

priority for the power company to fix. We use oil lamps and most often candles, so our evenings around the dining room table resemble séances. We sit with our heads bowed as if trying to summon spirits, while in truth struggling to see what's on our dinner plates. Being temporarily unable to use the technology we've grown dependent on to inform ourselves about the rest of the world, communicate with others, and pass the time, is a reminder of our alarming dependence on them. "Nights are so boring!" my neighbors kept repeating. Our days were not much better, with overcast skies that made it even difficult to read indoors. All of this reminded me of the days of my youth when my family, like so many others, lived in a monastic solitude when the weather was bad, since we had no television. It wasn't in church, but on dark autumn days and winter nights that I had an inkling of what they meant when they spoke about eternity. Everyone read in order to escape boredom. I had friends so addicted to books, their parents were convinced they were going crazy with so many strange stories and ideas running like fever through their brains, not to mention becoming hard of hearing, after failing to perform the simplest household chores like letting the cat out.

Living in a quiet neighborhood made it even worse. Old people stared out of windows at all hours, when they were not staring at the walls. There were radios, but their delights—with the exception of a few programs—were reserved for the grownups only. Thousands died of ennui in such homes. Others joined the navy, got married, or moved to California. Even so, looking back now, I realize how much I owe to my boredom. Drowning in it, I came face to face with myself as if in a mirror. I became a spectator of my own existence, which by turns struck me as being either too real or totally unreal. I recall one day being absolutely sure that time had stopped, despite the loud ticking of the clock in my room. Everything stood still. Walking through a museum, years later, I recalled that moment in my room as I passed the statues of Greek and Egyptian gods. They looked to me as bored as I had been.

I forgot who said one is bored only in paradise and not in hell. How true, I thought at the time. I remember living in a tenement on the Lower East Side in the late 1950s. The building was so noisy; there was not a chance of being bored for a second. At almost any hour of the day, one could hear several radios tuned to