

CALYPSO
(A Novel of Pathos)
By Vesna Milek

A man writes to throw off the poison which he has accumulated because of his false way of life. No man would set a word down on paper if he had the courage to live out what he believed in.

Henry Miller

The characters in this book are not fictional, with the exception of the main ones. These are so fictional that they have become real. They are all me - what I have been, what I may become, what I would never want to be and what I long for. It's all the same thing.

19 July

I don't need foreplay. I never have. Foreplay is a warm up and a warm up is boring. I'm always on fire. Perhaps it was hot when the two of them made me. I don't know and I never shall. My father was a hot-blooded man. That is the only thing I've ever managed to drag out of my mother in those rare moments of closeness that in fact weren't all that rare. We breathed together through the umbilical cord, my fears were her migraines and gallstones, and all her paralysed pleasures were my labour contractions. What is really terrible is that we still breathe together. Connected via the umbilical cord forever, made of the same material, we renew ourselves with the same cells, devouring each other slowly. I can't go on, mother. Let me go and allow me to grow up in this limp body of mine. For all too long I've been trying to cut this rubber knot and swim out. Do you hear me, mother, I want out? Let the ice cold air out there burst my lungs. I'm no longer afraid.

Because that is what I've decided. Yes, just like that, without foreplay. This strange, trembling, kicking mass inside me has had its fill of my blood and is moving around me like a fat mosquito, changing shape in a Kafkaesque way, pressing outwards and expanding me. It's hard to say goodbye to something that has for at least ten years been gnawing at my insides, enduring the tumult inside me for all that time. It is mine, after all. Today is the day when I can stand myself. And that inside me. I'm looking at myself under a magnifying glass as if I was a rare insect. In a cold and impartial manner. It's a unique moment. I'm neither on an ego trip nor in a masochist phase, I'm not even in depression. I'm in nothing and I feel strangely void.

I know one thing. My name is Eve. Or Rebecca. I could also be a Mathilda or Mary Magdalene. My name is Woman. And Woman came first.

I can write again.

25 July

We were lying on the rooftop terrace of an ugly apartment block. Not far from us, some bickering neighbours were hanging their washing. They were passing judgement on

whoever had cut their washing line: he must be from one of the former Yugoslav republics. That's how national problems are hung on the washing line. A negligee with a leopard-skin pattern, a pair of stretched underpants, some faded towels and sheets. The negligee somehow didn't belong. I didn't belong. The sun was gradually dissolving my paranoia. Splitting it into thousands of fragments, which were desperately trying to scramble each in their own direction, I am trying to find my trunk, my roots, something firm and permanent. There are so many possibilities, so many choices. I don't know how to choose. And when I don't know where to go, I find refuge in strong, hairy arms, in luscious lips, in sugary words that flatter and soothe like a balm for my never satisfied vanity. He doesn't have a name, the man, all I know is that he's somewhere. He's sitting in a bright room, by a window with green curtains, looking at the light outside. I don't know his face, but I can see his back. His white shirt is stretched over the slender, flexible torso, his thick curls are getting stuck in the collar of his shirt. A matador. That's it, I always find refuge in a man. I look for strength where there is none, I look for that which I don't have, or at least I think I don't have, and when I find it I start reshaping it, mangling, squeezing and kneading it, until I make a man according to my image. But the moment I've created him, I cast him aside. Just like poetry. Just like him. Just like everything. Nothing my hands have created has any value. Probably because it has been moulded according to my image. And I don't like my image. Obviously I don't. What other reason could there be for feeling so shaky, so incomplete, so not whole. And then I go off hunting again. More howling of wolves, more bellowing of stags and more barking of hounds. The anticipation of a new love, of new paper butterflies.

- Isn't it crazy that blood should be red? Laura woke me as she lifted her fine-looking head with its short hair.

- Have you ever thought how strange it is that under this transparent skin there can be such a strong colour? Isn't it lovely that we're in colour, darling? The brain crispy yellow, the spleen dark green. Have you ever vomited bile?

- Once, when I got poisoned with tequila, I think. I don't know if it was bile.

We were squinting at the sun, which was too strong. I thought about colours. Red, orange, yellow, purple. I love warm colours, but I masochistically wrap myself in dark, mysterious, dead ones. To stop anyone noticing that I'm still warm and alive.

- Come on, let's go somewhere, I said staring at the sun. I like doing this until red, yellow and rainbow circles start appearing before my eyes. - Somewhere far away from here.

26 July

An empty, suffocating Ljubljana, the hot concrete, the weary faces in almost deserted streets. Laura and I were wandering around the town and, as usual, trying to alleviate our guilt with coffee, ice cream and cigarettes, repeating new mantras about things being different tomorrow, oh yes, we would grab life by its horns, by its steering wheel, by its bridle, by anything. A few acquaintances were sitting on chairs beneath umbrellas, there was longing in the air, amputated by an empty wallet. The heat was thick, heavy and unbearable. We flaked out on the terrace of our café. It was even hotter under the umbrellas than on the street.

- Have you seen him? she asked me casually.

- No. Why?

- I ran into him the other day, we had a drink.

- Oh yes?

A hand on my shoulder. Igor, the café owner. - Are we going to survive this heat? he sighed, wiping his sweaty forehead with the back of his hand. - What can I get you?

I ordered my third coffee, Laura a lemonade. I turned to her.

- You didn't tell me.

- I forgot. She took a cigarette out of the packet and fumbled for the lighter.

- He doesn't look too good, you know, she said, looking at me in a way that irritated me.

- What? Sometimes I get a feeling that you're blaming me, too, I attacked her.

- Come on, she stared at the nails she's so proud of. - I don't know, I just felt I had to tell you... He sends his love. He said he'd call you some time.

Igor put the coffee and lemonade on the table. He brought ice in a separate glass. Just in case, he said. I looked at him gratefully and turned back to Laura absent-mindedly. I looked at the tattered poster on the front of the building behind her. I frowned in order to be able to read the words. *Excellent offer! Unforgettable two weeks for only seventy thousand tolar. The Greek island of fun, dancing, midnight beach parties and Sex on the Beach cocktails.*

- Darling, that's just what we need, I announced. Laura turned and looked at the poster.

- An instant holiday for students? She lifted a contemptuous eyebrow.

- So what. It's what we both need, I said and looked at her with such passion that her eyes lit up for a moment and immediately faded again.

- I can't, Rebecca, I really can't. I've got to pass those exams and the rehearsals are starting at the theatre. I pulled her out of her chair and forced her to look at the poster. - Besides... You know I hate organised trips.

- Two weeks, only two weeks, Laura. I stared at her as if trying to hypnotise her.

- My parents will kill me if I don't pass the exams. And I haven't got any cash.

- Do it for me, Laura, I said, holding her shoulders. - If not for you, do it for me, please, I said, surprised at my own perseverance. - I'll borrow enough cash for both of us, just say you'll come.

She started to look indecisive.

- Let's go, I said firmly and took her hand. - We've been procrastinating for long enough. Let's go. Anywhere. Even if it's just a holiday for students.

10 August

We were on a ship, far away from Slovenia, far away from anaemic attempts to sort things out in our heads and in our bodies and to pass exams, far from nightmares and what's-the-point discussions. The point was there, on the sea.

Dirty from soot, bloated from the alcohol of the previous night, we were standing on deck. It's not fair that some people look so beautiful after a night on the tiles. With her short hair in a mess, wearing a blue polka dot scarf around her long neck, she stood by the rail, looking at the sea. An image I'd seen before and which has a name. Longing.

- Darling, we're coming to dry land, our first trip together to another country. Greece, the cradle of philosophy lies ahead of us, she said as elatedly as only she can. An event is born out of a banal situation. Her long thin fingers took my hand and they felt cool.

- You don't know how happy I am that you talked me into going, she whispered.

We had a long hug, I could feel her heart beating fast, her thin supple body under my hands, her perfume in my nostrils.

10 August, Athens

Laura in khaki safari shorts on her long slender legs in high-heeled slip-ons, me in a flowery summer skirt I'd been wearing for two days; we were holding hands, running down streets, car drivers blowing their horns enthusiastically.

We caused a traffic jam, a bearded guy leant out of the window of his old Opel, grinned and whistled. We waved back, giggling. Laura's eyes glowed like the blue scarf around her neck. Two crazy beings. When it seemed there was nothing new we could tell each other, an even deeper connection was revealed on this trip. It's funny how much I love my Laura. I love her so much that I sometimes suffocate her, I know. And I know that she knows it and still lets me do it. That's her power over me.

We wandered around Athens, stopped next to a busker, rummaged through the colourful stands under the Acropolis, flirted with stall holders, learning negotiation skills. She photographed me as I was climbing into Athena's temple and I photographed her. I'd like to catch her smile as it is here. She laughs a lot, but it's been a long time since I've seen her laugh like this.

- You've no idea how happy I am that we're here, she said. - Thank you for getting me out of Ljubljana. Thank you. The Acropolis was swarming with Japanese tourists with miniature silver cameras - it's absolutely paramount to document everything, to take a shot of everything here and now. They'll take pleasure in it when they get home, when they can show the pictures to other people. I thought, why was I judging them? They're addicted, just as I am. The only difference being that I do it by carrying a tatty notebook with me instead of a camera. The old desire to capture a memory, a feeling, a thought and the beauty is our common denominator. We don't succeed; neither they nor I.

11 August, the ferry

The lights of the approaching islands, the dark sea, Laura and I among a crowd of vampire souls, thirsty for adventure, fun and madness, crowded onto a single piece of wood, sailing towards the promised land. Dizzy from the swaying ferry, we wandered among the drunken bodies, all trying to find a comfortable position among the heaps of sleeping bags, cans and plastic cups, sticky from ouzo and metaxa, which would help them get through until the morning... We were too excited to sleep. Each holding a plastic cup of ouzo in one hand and a cigarette in the other, we stood by the rail, blowing smoke into the indigo blue night, staring at the sea. I don't know why I looked in that direction. He was alone on a bench. On the only empty bench on the other side of the deck. He was the man from my head, with dark curls and the slender, flexible torso of a matador. A guitar was leaning on a dirty green rucksack. I can't remember what his face was like then, I can't remember whether it attracted me or not, all I know is that I couldn't stand his feverish eyes. He was setting my flimsy, flowery dress on fire and gluing himself to the skin beneath. I looked his way again, met his eyes for a moment, and quickly turned back to the sea in order to try and control my heart, pulsating somewhere in my throat.

- Am I just imagining things or is there something going on here, said Laura with a

meaningful smile.

- Let's go over there. There's still room, I managed to say, nodding in his direction. She lifted her eyebrows with a knowing smile and silently followed me.

He watched me approach with uncertain steps and there were whirlpools in his eyes. I stopped in front of him in my thin flowery dress, breathless, my knees soft, my hair dishevelled, my mouth slightly open.

- Is this bench taken? Like an embarrassed teenager, my excitement stifling the words. I swallowed saliva.

- Join me, he said with a voice hoarse from cigarettes, and moved his rucksack under the bench. He smiled at Laura and examined her from head to toe, then turned to me. Closer by, his features looked softer, his lips fuller and his eyes even more slanted.

- I've been waiting for you, he said calmly as if that was something totally obvious. - I see, I said ironically. - It's true. If you hadn't come to me, I'd have come to you, he said with an enigmatic smile, his eyes sparkling in the darkness. Laura and I looked at each other. Her laugh was too loud. I started talking in order to release some of the tension I felt after what he'd said. The introductory phrases about where we were all from and where we were going. His hand was warm and damp when he shook mine. Alexandros. - Alexander? My favourite, said Laura teasingly, - shame he didn't like women. - That's the only difference between us, he said. Laura took over the conversation and for a moment I managed to become invisible. My thigh muscles were trembling, then the trembling moved to the rest of my body. I listened to them, smoking.

- I don't know, I really don't know where I'm going. I set off around the islands, to search for music, for myself, I don't really know.

- And you, what are you looking for? he said turning to me. In waves the trembling spread from my neck to my breasts, stomach and groin. Laura disappeared. All the people disappeared, there was only the sky and the dark sea, his black hair, the reflection of his white teeth in the darkness. What was I looking for?

- Want some whisky? I said to extinguish the fire in my cheeks and gain some time. I swayed toward a group of accidental acquaintances we'd met on the boat, looked for my bag in the mound of other shapeless bags and, carrying a bottle under my arm, stopped in the dirty toilet on the way in order to make an offering to my vanity. I put some lipstick on, arranged my messy hair and ecstatically out of breath returned to him. We drank whisky in order to get drunk as soon as possible and alleviate the trembling, we talked and talked as if we hadn't seen each other for a long, long time and had to hastily make up for lost time, we talked using each other's words, we talked without words. The pulsating in my throat had dissolved into a glow, the sea had become one with the sky and the swaying of the ferry joined in the rhythm of his guitar and dark voice. The alcohol had warmed my body and tongue, I sat opposite him casually with my legs under the thin, short dress slightly open, I was warm and pliable, with my hands leaning on the bench so that I wouldn't fall toward him and bury my head in his lap.

I can't remember how I found myself in the toilet again and just as my parched kidneys had managed to squeeze out the drops of metabolised whisky, he walked in. We fell onto each other, the drunkenness, dizziness, the aroused bodies sensitive to every touch, his hair in my mouth, his mouth on my neck, he pressed me against the greasy graffiti covered wall, kicking the lid of the toilet seat so that it closed with a bang. I opened my eyes. He was holding me by the waist, pressing himself against me, my blue cotton

knickers which had previously remained half way around my knees, now slid to my ankles and drowned in the mixture of piss and dirt. With a practiced move he lifted my leg, positioned it on the toilet seat, lifted my skirt while continuing to kiss me roughly, his tongue swelled in my mouth, filled my mouth, pulsated like his penis through the rough material of his jeans, his bites were getting wilder and ever more painful, my groin began to throb. Then it hit my brain: a similar scene - a dirty public toilet at a student party and the smell of urine, but a different face bending over me, some other lips on my skin. I stiffened. The moment was over.

- I can't. Not now, I said and tried to pull myself together, catch my balance.

- Why not, he whispered, his voice breaking with lust.

I pushed him away and looked at him, his long curly hair in a pony tail, his lips swollen from kissing.

- Not here, I repeated. I lifted my right leg from the toilet seat, stepped into the puddle, freed myself completely from my knickers, kicked them towards the rubbish bin in the corner holding onto him in order not to fall.

- We've drunk nearly a litre of whisky, I said with a strange laugh so that it echoed from the worn ceramic tiles.

- Sorry. You're right. It's not the right place, he said, pushing some hair behind his ears. -

I got carried away. With our arms around each other we left the toilet, still feverish from the short contact, our breathing slowly calming down. We lay down next to the bench, it was dark, other bodies were dozing on benches or on the floor, wrapped in sleeping bags. He laid down his military sleeping bag next to our rucksacks. We fell asleep intoxicated, holding each other tight.

I was woken by a piercing noise, the ferry's whistle greeting the port. There was a stampede of people who, after a long night on the choppy seas were crowding towards the exit and dry land. A searing pain in my head, sawdust in my mouth, I was suddenly struck as if by lightning. Laura, I thought. Damn it, where's Laura? A head with messy hair looked out of the sleeping bag, the head of the stranger I'd spent the night with. He grabbed me and pulled me toward him. Don't go. I got up with difficulty, the floor moving away from me, swaying.

I'll find you, he whispered when I kissed him and wandered off, blindly stumbling around the deck, bumping into people, trying to forget what and who I'd forgotten.

...

Laura was standing in the crowd in the port, I saw her when I descended the gangway among the last survivors. We embraced.

- I was afraid, she said seriously. Where were you all night?

- I was with god, I said and tried to look for the familiar feelings of guilt that usually accompany a night like that. I couldn't find any.

- Again? Laura grinned.

- This time it's for real.

- What happened? She fished for information while I was trying to put together the fragments of the night that swam around, lost in whisky and intoxication. - Did you do it?

- No.
- No?

15 August, 5.30 a.m.

It's clear that I shouldn't really be on this island, which doesn't mean it isn't fun. Contacts are formed faster than you can run your fingers through your hair. Laura's eyes are glowing, her slight body immediately started vibrating in rhythm with the little town. She'd been waiting. Her small breasts are rising and falling strongly, her pupils dilated. Her excitement has transferred to me, evoking a mixture of contrasting feelings. Her muted sensuality is slowly getting exposed. It's something uncontrollable, frightening and stronger than herself. Something I have never dared let out. We are so similar and yet so extremely different. One a tall, ethereal praying mantis with cropped, jet black hair and transparent skin, the other one slightly smaller, with rounded hips and a mop of frizzy, unruly hair reaching down to the middle of her back. We're an unusual pair, a magnet for the iron filings attracted by our youth and energy. This island is nothing but a hunting ground where people with young, drunken, beautiful and glowing faces hunt for tempestuous contacts and sensations. To begin with, we only just managed to shake off two Italians, who after a ten minute get-to-know-each-other introduction invited us to Sicily. We found our next admirers in front of the entrance to our hotel. Two Israelis. The first guy had facial features that were too regular, like in a man's perfume ad, and he reminded me at times of my fatal stranger on the ferry. The other man, slightly less handsome, slightly more intelligent - a philosophy student - described him as an Israeli rock star. And we got talking. About Judaism. About Orthodox Jews, about the Sabbath. About my name. About my mother who adored the Old Testament. About fate. The future philosopher was visibly fascinated with my ideas, the rock star enchanted by Laura's light skin colour and aristocratic self-control. Laura and I were like playful kittens, as daring and lovely as one always is when enjoying the adoration of those one doesn't care for much.

It's been a long time since Laura glowed like this. I'm happy for her, she reminds me of the period when we first got to know each other, the night when I met him. And now we're here, alone, basking in the abundance of attention, turning like spinning tops; for a moment, I've forgotten the adventure on the ferry, for a moment it seems that there is a lot more in store for me here than that. Come on, let's let our hair down, for far too long we've been living in a strange vacuum within four walls, playing with words instead of having some action. I want life, madness, eroticism, drunkenness, the sun, I want it all and I know I can get it all.

16 August, 11.30 a.m.

We got up early and in a good mood. While dressing we giggled at the thought of the previous night. Italians, Portuguese, Israelis.

- Now we can write an analysis of the courting styles of different nations, Laura shouted

from the bathroom as she was brushing her teeth.

- Are you going to tell me you didn't enjoy it? I shouted back, trying to put up my wiry hair.

- I admit it, there's no better cure for a chipped self-confidence, she mumbled.

- Admit that you like him, I attacked her when she came out of the bathroom, flushed and happy. She giggled.

- Which one are you referring to?

- The Jewish rock singer who thinks he's Mick Jagger, I pouted.

- I don't know. He's only a child. A very cute child.

- He likes you.

- Oh, I don't know. The sea, the alcohol. I don't know... Two little creases above her nose and then joyous laughter. - I'm hungry. I'm dying of hunger, she said. The late breakfast in our white hotel didn't live up to our expectations. Dried out, paper-like croissants, butter and jam. The hotel owner, Zorgas was his name, sat down with us for a moment and asked where we'd been the night before when he did a tour of the night clubs with a group of Slovenes.

- Oh, I hate those drunken parties, Laura said with a small superior smile.

- Oh, do you? he said in likeable English. - So what would be good enough for you princesses?

- Only that which is more than everything else, I replied, winking at Laura.

- Oh, and what would that be?

- Less than nothing, Laura said laughingly. And then we giggled without reason until Zorgas shrugged and manfully marched to the kitchen.

16 August, 5.30 p.m.

- Rebecca, look, Laura prodded me, straightening up on her towel and putting on her catty sun glasses. - Isn't that your friend from the ferry?

With difficulty I sat up and, drugged from the sun, looked in the direction she was pointing. A dark figure in flip-flops with a halo of curls was approaching among the bodies lying on the sand.

-No, it's not him, I said, trying to assemble in my brain, numbed by the sun, the mosaic of his face.

-What do you mean, not him? said Laura. - Don't you remember him?

I looked again. Dark complexion, the features of a red-Indian, the flexible body, the laid back walk of a tramp. He was shuffling straight toward us, leaving small clouds of sand behind his flip-flops.

-Laura, it isn't him. He wasn't like that, I said, grabbing her hand.

He stood in front of us. In a fitted white t-shirt and a pair of wide, beige Bermuda shorts he looked taller and more boyish than that night on the ferry.

- Hi, he said to both of us, then turned to me with a playful smile. - I've been looking for you.

- Again? I trembled like a teenager on the first date and looked up, squinting from the sun.

- Well, here I am. What now?

He squatted down next to us like a supple cat, arranged his hair and looked at Laura. - How strange, all of yesterday and today I've been looking for the girl in the flowery dress and long, curly hair. His lips curled in a way that seemed familiar, he glanced at me, then again looked at Laura. - And then I thought maybe she's put her hair up or has a hat on, I realised that I didn't even know what she looks like in a swimming costume. He laughed louder, a bit more relaxed, and for the first time looked at me more closely. I noticed the corners of his mouth tremble.

He too. Nice, I thought. The air got thicker. I didn't dare breathe because he would see my breasts rise and fall. Subconsciously, I felt for my bikini top and gave Laura a quick glance. Her eyes were wide, her lips still in a surprised smile.

- I'll go and get a drink, she said considerately and started to get up. I said nothing.

- Come, I'll take you for a walk, he said to me.

Still sitting, I pulled my summer dress over my head, put on my sunglasses and accepted his hand.

- See you in the hotel, I half mouthed to Laura over my shoulder as I followed him. She wasn't smiling any more, but looking at us with an indeterminate expression on her face. I shook my head and forgot her expression, forgot the two mermaids, forgot our symbiosis.

- Well, he said, stopping. The sun was dazzling. Let me have a look at you... The rest of his sentence died somewhere in his throat. We walked in silence along the sandy beach, zigzagging among the bodies trying to catch the last rays of sunshine, until we came to a part of the beach where there were no people. We sat down next to each other, facing the sea.

- You can see I stayed on this island, he said. - You changed my destination.

- Didn't you tell me that the journey in itself was your destination?

- That's what I'm trying to tell you. It's only now I know what it means, he said with a smile. And then he added: - Calypso. That's who you are.

He handed me a rolled cigarette.

Drum, he mumbled, lighting it. Then he rolled another one. I had enough time to watch his profile with its Roman nose and white teeth biting the lower lip. Interesting really. To explore a man's features for the first time after you're already familiar with his scent, his touch, after you've already felt the heat of his kisses on your nipples. We were silent for a while, looking at the sun sinking into the sea. A kitschy postcard scene.

- It's funny. The only thing I had was your name and I kept repeating it so as not to forget it, he said quietly, more to himself than to me.

He stared at his flip-flops, squinting at the sun. And then, as if having just collected the courage, he looked at me.

- Jet black eyes, he said.

- It's the sun, I said, sliding my hand over the sand, picking it up and allowing it to run through my fingers.

I wanted to say his name just so that I could say something because the silence was too revealing, but I couldn't remember it. The sun had nearly sunk into the sea and there we were, sitting small and uncertain.

- As I look at you like this it seems I see you for the first time. It's sinful to think that I kissed you. Yesterday, the day before, when?

- Did you kiss me? I don't remember, I teased him, probably not very convincingly. He

deliberately failed to hear and leant towards me. My right shoulder touched his left shoulder. My hair touched his.

- It's all tangled up, he said and came closer. Then there was just his large mouth, slightly open so that the bottom line of white, sharp teeth was revealed. I didn't want to close my eyes. His face so near to mine acquired a wolf-like expression. His slanting eyes. We breathed at each other.

- What are you doing? I whispered.

- Exploring, he smiled.

I looked away, toward the sea. The electricity between us was becoming unbearable. The sea sparkled like a mirror. I didn't dare look at him.

With his index finger he touched the skin behind my ear and I trembled with pleasure.

The tiny golden hairs on my skin stood up, my nostrils became wider. Then his hand slid down my neck, stopped on the shoulders, the touch burning through my skin, a series of tremors going through my body. I was still looking away from him.

He turned me toward him and what I saw in his eyes scared me. It was so much like some other look, some time in the past. We stared at each other for a long time, until the whirlpools in our own eyes started to swallow us. There was something so pure and obvious that it burnt. His hand slid down my neck, down my back, so gently. His fingers felt like silk on my skin. A red ball of fire appeared in my groin and moved up my back until my nails, out of control, dug into the stretched skin on his back and I felt pleasure at the thought of being able to tear it apart, to injure this perfection. The kind of pleasure you get when you first bite into a new loaf of bread or an apple.

20 August

I'm in a frenzy. I'm flying. I can no longer see clearly. I go to bed when the sun comes up, I get up at night, drugged with the heat, I sit on the terrace, order a Greek ice café, light a cigarette and write. Now and again Laura's questioning look rouses me. She sleepily blinks on her bed, with the creased, pink face of a newly born baby she tries to understand which part of the world she has woken into, then mumbles something about me not being normal, turns on her side and goes back to sleep. I can have two hours on the terrace alone, enjoying the sweet words bubbling inside me.

The third night in paradise. I moaned when his hand slid down my thighs and I stopped it. Don't worry, he whispered, it's yours. Suddenly we were wrapped in sand, sand in my ears, sand in my mouth, sand and blood, blood and sea water. He had me for the first time. His jet black hair stuck to my face, getting tangled up with my hair, coarse with sand and salt. I cried when he pushed into me, decisively breaking the last fragment of resistance and, with his hard penis, clearing out the traces of all previous lovers. He banged into me like crazy, his mouth wide open, stained with my blood. He looked so beautiful as he grabbed my hair and stared at me, too deeply. I couldn't look because I'd go blind, there was madness in his eyes, his body glowed in madness, I wanted him to grab my head and smash it against the nearest stone buried in the sand. I wanted him to bite into an artery on my neck with his white teeth, I wanted to hear it tear, I wanted to feel the pain nail me to the earth. Because I could no longer stand the pressure, fear had shrunk my mouth, my heart was beating in my throat because it could feel the end. I

could not and did not know how to and I wasn't ready and there wasn't enough time and I was frightened of him, of myself, of the angels and the demons. And yet I wanted to open up, to dissolve in his mouth, to stop thinking, above all, to stop thinking. It confused me that I couldn't be everywhere at the same time, in my stomach, in my solar plexus, in my throat, in my groin that was trembling with pleasure, in my brain with its fluorescent glow, I was crying because there wasn't enough time. As if he could hear me, he moved away from my mouth, forced me to turn my eyes to him, he looked into me, deeply, gently, oh so gently: We have all the time, baby, all the time in the world ...

23 August, the white hotel

On the last day he arrived like Don Juan de Marco. He knocked on the terrace door of our room in a white shirt and black Levi's, with his guitar over his shoulder.

- You're going with him? said Laura with regret. I didn't understand what she meant - it was obvious I was going to go with him. - Shall we get together in the evening? she asked.

- I don't know. Could do, I suppose, I said in the by-the-way fashion. - Don't you have a date with the Portuguese?

- You mean the Americans? I do. But they asked if you two were coming, too. She looked at me with eyes that were almost begging. - There's going to be a beach party. I looked at him and blushed. Our last night.

- Maybe we'll come, I lied. She blew a kiss and disappeared through the door. Looking rather fragile and alone.

23 August, evening

We were sitting on the terrace, the air was thick with salt, the sun was soft, sticking to his skin as he strummed his guitar. A cute toy-town white room, in a white hotel with white windows and white doors, with a view of the sea and a hillside with white houses. Everything is white except our skin and the red stains on white sheets. Tired from sleepless nights, we got lost somewhere in semi-sleep. When I opened my eyes, I saw him kneeling next to me, watching me with the smile of a man in love.

- Good morning, mermaid.

I leapt up, confused, my hair in a mess, happy, with a pain in my ovaries.

- How long have I been asleep? I asked. - What's the time?

- It doesn't matter. Did anything matter? No.

- Have you been watching me for long, you pervert?

- Depends on what long means, he smiled.

I looked at the other bed.

- Where's Laura?

- I don't know, when I woke up, she wasn't here.

- Wasn't here? That's strange.

I got up, had a shower and returned refreshed and sad. Just one more night. I looked at my watch, it was eight in the evening. Good morning, night life.

- Are we going out? I said.

- If you want. Do you want to go out? Or shall we go on making love? Shall we go to the church on that hill and get married? Do you want to sail on, onto another island and lengthen our summer? I'll do anything you want, he said ecstatically, staring at me with the madness of a young poet.

- Really? Anything?

- Anything.

- Anything I want?

- Yes, he laughed.

- I won't demand great sacrifices, I said. - Take your clothes off!

He lifted his eyebrows in disbelief, something resembling anticipation flashed in his eyes for a moment. Without speaking, he undid his belt and his jeans slipped down.

- More, I said, pointing with my head.

- What now? He asked, standing naked in front of me, as beautiful as a statue of a Greek boy with a flaw. His penis was erect.

I pulled one of my favourite items of summer clothing, a dark blue dress with white flowers, from under my pillow.

- Here, put this on.

We looked at each other. An enigmatic smile.

He put the dress on without saying anything.

- Sit next to me! I ordered and observed in surprise a woman being born in front of me.

He lifted the dress coquettishly, sat on the edge of the bed and crossed his legs.

He laughed awkwardly. I looked at him impassively and strictly.

- Now I'll paint your lips, I announced in a dramatic fashion. I was still playing. The corners of his lips turned upwards, but he tried to remain serious.

With great pleasure I started to outline his succulent lips that any woman would envy until they resembled those from a poster advertising Revlon lipstick. A woman's lips. Something isn't right, I thought. The game was no longer a game, but I went on. He had totally surrendered to me and I didn't like that.

- Enjoying it?

- Mhm, said the rouged lips while the eyes remained closed.

- Have you ever dressed up as a woman?

He nodded.

- Really? When?

I moved away and watched him.

- Once at a masquerade.

- Only then?

- Yes. Why? He opened his eyes and caught something in mine. - Hey, what's wrong, princess? No, I don't dress up as a woman, if that's what you're thinking.

- You like it now, don't you?

- Yes, don't you?

Saying nothing, I outlined his eyes, added a bit of mascara, the eyeliner fell on the floor. I swore. In front of me there was no longer a man but a beautiful, sensuous woman, a Polynesian with golden-brown complexion, full, pouting lips and shiny black curls. He pushed the curls off his forehead. A woman's move.

I went to the bathroom, trying to put a mask on. I found myself competing. My rival was sitting on the bed, waiting for me. A mixture of emotions just before an explosion, I

know the first signs. My hands no longer obeyed me. I painted a mask on my face. The eye pencil, softened by the sun, smudged around my eyes. I felt ugly. For no apparent reason, I hit the door in rage and helplessness. My hand throbbed. The artery on my neck throbbed. Not again, not now, I thought. He opened the bathroom door and looked at me with surprise.

- What's wrong?

- Nothing.

- You're acting strangely, he said. His sad face looked grotesque as he stood there in my flowery dress, leaning on the door frame.

I felt horrified of the caricature that wasn't a caricature, but a woman. A woman with a flaw. A look at his hairy legs made me feel sick. I'd created a woman, I'd wanted to, but now I didn't want her to have ever existed.

The door opened and Laura burst into the room, her tanned cheeks flushed, she looked hot, her eyes slanting even more than usual and staring at nothing.

She kissed us. She barely noticed that Alexander had changed into a woman, she just said how beautiful he was, took a towel and grabbed the door handle.

- Where are you going, darling? I asked. I wanted her to be there, to share that strange experience with me.

- For a night swim, you know, with the Americans. She shuffled impatiently.

- Aren't we going together?

- I don't know, she said hurriedly. - They're waiting for me. She so obviously didn't want us. She's high, I thought and that made my incomprehensible anger even worse.

- Wait.... Why don't we go together? I took a step toward the door, tried to take her hand and tell her that I needed her because I was suddenly so scared to stay with that person with my red hair grip in his hair and with pouting red lips. But Laura kept looking at the door impatiently, her feet shuffling nervously, her head twitching. She wasn't listening to me.

- They're waiting for me, she said.

- Thank you, darling, I said furiously and with my hand swiftly swept off the little bottles in front of the mirror. The noise of smashing glass calmed me down for a moment.

Her eyes widened.

- What the fuck is wrong with you suddenly?

I looked at her with animosity, not knowing what was wrong with me.

- Nothing. And even if there was, you wouldn't understand. So much for intuition, for that special connection between us. As soon as you get a chance of a snort, everything else disappears. You're pathetic.

- I'm pathetic? She laughed. - I? Look at yourself, Rebecca. Don't involve me in your shit.

- Fuck off, I hissed.

She shrugged as if my words hadn't touched her at all.

- Thank you, too, she turned up her nose and left the room, seeing only her own world and her own pleasure. As if nothing had happened. As if I was just air. That wasn't my Laura.

I collapsed onto the bed. There was someone else in the room. I was ashamed to have allowed the person sitting on the edge of the bed to see so soon the other side of the sweet

girl. The romanticism was disintegrating. There was no way back. Or forward, only downward, into depths where control is no longer possible. Come on, let's go all the way. - Why are you looking at me like that? I attacked him. - Are you surprised, stranger? Surely you know, don't you? That you're a stranger. You came and you'll go as if nothing has happened. I didn't invite you, I never invite anyone. The door is open. He looked at me with such shock and disbelief that I started laughing hysterically at him with his painted lips, at me, at the whole situation.

I couldn't stop myself, the room was thick with negative particles that were suffocating me. I thought I was going crazy. But I never do, only red patches and grimaces remain on my face. The first test for the man I'd only just met. In summer romances the getting to know each other happens with extra speed.

- I don't get you, he said. - You're behaving terribly.

- You think so? I snapped. - You know me surprisingly well after these few days.

- You're behaving terribly. To me. To her. Didn't you say she was your friend?

- She's not. You saw what happened, didn't you? She left without saying anything, she just left. That's not friendship. He shook his head, his face closed. I wanted to say that it was all because I couldn't look at him in that dress, I couldn't look at the hairy legs and the movie face of one of Bond's exotic women. Especially as that face was trying to calm me down, lecturing me on my behaviour.

As if he could hear my thoughts, he took a paper tissue from the dressing table and started wiping off his make-up.

- I don't understand what's happening. I'm still the same person, Rebecca, he said calmly.

- It's not about that, I looked at him with disdain. He was funny and helpless. I directed all my contempt at him so that he wouldn't notice how I despised myself for allowing myself to sink so low.

- I'm leaving tomorrow, get it? And the door's open, I added coldly.

He started to undress slowly, threw the dress over the back of the chair and it slid onto the floor. He put on his jeans, tightened his belt. There was still some lipstick on his mouth; it looked as if it was mocking the spoilt evening.

I remained sitting on the dishevelled bed, not daring to look at him. I could only sense his steps toward the door. He opened it. He won't go, he can't I thought, trying to stop him with my eyes. As if he had caught something in my look, he stopped. The seconds dragged on. I wanted to say something but couldn't. Suddenly I became terribly embarrassed. I was looking at him and my rage was slowly dissolving into self-accusation. I'd gone too far. I looked at his hair, his lowered eye-lids, his eyes staring at the corner where my flip-flops, trainers and the flowery dress, still warm from his body, lay on the floor. His feet with nicely shaped toes in sandals were turned toward the door.

- I'm sorry, I said.

He looked at me. He raised an eyebrow, there was still a trace of pain and wounded pride on his face. I got up and with only two steps I was beside him, I grabbed his hair and started kissing him wildly, our lipstick became mixed with saliva, red patches appeared on my face. The buckle of his belt clunked as I undid his trousers.

- I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me, I whispered in tears as the awareness slowly dawned on me that what had happened wasn't because of him or because of Laura, it was because of someone else, someone who spends all the time in the darkness, only

awakening when the danger that I might give myself to someone again becomes all too imminent.

The end of the novel

18 July

It's 37.5 degrees Celsius. Humidity and heat. Betty Blue the sub-Alpine way or The Seven Year Itch without a fan, without an unfulfilled neighbour undergoing a mid-life crisis or a fluttering white dress. No desire for life.

He can devour all the romances, all the ambitions, but this he cannot stomach. No, he can't. Not he. The body is slowly moving away from reality. The vapours of heat are washing away common sense. She is lying lazy, heavy and full in the stuffy room, hating him. She is being suffocated, every square inch of the apartment is squeezing and flattening her. She walks from one end of the one room apartment to the other. It's not too far. It's wearily close. The music bothers her. The dirt bothers her. The full ashtray and the stale coffee on the table bother her. The fridge is empty, there's no food. Just a large water melon. But water melon is healthy. She needs poison, not water melon.

Hatred for her floppy, weak body, hatred for her tepid spirit squirming in the corners, devising megalomaniac plots that will never be realised. Someone help me. Let someone help me, I whisper. It's me. And that other woman isn't a part of me. I drop to my knees and there is a muted cracking noise in my knee caps. I pray, calling to the Virgin Mary, Isis, Astarte and Hathor, Kali, Shakti and Aphrodite, I call to the female faces of God, they seem more merciful. But when this comes over me it's too late, no-one can hear me anymore. I watch helplessly as a shadow appears from my limp body that is lying folded on my big bed, gets up and wanders into the kitchen, grabs a knife, walks in a trance over to the fridge and with shaky hands takes out the half-empty bottle of vodka. She pours it over the blade and, still in front of the open fridge, swiftly cuts into her wrists... Not too close to the vein, just in case. She knows exactly where to cut. A burning pain. She closes her eyes so as not to see the blood. When it's already dripping, she can stomach it better. Dizziness, relief. She sits on the floor in front of the open fridge, cooling her red hot head. A puddle of blood on the floor. She used to do this in the bath, but now she doesn't bother. She's alone, locked behind two doors. She's not expecting anyone, no-one will come to see this wonderful movie scene. She's done it so many times she knows it's not dangerous. Only the wounds sometimes take longer to heal. Next comes the routine disinfection procedure. The bandages are in the second drawer in the hall. There are no bandages for guilt. The wrists are smarting, the feeling that she's alive is more tangible. But the guilt for what she's done refuses to disappear. Nothing will change, she thinks as she lies down with wet gauze on her wrists. It never does.

Her reason no longer responds to comforting words telling it things will be different tomorrow. Perhaps it's time to look for help. She smiles at the thought of a psychiatrist. She can do that herself. Her father and mother. Tell me something about your mother... About your father.... And then she would have to say that there was another person bringing her up. Not for long, but enough for her to know what is now happening to her. She's a clever girl and she reads things occasionally. Abuse in childhood is usually linked

to bulimia. Come on, Rebecca, say it to yourself, write it down, a few times. Bulimia. Abuse. Describe them. Your mother's lover. Write it down. I can't, I'll do it tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. The gauze is damp. She is still trembling from the adrenalin. She gets up, tightens the bandages, steps over to the fridge, the puddle of blood looks at her accusingly. She takes the water melon out of the fridge and cuts into it using the same knife. Under the yellow-green stripy skin a red wound gapes, juicy red flesh. What an incredible fruit the water melon is, she thinks feverishly as the red stripes appear in front of her. Voluptuous, perverse, succulent, full of sticky sweet juice. Only a week ago she went through a period of cantaloupe melons. Then the world was orange, apricot coloured. Unfulfilled, she tossed on orange sheets in her wet dreams, wearing orange underwear. Now it was time for succulent water melons, a period of passion and new life force. Bullshit, Rebecca. Leave the water melon, leave the knife, write down what needs to be written. She bites into a slice of water melon, sinking into it so that the sticky juice runs down her chin. She gulps, sucks the new energy until she becomes sick. Then she falls asleep in the heavy afternoon heat. She sleeps, dreaming strange dreams. She's no longer dreaming about tigers in an arena but about diseased, cancerous tumours, about human organs in formaldehyde, about madness. The dream ends when someone shoots her in the ear. With a machine gun, while in the background whirs a camera, filming it all. I won't go to Athens. I won't go anywhere anymore. I'm tired. Terribly tired.

19 July, morning

I wake up the way you do after a bad hangover. It's the morning and the night is so far away that it seems it was never there. But yesterday something cracked. I don't know why I'm so sure, but I know. I held a knife in my hand for the last time, I stuck my fingers in my throat for the last time. I know it. I've said it a thousand times, I've promised myself a thousand times, but I know now that yesterday was the last time. It left. Yesterday it left. It's time for a new question. Who am I? Certainly not Rebecca. The more I try to expose myself, the more there is of me, more clothes and petticoats, layer after layer. I peel like an onion and with each layer of skin I get sharper, I burrow deeper and it's impossible to stifle my scent with a synthetic perfume. People smell me. I toy with my diary like I toy with my image. It's a strange obsession. When I reveal myself, I shy away and when I cover myself I expose myself, as slippery as an eel. The more honest I am, the less truth there is, the faster I fall into a dark well of anonymity, the bottom of which I can't see. And I'm back at the beginning: Who am I? Rebecca, Laura, Eve or Calypso? Yes, I toy with you, woman, and you're ridiculous.

So what? Where do I go? Search desperately and destroy myself for that which I really want to do in life or perhaps simply grab everything that comes my way, and feel in the touch of a fine material which slips between my fingers that which is truly mine?

And thus, in those rare moments when light shines on me, I tilt the glass as far as it will go, until I start to feel sick. I prefer that to missing something. As I know that after abundance there has to be abstinence, after gluttony starvation. There can't be uninterrupted passion, a force that would keep you in a constant state of exultation does not exist. This is the worst thing you have to reconcile yourself to.

Suddenly, I feel that the limit doesn't lie between what I am and what I want to be. I feel

that so strongly that I could hug this moment, press it in my hand and squeeze it into a bottle. The first transvestite was a sphinx.

I am and this is the world of a woman, the incomprehensible, mysterious world of the womb, of creation. My hair has been short and black, chestnut and curly, the colour of copper and of fire. Only my eyes remain the same all the time. Yellow, with brown spots. Sometimes golden like the eyes of a wild animal. And always feverish and penetrating. They see too much, that's their curse, they see much more than they should be able to see. And sometimes they see into the future, Alexander.

I'll leave everything. The radio, the posing, the TV scripts, all the pointless things I do in order to do something. I'll send away all the acquaintances, colleagues and friends. All of them. I'll wipe out the past, the fingers on my thighs and the feelings of guilt. I'll erase myself and start again. It's my turn now, for the last time I'll open my veins and let you out, thoughts, don't you ever dare mess up my white flesh. I'm healthy and strong. I glow in the light and I know I'm timeless, fleshless and bodiless.

I'll dye my hair a Titian red, shake it down my naked back and my black panther will walk calmly at my side.