

keeping still.

Our eyes had grown accustomed to the dark. In fact they were on quite friendly terms with it. We saw most of what we wanted to see, and dreamed the rest. Of course this didn't come all at once. We had to re-learn how to use our visual senses without the benefit of bright colors or fine lines. Re-wiring neurons. Perhaps it is a bit like learning to dance without music or rhythm. First we had to learn to identify difference. It was tempting, of course, to simplify matters - that patch over there is lighter, this one here darker. The trick was to see things as they are; to know the complexity of all that passes before one's eyes without the confusion of organized wholes. Seeing in complete wholes leads, among other things, to an illusory perception of depth, where A partially occludes B, and the figure C is fixed to a ground D. In the dark, we taught ourselves to see all of A and B simultaneously, as well as D in place of C and vice versa. We learned to recognize difference through a careful, yet relaxed study of individual forms. At first, we simply stared at one fixed point - not because we knew there was something there - because we hoped there was something. Gradually, gently, like a slow petal unfurling, a form would emerge. a form, a void. Where the two were once the same, we stared them into difference.

Wrapped in my thin cloak of silence, I would run my fingers all along my body. Behind the knees first, drawing them into my chest, curling into a ball. There was a reason for this position, but I will explain another time. So my fingers were squeezed between thigh and calf, my ritual begins. The ankle bones, heels, between each toe, one by one. I think at first it was to make sure I still had all my body, to affirm ten toes, two elbows, two ears, shoulders, eyelids. Comforting. One by one I began to imagine that it was her body, her ten toes two elbows eyelids. How did her feet flex, how warm behind the knees? I think I began to know more about her this way. Trying to know my body completely to know hers. A bit annoyed that I was unable to feel inside as well - the skin so delicious. Only able to the mouth or ears. But what is my stomach like, from inside? and hers? all I can have is my body, my voice, and her voice. Nothing else. And I could not know my whole body. The other side of my nails, the other surface of my bones - a mystery. So, I had to develop another ritual, not tactile, but mobile. Each limb, joint, finger alternately twitching like mad, curving with grace.

Above all else, remember. Keep things clear. In place. Some more important than others, but which? How things felt. Not my body, nor my

hair, nor air. But the stone, the space between stones, remember the word 'scrape' and what it corresponds to. I asked:

“What makes the sound 'scrape' ?”

“Scrape?”

“You know, like when nails scrape against skin for an itch.” (Had to avoid using the word 'remember' or 'memory' or else he would close).

“Scrape; I don't feel 'scrape', I hear it. A sound moving from ear to ear.

“No, no - what makes the sound, like - like stones - “

“I don't know; doesn't matter. I hear, that's all.” (I know what she is moving towards, but above all else, don't try to remember. No need for the past, don't give in. Stones don't matter).

“Yes, you hear it, but - sound is made by something, so - “

“No, I don't know. My mind goes scrape. My ears hear scrape. That is all. It has nothing to do with things that 'make'. It is I that makes, I that moves. You move, I move - “(and I will catch you some time; I will make my body curl into a ball and heavy, I will fall faster, I will kick my legs and always move closer, when you are not looking when you are sleeping I kick I make myself small and heavy. I fall faster. I will catch you sometimes like before I could not really see you I stared and stared and you were without shape I had to wait until you could speak)

“I know you know what I mean. we make sounds, things make sounds, like before - “

“Not before. Now. Soon. In a while. But not before.”

It dawned upon them by accident. A sudden movement, a shift of weight - and her whole body turned upside down. Of course that first time she cried out, but when it appeared to her that head down was not much different than the other way around, then the game began - punctuated with laughter she explained that movement, then both began to tumble and twist like a playful wind. Their voices echoed far into the endless shadow, chasing each other back and forth. She plunged her head downward, arms stretching forward, he did the same. Then both in reverse, he escaping her. Up became down, everlasting descent turned into everlasting ascent. It was during the course of one of these frolics that they attempted to. His head thrust downward, waving his arms over his head she face turned upwards and a sudden silence - the last laugh hovered a moment, then vanished. He stretched his arms downward, she lifted hers to reach. Breath came heavily, soft creak of straining muscles. He was trying to push down with his feet, left foot pointed, pushing against nothing. The two figures, nevertheless remained separate their lines in a vertical sculpture of effort. Completely, consciously futile. Her teeth grinding tight jaw like stone fingernails scraping the air. Limbs passing through cycles of exhaustion and renewed effort. Shoulders

trembling chest heaving irregular rise and fall. Slowly from the length of each body a wail crept delicately : first mouth open in mute shock, then bare the teeth almost a gesture of anger. Lids half-closed but fail to contain tears. Long, continuous notes of their grief echo far into the endless shadow.

The fall is lonely, and I have found myself inventing characters to speak with. easier to focus my attention when the conversation takes place out loud, be attentive to what he is saying, prepare an articulate response, or simply slip my tongue around sentences for the sheer physical pleasure. The memories I have are much more interesting when served piece by piece, like a special cake prepared only for company. Delicious confection, savored all the more because you cannot ask for another slice. The cake reigns over the table, promising delight but not for you! the rest of the pieces will be shared with other guests, amid other conversations. The hostess has prepared her dessert, mixing particular flavors with a strict hand according to a recipe or letting the ingredients come together just like that, allowing chance and memory to develop intimate taste.

"What do you imagine will happen when we finally stop?"

Several seconds silent.

"Quite honestly, I do not think about that often. You begin, allow me a moment longer."

"Oh, no - a moment I can give, but if I tell my story I will taint yours, and I want to know what you imagine pure and simple."

A moment longer passes.

"The air will become dense, we will fall ever so little by ever so little more slowly."

"What about speaking? How can we hear each other if the air becomes soup-thick and muffles our words?"

"Well, we will have to be quiet for a while, left to our proper thoughts. And eventually we will be able to sit, the atmosphere will gently support our bodies."

"I think we would get sick. If we slow down, the shock will - "

"I said *little by little* - ever so little by ever so little - remember? So when we come to a stop, we will by that time be accustomed to the pace, and we will begin to discuss all of the things we thought of when the air was too thick to speak without shouting (and you know I do not like to shout), we'll tell stories, share observations..."

Long moments pass.

"I imagine it will suddenly come, with a surface eagerly rushing to meet us, and then - nothing."

I want I want I can't so far I can feel I can feel near are you that can't think of you impossible without. Hope is a complete abstraction I have no idea of your skin though many times I. In my head in imagination only without. No action yields reaction. Impossible if I think of you at the same time you think of me will? I don't know how many times I. Thus here here be here I can't I know there will come a time knock knock tick tock who's there but seems impossible who's there. Seeking, found I want you find to look to where if not a visual memory then what tick tock time knocks and will appear on mental horizon time who? Wait. Wait so far when I during the sigh imagine small hairs flutter I can't.

Stretch arms and legs, horizontal plane. not yet - small kick as if swimming through the air, but not yet - one, two, three and - ah! Just barely scrape something solid with fingernails. If the width is twice my body (stretched). How to know both width one way and the other? I should call to her, she could stretch her body at a right angle to mine, then I would know the two widths. But if she is not as tall as I am? Better to keep this to myself. It's useless. I can't move through this air like water. I've tried to kick, to lunge, to twist - always stay in the same place, fixed. All the more useless, as this constant fall is the same as

keeping still. Depending on my mood, this is comforting or agonizing. How long have we been falling? And how much longer? A useless belief in change. A difference in movement that never arrives. A certain number of givens that stay rigid, a certain number that remain hidden. Which are more frightening? No more questions should be asked. No where, no when. I have never touched anything other than the wind, and my body. How long have we been like this? I like to imagine that I hover, that I am suspended. No light, no change - I can imagine what I will. I can listen. And as we fall in this no place which is no where, the wind makes sounds most strange. With my hands I sculpt the tones, I push frequencies apart and squeeze tones into harmonies. And this a fairly recent art. After all, I had to learn how to make of the wind an instrument, as we had to learn so many things...but now is the time to explain how we learned to hear. Because it wasn't just about how things sound, but how they are. Sometimes I almost forget who fell first, unless we speak - then I can trace the lines of her voice. It started with our voices: I screamed down to her, but at that time I didn't know how to deal with the wind rushing up to my face, so she could barely make out my words. It was as if the moment the thoughts left my throat the wind whipped them far off, stole the syllables and left my words tangled. Tried cupping both hands around my mouth, but that only delayed the inevitable confusion. So, what had to be done was befriend the wind. I would whisper softly to the gusts, so that they would not be jealous -

some of my thoughts I gave to the wind, some I gave to her, so neither received all that I had to give. The wind ceased snatching my phrases, and I was able to speak to her.

No matter how much strength I put into my screams, he could not understand all of what I had to say. Always a word missing in the middle, or at the end. Carried off who knows where. (We never know where...). It was a certain way of holding my head, a positioning of the ears to catch his words. His words were suspended in the air, and I had to catch them. It was as if all the sounds I heard were contained in the wind, and I had to learn when and how to pick them. I wonder how many thoughts or sounds I missed? The interval of sound is attention.

What if I keep quiet. Play a game without telling her. Like malicious elder sibling to younger “let’s play who can keep quiet longest”. She will think I didn’t hear, then call louder. And I will shut my eyes shut my ears with my hands. Though the latter less successful. Then two possibilities: anger or embarrassment. Angry at the childish game or embarrassed to yell at someone sleeping. The second possibility leading back to the first,

since no one sleeps forever. Perhaps she can hear me moving? There is so little change in the atmosphere, an irregular movement will alert her – if she has a careful ear. Makes things more difficult. No speak, no move. Maybe eventually she will come to believe that I was a figment of her imagination. She will talk to me anyway, inventing responses. Two possibilities: she will imagine my responses to herself in silence or out loud. It will be more amusing if she imagines out loud.

We are also defined by our cruelties. The things we do when backs are turned, intending to deceive. The things done only when back are not turned. Every word is deliberate, even if not every action is. Trying to prove that things inside our minds truly exist. Music unreal until it is hummed, sung, notated, played. Our dark situation makes this more difficult, not having the ability to discriminate each other's fine movements or facial expressions (maybe we don't make them anymore?). Unless I concentrate, whispers are lost. Maybe that was how it began, aggravated by all the soft words and murmurs that he refused to repeat, that I could not hear, that were carried off by the wind. Small holes in his phrases that I could not fill. Then you either fabricate a meaning or do nothing. Difficult either way, the rage of misunderstanding. Little by little

I introduced the idea; exasperation is more effective as duration increases:

“If you thought back to how it started, you’d understand.”

Then:

“It wasn’t like this before.”

“It’s hard to live, knowing...”

As if I knew. What mattered was being clear on the fact that *he* didn’t know how we got here. That he could not know, at least not without me. I had to wait a good length of time before he finally asked – and of course in a tone nonchalant, at ease, introduced by a feigned yawn. So I knew he had been mulling over how to ask me for hours on end. Should he ask outright? Scream the question in anger, or softly plead with me to divulge a secret I in fact knew nothing about? The indifferent voice was too heavy; make him repeat the question. Prove that I know his calm is brittle. Ask again, and the second time a voice that quivered ever so slightly.

“Would you tell me the story?”

(Ever so slight the emphasis on ‘the’).

“I heard you the first time.”

Silence. Which becomes more agitated as seconds drag into minutes. If I had the secret I would not be able to contain the desire to tell. He knows this. So I throw him a word or two.

“I think I might like that.”

Silence.

“Once upon a time...” he prompts.

A peal of laughter slips from my lips.

That’s not how it started. Another time. I’ll tell the story another time.

Another fantasy I used to play at was rain. A few drops would fall on my arms or neck. I would mistake them for her tears, which was a more probable occurrence than a rain shower. The frequency of the small water sensation steadily increases. Distracts my mind as I stretch my limbs in all directions to fell the delicious little droplets kiss my skin. Quite suddenly great sheets of rain would begin to drench us. The sound of it falling on her body, rolling gently across her curved lines and dropping onto my tongue. I laugh in the sheer pleasure of it, and because she knows my ways she jerks her body this way and that, now shielding me from the torrents, now allowing the downpour to pelt me without mercy. What a brilliant thing is rain in the darkness! The feeling of the raindrops is so vivid you become convinced that you can make out the beads of water rushing past or forming small pools in your palms.