

EDWARD ALFRED GIKA

A call to arms (Sinking of the Belgrano)

This is a piece of real fiction. Fiction because I sit at a typewriter inventing it, reality for the same reasons. It is a story that is no story because it has no end. I am deathly afraid of endings, that is why all my stories end in a death. The end of any story is its own death. This is a story of a beginning. It is a piece of real fiction. Its theme is paradox.

In the kitchen stands my father. He is peeling large onions and tossing them into a deep stew pot. He is crying tossing the sheaths in a desperate violence. Tomorrow I leave for the islands to live out my theme.

The reports said that four-hundred and thirty-six sailors are lost at sea. Four-hundred and thirty-six stories have come to an end but these are not true endings.

I am that I am. I am everyman and yet no man. I was born Argentine, bred to be American, branded a Jew, betrothed to an English girl.

I see myself killing Keats, Shelley and Shakespeare on some frozen rock of an island. The poetry of futile blood splattered not on the page, but on the cracks of rock and film of sea. The blood floats like spilt oil. All else is sunk.

My fathers eyelids are thick like onion sheaths. He knows what I am writing about. He knows where my story ends and he is afraid. The stew is sizzling. It makes a sound like the whirr of an electric typewriter. It crackles and pops.

"and the guns?" he asks with a voice that crackles and pops, "and the guns?"

I go to fight in a war, where the first pain is one of regret. My notice came yesterday. White cardboard and green ink. The seal was official. A green seal stamped on the forehead of four-hundred and thirty-six men. A seal embedded so deep it has damaged their dead reason. I feel my own forehead hot with the press of green ink. It is not the stamp of salvation. It is the stamp of absurdity and its color is appropriate. Green boys dying on a green landscape in green uniforms.

“Can you tell me where my country lies?” said the uniform to his true love’s eyes.

I am the theme. I am the paradox. My blood stirs for the country of my birth. My apathy lies in the streets of a nation that breeds such apathy. My faith demands isolation. My culture is the knife in the back.

Green men dead and green smiles question. The green smiles and questions of apathy.

English eunuchs with stiff upper lips. Spicy boys with splintered dicks.

I am breaking all the rules in one last desperate attempt. I am writing a story about writing a story about writing a story. I am lost in the repetition. My characters never change because they are lost in the repetition. An unending chaos, repeated slaughter. Life is a history book whose first page is also the last.

There are only two characters in this portrayal of absurd nature. We live alone. I want to spare all others.

He is cooking stew. I am writing it. One final meal before I go. I see that the main ingredient is blood red. The only spice: salty tears. For a while I lived the illusion that the idea of death is easier to face for an old man, easier to comprehend, to rationalize, easier to stamp with green ink on one's forehead. It is not so. He tells me to keep on typing, not to stop, not to end.

I leave because my cousins are dying or dead. I fight and I kill but I do not hate. I lack the main ingredient in the stew pot of war that sizzles and pops with the sounds of howitzers and torpedoes. I do not hate. I am Borges, Faulkner, Singer and Keats rolled into one pile of limp flesh clawing for a reason. Tearing at myself with the shears of philosophy, ideology, tradition. I strip away old illusions and apply the tainted mask of conviction. My death is that I am not convinced. Sitting here writing with the green stamp of death, I am not convinced by the mask. The painted mask. The passionless mask.

And the green smiles question glaring green teeth. And the green countries suck their bruised pride with lips that grow flaccid.

My father is trying to lose himself in a stew whose sauce is too thin. My father is dying. He is screaming violently for me to keep writing. Not to stop. Not to end this story which is no story. His stew is thinning in the reality of this fiction and now the sounds come like lethargic bubbles that burst on the inside of the lid. I burst my first illusion only to discover I must blow up new ones. I need new illusions, new reasons, if only to get through this absurdity

that binds me to every man. I shed illusions like a snake only to discover they grow back every summer. The mask wears heavily. The green paint melts from it in the summer heat. It needs a new coat.

He calls me to dinner now. I leave the typewriter running. He will know I am not finished. Again the illusion.

The table is sparsely set. A basket of multicolored napkins, a bottle of seltzer, one of wine, a set of fork and spoon at two places, a baguette of bread. He is spooning thick potatoes and carrots. They break apart as they touch my plate. He is spooning the stew in a sort of madness, piling it on my plate. He doesn't look at me. All his attention is focused on the pot. His hands tremble as he keeps adding to my plate. A desperate attempt to keep me. I stare down at a growing pile. He ladles another spoonful. I can see his eyes swollen with tears. The spoon misses. It falls dripping on the bread. The spoon is thrown into the pot in anguish. He rushes out of the kitchen. I can hear him pounding his fists on the walls mingled with muffled cries. The drowned cries of my brother and cousins all banging their fists on the walls.

He returns with wet hands. They are rough, thick hands. Running them through my hair, he sits down with a weak smile. Tearing at a piece of bread, he is talking about nothing. Babbling in a slow delirium. He refuses to look at me.

"It didn't take as long as I thought . . . you know . . . usually an hour . . . but I . . ."

He breaks off. His broken English is beautiful. I cannot eat. There is a lump in my throat like a soft broken potato.

"I'm sure it's good . . ."

He nods his head with a slight smile. A smile filled with the pain of repetition.

"Not so good, but it will fill the stomach".

Words of gold spoken in broken English. Not good, but

it will fill the stomach. He dips the bread into the sauce. Suddenly he is aware of the buzzing of the typewriter. He looks at me.

“You forgot to turn it off”.

I nod.