

**Your main commentary should be focused on *modal constructions*. Other topics may also be addressed.**

'Don't you think you should see a doctor?' he says to the Costello woman.

She shakes her head. 'It's nothing, just a chill. It will pass.'

It does not sound like a chill at all. It is a cough, and it has a soggy quality, as if the lungs are trying to expel, a fistful at a time, a layer of deeply settled mucus.

'You must have picked it up under the bushes,' he says. She looks back uncomprehendingly.

'Didn't you say you were sleeping under the bushes in the park?'

'Ah yes.'

'I can recommend eucalyptus oil,' he says. 'A teaspoon of eucalyptus oil in a pan of boiling water. You inhale the steam. It does wonders for the bronchial passages.'

'Eucalyptus oil!' she says. 'I haven't heard of eucalyptus oil in ages. People use inhalers nowadays. I have one in my bag. Quite useless. My standby used to be Friar's Balsam, but I can't find it in the shops any more.'

'You can get it in country stores. You can get it in Adelaide.'

'Can you. As our American friends say, that figures.'

He will get the eucalyptus oil out for her. He will boil a pan of water. He will even hunt in the medicine cupboard to see whether he has Friar's Balsam. She only has to ask. But she does not ask.

They are sitting on the balcony with a bottle of wine between them. It is dark, there is a strong breeze blowing. If she really is ill she would be better off indoors. But she does nothing to hide her distaste for the flat — 'your Bavarian funeral parlour,' she called it yesterday — and he is not her keeper.

'No word from Drago? No news from the Jokićs?' she inquires.

'No word. I have written a letter, which I have yet to mail.'

'A letter! Another letter! What is this, a game of postal chess?'

Two days for your word to reach Marijana, two days for her word to come back: we will all expire of boredom before we have a resolution. This is not the age of the epistolary novel, Paul. Go and see her! Confront her! Have a proper scene! Stamp your foot (I speak metaphorically)! Shout! Say, "I will not be treated like this!"

That is how normal people behave, people like Marijana and Miroslav. Life is not an exchange of diplomatic notes. *Au contraire*, life is drama, life is action, action and passion! Surely you, with your French background, know that. Be polite if you wish, no harm in politeness, but not at the expense of the passions. Think of French theatre. Think of Racine. You can't be more French than Racine. Racine is not about people sitting hunched up in corners plotting and calculating. Racine is about confrontation, one huge tirade pitted against another.'

Is she feverish? What has brought on this outburst?

'If there is a place in the world for Friar's Balsam,' he says, 'there is a place for old-fashioned letters. At least, if a letter does not sound right, you can tear it up and start again. Unlike speeches. Unlike outbursts of passion, which are irrevocable. You of all people ought to appreciate that.'

'I?'

'Yes, you. Surely you don't scribble down the first thing that comes into your head and mail it off to your publisher. Surely you wait for second thoughts. Surely you revise. Isn't the whole of writing a matter of second thoughts — second thoughts and third thoughts and further thoughts?'

'Indeed it is. That is what writing is: second thoughts to the power of n. But who are you to preach second thoughts to me? If you had only been true to your tortoise character, if you had waited for the coming of second thoughts, if you had not so foolishly and irrevocably declared your passion to your cleaning lady, we would not be in our present pickle, you and I. You could be happily set up in your nice flat, waiting for visits from the lady with the dark glasses, and I could be back in Melbourne. But it is too late for that now. Nothing left for us but to hold on tight and see where the black horse takes us.'