

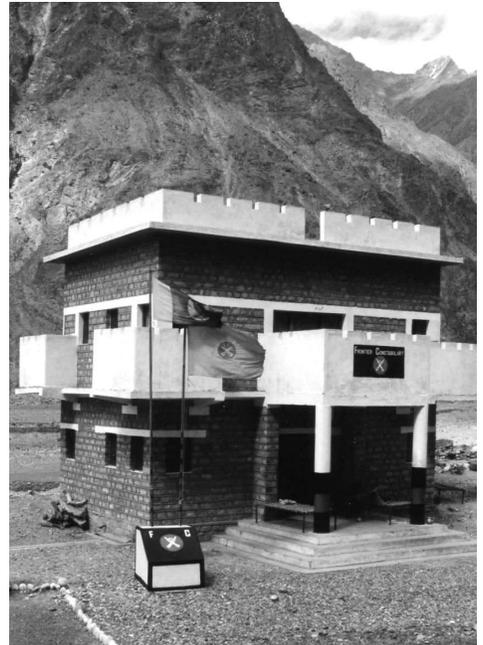
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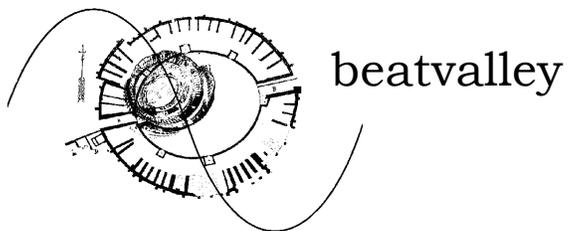
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Before the Law



Nidadakēs Seferiades



concocted a most treasonous lie. "I am king, come to rule this place." The guards rose. Far from arresting Anselmo, one ran into the gate house while the other saluted. "Forgive us highness, we did not expect you." "Now, now wait, that's a mistake. It's not true." "Come look. Though everyone knows the law, many people cross this bridge. They give true statements, and as the judges clearly see, so they let them pass. Yet in all this time no one has climbed from beneath the bridge, as seers on this side long ago predicted our

Emperor must arrive. In this case I should have dispensed with even the question. I wanted to be sure, but there is no doubt." "I am a fugitive! See I broke loose tonight from that jail there. I strung myself from the bottom of the bridge to escape!" "Don't be shy. This bridge was built for you only. Now it shall be removed. The viceroy has been fetched. You have plenty to discuss." Anselmo protested, but was led away to meet the viceroy and be oriented as master of the place. He lived longer than he wanted.

*

his fields destroyed, his wife and daughter perished under the hillside, when their hut and half the *cobertizos* on that face shifted into the river during a long rain. He was broken at ends, tried to bury his head in the gouge on the hill and got put into care of his friend Jacobo, the son of a poor doctor. Jacobo opened his hand to this Anselmo, but Anselmo stayed disconsolate. Anselmo slept long. He ate little, little walked about and seldom spoke. When he did, he talked of death. He wanted to die, but found he could lift not

Inspired by Panza's judgement

*"O perpetual discoverer of the Antipodes!
Torch of the world! Eye of Heaven!
Sweet stirrer of wine coolers! Here
Thymbrius, there Phoebus, now archer,
now physician! Father of Poetry, inventor
of Music, you who always rise and—though
you seem to—never set! On you I call,
sun, by whose aid man engenders man.
On you I call to favour me and to
light the darkness of my mind, ..."*

—Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra,
Don Quixote

Venice. Sardis. Al Qāhira. Tangier.
In the town of F—— a failed
farmer returned from sea to find

relying this catastrophe." The guard inspected Anselmo, and next day returned with some coils of twine. "Are you good with rope?" "I have been a sailor." "Perhaps you shall have better luck on the other side. I can release you, but you will be seen if you cross above the bridge. Loop these around a spar below the track and using these clips, guide yourself to the next. Loop around another and so on." Anselmo understood. Being freed, he embraced his conspirator. Following the guard's direction he made his way,

suspended by a series of loops, under the bridge span. Hauling his weight from spar to spar Anselmo spied the cliffs and deep waves beneath and more than once considered he might, by just undoing his clips, hurry to break his neck. But it was not within him. Finally he hoisted himself up a bluff beside the bridge end and emerged, surprising the pair of guards that side. They fell to bellies, then remembered to give the challenge. Anselmo, suspecting he at once looked the criminal sneaking from under the bridge,

up and help grow. My life already is something. I discard it, but why not one more pleasing?" Jacobo smoked upon his pipe and by and by pitied Anselmo. One day Jacobo found Anselmo out with the chickens. "You know there is a bridge, over a river dividing a big estate in the next district, with at one end a gallows and a kind of court at the other. This river is deep and much wider than ours. The law in that part requires anyone crossing the bridge to take an oath saying

hand nor tool against himself. Fearsome nature! "The sin is God's. Within this envy I shall be a prisoner, no more use to the Lord than if in a barrel." For some days Jacobo together with his wife preserved him. The town got thick with questions. Jacobo tried to wedge against his sadness. "Suppose, Anselmo, you had a son still alive." "I see beyond you. You think if I admit a living son would give me duty to live alongside grief, you could show by degrees my own poor being is enough like possessing a young child to pick

fourth countered that hanging a man who had correctly said he would be hanged would so invalidate the law as to be a worse mockery. The third again supposed you are a madman. The second offered they turn you back at the gate, the way you came...:”

“How shall they decide?” “Word to the magistrate, that his wisdom may resolve it. His messenger could be here in four days or so.” Anselmo’s crests must have fallen. Seeing so, the soldier asked had Anselmo really meant to bind up

the court or was he sincere in his wish. Anselmo confirmed his readiness, his impatience, to quit life, together with his lacking the faculty to end it. “A trap of time let me live months in my own flesh, baked even by the empty sky while elsewhere all stitches in the pattern I was making got torn out. My women are killed, more or less I miss them horribly. Yet my newer misery, stepping in this frame and feet, does not for torment match remembering energies & choices expended in that misplaced period. Indeed I am only ever

Teams with carts passed Anselmo, his horse stumbled on rocks in the shoulder. He caned his beast the more. In the unanimous night now it was so miserable Anselmo would not stop, to get there quicker. The road then got straighter and he seemed to smell water and hear the surroundings recede into the emptiness above water. The road got so straight and it seemed to rise even as by his measure it should be dropping and yet now it was a lighter steeper ride and went on so interminably, Anselmo considered maybe he was

where you are going and what your purpose there is. If some judges there find you truthful, you may pass. But the rule is quite absolute and any dishonesty brings death by hanging.” “No kidding.” Anselmo borrowed a little colt and rode till the dawn. He stopped twice of exhaustion, when he would dip his water, then had to turn under an empty grain shed just before darkness, when it started raining, but in less than an hour he couldn’t wait and rode on under the rain, which went in his eyes and made the track wet.



bucked, for the strange pronouncement and because already he sensed the difficulties it raised. Officials showed the afflicted and bearded Anselmo his small cell. He spent several hours, treated sparingly. After some time the guard entered into the dungeon, same as had questioned him on the bridge. "Consideration is stuck, sir. You've given them quite a puzzle. One judge said if you are hanged, you will have told the truth and you must be pardoned. The next pointed out if they let you go, you

will have told a lie and deserve death. A third said if you were mad enough to go on and hang, they should not get in the way. But the fourth judge insisted if you really meant what you said that no matter what they do you have told the truth, and can't by law be executed. The first then changed his mind and said you must be some rogue making a fool of the law, who in jamming the court with this trick clearly expected no hanging. He recommended death to discourage such insolence, and for wasting the court's time. The

already dead, say been thrown from the horse, and this his after-life. Instead with morning the river widened into view and above it the pylons of the bridge's perch. But Anselmo was caught off balance by the guard's approach and, when challenged "Where are you going and for what purpose?" he was so bewildered from his sleepless night, so weary of riding, he forgot about dissembling and the only dream in his mind that same which had fixed and determined him those miles. "I'm going across that bridge and be hanged." The soldier