

**The Invisible Apple – Robert Gwisdek - Translated by John Robertson**

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In the years that followed, Igor seemed lost to the world. He often stared, completely absorbed, into space and forgot to answer people in conversation. Whenever this happened he would smile, apologise and try to find out what the conversation was about.

A numbness, which he kept trying to shake off engulfed him and he worked just enough to cover the rent on his flat.

Igor made an effort to approach things without holding an opinion on them. As long as he did not know what things were made of, as long as he could not fathom where they came from and where they went to, he believed he had no right to an opinion.

He tried to remain neutral towards other people too. He did not want to condemn them, even when he could not help but look at them a little disapprovingly. Many of them were so reckless and the way in which they judged others so quickly and the stupid way they treated their surroundings often left him in a dark mood. He did not like this darkness. Igor believed that if he came to understand the world and its inhabitants well enough, he would no longer condemn anyone.

He thought, over and over again, about the idea of spending a length of time in a room without light, or sound. He always took the view that something worthwhile was sure to come of it, but did not yet have the strength to risk doing lots of experiments on himself.

He was often restless and absent-minded and went about his daily life with a fidgetiness that was difficult for those around him to bear.

Time and again he felt drawn to silence. He thought that if he succeeded in being completely silent, the world would reveal its beauty to him. He usually slept too little at night and too much in the afternoons.

During this time Igor often had a recurring dream in which he was running through a sewage pipe. Everything seemed hostile and poisonous and he had the feeling of being watched by things. They smelled his fear and the more he allowed himself to think that he had gone the wrong way, the more they seemed to multiply. It then seemed increasingly unavoidable that they would attack him and pull him to the ground in one of these anxious moments. They seemed to feed on his fear and he could not simply neutralise them, as he had done as a child, inside his biscuit tin. The pipe branched off in many different directions and every time he came to one of the branches, he thought he had chosen the wrong one.

After he had admitted to himself, he had completely lost his way, he heard strange, high pitched sounds in the distance. He followed them until he met a creature, right in the middle of the sewerage system, delicately playing a giant, octagonal, stringed instrument with great concentration. The creature's fingers had a dull lustre as they flitted over the strings; its hair was several metres long and floated about the room as if it were magnetised.

The music was so heart-rending, it had such an intense assuredness and seemed to embrace the world, yet at the same time was not connected to anything in particular, that immediately it made him certain that this creature must know a way out. It could not have originated from this dark place, but it must have come here of its own free will.

Each time it was clear to him, at this point in the dream, that he was saved. The music made him calm and he waited in a thoughtful silence. The hostile things still lurked in the darkness, but the fearlessness of the creature made him fearless too.

He stood for a long time like that, listening, and then it suddenly became clear that the creature had absolutely no intention of leaving that place. Igor became anxious again. What did it want down here? Why was it in this inhospitable sewer of all places? Just to sing? Nobody apart from him could hear it and appreciate what it was doing. There had to be a connection between them. This creature was clearly here because of him; but what would have to happen in order for them to get away? The creature appeared to play its music with no sense of aim, or time passing. Clearly this sewage pipe was no place to stay; something had to give.

The creature probably wanted something from him; an exchange would have to take place. When Igor realised this, he noticed one sound that the creature made on its instrument that in amongst the multitude of other sounds, stuck out for him. It was a single discordant note that sounded at now more and now less regular intervals. As he listened to the music with greater concentration he noticed increasingly clearly that it did not fit. It was distressed and fought against the harmonic current of the gently and powerfully flowing music. Igor understood intuitively that

this note was stopping the creature from opening up the dark world of the sewer with its song. He genuinely believed that the song would literally pull apart the entire underground sewer, if it were allowed to unleash the total power of its harmony. The walls and ceiling would melt and they could both slip out easily and unimpeded.

The creature must have tuned its instrument to create this dissonance on purpose; otherwise it would not have lasted two minutes in such a dark world.

Igor came to the terrifying realisation that the creature was playing its song discordantly on his account and now it seemed down to Igor to resolve this. He was touched, and scanned the instrument hard with his eyes for the string that was causing the dissonance. Drawing nearer with caution, so as not to disturb the creature in its deep concentration, he stared for a long time until he found the string that was out of tune. The string was comparatively short and mounted on the left side of the octagonal instrument. The instrument was made of white wood, which looked as though it had grown directly into that octagonal shape. What sort of tree would grow like that, he wondered. Soon he saw a small peg attached to the threadlike string, fixed to the delicate wood, which seemed that it could be adjusted. Igor hesitated – he knew he had to be careful not to shock the creature or to disturb its flow. The creature swayed gently as it played, which made it even harder to tune the strings without interrupting the playing. He looked for confirmation in the creature's eyes, but it just stared past him, its body moving in time to the music. Igor plucked up the courage and took hold of the tuning peg carefully, to turn it gently. As soon as he touched it, his hand suddenly grew to twice its normal size. Igor was startled and pulled his hand away abruptly. In hurriedly retrieving his now very large hand, he accidentally turned another peg and detuned a second string. Igor suppressed a scream and immediately tried to rectify the position of the first peg. However, as soon as he touched the strings, his hands swelled suddenly again to become even bigger and were now the size of two-seater chairs. He flinched momentarily, but in doing so turned more of the pegs and completely broke four strings. The creature stopped playing and looked at him. One of Igor's fingers had become knotted into one of the strings and would not stop growing. In a panic, Igor tried to pull the string off his finger, but failed. He jumped backwards to avoid doing more damage, but as he did so, pulled the whole instrument to the floor. Igor cried out and tried to lift the instrument up to the creature with his gigantic hands, but the hands grew and grew and continued to fill the room. The sudden fear that came over him caused the things that were watching, which had until now kept their distance, to jump onto Igor's back and to bite into his flesh. Just before Igor seemed about to be consumed by a storm of his own panic, he caught a glimpse of the creature, which watched him silently and curiously. Then he woke up.

Every time the dream left a bitter taste in Igor's mouth and he felt an urgent need to wash his hands. He buried himself in books about physics and religion and wherever he looked he saw symbols and hidden signs.

It was as though life put a question mark behind each event, every encounter and every thought. Nothing seemed to end with a full stop, or an exclamation mark any more. Everything was a clue to an invisible puzzle, which pulled him in a spiral, like a cyclone, nearer and nearer to an invisible middle point.

Why did life exist in the first place, where did it come from and why did it have to end? What was behind all of its games and grotesque images, what was the reason for his own existence and where was it all heading? Leading a normal life seemed even weirder to him now and perhaps even wasteful. There was not enough time for all of the ill-conceived duties that people had invented for themselves. Igor began to dispense with his full name and simply called himself Igor. He had always hated having a name and now he thought that he should at least choose it for himself. He liked the fact it had an I and an O in it. It reminded him of a zero and a one.

After Alma's death he struggled to escape from the darkness that he felt he did not deserve to be burdened with. He felt compelled to find a solution; as though he had to awaken something locked away that slept, deep in the centre of the spiral.

His body began to play an increasingly important part in solving the puzzle. Igor felt that something inside him was twisted. He could barely feel his feet when he walked. His spinal column was strangely contorted and there was a lump in his throat, which was always there and cut off his breath. He went running more often and took up different kinds of sport. He also became accustomed to allowing each part of his body to go limp before falling asleep on his back. He tried over and over to disperse the pressure that built up and compressed his head and then to move the pressure evenly around the other parts of his body. He would often lie like this and these times were the most interesting hours of the day. The knots in his muscles began to loosen and he felt freedom beginning to twinkle within himself. This only lasted for a few seconds at a time, but these moments were sweet and very precious to him. Soon nothing was more important than the constant cleansing of his inner-self and being rid of the blockages, which had stopped up his body over the years.

Igor had now landed a job that gave him financial security and allowed him to spend a lot of time alone. He often did his work half-heartedly and impatiently and could hardly wait to get home, to continue working on the exploration of his nervous system.

He now devoted himself so passionately to his research that he felt the complete opposite of the detached way he used to. He no longer felt distanced from his body. He was soon able to sit upright and relaxed and discovered links between hands and feet, throat and pelvis, belly and shoulders. His nervous system seemed to react to the most diverse variety of mental images and seemed to be increasingly linked to his own imagination. Using his mind he forced light into his stomach, through his muscles and veins and he grew better at noticing the different reactions this caused. More often now he linked himself with ideas that lay outside his body.

He thought that if the world was infinite and never ending, then all of the information contained in it must be too. He tried to call upon the information that was necessary to repair himself. He needed to tune to the correct frequency, to find where the encoded information was, just as he had seen it done on his parents' kitchen radio as a small boy. Then the solution would flow around his body like the sound of music.

One night he had another dream that would have a great influence on his life. Igor found himself in an elegant hallway, standing in front of a door numbered twelve. When he looked at his hands, he discovered he had twelve fingers. He went through the door and stepped into a waiting room. Inside there were chairs and a small table. Impersonal, bland pictures hung on the walls, a water cooler hummed quietly and an unnecessarily loud ticking clock on the wall displayed the time. It would have been a normal waiting room, were it not for the fact that the ceiling was so low. Nobody could have waited comfortably there. It was not even possible to sit up straight.

After having spent about quarter of an hour sitting hunched over, it became clear that nobody was waiting for him. He could simply walk through the door whenever he wanted. This he found very funny and laughed out loud at his obvious, silly mistake. All at once everything around him seemed more pleasant; even the ceiling did not seem quite as low. He got up and to his surprise, was able to stand up straight.

He got the sudden urge to look behind the door, which until now he had thought would lead to an unpleasant appointment with a dentist, or something similar. He opened it, not at all prepared for the unspeakably confusing things that waited for him.

Igor stepped through the door cautiously.

He got down onto his back and managed to grab hold of the ball that made a threatening, screaming sound all the while, before he attempted to run out of the room.

The room was brightly lit and the surface of its walls was made from an unusual, shiny material.

Igor cried out in panic and held himself up against a wall for a moment with his free arm, which then gave way so for an instant both his arms sunk into the ball.

He stared into the emptiness and could make out a figure in the distance, amidst the white, dusty haze.

Before he had time to end this thought, his arm was dragged into the ball, right up to the shoulder.

He went nearer to look and established that the figure was not a figure, but a circle spinning itself round and round with such speed, that it floated like a deflated ball around the room.

Its surfaces vibrated at the touch of his fingers and immediately a warm feeling flowed through his body, as though his hand was being gently sucked in.

It gave out a deep, buzzing sound and it was moving so fast that Igor could see his reflection in its surface.

Its shape was too appealing.

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Every time he awoke bathed in sweat. From beginning to end this dream made no sense. Some of its images did indeed make a big impression on him, but there was no logic to its sequence of events. The images repeated themselves, as though they were trying to get Igor to put them in order. It was as though they were crying out to him, like hungry chicks from a nest, to be sorted into their hidden, yet predetermined order. But Igor refused to reflect upon the dream any longer; it was too wild and too strenuous to continue to dream it.

After he awoke his hands burned and again he wanted to wash them. Even hours later Igor could not shake off the absurd feeling the dream left him with. He soon noticed that his relationship with time had become dislocated. It was no longer linear, but strangely convoluted and relative.

His visual perception had also changed. To begin with there was just a slight curvature at the edges, but increasingly often his eyes were clearly playing tricks on him. He grasped to the side of a cup whenever he went to take a drink from it, he no longer recognised old acquaintances, coloured spots appeared before his eyes and did not disappear for hours. He also repeatedly saw geometric patterns made of circles and triangles when he shut his eyes.

He hoped that this was just a temporary phase like a cold, but when after a week he was no better, he began to get frightened. As he went about his daily work, he laughed and joked, but inwardly felt depressed. He became aggressive, when he realised he could no longer read writing. Igor wished that someone would just come and give him a slap around the face, so he would snap out of it. But nobody came and he simply had to watch as he became lost to himself. Something had begun to shift inexorably and as Igor turned 23, he lost his grip on his previous reality.

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-Noc deus fluidum fonc-

Legs ground down by wood and undergrowth,  
over hills and meadows and brooks.  
Through wet and cold and wind you must go,

if the cities fall into ruin, if the cities are blown away,  
then nothing belongs to us and we belong to nothing,  
so dance and sing and laugh about it.

It's a good place. The room is plain and warm. Its walls are white and there is a carpet on the floor. The windows are double glazed and the heavy, black towel hanging over them, does not let any light through.

A mattress. Several sheets and blankets. 150 litres of water. Rusks and cans of fruit. Cans of apples. Pickled gherkins. Cans of beans. Jars of tomatoes. A toilet, air conditioning.

I go into the backyard. The sun is shining gently. The wind blows through the trees and the rustle of leaves sounds good.

I draw a circle on the ground with chalk. Then I make a triangle out of matches and put them in the circle and light them. They make a sizzling sound and I watch them slowly burn out.

I give in for a few minutes, standing in the sun with my eyes closed and breath the mild air, then I go inside and close the door behind me.

Everything is clean. The shower is repaired. I hang the final towel over the door, so that no light can seep through the cracks.

## DAY 1

I seem to have slept in. I can't say exactly whether it is the middle of the night, or still evening. Everything is dark and silent. But it's still very beautiful.

I've just eaten. The noise it makes when I open a can is deafening. It's a good thing that there are no streets nearby.

The gherkins were an excellent choice.

My body twitches a lot if I lie down. I'm annoyed. Why will it not simply lie and flow. Writing like this is weird and I'll stop it soon. Who knows whether anyone will be able to read it later? I take care to guide the pen slowly and with my free hand I feel how much of a gap I need to leave to the next line. I don't know if that helps.

It must be morning now.

For the first time I felt really happy to be here. It was only for a few moments, but I can still feel the afterglow. The thoughts are becoming louder and it bothers me that they are so repetitive. The brain is really strange. It spits out a series of random images at my feet. It has even sung the melodies of adverts. I'm going to lie down again.

After the sleep, I did a lot of exercise. My perception is becoming better. It is good to allow the eyes to have a long break like that. The head is still loud, but the noise from my muscles is only just perceptible. I've worked with the colour purple a lot internally.

Three of my vertebrae are worrying me. The lowest one seems hardly to allow itself to be moved at all. The uppermost one, my atlas vertebra, seems to have become misaligned. At one point I was just about to move it back into place, but I'll wait until a better time. The final one is in the middle, just under my first rib. I'll have to deal with it in more of a precise way.

I'm nervous for the first time. My brain now seems to be slowly realising what I'm planning to do with it and it is responding with the hands and feet. I had to hit the wall a few times, which did me good. When I move around a lot, the problem usually passes quickly. All the same it requires a lot of strength to calm my body. My brain and my body are still anxious, but I talk to them reassuringly. I think they'll soon get used to it.

A few times everything within me has gone very silent.

The darkness begins to move. My eyes clearly want to empty themselves and spit out colours. Perhaps that is a sign of them healing. I can't really estimate how long I have been here any more. It must have been four, or five days. When you're sleeping so often, you forget about the time. I probably need a while to get used to the fact that nothing happens here. I feel strangely divided within my own body. The darkness is almost swallowing it. Sometimes it is very close too. 100 Days is a long time, but I think it was a good decision. I'm sure it will change, I feel it already. If I manage the first week, it will get easier.

DAY 2

Today I've made an astonishing discovery: my diaphragm is obviously getting in touch with me. It twitched and demanded my attention. I looked at it and as I gradually became calmer, I was able

to take some very deep breaths. Unfortunately it was over quickly and then I lay there again, like I'd been strangled.

My mattress is too soft and I often sleep on the carpet. It's nice that it's so warm.

I'm thinking of giving up the writing soon. It breaks my concentration.

My brain seems to want to use it as a sort of anchor, but I reckon that it will soon stop.

The sense of time passing has finally left me.

I couldn't guess how long I have already been here in my research station. The darkness and the silence take everything away from you. It's beautiful.

### DAY 3

I thought I heard an animal in the room. It's probably an insect. It's scratching around somewhere quietly and I tried to find it with my hands. I liked it for the first couple of hours. Then it began to drive me crazy. Nothing is more overbearing than a tiny scratching sound when it's completely silent otherwise.

I think I have accidentally written over a page that already had writing on it. If I run my fingers over it, it feels strangely full. I must remember to check with my hands, whether a page is empty before I begin writing.

I cried a lot. It really did me good.

I had to stop and think briefly, whether the alarm clock that I set on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April is actually switched on. I can't check any more now and I was worried for a moment that I hadn't set it.

I just felt a great, powerful force. It is gone again already, but it straightened something inside my eyes.

I cut myself on a tin of peaches in syrup. Very stupid. But I think it will heal quickly if I put my mind to it. Another nice little exercise to do.