

The Lace Curtain

It's the way it is. To move out of yourself, look away, look out of the window. The water is flat. The distant misty hills with more city buildings. The grey. The red green and white containers are sitting still on the loaded boat docked below the hill. That's as far away as anything else. The sun is going down and lighting up the whole bay the whole city. Some of the glass walls are glowing orange, others are silvery. The cool breeze blowing through a beautiful day. How is it possible to be depressed or pessimistic in front of this. No other city is more beautiful than this city when it looks as beautiful as it can. The Greek lace curtain.

Isolate each sound. Something unexpected. Some clicking. Some very faint rasping. Why don't I hear everything in my own home. I think I'm listening to the radio. And life at large is continually passing by, the cars on the bridge. This huge flow which never stops and which overwhelms me when I think of it.

A page of white paper is lifting up at one corner in the breeze which isn't strong enough to actually move the page. Each time the corner of the page lifts reveals the page below it, to show the edge of a picture which is pink and orange surrounded by white. Something female. A picture with a purpose. Maybe an advertisement, maybe a cover of something. Or a postcard from somewhere far away. Somewhere unreachable. The breeze may get strong enough to blow the top page away. I must get up and take the page off except that it's interesting to watch and see how much will be revealed without doing anything. Calculated inaction. To advance with any plan now might be dangerous.

–Your face means something to me. I don't know what it is. Something terribly strong. So familiar. I love you. See the way you look out of your eyes. I've seen it before. It's away of looking I call sex appeal in a man. It tears me up because of its familiarity, because of what it makes me remember. The several men I've loved and lost in one way or another always had that look, that way of looking out of their eyes. But your eyebrows, the shape of them. The way you seem focussed in your head when you walk, I notice your head and wait for you to turn around, holding my breath and then you look at me. I breathe. When someone you love looks sad it's unbearable. Much worse than if you're sad yourself.

–Do you remember the time on the coast. As the sun went down the seaspray covered the beach like mist from one end to the other and from the water's edge to the sand dunes. The fine creamy sand like chalk dust. The waves were gliding in, white on the sand as it got darker. They looked quiet and when I remember the evening now it's quiet but I know the waves were making that noise. We must have got used to it after sleeping near it. The moon rose up over the promontory to one side of the lighthouse. One of those times when there was nothing to say. You just live through them quietly. I recognise these times I love by the presence of white and silence. Like the music I love. White because you can hear the singer breathing between the long soft notes. There is a way of playing any instrument and having the effect of white. I'm speaking abstractly. This white is completely abstract. I don't mean meaningless. How could a time on the beach like that be meaningless. With you. I noticed every touch but it was part of something larger. Floating away into dreamland with the sandman. It was oceanic. You recognise it when you feel it because it's white.

The sky looks like a mirror. is repeating itself over and over – mirror, mirror, mirror, kathreftis, kathreftis, The sky is white. The buildings are grey. Metallic sounds. Now, how do we know anything. What is it we should know that we don't know. She is going away now into her own personal realm. Can we say we even know her anymore. We take our fingers off the pulse of

what's happening now. We move away into the personal realm. When everything is so obscure we turn to ourselves. I turn to you.

Through my childhood my mother was calm and quiet. I think she was sad. I don't know but I think she was. Sometimes I hugged her and squeezed her to make her feel better and she would laugh.

–Please don't leave us, make everything stay the same.

Today it stopped raining. It looked warm but it isn't. The clouds are closing up again. The sound of the chainsaw starts up again and again. Every time it stops we feel relieved but then it starts up again. It reminds me of a sunny clearing in the country among tall gum trees where a couple of men are walking around some huge felled gum trees shouting to each other now and then. Hut nearby a radio is playing loudly as well as a record player, playing loudly. I am trying to tell her that things are different from the way she imagines. It's not like that. I'm shouting – For Christ's sake turn the music down. Where has he gone, he was here a minute ago. I run up and down the street. The main shopping centre has been demolished.

–You're looking for him? He left the train tickets for you, you leave at 8.30 and arrive at 9.30. The noise has stopped. The sky is white. There is the sound of a plane behind the clouds growing fainter. I follow it.

She folded her leg over his hip and whispered into his mouth, I want you to come in now, come in slow. I want you so much. He slipped over her leg. and went in. He came out and she turned onto her front. He slipped over her leg and went in. He came out and she turned again. They turned and turned. She clung around him with her arms and legs as he rose to kneel. He pushed her down again into the grass and came.

–I can't help myself with you.

–Come away with me.

–Yes.

Then she came.

–This scares me.

–What.

–When we fuck like this. It makes me forget everything.

–Do you remember the time on the beach when it was so sunny and windy and we just gradually got completely lost rolling over on the pebbles and kissing and kissing and kissing. We took over the place. Then the people arrived. A family. That was a public statement when we just lay there half undressed looking at them.

–Do you remember how romantic we were then.

–In those days I was so certain of what I was doing. There was the family to get away from. The issues were personal. Any wider social perspective had no more meaning for me than a series of slogans or an excuse to socialise with other people. But this didn't seem so stupid. My ideas about relationships were set. There was no ambiguity for me, no ambivalence about a person which couldn't be contained in my relationship with them. My life had a feeling of singularity about it. I didn't feel there were any opposing forces which had to be juggled. And overwhelmingly there was the most extraordinary sense of freedom. We were doing things that only a small number of people in this country were doing. We could rest on the laurels of entertaining ideas for the new Utopian lifestyle. We felt we had everything we could ever want. I don't know why time changed all that. Why change occurred, why we wanted to change when we were so happy. A feeling of contentment is what we had. Not that it was always bliss, not at all, but every moment was interesting. Learning about being independent and taking the first steps into places I've never left since. Making commitments to a way of life without realising the consequences of these decisions. In those days there was black and white. There was just everything we didn't want to be part of. A kind of 'everything's shit except what I want to do now.

I had such faith in you. I put my life in your hands without a second thought. You were so obviously good and right. And it's great to feel you're doing the right thing with a sense of purpose. You know we were unselfconscious. Maybe it's just age and the feeling of the times, a sense of beginning everything rather than a sense of having to maintain everything. The cold look of a few things for making tea. Cheap little tins half full of tea and sugar. No milk. The painted metal tray has lots of rings on it where cups have been standing.

You came out here but I left you alone for a while. I wanted to give you some time to find your feet in this place. Ultimately you did. I went to find you. I found you and I realised how long it was since I'd seen you and I was startled by your face looking at me – you seemed so young. This suddenly came home to me. We were in the city. You were a part of the city now, you had your own friends, your own life. I said, I think we should get married now. You said, But I have a girl now, a young girl of my own, you haven't seen me for so long. I said, Yes but you had to find your feet and I was living with someone else. You said, It's all over now, it's finished. And you walked away with your friends. I tried to follow you but you evaded me. Then I walked around to Australia Square, into the heart of the city.

Now everything comes and takes you. You can't be so rebellious that you butt up against everything. It's not possible to survive that. At a certain age you have to let things push you the way they want and go. We surrender to the pattern of our lives. I don't mean habit. Just suddenly the penny drops and you give up the fight. I live my life now like a method actor. Why not, everyone else does.