

Her  
friend got up  
to draw the  
curtains. But  
she jumped up  
from the sofa.

*Her wet handkerchief fell on the floor. She reached the window in two steps. She took hold of the cord. She stopped, her hand raised. And, suddenly, she opened the shutters wide open. She stood there, in the blinding light, like a statue slowly coming to life. She moves her hand. She waves out of the window. A boat full of young swimmers is going by. They are calling out. They wave. On the road by the beach, which shimmers in the heat, runs a big black dog (that one perhaps!) carrying in its teeth a basket with different fruit of all colours. It's looking around vaguely, as if it were blind, towards the window. A handsome, tanned swimmer, passing the dog by, kicks it with his bare foot in the belly. The girl in the window laughed. The dog went on. The young girl turned inside the room. She rang the bell. A servant, wearing a striped black*

*and grey pair of trousers, very tight (perhaps those trousers of her uncle), appeared at the door. 'Prepare the table,' she told him. He left. The two friends opened the balcony door and the other two windows. The room was flooded with light. The flowers in the baskets filled the air with perfume. The voices from the sea were heard even louder, mixed with the sound of plates and cutlery down in the dining room. The moist handkerchief remained on the floor like a small, clever, white bird, pretending to be tame and obedient. Little by little the handkerchief dried up, steaming.)*

Athens, Eleusis, Diminio, Samos,  
December 1965-December 1970

*(She has returned, as she returns every summer, from the dark foreign country, to her large family country house - very pale, as if tired from the journey, as if ill from the big change of climate, light, heat. Her face and hands still seem covered in a large, protective shadow. She is lying on the old sofa, in a wide, freshly whitewashed room, on the upper floor, the shutters of the three windows and the balcony door are shut. And yet the glaring sunlight is brilliant on the walls, a shimmering, striped radiance. On the floor, baskets and baskets filled with wild flowers, flowers like those she had no time to take with her then, on her first, sudden journey. They look as if they had been brought to her a little while ago by her girl friends, to welcome her. Now, standing by her side, there is only a young woman in a light, pale blue dress, a light blue band on her hair, who is perhaps her most faithful, her sacrificing friend, watery Kyane. By the sofa, on a chair, a bowl of cool water. Every so often, her friend dips in it an embroidered batiste handkerchief, wrings it and places it low on the forehead of the traveller, covering up her eyebrows. A drop occasionally slides across her cheek, dampens the wide, colourful pillow—as if she were weeping someone else's tears. And her hair is a little damp. Outside, the sea just audible - calm, oily—and every once in a while the voice of a swimmer. The glare becomes more intense in the room. The traveller speaks:)*

I'm telling you the truth—I was fine there. I'd got used to it. I  
can't bear it here;  
the light is too much—it makes me sick—it strips everything  
bare; it's inaccessible;  
it reveals and conceals everything; it changes constantly—you  
can't catch up; you change;  
you can feel time running out—an incessant, exhausting  
movement;  
glass things get broken when one moves house, are scattered in  
the street, glimmer;  
some people jump off onto land, others scramble up into the  
boats,—as in those days  
when visitors came and went, others arrived;  
their big suitcases were left in corridors for a while—  
a foreign smell, foreign countries, foreign names—the house  
did not belong to us;—it too was a suitcase full of new  
underwear, unfamiliar—  
someone might pick it up from its leather handle and go  
away—

In those days we enjoyed that. Such movement  
felt somehow to be a heightening,—something always arrived;  
then too we were afraid that it might go away, because we still  
had no experience  
of the mysterious, sudden reappearing of a boat from the other  
side of the horizon  
or of the wild goose and the swallow from the other side of the  
hill.

On the table, glasses, plates, forks glimmered  
gold and azure, reflecting the sea. The tablecloth  
white, well-ironed, was a level brilliance; it had no  
recesses into which other meanings, other suppositions might  
escape into. Now  
this light unbearable—it distorts everything, it reveals things  
in their distortions; and the sea's voice  
is tiring, with its endless unfixity, its fleeting colours,  
its alternating moods. And those mindless boatmen,

their breeches pulled up, wet, infuriate you;  
not to mention the swimmers, like coalmen, smeared with  
sand,  
laughing aloud (pretending to be jolly) only to make  
themselves noticed  
as if they were themselves inadequate.

Down there,  
no one dives into water; no one shouts. The three rivers,  
grey, disdainful, merging round the big rock,  
sound altogether different—a powerful, uniform sound—  
the stationary sound of endless flowing—you get used to it;  
you almost do not hear it.

When mother's brother came first time to the house  
there was something grey about him, like those rivers. He'd  
been taken ill suddenly.  
They laid him on the big bed and gave him cupping glasses (I  
think he'd caught a cold  
from the strong light and from the heat)—I remember his back,  
tanned,  
broad, strong, like a grassy pasture. I was frightened  
in case his hair caught fire—that's how close was the candle,  
the candle white in the silver holder. Then they put it  
on the marble counter by the basin. The room smelled of  
cotton wool.  
His clothes, still warm, thrown over a chair. I was looking at  
the candle dripping big wax drips on the marble.

Uncle  
caught my eyes. I felt ashamed. I wanted to run away. I  
couldn't.  
He was lying on his back; he'd pulled his vest down;  
and even though his chest was dark, and his vest was white,  
white,  
still you had the impression of a black, black curtain  
shading off something brutally luminous and dangerous. And  
then

uncle, the sheet pulled to his chin,  
was smiling beatifically in his fever. Under the sheet  
his strong legs were outlined up to his root. I left the room.  
Never saw him again while he was there; I wandered in the  
fields.

Three months later  
he sent mother, from some foreign place, a pile of his old  
clothes  
for the poor. I recognised his body right away. A pair of  
trousers  
was left hanging for some days from a hook in the corridor. I  
stared at them  
for hours, touched them; I thought of stealing them,  
hiding them under my mattress, wearing them. I couldn't do it.  
One day,  
I took a chair; I stood on it; I buried my face in them, smelling  
them.  
I fell off the chair. I was scared. I didn't hurt myself. The noise  
brought people running.  
I said nothing. I felt no pain. Just a taste of profound sin.

Those trousers were given to one of our servants.  
They fit him perfectly. Servants (you may have noticed)  
have an odd manner all of their own, a life entirely separate,  
closed and insidious, despite their demonstrations of dumb  
devotion, despite,  
indeed, their show of respect; there is animosity and  
greediness in their eyes, their lips, especially in their hands,  
powerful hands, severe, adroit, self-confident, heavy, rough-cut  
like bears,  
slow-seeming, though quick, as when they rubbed down the  
horses,  
when they harnessed them to the cart, or when they  
slaughtered an ox  
or hammered nails into a table or when they dug the garden—

God, how stupid they are and how mindless—not even  
realising how beautiful they are  
in their taut, sweaty skin, deep in their work  
surrounded by hammers, nails, saws—all those tools  
with unknown names—frightening for their usefulness,  
frightening in their secrets, or rather in their seeming to  
conspire,  
timber and intricate ironwork, sharp blades, flashes—

And they all have a heavy smell of stagnant water and of pine  
or of the milk that oozes from a fig tree. They never unbutton  
in our presence  
even one shirt button. They never laugh. Yet you know  
that they strip naked when they're on their own, they joke and  
horse around on  
summer afternoons, in the rooms below.

I saw them one day  
through the keyhole. One was asleep, his mattress on the floor;  
the others quietly stripped him, with soot they drew rings  
around his cock  
like a snake rising. He woke up; he chased them around;  
they were laughing under the arches, round the columns, and  
they were laughing,  
laughing, a great, memorable laughter.

I felt frightened. I ran away. God,  
those rings, one made of light, one made of shade, round a vast,  
vertical tunnel,  
something secretive, treacherous. I was choking. And I wanted  
to scream. I didn't.

I ran up the stairs two steps at a time—the stairwell was  
humming, cool, shaded,  
and you could hear the great golden heat of the sun outside,  
and far, far away  
the voices of the boatmen, dark, like hair in a man's armpit. I  
was choking.

I ran up to the big room, opened the balcony door;  
a smell of tar and carobs drifted in, the smell of red;  
mother's dog slept in the shade of the big loquat tree, its  
muzzle on its paws. I shut the door again.

Perhaps that's why we choose in the end the shade. Darkness  
is black—  
black, gleaming, unchanging, without shading. It spares you  
trying to discern things—what for?  
That servant  
was made as if of darkness. Do you remember?—when he  
grabbed me  
we had been gathering flowers in the wide meadow. The  
baskets were full  
of crocuses, violets, lilies, roses, amaranth, hyacinths;—I was  
leaning  
over a strange flower—it looked like a narcissus—a narcissus  
that one had never seen before of a hundred colours, a hundred  
stems;  
dewdrops sparkled on it. And I, dazzled,  
leaning over, as if doubled up in myself, like leaning over a  
well,  
gazing at my face (almost self-sufficient) in love  
with the rosy shade on the edge of my lips,  
the taut, ivory hollow between my breasts.

Above my back the burning sun flapped like a banner;  
it burned on my hair; countless delicate stars flickered,  
each on my hair's each hair with aureole colours. I could see  
them  
in the cool water (or in the narcissus—I didn't know),  
countless,  
they sparkled on my face, as if I were on fire myself, and as if  
all they longed for  
was to dive into my watery image to extinguish that fire.

And suddenly  
his two black horses were before my eyes, rearing  
as if blinded by the light (I saw them too reflected in the  
water). I screamed,  
not from fear, but dazzled, as if that flower had devoured me,  
as if I'd fallen in the well, as if I'd leapt down the whole  
staircase in one step

to reach the servants' rooms; and I felt on my bare soles  
the most delicious slipperiness of the lowest half-moon step.

I only just  
saw falling in this chasm your baskets of flowers,  
the fountain in the garden, the stone lion, the bronze tortoise.

I remember that austere inner density, and above it  
I heard you calling me, calling my name;  
and my name was foreign; my friends too were foreign;  
foreign the light above with the square, gleaming white  
houses,  
with the fleshy, many-coloured fruit, full of pretence and  
insolence,  
with the fragile, greedy cutting edges of grain. I wasn't at all  
frightened.

I hardly felt the loss as the corners of my lips  
suddenly dried up,—not shaped as if to make a sound, or as if  
they were about to make a sound,  
only a sense of the distant, dark freedom,  
met body against body—I and that sense of freedom—the one  
inside the other—made into one fantastic body.

And I felt then his arm wrapped round my waist,  
rough, hairy, muscular, taming my resistance,—what  
resistance?—

I was not I—so there was no fear of humiliation; everything  
had frozen still in the endless limpidity of an unaccomplished  
accomplishment.

'Are you afraid?' he said

(how weak are those who are very strong; they're always  
frightened

in case we're not afraid enough of them—the beautiful ones,  
the unsuspecting ones

in their childish arrogance). 'Yes,' I told him, 'I'm afraid', and  
he held me still more tightly against him, so much I felt  
his arm's hair

entering my pores as if I were knotted to his body



with thousands of fine roots—not at all captive since I had  
abandoned myself to him.

The houses there are subterranean, rivers are subterranean, the  
sky is subterranean;  
only a few ashen poplars in the subterranean garden,  
black cypresses, barren willows, wild mint and a few  
pomegranate trees.

He peeled pomegranates for me.

His fingers became blacker still. The pomegranate seeds  
glimmered faintly

like glass ampoules filled with blood. He offered me the seeds  
to eat off his palm

as we sat among big clay jars and stone stools, so I'd not forget  
and fail to return to him.—How could I not return? This sea  
sprinkles its sparkle, ground glass, in the eyes,  
in the mouth, in your shirt, in your sandals.

'Keep me,' I kept telling him—'just let me  
be one—half even—the whole half (no matter which),  
not two, divided, separated, because there's nothing left to me  
but to be an incision—that is, not to be—nothing more than a  
vertical stab wound and fundamental pain—';  
even the knife is not my own. 'I cannot bear it,' I kept telling  
him, 'Keep me.'

He is the big, dark certainty—the only one. Always downcast,  
his eyebrows hiding his eyes, so upright and yet so bent,  
shut in himself, inside the hair of his body, almost invisible,  
chewing on a leaf or smoking his clay pipe,  
the ember casting a light on his nostrils  
like lightning in the far distance over a desolate flesh  
landscape,

in an absorbing landscape; it absorbed me.

On the blind wall of this subterranean space  
were two bronze rings. They glittered  
giving off a mystic light, black-green; maybe that's where  
someone exercised his body

or where a handsome youth had hanged himself, I liked  
looking at those rings—

two openings into nothing—I could fill them in with anything  
I fancied.

Do you remember  
that statue we were gaping at one day at noon at the  
gymnasium,  
made of gold, silver, lead, bronze, pewter,  
painted dark (I sense now how it resembled him)—  
I think it was of Serapis—work of Vryaxis the Athenian—  
oh, he too knew. We loved him, laurel wreath on his forehead,  
handsome, fatigue diffused supremely in his body,  
like the winner of the pentathlon putting in an appearance  
after the games,  
naked, just before entering the baths, to the small circle of his  
friends

(winners always have very few friends or none).

He stood

a little awkward in his victory, not knowing how to answer,  
both giving in and unapproachable. Just then a cloud, a rosy  
cloud, I think,  
cast a shadow over the entire amphitheatre. His large thumb  
nail  
seemed to grow wider little by little (I noticed that especially; I  
didn't tell you)

like an uninhabited shore, soaked in the vast melancholy that  
heroes feel. And there, in one of the rows of seats,  
remained an empty soda bottle, reflecting  
with pretentious familiarity something severe and completed.  
Odd, now, to be talking and listening to my own voice. It used  
to frighten me

in case it gave me away. I only uttered,  
uttered slowly his name again deeply inside me. I called him  
dumbly at night,

'Nocturnal one, Nocturnal one,' turned to the wall.

How did it come about  
that everything got blended together, down there, in the low  
sky, where, sometimes,  
it is pierced by a bird cry?—the servant, the statue, uncle—all  
soundless, made of flesh and shadow.

You are persecuted here  
by the smell of hot resin and burned barley. The islands,  
scattered  
in the shimmer of the sea, always seem to grant you  
something,  
or take something away from you, or forbid you to have it.  
Here, the hours of noon,  
gelled in light, are like a dead spa. A mad woman  
runs around naked, shouting, among whitewashed boarded-up  
houses,  
in the yellow air; and the sea glimmers, turned into marble  
with masts and frozen flags. And that woman running,  
mad,—at times you can hear her scream moving about the hill,  
at other times her panting nearby, under the shutters.

Down there  
nothing ever disturbs the silence. Only a dog (and it doesn't  
bark),  
an ugly dog, his, dark, with crooked teeth,  
with two big, unfocussed eyes, faithful and alien,  
dark like wells,—and you can't even discern in them  
your face, your hands or his face.  
Even so,  
you do perceive total darkness, solid and transparent,  
full, consoling and sinless. That dog pretends not to see you  
but it always smells everything.

When I dream,  
suddenly I feel its breath steaming under my chin  
or passing over my temples as if following my thoughts,  
my shivers, my desires (and I follow them too). All my  
movements,  
even the calmest and most simple ones, when I comb my hair,  
when I wash,  
seem as if they were reflected in the pool of its breath  
as if tracing endless circles down to that great depth,  
the impenetrable depth as of nothingness. Each word  
unmentioned,  
each gesture postponed, enters this creature's space  
and sovereignty, it breathes them.

Sometimes,  
as I walk in the garden, absent-minded, under the poplars,  
or wash a shirt in the stone trough,  
or rest my hand on my chest,  
or hold a flower, with a tenderness all my own,

I feel suddenly naked, nailed to the wall,  
or to a tree trunk, or to the iron mirror at the entrance to the  
house,  
there especially, at the mirror, doubly nailed,  
doubly visible, with no refuge, not one leaf to cover myself,  
in a dense transparency, in and out lit up  
by the two searchlights of its breath beaming out  
of its narrow, suspicious nostrils,  
its oracular, sensuous, holy nostril.

'Send it away; send it away',  
I'd shout at him sometimes, nailed down, in a rage,  
in a state of undefined guilt and innocence, having  
nothing more to hide any longer—free in my helplessness.

Only  
my hair moving about wildly, going in and out  
of its nostrils, like roots which never cease moving,  
glimmering  
all round me like wings, like waves could see my hair. It gave  
me  
back another sense of pride—my own—an independence  
from dog and its master.  
And besides,  
who from and for whom does it guard me? For its master  
perhaps? For me? One evening, in the garden,  
it jumped up and put its front legs round my waist. Something  
moist and tepid  
remained on my thigh. I felt fear. And in fact,  
opposite me, the big snake was raising itself, its tongue  
shooting out. Was it  
from that it had protected me? Who from and for whom does it  
guard me?

The stain is still there on my thigh, gleaming, milky,  
like new skin of a healed wound. Was it ejaculation perhaps,  
or maybe a tear? Dogs too weep;—I know it;—so that at times  
I find this creature even likeable,—when it gazes in the river at  
its ugliness  
on moonlit nights; when it allows me tamely to weave in its  
thick hair  
asphodel blossoms, daisies, mint;—so funny  
in its rough submission,—it takes on something of human  
weakness.

But wasn't this creature too  
defeated some time by men? They dragged it out into the light,  
they mocked it;  
swarms of children and nasty old men scrutinised,  
in the middle of noon in the middle of the street, its dark  
snout, its crooked teeth,  
its black, dusty fur where one of my daisies  
was still caught.

I wouldn't want him to get rid of the dog.  
It's company of a kind;—it spies on me all the time  
obliging me to spy on myself, to find myself.

Out here, all sorts of voices and reflections, from opposite  
sides, call you, disperse you,  
as when we used to enter the Stadium—do you remember?—  
on hot afternoons  
the marble hot—it burned our feet; the rows of seats steamed;  
we didn't know  
which of those naked bodies we would single out;—an endless  
suspension;  
our eyes, multiplied, circled our faces trying to see all round,  
round and around the bodies. The javelins were  
hovering;  
a leg would thrust up in the air; the discus glittered;  
thousands of soles of feet glimmered flying; a chest covered in  
perspiration  
touched, panting, the ribbon;—you couldn't ever catch up.

We're never adequate to our desires. Desire itself is not  
enough. What remains  
is fatigue, giving up,—an almost unhappy weakness of the will,  
sweat, rupture, heat. Until at last the night comes  
erasing everything, merging everything in a solid and ethereal  
body, your own,  
bringing up a light breeze from the pinewoods or from the sea  
below,  
lights sinking, we sinking.  
Outside the windows  
you hear passing the roaming fiddler, the lame lamplighter  
those speechless wanderers who've been delayed, holding  
oak boxes tied with red ribbons, and the others  
who face down are pounding the earth with their palms.

You also hear the horses in the stables, and the water pouring  
as the pilgrims raise up two clay vessels,  
one towards the east, the other to the west, pouring out honey  
and water,  
or barley water mixed with wild mint,  
over the pit covered with laurel branches, while murmuring  
ambiguous words, prayers and spells. And mother's voice  
can be heard saying something about 'the golden wheat,  
harvested in silence'. The night doesn't bring rest  
either,—an endless corridor, secretive,  
with gigantic statues, painted screens, masks, mirrors,  
optical illusions, metal objects, crystals, doors, stones,  
now in darkness, now in light,—that same staircase,  
one step gold, the other black.  
'Smash it', I'd tell him.  
And the three women always there, their backs turned,  
their faces covered, leaning over the empty well,  
shouting out arcane words, and the echo multiplied  
their unintelligible voices in the well. I can't endure it here.

This resurrecting light is death. Pull the curtains.  
Vast, implacable, hostile summer. The sun  
gets hold of you by your hair, hangs you off the precipice. Who  
rules me?

He? His dog? Mother? Each one  
for some reason of his own that concerns me and of which I'm  
ignorant.

Endless days. It takes so long before night falls. And night is  
like day—it does not conceal you.

The sea glitters even in the middle of the night, rose or gold-  
green.

The salt creaks as it crystallises in the rocks. A boatman  
is pissing off his caique into the sea. The sound is heard  
between mute moans,—it's the thick ropes holding the boats  
tied to steel rings—a tug-of-war  
between water and earth,—the same staircase. Above the  
beach

the road runs between two rows of dusty oleanders. A thorn  
far away in a field, like the capital of a column that's about to  
fall.

The buzzing of a mosquito moves about in the room  
giving off deceptive signals, tracing quick rhombuses,  
exhausting your attention with acute and obtuse angles. The  
air

smells strongly of resin and sperm. You can't breathe.

Steps are heard after midnight,—it is perhaps the servants;  
they're throwing away old metal things at the bottom of the  
garden. Slowly

they're covered up by nettles,—an aluminium plate, a spoon, a  
broken statuette, a zinc table. Come autumn  
they're revealed again,—a wheel, an oar, the steering wheel,  
that axle from the antique carriage—memory things,  
our own, useless, battered, rusty things,  
yet still around, like jugs in the basement, or like stars.

Then comes a great calm, soft, noble, moisture from the  
southern wind,

as if from beyond the garden, up to the edge of memory, as if  
suddenly autumn had arrived.

Somewhere, deep down, moist sounds are heard, in distant  
carpenters' shops,

as if they're nailing together long, planed boards. The  
underwear  
hanging out in the garden takes a long time to dry.

That is the time when the hares come down in the street.

    Their eyes glitter  
in the high beams of the last cars. Great quietness,  
flat, spread out,—you cannot fold it;  
one of its corners soaks in the river,  
the second rises towards the south, far, in the sea,  
the third disappears in the island opposite, in the woods,  
the fourth in the moon with the yellow grasses.

It's lovely when autumn comes. I can breathe. The sun loses  
its supremacy, its awful superiority. Everything becomes tame;  
everything returns to itself, so much so I wonder  
if it isn't death that is our true self. The morning star  
rises much higher up, crystalline, translucent; it glimmers  
auspiciously over the dark forest, like the minutest  
drop of purest water, shimmering  
close by, as if it were stuck on the window pane and all at once  
immeasurably far,—a white gleam, a tear,  
diluted, all transience, independence and joyful vanity—  
a silent, deepest certainty of the end, of everything.

That is the time to return to him, almost redeemed,  
or rather to redeem myself in his shadow. Pull the curtains.

    Look,  
a bee has paused on my ring,  
it's even buzzing—can you hear it?—a ring-stone of sound.

So, pull the curtains shut. I can't endure it here.  
The light pierces me with a thousand needles,  
it blinds me. I can't endure it. I'm telling you, pull shut the  
curtains.