

The road snakes along.

I drive like a robot to the hum of the car's engine and the calls of the mountain. I think of a woman I love but see only the pine trees on the hillside in front of me.

I try to dream up this form I desire so much. The roadside bank is the only reality.

I'm alone with my phantom, obsessed by the body I can't conjure up. Her blue eyes stare out at me. I lower my head, unable to make a move, afraid I will ruin everything.

I'm not in charge of myself; too much of a child to resist, I speak to her watching the clouds.

Suddenly, on a bend, by a tree and an abandoned house, the dream cuts short. No longer in love, I have another need. In the hope of seducing her later on I have to make the clock stop, prolonging the harmony between her – my dream – and the countryside – my reality.

This woman destroys me, dominates me. I say nothing. I hold on to my framed vision of her. All her points attract me, the most banal as well as the most seductive. This beauty is my revenge.

I run up my red flag, my warning triangle.

I'm very calm. Quickly, precisely, masterfully I climb to the spacious darkroom. I don't hesitate or make a mistake. I have to control the frame, the density and levels of light. Nothing must spoil my moment of grace. Photographic emulsion will be exposed for half a second, her soft and meaningful look fixed on paper. Twin needs are as one – the present with silver abstracts, the future with this proof of love.

I am under the spell of this woman from afar. I start to get used to the idea of this *voyage a deux* – so gentle, so calm – through mountains and villages, fulfilling moments of silence and soft caresses.

I see her slender form, her freely-flowing hair so long denied me.

I don't dare to think about the nights in the hotel room, in our separate beds, of her body slipping between rough sheets, of her many delights.

We pass through isolated, deserted villages far from any town. The light is weak, without power to shock. Day after day I push on with my dream. Snuggled against the door, she goes long periods without moving. I am drunk on her voice.

As we near the cape she becomes even more desirable.

Delirious, I can see only her knee and – looking upwards – her neck, the neck of a small girl, impassioned, passionate and troubling.

The normal has long departed, replaced on this journey by frustrated happiness.

I drive towards the centre of Corsica. No anger, no tension. She's the sweetest of companions. Thanks to her I see things better. Valleys. Hills. Pockmarked walls. Churches and chapels.

Pretending to pose sitters, I photograph no-one. Another proof of her existence.

I like pot-luck, the first automatic or unconscious look. Captive to her charms, I want to be alone with her.

I'm a man without a life. I make her laugh.

I touch her hand in the restaurant. I'm surprised by her body's warmth. Her skin is soft, her hand delicate.

I forget my camera. She's telling me about her youth, about a murder in an old hotel, how the inn-keeper was killed by a guest.

She loves hotel rooms. I'm getting ever more unhappy.

Prisoner, I take photographs. Too soon I will be liberated, to return to the Continent.

This morning, in the dark hotel corridor, I caught the sad glance of another woman. She was young and seemed beautiful.

I would have loved to end my dream with her, to have spoken with her about this love affair which follows me around on my travels, filling the empty landscapes.

She vanished too soon.

I waited but I didn't see her again.



RAYMOND DEPARDON, *Désert*

Later, I stopped in a village square. A madman, on his own at first, started to run around me, epilepsy haunting his steps. He was unhappy in front of the camera, beginning a diatribe against social security. I thought of writing down his words, which were beautiful. He moved off, not at all sure of me.

For himself, too, the photographer fears the darkness of this passion which allows him to live, to write, to observe. Desire without a right to love.

Extract from Jean-Noël Pancrazi et Raymond Depardon, *Corse*, Éd. du Seuil (2000).



DEPARDON, *San Antonino*.

RAYMOND DEPARDON is author of numerous works, among the latest of which are: *La solitude heureuse du voyageur*, Musées de Marseille (1998); *Depardon Voyages*, Hazan (1998); *100 photos pour défendre la liberté de la presse*, Reporters sans Frontières (1997).