

## The Eleusinian Mystery

When I was a child, I would spin around so fast, and for so long that I would fall on the ground and watch the world still continue to spin above me, feeling dizzily elated, as though I was a god who could make the entire sky turn and topple over at my own volition. That's how I am feeling now, except I've been laying on the ground for I don't know how long and everything just keeps spinning around and around and I'm smiling like a fool but for some reason I just cannot remember myself, to bring myself to care about my reputation, family, whatever I'm supposed to care about. I raise my arms so my hands are right in front of my eyes, and I can't stop giggling because my hands are shaking and I do not know why.

It takes a considerable amount of effort to register everything in my view: *There are people around, lots of them, so I think it's the middle of the day, but everything is weirdly shadowy, and that big white thing is the moon, so it must be the middle of the night.* Its glow casts an enrapturing light that makes every brick, every blade of grass, every hair of each animal and person seem as though they are draped with a layer of translucent, white silk. It strikes me all at once, the magnificent beauty of it all, as if I woke up in a painting, glorious and elaborate on the surface, with a quiet beauty hidden in every brushstroke. And while paintings have never particularly roused me, the scene appeals to something so essential and irrevocable in me: the fact that we are here now, and will never be here again. All the beauty and loveliness and emotion struck into a singular moment because everything is constantly shifting, morphing into a new painting before you have time to appreciate the one before.

Apart from the moon, there is one other source of light that I can register; a torch, bright and smouldering next to a building which looks like a great hall, or a sanctuary. Realisations occur to me one by one, like water being gathered at the end of a steadily flowing stream. I haven't eaten; I haven't slept; something is wrong, and I know this as if it is one of those simple facts I've accepted since childhood. But somehow I feel content with it, this feeling of unequivocal *wrongness*, as if being wrong or right aren't moral opposites, but just two equal truths. I can hear something ringing. My head feels dull and heavy. I am desperately sick.

I lean forward slowly, taking measured breaths, trying to remember myself. My hair falls around my shoulders, and I notice how it's matted and darkened with something sticky and faintly sour. I grab a fistful and press it to my face. The taste of wine and barley in the back of my throat. But there is something else, something that makes lights sparkle in front of me, bolts of lightning in the middle of a desolate ocean. I exhale shakily, and look at my hand again. Blood. I watch the warm, sanguine liquid trickle down my hand, tracing the wrinkles on my palm. I close my fist and open it again and I feel like I am watching everything in slow motion, for the first time, as if I am a child who has just learned how to walk. I stand up unsteadily and take a breath of the harsh, wintry air. Where I am from, summer dips into autumn so sharply that one day I go to bed with my clothes still damp to remain cool, and the next I would have to don my thick woollen cloak or catch a severe chill. I grab my mud-stained skirts and thoughtlessly stumble to the light by the building, like a moth to a flame.

My cousin pretends to not see me coming over to her but when I'm only a couple of feet away, she grabs onto me with a surprisingly overwhelming force that causes me to fall right into her, pressing her against the cold stone wall.

She shoves me away with annoyance. "Where have you been this whole time? I saw you lying on the grass about an hour ago. You looked like an idiot."

I giggle nervously. I am grinning, and she is looking at me half-annoyed and half genuinely concerned, but I can't bring myself to stop, or even to be embarrassed.

I close my eyes, and instantaneously, I can hear voices. They are repeating the same thing over and over again, getting louder, and I am not sure where they are coming from, or even *if* they are coming from anywhere, because I cannot tell what is part of my imagination. By degrees I become aware of what they were saying; but as soon as I try to make sense of it, the pieces rearrange themselves, the string of words becomes tangled beyond comprehension. *Fasted, drunk, working, kiste, back, I have, I have, I have, now, calathus.* I open my eyes and steady myself. I feel as though I am standing on the edge of a very tall building, being drawn towards the inevitable ending. That place not so far in the distance. My eyes are blurry as if a sheet of film has been placed over them, making everything have an ethereal, dreamlike quality that I, in the giddy, dazed state that I am in, find very, very beautiful.

How could I describe what happened next? If you had seen only a painting of the ocean, or the image of one delicately woven into a tapestry, would you be able to know what it would truly be like? The cold shock of the water, the wind catching in your hair, salt pervading each crevice of your skin, would you truly know those things for what they were, just because somebody told you it was like that? Would you know how you would feel at that moment, would you be disappointed if, when you experienced it for yourself, you felt completely different things altogether? The emotions I felt seemed so detached, yet so undeniably connected to what was happening, what I could see, or hear, or reach out and touch, that it seems no use describing them, because if you experienced what I did, I am sure you would feel completely different ones. I was standing in the middle of a net, every possible decision I have made, or could have made, every inevitable thing that had happened to me, all branching out, weaving in and out of each other, so delicate and intricate it made me dizzy. I felt the culmination of it all which such an intense, vital life force, that I was sure there was something real, a monster perhaps, or a malevolent apparition, pulling me towards the edge, towards an unavoidable string of events; I do not quite know how I got here, and I will never be here again. The edges teeter out, shadowy and cold. There is the end. I am closer and closer to it. When I finally saw it in front of my eyes, hard and objective, I felt nothing at all.