

1968

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Recommended Citation

Bruce, Lennart. "The Argentina Meat Deal." *New Mexico Quarterly* 38, 4 (1968). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol38/iss4/66>

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THE ARGENTINA MEAT DEAL

Lennart Bruce

(Instalment from a novel in progress.)

I meet one of my old-time girl friends, as I'm lying floating in a swimming pool suddenly her face appears out of the water between my feet. She has just come to town and I invite her to come and stay with us. I share an apartment with two friends, although we are just about to leave the city by ship. The day of departure, I'm of course late; finally I manage to get through customs and all other controls. Once on board I slowly whirl around in my cabin with one arm outstretched before I fall asleep with the idea that it's a submarine; now we're diving, but only in a submerged tunnel winding like a bobsleigh track under the water: it's an exercise, I have to say that the tavern "Submarine" has improved, its bar is tops, I'm dead drunk, a triangle capsizes, inside it blue eyes and curly hair but no one I know, I swirl round and it vanishes, I shrink in my tight black sweater, it's suffocating me, I let down my shoulders from their slyly lifted position, take a couple of polka steps, my eyes also lose their sly expression and my whole attitude becomes normal, relaxed. The man with the long nose slides past, his posture looks silly as he leans forward because of the weight of the nose—and then I thought I was alone! Inside the left-hand bulge of my forehead a sudden fire flares up, the features of my face feel larger, twice as coarse; I avoid checking to see if this is correct, preferring to be delicately fine-limbed and small featured, totally relaxed. I lift my fieldglass to the eye in the same manner as a musician his trumpet to his mouth and gaze, a tall house rushes up to my face, a pair of clips give off a subdued shine from my ears, O.K. I'll have to wait until January, so what? There is a difference between the horrible and the ugly, a clearly defined difference between the terrible and the ugly to the advantage of the former; does the detestable exist? I get goose-pimples, an exhausted muscle is saturated by lacteal acid and stops functioning. By means of intense activity it is possible for me to choke within myself the state which is created by acclamation and praise from the outside, none of its satisfactions lasts and therefore its origin is of

no importance. It's the night of the jackbirds, roofs and trees are black with them, they scream at dusk, I slip my hand over my face, the tip of my little finger is caught in a wrinkle on my forehead, the fold of skin hangs on to it for a little while and then snaps back in numbed elasticity, in a corner sits the owl man in his circles, round-egged round-eyed round-headed hunchbacked armless; a psychic enlargement threatens to bust the cranium from inside; in order to hold together my organized structure I move into position quick as lightning concentrating. From somewhere in my memory my most beautiful attire emerges, a marine blue topcoat thirty years old. I'm just lifting it out of the delivery carton, tissuepaper is falling from its folds, the unused cloth is covered by a fine blue fiber-down: I'm happy but overtake time in the fast whiff of a snore and wake with the topcoat lost, the one who formed the mouth to say something has said it. I play cat catch rat with my penis but have to give up because it grows too big. What in the last analysis woke me up was the torment of a rectal cramp, then for a while I lie chuckling and humming, happy again because it let go, a great drama. A slit opens up and lets in a little light as I'm busy with my little specialty. Two white automobiles are lying one on top of the other, the one underneath with wheels in the air, the one on top twisted above the body, they are lying clenched in a fucking to death; deep inside a belly the contours of a fucked fetus, a blinker signals to death, a headlight throws forth a cone of light, I come and leave, try to be my usual self in spite of the accident; maybe they're nothing but toys? Perhaps I'm a giant unable to see the end of me? My head the top of a distant mountain, a vertebral bone pops in its neck although so little and in this connection invisible. The realistic surrealism is as ancient as the Oracle of Delphi, a wise man all drugged talking and talking with all doors wide, speaking directly out of his subconscious, his words fitting anything. The giant is on the go, he's colossal, before you know a thing he explodes into the room in his black suit. Meantime I sit in front of the young mother, she shows me her little baby, I turn it upside down and happen to drop it on the gravel, it's so tiny and all moist, it becomes covered with dirt all over its fine white skin. The baby forms its face in the shape of a howl, the mother snatches it away from me: I fail in everything I do: The giant is on the go, he seizes his victims by the collar or by the flaps of their coats and, as he tosses them against the wall, they vanish and there remains but a huge black hole while the room stands quaking. He looks up with his eyes and mouth of a lizard in his halfmoon smile of scorn, the chin is small and malicious, eyes

yellow at the corners, he takes his next victim & throws it against the wall, the black hole opens in it and the victim vanishes beyond all laws of nature with a strange harsh-sounding thunder, the giant comes rushing in looking for a new victim, seizes it throws it against the wall, again there's the familiar earthquake, the black hole and the harsh thunder. We climb up the trees but I'm detailed as the last man remaining on ground to throw the sticks up into the trees. Having dropped their leaves, their branches are naked and black, some of them dead, winding in bizarre shapes. On one of the lowest branches an old man is sitting who in turn has been chosen to receive the sticks I throw up to him, he's sitting a little too high up but I start throwing them. First I take those with a shape well suited for him to grab, or should he miss, for them to stick among the branches; still many fly by and fall back down, time is scarce; he climbs all the way down to the lowest branch, I concentrate on throwing the sticks in a straight and not a slanted trajectory in order not to miss the tree, it works better, now he catches stick after stick but all of them up till now have been provided with some twig or twisted form facilitating his grabbing them; eventually only the completely plain and straight canes formed like spears are left; they demand great precision although we have now acquired a certain skill. Nevertheless it's difficult. The smooth canes slip through the fingers just as they're about to close around them. When it's time to eat somebody throws a bag of food to me, the bag coming down meets a stick coming up, pass each other within only a couple of inches, the bag is white, contains various foods, among them a lemon, surroundings heave and sink in deep breaths, a phenomenon I'm only aware of for an instant. A tunnel filled with blue light opens, at its far end stands a black ship ready for take-off. Nobody really knows what's going on inside the walls of the palace, it covers a square mile, the Oba himself never lets anybody in but steps out into a specially constructed ante-chamber to receive visitors, very rarely lets someone pass behind its walls. The heir of his title and kingdom is sent away immediately after birth, only after the death of his father is he permitted back into the palace of the Oba, now as the Oba himself. Thus many unnecessary patricides are avoided. Only the Oba is permitted to wear colored beads, he's dressed in them from head to feet, his shoes are covered with them as well as his hat, his dress is so heavy that as he sits down his servants have to lift his arms onto the arm supports. The pope of the overgrown primates refuses to accept the pill and with it he is rushing toward his own annihilation, dragging his church with him. An enormous gravel-pit opens. It's

THE ARGENTINA MEAT DEAL

a holiday and the idle gravel trucks stand in long rows behind it. A cherub turns in the ceiling of a church around its beautifully pouting buttocks and blows its trumpet between its huge round richly pouting cheeks, somewhere half-way in between there's a churchyard just behind a junkyard, a couple of tough women with diamond eyes are approaching; again a psychosis slips out growing growing inside my head blowing it up to four times its size on the verge of bursting; it caves in and disappears broken down with the utmost concentration by my weak consciousness, long tracks of pain and behind them mountains turning blue in the distance; the front edge of a wound dissolves in some kind of radiation or fluorescent lines pulled backward indicating high speed in the direction of the wound, its center blood-red jelly; by all means, the bomb is disturbing but probably not very dangerous, can probably be locked up along with the gas from the first World War. More serious are chemical and biological weapons because of their low cost of production, and above it all towers the threat of general biological changes achieved by science rapidly bringing us to the road of parting: annihilation—survival.

The telephone is ringing, I answer, it's Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in one and the same person, saying: I'm wearing granny's nightcap—it's been a long time, I say, how are things with you—going to hell, have reached the far extreme of the rope, am going to hang myself so you can sell the corpse. I say, take it easy, one has to learn to live within oneself, no one else cares, you have to do away with the illusion that things are happening outside of yourself. The Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood yell into the receiver: it's ugly it's ugly. I answer, no it's horrible, terrible, but that's something quite different. Now the telephone cord has become twisted between us, I take the receiver from my ear and let it hang straight down unwinding itself, the receiver is shouting: where are you where are you?—here here I am, I shout here, I know it isn't easy, I say, but you have to live in the instant, think of the fact that red fully ripe tomatoes are beautiful—sure, sure for me everything goes to hell, I drop them on the floor so they burst and lie there like intestines split open with their slimy contents swelling from their wounds—we have to get together, just a moment, I have to pull the blind, I say, now it's O.K., yes sure we must keep in touch, this week is rather full I lie, but perhaps the next. A big human form out of stone sits staring at us with evil eyes between us on the borderline of our sections of the city. I see nothing but grey traversed by fine capillaries, now it's capsizing into a great plain covered with

houses, behind it rises a wall of stone and over its edge falls a thin cloth in the shape of a huge cigar filled with air bending in a long beautiful loop, slowly flying it rolls over the wall, on the other side of which, and out of sight sits Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in granny's nightcap desolately crying; an aeroplane is towing another airfilled cigar across the sky I yell: hello do you see it—yes yes I see it too—don't you see that it's beautiful—yes yes I see I see—We both see it, each from our different positions, so let's keep in touch—yes yes let's keep in touch. We hang up, the delicate arch of an enormous bridge collapses in our ears, a lightbrown and a black dachshund runs across the floor of my apartment, I see a woman with shadows in all her openings, beautiful against her blonde hair, we put our meaning on everything, that's the reason we insist on calling everything by name; originally it has no meaning. Right in front, the pointed ears of an ass are rising. Switzerland as a forerunner has automated its telephone system entirely, small improvements are planned but largely the system is perfect, telephones are even provided with a meter system of the same type used in cabs, permitting the one who talks to follow exactly the cost of his words. The United States of America is not, as it claims, number one but only number two after Switzerland in the automating of its telephone system. Scandinavian and some other northern European telephone companies have also greatly automated their telephones but keep their mouths shut about both Switzerland and the U.S.A. each one of them trying to give the impression of being leaders in the field, talk constantly about "the cobra," a new type of receiver sitting on the dialing disk which is released only when the receiver is lifted; its great disadvantage: it ties up both hands and cannot be cradled on the shoulder. Other countries are planning improvements in their telephone systems, but with no fixed date for total integration and automation; half-automated communication nets are available. I push a couple of barn doors wide open: there stands a figure skinny and mean like one of the assistants of death, and his skeleton just as white. A blue-white spot of light blossoms on a nose cone burning in friction, the light radiates in long lines which, before they vanish, resemble burning letters and numbers, compass legs run back and forth in a half circle accompanied by a pneumatic sound breaking the silence. My legs and arms are far behind me, only attached to my body by the lines drawn by their movements away from me as they're slipping behind; I'm again completely round, my extremes are the ring muscles of mouth and rectum and the round lids in front of ears and eyes which just have snapped, locked and enclosed the

sound and the light whirling inside my interior under a fine web of shining veins; there are only two straight lines: the tracks of arteries and veins on my neck; time just flies past and releases its system of bells. Creation is a coincidence, call it fortunate if you wish but beware of contaminated words, they may be spikes in your electroencephalogram. Threat's shadow slips in from the side, it's terrible and eerie out walking in thin air, I seek cover behind the shell of my backbone, throw the words around me, they are burning me. A young woman approaches, I lie down on my back with legs wide apart, she lies down on top of me between them but suddenly she throws back the upper part of her body and throws one hand over her bare ass, runs away weeping, shining needle dangles in its black thread, through space it grows darker, the thread grows brighter. From the surface of two butterfly wings, out of their beautiful pattern, two big calm eyes are looking at me.