him the same exaltation as a day of good productive work at the time when he used to think of his picture with the affection and warmth that he had never felt except toward his children. With the second cognac he recovered that poignant emotion that made him at one and the same time

master and servant of the whole world. The only difference was that he enjoyed it in a vacuum, with idle hands, without communicating it to a work. Still, this was closest to the joy for which he lived, and he now spent long hours sitting and dreaming in smoke-filled, noisy places.

Yet he fled the places and sections frequented by artists. Whenever he met an acquaintance who spoke to him of his painting, he would be seized with panic. He wanted to get away, that was obvious, and he did get away. He knew what was said behind his back: "He thinks he's Rembrandt," and his discomfort increased. In any event, he never smiled any more, and his former friends drew an odd and inevitable conclusion from this: "If he has given up smiling, this is because he's very satisfied with himself." Knowing that, he became more and more elusive and skittish. It was enough for him, on entering a café, to have the feeling that someone there recognized him for everything to cloud over within him. For a second, he would stand there, powerless and filled with a strange sadness, his inscrutable face hiding both his uneasiness and his avid and sudden need for friendship. He would think of Rateau's cheering look and would rush out in a hurry. "Just look at that guy's hang-

over!" he heard someone say close to him one day as he was disappearing.

He now frequented only the outlying sections, where no one knew him. There he could talk and smile and his kindliness came back, for no one expected anything of him. He made a few friends, who were not very hard to please. He particularly enjoyed the company of one of them, who used to serve him in a station buffet where he often went. That fellow had asked him "what he did in life." "Painter," Jonas had replied. "Picture-painter or house-painter?" "Picture." "Well," said the fellow, "that's not easy." And they had never broached the subject again. No, it was not easy, but Jonas would manage all right, as soon as he had found how to organize his work.

Day after day and drink after drink, he had many encounters, and women helped him. He could talk to them, before or after the love-making, and especially boast a little, for they would understand him even if they weren't convinced. At times it seemed to him that his old strength was returning. One day when he had been encouraged by one of his female acquaintances, he made up his mind. He returned home, tried to work again in the bedroom, the seamstress being absent. But after an hour

of it he put his canvas away, smiled at Louise without seeing her, and went out. He drank all day long and spent the night with his acquaintance, though without being in any condition to desire her. In the morning, the image of suffering with its tortured face received him in the person of Louise. She wanted to know if he had taken that woman. Jonas said that, being drunk, he had not, but that he had taken others before. And for the first time, his heart torn within him, he saw that Louise suddenly had the look of a drowned woman, that look that comes from surprise and an excess of pain. It dawned upon him that he had not thought of Louise during this whole time, and he was ashamed. He begged her forgiveness, it was all over, tomorrow everything would begin again as it had been in the past. Louise could not speak and turned away to hide her tears.

The following day Jonas went out very early. It was raining. When he returned, wet to the skin, he was loaded down with boards. At home, two old friends, come to ask after him, were drinking coffee in the big room. "Jonas is changing his technique. He's going to paint on wood!" they said. Jonas smiled. "That's not it. But I am beginning something new." He went into the little hall lead-

ing to the shower-room, the toilet, and the kitchen. In the right angle where the two halls joined, he stopped and studied at length the high walls rising to the dark ceiling. He needed a stepladder, which he went down and got from the concierge.

When he came back up, there were several additional people in the apartment, and he had to struggle against the affection of his visitors, delighted to find him again, and against his family's questions in order to reach the end of the hall. At that moment his wife came out of the kitchen. Setting down his ladder, Jonas hugged her against him. Louise looked at him. "Please," she said, "never do it again." "No, no," Jonas said, "I'm going to paint. I must paint." But he seemed to be talking to himself, for he was looking elsewhere. He got to work. Halfway up the walls he built a flooring to get a sort of narrow, but high and deep, loft. By the late afternoon, all was finished. With the help of the ladder, Jonas hung from the floor of the loft and, to test the solidity of his work, chinned himself several times. Then he mingled with the others and everyone was delighted to find him so friendly again. In the evening, when the apartment was relatively empty, Jonas got an oil lamp, a chair, a stool, and a frame. He took them all up into the

loft before the puzzled gaze of the three women and the children. "Now," he said from his lofty perch, "I'll be able to work without being in anyone's way." Louise asked him if he were sure of it. "Of course," he replied. "I don't need much room. I'll be freer. There have been great painters who painted by candlelight, and . . ." "Is the floor solid enough?" It was. "Don't worry," Jonas said, "it's a very good solution." And he came back down.

Very early the next day he climbed into the loft, sat down, set the frame on the stool against the wall, and waited without lighting the lamp. The only direct sounds he heard came from the kitchen or the toilet. The other noises seemed distant, and the visits, the ringing of the doorbell and the telephone, the comings and goings, the conversations, reached him half muffled, as if they came from out on the street or from the farther court. Besides, although the whole apartment was overflowing with blinding sunlight, the darkness here was restful. From time to time a friend would come and plant himself under the loft. "What are you doing up there, Jonas?" "I'm working." "Without light?" "Yes, for the moment." He was not painting, but he was meditating. In the darkness and this half-silence which, by contrast with what he had known

before, seemed to him the silence of the desert or of the tomb, he listened to his own heart. The sounds that reached the loft seemed not to concern him any more, even when addressed to him. He was like those men who die alone at home in their sleep, and in the morning the telephone rings, feverish and insistent, in the deserted house, over a body forever deaf. But he was alive, he listened to this silence within himself, he was waiting for his star, still hidden but ready to rise again, to burst forth at last, unchanged and unchanging, above the disorder of these empty days. "Shine, shine," he said. "Don't deprive me of your light." It would shine again, of that he was sure. But he would have to meditate still longer, since at last the chance was given him to be alone without separating from his family. He still had to discover what he had not yet clearly understood, although he had always known it and had always painted as if he knew it. He had to grasp at last that secret which was not merely the secret of art, as he could now see. That is why he didn't light the lamp.

Every day now Jonas would climb back into his loft. The visitors became less numerous because Louise, preoccupied, paid little attention to the conversation. Jonas would come down for meals and

then climb back to his perch. He would sit motionless in the darkness all day long. At night he would go to his wife, who was already in bed. After a few days he asked Louise to hand up his lunch, which she did with such pains that Jonas was stirred. In order not to disturb her on other occasions, he suggested her preparing some supplies that he could store in the loft. Little by little he got to the point of not coming down all day long. But he hardly touched his supplies.

One evening he called Louise and asked for some blankets. "I'll spend the night up here." Louise looked at him with her head bent backward. She opened her mouth and then said nothing. She was merely scrutinizing Jonas with a worried and sad expression. He suddenly saw how much she had aged and how deeply the trials of their life had marked her too. It occurred to him that he had never really helped her. But before he could say a word, she smiled at him with an affection that wrung his heart. "Just as you say, dear," she said.

Henceforth he spent his nights in the loft, almost never coming down any more. As a result, the apartment was emptied of visitors since Jonas couldn't be seen any more either by day or night. Some were told that he was in the country; others,

when lying became an effort, that he had found a studio. Rateau alone came faithfully. He would climb up on the ladder until his big, friendly head was just over the level of the flooring. "How goes it?" he would ask. "Wonderfully." "Are you working?" "It comes to the same thing." "But you have no canvas!" "I'm working just the same." It was hard to prolong this dialogue from ladder to loft. Rateau would shake his head, come back down, help Louise replace fuses or repair a lock, then, without climbing onto the ladder, say good night to Jonas, who would reply in the darkness: "So long, old boy." One evening Jonas added thanks to his good-night. "Why thanks?" "Because you love me." "That's really news!" Rateau said as he left.

Another evening Jonas called Rateau, who came running. The lamp was lighted for the first time. Jonas was leaning, with a tense look, out of the loft. "Hand me a canvas," he said. "But what's the matter with you? You're so much thinner; you look like a ghost." "I've hardly eaten for the last two days. But that doesn't matter. I must work." "Eat first." "No, I'm not hungry." Rateau brought a canvas. On the point of disappearing into the loft, Jonas asked him: "How are they?" "Who?"

"Louise and the children." "They're all right. They'd be better if you were with them." "I'm still with them. Tell them above all that I'm still with them." And he disappeared. Rateau came and told Louise how worried he was. She admitted that she herself had been anxious for several days. "What can we do? Oh, if only I could work in his place!" Wretched, she faced Rateau. "I can't live without him," she said. She looked like the girl she had been, and this surprised Rateau. He suddenly realized that she had blushed.

The lamp stayed lighted all night and all the next morning. To those who came, Rateau or Louise, Jonas answered merely: "Forget it, I'm working." At noon he asked for some kerosene. The lamp, which had been smoking, again shone brightly until evening. Rateau stayed to dinner with Louise and the children. At midnight he went to say goodnight to Jonas. Under the still lighted loft he waited a moment, then went away without saying a word. On the morning of the second day, when Louise got up, the lamp was still lighted.

A beautiful day was beginning, but Jonas was not aware of it. He had turned the canvas against the wall. Exhausted, he was sitting there waiting,

with his hands, palms up, on his knees. He told himself that now he would never again work, he was happy. He heard his children grumbling, water running, and the dishes clinking together. Louise was talking. The huge windows rattled as a truck passed on the boulevard. The world was still there, young and lovable. Jonas listened to the welcome murmur rising from mankind. From such a distance, it did not run counter to that joyful strength within him, his art, these forever silent thoughts he could not express but which set him above all things, in a free and crisp air. The children were running through the apartment, the little girl was laughing, Louise too now, and he hadn't heard her laugh for so long. He loved them! How he loved them! He put out the lamp and, in the darkness that suddenly returned, right there! wasn't that his star still shining? It was the star, he recognized it with his heart full of gratitude, and he was still watching it when he fell, without a sound.

"It's nothing," the doctor they had called declared a little later. "He is working too much. In a week he will be on his feet again." "You are sure he will get well?" asked Louise with distorted face. "He will get well." In the other room Rateau was

looking at the canvas, completely blank, in the center of which Jonas had merely written in very small letters a word that could be made out, but without any certainty as to whether it should be read *solitary* or *solidary*.

THE GROWING STONE

THE AUTOMOBILE swung clumsily around the curve in the red sandstone trail, now a mass of mud. The headlights suddenly picked out in the night—first on one side of the road, then on the other—two wooden huts with sheet-metal roofs. On the right near the second one, a tower of coarse beams could be made out in the light fog. From the top of the tower a metal cable, invisible at its starting-point, shone as it sloped down into the light from the car before disappearing behind the em-