



ARTICLE 5  
FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

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STICKO

I am a Stick, I am the most advanced stage in the evolution of humankind. I remain motionless, still, exactly the same as everything else, spread somewhere in some way. I am here, but no one sees. I sit in front of the television in my flower-patterned cretonne armchair. I too am flower-patterned cretonne. I am watching a programme in which they sell armchairs, one model is called Letizia, the other Gaia, Gaia has an extending footrest so you can stretch your legs out; if you want it you don't have to move either, Armchairs and Armchairs will send the Armchairs and Armchairs consultant to your home, call him right now at this number. I might even feel obliged to dial the number, but I can't: a Stick must keep still until nightfall, he mustn't move, otherwise they'll discover him.

Today she came, she took me by the arm, snap out of it Sticko she said, you can't go on like this. And she shook my arm really hard, she's been a bit on edge recently, but I've learned what to do, I left my arm in her hand. Anyway I know it'll grow again, it's happened before. She dropped the arm on the floor, let out a yell and went away. You have to understand her. Before this evolutionary stage I was twenty, and we used to make love every day.

But then she came back, and we began to talk things over seriously.

Allow me to remind you, I tell her, quoting an old book, that the struggle for existence can modify the structure of a young individual compared to that of his parents. As we know, natural selection accumulates variations in character or instinct, each of which is advantageous to the individual in his new living conditions.

I got her there. I feel that I got her there. Natural science and biology were my subjects, when I was a young man of twenty. Sticko, she says really brightening up, and there's no reason for that, you could go back to your studies!

I pretend to be thinking seriously about it, but then, choosing my words with care: although natural selection, I object, acts through every individual solely for his good, our ignorance doesn't enable us to judge which details and differences are necessary for the use and the disuse of the parts and sometimes variations accumulate in the wake of other, often entirely unpredictable ones. She holds her head between her hands and says nothing for a bit, then she goes into the kitchen to make me something to eat. My antennae are quivering, and I can't let them do that. I keep them as still as I can. After that, she didn't come back the next day, or even the day after, and the rubbish piled up in the kitchen.

At night the wind comes up and I move. I move very slowly, darker than the night itself, I go out of the house, I take two sidling steps, I roam the streets of my neighbourhood. I follow the low breathing of the shadows, I slip along, I flutter in the air. I still like my city at night, and sometimes I even catch a glimpse of the sea.

I come across few people. Those who had to dash out because the dog was desperate, pyjamas already slipping out from under their trousers, maybe they made it wait while they sucked the television down to the last drop and now they're being dragged

along like the load behind a juggernaut in a skid. Those who are coming and going from a place or a person, and know why they're doing it, and carry traces of it, in their eyes and on their clothes. Those like me, who are never going to or coming from anywhere.

The city is calm, and if I ever walk again or not it doesn't notice. No one sees me. I let the wind drag me along every night.

This morning she has some very important news for me. We had both been waiting for it for some time and mainly I was waiting for it even though it doesn't seem like that. Sticko, she says to me, it's horrible, I'm sorry. I don't know how it's possible. They've acquitted all of them. I mean, no: some were convicted, but not to serve time. And the real culprits? Nothing. The real culprits were guilty of nothing, and so the careers they've made since then have been consecrated too. I was hanging from the ceiling when she arrived, but when she said this I threw myself down and remained motionless until she despaired and went away.

Then I moved slowly into the kitchen. I had to do something. The kitchen is yellow and out of caution I also tinge myself yellow. It's the evolution of the species, I've told you that. The behaviour best suited to the twenty-first century, counting only those that came after Christ. A man gets to twenty and he learns to disappear.

My legs have become frail but my jaws are robust. I chew slowly on what she has left me in the kitchen.

Then I wait for it to get dark. And I feel the breeze coming up from the street.

But tonight the city isn't as calm as the other nights. My antennae quiver strongly with fear. I don't know what's going on but I sense it, from behind me or in front or to one side or above or below someone is coming. And then I see him. I freeze, I

become colourless like the wall and I flatten myself against it. He passes close by and doesn't see me, I am wall. He almost touches me but I'm good, I don't move a muscle and I don't make a murmur. A whiff of tiger balm mixed with fresh, pungent sweat in his measured gait, he has this well groomed sort of face, a steady gaze, a firm tone, composed, you've always known at least one person like this, you could trust him and that's what I did, he said strip off and then turn round, and bend over, it was the examination, I had already stopped talking but I was thinking now he'll get a good look at what they did to me, and there I was naked with my back to him and bent over forwards and I was cold and everything ached but I stayed nice and still as he had told me to and all the people around were looking silently at, I believe, the bruises the haematomas the blows the injuries when I feel the one who had brought me here resting his truncheon back there and he says you can see he likes the truncheon and they all burst out laughing then I wet myself with that truncheon resting back there and the piss running down onto the floor that has them dying with laughter, him too, with that strong smell of freshly rubbed-on balm mixed with fresh pungent sweat, fit, enrolled, and ready for the pokey he says now, but he was the doctor for crying out loud, I was in the presence of a doctor, and this had been his examination. I smell rancid, or maybe I've wet myself again and I'm cold again because he's no longer there but I can't move from here, I remain motionless for at least one hour, two, or I don't know how many hours more, no one sees me, I am wall. Only after a long, long time a new wind finally springs up, then without hurting myself I detach and let myself return. My house is at number 27 Via Ognissanti, the wind knows this. Right, here I am, I go up the stairs. And I am the door, I am the armchair. I am once more flower-patterned cretonne.

I saw him, I tell her as soon as she arrives this morning, he's here, he's come to live round here.