

CHAPTER I

Camel Man, related my mother, waited patiently, remembering the wisdom of his desert. There, patience is often compared to a tree. Its roots, said the Camel Man, are bitter but the fruits are very soft and sweet!

Knowing that at the end of patience there is always the sky and its intense clarity, Camel Man has long kept a stubborn silence about the letters of Ramissa and Ramis. In this respect he was following a desert proverb that says: He who has something to say does not speak. He is silent. One day, however, when the drought was especially severe, he refused to do like his old enemy (who was addressing himself to God). Instead he spoke to a woman well known for her wisdom, in these words: "I am like a mountain range whipped by erosion. I embody the implosion of time passing, deaf to the cough-ridden people of the night and to the tears of women enchanted by death. I do not know what I seek but I'm seeking something! I do not know what I did but I have lost my children.

"The woman supposedly told him:" Ask for milk from your camel, ask for a child from your wife, but ask for water from God alone". After several minutes of internal questioning she added: " If you do not like life in Africa, sing for the West: or better, do like the children of Africa a tour of Europe!"

It is not him but his children, you, me, all of us and especially my sisters and brothers in Africa who have followed, year after year, this enigmatic advice.

I, Hebekissa, live in Brussels. There is an abundance of water here. Very often God sends here tons and tons of rain. Once, one day, I was terrified by the idea that water, and the flow of young Africans, would dry up in this country, draped in greenery of great elegance. This terror raises other terrible but necessary questions. For example, what if the water becomes thirsty, what if the West brings fear again because of and to its own immigrants? And what if our nomadic loves destroy Love because I well know it is she who holds in her two hands the fragile door of madness of us all?

For me Hebekissa, the water is always thirsty; love stands against love, and these countries dreamed up by the West march in a direction counter to their dreams, which nonetheless impose themselves on others. Our malaises can only steep in unreal stories, can only burrow, walk, swell in these senseless tales, vanish in untranslatable books. And books, believe me, are sick of sleepless men.

O memory, do you still guard in your ravaged depths the scented sheets of our forgotten parchments! I do not know how to write this time absent from all time, time doubled, time present, these clearings full of silence's pathways, those nights bloated by erosion of the words without any grave, these words of love feeble-minded or lyrical, sumptuous dilapidated words in "life's bareness." I still am wounded by the sentences I write. The pages I cross out still complain of my sad sonnets, of my words hollow and obsolete.

Above all, do not turn way from those stories of women, of our nomadic loves, of our noises mistaken for the blowing wind, the roaring of the earth, the incessant and continuous tremors of the Horn of Lucia where I come from. With all these mottled noises I often tell myself that in this corner of Africa, the land itself is stricken with Alzheimer's disease!

But what doors do these noises open? The sounds are the keys in the hatchmarks of our lives, the sounds are the convulsions of the noises in the locks of our doubts, fermenting our steps more than opening our questions. The sounds are the lacerations, the plunges in our lives. They give a life its turns, its breaks, its curvatures (or else the tentacles of her heartbeat), their enthusiasms, her all-too-flat beats or else her rhythms as if (made) by an powerful and hilarious devil.

When you, readers, hear a voice like mine, one you did not know, your memory will dig in a heavy beat in its archives made of indignation, unjustified rejections as well as of blessed acceptance. The time we need to tell ourselves the sounds of the world-- who holds its keys? Are there any African noises different than the rifts of Europe, the growls of Asia and the bellowing of America? Think again, mad men and women! I do not know why but I am thinking about small emaciated men, about disfigured women and about kids harassed by a band of flies (these children do not have the strength nor the energy to wave free their eyelids) to tell myself that the rumors of famine in Ethiopia, of war in Darfur, reek of the sound of the beheading machetes of Rwanda, of the pestilence of Nazi concentration camps.

Were the heads of the murderers of thousands of Jews and of the *interahamwe* killers of Tutsis sealed off so as not to hear the sounds of life? Then, as so often, I return to the tales told by my mother, to the narratives of the desert without a testament, to the fabulous stories of the Camel Man, to his words whose meanings are at once trapped in and patched up by an intact and hideous liberty. I love to listen to her husky and sad voice. She is imaginary, and also a mad reality. For the Camel Man, the woman has since forever been the seed of infinite poetic mediation: "Where she stumbles, a verb sprouts. Where she speaks, expresses and exposes herself, she is a leap, a path that calls forth a path. She is a raft straddled by memory. She is the book at the book's threshold, the book bloodstained and lit by the outside world. "

For me, she is still nothing but a horse ridden by exile. Listen to me, these dim stories. Pay attention to these mad tales and destroy me, the many letters of impossible loves. Look around you, contemplate this city of Brussels. Immense is the Africa of my vast exile!

CHAPTER II

"She who has traveled" knows that the desert's roads of sound lead us to the love of silence. That the travelers of today discover nothing but their rough steps in a vibrant solitude. That they feel nothing but the wet smell of death and breathe distance by the light touch of the sand-covered everyday. "She who has traveled" knows that the testament of her happiness will be completed even before crossing this world full of starving jackals and wolves. That silence is too loud in the wake of lies so adored by men.

"She who has traveled" knows that life gives for pasture more than it shares with obedient and silent women. She is the one who loves stories written with a bloody pen, drawn with a pencil of fire, chained to the black ink of crime. Yet there is too much air in her life made up of sparkling enclaves.

"She who has traveled" knows that her life is a sad and mottled story of bits of suffering, dotted with tiny bright lights of joy. It is a life that looks like her lands of cooled lava and sand dunes bathed in the clarity of senseless light. One's legs are flayed there and reason sinks as if diving into nothingness. Yet there are too many holes in our layers of ozone and hope.

"She who has traveled" knows she is a woman of many cut lips, a mouth full of invective, of eyes at once sharp and rough, always on the edge of a precipice. She knows her courage makes her bleed as if a false birth, preventing her from speaking about life conceived and lost at once.

« She who has traveled" loves the dust on the earth, prefers shade to the clarity of things and the blood badly set on pieces of poor fabric, on paper where our lives are outlined.

Yet there is too much gold in her young life with its awful weather, its sways, its tears, its notches, splinters, its sufferings, its luminosities as well as its endless or fleeting joys.

Translated from the French.