

Portrait of an Unknown Girl

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An extract

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In the soft glow of the evening sun she crossed the courtyard with quick, light steps. That was how I first saw her, she had just moved into our apartment building and she didn't yet have a name to me. A few hours later a game ensued on our porch, a game that we, yesterday's children, actually were too old for, but fate, unresourceful as it is, though it was still favorable to me then, knew no better way to introduce us to each other.

I couldn't quite tell you the meaning of the game and why two players had to stand on the porch, while we were sitting on benches outside, and why, if I am not mistaken, we had to ask each other questions. What I do remember, and can even feel again, is how painfully sweet my chest grew tight, how my breath stopped when her hands followed the rules of the game and touched mine.

She had chosen me and I had to follow her. We returned shortly thereafter but only after the first time. When we were on the porch for the second time I forgot that we were playing a game and I forgot that the other children were waiting for us.

There was a brown scab of a healing wound on her knee which she mused with her fingers and I couldn't understand why the wound excited me so much, why I couldn't avert my eyes from her wound, from her knee and from the fingers and why I longed so much to touch the wound with my lips and feel the warm softness of her skin with my lips and to hold her fingers. But this of course was terribly, utterly unthinkable and impossible, it would never happen, I wouldn't dare doing such a thing, I lacked the courage to take half a step in her direction, I would hurt her forever, she would hate me and leave me immediately and never want to see me again, furthermore, she would always think of me in disgust and my heart would break either way; either when I would touch her or when she would leave.

The next morning there were classes at school and after school I immediately went to see her, without going home first. It was a day when the sun shone bright and piercing and this is no game of the memory that wants to insert a warm sun into every happy day from a distant past, so radiant and unusual for these surroundings that you could see that it is alien even without checking the label for its origin. I rang the bell and she answered the door. For some reason she was surprised that I came to her house when we had met just yesterday. And I was surprised that she had changed within one day and somehow had become even more beautiful. And while I had to catch my breath from ecstatic excitement, she was so familiar to me, that I had the feeling that I had known her for years.
