

MUSIC (V.B.)

*Paul Becker*

A hawk passes high over the house, pauses to hover above the gate, moves on, following the urine trails of mice lit up like the midnight grids of a city from a passing jet. The house somehow manages to be plain, even ugly, despite picture windows on every side. A woman lies on a bed, toying with a rope of pearls. The woman is neither problem nor solution, quest nor fulfilment and she exists beyond the confines of a convenient definition. We find it difficult to write or think clearly about someone so elusive, so essentially absent. The glare turns back onto us somehow, engendering too much self-criticism or at least an unprofitable amount of self-examination. Most of us like to offer the world at least the allusion of certitude even if, when communing secretly with ourselves, we understand the amount of lying this entails. This is no fault of hers. The truth is that we recognise very little in the details of our own whys and our own wherefores. More pertinent is how good are we at forgetting this. For all we know we are as naturally generous as we are reclusive. Instead of guessing, one has to fake things at times. At least creating the impression of definition and command offers up a comforting response. Is this not how entire governments function?

Q: Is it the role of art to appear to have all the answers or to represent the obvious fact of our helplessness?

V.B.: (...)

Being true to one's nature sounds rather old fashioned now, don't you think? And if one were to try and live that way, to live according to one's nature then yes, perhaps one would lie about all day half naked, motionless, brushing the occasional dusting of cigarette ash from one's chest, stroking a curl of pubic hair with manicured fingers, or staring up at a wall, looming through the rooms of the house like a ghost. Boredom, in some, exists as a fully functioning conduit state between stasis and motion. The implications are that there are more important things one should be doing. But not with her. She is being, not doing. There is a difference between something that represents something and something that is something. She is not the person who knows what they are doing, nor ever will be. For such a blessing, she has only the stars to thank. To hell with decipherable meaning and to hell with death alongside every other boring finality.

The music is charming. Is that a flute or some sort of pipe? A quena? The sound of the sea. The pillows are broderie anglais.

Sometimes, quite often, she will wear certain symbolic (to her alone) items of clothing to counteract or accentuate the lack of connection to her true nature, to her physical reality. Is this a tacit assertion of artifice? An ambiguous, wholly personal relationship to glamour? In the centre of a delicate hat, so light she forgets she is wearing it, is pinned a black enamel bird, a swallow; in its mouth, a true and tiny pearl. She often wears a particular fur coat, though only around the house. She despises fur. Usually it disgusts her. She cannot think which animal this pelt was cut from. When it is cold, she imagines the single hairs of the coat to rise up, almost to shiver.

We hope there will be more details of what she wore in these moments as these things are interesting to us.

It is probably a fruitless precept that the material lying closest to our skin speaks more clearly about ourselves than exterior appearance. Yet how and why we dress the way we do beneath our clothes is a difficult question, imponderable. Many prefer nakedness. Most lingerie fails to allow energy to flow inwards, provoking nothing more than the usual conventions of male erotics. How she dresses herself offers up enquiries to herself alone but what she wears and why adheres to a set of codes that even she would not be able to fully explain. Either way, the results are fascinating for us to watch. At least that is what we believe.

Her doing nothing possesses no kind of spiritual aspect. If anything, her reveries are closer to the inertia of an artistic sensibility, a dilettante, a would-be painter with no canvas, no urgency and no desire. Make. Don't make. Her loungings, her vigils of nothingness have no particular beast in view.

This pipe music is at times a little grating.

Is this even daydreaming? Could one even call this a reverie? She is as dedicated to her stasis as a sculptor is to her chisel. Such things require solicitude and need to be tended to, meaning that her lack of all discipline must be rigorously applied.

She lies there, not waiting for the moments to find her. Thinking absent thoughts like a queen on her way to the guillotine. What thoughts? How could we be allowed to know? Cars pass round and around the house. A black Lancia. A cream and

white Renault 5. We can see her. We see her. The circling cars go round and around, round and around. Perhaps she considers the separation of her head from her spine, her head from her lonely neck. There is the sound of a wren from somewhere. She pulls a wisp of hair from her face. A horsefly flies in from the field and buzzes about her for a few seconds. If she considers her own demise, at that moment, she would contemplate that the horsefly's tiny belly may well be filled with her warm blood, hours after she has gone. But this is to speculate. I mean, the whole thing is speculation. It could just as easily be that thoughts of death fail to interest her.

She has, or could have a certain social position. Recent wealth. Could we accuse her of neglecting her responsibilities? Of privilege? Of acting out a redundancy? A lounging Antoinette, indolent; not caring one jot about the problems of the world, its inanities and all its ragings. Of offering only a cosmic shrug, yawning into the maw of the void. And isn't there also something wildly heroic about that?

She hardly even notices the music that has been in her head all day but suddenly it becomes completely intolerable. It is like a particular type of wind, just when it feels as though it is about to blow over, it redoubles in strength and follows one everywhere. Of all the elements, music and wind are the most unbearable.

She is lying quietly in a room alone. No answers are forthcoming but she was never looking for answers, was she? What is the point of me? What am I doing here? Better the world should ask those questions of her than she of it.

Nothing is produced in the room but time, her breath and a small amount of perspiration. The movement of air over the tiny hairs of her arm. She lies upon this bed forever, toying with her endless rope of pearls. She cannot be co-opted. Does that make us uneasy? She is not at the centre of a maelstrom. There is no maelstrom. She is not the heartless femme fatale or the spider to anyone's fly, such things are from a previous epoch. Space exists within and beyond her frame but she is not a blank space propagating anyone's gaze. The more you think about it, the less it matters.

She utilises three different wigs. Each one, when properly figured and carefully considered as part of an ensemble, resonates in its own style. She wears this one with a caramel coloured twinset, cashmere that looks like a lesser acrylic, the pearls and what appears to be a cameo of a young girl but if we look closer is a photograph of her daughter, set in a gold medallion. There is a ring to match, gifts she never cared for. Such things suggest daughters rarely thought of. We wonder, if we were

party to her thoughts, whether this ensemble would speak to her of acquiescence, of resignation to circumstance? Do the clothes signify a form of concession or only the appearance of compliance? Words are old maids. What is truly written is silence. She is free of the complications engendered by her husband, their lover, his wife; they have seeped out of her pores. When she dreams, she dreams of none of them, she dreams of nothing at all.

What music?

The fabrics appear almost homespun, lots of capes or long wool skirts, printed scarves, mohair, velveteen and needle cord, quilted bolero jackets with leather piping and billowing, braided Ballets Russes sleeves. The colours of tomcats and late fall apples, copper beech and the darkest of mossy greens. When she remembers, she wears Shalimar by Guerlain.

The house is just as cold and ugly inside, dark despite a huge glass dome over the central hall but also, paradoxically, rich with an air of slumber, of welcoming restfulness. She wakes in the morning and lies in until long after breakfast, enjoying doing nothing, experiencing the agreeably regular pulsing of blood, feeling the rise and falling of her lungs, the ladybird that has come in through the window, crawling across her foot. The cool, soft sheet enfolding her that she coils tighter around herself a moment longer before she resolves to get up. She walks to the window of the room, inspecting the garden running down to the small patch of beach, tasting the air as it enters the atmosphere of the place and mingles with the morning smells: the salt with the soap and the coffee. From the black leather sofa she contemplates the room, the marble walls, the ceiling, as usual, letting her mind steep itself in its own space. It often feels like a luxurious hotel. It is odd that the more expensive the place, the more blank and absent it causes one to feel. Perhaps it is the perfection of the surfaces, the sheen of the leather, the marble; a reflection in every part of the room.

At times, she is so overcome by the warmth and the quiet of the morning that she lets herself fall back into a gentle sleep twice as refreshing as the one she has spent all night wrestling with. In these moments, born up by the distant music, she is drifting out to sea.

What is notable about the approach of the other woman is that she can only get this close because she comes in peace, as a comrade. It is much harder for a man to do this. His position is presupposed. Such a man would require 'compensation'. But have

you noticed as we have that she looks at women in a very particular way? As though she is not looking at a woman at all but observing instead a sportive otter on a visit to the zoo. How charming to be able to watch it through the glass! Look how sleek it is as it swims on its back! Does she consider herself to be some other, indeterminate species? At certain moments her eyes a tiger's, a falcon's. Is this petulance? An angry silence? Yet when the other woman moves away, her eyes hasten after her, as though fearful she will be left here all alone. Quite often she looks up to find she has no idea who she is, where she is, or how she got here. It would give her no satisfaction to know that she is only able to speak the truth because she conceives of herself as false at every turn. The woman appears to be aware of this contradiction. She appears to be aware of everything about her, an interlocutor who is also a silent narrator, who can prise apart the silver locks of her secrets with an encouraging smile, who can anticipate her, is an expert in the minutiae of her history. Is she imagining it? The woman knows the husband is a crook, a parvenu, a wheeler dealer. She knows that she loves him in her own way as well as the fact that she wants never to see him again. The woman wants to help somehow, to be of some obscure service.

As the woman speaks, she wonders for the first time about this middle age, middle class (essentially French?) concern with the taking of lovers, with establishing younger lovers, mistresses, gigolos, as though it is settled, as though it is a recognised and requisite part of any conjugal relationship worth the name. Offering what? The renewal of lost youth? Longevity via a comparative appreciation of one's betrayed or acquiescent spouse? Perhaps prolonging sex within a marriage? How? Offering a certain necessary distance, maybe? Adultery as a form of secret counselling? Was it all merely nostalgia? A way of being 'in love' rather than just loving? The excitement of the risk, the clandestine thrill? How often did it occur as vengeance? Is it all part of some unspoken tradition? She knew several couples who tacitly understood a certain amount of time was to be given over to each of their lovers. All that sex without love produced was a very particular depth of exhausted sadness.

She utilises a certain precision, some attention to detail and only looks for intimacy with herself, just herself, at times with not even her own thoughts. Discrimination is called for, even elegance. Study the paintings of Meredith Frampton.

The light changes again, like a hood over the day, the sea darkening, the music, now distant, now annoyingly close, at times like the ocean itself, at others a record stuck in the same groove, accidentally keeping its own time. Please close the door gently on your way out. We are thinking.