

She is an old scraggy woman, an appalling witch dressed in rags, affecting me with an unspeakable horror, frightening me, even worst, subjugating me. Hardly had I entered the underground passage that the heavy door closes again behind me; and I begin to roam in a tortuous labyrinth, anguished in full that she will appear suddenly. Soon she appears. All my energy gone at a blow and paralyzed, she came up for strangling me. I can feel her presence, even before she shows herself: trying to hit her with a bludgeon, to fight her, to escape her but, I free myself from her grasp only to meet her once more, as this awful scene returns the following night.

Some evening, suddenly, she is here, appalling as usual but so present that, as a sleepwalker, awake in cold sweat, I sit up on my bed with a death rattle. My mind under the curse of a mysterious nightmare, this fatal occurrence lasted twenty years, as a same old movie that keeps running: this old woman, who was she? Why has she harassed me during all these years?

I have spent my childhood in Provence. Signs of being different come out early. They are sudden attacks of distress, strong emotions and reactions caused by some domestic event, perceived unfair and beyond understanding; signs of morbid sensitiveness, as it is commonly said. Likewise, we are born short or tall, small or big, everyone comes to the world with an inborn character, a psychological profile inherited in the same way than physical structure. Brain and nervous system have been built in respect to a genetic code that fixes biological, hormonal and chemical balance and imbalance conditioning personality. In a family, propensity to distress is inherited, like blue eyes and red hair.

I understood this the day I unexpectedly saw my father, fifty years old, sunk in an armchair and sobbing like a child, without our knowing why. At once, I realized why, since the beginning, I had some problems.

Later, trying to heal such a confused inner life, I plunged myself into psychology and psychoanalyze readings. Afterward I understood, with Hippocrates humors analysis -gall breeds Melancholia- how tradition gives prime importance to an inborn character. Put the blame on Papa! Anyway, I also found how Freud and Psychoanalytic School lay much emphasis on

infancy's experience. Put the blame on Oedipus! Finally, Mounier taught me how Will works: character is not a fact but an act. Put the blame on me!

Meanwhile, I had to suffer. What for did I suffer? Or, what for did I think I had to suffer? One night in Marseille, my father holds me in his arms and, looking out of the window, shows me flashes enlightening the sky: these are the first air raids. We leave this town for Apt to take refuge in my grandmother's house. I remind myself hidden under Mimi's grand piano while a German officer paces in the drawing room, his shining black boots pounding the carpet. In fact, Mimi's piano was an upright one. Sometimes, Gestapo comes to arrest me and, so distressed by the fear of torture, I am gasping for breath until I jump through the window to escape executioners. Sometimes, I die, that means I wake up; if not, nightmare just goes on.

The First Indochina War, the dirty colonial war, with some obsessing episodes such as the murderous ambush where Foreign Legion soldiers have been decimated on the road to Caobang. They feed my nightmares: terror in the night, rice-fields and convoys running with fear of an ambush. Then, the Apocalypse, Dien Bien Phu, small forts bearing sweet sounding names of girls, Isabelle, Béatrice, Gabrielle, uninterruptedly quoted on the radio like telling beads of a bloody Lesser rosary, heart-rending images of deprived lank bodies and suffering gaunt faces of French prisoners, soldiers, non commissioned-officers and officers, walking in a single file, innocents paying for the greed of the wealthy and for the incompetence of the powerful.

Ah! What beautiful childhood memories! Here comes the board-school time, a grey flabby nightmare, a journey to the land of ugliness and anguish. Disgusting pork ears, smelling cold fat, served with their hair at the dining hall; clogged loos in Winter, discharging overflow on the playground that cold weather freezes -frozen shit below an ice-sheet yellowed by piss; cold water morning washing around the washstand; locked at night in individual cubicles by men in black cassocks; weekly shower in groups in an overheated bathroom where white naked teenage bodies move in a thick steam; then, out on Thursday, dressed in navy blue serge uniform, and, dead silent, walking in rows along streets where blew a frosty North wind, or on the banks of the Rhone river, which waters overflow lowlands from where twisted black trees silhouettes emerge against a murky sky crossed by dark storm-clouds.

How many years, sad at heart, did I wander through these baleful corridors, climbed these Kafkaesque staircases, roaming in the labyrinth of these shabby dormitories, in vain trying to reach the classroom where I always come late? I came on weak and they broke me down. Poor families, they try to their best but end doing harm without even knowing it! Thus, for having experienced a sadistic close-society where authority reigns supreme, I became allergic to

authority of all sorts. They thought they made a well decent bourgeois. A hidden Anarchist came out of the factory. Little M. Nobody came in to town, ill at ease with his provincial accent and badly cut dresses, lost in the midst of the arrogant aristocracy and upper class. Paris, a city in the North, is nearer to London, Berlin and Oslo than to Marseille, Avignon or Naples. All is grey here, not only the sky but buildings, cars and people's dresses too. Students' riots break out. C.R.S troops square up, charge and hit. At night, in a nightmare, I revive this urban guerilla, running breathless to escape bludgeons of these men dressed in leather, wearing helmets and boots, hiding myself in the buildings staircases, always chased, always detected as trying to escape troops in serried ranks - iron cohorts blocking dreadful cross-roads. Ah! In these times of Père de Gaulle, the police used to lay it on. Images of atrocities perpetrated in Algeria go around, frightfully mutilated bodies of murdered children, women and elder people. On the river Seine, dead corpses of Arabs victims float with the stream towards the sea. Thanks to University studies, I could avoid to fight in Algeria. Only yearly summer holiday in Provence enlightens other seasons dull days. Under the heat then, daylight vibrates and sky turns into deep blue. Black cypresses spreading over the fields where abound fruit-trees and vegetables, olive-trees with gnarled trunks and silvered leaves, violet lavenders rows on red ochre earth, green and fresh canopy of plane-trees foliage over little roads, reeds sprouting out from brooks, compose a setting which refinement of colors and exquisite harmony delight soul. This scenery entranced Van Gogh.

Later, as dispel haze where children and adolescents live, I will learn that he died from it. For more than two thousand years, people have worked for turning this unique land into a charming place to live in. Rome has built cities and boroughs that naturally set in landscape, Nîmes, Arles and Glanum with their noble and well-temperate monuments. Provençal civilization flourished during Middle Ages and Renaissance, peculiarly when Avignon was the Popes' residence. Palaces, hotels, castles, monasteries, convents, hospices then multiply, always showing a distinctive touch of beauty and temperance. Around Alpilles and the small mountain where Abbey of Frigolet is nestled, spread out prosperous small villages: Eygalières, Maussane, Saint-Rémy, Maillane. On a steep rock named Les Baux, stand the ruins of Grimaldi fortress. As Virgil did in his time for Rome province, Daudet and Mistral sang the praises of this Garden of Eden.

There, in Nîmes and Arles, during the "Feria", I discover heathen festivals as Greek and Roman people used to do and such as Nietzsche used to praise; death, wine, dance and collective madness, taken away by the whirlwind of solstice nights and days, well watered with pastis. Still lost in the same haze, I do not see the horror of corridas, a ritual murder of innocent animals that stupid phantasms of virility make up as a deed of bravery. But, haze or not, it's here anyway that I met first love, while taking a nap in cool rooms that thick walls and closed shutters protect from heat, or later in the night, after cicadas had become silent, under the summer star-spangled sky where fleeting shooting stars pass through. Too much sensitivity gives the advantage of a keen desire for beauty. Therefore, in the afternoon, lying under the sun, I stay for long hours at the city's swimming pool, gazing at slender bodies of young girls in

flower whose tiny swimsuits show to their advantage their secret sweetness.

Sex obsessed me quite young. Should I complain? Gloomy years, year after year, while I was learning how to survive or how to sail on an inner sea, seldom calm, often rough, at times stormy. You have to reduce sail when the sky is cloudy, shelter from storm in harbors, set sails again when by chance, a rift in the clouds breaks out and a stiff breeze rises. To other people, ignorant of such inner meteorology, to my own people, I look like an unstable and oversensitive person. Upper class families are haunted by one of them that become conspicuous and marks off from other people, taking the risk to break in two the shell of conformity under which they feel secured. As an old corny tune, family keeps on blaming, why don't you do as other people do?

My grandmother Mimi used to call me "le bâton merdeux". Better and better, we learn how to stand up well against blows; it is about the learning of life: jealousy, hate, contempt, vulgarity, brutality, stupidity, this is part of human relationship, except that suffering gets worst with familial struggles. That is a trap: I love you but, if you don't behave as I want, you will hurt me and, because you love me, you will suffer from my pain so that you will be in distress of your assertiveness. Twisted so young; is that an inborn or acquired quality?

Les deux, mon General! This always happens at night in large entrance halls that paneling, crystal chandeliers and majestic staircases adorned. Like a bird, I flap my arms and fly away. Moving in the air, turning around the chandeliers, gliding above the stairs, coming close to the ceiling that my fingertips brush; what a great sensation I still enjoy. I cannot get used to such uncommon feel; I can fly! I get a quiet pride from it. Yes, I am different! However, sometimes, I wonder, telling to myself: I must be dreaming. While still flying, I start to think and suddenly realize that, yes, for sure! I am flying! They hurt me well and broke me down but could not break my wings. I don't mind to fly only at night and without witness. I fly. I am free.