

THE scepter must be held in the right hand, erect; you must never, never put it down, and for that matter you would have no place to put it: there are no tables beside the throne, or shelves, or stands to hold, say..., a glass, an ashtray, a telephone.

High, at the top of steep and narrow steps, the throne is isolated;

You are the king; everything you desire is already yours. You have only to lift a finger and you are brought food, drink, chewing gum, toothpicks, cigarettes of every brand, all on a silver tray. When you feel sleepy, the throne is comfortable, you have only to close your eyes and relax against the back, while apparently maintaining your usual position. As for your corporal needs, the throne has an opening, like any respecting throne; twice a day they come to change the pot. More frequently, if it stinks.

In short, everything is foreordained to spare you any movement whatsoever. If you rise, if you take even a few steps, if you lose sight of the throne for an instant, who can guarantee that when you return you will not find someone else sitting on it? Perhaps someone who resembles you, identical to you.

There is the problem of stretching the legs ; to be sure, this is a serious inconvenience. But you can always kick, raise your knees, huddle up on the throne, sit there Turkish-fashion. Every evening those charged with the washing of the feet arrive and take off your boots for a quarter-hour, in the morning the deodorizing squad rubs.

The eventuality of your being seized with carnal desires has also been foreseen. Carefully chosen and trained court ladies, from the sturdiest to the most slender, are at your disposal.

In sum, the throne, once you have been crowned, is where you had best remain seated, without moving, day and night. All your previous life has been only a waiting to become king; now you are king; you have only to reign.

And what is reigning if not this long wait? Waiting for the moment when you will be deposed, when you will have to take leave of the throne, the scepter, the crown, and your head.

The hours are slow to pass; in the throne room the lamp light is always the same. You listen to time flowing by. Kings do not have watches. You have only to prick up your ears in order to recognize the sounds of the palace, which change from hour to hour: The palace is a clock : it's ciphered sound follow the course of the sun.

If the sound are repeated in the customary order, at the proper intervals, you can be reassured, your reign is in no danger : for the moment, for this hour, for this day still.

For you the days are a succession of sounds, some distinct, some almost imperceptible ; you have learned to distinguish them, to evaluate their provenance and their distance ; you know their order, you know how long the pauses last; you anticipate it in your imagination; if it is late in being produced, you grow impatient.

The palace is the ear of the king.

The court is full of enemies, so that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish them from friends.

While your palace remains unknown to you and unknowable, you can try to reconstruct it bit by bit, locating every shuffle, every cough at a point in space, imagining walls around each acoustical sign, ceilings, pavements, giving form to the void in which the sounds spread, allowing the sounds themselves to prompt the images.

The palace is a weft of regular sounds, always the same, like the heart's beat, from which other sounds stand out, discordant, unexpected.

Does some story link one sound to another ? You can not stop looking for a meaning.

And if there is a story, does that story concern you ?

Prisoner of a cage of cyclical repetitions, listen with hope to every note that upsets the suffocating rhythm.

Perhaps the threat comes more from the silences than from the sounds.

Near the throne there is an angle of the wall from which sometime you hear a kind of reverberation : distant blows, like knocking at a door. Is there someone rapping on the other side of the wall ?

Blows that emerge from a dark profundity, yes, from below ; a knocking that rises from underground.

Are these raps signals ?

Do not become obsessed with the noises of the palace, unless you wish to be snared in them as in a trap.

Go out ! Run away ! Outside the palace spreads the city, the capital of the realm, your realm !

You have become king not to possess this sad and dark palace, but the city, various and clamorous, with its thousand voices!

There was a voice, a song, a woman's voice that from time to time the breeze carried all the way up here to you from some open window ; there was a love song that on summer nights the air brought you in bursts, and the moment you seemed to have grasped some note of it, it was already lost, and you were never sure you had really heard it and had not simply imagined it, desired to hear it, the dream of a woman's voice singing in the nightmare of your long insomnia. It has been a long time since you felt yourself attracted by something, perhaps since the time when all your powers became concentrated on conquering the throne. But all you remember that devoured you is your persistence against the enemies to overcome, which did not allow you to desire or imagine anything else.

And when in the darkness a woman's voice is released in singing, invisible at the still of an unlighted window, then all of a sudden thoughts of life come back to you : your desires find an object.

What is it ? Not that song, not that woman, whom you have never seen : you are attracted by that voice as a voice, as it offers itself in song.

That voice comes certainly from a person, unique, inimitable like every person. The voice, too, is unique and inimitable : they might not resemble each other, voice and person. Or else, they could resemble each other in a secret way : the voice could be the equivalent of the hidden and most genuine part of the person.

Is it a bodiless you that listens to that bodiless voice ?

A voice means this : there is a living person, throat, chest, feelings, who sends into the air this voice, different from all other voice.

Are you trying to imagine the woman who sings ?

it is best for you to stick to the voice, resist the temptation to run outside the palace and explore the city street by street until you find the woman who is singing. But it is impossible to restrain you. You would like your listening to be heard by her, you would like to be voice too, heard by her as you hear her.

Too bad you cannot sing. If you had know how to sing, perhaps your life would have been different, happier ; or sad with a different sadness, a harmonious melancholy. Perhaps you would not have felt the need to become king.

Now you would not find yourself here, on this creaking throne, peering at shadows.

Buried deep within yourself, perhaps your true voice exists.

The man you are or have been or could be, the you that no one knows, would be revealed in that voice.

Try, concentrate, summon your secret strength. Now ! No, that will not do. Try again, do not be disheartened.

Ah, there! Now : miracle ! It is you who are singing, no doubt about it : this is your voice, which you can listen to at last without alienation or irritation.

But too many sounds intrude, frantic, piercing ferocious : her voice disappears, stifled by the roar of death that invades the outside, or that perhaps reechoes inside you. You have lost her, you are lost.

The life of voices was a dream, perhaps it lasted only a few seconds, as dreams last, while outside the nightmare continues.

You realize that being king is of no use for anything. Your every attempt to get out of the cage is destined to fail. For you there is only the palace, do not let your attention stray from them even for an instant ; the moment you are distracted, this space you have constructed around yourself to contain and watch over your fears will be destroyed, torn to pieces. while you were intent on listening to voice, the conspirators have exploited the lapse of vigilance in order to unleash the revolt.

Around you there is no longer a palace.

Where are you ? Are you still alive ? Did the secret stairway afford you an avenue of escape ?

The city has exploded in flames and shouts. The city crumples like a burning page.

Run, without crown, without scepter ; no one will realize that you are the king.

There is no night darker than a night of fires.

There is no man more alone than one running in the midst of a howling mob.

You gasp, you gasp and under the dark sky only your gasping is heard. Why are the frogs quiet now ?

No, there they begin again. A dog barks... Stop. The dogs answer one another from a distance.

For some time you have been walking in thick darkness, you have lost all notion of where you might be.

You prick up your ears. There is someone else gasping like you. Where ? The night is all breathing.

You do not know which of these breaths is yours. You no longer know how to listen.

There is no longer anyone listening to anyone else. Only the night listens to itself.

If you raise your eyes, you will see a glow.

Above your head the imminent morning is brightening the sky: that breath against your face is the wind stirring the leaves.

You are outside again, the birds wake, the colors return on the world's surface, things reoccupy space, living beings again give signs of life.

And surely you are also here, in the midst of it all, in the teeming noises that rise on all sides.

Somewhere, in a fold of the earth, the city is reawakening, with a slamming, a hammering, a creaking that grows louder. Now a noise, a rumble, a roar occupies all space, absorbs all sighs, calls, sobs....