

Women in the shadows

Maria Mercè Roca

"Meanwhile my wife withered away, because a woman who doesn't feel loved wilts. The years treated her more cruelly than others. I never told her that I liked her, that she was good-looking. I never showed her that I wanted her. In bed I was afraid she would notice I was thinking of someone else. I destroyed her life, and yet she never stopped loving me."

"When she died, we were both fifty, just a few months apart. She had to go to the hospital. She was only there a couple of days, it all happened so fast. She was under sedation and slept a lot, but once she opened her eyes for a moment, looked at me with her eyes a bit glazed, and suddenly said out of a clear blue sky, 'You still love her, don't you? You still love my sister. I held her hands and began to cry with my head on her arm, because she was dying on me, because it turned out she knew all along and had never said a thing, and because she was dying... and I couldn't turn back and make things right or ask her forgiveness. The next day she slipped into a coma and died early in the morning. And I haven't slept since."

"I cried a lot in my bereavement, but I couldn't stop thinking about her sister. I couldn't do anything about it, everything led to thoughts about her, a desire for her that was even freer now with my wife out of the way. Four months later I insisted once more and this time she said yes. She was no longer young, and I had chased after her for so long! She said yes, and we lived together for six months, between her place and mine, in order to keep up appearances. I had desired her so much, I had imagined and dreamed so often that I had her, that we shared the same bed, the same meals, the same secrets...we embraced...and all that pent up desire melted rapidly away. I had invented her in my mind; I had made her as I imagined she was, as I wanted her to be. That craving for sex with her, at my age, disappeared fast. Our conversations languished, and I realized that all those years I had been pursuing a dream, a thing that didn't exist, a fantasy. It wasn't her fault, she was simply being herself all that time. It was my fault for having invented her to suit my own tastes. Furthermore, the memory of my wife was always there, between us, even though we never mentioned her. Sometimes the memory of her, now that she was dead, took on the proportions of a sacrilege. I requested early retirement, I bought an apartment here and started to work nights, first in another hotel, and now for the past eight years in this one. I haven't seen her again since then. I spend a lot of time reading...books keep me company. And I think. I often wonder what my life would have been like without my obsession for that woman. It would have been a peaceful life. I even think my wife might not have died, because I've heard that cancer more easily attacks people who suffer and are sad... I'm mortified when I think about those things. At night there's time for everything."

ROCA, Maria Mercè, *Women in the shadows*. Traducció inèdita.
Traduït per John L. Getman