

Epithalamion

The last lion in the Sarajevo zoo was named Brzenic and had been something of a pet to the zookeepers, who were evenly divided between all the prevailing ethnic and religious groups in the region. Brzenic had been raised in the zoo and was generally as good-natured as any housecat, i.e., he could get cranky when he was tired or when too many people crowded around the bars of his cage. When the shelling started, Brzenic became agitated, pacing up and down the length of his compartment; when the roar became too loud, he covered in the center of the cage with his paws over his ears in a gesture that looked so unmistakably human that his remaining keepers, however busy they were with their own terrors and hatreds, stopped whatever else they were doing and looked on him with pity.

As the war progressed, depredations on the zoo and its exotic citizenry became more and more common. Brzenic's keepers, sadly depleted in both number and goodwill, knew that it was merely a matter of time before Brzenic wound up on someone's table for supper. None of them were willing to kill the beast himself, however. Finally, they hit upon the perfect solution: suicide. Late that night, the bravest of the men crept into Brzenic's cell and placed a fully-loaded revolver in the sleeping Brzenic's right paw. In the morning, the revolver was gone, but so was Brzenic. Where he had last lain lay a card— good-quality cream stock—with six lines scrawled in blue ink. But it had rained during the night, and the ink had smeared, rendering the card illegible. The only word anyone could make out was "singing."