

## Last Love

For the first two weeks of her stay in Paris, Amalia felt quite well. For hours on end, day after day, she would sit between the tall, shuttered casements of the open hotel room window with her knees resting against the black wrought-iron railing that was molded as fine as a piece of filigree. From there she would gaze down into the Tuileries Gardens across the street. The pills she was taking had completely dulled her pain, and if she happened to feel an ache in her chest, Gabriel would double the dose of her medicine.

Ever since the Second World War she had suffered from tuberculosis. She had spent time in a number of sanatoria and had thought herself cured—especially during the years she lived with her former husband—when suddenly, for some mysterious reason, she suffered a relapse. Now she was in the last stage of her illness, from which, the doctors said, there was no hope that she would recover.

Gabriel had brought her to Paris to grant her what she—partly in jest, partly in earnest—had called her “final request.” She wanted to die in Paris, she had told him in a coquettish tone of voice. She wished to embark on her journey into Eternal Darkness from the City of Light, the city where she had gone directly after the war, the city where she had been young, where her beauty had come into bloom, and where she had fallen in love for the first time.

There, many years later, she had also met Gabriel. At that time he had been an unsuccessful sculptor with a family to support, while she was an elegant matron who had run away from her wealthy husband in

Montreal. Alone in Paris, she had sought out her favorite spots, which included the Tuileries Gardens, where she wandered about the Jeu de Paume Museum and the Musée de Flore. Having refreshed herself by gazing on the works of her beloved Impressionists, she stepped outside to stroll at a leisurely pace among the Henry Moore sculptures in the garden. There Gabriel too had been strolling.

It was his first visit to Paris since he had emigrated from Europe. He too lived in Montreal, where he had left his wife and children in order to make the trip to Paris alone, a trip he considered of great importance to his survival as an artist. His creative output had begun to decline; his imagination had lost its wings. Like a wanderer in the desert he was frantically searching for an oasis, for a revitalizing spring. And so he had launched himself into the world again in quest of the stimulation he hoped would save his soul.

In Montreal Gabriel and Amalia had never met. They might have heard each other's names mentioned, or noticed one another from a distance at a vernissage or a prize-giving ceremony or some similar function where money and art met, but that was all. And here too, in the Tuileries Gardens, they almost escaped each other's notice. Amalia, having distracted herself at the art exhibit, walked among Henry Moore's rocklike masterpieces absent-mindedly, lost in the labyrinth of her own inner world, her thoughts stumbling along the stony paths of her own life.

She was, of course, aware of the stranger who, like herself, had been strolling among the bronzes. On such a rainy, pre-spring day, when there were not yet many tourists in Paris, the gardens were deserted. Gabriel's tall, slightly stooped figure had immediately caught her eye. He was clad in a not overly clean raincoat, while the unkempt strands of his graying hair extended in all directions like exclamation marks. A number of times she had even been obliged to step aside and let him pass, so absorbed was he in scrutinizing the sculptures. Yet she did not notice him—not really.

As for him, he definitely did not notice her. He was preoccupied with comparing Henry Moore's artistic idiom to that of Picasso. At

the same time Moore's massive creations transported him, through the shortcut of association, back to the majestic Canadian Rockies, which he loved.

He suddenly realized how late it was and automatically turned to the strange, trim lady who wore a white suit that did not yet match the season but was a refreshing contrast to the gray of their surroundings. Her blonde hair, loosely gathered in a bun, fell with charming negligence against the white ermine collar hugging her neck. He walked up to her and asked if she knew where he might take the metro to the Bastille.

"To the Bastille?" She raised an eyebrow as if in surprise, and before his eyes this mysteriously alluring woman acquired the look of a young girl whose facial expression suggested that she was being robbed of something that belonged exclusively to her.

"Yes, to the Bastille," he nodded.

They recognized the racial kinship in each other's accent and eyes—a Jewish gaze from Jewish eyes. In the same instant they both exclaimed, she a question, he the answer.

"First time in Paris?"

"First time in Paris since the end of the war."

A stream of more typically Jewish questions and answers followed in rapid succession. They both, it seemed, hailed from Montreal. Each vaguely recalled having heard the other's name mentioned; perhaps they had even met. Surely they had met, the day before, or years earlier, or eternities ago. From the depths of their eyes a magnetic force drew them together. They continued questioning each other but had ceased listening to the answers. No, he was in no particular hurry to get to the Bastille, nor did she have any pressing business to attend to.

That day Gabriel did not go to the Bastille. He and Amalia spent the day in the Tuileries, with no food or drink. They sat on the iron-work garden chairs, which grated unpleasantly against the gravel. The seats were painted orange and looked like rectangular slices of sunshine against the gray. They reminded Amalia of the color of the bougainvillea that grew in the small Japanese town where she had been stranded

when the war broke out. When they grew tired of sitting, Amalia and Gabriel walked about the garden, then returned to the Moore sculptures, sat down again, and continued their conversation, increasingly fascinated by and absorbed in each other's world.

On the whole they exchanged banalities, laying out the patterns of their respective lives for their mutual perusal. Gabriel confessed that he was a deplorable breadwinner, that when he had been forced to put away his chisel and carving knife in order to concentrate on earning a living he had cursed his life; that he had worked at a regular job until his children were grown and that during all those years, he had barely done any sculpting. Now he was feeling the effect of having neglected his skills. Apart from the fact that his creative vigor had vanished, his technique, too, was faulty and inadequate for his needs. He also told her that his wife resented him.

"She . . ." he began.

"She doesn't understand you." Amalia finished the sentence for him with a discreet chuckle, aware that such a statement could be both a cliché and a painful truth.

"She's about to divorce me," he said, and in turn asked her the customary question that one asks a woman alone—namely, why is she alone?

Her reply was candid and direct: "My husband had an affair with another woman. So I've come here to sort out my feelings." She also told him that she suffered from tuberculosis but that at present she was almost completely cured.

It was good, gratifying, to be frank and not feel obliged to embellish one's story or hide behind a mask of half-truths. No doubt this foreign city contributed to that ease, to that open-heartedness. So did the fact that they were strangers and that, although receptive, friendly, and curious about each other, they would probably never meet again. It was like getting undressed in front of a doctor and finding a partial remedy for one's ills in the mere expectation of a cure.

Actually, it was not a matter of what they said to one another but of what they did not say yet allowed each other to sense. There was some-

thing in the air between them, a radiance of spirit that enveloped them both and set them apart in a distinct and harmonious sphere.

With the gray of dusk, they left the Tuileries, crossed the street to the Arcades, and had a baguette sandwich and a cup of coffee in a tiny bistro. They both laughed at the fact that Paris was a cure for the torments of the heart.

Afterward Amalia, in the most simple and direct manner, invited Gabriel to her hotel room. She was staying nearby, at the distinguished Hotel Meurice, once part of the building complex that had housed the Gestapo headquarters during the German occupation. There, in the room with the tall, shuttered windows that faced the Tuileries Gardens, they spent the night.

The following morning she said goodbye to him. She had no intention of seeing him again. It was true that life with her husband had lost its meaning, but she was not yet ready to become involved with another man, let alone to fall in love with one.

It was then that Gabriel said to her: "I shall never leave you. Nor will I ever be unfaithful to you."

He did not visit the Bastille that day either, but waited for Amalia in front of her hotel. At length he saw her appear, wearing the same white suit she had worn the day before. She entered a nearby travel agency, and he followed her inside. Before she had time to sit down at the agent's desk he strode over and seized her arm.

"You are my destiny. I feel it in my bones," he said to her. "Wherever you go, I will follow. Wherever you are, I will be there too, now and forever."

She was startled. There was an edge of rawness and heat in his voice, as well as a forceful sincerity that made her head swim. To see such a face, to meet such a gaze and hear such words from a man of this type, could only happen once in a lifetime. She knew that. This was not the first time in her life that she had listened to a declaration of love from a man. But the declaration she heard at that moment, as they stood facing each other in the travel bureau, had nothing in common with other love declarations. What she herself felt for Gabriel was of no

importance. Just as she had not managed to sort out the feelings that she had brought with her from Canada, so she could not disentangle the chaos of emotions that had overtaken her during the last twenty-four hours.

So he made the decision for her, and she allowed him to do so. She, who had lived through her own series of trials and tribulations, was reckless for perhaps the first time in her life. She trusted him, although she hardly knew who he was. But in the forcefulness of his words she heard the command of Fate, for better or worse, the confirmation that they were meant for each other.

She postponed her departure from one day to the next, and he did the same. They spent the days and nights together, never leaving one another for longer than was absolutely necessary. Often when they made love, tears would flow down Amalia's cheeks.

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Gabriel kept his promise. He never deceived Amalia. Nor did she deceive him. She felt good with him. She never discovered whether her feelings for him were as powerful as his for her, but that did not seem to matter. His love for her, their lovemaking, and his readiness to serve her filled her heart with such gratitude and enriched her days so abundantly that being with him, talking to him, or keeping silent with him became as necessary to her as the air she breathed. She grew more sensitive, more sensuous than she had ever been before, as if Gabriel had removed the dust from some delicate chords that had lain untouched for a long time in the deepest recesses of her heart. She felt a kind of ecstatic tenderness for him and could find no other name to call it but love. Like a plant starved for nourishment and receiving finally what it had lacked, she came back to life. She unfolded like a flower in bloom, infusing the air about her with a kind of soul perfume that permeated her surroundings.

As soon as she and Gabriel were divorced from their respective spouses, they rented a studio apartment at the foot of the mountain

in the center of Montreal. There Gabriel could devote himself to his work. They lived modestly, frugally, on Gabriel's earnings from the infrequent sale of his sculptures and on Amalia's salary. In Japan she had taken lessons in flower arrangement, which stood her now in good stead, and thanks to her attractive appearance and her fluent French she found work as a saleslady in a high-class flower shop.

She liked flowers of a warm, rich hue, and the wide window ledge in Gabriel's studio was crowded with pots of blooming azaleas the color of deep coral sunsets—although her favorite color, the one she herself liked to wear, was white. She cared a great deal for her flowers and talked about them so often that Gabriel would sometimes call her "my white azalea."

In his heart he also bestowed on her two other names that were connected in meaning. He called her "my white Dame aux Camélias" or "my white geisha." Both names suited her, not only because La Dame aux Camélias had worn a white carnellia in her hair or because she too had suffered from tuberculosis, and not only because "geisha" evoked Amalia's Japanese interlude, while the porcelain pallor of Amalia's face reminded Gabriel of the artificial whiteness of a geisha's complexion, but also because the reawakening of her illness—of which they had both been unaware at first—stimulated her sexual appetite. Thus he lovingly compared her to a refined courtesan who maintained a knowing balance between decency and vulgarity, and in this way she made him want her even more. As Amalia's illness progressed, a delicate flush caused by fever colored her cheeks, and she became even more beautiful.

The years wore on, one month followed another, weeks came and went, not always in perfect harmony. Periods of boredom occasionally punctuated their time together; discord and misunderstandings occurred more than once. But these usually gave way to moments of clarity, of consciously rising above the workaday tedium, and once again the light of devotion would illuminate the gray, monotonous plateau of routine with a warm glow.

It was usually Gabriel who saw to it that their hours of estrange-

ment after a quarrel should end quickly. Whatever elements of mediocrity may have existed in him as a sculptor, he proved himself a true artist in his love for Amalia. His life with her became his masterpiece. And it was precisely this feat of creativity in his daily life that began to stir his potential as a sculptor. The inventive power of his love stimulated his artistic imagination. Gabriel and Amalia, both touched by war and personal tragedy, treated each one of their days together as if it were a symphonic poem or a chapter in a romance.

Gabriel's sculptures began to sell. As soon as their financial situation improved he bought a car, a Jaguar. Amalia covered the seats with warm-colored fabrics, and they traveled a great deal all over Canada. Once he drove her all the way west to the Rocky Mountains to view the turquoise blue of crystalline Lake Louise, a lake whose magic-mirror surface reflects the surrounding mountains, which recline like queens with snowy veils on their heads, each peak demanding to know who is the fairest of them all.

But Amalia's health began to deteriorate rapidly. She gave up her job, although, thanks to the excellent medical care she received, there were still times when she led a perfectly normal life. She remained active at home, caring for the household, tending to her flowers, and reading. She spent long hours sitting with Gabriel in his studio watching him work while the phonograph played their favorite music, most often Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*.

Amalia's beauty acquired a new delicacy and fragility. She grew ethereal in appearance; from the grayish green of her eyes there emanated an intense inner light. She released a kind of soul heat into the atmosphere around her. Sometimes, when Gabriel watched her moving about the room, wrapped in her long, white dressing gown, her eyes glowing with the high fever devouring her body, she appeared to him like a statue chiseled out of burning coal and wrapped in a cloak of white ice, or like a marble lamp covered by a marble lampshade; but most often she seemed like a white ghost who had gathered the whole of the sunset to her bosom.

Gabriel was possessed by the impulse to carry her around in his

arms, to touch the flame that burned within her. While she, for her part, yearned for his touch, for his caress, and could never get enough of their lovemaking.

His grief at her illness was overwhelming, and the only means by which he could forget his sorrow was to immerse himself in his work. From dawn until late at night he stood at his workbench, hammer, chisel, or carving knife in hand. His only inspiration, his only subject, was Amalia. He began to shape her likeness in countless variations of delicately formed, ethereal figures. He made the transparency of her soul sing from the clay, from the metal or stone with which he worked. He wanted to fix her forever in these forms, to prevent her from slipping away from him. He wanted to imbue his sculptures with his love song, with his boundless devotion.

His studio became full of her. A room full of Amalias. And still it was not enough. He was like a man possessed, in a continuous trance, in a state of uninterrupted intoxication. He found himself at the very bottom of despair, like a beggar, while at the same time he was as elated and proud as a king, as if he had only just discovered the artist within him.

Never before had it been as difficult for him to part with his works as it was now, when he had to sell one of his Amalia figures. Each piece he packed in a crate gave him the impression that he was placing both Amalia and himself in a coffin, as if their joined selves were about to leave the house forever. It was only Amalia's encouraging smile that gave him the heart to deliver the package to its buyer. And he was compelled to make this effort with increasing frequency when Amalia was finally forced to enter a sanatorium in the Laurentians.

To live without her in their apartment was like living in hell. It gave him a foretaste of what her actual absence from his life would be like. Occasionally he had the impression that he could hear her rustling steps behind him, that at any moment she might emerge from some shadowy corner. In the studio where he spent his days, he drank in her radiance from the figures he had made of her, and they gave him support. With tenderness, deeply moved, he took care of her flowers, the coral-colored azaleas on the window ledge of his studio, which he

now addressed as "my beautiful Amalias." He could hardly wait for the weekends, when he set out to visit her in the mountains.

Nurtured by his longing for her, by his sorrow and his fear of losing her, his muse flourished. Overnight he became famous. His Amalia figures cast a magical spell over their viewers, as if each piece of bronze or stone exhaled the warm breath of love. Women looking at the figures recognized their own souls revealed in their fullest beauty, while men saw the features of the women who haunted their dreams.

The harder it became for Gabriel to part with his statues, the greater the demand for them grew; and the more he raised his prices in order to discourage buyers, the more eager did the buyers become to possess his work. Thus after each exhibition of his sculptures, in Canada or abroad, when his studio was left depleted and empty, Gabriel felt himself orphaned, ill, without support. And he immediately set out to create new Amalias, formed in humility, carved out of his fantastic visions of her. The sicker Amalia became, the deeper grew Gabriel's grief and the greater grew his fame as an artist, as if his creative genius were feasting on her illness. And so his victory went hand in hand with his defeat; his creative health and prowess went hand in hand with the greatest pain of his life.

When it became clear to Amalia that there was no hope for her and that her life was drawing to a close, she asked Gabriel to take her to Paris. Her physicians had no objections, since there was nothing more to be done but to satisfy her last wishes. They recommended a competent nurse to accompany the couple on their journey, and Gabriel made the necessary arrangements. Since Amalia wished it, they installed themselves in the same Hotel Meurice, across from the Tuileries Gardens, where they had spent their first night together.

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After their first two weeks in Paris Amalia began to feel that the last springs of her life were draining away. She sat at the open window of the hotel room. It was the beginning of autumn. The trees in the gar-

dens across the street stood dipped in the red-gold and yellow-brown of sunset, colors she so admired.

It was the best time of year to be in Paris. The weather was not hot but pleasantly warm. Amalia could guess the temperature by observing the people in the street, noting what clothes they wore and the expressions of leisurely contentment on their faces. She herself felt the usual heat in her body and the fever bugs crawling over her skin. Young couples strolled in the Tuileries Gardens, while excited children raced after the falling leaves. Seen through the haze of suffering and the thin veil in front of her eyes—the effect of the pills she was taking to soothe her pain—the sky above the treetops resembled a painting by an Impressionist master.

Amalia's mind, dreamily awake, was worried by a vague craving as it wandered about its inner autumnal world, where scraps of memory were scattered by the winds of time, like golden leaves with burnt, dark edges. Only one leaf, still fresh and green, not yet fully unfurled, as if it were waiting for a summer that would never come, remained firmly rooted to the stem of her memory. Now, as all the other leaves of recollection fell away, this single leaf became the focus of her attention, like a scream within a void.

A question, both tragic and amusing, picked at her mind. "Who was the idiot," she asked herself, "who said that the unexamined life is not worth living? What a fool! Life is like wine. All you need is to feel its taste on your tongue. Let the wine producers or the scientists analyze it if they like; for me it is enough to feel the intoxicating stream flowing through my veins. And yet . . . and yet I wouldn't mind knowing . . . I would like to discover what was the strongest force propelling me through life. What was my most powerful passion?"

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Another bright, sunny morning. Paris was flooded with sunshine, made colorful by crowds of well-dressed strollers. Gabriel was still in his pajamas. Amalia, clad in her white dressing gown, sat in a cushioned arm-

chair. The room service waiter had just rolled in a table on tiny wheels with breakfast for the couple. There was, as usual, a bowl of strawberries. Amalia never ate the strawberries; she just liked to look at them.

Amalia's long hair, which had once been blonde, was now knotted in a loose gray braid that lay limply against her bosom. Gabriel served her. It was usually he who attended to her needs, who served her and took care of her. They had brought along the nurse whom the doctors had recommended, but they availed themselves of her services only in medical matters. Until recently the nurse had also assisted with Amalia's morning toilette and with her bath. But then Gabriel decided that he alone would be responsible for that. They both felt good about this, although Gabriel's heart contracted with grief at the sight of his wife during these daily ablutions.

Whenever he touched her body, it seemed to him that he was engaged in an unsuccessful attempt to mold a sculpture by adding handfuls of clay that refused to adhere to the frame and kept falling away. He felt that his reason was leaving him. There were moments when he wished her dead—because he loved her so, because he was incapable of watching her die—and wished to have it all behind him. Yet these moments of tactile intimacy with her were precious to him.

They would talk frankly about her leaving him and about what would happen after her death. She had even sent him out to buy himself an entire wardrobe of coats, suits, shirts, shoes, and ties that he was to wear after she was gone so that she might have an idea of how he would look. The more life dimmed within her, the more she loved him. And she realized that she knew the answer to the question she had asked herself the other day.

That morning she said to him, "Do you know, Gabriel, what the most powerful forces were that shaped my life? They were love and the fear of death. And they both expressed themselves in erotic passion, in my sexual excitement. It is true that the climax of pleasure and death are related." Then she added quickly, brutally, "And do you know what my last wish is, Gabriel? My very last wish is to make love to a young man."

A spasm intended as a smile twisted his face. "Amalia . . ." he stammered.

"Don't laugh at me, dearest. Why are you so red in the face? You're not a prude. And you can't tell me that I mustn't give way to such lustful cravings at this point in my life, or that my body is simply too repulsive, since just this very morning, when you washed me, you remarked how youthful, white, and soft my skin is. As delicate and smooth as silk, you said. And I know it is so. I saw myself in the mirror when you wiped me dry with the towel. Even on her deathbed a woman wants to look beautiful. I would not have dared to entertain such a wish had I not been sure that I was still pleasing to the eye. Yes, beautiful . . . because you think that I am beautiful, because you have sculpted me so. You shaped me, with the chisel of your gaze, with the caresses of your hands, and with your telling me year after year how much you loved me, my face, my body, my limbs; how you loved to look at me, to touch me. This was how you kept your plant flourishing. And you still do. Because the thing that is so hopelessly ill within me, my darling Gabriel, is nothing but a sick sunset, which is, at the same time, a sunrise somewhere else. It must be so, Gabriel, my dearest. Because the sun never stops shining, does it?"

"Amalia . . ." he groaned. He had started to eat before she began speaking. Now his hand was unable to lift the food to his mouth.

Amalia continued talking, oblivious to his discomfort. "Perhaps my face betrays me a little bit, after all. What do you think?" She smiled faintly, and a small, playful spark lit up the grayish green of her eyes. "Yes, my face is like an azalea that has stood in the sun too long and become burnt around the edges. On the other hand, it is possible that only you would notice this, because you know . . . Anyway, I will try to fix it somehow, to adorn myself. You will help me, won't you? You will make me up with the hands of an artist; you'll add some color, a tiny bit of rouge on the cheeks to cover the pallor. You'll enhance me ever so slightly, only enough to render homage to the aesthetic sense of man. I don't want to play-act by masking myself. Because the curtain is almost touching the stage. And, dearest, why have you put down the

croissant? Why don't you drink your coffee? Are you weeping? But, Gabriel, why?"

He did not answer. When she began to insist he jumped to his feet, walked over to the window, and through blurry eyes searched for an escape. But she would not give up so easily, and although his back was turned, she continued whispering tenderly, insistently, nagging him for an answer.

He turned to her abruptly, but all that could pass through his constricted throat was a hoarse whimper. "Please, Amalia!"

"Of course, I understand . . ." She placed her hot hand on top of his as he stood holding on to the railing, yet she did not stop talking. "And you must understand me too. I know you will. That is why I want to ask you . . . And please forgive me, my only one, for putting you through all this. But I know that your love for me ennobles everything I do and allows you to tolerate and forgive my wildest whims and caprices. Gabriel, I wish to ask you . . . no, not because I am capricious. But do find me a brown-haired . . . Someone of your height, perhaps a little taller . . . an attractive young man. Do it. Of course, I know how unbearably difficult this must be for you. And it may not be so easy to find him. But if someone like me exists, someone capable of having such a need, then someone like him must exist too, someone willing to respond to that need, prompted by a need of his own, by a secret wish. Forgive me, my sweet Gabriel, for my arrogance and for daring to hurt you so, but the need is stronger than I am, more powerful than life itself, more powerful than . . ."

He could not bear to listen any longer. Every one of her words cut into his heart. "Amalia . . ." he implored.

Still she continued: "And you must not pay him. Do you understand, dearest?" She feverishly stroked his hand. "Because if you do, the whole thing would lose its meaning; it would cheapen it. And you must tell him about me, about the state of my health. He must be aware of it. So I suppose it will take you some time, and you know how much time I have left . . ." She surprised him with a mischievous giggle. "This will also give you the perfect excuse to leave me for a while. I know that

you need a rest. And from the artistic point of view, this might turn into quite an interesting experience for you. The nurse will stay with me, so you have no need to worry."

It was the first time that he burst into tears in her presence. His shoulders began to shake violently. "Why do you talk so cruelly, Amalia?"

"No . . . no," she stammered, moved by his sorrow. "I am not cruel. Fate is cruel. Understand—I never loved you as much as I do now. Perhaps it is merely that the manner in which I express my feelings has changed."

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Gabriel could not make peace with Amalia's strange demand. It seemed to him that it was madness on her part, and that to comply with her wish would be madness on his. His despair acquired a new dimension. He was convinced that the high fever brought on by her illness had begun to confuse Amalia's mind and that she was dragging him down with her into the macabre entanglements of a reality in which everything was twisted and distorted as if reflected in a crooked mirror.

For the next two days he never left the hotel room. During that time they both refrained from mentioning the "mission" she had entrusted to him. On the third day he decided to venture out into the street and leave the nurse to stay with Amalia. When Amalia saw him take up his coat she did not stir, but a Mona Lisa smile played on her lips, which were tinted dark red by the fever. She said goodbye to him with a slight motion of her finger, from a distance, since he had not drawn near to give her a kiss nor a caress, nor had she called him over to receive one.

He wandered about the arcades in front of the hotel eyeing the luxurious window displays in the elegant shops at the same time as he scanned the faces of passersby. But he saw neither one nor the other. Instead he saw Amalia's chalk-white face and her long gray braid. The air was mild, yet he felt chilly. He wrapped himself in his raincoat, tightened the belt around his waist, and thrust his hands into the pock-



ets as if he were trying to hold himself together.

Absently he crossed the street and entered the Tuileries Gardens, as though the subconscious recollection of his first encounter with Amalia propelled his feet in that direction.

Kicking a pebble along the gravel path he approached the Henry Moore sculptures and wandered about among the bronzes—reclining women who were cut up into raw, compartmentalized masses, heads askew, arms and legs asunder, bosoms like huge open gates, wombs like hoops made of granite, full of air, full of emptiness. Theirs was the majesty of the Rocky Mountains with only the icy glaciers of eternity missing from their backs. A cold wind breathed through the massive forms and through his own heavy thoughts. He felt hollow, drained, without a drop of energy left inside him—an unbearable existence, with a knife piercing the very core of his being, the blade lingering in the wound, the heart in one ceaseless spasm. He was overcome by a yearning to be transformed into a mass of stone.

He approached one of the iron chairs and slumped down so heavily into its orange-painted seat that the chair slid across the gravel. Before long his chin fell against his chest, and he drifted into a restless sleep. The sun warmed his back, beads of sweat formed pearls on his forehead, yet in his sleep he shuddered.

He woke to find himself the object of a stranger's gaze. Across from him sat a young man wearing threadbare jeans and a creased windbreaker. A scarf with long fringes was loosely draped around his neck; his arms encircled a knapsack on his knees, and a rolled-up copy of *Time* magazine protruded from one of his fists. The young man smiled broadly at Gabriel and offered him the magazine.

"It fell out of your pocket, Monsieur," he said in thickly accented English. "I did not dare to slip it back into your pocket in case I woke you. You look catastrophically tired, Monsieur."

His use of the word "catastrophically" caused Gabriel to look more closely at the young man. He saw before him an unusually bright, part-manly, part-boyish face from which there emanated a kind of radiant serenity. But when Gabriel peered more attentively into the

stranger's brown eyes, which seemed to have the size and shape of a pair of plums, he noticed that there lurked a restless little flame in their depths; the young man's gaze was jumpy, like that of a startled rabbit. His brown, disheveled hair trembled with every breeze that brushed past his forehead.

"Thank you," Gabriel said, taking the magazine from the young man's hand.

When Gabriel stood up, the young man did the same. "You're an American, aren't you?" he asked.

"A Canadian," Gabriel replied.

"Really? You don't say!" the young man exclaimed enthusiastically. "I've always dreamed of visiting Canada, the Canadian Rockies. I'm a mountain climber. I've just come back from the Alps."

"Is that so," Gabriel said indifferently. Out of politeness, he asked, "What attracts you to mountain climbing?"

"I like to flirt with death," the young man retorted nonchalantly. Observing that he had not aroused any interest in his listener, he added guiltily, "I am a Parisian. My English is not very good, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Passable," Gabriel grinned.

"I'm learning English from my fiancée. She is an American, studying French at the Sorbonne." He said this with obvious pride. "As a matter of fact, I'm waiting for her here. We are going on a picnic. She was with me in the Alps too. You understand, Monsieur, mountain climbing is a kind of erotic drive. Every mountain is like a woman you want to win, to conquer, and in the process you are liable to break your neck and lose your soul. But we had to return to Paris because her classes are soon to begin."

Gabriel was barely listening and did not react to his words. But the stranger continued to tramp along beside him, although at a distance. Finally Gabriel turned to face him.

"What is it that you want of me, Monsieur?" The young man drew nearer and asked, "Monsieur, are you in favor of peace in the world?"

The word "peace" pronounced with a French accent sounded comical. Gabriel had to smile. "Of course I'm in favor of peace."

"I don't mean you personally, *mon ami*. I mean you Canadians, in regard to your foreign policy."

"No one wants war except those who don't have to take part in it or those who profit from it," Gabriel replied curtly.

The young man was delighted with this response. He began to talk very quickly, grabbing hold of Gabriel's hand and pumping it vigorously up and down, then patting him cordially on the back. "My name is Jean-Pierre. I'm an activist in the Peace Movement. Perhaps you wish to make a small contribution?"

With a feeling of contempt for such undisguised begging, Gabriel thrust his hand into his pocket in the hope of retrieving a couple of francs but instead pulled out an American twenty-dollar bill. In order to rid himself of the nuisance as quickly as possible, he handed the money to the young man. "Bonjour!" he said sharply, turning away. He listened to his own heavy steps on the gravel, trying to determine whether or not the stranger was following him.

The next moment the young man was standing before him, the twenty-dollar bill in his outstretched hand. "Just a minute, Monsieur," he panted. "I have to give you a receipt, and my fiancée has the receipt book. Will you wait with me for her? Please do, *cher ami*. It won't be long."

Their eyes met. The anxiety in the young man's face was more evident now, his expression more frantic. Gabriel scrutinized him again. He slowly and carefully let his eyes travel over the figure of the young man in the creased windbreaker and the worn jeans.

Jean-Pierre was taller than Gabriel. He had a high, unshaven neck with a large Adam's apple, which was visible above the loose scarf that was wrapped around his neck. His mouth was broad and strong and his nose prominent; his jaws joined the chin in a sharp, decisive line. He had a pair of large, finely shaped ears; a few curly strands of his shavened hair, cut in the Parisian style, were tucked behind his earlobes. However, these hard, masculine features were softened by the warm glow of the large, brown, plum-shaped eyes that illuminated his entire face. There was an air of nobility about the face, although its former

radiant serenity now seemed faded. As for the young man's hands—Gabriel was capable of reading a great deal into the appearance and shape of a hand—he had just now felt their suppressed strength in Jean-Pierre's handshake.

Nevertheless Gabriel was suspicious. Perhaps this was some kind of scam? True, no one knew him in Paris, but he could be kidnapped just the same, or he could be robbed. Automatically he thrust his hands into his pockets and glanced stealthily about him, checking the gardens for passersby.

"Really, Monsieur," Jean-Pierre continued in his strongly accented English. "I would like very much to have your twenty dollars for the Peace Movement. I am appealing to you to wait here with me. My fiancée will be here any minute. She was supposed to be here already. She was supposed to be here an hour ago. *Vous comprenez?* I sense in you . . . I can see the catalog of the Louvre sticking out from your pocket . . . Monsieur, I beg of you."

Gabriel looked directly into his eyes. "What do you really want of me?"

"Really, Monsieur, I want you to wait with me for my fiancée."

"Why can't you wait for her by yourself?"

"I can, but I want to give you a receipt, and . . . I'm afraid she will not come. I need simply someone to talk to."

"Why shouldn't she come?"

"Because she was supposed to be here between eleven and twelve. Usually she is here about eleven. We meet beside the Moore sculptures. And today was supposed to be a most important day for us. We are supposed to fix the date when we register as man and wife. *Comprenez-vous*, Monsieur? We are so much in love and everything goes so well. And her parents in Philadelphia agree, and my parents also agree. But, Monsieur, we study the facts of reality. Contemporary life and the contemporary world, they stink, forgive the expression, Monsieur. So I am afraid that something may happen to our love. Because it is so holy, so sacred, and so unreal. This is my problem, Monsieur. I am trembling over my happiness. I have the feeling that I ought to pray, to

make some sacrifice. To become husband and wife is no small thing, *n'est pas, Monsieur?*"

Something stirred within Gabriel. The young man's disarming, almost boyish candor was clearly genuine. He put his hand on Jean-Pierre's shoulder and patted him amicably. "It will all work out just fine, I assure you."

"What makes you so sure?" Jean-Pierre glanced at him searchingly.

"Your love and your imaginary problem."

"I know, I am crazy."

"Right. So am I."

Jean-Pierre smiled at him compassionately. "You are in love with a young woman?"

"No, I am in love with an old woman, an old woman who is dying. And you see, it is I who have the real problem. You want me to wait with you for your fiancée? Let's sit down, and I will tell you about my problem while we wait."

\* \* \*

It was not easy for Gabriel to start talking to the strange young man, and at first he could only stammer out broken sentences between long gaps of silence. Both he and Jean-Pierre were preoccupied, each with his own anxiety, his own insecurity. Gradually, however, Gabriel's reluctance to talk gave way to an increasingly compelling need to liberate himself through words, to purify his soul with confession and burst open the boil that had festered in his heart for so long. He saw a pair of human ears before him intent on hearing what he had to say. There were the large, plum-shaped eyes concentrating on him, their restlessness muted. It seemed as if the stranger had moved his own soul in with Gabriel's and was a stranger no more.

Gabriel told Jean-Pierre about Amalia and himself and also about the mission on which she had sent him. Just at that moment, a young beauty with long, wispy blonde hair came running breathlessly up the garden path in the direction of the two men sitting on the iron chairs.

Both men jumped to their feet. The young couple fell eagerly into each other's arms as if they had not been together for an eternity. A long time seemed to pass before Jean-Pierre recovered himself and introduced his fiancée to Gabriel.

"This is Rose . . . Rosa."

She did indeed look like a newly opened rosebud. Her large blue eyes, moist from the wind, were smiling. Her flushed cheeks were the color of coral, and they reminded Gabriel of sunrise. As she brushed the long strands of hair away from her face, she tried to explain to Jean-Pierre why she was late. They were standing very close to one another, hand clasped in hand, yet they pressed together still more firmly in order to be even closer.

Jean-Pierre gave Rosa the twenty dollars for the Peace Movement. She wrote out a receipt and handed it to Gabriel. He wished them both much happiness and walked away, his mind calmer than it had been before. He prepared himself inwardly to refuse Amalia's request. He did not have the strength to fulfill her impossible wish, especially now that he had had this encounter with health and beauty.

As he entered the hotel room, Amalia, who had been lying in bed, opened her eyes. She smiled faintly at him and, without a word, again lowered her eyelids. For the rest of the afternoon and evening he could not bring himself to speak to her.

The following morning Gabriel went down into the street for a walk, something that had suddenly become a necessity for him. As he took his first undecided steps along the colonnade, Jean-Pierre suddenly emerged from behind a column and walked up to him.

"Monsieur," Jean-Pierre said, a note of suicidal resolve sounding in his voice. "I will help you. In the name of love, I will help you. I will offer myself as a sacrifice to earn absolution and blessing. When should I come?"

Gabriel replied without hesitation, "Tonight! Eight-thirty! Hotel Meurice, room number 639!" He ran into a kiosk, bought himself a pack of cigarettes, and hurried back to the hotel.

Once inside he slowed his pace and strolled slowly through the car-

peted lobby, which was filled with photographers and journalists. Elegantly dressed men and women of various nationalities were standing around in loose groups. Waiters carrying champagne glasses and hors d'oeuvres on large silver trays navigated from one cluster of people to the next. The door to the Grand Salon stood open, and inside everything sparkled with the reflected light of mirrors and chandeliers.

Gabriel moved toward the Grand Salon. He glanced inside the room, then inquired of a man nearby what was going on.

"A luncheon for the delegates to the Peace Conference, sir. A dinner and ball to follow tonight," a tall, unhappy-looking Englishman informed him politely. Gabriel thanked him with a slight bow and entered the lift with peace in his heart. He got off at the sixth floor, unlocked the door to his room, and once inside was immediately met by Amalia's hazy, gray-green stare. He smiled at her broadly and sank to his knees beside her bed. He took her hot hand in his.

"I found him, dearest," he said softly. "As handsome as Adonis, with a warm heart, full of passion. Our kind of man." He kissed her white arm and her delicate, dark red lips.

From that moment on, Gabriel and Amalia were particularly careful with one another, particularly affectionate, but few words passed between them. Gabriel hardly noticed that Amalia did not finish her sentences, that she mumbled rather than spoke, and that she barely moved, as if she were paralyzed. He was too busy with his own state of mind, with his victory over himself, and with absorbing the tragic beauty, both real and unreal, of this particular day in his life. He did not finish his sentences either, although his head was buzzing with talk, with prayer, and with the motifs of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. It seemed to him that he should walk about on tiptoe so as not to waken anyone.

In the afternoon they slowly began to prepare for what was to follow, and they stopped talking altogether. At dusk Gabriel gave Amalia a bath and saw to it that the linen on her bed was changed and the bed itself made up. He dressed her in her most beautiful nightgown—at least the two of them thought it the most beautiful, although it was very old. She had worn it the first night they had spent together in Paris. It

looked like a white satin evening gown, and she had more than once whispered in his ear that she wanted to be buried in it.

He ordered a dozen royal roses up to the room and put them in a vase. Unaware of what he was saying, he murmured, "Rose, Rosa . . ." as he nestled each flower between the delicate green ferns in the vase. He placed the vase on the marble top of a small Louis Quinze table that stood near the window. The flowers filled the room with their intoxicating perfume, and Amalia asked him to open the window a little. Outside the sun was about to set, and Gabriel opened the window much wider than she had asked. He drew aside the heavy brocade drapes and let the light of the entire Parisian sky with its symphony of pastel colors pour into the room. Far in the distance, in the faint blue of the horizon, Gabriel caught sight of a glimmering star.

Amalia asked him to turn on the light on the night table, even though it was still quite bright in the room. He dabbed her wrists and earlobes with the drops of a French perfume whose fragrance he liked. He looked at her as she lay in her white nightgown against the white pillow under the white blanket. The long, gray braid of frayed, stringy hair lay against her bosom, rising and falling with each breath like a snake in agony. Her face—to which, at her request, he had applied a little makeup—seemed to glow. She was unbelievably beautiful, and he wanted to sink to his knees beside her and beg her forgiveness—for her fading life, for the extinguished desire that he felt for her, for the peace in his heart.

A few minutes past eight-thirty, Jean-Pierre knocked at the door. He was wearing tight black pants and a neat white sport shirt with an open collar from which protruded his dark-skinned neck with its large Adam's apple.

As if she had been saving her last smile just for him, Amalia smiled at Jean-Pierre so generously, so radiantly, that the young man blushed. He stammered something in response, then burst into loud laughter and, assuming an air of self-assurance, firmly shook Gabriel's hand, as if he wanted him to leave.

"I'm on my way," Gabriel muttered.

In the manner of an experienced babysitter, Jean-Pierre patted him reassuringly on the shoulder and accompanied him to the door.

"I will be waiting in the lobby," Gabriel whispered to him.

The young man closed the door behind him and turned the lock. Gabriel sat in the downstairs lobby. The figures of men and women, blacks and whites, glided past him, the men in dark frock coats, the white women in long black dresses, the black women in long white dresses. An orchestra played in the Grand Salon with its glittering mirrors and crystal chandeliers. Couples danced round and round, while Gabriel's head whirled along with them, between suns and moons, nights and days, in and out of constellations of stars, round and round between now and eternity, in dull indifference, with no pain or sorrow, with neither love nor hate but in a frozen, never-before-experienced loneliness.

He had no idea how much time had passed since he sat down when suddenly he saw Jean-Pierre run out of the elevator with his hair disheveled, his clothes in disarray, his eyes wild, and his face aflame. He rushed toward Gabriel, who had jumped to his feet, and almost toppled him.

"She's dead!" he cried. "She died in my arms! Is your name Sebastian?"

"No!"

"She called me 'Sebastian.' That was the last word she said. Do you want to call the police?"

"No. What for?"

Gabriel took the key from Jean-Pierre's hand. Jean-Pierre turned abruptly and ran out of the lobby.

Gabriel hurried to the elevator. On his way up he remembered that Sebastian was the name of the young man who had charmed Amalia after her return from Japan, when she had come to Paris for the first time. She had met Sebastian on Bastille Day, she once confided to Gabriel. She and Sebastian had danced together, and she had fallen in love for the first time in her life. She had arranged to meet him again the next day at the Bastille metro, but he never appeared. She never

saw him again. It was foolish to be jealous of such a love. Amalia had never been alone with Sebastian, not even for a second, and besides, it had all happened so many years ago. So Gabriel had thought when she told him about it.

\* \* \*

That night Jean-Pierre did not visit Rosa but wandered instead through the streets of Paris. He had the impression that during that one evening he had aged a decade. It was strange that he thought so little about Amalia's death and so much about her living, delicate, submissive body, which he had held in his arms. He thought about the awesome and eternal force—for which he could not find the proper name, since he was ignorant of its nature, and knew only that it was godly—Amalia had poured into him, an uncompassable force he would never be able to describe in words, although he could feel it so clearly coursing within him, in the marrow of his bones. It was something magical; it filled him with piety and elation; it devoured him with its heat. Shudders crept up and down his spine. It filled him with horror.

Over and over again his mind replayed the scene with Amalia. Her body was still beautiful, her skin smooth and white, without the faintest blemish. A virginal purity, a chaste innocence, permeated it. He traced the vague outlines of her loose breasts in his memory. Even the aureoles around the nipples had been white, bloodless. She was all whiteness, as if she had been molded from a white bedsheet or a kind of hot snow, because she had burned in his arms. And he had wanted her; he had wanted to absorb her desperate passion for life, a life whose last drops had dripped through his fingers. She reminded him of the thirteen-year-old girl with whom he had once been paired, a long time ago, in a brothel. That time he had run away; this time he had not. He had not turned his back on a dying old woman.

Now he was in love with Rosa, who was somewhere high up at the peak of Mount Blanc while he was climbing up toward her, clinging to the chain of love, rising toward her from the very bottom of the abyss.

How strong this chain was! How powerful was his love! He had never felt it more intensely than in that deep pit, on the threshold of Amalia's eternity. There he had found himself in a state of ecstatic delirium compounded of pain and pleasure, which no other sensation could equal. When he had awoken and touched his own cheek he found his fingers wet with his own tears. Only then had he realized that the body entangled with his own was limp and lifeless.

For the next few days he prepared himself to tell Rosa what he had done and why. But he did not dare. She was too beautiful, too healthy, and too much in love with him to understand his reasoning. Besides, talking was liable to complicate the matter even further. So he postponed making his confession from one day to the next. And in order to clarify the whole experience to himself, and because he felt "unclean"—not on account of what he had done but because he had not told Rosa about it, which was a form of cheating on her—he punished himself by keeping away from her, using any excuse that came to mind.

Before long he and Rosa became man and wife. It was a memorable day for both of them. Exhausted yet exhilarated after the modest celebration at his parents' house, they left for their new apartment and fell on the bed in each other's arms. Jean-Pierre immediately fell asleep. Rosa did not wake him. They had a long life before them with many nights to stay awake together. And she too fell asleep with a smile on her lips.

It was not until some months later that Jean-Pierre began to realize that something had gone wrong in his relationship with Rosa. Being with her no longer gave him the same feeling of joyous exaltation as it had in the past. Every time that he took Rosa's supple young body into his arms he would see the dead Amalia beckoning him from somewhere nearby, calling out to him with overwhelming urgency. After a while, Amalia began to haunt him even when he was not holding Rosa in his arms but merely sitting next to her. Rosa, beautiful and blossoming, seemed faded somehow, drained of her vitality as if it were she who were withered and old, while Amalia lured him with promises

of an eternal life that was beyond age and time. He yearned for that powerful "something," for the magnificent hymn of love and ecstasy, for the marriage of life and death.

So it happened that he, who had once been so talkative and so adept at letting Rosa know with both words and caresses what he felt for her, now turned into a mute, wooden, and awkward man.

Rosa could not understand what had happened to him. She was tormented by the fear of losing him. Anxiously she dressed in her most alluring clothes and tried to make herself as beautiful and enticing as she could. She tried to seduce him with her gaiety, or she tried to be serious and romantic. She ceased being herself altogether and no longer knew how to talk to him or how to behave. Finally she could bear it no longer; she was exhausted from trying to jump out of her own skin. And clinging to what she called the last straw, she attempted to regain the honesty and frankness that had once been the rule between them.

"Don't you love me anymore, Jean-Pierre?" she asked him one day. "Of course I do," he replied, fearing to add any more enthusiastic confirmation of his love as he had often done in the past when she had playfully inquired about the state of his feelings for her. He too wanted to be honest with her. Honesty had become the only path left to take. Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to tell her about Amalia.

She sensed caution in his reply, but her woman's intuition misled her. In a trembling voice she said, "You've been seeing another woman."

"No. Heaven forbid!" he protested, but without conviction in his voice. He realized that he could dissemble no longer, and was on the verge of making his confession, when Rosa burst into tears.

His eyes too filled with tears. In that instant he knew beyond any doubt that he pitied her but loved her no more.

Not long after this he left Rosa for good. He grew a beard, and his long vagabondage began. He became a professional mountain climber and joined all possible expeditions. He never again loved a woman as he had loved Rosa. However, between one expedition and the next, he compulsively pursued women, in search of the one who would bewitch him, but he could not find her. For a time he even sought the company

of older women in the hope that one of them would again awaken that powerful feeling he sensed was waiting for him somewhere. But the older women were too greedy for him; they devoured him with their passion and spoiled him. They possessed too much last-chance vitality and lacked the otherworldly enchantment he craved.

At length his travels brought him to North America. He flew into Montreal with the intention of buying a secondhand car and driving across Canada to the Rocky Mountains. He scanned the newspaper ads to see what was available. Responding to one of the ads, he found himself on a street at the foot of Mount Royal, in the center of the city. He entered the studio apartment of an old, gray-haired sculptor. One look at the sculptor immediately brought back to Jean-Pierre's mind the macabre sexual incident in his past, an incident he had tried to banish from his memory.

The sculptor bore no resemblance to Gabriel. He was too old, too skinny, too stooped, and he wore thickly rimmed glasses. Nor was Jean-Pierre inclined to inquire after Gabriel. What for? He refused to spoil the pleasure of his trip. And for this reason too he wished to leave town as quickly as possible. He had, in any case, little opportunity to engage the old man in conversation or to look at him more closely, since there was something else in the apartment that caught his attention.

The sculptor had led Jean-Pierre into his atelier, which was filled with sculptures of breathtaking beauty. The sculptures had a strange effect on Jean-Pierre. He had never been particularly interested in sculpture; certainly, he was no more interested in it than he was in any other art. But he possessed an innate sensitivity, a modest aesthetic appreciation, which was not unusual in a man of average education who had grown up in a city like Paris and been exposed to its treasures. Now, however, he could not take his eyes off the statues he saw in the studio.

At length the old man grew impatient. "You've come about the car, haven't you?" he asked severely.

Jean-Pierre, his eyes on the sculptures, replied with a question: "Why do you want to sell it?"

"I have no use for it," the old man answered. "I am not well. Whatever I need, I can get here in the neighborhood."

They went out into the garage. The car was not at all to Jean-Pierre's liking: an old-fashioned, quaint-looking Jaguar with orange-colored seats. However, the motor seemed to be in excellent condition, and there was relatively little mileage on the odometer. He got in and drove the car around the block a few times, noting that despite his initial reservations he felt comfortable and relaxed at the wheel. He decided to buy the car.

During their sparse exchange of words, Jean-Pierre and the old man had hardly looked at one another, each being immersed in his own mood, in his own world. The old man seemed sentimental about the car, while Jean-Pierre suddenly began to feel festive and could not understand why. When they had completed the sale of the car, Jean-Pierre said, "I would like to buy one of your sculptures, Monsieur."

The old man shook his head sharply. "They're not for sale!" he replied.

Jean-Pierre left Montreal in the Jaguar. The longer he rode in it, the better he felt. He began to develop a tender feeling for it, a kind of affection. It performed superbly, as if it were driving itself. When, after much traveling, he crossed the prairies and saw the Rocky Mountains looming ahead, he was already so taken with his vehicle that instead of renting a room in a motel he slept in the car at night. He felt strong and stimulated and excitedly planned his climb to the snow-covered mountain peaks. His thinking was amazingly clear and easy in this car, and dreaming was easier still. Never in his life had he felt so free and happy. Perhaps this was due to the vastness of the enormous country through which he had just traveled or to his feeling of wonder and awe in the shadow of the majestic mountain range here in the north, where in the middle of August one could read a paper or a book outdoors at midnight. The mystery of life seemed so near and tangible that one could practically touch it with one's hand.

Once when he was driving high up in the mountains he decided to continue on his way through one such night that seemed like day. A

mood of dreaminess overcame him; everything he saw was real and unreal at the same time. He began to appreciate the warmth of the orange material covering the empty seat beside him. It seemed to infuse the air with a glow as though the seat were not empty at all but occupied by a strange, luminous presence. The road before him was white and empty; on both sides lay the majestic, snow-covered peaks, like gigantic, reclining women covered with white bedsheets. What a glorious feeling of both infinity and cozy intimacy!

From a distance he noticed a human form, a woman waiting by the roadside. She looked like a piece of granite sculpted by the winds of time, set apart and yet of a piece with the outlines of the massive clusters of stone and earth that hovered all about her. For a moment he remembered the Henry Moore sculptures in the Tuileries Gardens back in Paris, sculptures he knew intimately because he had so often waited for Rosa beside them. The woman had her arm outstretched as if she wanted to stop the car and ask for a ride. As he drew nearer he saw her more clearly. She was dressed in white, with a long, white, flowing veil wrapped around her shoulders. She seemed transparent, hollow. He smiled at his own strange equation of a work of art with the form of a living woman. He chuckled to himself. No doubt the sculptures he had recently seen in the old sculptor's atelier had inclined his mind in that direction. He stepped firmly on the accelerator and raced toward the woman.

—He caught up with her on the opposite side of the precipice over which he had taken flight.