

BECAUSE A WORLD FULLY ALIVE HAS THE POWER OF A Hell.

Yesterday morning—when I left the living room to enter the maid's room—nothing led me to suspect that I was a step away from discovering an empire. Just a step from me. My most primary struggle for the most primary life would open with the calm, devouring ferocity of desert animals. I would encounter inside myself a degree of life so primal in myself that it was nearly inanimate. Yet no gesture of mine hinted that I, with my lips dry from thirst, would come to exist.

Only afterward did an old sentence occur to me, one that years before had been unwittingly engraved upon my memory, no more than the subtitle of a magazine article I ended up not reading: "Lost in the Fiery Hell of a Canyon a Woman Struggles Desperately for Life." Nothing led me to guess where I was going. But then I was never one to recognize events as they were unfolding; every time they came to a head, they surprised me like a break, explosion of instants, with a date, and not the continuation of an uninteruption.

That morning, before entering the maid's room, what was I? I was what others had always seen me be, and that was how I knew myself. I don't know how to say what I was. But at least I want to remember: what was I doing?

It was almost ten in the morning, and for a long time my apartment hadn't much belonged to me. The maid had quit the day before. The fact that nobody was talking or walking and making things happen expanded in silence that house where in semi-luxury I live. I lingered at the breakfast table—how difficult it's being to know what I was like. Yet I must try to at least give myself a prior form in order to understand what happened when I lost that form.

I was lingering at the breakfast table, making balls out of the soft center of a loaf of bread—was that it? I need to know, I need to know what I was! I was this: I was distractedly forming balls out of bread, and my last relaxed romantic entanglement had dissolved amicably with a caress, I gaining once again the happy and somewhat insipid taste of freedom. Does that place me? I'm easy to get along with, I have sincere friendships, and my awareness of this allows me a pleasant friendship with myself, one that has never ruled out a certain ironic feeling for myself, though without persecutions.

But—what my silence was like before, that I don't know and never knew. Sometimes, looking at a snapshot taken on the beach or at a party, I noted with light ironic dread what that smiling, darkened face revealed to me: a silence. A silence and a destiny that escaped me, I, hieroglyphic fragment of an empire dead or alive. Looking at the picture I saw the mystery. No, I'm going to lose the rest of my fear of bad taste, I'm going to begin my exercise in courage, courage isn't being alive, knowing that you're alive is courage—and say that in my pho-

tograph I saw *The Mystery*. The surprise crept up gently, I'm only realizing now that it was the surprise that was creeping up upon me: for in those beaming eyes there was a silence that I'd only seen in lakes, and that I'd only heard in silence itself.

I'd never then imagined that one day I'd go off to encounter that silence. To the shattering of the silence. I glanced at the photographed face and, for a second, in that inexpressive face the world peered back at me just as inexpressive. Was that—just that—my closest contact with myself? the greatest mute depth I could reach, my blindest and most direct link with the world. The rest—the rest were the always organizations of myself, now I know, ah, now I know. The rest was the way I'd transformed myself little by little into the person who bears my name. And I ended up being my name. All you have to do is see the initials G. H. in the leather of my suitcases, and there I am. Neither did I require of others more than the primary covering of their initials. Besides which "psychology" never interested me. The psychological viewpoint made me impatient and still does, it's an instrument that merely trespasses. I think I'd left the psychological stage in adolescence.

G. H. had lived a good bit, by which I mean, had lived many facts. Perhaps I was in some kind of rush to live everything there was to live all at once so I'd have time left over to ... to live without facts? to live. Early on I satisfied the duties of my senses, early and quickly I had my sorrows and joys—in order to be quickly freed from my minor human destiny? and be free to go in search of my tragedy.

My tragedy was somewhere. Where was my greater destiny? one that wasn't just the story of my life. Tragedy—which is the greatest adventure—would never happen to me. All I knew was my personal destiny. And what I wanted.

I exude the calm that comes from reaching the point of being G. H. even on my suitcases. Also for my so-called inner life I'd unconsciously adopted my reputation: I treat myself as others treat me, I am whatever others see of me. When I was alone, there was no break, only slightly less of what I was in company, and that had always been my nature and my health. And my kind of beauty. Were my snapshots the only things that photographed an abyss? an abyss.

An abyss of nothing. Just that great and empty thing: an abyss.

I act like a so-called successful person. Having done sculpture for an undetermined and intermittent period also gave me a past and a present that allowed others to situate me: people refer to me as someone who does sculptures that wouldn't be bad if they were less amateurish. For a woman this reputation means a lot socially, and placed me, for others as for myself, in a region that is socially between women and men. Which granted me far more freedom to be a woman, since I didn't have to take formal care to be one.

As for my so-called personal life, maybe it was the sporadic sculpture that gave it a light tone of pre-climax—maybe because of the use of a certain kind of attention that even dilettante art demands. Or because of having the experience of patiently wearing down the material until gradually finding its immanent sculpture; or because of having, also through sculpture, the forced objectivity of dealing with something that was no longer myself.

All this gave me the light tone of pre-climax of someone who knows that, if I get to the bottom of objects, something of those objects will be given to me and in turn given back to the objects. Maybe it was that tone of pre-climax that I saw

in the smiling haunted photograph of a face whose word is an inexpressive silence, every picture of a person is a picture of Mona Lisa.

And is that all I can say for myself? That I'm "sincere"? I am, relatively. I don't lie to create false truths. But I overused truths as a pretext. Truth as a pretext to lie? I could tell myself things that flatter me, and just as easily relate my nasty defects. But I must be careful not to confuse defects with truths. I'm afraid of whatever could lead me to a sincerity: my so-called nobility, which I omit, my so-called nastiness, which I also omit. The more sincere I was, the more I'd be tempted to praise my occasional bouts of nobility and especially my occasional nastiness. Sincerity only wouldn't lead me to boast about my pettiness. That I omit, and not just because I couldn't forgive myself for it, I who have forgiven everything serious and significant in myself. I omit pettiness because confession is often a vanity for me, even the painful confession.

It's not that I want to be pure of vanity, but I need to have the field clear of myself in order to keep going. If I go. Or is not wanting to be vain the worst form of vanity? No, I think I need to look without bothering about the color of my eyes, I need to be exempt from myself in order to see.

And is all that what I was? When I open the door to an unexpected visitor, what I catch in the face of the person seeing me at the door is that they've just surprised in me my light pre-climax. What others get from me is then reflected back onto me, and forms the atmosphere called: "I." The pre-climax was perhaps until now my existence. And the other—the unknown and anonymous—, that other existence of mine that was merely deep, was probably what gave me the assurance of

a person who always has in the kitchen a kettle on a low flame: whatever happened, I would always have boiling water.

But the water never boiled. I didn't need violence, I bubbled just enough that the water never boiled or spilled. No, I wasn't acquainted with violence. I had been born without a mission, neither did my nature impose one; and I was always delicate enough not to impose upon myself a role. I didn't impose a role upon myself but I did organize myself to be comprehensible for myself, I wouldn't have been able to stand not finding myself in the phone book. My question, if there was one, was not: "Who am I," but "Who is around me." My cycle was complete: what I lived in the present was already getting ready so I could later understand myself. An eye watched over my life. This eye was probably what I would probably now call truth, now morality, now human law, now God, now me. I lived mostly inside a mirror. Two minutes after my birth I had already lost my origins.

A step from climax, a step before revolution, a step before what's called love. A step before my life—which, due to a kind of reverse magnetism, I hadn't transformed into life; and also out of a desire for order. There's a bad taste to the disorder of living. And I wouldn't have even known, if I'd wanted to, how to transform that latent step into a real one. From the pleasure in a harmonious cohesion, from my greedy and permanently promising pleasure in having but not spending—I didn't need the climax or the revolution or anything more than the pre-love, which is so much happier than love. Was the promise enough for me? A promise was enough for me.

Perhaps this attitude or lack of attitude also came from never having had a husband or children, never needing, as they say, to break into or out of anything: I was continuously free.

Being continuously free was also helped by my easy nature: I eat and drink and sleep easily. And, of course, my freedom also came from being financially independent.

From sculpture, I suppose, I got my knack for only thinking when it was time to think, since I had learned to think only with my hands and when it was time to use them. From my intermittent sculpting I'd also acquired the habit of pleasure, toward which I was naturally inclined: my eyes had handled the form of things so many times that I had increasingly learned the pleasure of it, and taking root within it. I could, with much less than I was, I could already use everything: just as yesterday, at the breakfast table, all I needed, to form round forms from the center of the loaf, was the surface of my fingers and the surface of the bread. In order to have what I had I never needed either pain or talent. What I had wasn't an achievement, it was a gift.

And as for men and women, what was I? I've always had an extremely warm admiration for masculine habits and ways, and I had an unurgent pleasure in being feminine, being feminine was also a gift. All I had was the easiness of gifts, and not the fright of vocations—is that it?

At the table where I lingered because I had the time, I looked around while my fingers rolled the bread into balls. The world was a place. Which suited me for living: in the world I could press one soft ball of bread into another, all I had to do was rub them together and, without too much exertion, just knead them enough to make one surface bind with another, and so with pleasure I was shaping a curious pyramid that satisfied me: a right triangle made of round shapes, a shape that is made of its opposite shapes. If that had any meaning for me, the bread and my fingers probably knew.

The apartment reflects me. It's on the top floor, which is considered an elegance. People of my milieu try to live in the so-called "penthouse." It's much more than an elegance. It's a real pleasure: from there you dominate a city. When this elegance gets too common, will I, without even knowing why, move onto another elegance? Maybe. Like me, the apartment has moist shadows and lights, nothing here is abrupt; one room precedes and promises the next. From my dining room I could see the mixtures of shadows that were a prelude to the living room. Everything here is the elegant, ironic, and witty replica of a life that never existed anywhere: my house is a merely artistic creation.

Everything here actually refers to a life that wouldn't suit me if it were real. What is it imitating, then? If it were real, I wouldn't understand it, but I like the duplicate and understand it. The copy is always pretty. My semi-artistic and artistic milieu should, however, make me disdain copies: but I always seemed to prefer the parody, it was useful to me. Imitating a life probably gave me—or still does? how much has the harmony of my past been ruptured?—, imitating a life probably gave me assurance precisely because that life wasn't my own: it wasn't a responsibility of mine.

The light general pleasure—which seems to have been the tone in which I live or lived—perhaps came from the world's not being either me or mine: I could enjoy it. Just as with the men I hadn't made my own, and whom I could admire and sincerely love, as one loves without egoism, as one loves an idea. Since they weren't mine, I never tortured them.

As one loves an idea. The witty elegance of my house comes from everything here being in quotes. Out of honest respect for true authorship, I quote the world, I quoted it, since it was



neither me nor mine. Was beauty, as for everyone, was a certain beauty my goal? did I live in beauty?

As for myself, without lying or being truthful—as at that moment yesterday morning when I was sitting at the breakfast table—as for myself, I always kept a quotation mark to my left and another to my right. Somehow “as if it wasn’t me” was broader than if it *were*—an inexistent life possessed me entirely and kept me busy like an invention. Only in photography, when the negative was developed, was something else revealed that, uncaught by me, was caught by the snapshot: when the negative was developed my presence as ectoplasm was revealed too. Is photography the picture of a hollow, of a lack, of an absence?

Whereas I myself, more than clean and correct, was a pretty replica. Since all that was probably what made me generous and pretty. All an experienced man needed was one glance to know that I was a woman of generosity and grace, and one who isn’t a bother, and one who doesn’t eat away at a man: a woman who smiles and laughs. I respect other people’s pleasure, and delicately I consume my own pleasure, tedium nourishes me and delicately consumes me, the sweet tedium of a honeymoon.

That image of myself in quotes satisfied me, and not just superficially. I was the image of what I was not, and that image of not-being overwhelmed me: one of the most powerful states is being negatively. Since I didn’t know what I was, “not being” was the closest I could get to the truth: at least I had the other side: I at least had the “not,” I had my opposite. I didn’t know what was good for me, so I lived a kind of pre-eagerness for my “bad.”

And living my “bad,” I lived the other side of something I

couldn't even manage to want or attempt. Like somebody who follows with love a life of "whoredom," and at least has the opposite of what she doesn't know or want or have: the life of a nun. Only now do I know that I already had it all, though the other way around: I was devoted to every detail of the not. Painstakingly not being, I was proving to myself that — that I was.

That way of not-being was so much more pleasant, so much cleaner: since, without meaning this ironically, I'm a woman of spirit. And with a spirited body. At the breakfast table I was framed by my white robe, my clean and well-sculpted face, and a simple body. I exuded the kind of goodness that comes from indulging one's own pleasures and those of others. I ate delicately what was mine, and delicately wiped my mouth with the napkin.

This her, G. H. in the leather of her suitcases, was I: is it I—still? No. I immediately figure that the hardest thing my vanity will have to face is the judgment of myself: I'll have every appearance of a failure, and only I will know if that was the failure I needed.