

THE WITNESS

I grew up among my mother's friends. I don't know how many there have been, nor can I claim to remember them all, but I haven't forgotten many of them, and though I may not have seen them again, or though they may visit the house only sporadically, I know who they are and have fond memories of them. I did not play with other children but rather with my mother's friends. The truth is that I am quite a lonely guy, and I prefer the company of machines to that of others like me. Machines, or my mother's friends. To begin with, they surface one at a time. For long periods of time my mother will have a single friend who practically lives in our house, sharing with us the food, the video sessions, the television shows, the outings, the games and the evenings at home. They have always been very tender towards me.

"I really enjoy not having other men around the house," I told my mother once, thanking her for not having blighted my childhood with the screams of a violent father or a demanding lover. Women are so much sweeter. I get along much better with them. I would not have liked sharing the house with other men; but I found it enchanting to share it with my mother's friends.

I think my mother felt the same way. Since she and my father separated—when I was very young—the house was only visited by women, and that was very comforting. I assume my father also found it so. The first one I remember was a rather dark-skinned girl with a high-pitched voice and bright black eyes. My mother was very young then, and I was only three years old. We went on a lot of outings together; I slept in my room, and the two of them slept, together, in my mother's room. But sometimes I would get up at night and appear in the master bedroom. Then one of them would take me in her arms and cuddle me, and I would fall asleep between them, cradled by the warmth of their naked bodies. Another one, however, had long blond hair, and it gave me great pleasure to run my fin-

gers, like summer butterflies, through it. My mother used to comb her hair very carefully, sliding the tortoise-shell comb down her silky hair, which reached almost to her waist, while I watched. (I regretted many times not having been born a girl, so that my mother could brush my hair with the same fervor and absorption; I regretted being a short-haired boy and thus being excluded from something that afforded them so much pleasure.) There was another one, however, who was more masculine in appearance; she had broad shoulders, a robust body, a low voice, and seemed to be a very strong woman. She used to buy me lots of toys: she gave me a bicycle, several puzzles, and was always proposing competitive games, daring me to jump, box, swim. I did not have the same affection for her as I had for the others, but I enjoyed her horseplay and beating her at chess. The excessive attention she gave me used to bother my mother, and I think that they once argued about it, but I put my mother's fears to rest, telling her that I certainly preferred her, that she was more beautiful and more intelligent.

The most recent one was a young actress. She had starred in a movie, which I did not see, since my mother did not deem it appropriate for me. We had to protect her, that's what my mother told me. She had had an unhappy childhood and now she needed to learn a lot of things before continuing her career: we were going to give her a home and the knowledge she lacked.

My mother was a very generous woman. She was always helping someone, and she brought me up to do likewise. We have helped a lot of women, even though they have since disappeared from the house. In our house they find a roof, food, warmth, books, music, and affection. You could tell right away that the actress needed protection: even though she was cheerful, amusing and very likable, she was not very consistent and seemed to lack method.

"You will learn to study with my son," my mother told her. And indeed, from the beginning my mother assigned her tasks: she had to do English and French exercises, and she recommended a series of books from our library for her to read.

It was beautiful to watch them together, listening to opera, trying out each other's clothes, exchanging dresses. Sometimes the actress would wear a blouse and skirt of my mother's; at other times, my mother would wear the actress's pants, English hat, and white scarf. I learned from my mother that the actress had abandoned her home, which had not been a real home, and that now, in our house she had finally found a refuge.

"The company will do you good," my mother told me, "you're growing lonelier by the day."

And indeed, I enjoyed her company. Helena had big blue eyes, she was tall and thin, and her long and white neck was like the stem of a wine glass. I grew very fond of her. I let her come into my room—where not even my mother was allowed—and showed her my drawings; she listened to my favorite albums. I liked looking at her. She had agile and subtle movements, not awkward like mine (I've grown a lot lately and can't control my limbs very well); she spoke in a soft, delicate and very suggestive voice, and when she came near me, I felt vague stirrings. I especially liked to look at my butterfly collection with her. She seemed enraptured by the drawings of the butterfly wings, and she soon learned to classify them. We went on a couple of excursions to the countryside, looking for rare species, while my mother waited for us in the car reading one of her books.

My mother also taught her to cook, and she would sometimes surprise us by preparing one of our favorite dishes.

At night they slept together in my mother's bedroom. I tried to delay that moment, because I had grown accustomed to Helena's presence and had no desire to go to sleep. But once my mother announced it was bedtime it was very difficult to dissuade her to let me stay.

In the mornings, before I left for the institute, I went to my mother's bedroom to say goodbye. The door was always closed; I would knock softly, and when I heard that my mother was awake, I would push the door slightly and enter the darkened room. It was difficult to discern the figures in the dark, but my eyes would soon pinpoint the two bodies, one next to the other. Helena was always

asleep, being obviously the heavier sleeper of the two. I would quietly kiss my mother and leave. But once I went in without knocking and saw Helena half-asleep, wearing a sheer gown; her cleavage showed precociously through the fabric, and I glimpsed her thighs, firm and resplendent, through the sheets.

The discovery dazzled me. That day at the institute I couldn't concentrate, I was distracted and restless, something that quite surprised my professors.

I returned home nervous and excited, hoping to find Helena there. She was, in effect, in the kitchen preparing a dessert, and it pleased me just to be near her, jumping and prancing around her to get her attention.

"Be still," she told me, laughing.

I adored her laughter. She was playful, daring, a bit childlike. My mother's laughter, on the other hand, was grave, low, mature. The laughter of a woman who can be severe.

After dinner, the two of them remained in the living room, sharing a book. I paced my room nervously, unwilling to study or to play with the machines. I wanted to be with Helena, but at this time of day she belonged to my mother.

I went to the bathroom and masturbated. I did it thinking of Helena's breasts and my mother's legs. Oh, my mother's legs. Earlier, when I was little, my mother used to walk around the house almost naked, displaying her beautiful white legs. They are full, luminous, like two Roman columns. Not even Helena's legs could compare to my mother's. Now, since Helena has been with us, my mother has stopped lounging almost naked in my presence.

After a while, I heard the door to the master bedroom close. They had obviously gone to lie down together in bed for a while. It both pained and gave me pleasure to imagine that moment. I could picture, like on a screen, my mother taking off her white silk blouse, and Helena shedding her black velvet pants. I could see them comparing their breasts, their thighs, their pubis. All this in silence, so as not to awaken my curiosity. Everything in silence, pretending they were asleep.

I did not need to spy through the keyhole. I knew the scene even though I had never witnessed it. The door to their room remained locked, closed to me with them inside. I was the excluded one, the rejected one, the absent one. I imagined a thousand and one schemes to intervene, to interrupt the scene playing itself out inside my mother's bedroom, but I knew I was too cowardly to avail myself of any of them. I didn't feel I had the courage to interrupt my mother, and I wasn't sure I would be able to withstand the vision of the two symmetrical bodies laying on the bed.

That night at dinner I had no appetite and felt somewhat hostile. I managed to annoy my mother, who exclaimed:

"I would like to know what is the matter with you. You are in an unbearable mood."

But Helena intervened on my behalf. She winked at me, smiled, and touched my leg with her foot under the table. Her complicity comforted me. I briefly held her foot with mine and spilled my glass of wine on the table deliberately to annoy my mother.

That night, when I went to my room, I could hear them arguing in the living room. My small fit of ill-humor had managed to disturb them and, satisfied with that small measure of revenge, I closed my door.

A week later I won the Drawing Competition organized by the institute. I was thrilled, and returned home eager to bring the good news to my mother. I opened the door with my key and found no one at home. It's true that I had returned home earlier than anticipated, but I was excited about the prize and wanted to share it with her. The house was in silence. I was on my way to my room when I saw a light in my mother's bedroom. I approached the closed door, and called.

"I have a migraine," my mother answered without opening the door. But I heard movements in the room, a rustle of clothes and sheets.

I assumed that Helena was inside. I was overcome by anguish, my eyes filled with tears.

"I'll be right out," my mother announced, sensing, perhaps,

that I had not moved from the door.

I think I blushed. My mother was on her knees, half-dressed, looking on the floor, like a dog, for the clothes she needed. It annoyed me to find her in such a position. "Go away!" she ordered me, imperiously, but I stayed. Her feet were bare, and she was only wearing a black lace camisole. I saw her beautiful white legs, the opulent breasts barely covered by the netting, the inflammation of her lips, her untidy hair. Next to her, still lying on the bed, was Helena. She started to laugh foolishly. She was naked and tried to cover herself with the sheet when she saw me.

I pounced on top of them. I am very tall, and my bulk pushed my mother onto the bed. In her surprise, she let out a ferocious and muffled cry.

"Go away!"

I held them both on the bed. Helena was laughing stupidly, disconcertedly. My mother, on the other hand, was surprised, and could not manage to understand the meaning of my eruption in the bedroom, something that violated the tacit accord that existed between us. I held them both down with my arms, and I also let out a grave, dull and anguishing scream.

Helena had started to cry. I don't like women who cry. I never saw my mother cry; she never allowed herself such weakness before me. I suddenly felt contempt for Helena for being so weak.

"Kiss her!" I ordered her. Helena sat on the bed, covering herself with the sheet, while I held my mother down, and she looked at me with an expression of surprise on her tear-stained face.

Suddenly I pulled the bedsheets away. It was a fast and violent gesture. Helena's body emerged from under the bedclothes, long and narrow, the marked bones on her shoulders, her nipples like purple grapes, the very dark pubic hair, the red toenails. I also saw my mother's broad neck, still covered with pink stains, the white and milky arms.

"Kiss her!" I ordered.

Sobbing, Helena approached my mother timidly. She kissed her on the mouth. It was a weary, flustered kiss, but I insisted.

"Kiss her!"

My mother struggled to break loose from my grasp, but she is not a strong woman, despite her height, and couldn't break free.

"Now," I ordered her, "grab her breasts."

Helena looked at me incredulously.

"Do it!" I bellowed.

I realized she was afraid. Slowly, hesitatingly, Helena brought her hands to my mother's breasts.

"You're crazy!" she cried, trying to break my hold on her.

"Once before you tried to rid yourself of me," I answered her. "This time, you won't succeed," I added.

Helena's trembling hands cupped my mother's breasts.

"The nipples," I indicated. "Squeeze her nipples."

Helena's eyes were full of dread.

"Do it," I suggested.

Helena barely touched her.

"More," I indicated.

Her fingers then squeezed my mother's nipples firmly.

"That's good," I said, approvingly.

"Lie on top of her," I added.

"What?" mumbled Helena, bewildered.

"Lie on top of her!" I yelled.

I had suddenly thrown my mother on the bed. I liked seeing her like that, half-naked, lying down, with the black lace and nylon camisole barely covering her belly, her waist, the lower part of her chest. A few curling hairs escaped through the lace.

Very softly Helena laid down over her.

"That's good," I whispered.

Her body, thinner and firmer, covered my mother's. I saw Helena's shorter hair, her rounded buttocks, her bare feet. My mother's body was barely underneath Helena's. Their arms rested on the pillow, and their foreheads touched. Now I could see four breasts, four legs, two united torsos, like a prodigious double statue, like two Siamese twins joined by an umbilical cord.

Then, I quickly lowered my pants and climbed the pyramid

they formed from behind.

Standing over them, I was the third figure in the triptych, the only one moving convulsively. I planted myself firmly on my thighs and pressed the women's two bodies under my weight. I quickly penetrated Helena from behind. She screamed. My mother, on the bottom, lying on the bed, panted.

I burst like a broken flower. I exploded. Then, exhausted, I left the room. I left them quickly. Before I closed the door, I said to my mother.

"Don't worry about me. Now I really am a man. The one that was lacking in this house."