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The Secretary is tired of making notes, and he's tired of revising text written months or years ago. The Secretary is physically tired, and he wants to go to bed, even though it's only 23:38. Twenty-three ... thirty-eight?! Appearance and truth. Identity, and men who are not allowed to grow beards because the hair will get stuck in their cellular phones when they discuss business with other people who work in offices. People are emotionally indigent because they never learned how to be on their own. The facts, at 23:40 (colon) I have two hands, ten fingers, a keyboard under my fingers linked to a computer that is connected to an electric current that is embedded in the wall. I press my fingers down on the keys, and the result is an expression of my reality at 23:41. I am aware that I am not the keyboard. Or maybe I am, but I was raised with the idea that I am not a keyboard. (Then again, I was not a keyboard ten years ago. As I understand it, constancy is an essential element in the consciousness of "I". It can, therefore, be argued that because I was not a keyboard ten years ago I cannot be a keyboard now ... although this kind of logic cannot be used if I were not, say, a dentist ten years ago.) I consist of flesh, skin, bones, and blood. I know about the flesh because I once cut myself (accidentally, not as an experiment) and saw that my flesh is similar to that of other animals whose flesh I eat as meat. I know from the same cutting that blood runs under my skin. I've never seen my own skeleton, but I've heard how people who know about these things, talk about it. I've also seen pictures of bones that had belonged to people who may have previously also sat behind keyboards or notebooks, but who have since lost their flesh and skin. If I caress my skin, I feel something hard under the surface. I guess what I'm feeling on such an occasion is indeed my own personal skeleton. Although I've also never seen my own brain, I have confidence in the accuracy of the pictures and texts produced by people who have apparently done research on this topic, and who have indisputably proven that

(most) people have a brain. I am also aware of the fact that I was smaller at an earlier stage of my life. If I think about it, I can remember that I was as young as three or four at one point in my life, holding my mother's hand during a carousel ride. I also know that I have had this particular memory in the past. If, on the other hand, I have been old, I cannot remember anything about it. It may also be that what I am referring to as "I" (with the help of the keyboard under my fingers) have previously existed – and by previously I mean before I became this man who is now sitting behind a computer's keyboard at 23:55, and who knows, or believes, that he was once much smaller, holding his mother's hand in a dark tunnel during a carousel ride.

The Secretary scratches his neck (which itches only a little bit, but he enjoys the sensation of feeling something, and to know, as a result, that he is alive). He looks at the fingers that cause the pleasant sensation. He sees the neatly clipped nails. He also sees oily stains on his right thumb, and bits of oil under his right hand's nails. The reason for this – he knows because his brain stored the memories along with all the memories of events of what he calls "yesterday", and all the days that preceded "yesterday" back to a few years before he had held his mother's hand during the carousel ride (although he does not remember much of his current life before that particular ride) – has to do with the fact that the old man who has a monopoly on bicycle repairs in the neighbourhood was asleep late this afternoon when the Secretary pushed his friend's blue bicycle of which the tyre had become flat overnight to the old man's workshop to pay the latter money to replace the inner tube. The Secretary, after he politely conversed in Chinese with the old man's impolite wife or daughter at the entrance to their house, then pushed his friend's bicycle that she had left with him two years ago and which he has now been using for about seven months, back to his apartment, parked the bicycle against the wall under the living room window of the other old man who is always watching TV and who sometimes loudly

shuts his living room window when he hears the Secretary returning from town, walked up the stairs, took his keys from the Seven Eleven plastic bag, unlocked the door, kicked his sandals off, and fetched his box with tools in the kitchen in order to change the flat tyre with one he knew he could get from the rear wheel with the broken spokes on his yellow bicycle – which he would have preferred if the spokes were not broken – that was standing in the spare room together with the other possessions his friend had left with him after leaving the country two years ago. In other words, he knows where the seven oil stains come from on four of his right hand's fingertips. From the bicycle. Which made him happy – that he fixed the bike. The yellow one. His own bike. He took the blue bicycle's wheel, the yellow bicycle's inner tube, and also the yellow bicycle's tire (which he prefers because it's rougher), put it all together and then he did not put the wheel back on the blue bike as he had initially thought he would, but on the yellow bike – which he then rode to the English conversation class to earn another R169.81. He thought to himself, one should create things, or at least fix things because it is closer to the true nature of a human being. So he thought someone will one day say: "He, the famous Scribbler-down of Ideas and Insights once said ..." But then he interrupted himself, and he thought: There are writers, poets, essayists, playwrights, novelists, columnists, but I'm not really one of them. I'm a Notist, or a Notisist ... no, a Notist. The he wrote it down in his notebook that is always lying open on the antique cabinet: A Notist. Then he walked into the kitchen, took a cigarette from one of the four packets lying on the sink, lit one, and thought: He, the famous Notist of Ideas and Insights – or, the Secretary! – said it was not part of human nature to do much of the work that people do, but it is also true that eighty percent of the people who fill these labour positions, make life easier for people like him because they do the work they do. He also wondered whether one could say "human nature". Then he thought that both Charles Manson and Mohandas Gandhi had eyes, and that these eyes served exactly the same

purpose. Their eyes did see different things in different countries and at different times, though. It is also true that they decided ... or maybe they did not decide because it was not in the first place their choice to be born as Charles Manson or Mohandas Gandhi, but since you still have free will and so on, one can say that they chose to see different things with eyes that nonetheless had exactly the same function and mostly (except perhaps for pigment) the same design. He also thought it was ironic, considering a few things, that Charles Manson's chosen profession was that of "musician" while Mohandas Gandhi was a "lawyer". Yet he believes that not only were they both born with the same design in eyes, but also with the same human nature – which according to him determines that a human being's true role and function are that of Creator, and not Office Worker. On the way back from town, on his yellow bicycle with tightly inflated tires, and the Seven Eleven bag now loaded with a box of Korean fermented cabbage, soup with noodles and two hamburger patties, a plastic glass full of papaya milk and a plastic glass full of green tea, the Secretary continued. He thought, people who perform administrative duties, or any other tedious work that requires no imagination actually make a sacrifice so that the rest of us do not have to agonize over the management of companies and institutions and government agencies. However, if one could automate the repetitive work people do in order to get money for food and clothing but also for other junk they don't really need but which they buy to feel better about themselves, and let's say, dismiss fifty percent of this workforce ... it will adversely affect the economy, of course. It is certainly true that you end up in twisted alleys if you want to change how things work. If one could then maybe take this workforce of people who do mundane, non-service, non-creative work and re-employ them in positions where they manufacture something, but not in the sense of assembly line labour circa 1925 in a Ford automobile plant ... you end up in another alley, namely that it will have a negative impact on their status in the community and their view of themselves. The reason? The dominant culture of the

day gives higher ranking to so-called white collar workers performing soul-destroying tasks in offices than to people who produce things with their hands. People should indeed be re-educated! Most people do not understand complex questions about human nature and the true purpose of human life. Most people also don't question the skewed culture where people are given higher status, and in many cases more money if they don't have to dirty their hands. The Secretary understands the historical background of this development in the evolution of human beings as labourers, but he cannot understand why more people don't get seriously upset about this culture! Then again, he can understand this as well because most people reckon if they can provide in their own needs, if they can find a partner with whom they can start a family and if they can continue with what they have been taught is a "good life", then all is well, and questions about human nature and the true purpose of human life are then largely unnecessary. Or, in case these questions are still deemed valuable, it is nevertheless considered sufficient to uncritically recite statements made about these matters by someone like the local pastor or priest. In addition to these ideas, the Secretary is of the opinion that all men ought to have the right to grow a beard; that they should not be told what to do with their facial hair by their supposedly higher officers in the company, organization or business where they earn money. And regarding women who complain about beards that get in the way when it comes to kissing or that their men look unkempt with a beard, the Secretary is undoubtedly old-school. "Since when are men willing to give up their ancient right to grow a beard just because their women forbid them, or tell them they look silly? What's the world coming to?!" the secretary will say. Not that he is angry with women and taking men's side. Most men annoy him. Well, most women do, too. But women (especially the two who sell tea in the main street) have the unfair ability to manipulate men just by being who they are. Men are weak. Women, too. And if women don't want to shave their leg hair or their armpits, it is their right. If the Secretary does partner

up with a woman one day, he won't mind her hairy legs or her hairy armpits, as long as she does not complain about his beard when she kisses him. (It is true that the world will most probably go under initially if the Secretary were to be the boss, but it will only be for the first few decades.) He has also come to the understanding that women look for certain things in a man, and if he does not have these things by the age of 25, she will give him the benefit of the doubt in the belief that he will have these things within a few years. However, if a man is already 33 and he still does not have a house and a car and credit cards and check books and expensive shoes, then she reckons this is how it will be for the rest of his life. It matters less now than a year or two ago because although women still drive him crazy, he recovers his sanity much faster nowadays. Women have exceptional anatomy. What he is searching for, however, is an extraordinary woman. And extraordinary women, like extraordinary men, are as rare as an administrative position that requires creativity.

It is now 01:25. The Secretary is exhausted. He wants to go to bed because it's late, and because he's falling asleep behind his computer.

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Charles Manson had a beard. Gandhi didn't. Manson was a musician. Gandhi was a lawyer. Manson killed many people, or at least inspired other people to go on a killing spree. Gandhi inspired millions to do good things. I'm dead tired now.

NOTE:

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