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## THE CASTLE OF COMMUNION

*And the goddess received me gladly,  
took my right hand in hers and  
addressed me in these words: O young  
man, you whom immortal charioteers  
accompany, you who reach our  
dwelling, these mares drawing you,  
welcome. It is by no means fatal  
chance which has set you on this  
course (for it is far away from the path  
of man), but right and justice. Now  
you must be instructed in everything,  
in the untrembling heart of perfectly-  
rounded truth as in the opinions of  
mortals in which one cannot believe  
anything as true. Also learn how the  
variety which shows itself had to  
unfurl a presence, which pervades all  
things, worthy of being accepted.*

PARMENIDES

THE MOON EMERGED FROM THE SEA. IT WAS THE OLD MOON shrouded in mist, half in black silk, half in white. I remember. We were coming into harbour when someone said:

“Diana’s a widow once more. Her devotees must be breathless following one who’s constant one moment, changing the next.”

I remember. A cold light bathed the top of the hill, crowning the town. All eyes were turned towards it, and yet, I dare say, none saw the sudden and fleeting division of the disc face — Diana’s transparent smile exposing Hecate’s black laugh. The white houses were the teeth.

Next day I left town and set out for the desert which occupies the centre and east of the island. I was hoping to come across one of those remains (frequent in that South Atlantic archipelago whose settlement escapes history) which prove science wrong, speaking only to the imagination. Besides, it was only a matter of going deep into my memory. I dreamt of the white egg of the desert at whose base the shadow is salted like solitude. And then, after many days of walking, I sighted, quite close to the other sea, a cluster of houses not marked on the maps.

This village was built on the slopes of an amphitheatre whose rocky revetments concealed it from raiders. A single wooden placard, nailed to the sacred post marking the boundary of the hillside, stated the name of this secluded place. The name carved deeply with iron: *Matopocado*.

To make friends with the inhabitants is rather difficult. They welcome you, they watch you, they speak to you, but they do not want you to overstep the mark. Nevertheless, my straight-

forwardness must have convinced them I was well-disposed, for towards evening I found myself occupying a house, or rather, a long, low room with walls that seemed cut from the solid rock, with a roof of flat stones that were not much different from the dark colour of the cliff. I had just a table and a bed, but eternity boiled in the depths of the sky, and the spring was fresh.

Before long the fishermen agreed to let me join their nocturnal expeditions, and I learnt to taste in silence the bitter wine from the volcanoes that they kept cool in the waves. I remember. Sometimes I went into the mountain when the light was level with the stones, and its rays seemed to draw up the surface of the sea like a net. Sometimes I went hunting and the game I caught brought friendly smiles to the fishermen's faces. And we drank around the fires till the embers and the moon turned black. Then the shadows which kept us strangers would dissolve into the great elemental night.

Nevertheless, it occurred that even the least rude of these people shunned me on certain days, and at such times I returned to my house determined not to be affronted by their avoidance. One of their elders had told me:

"There is nothing to learn. You can only lie low, watch and grow."

One evening, when a similar situation had forced me into my retreat, I suddenly heard a music, the very strangeness of which struck me immediately as a call. I followed the side road and reached the revetment which hid the sea from me. The music came from above, from a large terrace among the cork-trees. The whole village was gathered there in a circle. (At first I did not notice that in actual fact the crowd formed two semi-circles, the men opposite the women.) At the foot of the cliff, the ocean looked like a metal plain.

The music came from the group of elders in the centre of the semi-circle of men. Their instruments were simply large shells on which strings or skins had been stretched. From time to time a flute answered them from the gathering of women. When I appeared the formation swayed, as if stirred by a breath, first of

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expectation, then anguish, then curiosity. For a moment something inside my body sensed danger, but barely had I become conscious of it than the thing had already passed. An elder pointed out a place for me, so I moved directly to squat amongst the young people, who made room for me, gathered at one end of the male crescent.

How can I describe the rhythm to which the assembly yielded seeing that I too was instinctively submissive? Or rather, no. I remember. It was deep inside me like a sea of shadow, the music drawing a tide, at times rousing my limbs, at others my tongue or my entire body. I was far away or deep down, at the point where habit is no more than a dead skin sloughed a long time ago, and where the body regains contact with the one and only race.

To begin with there was only that music: carnal, insinuating, passing through me to the bone. Music gushing from those great marine calabashes, sometimes rolling, sometimes grating. The flute responded with agonizing shrieks, always unexpected, making the whole gathering tremble. It was not a matter of *listening*, even less of watching, but only of letting oneself go, of being the deep sea from which a cry abruptly tears a spurt of life.

Exactly when the fire was lit and why, I do not know. I was already losing control of my movements, my hands already trembling, flapping around my shoulders, my temples. The night turned red. All the men's hands were dancing like mine, whilst the women remained immobile, solidified like white statues. The red of the night heightened. The flute's shrieks became more frequent, more piercing. The dance of our hands quickened. A whistling sprung from my throat — from all our throats — and I felt braced by the very deep breath that pressed on my belly and gave strength to my body.

Yet another cry and a young girl stepped out from each end of the female crescent. At first they were only two slender shapes among the red flames, two shapes writhing in the crackle of pine needles and showers of sparks. The gasping from our throats became faster amid the hollow rolls from the musical shells. Our hands moved more quickly, and our bodies slowly swayed from

right to left, left to right.

Then the young girls beat the ground with their heels, their shoulders still immobile, dominated by the precipice of a stiff chin jutting upwards. The fire flared up as the speed of the heels increased, until, suddenly, a cry froze the entire scene. Our hands remained outstretched.

In the sudden stillness an elder stood up, turned his head to the east and began to chant a litany which I cannot recall at all. Around me I felt bodies vibrating to the waves of words, and though I was not aware of it, I also vibrated to that chant which grated upon my nerves, though not without pleasure. When the voice stopped, night lay her soft presence on us, almost immediately torn by a cry unleashed from all the women. The elder threw a handful of salt on the fire, then a fresh armful of eucalyptus branches, and while the crackling flames, shooting upwards and outwards, licked the wound they had opened in the darkness of the night, a woman emerged from the oak forest. She was naked.

Such beauty! I could have died. Has any woman ever torn such words from you? The Absolute walked towards us cloaked in red hair. She had a face to rouse the gods and breasts that gave our hands intelligence. The curly triangle was the body's centre of gravity, every step rendering it more glorious, for her walk accentuated her grace, harmonising with the air, the night. Such a summit of beauty is at the same time so alive and so complete that it spreads. Suddenly the world changes, or else the eye sees its depth, and harmony is no longer just a word.

The new arrival circled the glowing fire, haloed with a redness that made more stunning the curve of her back and the full-blown globe of her buttocks, below which a few curls could be discerned. Maintaining the same slow grace, she reached, opposite her point of entrance, the westward area where the semi-circle of men joined that of the women. She sat slightly in front of the spot where the circle closed, and the two young girls who had been dancing came and sat either side of her.

The music recommenced, hollow, solemn, rolling rough

rattles . . . and all of a sudden the anguish became unbearable. My gaze turned inwards, perforating my head, perforating my body, draining the marrow from my spine, allowing night to surge into the hole. I was afraid of the cataract of images which, following the flood of darkness, rushed down the slope of my bones, filling me with a vortex. So many faces, so many gestures — drowned fish displaying their bellies to the flow of time. And death — death, down there, beneath the arch . . .

The flute emitted a terrifying shriek. My eyes reopened to the tropical night. I was standing even before I had control of my body. Beauty's hand had just stretched in my direction. The elder who had spoken previously approached me.

"You wanted to become one of us?" he asked.

I nodded in agreement.

"You wanted to become one of us and she has chosen you."

His eyes lit up.

"She has chosen you . . . Do you understand?"

I was petrified. Fear, astonishment, questioning, torture, perplexity, hope, anticipation . . . I don't know. The elder exclaimed again:

"She has chosen you!"

The assembly broke its circle and all the villagers in turn hastened to examine me. Their eyes, however, reflected no curiosity, nothing but a dark decision which set me in two minds, seeing there an inexorable goodwill.

Beauty did not move, neither did her attendants, during the general movement of the others.

When the procession had finished, the men and women lined up face to face in two rows. Then the elder spoke:

"Whoever believes in submitting to his own desire only submits through himself to the desire of the species. He must cast aside the self, he must strip bare the impulse of the species."

He pointed to me and continued:

"This is His body — the body of His desire."

Then addressing me alone:

"The new night will succeed the old night, the new month will

drive out the old month . . . You are the body, you are going to marry the new moon.”

Two men came out of the night, their arms laden with rods which they set down in two very distinct piles near the fire. The musicians went and placed their instruments on wattles at the edge of the forest. The elder motioned to the women and the three eldest came towards me. Immediately they set about undressing me. My spirit paralysed, I watched them as if I had already become another.

Cautiously, they released my sex. When this made its appearance, the flute tore the air with short sharp shrieks.

The attendants rose. They went once round the fire, approached, and, lifting their flowing hair, bathed my shoulders and belly with it for a long time. After a while, one knelt and her tongue, seeking the course of my nerves, made a tree spring to life beneath my now transparent skin. Then, at the exact moment when the violence of the caress arched my body, the young attendant shied away and fled towards the forest. I was about to follow her when a glare from the elder nailed me to the spot.

“What’s done is done,” he said.

He signalled and all those assembled went and took a rod from the faggots deposited near the fire, the women from one pile, the men from the other. Finally, each returned to their place and the two ranks reformed.

Three elders then came and flanked the attendant who had remained inactive near me. On a second sign from the ceremony’s leader, they began to undress the slim body whose paleness clouded her gracefulness.

“The new moon is a virgin,” declared one of the undressers, pointing an idiotic finger at the uncovered pubis, whilst his two assistants broke into a laugh which swelled, till the leader put an end to it, as with an organ stop. “The new moon is shy,” he added as the young attendant took flight, plastering a clumsy hand to the top of her thighs.

On a command, she returned to her position between the three elders who led her to one end of the double line of men and

women, whilst the leader escorted me to the opposite end, saying:

“You are going to the new moon, but take care, the hour is longer than you think. The hour does not obey us. You must pass through it patiently. If you run, the time that it contains will fly and you will never find it again. Nor yourself.”

I tried to understand. I was understanding. I saw myself understanding. The attendant's white form was stretched out some fifty yards in front of me at the end of the double line of men and women. My destiny no longer posed me any problem. I would pass through time.

A first step bore me forward. Immediately, rods lashed me from each side. My body contracted, tried to spring away. I braced myself and took another step. The blows came down again. The two long human hedgerows undulated before my eyes. Two rows of faceless movements between which the air blurred. Step by step I advanced into that whistling haze. Each lash from the flexible rods followed every contour, leaving burning weals. Even so, a cold sweat trickled down my back. Oddly, I saw nothing more for my gaze had burst inwards, tracing a broad golden trail in my body, my sex in full bloom at its end. My complete faculty of sight strained regally above my puffed balls. I bore it before me, bore it triumphantly beneath the blows of the sticks which bit more and more accurately into the flesh around my stiff member, occasionally inflaming it with a sharp blow. That terrifying limb, rising from me, tugged me forward with an unerring and irresistible force. Then, as my blood began to run in thick channels, I saw my inner look sheathed in red — in thick red clouds. The earth trembled and I felt the nakedness of my bones.

In no time it seemed there was very little distance left to cover, but the blows increased and I knew nothing more. I tried to regain my mind, I tried to fix a definite image in myself, but it seemed as though my body was lost, my entire life was slipping away. I remember. A morning from childhood slid suddenly into my throat. The smell of the grass intoxicated me for a second, then the cheeping of a sparrow I kept secretly in the attic. Then



the blows snatched all that. Nothing remained but pain, the pain of knowing I was not yet through with ending. A wound still raw, kept open by the blows in a place other than directly where they fell.

Then, very abruptly, everything changed, for I remembered I had accepted what was happening to me beforehand. And all that might happen to me. So I courted the blows, willing to exhaust the possible. The fire they ignited on my skin I made my strength. Everything flamed, for I was broken all over. My buttocks, my belly, my chest were etched, penetrated, burrowed. I had no more skin. I was carried to the depths of myself. I was witnessing my own end for I too had to become new. That which smashed me remodelled me, pain metamorphosed into love. I loved. I loved the new night and the rising moon and the quivering of my great tree of bone. Upon it, like pure white ivy, my nerves trembled at the breath of the huntress whose presence I now felt was very close. At the moment the flame fell away another flame lit up and death reopened my eyes.

There was a tangible silence. The virgin moon was before me, her black-marked paleness divided. The flute shrieked. My breath regained its composure. My sex stiffened towards its target, which the fleece's shadow made the same as the soul of the night. I howled, despite myself, for at that moment the world's axis passed through me.

One bound and I hurled myself at the new moon. My sex dipped into the moistness of her lips, my hands seized her breasts, my mouth her mouth. We began to fall through the night whilst my pillar of flesh received a token of virgin blood that steamed on my testicles. Having forced entry, my sex raced between the throbbing walls to reach the sweet scabbard's depths. The villagers made a circle around us. They hung on the rhythm of our breathing. Skin to skin, I clung to the new moon, impregnated her with the brownish leaf-mould of my wounds whilst her new blood oiled our meeting. From time to time I withdrew my red sex so they could see it stand out between our legs before plunging in, coming out, and then plunging in again. The night where we

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flowed hooked onto our bones mysteries that the wind of our flight was able to solve. It had been like a hole of air, a fall within a fall. But at that moment I felt myself lifted up. Hands had grasped my shoulders and legs. I had been uprooted. Finally I was turned over and lifted by their outstretched arms. I saw the sky against me. The milk of my semen spurted into it so that the new moon could slide across night's zenith and open up a gilt-edged hole.

*"Matopocado,"* cried the crowd.

WHO HAD BROUGHT ME BACK? I FELT I HAD ROLLED AGAINST sky before the final splash of night carried me through my door. Not so, I was lying on my bed. The new moon was smiling down at me. As our eyes met, she turned aside, picked up a goblet and held it out to me — and night immediately flowed back, recaptured me.

I went. The wave was strong, its crest carried me. I went towards an island that looked like a high table set on the sea. The wave set me down at its foot. I saw the cliff, then again the sky, unless it was the steep of the cliff like a vertical sky. I remember. I stretched out my arms and opened my hands. Something very soft trickled, drop by drop, along each finger. These are the remains, I thought, but ‘the remains of what?’ was the question that shook me awake.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Emma,” replied the young moon.

She turned away again, this time to look for something. I closed my eyes. When I reopened them, Emma had quietly returned to my side and her hand was already rubbing my shoulder with oil. Then I realised I was still naked. She too.

“Why are you naked?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

I drew her to me. She let it happen naturally. But the tenderness that touched me was less rousing than my sudden desire to speak to her.

“The difficulty,” I said. “The difficulty is in having no recollection, being ahead of one’s memory. I don’t know whether I’m coming or going . . .”

“Yes,” she nodded. “It’s the white shadow.”

“Why did you say that?”

“I don’t know.”

She looked at me closely, but there was nothing but abandonment in her eyes. Her warmth was slowly transferred to me. But I still wanted to speak, maybe to make up for all the time I had remained speechless. Yet as my lips half-opened, she cut me short.

“Sometimes,” she said, “I see words . . . then I say them.”

I was content just to watch her, before persevering with:

“The difficulty is to have done something, say, opened a door, then to realise that there was no door, and yet you’ve opened it . . .”

“You’re almost healed,” she said. “I love you.”

Slowly she withdrew from my arms, the tip of her breast brushing my shoulder as it passed. She straightened up on the bed, positioned herself facing me, sat back on her heels and looked at me. Suddenly she fell backwards, her two hands forming a crown for her sex, offering it to me. The pressure of her hands made her slit gape slightly.

“Come to me,” she said.

I obeyed, feeling the words I had not said return to my throat.

But Emma’s forthrightness was already rousing my flesh, the pleasure all at once driving me mad. She watched me with an upside-down smile that gave her appearance a dark side. I remember. I am on her and I lean forward. Slowly, I lean over further to butt against the tips of her breasts. She slides under me. Her skin, which is extremely smooth, feels good to my skin and hands. We are between two waters. I let her slide more quickly so as to seize her belly as it passes and bring my mouth to it. She swims desperately, but her every movement only increases the undulation of her sex against my lips. For a long time, a long time, this dance continues, before I climb back up along Emma and lie body to body. Then the night from within us escapes, scraping our teeth as it goes.

One morning, I feel renewed. I step outside and the whole

village is at my door. They fête me, but silently — it is in the light on their faces. The leader steps forward to shake my hand. The others, nodding their heads, approve this gesture. I am no longer an outsider. Before long, each leaves for his work, but not before setting at my door an egg, a cheese or maybe some firewood. Emma and I tinker with these riches, and then we walk down towards the sea.

From then on I lived only for Emma. I loved her, in different ways — spread out in the water, spread out on the land and upright in the air. It seems we had no other activity than pleasure — or awaiting pleasure.

During that time I forgot the desert and the hereafter of a memory that I had intended to run through in my own. I was here, nowhere but here. That is to say, I was completely involved in Emma's body. Now I search for words which might give me an illusion of that body, of her spontaneous alternation of sweetness and wildness. What else do I know? Simply that pleasure cannot be a memory. Yet, I remember. Sometimes my tongue slides out of my mouth to lick Emma's absence. I remember: Emma seizes my sex and pushes it into her. Later, day has dawned. I watch. Emma has fallen on her back near the bottom of the bed. She sleeps, one leg thrown across me. Her fleece is tainted and wiry. Some sperm seeps from her slit, and the insides of her thighs are marked with large white patches. I sit up and slide my hand across the sticky flesh. The mucus covers my fingers and I notice a fine thread of blood. I push: it throbs, broadens, becomes deep and red. There is a sort of hiccup, and an overflow of spunk runs over the back of my hand. I observe it moving slowly down my wrist, and while it does so, something strange happens to me — something I would not know how to explain, for there is only the trickling and a voice in my head which says: life is transparent . . . life is transparent . . .

After that I know nothing more about the place, nor Emma, nor above all about myself. I fall. I feel happy. But naturally, before long, I want knowledge afresh, or rather, to recapture my knowledge. I row through time and secrete words.

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Words? Always the same of course, but sex and its movement are always the same and yet always different. Speech too has its saliva. Words which speak, which do not speak, which are finally something other than memory, because before long they produce an image which is not recollection but the beginning of *repetition*. I remember. You are speaking to me. You are sitting on your heels like all the women out there. You have that haze of light on your face that I remember even more than your face. No, it is to my sex, erect before you, that, sitting naked, you are speaking, the sound of your expiration making each word edge dyingly through your teeth.

“My vainglory my gem my finger my felon my sharp-pointed my snub my walnut my planting my balk my burrower my gourmand my gowk my stopple my dart my pillar my filthiness my stealer my stake my regiment my thief my wretch my stock my kingling my pointel my postel my orphan my imp my hungered my lance my jewel my settle my spur my celerity my pile my tunneller my dotard my mole my falchion my cockrow my skinful my pipe my diviner my glaive my stiff my cockle my ravisher my spear my weathercock my sparkling my jack my arrowhead . . .”

I remember. Like a heartbeat in my ear. But perhaps it is only my tongue beating hard against my teeth's cage. Sometimes I am so hollow that you come inside and the shadow cries out for mercy. Then I stretch out my hand and there is a little reddened gold because night is drawing in. The room is a hole in the stone: an open tomb. You are no longer speaking to me. Your halo has also reddened. If I lift my hand slightly I do not know whether I am seeing the sky or the sea.

I remember. We are naked, stretched out on the white sheet, both motionless, waiting for night's arrival to erase the = sign we form with our bodies. I closed my eyes a long time ago. I see bygone days falling like leaves. The breeze from that falling turns my seven skins one by one. I see the cells shit into my blood, the air carry that filth up to my throat and throw it out. Then night falls.

“Sweet,” I say. “Sweet.”

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You do not reply. You are dark. My hand moves, moves slowly towards you. It runs a little way down your side and then suddenly accelerates and scales your thigh. It marks time there, as if to be forgotten, before it slides towards your abdomen and knots its fingers in your fleece. Another halt. You breathe against my fingertips. You wait and I wait. One of your hands has moved towards me, secretly. I feel it coming. I avoid it by arching my back. “Be good,” you murmur. Your hand touches me, climbs calmly onto my belly, runs to my thigh, drops down and slips under the fold of my buttock. You are there like a shadow that I cannot see in the shadow but know is there lying in wait for me. Suddenly I think: I love you. Your hand starts to caress while mine crosses the curly bush, lets itself slide along the outer labia, then slowly extends each finger to cover your whole sex. Listen. Don’t move. Wait. I see a millipede at the base of my abdomen and its feet become the lashes of a huge red eye. Your hand is under my balls. Your hand holds the reins. Not yet. Don’t get hard yet. A bubble of silence swells around us. You explore my buttocks and I imagine that I too have a large mouth there. Beneath my hand, you tremble, and a pulse blooms at my fingertips in reply to your palpitations. “Emma, Emma, Emma,” I say very quickly, feeling a liquid oozing from your labia. Your index finger pierces me: I am a ring of flesh that I squeeze and ease to play on your finger. You arch against my hand pushing harder. Its pressure is enough to open you. You have a moist slit. I love you. I touch your clit, you moan, roll against me and our deranged hands lose themselves on all the flesh that comes their way. Passing near my face, mine brings me your odour and I want to take hold of the nape of your neck. I want to. But you bite my shoulder, then my throat. I search for your sex with all my fingers. You brush them aside, straighten up. I open my eyes to surprise you on the move, but see only the air in the room has turned milky and you are swimming backwards towards me. You float above me. You place your knees in the hollow of my armpits. You lean forward. You run your lips over my sex, then

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your tongue, then your half-open mouth. I have eyes in my crotch — eyes that would like to roll between your teeth. But when your lips gently encircle me, there is a great surging back through my whole body, as if the fact that my cock was stiffening was returning my sight back to its proper place. Your knees squeeze tightly and I part my eyelids only to see the mound, where the sweet valley gapes, coming down towards my face. And there is your odour. I open my mouth straightaway to drink up that odour. My tongue is stuck out. Yours slides along the huge vein. I swell. I knock against the roof of your mouth. It is me down there who fills your mouth. But more of me is here in my extended tongue which now pushes between your other lips. I am a bow and you the string. Now you suck the whole shaft and me, I lick, I nibble. You become earthy, humid and deep. I plough your entire furrow. I remember. Emma lets rip. Her mouth goes down, draws back up — a loving bracelet that my member fills. At each movement to the base her nose batters between my balls and her breasts bang against my belly. I love. I love. The dear tongue of my mistress clings to the head of my cock and its sweet saliva oils my weapon. My nose, meanwhile, has pushed to the most hollow part of the furrow while my tongue dances around the stiff little clit. The anus contracts level with my eyes, then purses its lips and allows a glimpse of a fillet of pink flesh beyond the brown rim. I love. You love. We love. Emma pitches her hips, discharges a slightly bitter juice on my nose, rubs her cunt against my swollen lips in a swirling motion which corresponds exactly to the dancing of my mouth. The swirling increases. Hairs caress my entire face. I knock against the back of her throat at each slide of the bracelet to the base of the shaft. Her breasts beat my belly like two little heels. Each jerk by Emma deposits a moistness which spreads across my chest. I bathe my index finger in the hollow of her mound, smear it with the fragrant mixture of saliva and juice, then, while my tongue travels up the entire furrow, I suddenly thrust it into the pink whose corolla winks. There is a groan. Emma's hands slide beneath my buttocks, part them, and her finger does the same to



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me. Her crotch is resting on my chest. We turn together. We write our love. Gravity accelerates in the empty sky. Down below the moment draws near. A ball of whiteness descends the inside of my marrow. My balls burn. A sudden surge of will impels me to unstick my mouth, withdraw my cock. Emma groans, complains. "Come! Come!" she cries. I throw her across the bed, sit astride her, cover her, stab her to the hilt. Silence. The light is on her face. We look at each other. We no longer have any skin between us. Same warmth, my sweet, same dance of flesh on our bones, same trembling among the branches. Life is so alive in my head that my eyes bulge. Silence . . . I love. You love. We love. Our breathing deepens, forms a rhythmic pattern, installs in our bellies the certainty of being together. Calm, calm. Light on the down of your cheek. You smile. You invite me. You spread your heartbeats through your entire belly so that the wall's pulsations set my tool awry. I smile at you. I raise myself up. I draw my cock slowly out of you. I watch it emerge. Then, with a movement we would like to be inexorable, I thrust it into your consciousness, withdraw it, thrust it farther. You vibrate. You sweat. You sheathe me with long, long palpitations. I swell again. Contemplating it once more between our legs, I admire you for making this arm blossom at my base. This arm, this bone at whose root swings a double orange. You raise your sex to meet this machine. You gobble it up, you swallow it. I watch it being gulped down, exaltedly. You take hold of it, pumping with all your strength, squeezing, beating, but I manoeuvre away and with the same exaltation see my penis emerge inch by inch and uncover its head. But you refuse to let go of the engine and you push up your mound to pursue it. I remember. The hair roots were full of slaver. It was a flooded meadow beneath the water, and my penis pointing towards the source's mouth was sticky and steaming. Then, I had the mad desire to plant myself in that greasy ground, to be plastered with it, to have its residue all over my body. I took Emma's hands, plunged them one after the other into the source and used them as brushes to paint myself with its colours. I remember. I am your savage. I have just pinned you

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down. I dance. You cunt about before me and I pin you down again. "Go on, go on," you say. "Fill my hole to the brim. Leave nothing there but the room you fill and the longing for you, my longing to be fucked by you." I get stuck in. I plunge. I drive into you till I make your shoulders tremble. The bumping of my balls against your arse excites me further. I love you. I catch hold of your breasts. You thrust your pubis so hard against me that it hurts. You claw my back, my neck. You knot your legs around my waist. You contract your vagina till it becomes the jaw it dreams of being. You cling to my neck. Positioned on my hands and knees, I sway so you can mark time with our passion. I love you. Your jaw encircles me, and I do not know whether it is her or me beating in the flow of sweet saliva. You love me. You stream down. I say: "Suck me till your thirst is quenched." And I say, or I think: "Odour of pleasure, I love you; fountain of time, I love you; source of the imaginary, I love you; hole of surpassment, I love you; crown of penises, I love you." Your heels pommel my buttocks. You are the pendulum of a crazy clock. Your mouth enters my mouth so that our tongues fight between our teeth. I now support our career with only one hand. With the other I gather liquid flowing from your hole, then use it to smear our lips. Then I strike you with it, lash you with it. Enraged, you squeeze me harder and the pendulum swings even more wildly, and I cry: "Eat me!" And you: "Again. Further. Further." I am only that red bone in your mouth. Above there is the long trail of a scream between your teeth. Below, your soft mouth contracts. Here you are tied my beauty, tied to my tree and ready for the great explosion. But the knot remains immobile and central while shooting along our limbs, and rolling to the depths of our communal memory we share the same cry.

The July night covered us again with its gentleness, and so as not to disturb it, the ocean's surface barely rippled. Nothing was more urgent than youth and happiness, as far as life can go, for happiness renders youth tireless. Before long our bodies were feeling their way again. We knew that, contrary to the order of rhetoric, it is not a matter of exhausting *the subject* but of making

it inexhaustible.

One day, having climbed the cliff, we came across the place of our first meeting, and I asked Emma what significance the ceremony, in which I had been held worthy of her, held for the village people.

“It seems the festivity used to be held at the new moon preceding each solstice and each equinox. The custom only recommenced a few years back. But I had never heard of it till the old man came to ask my parents to prepare me for the ceremony. He said: the Lady has chosen her. The Lady wants her. I believe my parents were afraid. They agreed without a murmur. And you, well you do not displease them now. My father said: he could have eaten our hearts, but he’s a man.”

As I knew nothing of the ceremony’s end, I should have liked Emma to describe it to me.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Virgins only come here if they have been chosen as new moon. The old people say we must deflower the new moon.”

“But who chose you?”

“The Lady. I told you.”

“What lady?”

“The one from the island.”

I had never heard of this other island. I wanted to know where it was.

“Over there,” Emma motioned, pointing out to me a spot on the horizon just opposite the terrace. It looked two or three hours away by boat. A very tiny island.

“Have you ever been there?”

“No one has ever been there. It’s forbidden and people are afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“The Lady.”

“But who is this lady?”

“The one who arrived naked.”

In a flash I saw her again. The Beauty. The hair. The triangle. The walk.

“Why are people afraid?”

“The island is well-guarded. There are dogs, arabs, armed black men. Mariners say that anyone who lands there never returns.”

“Are you sure?”

“That’s what they say.”

“And the village accepts that? There are many men here.”

“The Lady’s rich. She buys everything the men catch in the sea. She brings us everything that comes from elsewhere. It’s enough not to meddle in her affairs. That is the order.”

“And what does she do?”

“She has a large castle in the middle of the island.”

“And before?”

“Before what?”

“Before the Lady ruled here?”

“I do not know. The Lady’s older than me. The village has always depended on the island.”

There was a shadow behind my eyes. I had not known it to begin with, but suddenly I realised I was not seeing Emma anymore. Like a blind man I stretched my hand towards her face, then my tongue towards her tongue. The shadow persisted. At that time, towards her, I was no more than the fool of my own folly.

That night I left our stone house and the white bed to go down to the inn and talk to the fishermen. They greeted me, teasing:

“Emma is beautiful, isn’t she?”

“And what a pleasure, young man, by the look of you!”

I bought drinks and their friendliness expanded with every bottle they emptied of the dark wine. At last, when I thought the moment was right, I asked:

“What’s that island you can see from the top of the cliff?”

The lightheartedness disappeared abruptly. The mariners looked at me then at each other, before one of the oldest finally decided to answer:

“It’s Countess Mona’s island. You pleased her, since she

picked you out the other night.”

“Is it always she who chooses?”

“Yes. She presides over our festivals. She started them again, after all. Old Bastien, the one in charge, defended the tradition well but without the countess it was probable that our virgins would keep their holes stoppered till marriage.”

“And Mona? Is she from here?”

“The island belonged to her father, and her father’s father. But the old man did not care much about us. Mona looks after us better, though we must not go near the island.”

“You have never been there?”

“No. It is forbidden. There are dogs and black men. Sometimes when the wind is strong you hear those beasts from hell howling . . . After all it’s her home!”

“Does no one ever go there?”

“Friends of hers who arrive in their yachts from the other side of the sea.”

“And what if I went there, to her island?”

“She said it is better not to go.”

“She has spoken of me?”

“She said it is better not to go.”

“At any rate, your countess would not eat me!”

“Who knows?” shrugged the old man.

While calling for drink to put an end to my interrogation, he gave me the half-condescending, half-pitying smile that old people sometimes have.

From then on I had but one idea — to see Mona again, to visit her island, her castle. Although I took great care not to show this desire, my assiduity with Emma abated. I kept silent in order to imagine and thus envisage, but who has faith in his own visions?

Frequently, in the afternoon, I escaped to the terrace. I had been able to obtain a telescope easily, but though it drew the island nearer, it did not show me anything. I succeeded in spotting a large white yacht, the castle not at all. The island was hilly enough to conceal it. In any case, did they not call anything the

least bit bigger than the poky village houses a castle?

The map told me nothing either. No doubt the island was off the main route, or else so tiny that reduction to scale made it invisible.

I secretly prepared for my expedition, making a habit of borrowing Emma's father's boat. It had a shallow draught and I quickly familiarized myself with its handling. The weather was calm, my hopes high: what have I to fear from Beauty?

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THE CERTAINTY OF MY DEPARTURE CLOSE AT HAND HAD restored my taste for Emma, although my dreams were still all about the red moon. Why did I not confide my project to her? What good would it do? Now is now and that is that. And besides, I had not settled on a day myself.

It had been a milder evening, a little mist on the horizon. I saw the moon, like the first evening, emerge from the sea. It was huge, a cycle had been completed. I decided the time had come. I loved Emma till she was gorged with me, and when she had fallen asleep, I escaped to the cove some distance away where the boats were stowed. It must have been two o'clock. I had just enough time to reach the island before sunrise.

Not one wave, the ocean scarcely rippled against the boat's bow, although I rowed hard to beat the coming of the day. I had the moon full ahead, though waning, milky and obscured. Fatigue made me porous to all that played between the air and the water, too transparent to be stilled in a word. I went. I had no recollection and no present. I crossed. And without doubt, since at that moment my will could not trace the point of division, time carried me as the sea carried my boat.

Suddenly before me, I saw the island, whilst a pink finger level with the waves signalled morning's arrival. The low coast was only a strip of sand at the foot of a sheer cliff. I set about looking for a more favourable landing-point, but the cliff continued to offer the same aspect. I was navigating to the point of a little headland when I spotted the yacht which must belong to the countess. It instilled a vague fear in me, perhaps because it was too white. I turned back and decided to land on the narrow

beach before continuing on foot. So I manoeuvred with this in mind and, having touched onto the sand, I set about dragging the boat into cover. A sudden noise behind me made me turn round. A gigantic black man accompanied by two mastiffs was watching me.

I smiled at the man, he remained impassive. His eyes, and those of the beasts, were examining me with an absence of curiosity and a coldness in which there was something terrifying. The sun rose at my back, its enveloping redness giving me courage. I took a step forward and said:

“I’d like to see the countess.”

The dogs stretched their necks towards me, the man remained posed like a statue. I repeated:

“I’ve met the countess. I’d like . . .”

The man made an imperceptible sign and the two monsters leapt on me. Before I had time to make the slightest move I was thrown to the sand. One of the beasts held me by the throat, the other straddled me. Neither harmed me, but I felt they were prepared to tear me to pieces on an order. Fear made red flakes snow down in my throat and before my eyes. My brain was working behind this screen, looking for the reason why, observing, watching out, preparing my nerves to obey it promptly. Then I remembered. Whatever happens, she said, tighten your belly, breathe deeply, compose your breath.

A shadow slipped over me. The black man approached. His immense height dominated me. His eyes, ever cold, stared at me from on high. I saw him bend his leg, then bring an enormous foot towards my face, moving it slowly so that I had plenty of time to contemplate the repulsive pallor of that sole scored with wrinkles of a dirty pink which was coming to flatten me. The foot halted a few inches from my eyes. There was a second of infinite anguish during which I did everything to master my breathing and remain quite still. The foot withdrew. The dogs released me.

I remember. The man makes yet another sign. The two beasts return to action. Rabidly, they rip away everything that protects me. I do not move. I know I must not move. The dogs, moreover,



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