

I'M CAUGHT BETWEEN THE four walls of memory, in a damp low room. I don't dare look through this window. It gives me the feeling of being in a cellar. Everything happens above me. I see legs hurry past the window. Really, it's very high. If I had to escape, it would be so easy to get my hands trampled, my fingers crushed. And I'd fall back into my hole. I'm trapped in a kind of grave where I still see the legs of gravediggers and friends. Maybe the lid will close again, I'll be left alone with my dampness, alone in this hotel room that resembles a funeral parlor, alone to wait for the bugs. The place is suited for that; I understood that right away. Already I feel penetrated. There are things that are working on my body. They enter me slowly.

Now I regret having chosen Naples. There are so many other cities where we could have met. Florence, Rome, even Milan. Naples, obviously that's a magic name. Right away I envisioned serenades, strolls at the port in the evening, the sun. She was enchanted too. Naples, that was the great adventure. Too bad. I wouldn't have time to write her that I'd prefer to wait for her in Rome. She's already left. No, not yet, almost. Tomorrow morning, at nine o'clock, she catches the train at the Lyon station. Twenty-four hours to Rome; then, taking the *direttissimo*, she'll be here at 1:40. I explained all that to her.

Really, it is unhealthy here. My shirt weighs on me. When I stretch out on the bed, it's worse, I feel sick: I don't want to do anything. My strength crumbles. Even reading bores me. Besides, I have almost finished the *Stendhal*. God knows it can get boring, with those impressions of travel in Italy. You can see that he wasn't waiting, not him. He just looked; he went home in the evening and recounted what he had seen. He wasn't impatient or anxious. But then, he wasn't waiting for anyone in Naples . . . Two days. Two days, but after a month. And especially in this room. We'll have to change anyway, because *Hélène* wouldn't spend the night here. We'll leave Naples as fast as we can when she arrives; I'll certainly have had enough. We'll find a little inn, near Sorrento. But not this room, not these walls. These ugly brown walls. There are even flower patterns. They look more like spiders. On the four walls and from bottom to top, they spread their big legs. On the ceiling, those are actual spiders. My goodness, there are cobwebs everywhere, between the pipes and the wall, in the frame of this locked door. This fake door would be something else to bother *Hélène*. It's as if someone

could come in at any moment and surprise us. It's a constant threat, and if I were to keep on looking at it, I feel as though I wouldn't be able to close my eyes at night. Nevertheless, it must be locked. But a door, you can't forget that it is still a door: a white door, poorly painted, with a keyhole. Let's look through the hole. They've probably stopped it up, it's black. I remember the first time H  l  ne came to my room. That's what bothered her: the door, just opposite the bed. I told her over and over that it would never open, that never to my knowledge had it been opened, that never in all eternity would anyone cross that sill. She didn't like it. She looked at it the whole time she was staying in the room. She couldn't get used to it. She came back later on. Twice. No, three times. That was to help me pack my bags. No more thought was given to the door then. H  l  ne thought of it, maybe. Anyway, we didn't talk about it any more. Besides, we never talked much when we were together. That's a fact. Even the first time that I saw her.

We began in silence. I've never really understood her behaviour that evening. At what moment did I sense that something was happening, that our relationship was changing. Not even that. I scarcely picked up on the complicity of her look. So little did we look directly at each other. A kind of certainty assured me that H  l  ne was no longer the same. What might be the cause of this sudden change of direction on her part. For my part I had too often let her know that I found her attractive. And with what awkwardness. I no longer dared to count on a success that I had desired with too much frenzy. I always came off the worse with her. I was the one who went astray with speeches, explanations, comments. She never said a word. She held sway over a mountain that I was painfully climbing to catch up

with her, then finally I tripped and tumbled all the way down the slope. In front of others, I became more clumsy. I destroyed all my good impressions even before taking advantage of them . . .

What was there that had changed that evening? I was the same, perhaps off-hand, because I had gotten to the point of making fun of an ambition that was forever futile. At a certain moment in the evening, after the meal, something happened, a change in atmosphere. She listened to me talk and always agreed with me. That permitted me to put forth my ideas still more flippantly: she always confirmed, she approved, she always said: "That's right" . . . It was my evening. Events were turning in my favour. It was almost midnight, and I had decided not to leave her place. I was eager to run out of time for the last metro, to make use of this pretext. Toward 12:30, I noticed obvious signs of nervousness on her part. Me, I had run out of conversation, and we listened in silence to the clock marking the seconds. We were both very nervous. My heart was pounding in my chest. I still had said nothing to H el ene to seduce her. The time was passing, I was safe, alone with H el ene in a room, on the same couch. Everything seemed obvious, although, for me, unhelped for.

I took a few minutes to regain my composure. I put all my energy into concealing my delight. I talked a little, too much for sure. A good fifteen minutes of discomfort went by. Then, risking everything, without any transition, without the usual preamble of sweetness and affection, I got up to turn off the light. She still didn't say a word. Neither did I. Still, I had several facetious remarks at the tip of my tongue. This scene was definitely comical. I bumped against the bed coming back, I took my place, I pulled a coverlet over us

that I had noticed at the outset, and tried to recognize the places of her body to match myself to. First I encountered her face, whose touch was for me infinitely soft, this smooth and burning skin that I had barely brushed against several times while dancing and which all of a sudden was offered to me. I recognized the corner of her mouth and her lips. Completely at random and as a matter of principle, I placed some kisses on this face that I wasn't yet well acquainted with. Somehow I managed to throw a leg over hers. I spent some time finding my position. All this was done in silence, we didn't breathe a word. I kissed her on the lips. I had a little difficulty in making those kisses artful: I turned and turned my head to find perfect harmony. I started at the corners of her mouth, I moved toward the center, I opened her lips and put in my tongue. Finally I sensed her consent. Her lips moved with mine, I felt her saliva enter my mouth and our tongues brush gently, a new and sensuous language taking place. Then I withdrew; our lips were still moist with saliva, and we resumed those embraces that were our first moves.

The moment hadn't yet come to let myself go in my ecstasy and to admit to a pleasure that would have, once again, made me lose the upper hand. It was her ecstasy that I wanted first. I kissed her on the neck. Feeling her willing, I made a move that should have been a welcome discovery but was then a long shot. I unfastened the two layers that covered her. She didn't say a word, me neither as a matter of principle. She kept still, and me, I went even slower as it all struck me as ridiculous. I proceeded to the end of the row of buttons, opened her clothes and kissed her breasts. What a marvellous sensation to touch them, alive and open to my lips. I put my lips everywhere. I felt as if her blood should flow in me and overrun me.