



THE FIRST ODDITY

So there we were—three of us, as I said,
me,
the mirror,
the chess set.

I was looking at the mirror; the mirror was reflecting the chess set.

I already described the mirror as old and a little greenish. I immediately noticed that the chess pieces reflected in the mirror, the black as well as the white, were paler than the real chess pieces, and their outlines less distinct, almost hazy. In fact, staring at them for quite a while in the mirror, it seemed to me that they were vibrating slightly, like grass and stones you see below the water of a lake or a pond.

I haven't yet pointed out an important fact, which is that the mirror propped on the marble of

the fireplace was leaning slightly forward. Because of this, the chessboard and the thirty-two pieces reflected in it were not on the same plane as the thirty-two real pieces, but seemed to have climbed up a slight incline.

From there, the mirrored pieces watched the real pieces—each its counterpart. The White King looked at the White King, the Black Queen at the Black Queen, and so on. And those in the mirror, higher up and a little at an angle, seemed to be looking at those down below with disdainful superiority. Those on this side of the mirror, in turn, allowed themselves to be observed impassively, and it seemed that with this indifference they were perhaps flaunting their being more colorful, clearer, and firmly positioned on the perfectly horizontal surface.

I stood up on my tiptoes once more to see if I could catch sight of at least a little of myself in the mirror. But it was hopeless. I said a moment ago that I didn't remember whether there was a chair in the room. Now, I think that there certainly wasn't one, otherwise I would have stood up on it.

But, stretching up like that, the following thought occurred to me. "That mirror contains everything in this room, the blue walls, the chessboard, and its pieces, so I ought to be in it, too."

Then a very funny thing happened.

The White King, not the real one who was on this side but the slightly paler one up there on the other side, stopped staring at his counterpart, and instead looked at me. He shook himself a bit and spoke.

He spoke directly to me, as if he had read my mind.

“Of course you’re in it,” he said. “You’re down below. Come on up here and you’ll see.”

Every time I’ve thought about that moment, it seemed to me that it was extremely odd, almost unbelievable. And now, recounting it, it still seems that way. But at the time, I didn’t find anything strange about it. I answered calmly.

“I’d be happy to, but first of all, I don’t know how. Secondly, your Lordship must know I’ve been ordered not to move from here until someone comes to let me out.”

The White King in the mirror protested.

“When I say that you’ll be here, I mean that there’ll be another just like you here—your image. Come on. There are two of you, just like me and that White King over there on your side. Therefore, if you come here from where you are, it’s only natural, it seems to me, that your image will be back there. So there will always be one of you for any

eventuality.”

“In that case,” I protested, “I won’t be meeting myself up there.”

“Right. But it will still be an interesting trip.”

“That’s true,” I answered. “But there’s still a big problem. I don’t know how to get up there. If your Lordship would kindly instruct me...”

The White King in the mirror admonished me sternly.

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

