

## VERSION ANGLAISE

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I paid my bill and rose abruptly and made for the door, again as if I were fleeing someone, and had the sensation, as so often at such precipitate moments, of having left something of myself behind, and thought that if I were to look back now I would see a crude parody of myself sprawled on the chair where I had been sitting, a limp, life-sized marionette, hands hanging and jointed limbs all awry, grinning woodenly at the ceiling.

The door, heavy and high, resisted me, and I had to lean my weight into it to push it open. At my back I heard a flapping step, and saw in the sunstruck, bevelled glass panel of the door in front of me the reflection of a grinning face looming at my shoulder. It was the red-haired fellow, the one who had been watching me while I drank my coffee. I turned to confront him, and the door on its stiff spring swung back and struck me on the shoulder, and would have sent me pitching headlong among the tables and the chairs and the legs of the waiters if Carrot Head had not grasped me by the elbow – the one I had bruised on the bathroom shelf naturally – and held me upright. He had a large, round, high-coloured face, with a sprinkling of ginger bristles on cheeks and chin that glittered in the sunlight falling through the glass. That awful blazer was far too big for him, as were his trousers, and he wore a pair of incongruous, once white plimsolls with soiled laces and thick rubber soles. He nodded and leered, saying something in what seemed to be dialect. I shook off with difficulty that insistent and insinuating hand, and took a step forward and let go of the door, hoping it would bash my pursuer in the face, but he avoided it nimbly and followed me into the street, still keeping up his incomprehensible patter. The only word of it I could make out sounded like *signore*, which was repeated over and over, with puzzling emphasis, while Carrot Head nodded vehemently and pointed to his own face. I turned away from him and set off along the lofty corridor of the arcade as fast as my bad leg and the uneven paving flags would allow, keeping my gaze fixed furiously ahead. Still Carrot Head would not let me go, but trotted eagerly beside me, burbling away, and leaning down and round and up to push his face in front of mine. And so we went along, by the stone archways, through alternating intensities of shadow and sunlight, glanced at by quizzical passers-by, until, at an intersection, beside a second-hand bookstall, I halted suddenly and took a step sideways and lifted high my stick in a hand white and shaking, and Carrot Head at last fell back, pursing his lips and shaking his head with a sorrowful smile and holding up placatingly a pair of empty palms.

John Banville, *Shroud*, 2002

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