

At Night I Hear Them Dying
Translated by Alain Régnier

I live someplace where, at night, I hear the mice that are dying. Snap. Snap. They don't make any noise except for sometimes, they get caught by the tail and run around with the thing following them. I'm scared to see them running or dying. If I have to go pee, I put my hand in front of my face and I sing *scat, scat, scat, I'm the cat*, even if it's not true, we don't have a pet. It's just to make them even more scared. I wonder if you can die from being scared or lose all your hair or have them all turn grey. Titi says that all of her grey hairs are because of me, when I'm not happy. I don't know how she can be not happy when I'm the one who isn't, that is to say, leave me in peace with my suffering.

Our house isn't very, very clean. It smells strong of coffee, dust, incense and alfalfa. The furniture is caved in with the shape of our bums (small in my case, I always have the same place on the loveseat), the dirt from the plants is spilled, the glasses have fingerprints on them, and there are bits of stuff on the plates when you take them out of the cupboard, like little turds from who knows what. Titi is very careful to respect the cleanliness of the outside, however, because it's important, the river that's clear is always more tempting than the one that's gross. If I say this, it's for a good reason: in the village, the two rivers end by joining up one next to the other; one half runs clear and the other half runs brown with a plain split down the middle. Our place is situated just after they join, just after the brown has browned its other half, and needless to say which side I prefer.

I like the coolness of nature when it is beautiful, and to go swimming.

At school, they ask me: who is your mother, who is your father. I myself have no idea, I have Titi and that's about it. I've never asked her what she is, I'm too shy, and it's a funny question to ask, I find. All that I know is that she's been there all the way back since the time that I can't remember anymore. I don't know if she put one of her breasts in my mouth when I was a young baby for milk or something, but I saw that in a catalogue the other day and it makes me feel strange to think about it, with Titi. I don't know if she made me or if she wanted me to exist in life or anything. I've never called her Maman or Papa like the others, at school, with the ones who come to get them. Titi raises me anyhow, she gets mad at me, she gives me things, kisses, she talks to me and she does the cleaning. On some nights, she pulls at her hair and she yells that she's going to go for good. I imagine that this is something that mothers and fathers often do.

Also, the thing is that we don't have a man in the house, contrary to custom. Titi says that we never need a man to do what we're able to do for ourselves, that is to say, but I think (and this isn't to hurt her or to contradict her) that it has to do with if you're pretty or not, because the other feminine types in the village have men at home and they're very sublime, I find. I wouldn't want Titi to know that I said this, she would cry while listening to very slow songs like prayers

that I don't understand. But I can't lie anymore if she asks what I think, otherwise we'll fight. I never lie except for once or twice, where I have to, as punishment, to deprive the fish that Titi has caught of their heads while they're still wriggling (so that they won't suffocate too long). A fish is extremely slippery, and when the heart comes out of the hole in the neck that's been cut inadvertently and is still beating on its own, that makes me feel very sick, and I'm not really ready to start over.

That's why I'll be honest: I like the milk that's three point twenty-five the most and I'd like to eat two ripened avocados a day, thank you very much.

The roads here are made of dirt, like in the old days they say. People other than us spend their lives looking for gold nuggets deep inside Planet Earth to get rich, and there are almost never any avocados at the supermarket (but lots of meat from killed animals). Titi and me, we watch the Moon grow and we imagine biting into her when she is big and juicy, to make her lose weight, and it always works. We decorate the windows with tree branches that wilt, fall and become the dried up strips of a burial shroud that we don't sweep up. We look at catalogues from other places, which is how we know that here isn't the same as elsewhere. Here, we're all alone in the world, it seems like. Over there, things seem more soft and gentle than here, and I'm sure it's less colder than hell in the winter. But in the summer we're happy. We don't wear a bathing suit when we go for a soak. The adult swimmers who go by there get mad at us, they start petitions and want to call the police. Titi defends us, she answers back that we shouldn't teach children to be ashamed of the body, that the human is beautiful and that its attributes, sexual or not, are there to exist. They don't ever listen, the adult swimmers, ever, and when Titi has it up to her neck with their racket, she makes dolls that she sticks with pins while saying all of their names (that I can't remember) and I like this very much.

I myself don't have many sexual attributes, if I compare myself to others (if sexual attributes are especially boobs, in my case, my boobs are not really growing and don't knock together much).

In the fall, we hunt and we peel apples since I'm allergic to the skin, even without poison on it. My boots, which I call *my little canadas* because it makes Titi laugh, are all splattered with mud and are good for kicking rocks and bringing in wood, like those of all honest persons, of the male race or not.

Soon, it will be winter. I don't like it, we have to get everything ready, make so many jars of pickles, tomatoes, thick soups that Titi likes and disgusting pork tongues! Soon, the fire will dance in the chimney, it will be Christmas and I won't have any gift because Titi isn't for aggressive capitalism. I'll wait for this song that I like on the radio and hope that Titi won't turn the volume down right in the middle of it. It goes *silenna, hollina, ohhhhhh is comme, ohhhhhh is bra*, if I'm not mistaken. We will walk in the streets pale brown and white with our fake furs like tamers of snow wolves and people will avoid talking to us. Titi will have a small drink once or

twice and after I'll have to clean her nostrils, her mouth and her hair all during the night, with a rag.

— I'm bad bad I'm useless, she'll say.

— No you're good, you're good, Titi, I'll answer.