

¶1: WHEN I fell I must have lost consciousness. I only remember two eyes staring at me and the airplane rocking back and forth for the last time, as if a huge nursemaid were rocking me in her arms. A boy likes being rocked. I closed my eyelids, wandering around unknown worlds. Then a deafening noise and a hard blow brought me back to reality: the hard crash to earth. Nothing brought me in touch with earth except for the feeling of a bonfire going out, leaving gray ashes so much like silence. I don't understand what form the accident took: suddenly I was here, alone, in the jungle with all the provisions but without any sign of the plane in which I had traveled—all so strange. Someone will come looking for me; I trust the skill of the airmen who besides looking for me and the rest of the crew and passengers will come looking for the plane. They will find me by accident; accidents happen and sometimes they are fortunate. These provisions, if guarded carefully, will last for three weeks. My count may be inaccurate.

¶2: Besides, some rodent, some bird, some animal could devour the provisions that aren't adequately wrapped, which would reduce my supply considerably. In that case I would only have the jelly and the little tinned crackers that taste like cardboard, smoked meat, tongue, dates and prunes, repulsive cashews, peanuts.

¶3: But those eyes, where were they?

¶4: Three weeks is a long time, almost a month. Provisions for three weeks, what more could I ask for? Sharing them—would I have this privilege? I don't remember where I read about some monks who survived for a long time on two or three dates a day. The bottles of wine will also help me stay healthy and strong.

¶5: But those eyes that were staring at me, what will they drink?

¶6: No animal could be interested in wine: Why? And speaking of animals, I think about the possibility of predators.

¶7: Sometimes I hear branches creak and I think it smells of predators, but I understand that if I let my thoughts go I will go mad, so I throw myself down on the earth, kiss it, and try to imagine a world full of sheep, like in the prints we got for first communion, and of butterflies, like in a child's first readers. My bed is so comfortable that after sleeping for eight hours I wake up calm, thinking that I am at home. I stretch one arm out, confidently trying to turn on the light on my bedside table, dwelling in this illusion for a while. If the night is very dark I am seized by great anguish, but if there is a moon I look at the light that shines on the leaves of the trees and the trunks covered with moss and imagine that I am in a tended garden. That image, so silly in reality, makes me feel calm, though I always preferred woods to gardens. That's why I always wandered around with my hair unkempt, why I let my beard grow, and why at times my clothes are less than spotless. Now that I am surrounded by vegetation that grows at random, would I prefer to be surrounded by well-kept plants? No, not at all. My thoughts go back to the city that I hated, to the city's surroundings that I scorned. I angrily remember its smell of gasoline, mothballs, drugstores,

sweat, vomit, feet, basements, old people, insecticide, urinals, newborns, spit, shit, kitchens. I don't commit the mistake of redeeming the image of the city with the image of beloved people. I try not to miss the toilets or the sinks. I adapt to this life. One adapts to anything: that's what Mama said, and she was right.

¶18: I don't know what sort of climate this place has; I do know that I am disturbed by my ignorance. It would be difficult to find out without anything that could guide me: no barometer, no geographical sign, no botanical or climatic study. Due to a storm, the plane went off course, so I have no idea where it fell. I could consult the sky, but I don't know much about the stars either. I fear making a mistake. I think this place is damp because there are some vines and a variety of honeysuckle that grows in damp places. I don't know whether the heat I feel is tropical or just summer. Beneath the trees there are some ferns piled up among the moss.

¶19: What color were those eyes? The color of the marbles I picked out at the toy store when I was a boy.

¶10: At night there are fireflies and deafening cicadas. A soft penetrating perfume seduces me: Where does it come from? I don't know yet. I think it's good for me. It comes from flowers or trees or herbs or roots or from all of those at once (maybe from a ghost?); it is a perfume I never smelled anywhere in the world, an intoxicating yet soothing perfume. Smelling like a dog—will I turn into a dog?—I tear at the leaves, the plants, the wildflowers that I encounter. I study the leaves, searching for the perfume. I tear at the bark of trees and taste it. At last I discover what perfumes the air so thickly: a vine, one with insignificant flowers. Nothing about its appearance distinguishes it from the others except its impetuous foliage. While I look at it I think it's growing. I feed myself methodically in accordance with the daily amounts of food that I have decided to eat so that the provisions will last until the plane, or helicopter, arrives, something I expect via men or God. Several times a day I eat small amounts of food. There are some wild fruits that enrich my diet. I am filthy. Why do I take such care of myself? Less than a month ago I thought of committing suicide; now I am methodically eating, trying to rest, as if I were taking care of a child. There are people who only find out who they are after a long time. The song of birds at midnight (at what I guess to be midnight) becomes deafening. I could have made a slingshot out of the elastic bands that I have on the waistband of my anorak and two branches that I have cut. Why hunt a bird? I ask. The natural thing would be to kill and eat it. I couldn't. My will weakens, perhaps. I sleep a lot. When I wake up I take pictures of the trees, of my hand, of my foot, of the foliage; what other photographs could I take? I don't have an automatic shutter to take a picture of myself. Besides, I don't know if my camera is working because it fell hard. Sometimes I pronounce my name over and over, giving my voice different tones. Am I afraid of forgetting it? I discover that there is an echo in the jungle. Nothing frightens me so much as that. Sometimes I hear, or think I hear, the motor of a plane: at these times I search the sky desperately.

¶11: Where could those eyes be that stared at me so persistently? What might they talk about? Could they have fallen into the sea, attracted by their own color? What if they were to come all of a sudden?

¶12: Little by little I get used to this life. I prefer to sleep: it's what I do best, sometimes even too much. If a predator were to attack me while I slept, I wouldn't be able to defend myself. Every day I commit the foolhardy act of sleeping deeply after lunch; of course I don't know what time it is, because my watch has stopped and for the first time I have lost all notion of time. The sunlight reaches me indirectly through the trees. After losing the thread of time, if I can put it that way, it would be difficult to orient myself using that light. I don't know whether it is fall, winter, spring, or summer. How could I without knowing where I am? I think the trees around me don't lose their leaves. I don't dare go deeper into the jungle; I might lose my provisions. This has become my home. The branches are my hangers. I miss soap and a mirror so much, scissors and a comb. I begin to worry about the question of sleep. It seems to me that I sleep almost all the time and I think it's because of the intense perfume of the flowers. Their harmless aspect is deceptive: they form an arbor that on closer inspection is diabolical. In vain, I rip them up out of the soil; they grow back with even more force. I try to destroy them by burying them but I don't have any digging tools. I try to use a short piece of wood but it is too difficult. Poor Robinson Crusoe, or rather, lucky Robinson Crusoe who knew how to handle the tasks imposed by solitude. I am helpless in a situation like this. In vain I try to destroy the flowers because they climb up into the trees and cut me off from the sky. I couldn't destroy their scent in any case, since this place is like a locked room. Sometimes while falling asleep I've noticed a branch with two or three flowers; when I wake up I see that the same branch has nine more flowers. How long have I slept? I don't know. I never know how long I sleep, but I suppose that I sleep the way I did when I had a normal life. How could so many flowers bloom in such a short time? I think these things will drive me mad. I observe the flower that is guilty of making me sleepy: it looks like a trumpet flower and it is sweet (I have tried it). The branches that emerge are weaving strange little baskets. I never observed a vine so closely. It curls around trunks and branches, making such a tight weave that sometimes it is impossible to pull it off. It is like a lining, like a cascade, like a snake. Thirsty for water, it comes looking for my eyes. Now I am afraid of sleeping. I have nightmares. I've been dreaming the same dream several nights in a row: the honeysuckle confuses me with a tree and starts weaving a net that takes me captive around my legs. I don't think I'm in bad health. Quite the contrary, I think that I'm perfectly fine. Nevertheless, this state of sleepiness doesn't seem normal to me. Sometimes I ask myself: Have I lost all sense of time? Am I sleeping more than is normal for a human being, or do I believe that I am sleeping more? Is it the perfume that makes me sleepy? At the hour that it is most intense, I begin to nod off, my eyes close, and I fall into a lethargy that frightens me when I wake up again. The progress the vine made up the tree served as my clock for several days. Like a weaver it tightened its grip around each branch. When I woke up I could calculate the time I had slept from its knots but right now it seems to be speeding up. Is it me, or time? Jumping from one idea to another without any order is one of my normal habits, but the truth is that I never had so much time or so much physical inactivity. I never believed that I would find myself in such a situation. Besides, abstinence

always horrified me. Yesterday—was yesterday yesterday?—I drank several bottles of wine to relax, and after wandering drunk through the jungle I fell asleep, who knows for how long.

¶13: I dreamt that I was saying, Where are those eyes that stared at me so intensely? What would they drink? There are people who are hands; others, mouths; others, hair; others, a chest that you can lean on; others, a neck; others, eyes, just eyes. Like her. I tried to explain it to her while we were traveling on the plane but she couldn't understand. She only understood with her eyes and asked, "What? What did you say?"

¶14: I woke up far from the provisions, thinking that I wouldn't ever be able to find them again. I scolded myself harshly. I argued with myself. I found my way back, guided no doubt by divine grace, back to the place of my salvation: my food. What an irony of fate! Depending on food when I was one of those men who boasted of being able to fast for twenty days, who used to laugh at hunger strikes! Now, for a date or a repulsive cashew I would sell my soul. No doubt all men are the same and they would all react in the same way. I don't move, am enclosed as if in a prison cell. I never imagined that a cell and a jungle could be so alike, that society and solitude could have so much in common. Inside my ear a million voices are arguing, getting angry at one another, devoting themselves to destroying me. Tra ra ra ra, I am sick of this.

¶15: My God, may I never forget those eyes. May their irises live in my heart as if it were of earth and the irises were plants.

¶16: Those contradictory voices (the voices that I hear in my ears) are devoted to destroying me.

¶17: Love one another. Never before was it so hard for me to follow that precept. Though one shouldn't scorn solitude. One day the world will be so densely populated that my present lair will no longer be isolated. Thinking about transformations makes me dizzy. With my eyes closed I think about all those crazy things, which isn't prudent of me: the vine takes advantage of my distraction and wraps around my left leg, weaving a fine net around each toe. The baby toe makes me laugh. How skillfully it wraps around it. To say nothing of the big toe that looks like a vessel to sprinkle holy water. The vine does its job in various ways; for the smaller toes it uses a stitch that looks like the slats of modern wicker chairs, for bigger surfaces it uses a strange mixture of arabesques that imitate plastic car seats. I pull the web off my food with some difficulty. I remember a vine at my house called wallflower, with little clawed feet that stuck onto the walls. I remember as a boy pulling off some of the leaves that were like kittens that didn't want to let go of their prey. This vine doesn't have little feet like that wallflower. It is the better for it. It tirelessly goes around weaving knot after knot. Poor trees, poor plants that fall victim to its claws! Lucky the tree that is barely sensitive.\* I recited that to someone (I no longer love) to impress her. The line has stayed with me. I'm not so sure about that "barely sensitive" stuff. At night I think I hear the trees complaining, hugging, rejecting one another or sighing, kneeling before other members of the family or before those who have succumbed to the vine. I entered this vegetal realm in complete ignorance. The only tree I knew, besides the willow, was the tipa

tree. Once Mama told me while we were crossing San Martín Square, “What beautiful tipas!” At that moment two horrible tipas walked by. “Why are you laughing?” Mama protested, looking at the foliage of the tipa trees, adding, “Now one can’t even admire the trees?” “What trees?” I asked. “The tipas, silly. Don’t know what tipas are?” “Oh, the tipa trees,” I answered with the due surprise, “I thought you were talking about those ladies.” “You don’t know what you’re saying. You should go to the jungle to chat with the monkeys.”

¶18: Poor Mama, she must be regretting that insult now. Sometimes I’m kept awake by that memory, unable to avoid it. I look at the tipas in the dark. They had yellow flowers; they made Mama’s dress look even bluer. And will I always have the gray face I had in Buenos Aires?

¶19: What are those eyes looking at?

¶20: A doughlike face—that’s what the seamstress who came to sew for my sisters at our house said about me, always thinking I was twelve years old even though I had just turned twenty. What a drag to be twenty! I don’t miss my house at all, but a mirror is all the company I have now—for better or for worse—and there I had a mirror that was as round as the moon. I have fallen asleep this time more deeply than ever, more than the day I got drunk; it’s clear that I can’t be sure if I’m mistaken.

¶21: Where are those eyes? Could I be forgetting them? I can’t remember the shape of the corners of those eyes.

¶22:

¶23: Sometimes you fall asleep for five minutes and it seems like you’ve slept the whole night. Last night I fell asleep, waking up at the break of dawn. Could I have only slept for five minutes? I have proof that that’s not the case: the vine had time to wrap itself around my left leg and to reach my thigh: it has my thigh! And as if that weren’t enough, now it’s started on my left arm. This time I pulled it loose with great difficulty, with less force than before, calling it stupid, like one of my girlfriends says about me in jest. I have resolved to change my location. I lift up my provisions and leave, searching for a place without vines; but I can’t find one, and the walking exhausts me. Sometimes I think that years have gone by, that I am old, but if that were the case I wouldn’t have any provisions left. Now I have stopped in a place that may be worse, but I don’t have the strength to go back to where I was. This whole jungle is a huge vine. Why should I worry? I should only worry about things that have solutions. The perfume will still intoxicate me, making me sleepy. The vine will go on twisting. Now I usually wake up to find another web around my arm or my leg. Yesterday it reached my neck. I was quite upset. It’s not that I was afraid, not even when it wove itself around my tongue. I remember that when I was dreaming, I shouted, imprudently opening my mouth. It’s weird. I never thought that a vine could find its way so easily into my mouth.

¶24: “Pervert. Who do you think you are? A person can’t trust anybody anymore,” I told it.

¶25: I’m amused when I think about how my friends will laugh at this anecdote. They won’t believe me. They won’t believe my lack of laziness either. Lately I have tried weaving knots

like the vine does around the branches: it's a very difficult experiment but an interesting one. Who can compete with a vine? I am so busy that I forget those eyes staring at me; understandably I have forgotten to drink and eat. Human gender, oh so changeable! I, suddenly female, wrap the pen in my green fronds, like the pens that prisoners wrap with silk and wool thread.

¶26: \* "Dichoso el árbol que es apenas sensitivo," a famous line from Rubén Darío's poem "Lo fatal."