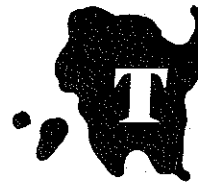


FORCE OF HABIT



he table is laid in the dining room; the taps are running with clear water, tender water, temperate water, perfumed water. The bed is as big for two as it is for one. After the bud will come the leaf and after the leaf the flower and after the rain fine weather. Because it is time, the eyes open, the body stands straight, the hand reaches out, the fire is lit, the smile fights the wrinkles of the night for their guileless curves. And it is the clock's hands which open, stand up, reach out, light up and point to the time for smiles. The sunbeam walks round the house in a white blouse. It is going to snow again, a few drops of blood are going to fall again around five o'clock, but it will not matter. Oh! I had a fright, I suddenly thought there was no longer a street outside the window, but yes, it is still there. The shopkeeper is even busy pulling up his metal shutters. There will soon be more people pushing the wheel than in the mill. Work is cut to shape, forged, planed, calculated. The hand recognises with

pleasure in a familiar tool the security of sleep.

If only it lasts!

The mirror is a marvellous witness, ceaselessly varying. It testifies calmly, and forcefully, but when it has finished speaking you realise it has taken back everything it said. It is a running personification of truth.

On the ricochet path obstinately attached to the legs of the man who is going back today, as he will be going back tomorrow, on the slender deposits of insouciance, a thousand steps each day marry with the steps of the day before. We have already been there, we will come back without being asked. We have all been past there on our way from joy to sorrow. It is a small cabin with a huge gas lamp. You put one foot in front of the other and your are off.

The walls are being covered with paintings, feast days are being sifted with bouquets, the mirror is steaming up. That many lighthouses on a stream and the stream is in the slime of the riverbed. Two eyes the same, for the use of your face alone — two eyes crawling with the same ants. Green is spread almost evenly over the plants, the wind follows the birds, there is no danger we will see the stones die. What is on show is not a trained animal, but an animal trainer. Pah! It is the imprescriptible order of a ceremony already so imposing, indeed! It is the repeater pistol which makes flowers appear in vases, with a smoking mouth.

Love, in the long run, can happily do without seeing this clearly at night.

When you are no longer there, there is your perfume that seeks me out. All I can get given back to me is the oracle of your weakness. My hand in yours looked so unlike your hand in mine. Misfortune, you follow, even misfortune improves with acquaintance. I was given you as my share, you cannot not be there, you are the proof that I am there. And everything conforms to this life I have made myself to make sure of you.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing."

SURPRISE



hen, the sensation of time passing having seized him by the throat, man gives up overturning the absurd constructions of his ingenuity, and sits down at the desk of attention, a freezing little breeze forces him to button his jacket and bury his hands in his pockets. He tries to make up for his woeful appearance with a smile he would love to make look insolent; the crutches of courage are broken, nothing works any more, everything takes care of itself. So he opens a newspaper but try as he may turning it upside down and inside out, you have to admit that yesterday proved as calm as could be. Apart from a rain of grasshoppers over the Atlas, there was not much to disrupt things. The weather forecast is silent about any changes in the weather of a new kind such as organ wind passing abruptly into cocoons or blue women spurting from certain large clouds.

You cannot look back over your life without realising that you have never encountered those

great big ghosts with carbuncle eyes that go by in books, nor shivered at finding one evening in your arms the unknown beauty you were not expecting. The moments of real panic have been brief. Butterflies, most fortunately, have not thrust themselves upon us in a mass compact enough to knock us down. Even if the woman-headed hydra stayed quietly in a nonchalant pose on a café terrace, you have to admit that, on the other hand, by looking under your furniture every evening, you can hardly claim to have succeeded in passing the time of day with anyone but blockheads made of dust. You may have been able to see as you wrote your own head through the penholder, to hear the sound of the railway by shaking poppies, to touch with your finger the star on your tombstone, but you have not yet succeeded in holding in your hands a dagger made of water, even only to slit the throat of your double made of drops of water.

You have not seen yourself in mirrors with a face other than your own, either transparent or shining. You have been through everything: the sky and its sheep, every form of storm and wind, the circumvolutions of the sun and its nursery of birds, the burning coals of dated songs, the screeching of suppressed anger, the tight-stretched sails of the blood vessels, with the ensign flying at your temples, the able-bodied light, the checkerboard of your game, the oblivion of dreams and the calendar. Not a second of respite, only a second a tiny bit longer than the others, not a winter April fool. Lengths,

yes, let us say the word as we would not be ashamed to at the races, *longueurs* in presence, in absence, in waiting.

How should we respond to those who do not ask us the impossible, to people whom nothing astonishes? With lowered eyes we carry the burden of silence, forever and always. We will not let go of it until we hear it begging us to do so.

Our hands are rockets that do not fire, even on the finest days. Everyone has arrived too early, nothing is ready. The cars have new tyres, it has stopped raining. The man and woman who love each other do not love each other enough to kill themselves the first time they see each other. How to get them to remember that wonderful book cover, that cover frozen in colours: he with his hand over his heart, kneeling before her on the terrible tracks, one turn of the wheels away from the express (*The Sublime Sir*)? How to show them on the wall behind their bed that bird circling whose wings are made of two scythe blades and whose head is a butterfly pinned and slowly dying.

All is predicted, all is foreseen, all is set in stone. A fortress of sounds defends the nightingale's song, the illusions perfectly fit the magic wand, the beauty of dresses is made by the beauty of bodies, evening announces the dawn. But one perpetual night the nightingale can stay silent, for the fortress has been taken.

The retort now empty of man, though imperceptibly traced with gold, still resists the

elements at the level of the thirtieth floor of the Tour St Jacques which is yet to be constructed. It is held up by two Siamese angels. It cannot be made out unless one is quite alone.

In the shadow of the tower the whole earth accepts to be ploughed, it accepts its dead. Hinges of bread close the doors of hunger, fine weather closes the prisons. It is always, it is never. Possible beings question probable beings, already without fathers or mothers. They wait their turn, they form a circle and pass round the glove of visibility. Man, in the middle, is now no more than the candle.

THERE IS NOTHING INCOMPREHENSIBLE



That attraction, then, has brought together at the bottom of this chasm three thousand feet below the surface of the sea some of the greatest criminals of our time? The place is cool, but sparse rather than overgrown. No anxiety about the future, no hidden light has drawn to this place people who search throughout the countryside for great living confessions. A tiny suburban villa noses between the cliffs of coral and the chants of bubbles with its lightning conductor and dovecote against the soft epidermis of red seaweed. Those who frequent this spot speak more willingly of hate than of love. This year chance has led some famous virtuosos to this clearing.

Troppmann, La Brinvilliers, Vacher, Soleiland, Haarmann ... what charity gala could boast of bringing together such great stars on the same bill? They are there, however, without having consulted one another, to rest, and to study, too, to prepare in



Do not read, look at the designs created by the white spaces between the words of several lines in a book and draw inspiration from them.

Give your hand to others to keep.

Do not go to bed on the ramparts.

Put back on the armour that you took off when you reached the age of reason.

Put order in its place, upset the cobbles in the road.

If you bleed and you are a man, wipe the last word off the slate.

Form your eyes by closing them.

Give to the dreams you have forgotten the value of what you do not know.

I have known three footplate-men, five woman levelcrossing-keepers and one male levelcrossing-keeper. What about you?

Do not prepare the words you yell.

Live in deserted houses. They have only been lived in by you.

Make a bed of caresses for your caresses.

If they come knocking at your door, write your last wishes with the key.

Rob the meaning from sound; there are muffled drums in among the pale dresses.

Sing of the great pity of monsters. Bring to mind all the women standing on the Trojan horse.

Do not drink water.

Like the letter l and the letter m, near the middle you will find a wing and a serpent.

Speak according to the madness that has seduced you.

Clothe yourself in glittering colours, it is not the done thing.

What you find belongs to you only so long as you hold out your hand.

Lie while biting your judges' ermine.

You are the pruner of your own life.

Hang yourself, brave Crillon, like a pendulum, they will stop you swinging with their "That depends."

Tie down those faithless legs.

Let the dawn stoke up the rust of your dreams.

Learn to wait, with your feet forward. That is how you will go out one day soon, and well wrapped up, too.

Light up the perspectives of tiredness.

Sell what you need to eat, and buy something to starve with.

Give them a surprise by not confusing the future of the verb "to have" with the past of the verb "to be."

Be the glazier with a stone embedded in the brand-new pane.

If someone asks to see the inside of your hand,
show them the undiscovered planets in the heavens.

On the set day, you will calculate the ravishing
dimensions of the leaf-insect.

To uncover the nudity of the woman you love,
look at her hands. Her face is lowered.

Separate chalk from coal, and poppies from
blood.

Do me the favour of coming in and out on tip-
toe.

Semi-colons; see how amazing they are, even in
punctuation.

Lie down, get up, and now lie down.

Until the new order, the new monastic order,
which is to say until the most beautiful young
women take to wearing a *decolleté* cut in the form of
a cross: with the two horizontal branches
uncovering the breasts, the foot of the cross naked
at the base of the belly, slightly singed.

From all that has a head upon its shoulders,
abstain.

Match your gait to that of storms.

Never kill a nightbird.

Look at the flower of the bindweed: it does not
help you to hear.

Miss the apparent target when you should be
piercing your own heart with the arrow.

Perform miracles so that you can deny them.

Be as old as the aged raven who says: Twenty
years.

Watch out for the fishwives of good taste.

Draw in the dust the uninterested games of
your boredom.

Do not seize the time to start afresh.

Argue that your head, unlike a horse chestnut,
is entirely weightless because it has not yet fallen.

Sugar with a spark the otherwise black pill of
the anvil.

Think, without batting an eyelid, what
swallows could be like.

Write imperishably in sand.

Correct your parents.

Do not keep about you things that do not offend common sense.

Just think that this woman fits into three words and that that hill is an abyss.

Seal the true love letters that you write with a communion wafer profaned.

Do not forget to say to the revolver: I'm delighted, but I do think I have met you somewhere before.

The butterflies outside are only trying to join up with the butterflies inside: do not replace in yourself, if it should happen to get broken, a single pane of the streetlamp.

Condemn what is pure — purity is condemned in you.

Observe the light in the mirrors of the blind.

Would you like to own at once the smallest and the most disturbing book in the world? Have the stamps from your love letters bound up and weep - in spite of everything, there is good reason to do so.

Never wait for yourself.

Look closely at those two houses: in one you are dead and in the other you are dead.

Think of me who am speaking to you; put yourself in my place to answer.

Be afraid of walking too close to the wall-hangings when you are alone and you hear your name called.

With your own hands wring out your body over other bodies: accept this principle of hygiene without flinching.

Only eat birds that are in leaf: the animal tree may be subject to autumn.

Your freedom with which you make me laugh until I cry is your freedom.

Make the fog run away from itself.

Seeing that the mortal nature of things does not bestow on you the exceptional power of lasting, hang yourself by the root.

Leave it to the stupid pillow to wake you up.

Cut down trees if you will, and break rocks too,
but beware, beware the pallid light of utility.

If you look at yourself with one eye, close the
other.

Do not abolish the sun's red beams.

Take the third street on the right, then the
first on the left, you will come to a square, turn the
corner by the café you know, take the first street on
the left, then the third on the right, stick your
statue on the ground and stay put.

Without thinking what you will do with it, pick
up the fan that woman dropped.

Knock on the door, shout "Come in," and do not
go in.

You have nothing to do before dying.

NOTES

1. The French reads *Violoncelle qui resiste*, a pun on the phrase *Violons celle qui resiste*, meaning: "Let us rape her who resists." —Translator.
2. See Introduction for an explanation of how this passage derives from the pages of *La Nature*.