

The Illuminations of the Night

They lay very close together in bed and Konrad could feel the warm thighs of his wife Gerda. The warmth of her smooth skin broke on his fuzzy leg hairs which were pressed gently back onto his skin. Taken at their most literal, hairs were an obstacle between people. But they were also something which stopped things going too smoothly. That would be boring in the long run anyway, he thought.

The light from the street lamp fell through the gaps in the blinds onto the bed covering him as if in a zebra skin. Konrad couldn't feel this light. Apparently it was just there. Maybe you can't feel it because it doesn't make any difference, he thought. Maybe you only feel what's important and the useless things are restricted to the surface of the visible? If he continued taking in the hefty tomes from Merleau-Ponty about the 'Visible and the Invisible' for much longer he would begin to forget who he was. However interesting this philosophical junk was, in one way it destroyed something. Speculations about seeing and feeling while he was lying in bed with his wife. If it goes on like this, he thought, I'll soon go crazy. Then, I think, I'll have lost my sanity, my senses and my sensuality. It's starting again. Enough.

Konrad was getting hot. He felt the heat between his skin and Gerda's creeping slowly upwards. His limbs became tense and hard. Sometimes he had a feeling of going mad. He saw the world through blinkers, his film tore. To close my eyes and to be at peace just once, he thought. Tired of the visible world, that's how he expressed it, because he didn't give a fig for pseudo-scientific formulations especially applied to himself. To consider himself as an object of research was his speciality. Only sometimes the object and the subject didn't quite fit together and a seam remained open. A crack through which senselessness poured in. That happened when you lost contact with the world. Often it was seeing itself which was the cause. *Looking at what is there obscures the view. Real seeing is visionary.* Fragments of sentences raced through his mind. And that while he lay closely nestled up his wife Gerda. The wife he loved and desired. And that wasn't a vision or anything else - as apparent to him as it would be for a blind man? Was it so obviously apparent. Or more? Or less? In any case something was about to happen, his chances not bad

that she wanted what he wanted. Just so long he wasn't distracted by his crazy mind games.

It was only now that Konrad noticed Gerda was breathing slowly and evenly. He jerked open his eyes to make sure if Gerda was already asleep. From very near he squinted at her face. Strips of light ran over it. She had her eyes closed. He wanted to find out if she was awake or asleep. But however wide he opened his eyes he couldn't see it. At least, not for certain. In order to find out if she's asleep you have to go about it some other way, he thought. You have to notice it, perhaps by listening to her breathing or feeling the tension in her limbs. You have to feel it or something. But just by looking you will never be sure unless she opens her eyes. At that moment Gerda's eyelids moved slowly and gently upwards, and she looked into Konrad's shocked face.

-Your eyes are two huge mirrors, she murmured. But right now I don't want to look at myself in them because I want to be myself and maybe with you. A light really went on in Konrad's head. Reflection as a relationship to yourself originates in a model based on the mirror. A mirror shows me to myself without the participation of any of the other senses. Reflections are pure seeing. As a sighted person I confirm my existence in the mirror's reflection. Which is why something which is only apparently there can confirm being. And vampires, the un-dead and hybrid beings are invisible in a mirror. That's it. What do I mean, that's it. What is what, he thought. How does someone who is blind relate to themselves? The mirror gives you proof that you are a unity separate from the world. The mirror separates us from the world and the reflection does as well. If I could stop reflecting just this once, I wouldn't be lying alone and paralysed next to my wife but connected to the world at many points and in different ways. My edges snug to the edges of the world, like my legs on hers. Not separated by a crack. The mirror is like the hair on my legs, he thought. An obstacle, a separator.

- The blind are not blind. They hear, taste, touch, feel. Only the sighted can be blind. Why did Gerda say that now. Did she know her husband so well? And was it meant metaphorically or literally?

- Did you see the blind man today, she asked.

- Oh, yes, in the pedestrian zone, Konrad remembered now. Of course, that's why he had a ringing in his head. The blind man had gone straight towards one of those horrible concrete plant containers and from some distance away both of them had been rooted to the spot and had stared at him. Should they call out to him? At the last second the man had avoided it as if he had known it was there. How did something like that happen? They hadn't talked about it afterwards, but somehow it seemed to occupy Gerda's thoughts as well.

-Why do blind people see more? The blind are able to see the invisible as well. It's as simple as that.

Gerda surprised him again and again. He struggled with difficulty with his ideas which were seldom fruitful, often petered out half way through, like an apple tree which grew and prospered but bore no apples that could be picked. For her, original insights just fell from the sky. And Konrad admired her for this. His mother had once said to him: why do it the easy way when you can find a more complicated one? Really, why did he use so much determination to work himself into a labyrinth of ideas? Wasn't it easier to simply be in the world - and stay there.

- Only a blind person can find the way out of a real labyrinth, whispered Gerda, and closed her eyes again. Remember J.L. Borges and remember the blind monk in Eco's "The Name of the Rose", the one who ate the book on comedy page by page and went in and out of a library which was a maze of winding passages.

-The model for the figure of the blind monk was Borges, Konrad wanted to reply because at the time he had read it somewhere. But he didn't because he felt that it wasn't appropriate somehow. It was. But it didn't make sense.

- A seer is almost always blind, she added and snuggled with justifiable pleasure at being in bed. Didn't you notice that?

At that Konrad forgot everything he had been thinking about in the previous ten minutes, closed his eyes and gave Gerda a long kiss. Her lips were soft, but soft and firm.

And because you can only kiss and make love with closed eyes, he didn't want to open them again. So he kept them closed and determined not to open them. He slipped a hand under Gerda's night dress and laid it on her hip. He intended to concentrate all his attention in his finger tips. He stroked her back gently and tried,

tried what? Tried to read her. I've never seen her in this light, I mean, felt, he thought. He was standing on the threshold of a new world and it was calling to him. It offered him a possibility of how to live. Could one see this world as a gift? He felt his wife beside him and shortly after it was no longer necessary for him to concentrate on keeping his eyes closed. His eye lids lay quiet and relaxed.

The first time he was tempted to open his eyes was when he wanted to light a cigarette. But Gerda found his decision entertaining, so she lit the cigarette and stuck it in his mouth. Even when he scattered ash over the bed and bed-side table because his hand couldn't remember where the ashtray was from one time to the next, she found it funny.

- And it will come to be that my ashes will also be scattered thus, he intoned with solemnity.

Of course, when he had inhaled in the past and often closed his eyes because he felt a connection between inner depth and darkness. The more he drew on the cigarette, the deeper went the soft warmth, the plump cloud of nicotine in his chest. Right down to his pelvis.

In order not to bother Gerda, he pulled himself together not to go to the toilet again before he fell asleep. Suddenly he remembered how, as a child, his mother had teased him every night when he was already on the way to his room.

- Don't forget, she called after him, and he turned quickly waiting for an instruction or admonition, but anyway with the open curiosity of a child. Don't forget, to close your eyes when you go to sleep, she continued after a pause. One of his mother's foibles were jokes like that.

When you close your eyes it's always black at first, he thought. But when you sleep and dream it's not black at all. Do blind people see black or nothing at all? What would that be like, to see nothing at all? What would it look like, this absolutely nothing. Is it dark, or is it simply not there? Not, a peculiar word. The no-thing doesn't allow itself to be seen, he thought. But what is it then, if we can't see it? We can see when something is missing, of course. When I come home from the office in the evening and Gerda is not there. I can see that. I can see it immediately. I can see it even as I'm parking the car in front of the house. I see it from the fact that the light in the living room is not switched on. There's still the possibility that she is

already in bed. Although the chances of that are very small because Gerda can't fall asleep without me being there. Really. So I can see immediately that she isn't there, even when I don't always see why she isn't. Gerda sometimes does something and I don't see why and I don't want to see why. I don't find that particularly considerate of her, thought Konrad. But so what. In the end you can only look back. Looking back. Looking forward, Fore-seeing. Strangely enough everything has to do with seeing.

Then he slept. With closed eyes, as normal. He dreamed of a holiday with Gerda on a white sandy beach. Gerda, tanned, lay in a colourful deck chair. The sea was blue. The sun warmed his skin and everything was just wonderful. He had on a pair of yellow swimming shorts with three black dots. As the sun sank lower, the sky took on many colours. Red, yellow, orange, a thin green stripe and violet. his swimming shorts were uncomfortable. He really wanted to take them off. But on the other hand he really didn't have the courage to lie naked on the beach.

When Konrad woke up in the morning he immediately remembered his vow and kept his eyes tightly shut. Points of light shot through the black. He wanted to remember the kiss of the night with gratitude.

- Wake up, Konrad, look how sunny it is. Gerda poked him on the shoulder.

- I'm already awake.

- But your eyes are still closed.

- I can feel the sun shining and it's nice. It warms the air, but only special layers.

Others are still cool and brush over my skin.

- You're crazy.

Gerda got out of bed and went into the kitchen. She heard Konrad bump into the door post and swear. He tottered tentatively into the kitchen, his hands, stiff and tapping, stretched out in front of him. He felt for a chair, pulled it out and sat down slowly.

- Bear with me in this dark hour, he asked his wife. He wasn't capable of doing anything for himself with closed eyes. Gerda spread the butter on a roll for him and poured the coffee. Afterwards she guided him onto the balcony where he sat silently on the ground.

- Bring me a scarf and tie it over my eyes, he requested. They don't want to stay shut any more and then I would break my word. Gerda brought a soft silk scarf, put

it over his eyes and bound the ends behind his head. The material still bore traces of her perfume. He cowered on the balcony in silence. After two or three hours he began to panic. He didn't know how Gerda looked any more. He had forgotten his wife's face. After so short a time. Not even half a day. It was unbelievable. He jumped up and wanted to run to her. He stumbled and fell headlong. *No sighted person will ever enter this world.* What kind of sentence was that. Where did it come from, a fairy tale?

- Let me touch your face he pleaded. I need a partner otherwise I feel so alone.

Gerda squatted beside him. He felt her face, stroked hair off her forehead, nuzzled around her ears and touched her lips. Then he became an explorer and brushed the little nub at the corner of her eye, pushed her lips open and stuck his fingers in her nostrils. He had to laugh.

- Another and quite different woman, it's amazing.

- You don't have to prove anything to me, said Gerda. She opened the knot in the scarf and took it off. Then she kissed him, and it didn't matter to her that he had his eyes open and was staring at her.

- And? Résumé?, she asked laughing.

- What can you say about blindness when you can see, answered Konrad, that it's a wonder that you can get through life without eyes, and that we, with our eyes wrenched wide open, almost miss out on how the world sounds, smells and tastes. Somehow that was a conclusion to which he had come, Konrad found.

- Can you remember the dialogue in the 'Stadt der Engel' he asked. When Nicholas Cage asks another angel if anyone had ever seen him.

Gerda shrugged.

- Yes, in a supermarket, he was told. A blind woman behind me asked me to give her a packet of salt from the shelf. Cage doesn't understand and says: but she didn't see you. Don't you understand, replied the other. She felt that I was there.

- Well, said Gerda, Maybe angels are more real than we believe.

Bernd Liepold-Mosser, May 1999.