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I always wondered what Hell would be like if only I could believe. You might think that this is a self-contradictory statement. I'll leave you for the moment to puzzle over it. Personally I am far too busy to spend the time—too busy trying to break out of the confined space I find myself in. I have lost track completely of how and where and why I got myself into such a predicament—if I ever did know. The thing is that in one way it feels like an ordinary experience, while at those precise moments when I can actually focus clearly, it feels extraordinary. I am aware that there is a change and it's not due to external circumstances so much as deep in that place where my sinews and bones are caught in a rather puzzling relationship with their...Never mind let's just say I can feel it in my bones. (You're probably not listening anyway because I suspect you're still thinking about Hell). It's like Kafka's man who was not so much surprised at the discovery that he had turned into a cockroach as to find that his brother had thrown an apple at him and it was lodged and rotting in a split in his carapace—but perhaps the worst thing (especially for a cockroach) is to be confined in such a small room.

It is my present experience that the small room I find myself in, is full of company, so I am not as isolated as that cockroach. My company comes and goes rather like a lending library but in each case they are people not books.

The last person described himself as a book that was being watched by all the great books of French literature on the shelves of his study. As he spoke to me he was smoothing the creases away from his crisp white shirt as it stretched across his stomach.

The next person burst through the door and rummaged on the shelves in a desperate attempt to find a particular book. 'A rare book', he said. 'There are only two copies in the whole of France and I must have one of them.' It seemed to me that he was set on continuing his search. He was being very careful and perhaps 'rummaging' is too strong a word. It was clear that he was obsessed with books. He stroked the bindings and from time to time opened a volume and pressed his nose deep into the crease between the pages—as if he wanted his nose to become one with the spine for all eternity. (Would that be Hell? I wondered). I heard later that this fellow had been caught up in a scandal about the theft of a book and had been, perhaps maliciously, accused of burning down his own house and his own book collection so that a famous antiquarian from Spain could not have the last of a particular rare volume. Be that as it may, I left him to sort through the books because to tell you the truth I am not so much a book fetishist as someone who is trying to escape the wretched papery things. They reach out from

their sneeze-making cores into the depths of my being—deep into where my bones prematurely crumble.

A moment ago I came across another person crouched in the corner of my room with an open book on his bent knees. He was a wiry fellow with a thin bony face and a well-developed cranium with a rather greasy comb-over. When I approached him to ask what he was doing here (apart from the fact that he was obviously reading) he raised his head slowly as if trying to come up from a trance. I said, 'If you won't tell me why you are here will you at least tell me what you are reading?' He replied, 'I prefer not to'. And there was not much that I could do about that.

I walked to the window and gazed across the field of sunflowers with their heads turned towards the sun. It seemed as if they were all watching a galloping horseman as he approached. The man was wearing a dark blue cloak, and a floppy cap with a long feather. Very French, I thought. At the steps he leapt from his horse and carelessly hooked the reins around the raised radio aerial on my silver Lamborghini that was parked in the driveway.

I heard someone calling out with some excitement, 'It's François! It's François!' The François person came up the inside stairs possibly three at a time because in a moment he was through the door and was somewhat breathless. In his arms he held a large cloth bag full to a bulky state. I was surprised because I hadn't seen him carrying it on his horse. He grabbed at the bottom corners of the sack and emptied the contents onto the floor. The noise was almost deafening. There were dozens of block shaped letters from the alphabet. The oddest thing was that they were all made of ice. There was scarcely any more room to walk about in the room and all the books trembled.

The other people were mostly looking from behind bookshelves—either round the ends or over the top. 'What is this about?' I asked. 'Wait a moment and you'll see, or rather you'll hear.' Then to my astonishment, as the letters melted they emitted sounds. The horseman smiled broadly with arms akimbo.

'There! Do you know what they are?' He didn't wait for a reply. 'It is everything that has ever been said gathered from the atmosphere and brought to be indelibly recorded on the pages and crusty indices of all who are gathered here.'

We grumbled, mumbled and scratched. Our pages turned. In a flash, I believed that at last I understood—then the thought was lost again.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nola Farman.*