

I

The living room was only slightly lit as she moved towards one of its two windows. She pulled the curtain aside a little so she had a wider space for her eyes to spread their vision outwards. The sky was in a shifting phase between darkish blue and black, with vague shapes of cumulus clouds, still discernible to a human eye. The neighbourhood seemed peaceful and across the street, all windows of the building were dark to her eyes. She opened the window, only a little, and her ears could perceive almost nothing from outside but occasional wind, the modest sound of which appeared and disappeared in almost no time at all. The scent of the air was pleasant to her and so was the temperature.

With her face turned slightly to the right, her vision spread as on hen better wings out over the roof of the block next to the one she had just seen, which was a couple of stories lower and so the vision flew across a rather large part of the city. The shapes of the taller buildings were about to merge with the night and the small forest she knew was a couple of miles from where the city ended was all black to her and the

horizon was not as sharp as it would appear to be in daytime. She sighed contentedly as her vision returned its findings to her and after a minute of silent contemplation she closed the window and returned to the sofa in the room with a table on which there was a tasteful and rather small crystal bowl filled with water where three lit candles floated and made the colour of the bowl seem more yellowish than normal. She also had a small bottle of gin on the table and beside it a glass with a drink that she had a sip of as she was seated.

The night made her feel at ease. That used to be the case. The buzz and the electric confusion of the city were distant and her spirit knew where it belonged. It was here, in this apartment, quite ample, that was her natural place in the evenings. She had a sip of the drink again and then she let the beverage in the glass be transluced by the candles on the table. The transparent beverage and the crystal of the glass made the yellowish become even more vague, as if it was interwoven with the dim light from the small floor lamp placed nearby. She sighed lightly as the beverage had its effect and all that surrounded her

contributed to the peace of mind she felt. She needed it. It was Friday and a whole weekend was ahead of her when she could breathe freely; gather power in order to face what to come; what had to come.

The hour was late and she had set an appointment with James after he had been out with friends and colleagues. They were only going to some pub after having had a men's dinner party and it wouldn't take long. He had told her that he would come as soon as possible. But the hour was getting late; a quarter past one. Maybe he would end it by one. She needed him now; more than ever perhaps.

The week had been awful. Who was she to go through all this alone? She had a sip of the beverage again and watched the lithography on the right of the draped door. A painting by Cezanne was the original. She didn't have any deeper interest in paintings, it was mainly decoration for her but now it seemed to her that the painting began to speak; it had a language. Maybe it was the situation that suggested it; maybe it was something else. The painting seemed alive. It

spoke to her in a language adjusted to her and only her. It was her mother that had chosen the painting. It had never really suited her. It was probably because of the motif. Somewhat morbid she might think but now it was her mother's choice that captured her. She had said that it was a typical Cezanne and a kind of still life. The colouring was nice but what never had pleased her was the human face, vaguely skeleton-like, that was discernible. But for her mother's sake she had put it there anyway and it fitted nicely with the rest of the room. She had a taste for the visual without making an affair out of it.

Time passed. The spell broke after god knows how long; maybe ten minutes. James was late. By half past one he should have finished the pub and be on his way. She needed him. They had hardly seen each other for the whole week; only talked on the phone. It was high season at his job and he'd had a lot of overtime but tonight they had all night – and all weekend – together. She could hardly wait but knew that she had to, so she sat down in the sofa; the same sofa she had been sitting in earlier. She watched

the soft light play. It played like a holy Ganesh before her eyes. Or maybe like a Roman “Alladin and the Wonderful Lamp”. Obsolete perhaps, but there for certain. Obsolete like all ancient knowledge. Nevertheless the wheel was invented and the Persians and the democracy and everything seemed to come to her as she tried not to think. Maybe she should return to the painting. Cezanne may perhaps be good for her mind.

Her eyes. Not jaded but still as she wanted them to be. Her whole body was still; just like she wanted it to be. She didn’t meditate; she didn’t know how to. She tried to think of nothing though and the atmosphere in the room was beneficial for that.

But then all of a sudden! James was late. Had something happened? Why this? Oh well, she thought. It was only half an hour. Anything could have happened. Nothing to worry about. At least she tried not to worry. It was just that she needed him. She needed his company. She needed to talk. Her heart couldn’t bear much more than this. Only a short talk; that was all she needed. Not much. Just someone –

James – whom she knew and who could relate and maybe give advice. They had all weekend together. She knew that. A great deal of things could be sorted out. At least she hoped so. She hoped so and her hope travelled by the lightwaves of the crystal glass as she had another sip. Why not put on some music to make the whole waiting part completely integrated in some painted cathedral or other? No. That would be too much. She needed the silence, at least until he came. Silence was her medium on a night like this. Silence only interrupted by some distant sounds in the street below now and then. She couldn't help it. She lived where she lived.

In her loneliness she returned to the things she enjoyed. The lights of the apartment. She had another sip of gin and made a new ceremony with the glass. It filled her with contentedness. The room was as still as she would like her mind to be and she tried to inhale the scent of the room. Was there any scent in the room? There was a flightly scent; inpredicable but enough for her. She didn't have to think about it. There was also the scent that comes with wallpaper, furniture and the like. She enjoyed it

and wished. Oh how she wished! No, no! No time to be too emotional. Just keep cool and try not to get carried away, she thought to herself. She knew she could get carried away easily these days. No wonder. The week had been horrible and all she wished for was for it to end.

It's funny how the calendar can mean things for people. Almost like a ritual for the Indians. Manifestation. Sharp lines between youth and adulthood. Funny how a new year's eve can mean so much. It wasn't New Year's Eve yet. It was quite some time 'til then. But anyway. Rituals. She supposed there could be public rituals and also private ones and she had just invented a new one for herself; watching the Cezanne painting her mother thought was so fine.

Mother. Always goal-oriented, always going someplace. Firm but juste. Oh how she missed her! Oh how she longed to be with her! But now it was too late. The distance was too much; too much for her to bear.

Electric confusion. It was very distant at night and

it didn't disturb her. Not the least. What disturbed her was thinking about her mother, but she had to, only not now. James would probably be here any minute now. She needed him. There was so much in her hands. She couldn't even focus.

She returned to the window with the drink in her hand. The street was as empty as it should be. This was a quiet neighbourhood. It wasn't that she didn't like to be in a crowded place, it was just that she preferred living a little apart from the center and she had been lucky finding this apartment. Her mother had helped her. Her mother had always helped her. And now, the distance. Oh!

The clock was ticking. James was a great deal later than he'd said he would be. However, she didn't lose her patience in waiting. She was not that kind. As a matter of fact she felt being by herself for a while did her good.

She sat down again and tried not to think. She tried hard not to think and maybe that was her mistake; her mother emanated from memory all the time. Oh James! Where are

you?