

# So now I'm stopping

for a bit, amazed by this world appearing before my eyes, splendid and stormy, as if it was the song I found I was singing to myself when I woke up from a dream, dancing, then weeping, then lost in contemplation. I didn't know what state I'd be in as I woke up, for I'd begun to remember my strange clothes and features, which I'd seen in the dream, without mirrors, and the things around me which had turned into a festival of voices and actions with a multiplicity of meanings. Have I stopped? Perhaps I'm no longer walking along this sandy, unmade road, and the rains have soothed the raging of the sands by moistening them a little, so they've calmed down despite the violent wind.

I would have forgotten that song by now, but here I am looking at the sea and the graves and my footsteps and thinking how I've passed this way so many times without seeing those things as I see them now. I opened my bleary eyes and saw myself coming to a standstill, then realised that this was because I was tired. I hadn't thought about stopping, but I stopped all the same, and when I did I began trying to work out why, and found that tiredness was the justification, and also the weight of the greens and fruit I was carrying.

The sea and the graves.

Lotus trees and prickly pears.

The dusty earth.

Shrunken domes and crumbling headstones and owls' eyes.

The sea is behind everything, flat and shiny like the edge of a sword, its seductive blue dispelling this desolate sight. I didn't notice a single ship or boat grazing the flat blue surface extending to the horizon, although I wasn't really aware of the existence of the sea, despite the fact that it lay there, blue muddied with black. It didn't impinge on me, didn't enter my range of concerns. It was as if it was something superfluous, since it had no relevance. The idea of drowning made me laugh, and the idea of fishing, and swimming. I'm laughing now! Even the idea of complaining or contemplating or baring my soul seems ridiculous and so I'm laughing loudly enough for the sea to hear.

To the other side of me cars are passing and foreign trucks loaded with goods. This is a busy route carrying freight to Africa.

The truck drivers throw empty beer bottles out of their cab windows, and you can catch a glimpse of their fat faces as the trucks shoot past. I continued standing there resting, holding the vegetables and fruit. When will I reach the hill and open the door and collapse into the chair to catch my breath?

This is me now! I should remember. I'd forgotten the doctor's face, and the other things that came after his death. When I came from the South I didn't imagine that the North possessed all this luxury and splendour in everything. The sun didn't look like the sun to me, nor the *cafés* like *cafés*.

Numerous languages and people celebrating with plants and flowers and tears. Men crying and women crying and sighing, and cheeks going red and giving off steam from the tears. Razor blades and deep scars on cheeks and foreheads. Children with scars on their faces. Knives, killing, foreign currencies, revolvers. I couldn't go back. The North is the way of no return. I didn't write any letters. I'd forgotten my family and didn't send them anything from this North. Over the years I'd forgotten their names and faces, and also their voices and movements and gestures. I hadn't acquired any family in the North, for I'd been afraid of someone loving me, a man or a woman, a man I would become a loyal friend to, or a woman I'd get close to and marry so I'd have children. The love of the people in the North is fatal. Why should I search for love when people here kill a person because they love him? They kill, then commit suicide, or laugh dementedly for the rest of their lives. All the men and women in the North do this, and I've seen such things. I've seen a Northern child go crazy about a child of his own age outside a *café*, stopping him, and looking at him passionately, and the other child getting annoyed with him, and people watching without surprise. Then he took out a knife and stabbed him in the heart before he could do anything. I saw an old woman coming out of a house, her hands covered in blood, and she was crying and telling people stupidly, « I've killed him », as if when she'd embarked on the act she hadn't realised that's what murder was. I've seen more than all this. I've seen imbeciles outside *cafés* and all of them would have stories to tell about killing someone they loved: a wife or a friend or a son or a lover. The doctor assured me of these things when he was talking about being a confirmed bachelor and a recluse. He said, them hating me and calling me narrow-minded and withdrawn is better than them loving me and killing me. And he said to me, « We can't talk about death ».

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