

ADAPTED FROM  
THE STORY  
BY  
MIRCEA  
CĂRTĂRESCU

The  
Roulette  
Player

ART AND WORDS  
BY  
G.F. MARLIER

Later, He was Known  
Throughout Bucharest  
as THE Roulette player...

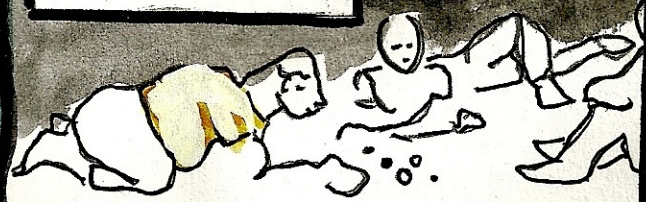
But when we were  
Children playing in  
the Shadowed Alleys  
And  
overgrown lots  
around the Blocks  
Where we lived....

He was Known as  
Mitya,  
the LosER.



He lost at every Game ...

MARBLER...



Wrestling...

DURAK...



When we played  
Hide and Seek  
No-one Bothered  
to find him.  
We would go in to  
eat dinner when it  
got dark.  
we hadn't even noticed  
his Absence.

His Bad luck was legendary among  
the Children of Emil Botta.  
No-one wanted to get too close to him  
for fear it would Rub off.

AS A teenager he hung a stray dog from a tree  
in our courtyard. He boasted, saying  
it was for practice; Someday he would go  
to Africa, string up a bull elephant  
and stab it 1000 times in the throat.



He robbed and Beat long-time  
Neighbors  
threatened girls he'd known all  
his life with Rape  
in Dark corridors...  
In his way he seemed to rail against  
the social order of our cement  
Grottoes, our Piles of Garbage.

predictably, he wound up in Jail.  
Some said For Rape, others said Murder.  
Some suggested he's gotten involved  
with a mafia, Running Drugs and guns.

At the time, I was trying to be a Christian.

So I visited him in the sordid prison on the outskirts of the city.

He wouldn't discuss his crime, but said he did not regret committing it. He gruffly asked why I had come...

However, by the end of our twenty minutes he seemed grateful for scraps of gossip about people from the old neighborhood.

As a parting gift he gave me a horse he had made by folding a scrap of newspaper. His last words that day were: "A guy gets very bored in prison. You find yourself making ponies out of paper, like a little girl."

In that moment, I liked him.

Ten years later, on one of my infrequent visits to my mother, I dropped into the Bar where our fathers used to drown their work-days.



I saw him as if seeing a ghost. He had shrunk into the costume of a Bum. a Bottle of Cheap vodka weighed down his pocket. A couple toughs were making him draw straws from a fist. If he drew the long straw they bought him a bottle. If he drew the short one, he would undergo some humiliation for their amusement.



make him Lick Dog Shit




make him Stand on His head until he Blacked out

They might Piss on him



I turned and left, like a Coward. I was sure I'd never see him Again.



But a couple years later  
on a Balmy Spring evening  
I glimpsed the Apparition  
again, over the Alabaster  
shoulder of a young lady I  
was courting.

It was him, but he had  
transformed. He was  
well-dressed, with fawning  
cronies at both his elbows.

The Champagne Bottle  
Before him on the table  
seemed to magically refill itself.

After he left the table, I approached  
his companions and, by thorough  
questioning confirmed that he was,  
indeed, "Mitya the loser" -

though they had never heard the name.

When I inquired  
as to how his fortunes  
had turned so  
dramatically since  
I had last glimpsed  
him in the  
Tavern

They laughed a cynical, opaque laughter

And they offered to  
take me with them  
that very night  
to see ...

THE Roulette.

I Agreed.

They Laughed as they put  
the Blindfold on me.  
They said not to worry,  
it was a Necessary  
formality.

The Locations of the  
Roulette must Be  
Protected.

After a short Ride  
the Blindfold was Removed.  
I was walking down a damp  
Stone Stairwell, into a  
Basement crowded with  
men from all walks of life.

A Book-maker walked  
Among them, taking bets,  
Collecting what seemed  
to be a substantial sum.



This is the Cast of the Roulette:

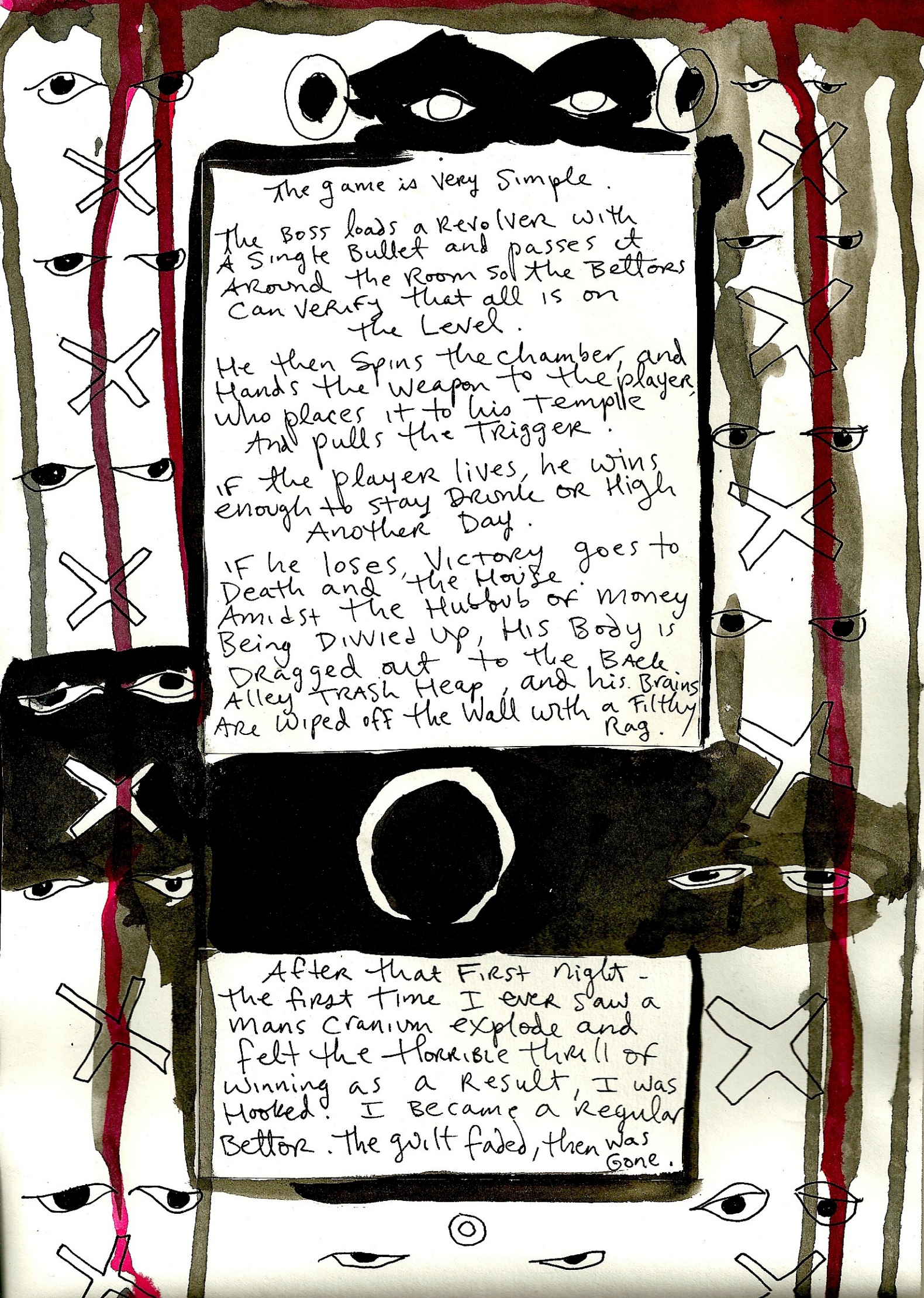
The player: usually a Bum. a wino or opium fiend. A man who has given up. He can accept the thought of Being A corpse in the gutter.

The Boss:

A pimp for players. If the player wins, The Boss takes a cut of his winnings - often as much as 80 or 90 percent. He arranges Appearances And insures that his player appears And plays. Tradition dictates that the Boss provides THE Weapon and the Bullet.

The Bettors: folks like you and Me who are drawn to the lively Stink of Blood - Sport, and prefer the Roulette to cock or dog fighting Because the stakes, in some sense, are always Higher.





The game is very Simple.

The Boss loads a Revolver with A Single Bullet and passes it Around the Room so the Bettors Can Verify that all is on the Level.

He then Spins the chamber, and Hands the Weapon to the player, who places it to his temple And pulls the Trigger.

If the player lives, he wins enough to stay Drunk or High Another Day.

If he loses, Victory goes to Death and the House. Amidst the Hubbub of Money Being Divied up, His Body is Dragged out to the Back Alley TRASH Heap, and his Brains Are Wiped off the Wall with a Filthy Rag.

After that First night - the first time I ever saw a mans Cranium explode and felt the horrible thrill of winning as a Result, I was Hooked. I became a regular Bettor. The guilt faded, then was Gone.

And Mitya the Loser?

He had become  
the unlikely King  
of the Roulette.

He had played for over  
A year and survived -  
An unprecedented feat.

He'd gotten Rich  
By Not Dying.

He'd become cocky,  
Spending wads of  
Money on Booze and  
Whores.

He was no longer  
MITYA the Loser.

He had disappeared  
into the stone eyes  
of  
the Roulette player.

He was the only  
player who had No  
Boss.

He was the Boss.



To keep the Bettors  
Betting, He had  
Begun to Add Bullets to  
The gun.



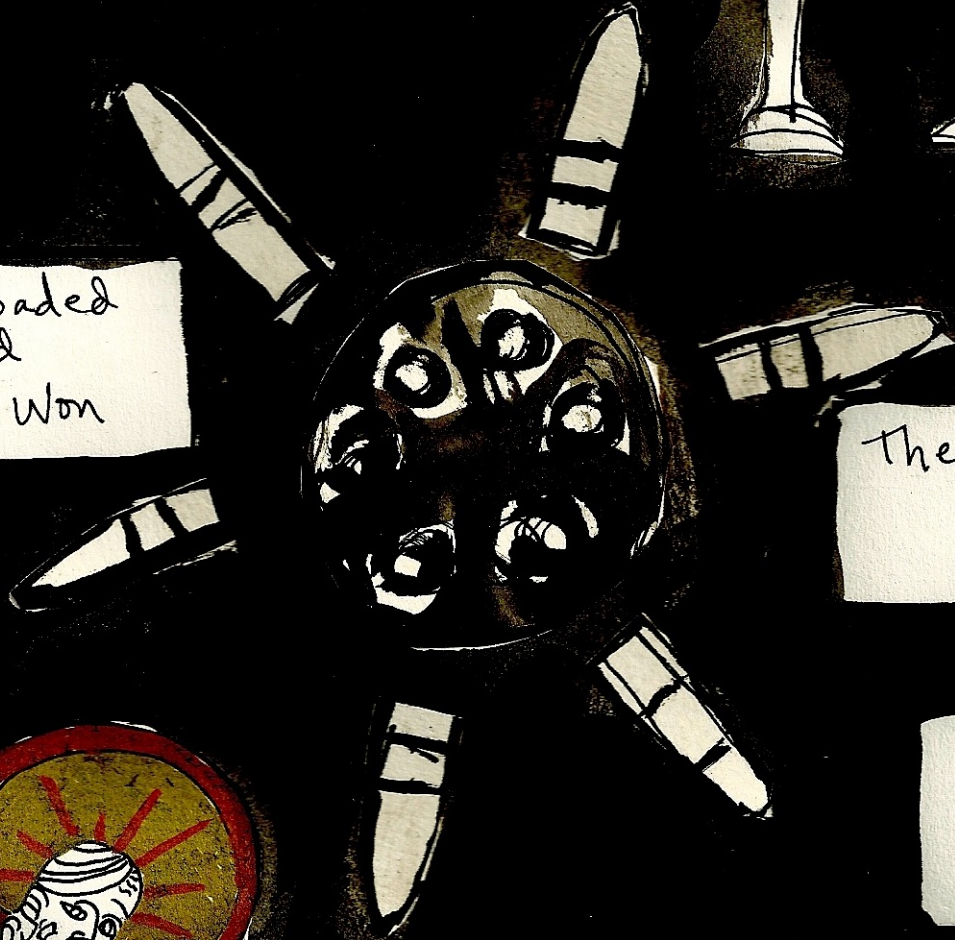
first he loaded  
two and  
played, and won

Then  
three

four

finally,  
five

and miraculously,  
He survived.





Finally, he announced  
A Christmas eve appearance.  
This time, he said,  
He would load the gun with  
All Six Bullets.

The stakes, strangely  
were high.  
A good Number of  
people were  
convinced he was  
immortal.



men came in their  
finest suits, women  
in gowns.

The Atmosphere  
was Festive  
on the Night of what  
I thought was my  
Childhood Companions  
Public  
Suicide.

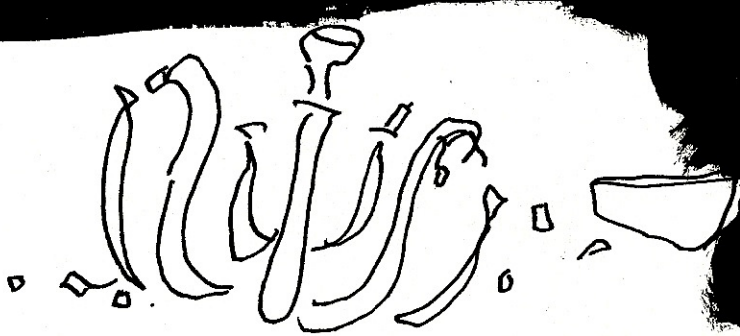
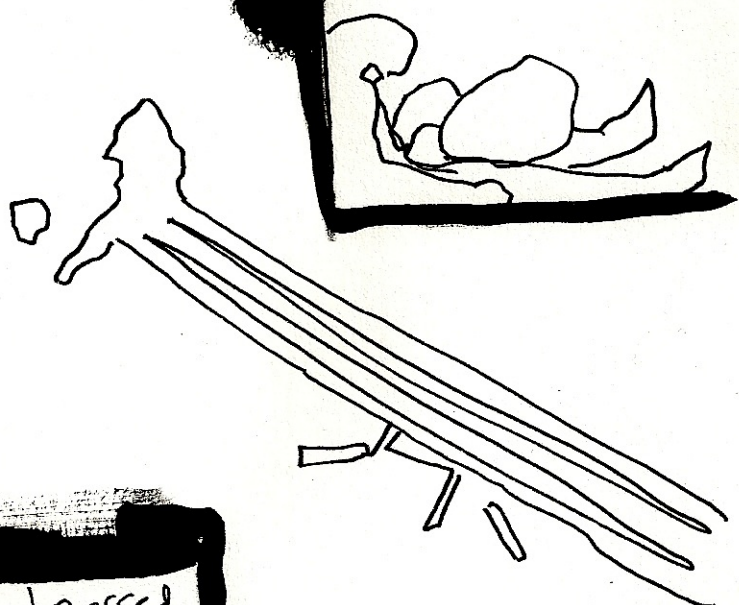
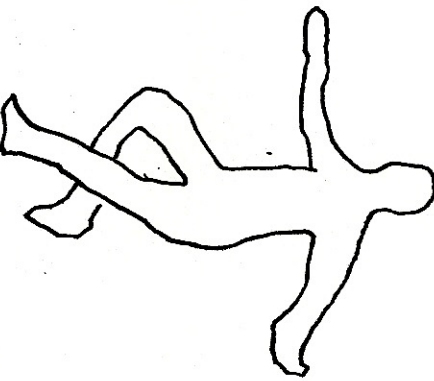
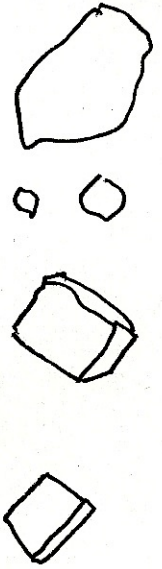
I will admit that  
I was not only in  
attendance, But Also  
Wagered (and lost) a considerable  
sum.

But just as he lifted the  
Revolver, as women gasped in  
the Hushed Hall, the Building  
was jolted by a powerful  
Tremor.

There had never been  
an earthquake in Bucharest  
before, and there has  
never been one since.

The remains of a dozen well-dressed  
citizens were found under the rubble  
but the roulette player was  
unscathed.

Soon after that  
night  
he announced  
his  
retirement from  
the roulette.



I would sometimes see him  
in Bars, surrounded  
By whores,  
Sworn to a life of Decadence.

He had become  
eccentric, let his hair  
grow, put on the  
Rough clothes of a  
peasant.  
Though He was the center  
of women's Attention  
I wondered if he  
had ever Found Love,  
Ever Been Happy.



only a year or two of Drink  
and Women passed After His Final  
performance And Before He met his  
strange demise. I heard of the end  
of the Roulette player From a friend  
in the police, who had seen the file.

One Night, Stumbling home,  
He was pulled By a young  
thug into an alleyway.



The Robber  
pushed his face  
Against a wall,  
Held a gun to  
his BACK and  
said

"give me your  
money or I'll shoot."  
whereupon, mitya  
the Loser had a  
Heart Attack  
AND collapsed. He  
died soon After.

It didn't take the police  
long to catch the inept would-be  
thief. He turned in the gun,  
which he explained he used only to  
scare people. He didn't really know  
how to shoot it, and it wasn't loaded.

