

Translation by Mark Kline

His Own System

All I had done was to hire a man to come and trim the apple tree. It's over fifty years old, and it spreads out in every direction. The small limbs are green from algae and look crippled. The tree bears lots of fruit, but the apples are small and sour and there are too many of them.

Gathering up the fallen apples is a lot of work. Every morning in August there are hundreds of them lying on the lawn. Also, they fall onto the sidewalk and the neighbor's driveway. I run around with a bucket and fill it up several times a day and throw the apples on the compost heap, but that's not good, either; apples attract rats.

The agreement was that he would come at eleven.

At ten-thirty I notice a man sitting on the lawn in front of the tree, his back to me. His shoulders shake as if he is crying. I'm standing in the living room and I cannot take my eyes off him. I wonder whether he is the man I have hired or if he is someone else. It does look very much as if he's crying.

He reaches for his jacket, which has been tossed onto the grass. Now I notice a saw beside the jacket; he's the man, all right. Sunlight reflects off the sawblade.

He has a handkerchief in the pocket of his jacket. He blows his nose and shakes his head. So he really was crying. You have to ask yourself why he is sitting on my lawn crying, a half hour early and without coming to my door first.

I haven't changed my clothes. The way I look now, him seeing me is out of the question. My pants can't be buttoned, they gape open at the waist, and I'm not wearing a bra. I stand at the window and look at him, his short blond hair. He spits on the grass, now he begins to take his clothes off.

He pulls his t-shirt over his head and dries his face with it. Then he tosses it aside. It lands on the sawblade, and then he kicks his tennis shoes off, they are brown and black and worn out. He manages to wiggle out of his shorts without standing up. Though it is mid-October the temperature is close to seventy, the sky is blue, and he is actually wearing shorts, or at least he was. Now he is wearing nothing, not even underwear. Fortunately he has stopped crying, that would be almost too much to bear.

He reaches down in the grass for the saw. He holds it in his hand and sits for a while, he looks up. Then he stands and begins trimming the tree.

He doesn't use a ladder. He climbs up into the tree and saws while straddling a limb. Big branches, hollow and rotten, fall onto the grass and the sidewalk and the neighbor's driveway. He saws away with a persistence second to none. It is very impressive.

Yet I have to admit that I'm a bit annoyed by how he has taken matters into his own hands. After all, it is my lawn and my apple tree. The fact is, he can't know how I would like the tree to be trimmed. It's possible that I want it to look completely different from what his system will result in. He does have a system, definitely. He is thinning the limbs out with a symmetry in mind I can't quite figure out. And it all happens so fast. The tree is taking on a new form, something resembling a cupola. And here I am, standing in the

window, my pants unbuttoned and without a bra, a lovely sight; I can't even go out and ask him where he learned his technique.

This is too much. There he sits in the tree wielding his nearly invisible saw, that's how fast he is working. And to top it all off he is naked, and he has been crying. We could not be more different from each other, he and I. He saws and saws.