

CHAMULA

**Translated by
Walter Leonard**

I had to travel further south. I had a good breakfast and took a local bus. I reached a village celebrating its annual festival, for Santa Rosa. There was the occasional tourist and a lot of natives. I left the village and followed a road. Some children came up to ask for money. The countryside was very green. I was dressed all in black with a turtleneck jersey. I was scared of getting dengue fever from mosquito bites. I felt great, for the first time since I set out on my trip, I was happy in my own company, safe. I pulled off my jersey, to hell with dengue, I was tired of being afraid. Having left the village quite a way behind, I crossed paths with a woman laden with firewood. I asked her where the road led and she said to another village but that it was a long way off. I decided to return. I was wandering off too far.

When I reached the village I entered a church, I had to pay, I got annoyed with the man at the door, I'd never paid to enter a church before. Tourists were not allowed into the far end of the church, the locals were making offerings and you weren't allowed to intrude on their sacraments. I had a very dark sensation. Someone came up behind me and began to explain why they worshipped their saints with soft drinks lined up in front of their knees. "They offer drinks in exchange for favours. They make vows", he told me. They drank and belched.

“There was a sacrifice a while ago, smoke everywhere, so much tension that a tourist fainted and had to be carried out. They’ve gone to the mausoleum to make another sacrifice”. I moved away from him because I didn’t like guides. “You have a very strong character,” he said, approaching me again. “I don’t want a guide,” I answered.

I left the church and went in search of the mausoleum. I asked but no one knew where it was. I ended up at the cemetery. It was at the top of a slope among some very tall trees. I looked around, there was no one, no celebration, no sacrifice, nothing. It began to bucket down with rain so I slipped on my jersey. Two guys in a pickup truck said they’d give me a lift down to the village. I looked at them. It was raining heavily, I said okay, got into the pickup, they drove me down to the village, I said thanks and got out. I took shelter under the awning of a shop that sold a little of everything. I bought a banana and sat on a chair to eat it. The rain poured and didn’t look like stopping. The locals looked at me like just another tourist though with a certain curiosity at my being alone. I sensed a certain disdain towards the tourists, a disdain I hadn’t seen in other parts of the country. Here they were less servile, more abrupt, not so friendly. Proud and very poor. They saw you as an intruder.

I returned to the church, I wanted to know where they were carrying out the sacrifices. Years ago I had seen some fairly barbaric sacrifices in another country. I’d watched them kill animals before their gods while they prayed and shouted. All around the ground was stained red. Blood was everywhere.

I entered the church, drawn to the darkness. It was an intense place. I approached the guide and told him I hadn’t found the mausoleum. He told me to wait, he was attending to two other tourists. A couple, countrymen. I sat on a bench and waited. He came over and sat at my side. He told me the couple would probably want to see the sacrifices as well and said we’d wait for them so we could all go together. We could also go and see a shaman he knew who was very powerful. Even people with Aids had visited him. He was very old and

very renowned. People from all over the country came to visit him.

He made me wait a while longer, I saw him take his leave of the couple at the door. I got up and went over. "In the end they've decided not to come," he said. "Do you want to go?" he asked. "Yes." "I don't know... looks like rain again," he said looking at the sky. It had stopped raining. I looked at the sky and said nothing. "All right, let's give it a shot," he said. We walked up towards the road I had strolled along when I first arrived. I thought I had better go to the toilet before going off anywhere. I asked him to wait outside for me, gave a coin to the woman at the door and went inside. I came out, he was still there waiting for me. "Is he a good shaman?" I asked. "Yes, he is. His daughter isn't. He has a daughter who also has powers but she's not good. He is. He's good." "If he's not good, I don't want to meet him," I said. We began walking along the road. I'd already been up it, I told him. We left the last of the houses behind. "Where does the shaman live?" I asked. "Outside the village. He has lots of children and several wives. All the women want to be with him. The village people are jealous of him so he's had to move away... Have you come on your own?" he asked. "Yes. I've been travelling for two weeks." "Are you staying in town?" "Yes." "Where?" I didn't want him to know where, why did he want to know? "In a hotel in the centre." "I'm thinking it would be better to go and see the shaman first which is that way, and then we'll come back and go to the mausoleum," he said. "Won't the sacrifices be over by the time we get back?" "No, they go on until evening." I looked towards where the shaman lived. There was no house in sight. Just countryside. "Is it very far to where he lives?" "Do you see the cross on the top of that hill?" "Yes." "Right there." It wasn't so far, you could see it from where we were standing. I wanted to go. Maybe he'd be able to cure my lovesickness. "Come on," I said, and we turned off the road down a small, narrow pathway. "What's the shaman called?" I asked. "Manuel." We made our way through the outlying vegetable fields. There was no one around. "Where are you from?" he asked me. "Spain," I said. He had fairly short dark hair, indigenous features, was very gaunt, more or less my height. He was wearing beige trousers and a jersey of odd-shaped blue and white squares. "Why aren't

you wearing a guide's badge with your photo on it?" I asked. "I've got one but I never wear it, everyone in the village knows me. I'm a state guide, I work for the Tourist Board. Come, this way," he replied. I felt fine, self-assured, confident. I liked him, trusted him. He wasn't clingy or a pain. "If you get tired and want to return, just say and we'll turn back. That's okay by me," he said. "It's a pleasure taking you. I took a German girl once and she never stopped asking me questions. You don't ask anything. She was all the time asking where it was and how much longer it would take." I half smiled. We passed by a well. He told me that was where they washed the sacrificial offerings, and that's where they threw the remains and the knives. The well was pitch black. "You keep up a good pace. Do you practice sports?" "Karate," I told him. I walked behind him, following him for my own ease of mind, so he wouldn't stare at me. We began to climb towards the cross, the slope was quite steep. When we got to the top he said he was tired, that he was going to sit down for a while, that I was much fitter than he was. I remained standing. He sat under the cross. "Is it far? Where's the house?" "There, behind that small mountain," he said. And he gave a sideways glance at the village. We were a fair way off by now. I didn't like that look. "Do you want us to go back?" he asked politely. "No, let's go on," I said. All I could think of was the shaman. The shaman and my lovesickness.

We walked down the slope from the cross following a narrow path into a valley nestling among hills. It wasn't as green as the outlying vegetable fields we passed earlier, the land was ploughed. I still walked behind him, at a safe distance and a steady pace. He looked back several times, as if to check whether anyone was coming. We walked in silence. The village was now out of sight. Half way through the valley he told me the shaman's house was just on the other side. "Behind that mountain. We can skirt round it by following the road, or cross it taking a shortcut through the woods. It's up to you," he said. I'd always been terrified of woods and this one was dense. "Let's stick to the road," I replied. We took a few steps and I thought of my fear, of how tired I was of being afraid. "Let's cut through," I burst out suddenly. We did so, bordering a field of quite high-standing crops and began to climb a slope. There was no

pathway and it was very muddy. The slope was very steep. He looked back again, as if to reassure himself that no one was coming. "Why do you look back so often?" I asked him. I don't think he said anything. We continued climbing. We entered the wood. I thought I wasn't afraid. We continued without a word. The place grew darker and darker. There was lots of vegetation. Trees, bushes, fallen leaves... The ground was damp from the rain. Not a sound could be heard. "Let's turn this way," he said. He nodded to the right. "But we need to go straight on to get to the other side. That way takes us upwards," I told him. I thought it couldn't be that way. Why did he want to take that route? I'd followed him enough. We were a long way from the village. The house was supposed to be near the cross. I wanted to go back. Something wasn't right. I wanted to return to the road, to the valley and the daylight. "Let's go back to the road, I prefer to use the road," I said to him. "All right," he said. "Just a minute, I need to pee. Then we'll go," he said. "Okay," I answered. He walked back a few paces, stopping near where we'd just passed. He stood with his back to me and rummaged in his trousers. He was no longer in front of me but behind. He whipped round suddenly with a knife in his hand and a cruel look in his eye. My whole body tensed, my heart began to pound, my hands to sweat and I thought: "Shit." I felt panic. "This is an attack," he said. "Don't move, don't do anything." He began to approach me very slowly, his knife arm outstretched, his whole body taut. I looked around me, I saw the wood, trees everywhere, and I thought that wasn't happening to me, it couldn't be, it wasn't real, I wasn't there, I was just observing myself. It was a dream. A bad dream. A fucking real dream. It was real and actually happening to me and I had no time to lose because he was coming for me. But, of course! It was obvious. How could I not have realized from the start?! What was I thinking of?! What an idiot I am. What if I make a run for it? He was blocking my escape, the wood was dense, there were lots of trees, lots of bushes, I'd trip up, he'd catch me, I couldn't go towards where I'd come from, the only way back I knew was that one, what if I went further into the wood?, I'd turn my back on him, what if he stabbed me in the back?, I was afraid, really afraid, I had little stamina for running, I'd never be able to run all the way back to the village, how would I manage to run down the

muddy, stone-ridden slope we'd come up to get to the wood? I looked left, saw tree-trunks, saw death. Flatness. There was nothing. Just a fixed frame. Frozen reality with nothing behind. Hollow. There was nothing. Nothing beyond. This was the end.

I had never seen death before. I did not like it.

And I was alone. All alone. There was no one else. I was going to die and it didn't matter. It was me going to die, not my brother, or my mother, or anyone else. I was going to die and I was completely alone. No one was dying with me. It was me dying. Such dreadful solitude. "Wait, wait a moment," I said to him. "Wait." "I belong to the guerrilla," he told me. "We know who you are, we've followed you through various towns. You're a doctor and you've been taking photos of the guerrilla. Give me your camera." The guerrilla? I thought. I wanted to see them and I'd found them. No, not this way. "You've got the wrong person. It's not me. I don't have a camera, I swear. Where would I put it?" I patted my pockets, I wasn't carrying a handbag, I'd no room for a camera anywhere. "We know where you've been", he named tourist spots where I had actually been and others where I hadn't. "I haven't been to all of those places, you're wrong. It's not me, let me go." "Give me the camera." "I tell you I haven't got a camera." He came towards me and I stepped back. The knife was still in his hand. It shone brightly. I couldn't take my eyes off the knife, its glint, its sharp blade. "I've got a gun, too. Don't you believe me? Do you want me to get it out?" "No." "Money. Give me money. Everything you've got." I unzipped the back pocket of my trousers and gave him all the money I had on me, a couple of notes and some coins, it wasn't much. "Leave me some change for the bus so I can get back to town," I told him. He didn't take the coins. "I have to mark you," he said. "They have to know I've been with you." I imagined the knife slashing my face and became even more terrified. "No, not that," I said. "I'm an actress. I make films. Don't touch my face, or my body. Please, don't do anything to me. Let's go back to town together, I'll give you more money. We'll go to the bank. I swear. Don't scar me," I said, panicked. "I have to. I'm going to scar you...", and

he approached me. "What about the others? Where are the others?" "They're here," he said glancing from side to side. "Call them. Tell them to come." Maybe one of them will rescue me, I thought, and take care of me, someone with more authority. The boss. "You don't want me to call them, believe me, if they come, it'll be worse." Worse! Worse?! What could be worse?! I didn't stop to think about it. My fear was swelling. "Come here." We stared at each other, hardly moving, everything was paralyzed, I couldn't take my eyes off the knife, the glint of the knife, the knife on my face, the mark forever there, the sign.

"I'm going to kill you." "But don't you understand? My life, MY LIFE, can't end here, it's too soon, I still have a lot of things to do. I can't die today, it's senseless. It's senseless. I mean senseless. Do you understand? I, I, I have to go on living. I still have important things to do. Don't kill me. Don't kill me, please. Please, don't kill me." I felt so small, my life, my life was nothing, nothing at all, it was something another person could take from me, someone I didn't even know, someone who couldn't care less, someone for whom my life was worth nothing. Nothing. Worthless. Someone I had to beg. To beg for my life. My insignificant life. My life was to come to a violent end, violent and absurd. Completely absurd. I was going to bleed to death in a wood far from home, no one would know it was me who had died, no one would find me, no one would know my end. I'd been missing for two weeks, no one knew where I was. My brother would have to come to search for me all over the country, I would leave my family with lifelong uncertainty.

"Lie down there." He pointed with his knife to the ground beside a bush. "I'm going to make love to you." He's going to rape me. Just then I remembered a scene from a film in which a young woman is being initiated and a friend, her lover, takes her by boat to a cottage full of people where an elegant elderly man dressed in white takes her from behind while the others egg him on. She leaves the place in a daze, accompanied by her lover, feeling that she has had a new experience. "I've got Aids." "I don't care." "That's why I wanted to go and see the shaman, really." "Lie down." I'm going to be a raped woman, I thought. I'm

going to be a raped woman. I don't want to be a raped woman. I don't want to be a raped woman. I don't remember how I ended up on the ground, I think I sat down myself, but I don't remember, even the day after I didn't remember, even when I left the place I didn't remember, nor when I told the first person. I don't remember how I ended up on the ground with him sitting astride me. I don't remember how I got into such a vulnerable position. It has occurred to me that I don't remember because it was the moment I gave in. The moment I was most afraid, but no, I don't know, the most terrifying was when he turned and pulled out his knife, when he showed his true colours. Maybe he pushed me, I don't remember, but at no point had I let him come near me, he couldn't have pushed me, I don't know, if he approached, I stepped back, I don't think he could have pushed me, why is it so important for me how I ended up on the ground? Because it was the most shameful moment. Because I thought I'd rather be raped than have my face slashed. Because the rape was visible inwardly but not outwardly, and if he slashed my face, every time I looked in the mirror I would remember what had happened to me, every time someone looked at me, I would see it, in their eyes. I was going to be scarred, I would never be the same person. My life was going to change radically. I would cease being a pretty girl and become a victim. But if he raped me, he could infect me with Aids, he was going to enter my body. Was it less important for me to be raped than to have my face scarred? Was I so concerned about my physical appearance? I thought of fashion magazines. Of models with unscarred faces. I felt like an idiot, a Westerner, with topsy-turvy values, an imbecile, a fool, but I didn't want him to scar my face. He was straddling my stomach, I was lying flat, in his right hand he held the knife, the knife was what scared me most, with my left hand I grabbed his right wrist, he struggled, I didn't want him to get his knife near my face, with his left hand he squeezed my throat, tighter and tighter, I was choking, I pushed his knife hand back, he shouted at me: "Let go of me! Let go!" "I'll let go if you put the knife away!" I shouted back. I proved I had enough strength to keep the knife away from my face, enough strength in my left hand, he wasn't so strong, he was very thin, even so he had me pinned down, with my right hand I tried to pull his left hand off my throat, he was

choking me, I noticed how I was losing my strength, little by little, losing my voice, the voice to make a deal, the deal of me releasing his wrist if he put away his knife, I felt the pressure of his fingers on my neck, tighter and tighter, he was strangling me while I struggled, he had me pinned down, I could do nothing, all I wanted was for him to put away the knife, the knife, the knife, to put away the knife. He lowered his voice, calming down, and told me he was going to put it away and to let go of him. I let go of him, he closed the switchblade and slipped it into his back pocket. He took his hand from my throat. I coughed. He could have strangled me. I took several quick breaths. "See, I've put it away. It's gone." I saw that my jumper had torn in the struggle. I thought that, since I'd got him to put away the knife and let go of my throat, now was the moment to punch him in the balls and make a run for it. I pulled back my right arm as far as I could, like I'd been taught, and punched with all the strength I had left after being choked. The punch didn't land. I didn't reach. I tried again. Again I missed. The way he was sitting, I couldn't reach. He glared into my eyes, he turned cruel, very cruel, he raised his right fist and said: "So, fancy yourself as a rebel, do you?", and he began to strike me across the head, on my temples, first one then the other, the blows sounded hollow, tremendously hollow, like an empty space, I was scared, I'd never been hit like that, he kept on, not stopping, I was afraid I'd die, the blows were dull. "Do you want me to break your nose? I'll break your nose. Just see if I don't." And he threatened me with his raised fist. I thought my nose could be put back together, I didn't care, but I imagined the blood. "No, no. You don't have to. No." He struck me again on the temple. I tasted blood on my lip, one of the blows had caught my lip. I felt the pain of the blows, but what hurt me was the damage, the damage they could end up doing to me. It was a future pain, each impact was deadened by the following blow. It didn't matter. While he hit me he said: "Because here we really hate Spaniards. We really hate Spaniards." He was so full of rage. He stopped and looked at me with hate. "I'll kill you. I'll kill you. Don't you believe me? Do you think I haven't killed already?", and he glared at me. I believed him. You bet I believed him. And he finished off the beating with a few punches to the pit of my stomach. So I'd get the point.

The blows put me in my place. I think it was then that I decided I'd have to adjust to the idea that I was going to be raped. I had to accept it. The guy meant it, he was in no doubt about it. The beating had left me physically unarmed. My ridiculous girlish punches had cost me dearly. If I was going to try anything else, I couldn't fail, if I tried and failed, the man would kill me. The idea terrified me, it terrified me enough to be prudent and put a damper on my arrogance. It was clear that he was stronger than me. Very clear. He might be scrawny and only my height, but he was a man and stronger than me. I felt powerless. I thought the only weapon I had left was my brain. To try and persuade him. I was good at convincing people. I focused. Everything was the present. The absolute present. I didn't remember anything, I didn't think of anyone or anything that wasn't how to get out of that situation. I became cool, calculating, the survivor in me took over.

He yanked down my pants and knickers, without lust, without ceremony, without depravity. He wanted to penetrate me. "Wait! What I said before about Aids is a lie, but what I didn't tell you, and this is the truth, is that I have a herpes sore. Take a look, if you want, it's there. Do you see it?" I pointed to the lower right area of my labia. He didn't bother to look, just unfastened his trousers. "I've had it for ten years. It's highly contagious and very painful. It forms a huge scab and then your flesh starts dropping off." "Who cares?" He loomed over me. I began to tremble. I thought if I exaggerated the trembling, he might feel sorry for me, realize what he was doing to me, how I felt, or maybe think I was going to have an epileptic fit, an attack of hysteria, and get turned off the idea of raping me. "Stop shaking!" I stopped. The tone in his voice had been categorical. "If you don't let me, I'm gonna have to knock you out to do it." "No, not that. I'll let you. I'll let you." If he knocks me unconscious, I'm done for, I thought. I need to be conscious to survive this. Unconscious, no way. I imagined how, after raping me unconscious, he would take a rock and bash my skull in. He tried to penetrate me. I squeezed my thighs together and he couldn't. I squeezed and squeezed them. "The herpes is awful. You'll see. You'll be sorry." He kept on trying to get

inside me. I continued closing my legs tightly. I felt his skin against mine, it was warm, foreign, strange. I squeezed my thighs together with all my might. He tried to enter me. "Wait a minute, let's talk, wait...", I didn't stop talking for a moment, all the time, I don't know what I said, I told him things, I asked him questions, talked on and on. I could tell he couldn't manage to get inside me, he couldn't even get hard. He was a very rough and ready guy, he didn't seem to have much sexual experience, I had far more. That gave me a little self-confidence, I knew the terrain better. I had to avoid him getting inside me. I had to. "If you don't stop talking, I won't get a hard on. Take a leg out of your pants. I can't get in otherwise." No, I don't want to, that way he'll be able to open my legs more easily, I don't want to take my clothes off, I don't want to, he's going to get it inside me, he's going to do it, I have to take off my shoe, I can't get my pants off, I can't get my pants off. I took my shoe off, I rested my foot on the ground, it was wet, it had been raining and the ground was wet. There were lots of leaves, and mud and twigs. I remember the image of my unlaced brown boot lying on its side on top of the leaves. I slid one leg out of my pants, slowly, in case he changed his mind. He didn't. I pulled up my knickers. "Those too." I pulled my leg through my knickers. He tried to penetrate me again quickly. I continued squeezing my legs together. He still couldn't get a hard on. He wasn't going to get it in ever. It seemed to me that it could be very easy to stop someone forcing himself on me. I got the impression that he didn't know what he was doing. He was nervous. "I've got a boyfriend. We were supposed to be getting married soon. When he finds out about this, he won't want to marry me any more. We were going to get married..." "Ah, so you're a virgin, eh? Well, you can tell him what a good time you had with me." The bastard. He's pathetic. The impotent jerk actually gets off on the idea of taking my virginity. How cruel is that? He kept on trying to penetrate me, I kept on shutting my legs, I was gradually losing my strength, getting more and more tired, so tired. How long were we going to be like this? He managed to rest the tip of his dick on my hole. I shouted: "The herpes! The herpes! Ah! It hurts! THE HERPES!" It went through my mind that no one could hear me. There was no one about. We were alone, a long way from the village, from other people. Later, I thought that the

shouting liberated me, liberated me from the pain, from the emotional pain. I got rid of it that way. It alleviated me. "I can't, I can't get it in. You keep rabbiting on and I can't get hard." The odd thing is he listened to me, he listened resignedly to what I was saying to him while I chattered on. "I know, I'll stick it in your mouth, that'll get me hard." No way, I thought, no way. He got to his feet, told me to kneel, grabbed my head and pushed his dick against my mouth. I closed my lips, I remembered they were bleeding, I thought of infections, I thought how humiliating this was, more so than being penetrated vaginally, I thought it was safer, less risk of getting Aids and no risk of pregnancy, I thought that if I blew him and made him come, he wouldn't rape me, but the very idea turned my stomach, his dick was revolting, I didn't want to find out what it tasted like, I didn't want to be left with that taste in my mouth, no way, no way, no way, even if he came, he would want to penetrate me afterwards, I bet, I bet, I was not going to suck it, no way, no way, no, no, I didn't want to, I pressed my lips together and feeling him push it against them, I said through the side of my mouth as best I could: "I don't know how, I don't know how. I've never done it." He gave up, I don't know if it was because he really believed me or because he couldn't be bothered to start another struggle, or because it occurred to him to penetrate me from behind. "Get on all fours, I'm going to give it to you from behind." "How? How do you want me? I don't understand. I don't know what position you want me in." "Kneel, lean on your hands." No way is he doing me from behind, too humiliating, no chance. No. No. No. "No, not that way." I managed to convince him of that, too. I don't know how, but he was beginning to give in, we were reaching an agreement. We were gradually getting to know each other better. The situation was becoming more familiar. It began to drizzle. My knees were caked with mud, I was covered in leaves and twigs. It was cold, a damp cold. My clothes were soaked. "Let's go, it's started raining. It's going to get worse. Let's go." "I know what we're going to do. Lie down at the side of that tree and put your leg against the trunk." He pointed to a tree behind me. If he made me put my leg against the tree, I was done for, he'd be in for sure. I wouldn't be able to squeeze my thighs together. This was it. "Have you got a condom?", I asked him. "No, have you?" Damn. "No." How ridiculous. "I'll let you

do it to me if you swear you won't kill me afterwards." "I swear." "Swear on your mother's life." "I swear on my murdered mother's grave." And his eyes welled up with anger while he stared at me. I approached the tree, dragging with me the loose trouser leg. My shoeless foot was soaked. I sat by the tree. He came up towards me. "Put your leg against the tree." I lifted up my left leg. He played with himself, trying to get hard. The rain kept falling. I was very tired. It seemed like it was never going to end. "Aren't you tired? Why don't we forget this and go to a bar for a quiet drink, just you and me? Don't you fancy a drink? A drink and a chat? It's raining. We've been trying this for ages now. Wouldn't you rather we left?" I made as if to lower my leg. "Don't move your leg from the tree. Not one inch," he barked. The rain kept falling. I was so tired... I wanted to leave. I wanted it all to be over. I wanted to escape from this nightmare. I was drained. I no longer had the strength to keep fighting. I wanted to leave. To go. I wanted it to be over. I'd had enough. Eva, I thought, you're a woman and you know men, until this guy comes he's not going to let you go, or he's going to kill you. Look at him, he's still at it, trying to get a hard on. He was pathetic, he wanked and wanked but got nowhere. He came over to have another try. He pushed but it didn't go in. It wasn't hard enough. He pushed but no go. "Lift up your jumper. Let me see you." I pulled it up. My T-shirt as well. The black bra I was wearing stayed where it was. I didn't want him getting any ideas about my nipples. The fewer ideas, the better. He kept on feeling himself. He just couldn't get it up. I didn't want to bring all this to a head, I was scared, I could help him, help him to come, I knew how to do it, how to turn him on. But what if he killed me afterwards? I was so tired, exhausted, I wanted to leave. I couldn't go on. I wanted to go. To go or for all this to be over. Now. Now. I had to run that risk. The important thing was to get him to become affectionate, to feel something for me, that was all I could do to be in with a chance of not getting killed. If I could get him to become affectionate, he wouldn't harm me. He wouldn't hit me anymore. That was when I said the key phrase: "If I don't enjoy it, you won't." He became more human, he approached. I thought that maybe if I jerked him off, if I jerked him off and made him come, he would leave me alone. "Do you want me to help you?" "Yes, have a go." I took hold of it, it was quite small. I

thought I'd have to do my best hand job, the best hand job of my life, touch him so well that he'd come straightaway and wouldn't have time to screw me, I tried to apply myself, it began to swell, little by little, more. Then I saw clearly that he was going to screw me, that this guy was a rapist and rapists are rapists because they penetrate, because they rape, because otherwise they wouldn't be rapists. Sure enough, no sooner was it hard enough for him to stick it in me, he did just that. "Like that, do you? Like it, eh?" "I love it, I love it. Come outside. Come outside. Here, on my stomach, that's what turns me on the most. Here. Here. I just love it, all over here, come outside." He thrust once, he thrust again, "you're really pretty," he said, turning all affectionate and stroking my head. He leant in to kiss me. I clenched my lips, remembering once again that they were bleeding. He thrust again. I realized that I was wet, it confused me, I couldn't feel his cock, it was very small, I was just concerned that he didn't come inside me, I didn't feel anything else but sensed... I pushed him. He came on the inside of my right leg. "See, I came outside." At least I'd managed that, I'd managed to avoid him coming inside me. I felt a little less invaded. A little less dirty. With less risk of becoming pregnant, with less risk of contracting Aids.

He fastened his trousers, I pulled up my knickers quickly, pulled down my T-shirt and pullover, put my right leg in my trousers and hastily fastened them while I went to fetch my boot which was still lying on its side a few yards away by the bush, I put in my foot, wet sock and all, and zipped it up. I didn't turn my back on him for one moment, I was uncertain, I didn't know what he planned to do with me. I felt relieved that the struggle, the battle, was over but I didn't know what the outcome was. That decision was his. He had his hands in his pockets, looking for something. "The money. I haven't got the money." He raised his head and looked at me. "You've taken it." "Oh, yeah, like I've nothing better to do after all you've done to me than take the money." He looked at me, taking my point but with a certain disbelief. "You must have dropped it." I looked at the ground, it was covered in leaves, the money could be anywhere. We started looking for it, it didn't turn up. I became desperate, it looked like everything was going to start again. "You've got it. Give it to me. You've got it." "I haven't. I

swear. I've got nothing. Here, take all my change, if you want." I emptied my pockets and gave him the coins he'd let me keep for the bus. I patted my side pockets. "I've got nothing, see? This is my passport. Do you want my passport?" I took it out, opened it so he could see there was nothing inside, I remembered I had my credit card, the only means I had of getting out of there, I'd no money left at the hotel, the card was tucked inside a piece of paper inside the passport, he saw the paper covered in handwriting and paid no attention. I put the passport back in my pocket. He turned round and continued looking for the money by the tree, I thought I must find it. It has to turn up, please, please. "Here it is," he said. Good, I thought. I was on edge, I wanted to leave, I wanted to leave now. Right now. He looked at me, he approached. "I like you. I'm not going to kill you." I tried to smile. We walked down towards the place where we'd entered the wood, the steep muddy slope we'd come up. He looked me up and down. "Look at the state of you, a real giveaway." I looked at myself. "It doesn't matter, soon put that right. Watch." I took off my torn jersey and tied it round my waist. I took a rubber hair band from my pocket and tied back the mass of muddy, leaf-filled hair. I quickly brushed down my clothes. "There. Can I go now?" I wanted to go. I wanted to go. I wanted to go. "You go back the way we came, I'll cut through here onto the road. Don't you dare go to the police or tell anyone anything. We know where you are, what hotel you're in, and we'll be after you. Understand? I'll be after you. Are you leaving?" "Yes, tomorrow I'm off. I'm not going to tell anyone, I swear. Can I go now?" "Yes, go." As soon as I heard the "yes" I turned and slowly, thinking that I couldn't afford to fall and break a leg, I slithered down the slippery muddy slope. I turned to see if he was coming after me and saw him looking, I slid down a little further, turned again and he was gone. I felt a little easier. I reached the crop field, sped up, began to stand upright and at a brisk pace got onto the road as a feeling of happiness flooded over me. Of euphoria and heartfelt victory. I WAS ALIVE. I couldn't think of anything else. I WAS ALIVE. I had survived. I was alive. I walked with strong, firm strides. Decidedly. I looked back. Behind me was the wood. Behind me was that dark, dense, dank place, that hole. Behind me. I looked forward. Shoulders back. Head high. Two children appeared, two very small children.

They walked beside me. I felt safe. I was no longer alone. We came out of the valley and approached the village. We passed by the cross. "What happened to you?" the girl asked, she was a little older than her brother. "What happened to you?" "I fell." We carried on walking. "You've got blood." "Yes, I know." I touched my lip, I saw it on my finger. "There as well," she said pointing to my other hand. I had a broken fingernail, also bleeding. We continued walking, the village was now very near. "What happened to you?" "I fell." "You've got mud in your hair." "Yes, I know." "And there as well." She pointed to my back. We entered the village. I went straight for a taxi. I searched my pockets, I had some coins left. In my nervousness I hadn't given him them, I didn't even realize. I looked inside my passport, I discovered a large banknote, I hadn't remembered to give him it. Just as well he hadn't seen it when I showed him my passport, he would have gone into a rage for not giving it to him before. The children said goodbye and went off, I didn't have a lot to say. I noticed some people looking at me, but I found it strange that they didn't do it in a more obvious way. I felt quite invisible. As if nothing had happened to me. I approached a taxi driver, I asked how much it cost to go to the town. He said: "Get in, get in", without even telling me a price. I didn't like that. It didn't seem safe. I'd already had enough. I thought that with the coins I had maybe I had enough for the local minibus, the note I had was too big. I asked and it was in fact enough. I got onto the minibus along with other tourists and a couple of local Indian women. They peeped at me out of the corner of their eye without showing the least amazement. I was drenched and dirty. On the road, I checked my hands and elbows, I didn't appear to be very bruised. I looked at the green, damp countryside through the window, I looked at the people walking beside the road, I looked at the mountain with the wood at the other side. I wanted to get to the hotel, I wanted to shower, clean myself up. I wanted to get to the hotel. We reached the village. The minibus stopped by the market where I had caught it. I got off, the street was full of people, I walked quickly, oblivious, invisible. I saw one or two people look me in the face, but I was in a hurry, I wanted to arrive. I asked the receptionist for my room key, I sensed him looking at me with a mixture of pity and curiosity, although I hardly gave him time. I reached my room, locked the door and blocked it with a chair. I

turned on the shower, quickly stripped off my clothes and tossed them on the floor. I stood under the shower, I looked down and saw soil, leaves and twigs washing off me. First I washed my pussy, with lots of soap, I put my finger in trying to wash it inside, to clean out whatever might be in there, thoroughly. I didn't like putting my finger in at all. I checked over my body, I washed my lips with soap, my broken finger nail, the rest of my body. I noticed myself beginning to warm up, I was freezing, freezing. I stepped out of the shower, looked at myself in the mirror. I looked for marks, injuries. My lips were swollen, there was a cut on my lip, another above my eyebrow, marks on my neck, another on my chin, a scratch or two on my arms, but there were no bruises. I was surprised. There wasn't a mark on my stomach despite all the punches. Not one. The pain was internal.

I brushed my teeth, went back into the room, my clothes were still there on the floor, stained, wet, dead. I thought about dumping them all. I put on some clean, dry clothes. I picked the others up off the floor, went into the bathroom to the paper bin and threw them in.

I wrapped up well, took my money, my credit card and passport and went downstairs. The receptionist gave me a serious look as I walked past him. I left the hotel, looked both ways down the street and went right, I entered the first call centre I found. I rang the person who was the closest to me: eighteen hours by bus. His friend picked up the phone, I asked to speak to him, he told me he was sleeping, should he wake him, I said no, I'd ring later. I'd been mugged and robbed but I was all right. I told him which town I was in and that I'd ring back. I hadn't called for two weeks. I'd gone missing.

I went to the bus station, everything was in the same street, in the same street as the hotel, I remembered the last time I'd been there, accompanying some Italian tourists to buy their bus tickets the day they were leaving, if I'd left with them... I looked at the timetable. I thought of going to the next town I was planning to visit, to be strong and continue my trip, blot out the incident. I also

looked at bus times to return to the town I had set off from, to go back to the person who hadn't wanted to come with me on the trip. I walked out. I returned to the same street. Half way down the street was a hospital. I went in, to the emergency room. There was a queue of Indians waiting. I looked around me. I knew I couldn't wait there. Alone. I felt fine, they would ask me questions, I'd have to go to the police station, testify, file a complaint. The police scared me. I was alone. What if they raped me as well? I'd heard bad reports of the police in this country. I was scared of them. I left the hospital. I was fine. I wasn't as badly off as those waiting in the queue, they would ask me what I was there for. I walked to the end of the street and reached the square by the hotel, I went to a chemist's where I'd been two days previously, or the day before, I don't know, time had expanded, I went in and asked for iodine and a douche to wash out my vagina. I also asked for some alcohol. I thought how the money I hadn't given him was coming in handy. I couldn't remember my credit card pin number and in many banks I had problems getting them to give me money. I returned to the hotel. The receptionist gave me yet another serious look. I went up. I stripped and lay on the bed with the douche and the iodine. I squirted all the iodine I could inside. Lying down and with my legs open. I was fed up of my cunt. Fed up. Fed up of rummaging around in it, fed up of having so many things poked up there. I had another shower, the red iodine trickled down my legs. I soaped myself again. The leaves and soil were still on the floor of the shower. I turned off the tap and listened to the silence. I dried myself and looked into the mirror again. I felt speed diminish. I was cool. Orderly. Collected. Taking care of myself. I was alone. I only had myself. Dry eyes. Not a sob. Not a sigh. Cold. Frozen. I saw myself in the mirror. I dabbed the scratches and the broken fingernail with alcohol. I got dressed. I wrapped up warm. I returned to the bathroom. I looked at the waste bin with the discarded clothing. I bent down, took the clothes from the bin and looked at each item separately. The panties were wet, they had been a present and had a tear which I'd sewn with pink thread. I thought I was never going to want to wear them again, plus they were darned, I threw them away again. The jersey was my favourite jersey, I'd had it for years but it was falling apart and there was no way of patching it up, I threw

it away again. I thought of throwing them all away again. I liked the trousers, they were very comfortable and I wore them often. I thought on top of what had happened to me I'd no reason to be left without my trousers, I'd wash them and keep them. It would be good therapy wearing them again despite everything. I had to be strong. I put them in a bag, the bra and T-shirt as well. The bra was new, and the T-shirt, which had also been a present, I was told at the time, was supposed to bring me luck. Some luck, I thought, well, maybe it was true, maybe I had been lucky. I think I also put my socks in the bag, although I don't remember having seen them since. I put on my anorak and left the room. I went downstairs to that pretty courtyard that I'd enjoyed so little and gave the bag of dirty washing to the receptionist. I asked him if they could have it ready for the following morning as I was leaving. He nodded, looking at me very seriously. I asked if I could receive a call on the hotel telephone, and he said I could. He gave me the number, looking at me very seriously.

I approached the phone by the receptionist and dialled the same number as before. The friend answered again and said he'd hand me over right away to the person I wanted to talk to. "What happened?" "I was mugged and robbed". "Where? When? Are you all right?" "Yes. In a wood by a village near here." "Were you raped?" I said nothing. "Eva, were you raped?" "Yes." I said it quietly, so as not to hear myself. I said it. I said it. I didn't plan to say it, but I did. I felt his silence. "Poor thing. You must have gone through hell. Poor thing." I noted how he became affectionate, more affectionate than ever, affectionate in a way he'd never been with me. "How did it happen?" "I was looking for a shaman, I don't know, it was so obvious, he told me he'd come with me and I went into the woods with him. How could I not realize? It was obvious. Obvious. After all the travelling I've done. After all I've seen. How did I not realize until it was too late... What I'm most afraid of right now is myself. How could I do this to myself? How could I go into that place? I've always been afraid of woods." "Listen to yourself, how you've changed." "Why?" I told him to ring me, that I had no money. I gave him the hotel number. He rang me straightaway. I told him everything while the receptionist listened behind my back, at least I thought so, I

didn't look at him, I was looking at the wall, staring at a detail on the plaster, or the wood, I don't know, something insignificant that I stared at vacantly and will never remember. He told me he wanted me to speak with a friend of his, a girl from my country who was in the house, his flatmate who was just back from her holidays and there with him. I'd heard a lot about her but had never met her, I'd set off on my trip before she got back. I told him I didn't want to speak to her, I didn't know her, he insisted, I said no, he insisted further and passed me over to her. "Hi." "Hi. I've heard a lot about you." "Me too." "I'm sorry we're meeting under these circumstances." "How are you?" "I've just been raped." "I know how you feel. It happened to me, too." "Where? Here?" "No, in Spain. Some time ago. But don't worry, if it's happened to you once, it won't happen again." It was a great comfort to hear that sentence. Very much so. I didn't fully believe it but it put me at ease. "Why?" "Because you've lived it. You know what it is, you'll see it coming. What do you plan to do?" "I don't know, maybe continue my trip, or catch a bus and join you all, I don't know." "Catch the first plane here. You're in shock right now but when it passes, make sure you've got someone with you. D'you hear? Take my advice. Get here as soon as you can." "Yes, you're right. I'm sure that's the best thing to do. But I'll probably get the bus." "No, fly here. Forget the cost. If you need money, we'll send some. This is an emergency." I felt protected. There was someone thinking for me, making decisions, someone with experience, I would do everything I was told, I was overwhelmed, dazed, I wanted to get away from there and take refuge with my friends, see him, be with him, not be alone, feel safe. My arrogance at wanting to continue my journey was crazy, she was right, I should get up there as soon as possible, by plane. "Whatever it costs, pay it," she said firmly. "For ages I've been afraid of getting raped, worrying it would happen to me. It seemed like the worst thing that could happen to me. The worst. And now that it has happened, it seems like the rape, the actual rape, the sexual act, was no big deal. I've had worse shags, emotionally speaking, if you take my meaning, I mean, it wasn't at all pleasurable, but what seemed much worse, much more brutal, much more violent, was the feeling that, at any given moment, he could have killed me. Maybe it's because I've fucked a lot during my life, with a lot of people, I don't

know. Just as well this didn't happen when I was a virgin or inexperienced. That really would have left a scar." She listened to me, I sensed she was distant, perhaps remembering her own ordeal, she listened to me and just gave me advice that was clear, no-nonsense. Realistic. "Before he raped me, I thought all the time that I didn't want to be a rape victim. The fucking social stigma pisses me off, as of now I'm a rape victim. The rape was trifling compared to the sensation of being about to be killed." "It might be an idea to go to a support group when you get here. With people from our country." "I don't want to go to a support group, or see people from our country, I'm fine, I'd rather sit quietly at home." He returned to the phone. He was nice to me, he listened, he told me he had a cousin in the town and was going to ask her to drive me to the airport, that I should go and buy a ticket straightaway, that he would pick me up at the airport, that he'd ring me again after I'd bought my ticket to check my flight time. I told him it wasn't necessary for him to ring his cousin, that I'd get a taxi. He asked me if I was all right in the hotel, if I felt safe. I told him I was, that the hotel was really nice, that I had a very big corner room, that it was a pity I couldn't enjoy it. Looking back I realize that the hotel being so nice was a help. It seemed like it was the place I'd chosen to go through all that. I hung up, looked at the receptionist. He looked at me seriously, concerned, but said nothing. I rushed out of the hotel, the travel agencies were about to close. I went into the nearest one. In the same street. There was a man and a girl. I sat down. I told them I wanted to leave as soon as possible, they looked at my face, that I had been attacked and had to leave, that I wanted to leave as soon as possible. They told me it was late and that maybe the main ticket office was already closed, they picked up the phone and dialled quickly, no one answered at the other end, I begged inwardly, please, please. The idea of staying there another day horrified me. I thought of going by bus if they couldn't get me a plane ticket. Someone picked up the phone at the other end. After saying hello, asking for a colleague and negotiating a deal, they looked at me, nodding, confirming the flight details aloud for me to hear, I asked if there was a flight that night, they asked but from their conversation it became clear that there wasn't. I said I'd go the following morning and they confirmed the ticket without hanging up. I was

able to pay with my credit card, it didn't give me any problems, they told me they would book a safe taxi and in a kind, sympathetic tone of voice said what a shame it was that I had to take that experience away with me. How unfortunate I couldn't leave with a different recollection of their homeland. I sensed they knew exactly what had happened to me. I returned to the hotel. I asked the receptionist to return my bag of dirty washing since I'd be leaving very early. He said he didn't know if the washerwoman had already left with the bag. He'd go and check. And by the way my friends had rung. I picked up the phone and called. I gave him my flight details, he told me he had called the company meanwhile to reserve a ticket but the details didn't coincide so maybe they'd sold me a false ticket. "I don't think I could have been taken in twice in one day. Though you never know, I'm stupid enough." He said he'd call and check. And he'd call his cousin and get her to drive me to the airport. I told him again not to bother, that I'd ordered a taxi. That I was really looking forward to seeing him. "Me too," he replied. I felt loved, cared for. I went up to my room. Shortly afterwards the receptionist came up to tell me I had a phone call. I ran down across the courtyard. It was him again, his cousin would come the following morning to drive me to the airport. "Did you tell her?" "I told her you were mugged. That's all." We said goodbye until tomorrow. The receptionist gave me the bag of clothes. It was a dark bag, black, the clothes couldn't be seen. I thanked him. He had been very helpful and had asked no questions. I thought I should eat something, to keep my strength up. I'd eaten nothing since breakfast but I wasn't hungry. I sat down in the hotel dining room and ordered carrot purée. It was easy to eat without appetite. Nothing to chew, hot and nourishing. Two young tourists were sitting opposite me. The rest of the dining room was empty. I looked at the two girls inwardly hoping they wouldn't experience anything like what I'd been through. They seemed to be sitting in a different reality.

I went up to my room and turned on the light. I jammed the chair under the doorknob and turned on the rest of the lights. I closed the shutters tightly. I looked round the room, it was spacious and had three beds and three

balconies. It was very pretty. All warm colours. I chose the bed furthest from the windows and the door. I put on my pyjamas, picked up a book, *Under The Volcano*, lay down, looked at the windows, at the door, and thought I was in for a long night. Very long. Tremendously long.

I tried my best to keep on reading even though I was taking nothing in, it stopped me remembering or thinking about what had happened to me, and unbelievably, I fell asleep. Some time later a noise in the street woke me. I was scared someone was coming for me, I was scared sick that someone was coming for me, that he was coming for me, I looked at the balconies with their closed shutters, it was easy to climb up, I was on the first floor, they could also get in through the door, just one kick, I heard a car's brakes squeal, I heard people, I heard noises, I was scared, I was very afraid, very, totally, I was terrified, terrified, it was awful, awful, the moment intensified, it was awful, I was petrified, scared stiff, out of my wits. I got onto my knees. I don't believe in God, in any god, but I prayed that nothing would happen to me, please don't let anything happen to me, that if nothing happened to me and I got through the night, I would do anything, I'd change. I thought of what would suppose the biggest sacrifice, what would be the hardest thing for me to do. I would put an end to my selfishness, I would be very good, I would take care of others, I'd do no harm, I'd stop biting my nails. And I don't know what else. Everything I could think of. That calmed me down a little. I got up and got back into bed. I don't recall ever having slept in a room with so much light. I don't know if I went back to sleep. I think I closed my eyes and tried. Every noise I heard, every car, every person, every creak in the woodwork made me open my eyes. This went on until daybreak and I heard the street waking up. I opened the shutters and the sight of sunlight filled me with peace. I was impatient to leave, I wanted to get out of there, walk away from all that, from that room, from that town. I wanted to flee.

I think that was the worst night of my life.

I went downstairs, bought breakfast with the last of my money and sat down beside my black backpack and straw hat opposite the receptionist biding my time until the cousin arrived. I couldn't wait for her to get there.

She arrived. She greeted me with a smile, I tried to smile back, I thanked her for coming, I told her I had told her cousin that it wasn't necessary for her to put herself out and she told me she was delighted to be here, that I should have called her sooner, that she ran a hotel, that I could have stayed there. I knew which hotel it was, the most expensive one in town. I had looked at a room but didn't like it. There was no one there, it had unsettled me. She told me it was ages since she had seen her cousin and she'd been surprised by his call. We left the hotel and, as we crossed the street, I heard someone calling me from the other side. It was the guy from the travel agency telling me he had a taxi waiting. I said thanks but I was getting a lift. He waved goodbye with a puzzled expression. The cousin walked round the car and as she opened the door stared me briefly in the face. I sensed her compassion. My lip was no longer so swollen but it was still noticeable. The scratches too. I suppose my expression said it all.

In a forced conversation we exchanged pleasantries, at no time did she ask me any questions. She spoke of her cousin and family, I enjoyed listening to her, and of how she, from the north like him, had got married and gone south to live. She told me she liked it there. It was a long way to the airport, it seemed we'd never get there. The road was lined with woods. Thick, green woods. I thought just as well she had come to fetch me, I would have had a bad time with the taxi driver, the interminable journey, through all those woods. I was very grateful to him for ignoring me and making the decision for me. We reached the airport. It was very small. I told her there was no need to get out of the car. She got out with me. She accompanied me to check-in. I didn't check in any luggage. We sat in some chairs under a skylight. The airport only had one lounge. There were hardly any people. There only seemed to be a couple of flights a day. We didn't speak. We'd run out of conversation. I began to feel terrible, dark. My

body went tense, I felt awful, really awful. I felt it best for that chance person present in my life at that moment to leave, I didn't want her to absorb all that darkness. All that sadness. She asked me if I wanted her to wait for the plane, if not, she'd go, she had things to do. I said yes, that she should go and thanked her, thanked her very much for bringing me. She got up and left. I tried to relax. It was less difficult on my own. The plane was running late. I remember looking at the few women seated around me waiting for the plane. There was a fat woman speaking on the phone about a congress. She was standing. I can't remember what I thought but I spent a long time looking at her. I wanted the plane to arrive. I wanted to get out of there.

The plane arrived and took off. I looked at the clouds through the window, I wanted to sleep but couldn't. The white clouds, the sky, I thought of my brother, of how I was going to tell him what happened to me when I got home. I started crying. It was the first time I'd cried since what happened to me. I cried very little, hardly at all. I couldn't. Now I can, writing this I cry, I cry more, much more, after over a year. After ten.

I got to the airport before him. I waited for him. I saw him in the distance coming towards me with a smile. I smiled. He gave me a kiss, he studied my face up close and with a sad expression tenderly stroked my wounds. "You should have seen me yesterday. I looked as if I'd had a lip job." On the way home I told him everything that had happened in detail. I talked on and on. I was euphoric. When we arrived I told him I wanted to leave the black bag of dirty washing at the laundry because I wanted it washed as soon as possible. The laundry was closed. When we entered the house, I greeted everyone with a smile. A guy who was often around gave me a big hug. "Careful, you'll break me. I ache all over. I took quite a beating." "Sorry. Maybe you want a shower or something." "If I wash myself one more time, I'll have no skin left." They all laughed. "You've been nicknamed Little Red Riding Hood here." "That's me." I called my mother fearing that she might have sensed that something bad had happened to me. I plucked up my courage and took a deep breath so she wouldn't suspect anything. I told her I was back from my trip and was with friends. She was really happy. She'd been rather scared about my travelling alone in that country. "I'm fine. I'm fine. Don't worry." I fancied a glass of water but all the glasses were dirty. I washed one and, worried because I'd rinsed it with tap water, which was unfit for drinking, I asked if I should have washed it with mineral water. "Listen to

her, she almost gets killed yesterday and today she's worried about a few drops of tap water. Drink it, you'll be all right," said my compatriot. She was right. We all decided it would be best for me to go to the hospital for a check up. The blows on my head were quite worrying. My whole body ached, every time I moved or if I lay down and wanted to get up, the pain in my abdominal muscles was really sharp, even though there were no bruises. Somehow the physical pain masked the mental suffering, it was more specific, more urgent. It exhausted me and relaxed me.

On the way to the hospital, accompanied by him, I told him I felt fine, that maybe it was best not to go, they'd only ask questions and I preferred not to have to give explanations to strangers. I was fine. As fit as a fiddle. He said he'd buy me a drink, there was no hurry, we'd go for a walk so I could think it over. We went to see an exhibition of photographs in a gallery tilted by an earthquake, when we came out I wanted to embrace him but he didn't let me. It nettled me. I decided we'd go to the hospital but wouldn't say anything about the rape. I had no wounds on my pussy, I just wanted them to check the blows on my head.

We arrived. It was a private hospital. We approached the window: "Hi. Listen, I've been robbed and mugged and I wanted to have a check-up. I was hit on the head." "Do you have insurance?" "No." "These are our charges. Fill in this form and sign here." I did so. We were told to sit down and wait until we were called. The waiting room was almost empty and there was a TV switched on. I had no desire whatsoever to go through the door in front of me. They called my name. I had to stand up. He also got up and tried to go in with me. He wasn't allowed to so he returned to his seat. I looked back, through the glass panes in the door, and saw him waving me forward with his hand. He smiled. He had a very broad smile. I entered a small room with a stretcher bed and a small table too. A doctor in a white coat sat behind the desk and asked me to sit opposite him. "Name... Surname... Nationality... What happened to you?... Where?...When?... Did you report it to the police?..." As I answered, he repeated what I said and

typed it up. The click of the typewriter keys made me feel like I was being interrogated. It was all so clinical. The rhythm of the keys was constant and implacable. My ordeal reduced to a few keystrokes typed by an indifferent person. My life, my death, reduced to pure bureaucracy. "Was there penetration?" He stopped typing. "Yes." "Wait a moment, please." He stood up and left the room, closing the door behind him. I was left on my own. I looked at the walls of that small white room. The whole situation struck me as absurd. I heard the door, I turned round and the same man in the white coat came in with a nurse. A short, curvaceous woman of about fifty. She greeted me very sweetly. The man resumed his seat behind the typewriter. "Where?" "The vagina." "Any dizziness? Did you lose consciousness at any point?" "If I'd lost consciousness, I wouldn't be here." My answer was curt. The question outraged me. "We're going to check your external injuries, but if you've been raped, you ought to have a gynaecological check-up. The cost is extra." "But I'm fine. He didn't do me any harm." "It's advisable." "Do you have a female gynaecologist here?" "Yes." "Very well." He shone a light into my eyes, he asked me to raise my arms, he studied them closely, he asked the nurse to lift up my T-shirt, he felt my stomach, he touched my neck. "That's very painful." It was very tense. "Strangulation makes the neck tighten up, it's a natural reaction. It'll take a couple of days to loosen up." I would have loved him to have massaged my neck but he just examined it. The nurse looked at me with a forced smile. "Does it hurt here? And here?" "No. It does there." "You're fine. You don't seem to have any serious contusions. Wait just a moment, please." He headed towards the door. "This fingernail's broken, it's very painful, it keeps digging in. Can you do something about it?" "Yes, the nurse will look at it for you." He left the room and left me with the nurse. "Let's see." The nurse took my hand and carefully inspected the fingernail. "I'll sort it out later. Don't worry." "Thanks." We fell silent. The man returned. "There's a problem. The hospital's lady gynaecologist is not in today, but we have a very nice male gynaecologist who'll treat you very well." I wasn't happy at the idea, but agreed. They took me to another room. I walked past the glass door and saw him waiting for me. I gave him a this-could-go-on-forever look and he corresponded sympathetically. The gynaecologist

appeared and said hello, opening the door for me. He was indigenous. The room was a gynaecologist's consulting room. Just what I needed at a time like this. You have to lie back, open your legs and rest your heels on two cold metal stirrups. The nurse gave me a shift and told me to take off my pants and knickers behind a screen. I left my socks on to alleviate the cold of the stirrups. I laid back and reluctantly opened my legs. Here we go again, I thought. Here we go again. The nurse stood on my right. The presence of a woman put me considerably at ease. "This won't hurt, you'll see," said the gynaecologist. "He didn't harm me. I think I'm okay." "We'll soon find out." "I mean, apart from hitting me and robbing me, the actual penetration wasn't physically painful." "Ah, he robbed you, too?" "Yes." "What a bastard, as if this wasn't enough." The robbery had actually left me quite indifferent. He looked indignant, indignant as a man. It struck me as a very sexist attitude, I was the indignant one, it wasn't a matter between men. I was the one who had been hurt. That attitude of indignant macho seemed to me almost as arrogant as the attitude of the rapist. We women didn't count. It was all between them. We women were an instrument of their mutual aggression. I heard him preparing the instruments he needed, they clanged against the metal tray. "A psychopath." "Do you think he was a psychopath?" "Obviously, anyone who is capable of doing such a thing is a psychopath." I liked the medical idea of him being a psychopath, of it having a name, of having come out alive from an encounter with a psychopath. I was frightened. "He threatened to kill me." Yes, maybe he was a psychopath. I don't know, I don't know what the line is you cross to become a psychopath. Up to then I had seen him as a person. As a rapist. He stuck in his fingers, a stick, I don't know, things. "It was in a wood, on the ground, when I showered I put in my finger and pulled out earth and leaves." I remembered an image of his dick covered in damp soil. It must have happened during the struggle. "I flushed out my vagina with iodine shortly afterwards, I don't know, maybe a couple of hours later or more." "Well done. That was a good idea. What made you think of it?" It seemed like an odd question, I was very touchy, very suspicious, I had the feeling that he thought I had experience of being raped, or that I was a slut. I don't know, I didn't like it, I felt a certain reproach. Maybe it was the complete

opposite, a small degree of admiration. But then he was prejudging me as useless, an idiot. Whatever, I didn't like it. "There are still traces of soil and leaves. We need to clean it up. It will take a while. It ought to be disinfected." I want to leave. How long is a while? I want to close my legs. I want them to leave my pussy alone. He introduced some metallic forceps, at least that's what it felt like, and opened me up. I hate that sensation. I find it most unpleasant. It's like they cause a vacuum. I don't like it. It's very uncomfortable. I don't know if I can stand it. Ouch! It hurts. He is scraping me, cleaning. "I pushed him away and got him to come outside." "Very good." He continued scraping, delving, it got more and more uncomfortable, I wanted to get it all over with, to close my legs. It hurt. It was uncomfortable. "I'm afraid there are traces of semen here." "But I saw him come outside!" "I don't think it is vaginal fluid. I'm sorry." I began to cry, I let my head drop to the left, I was fed up, it wasn't fair, I had pushed him away, I'd seen his semen in my groin, Aids, Aids. Dammit. That's all I needed. To get Aids from a rapist. I felt marked. Dirty. Handicapped. "We're nearly done. Hang on a little longer." I kept on crying. I couldn't care less about the nurse and the gynaecologist, not knowing them, I felt no shame, I considered I was within my rights to cry, it was natural, it put me at ease, it was the only way to bear the situation. "That's it. We're done. You can close your legs now." He walked round the stretcher bed to my right and, trying to be kind-hearted but sounding like a doctor, asked me when my period was due. "In a few days, I don't know, two or three." "Fine, in that case there's no danger of pregnancy." I was relieved, although the thought of pregnancy had never crossed my mind, I had more important things to worry about. What's more I had a certain inner conviction that he had not got me pregnant. I wasn't worried. "There does exist a risk of Aids or hepatitis. You must have an Aids test in three months' time, repeat it after nine months and, to be on the safe side, after a year." I thought he had frightened me enough with the threat of Aids, that he was exaggerating, that it was enough to be tested twice. That there was a sector of sexist gynaecologists specialized in making one feel like a filthy whore. Although this guy had not been altogether bad, the circumstances seemed to have softened him up. He approached and gave me two

prescriptions. "Use some fungicidal pessaries just in case there's some slight infection. And take these antibiotics to avoid any more serious infections." "I'll use the pessaries but I prefer not to take the antibiotics. They'll make me weak. If I develop any infection, I'll take them. I don't want to take antibiotics as a prevention. They're very strong." "As you wish. I'll prescribe them anyway." That's all I needed, to drug myself up with antibiotics. "If my period starts, I cut out the pessaries, right?" "Yes." "What about my fingernail?" "Stay where you are and we'll see to it right away." I looked to my right and saw the nurse nodding her head with a smile. All I had wanted since I entered the hospital was to have my fingernail seen to. It was painful and reminded me incessantly of the struggle. It was as if all my pain, the whole problem was focused in that spot. I wanted my fingernail to be seen to. The nurse took my hand and with some small scissors cut away the nail that was sticking into me. She disinfected it and dressed it with gauze and a sticking plaster. It was the treatment I most liked of my whole visit to the hospital. So meticulous, so kindly, so delicate, so thorough. I felt like I'd really been healed. I thanked her and went out into the waiting room. He stood up and came towards me. "How did it go?" "Fine. A bit hard. Very hard. Let's go." "When I saw the Indian gynaecologist walk past, I thought, well..., just her luck. Did it remind you?" "No, not at all. A whole other story." I paid and we left. Once in the street he showed me a form he had had to fill in while he was waiting. They'd asked him what he knew about what had happened to me. "Since I didn't know if you'd said anything about the rape, I didn't know what to put. What's more, I didn't know how to refer to, to the..." "Incident." "Exactly. I put 'event'. Look. Do you want to read it? It's hilarious." I read it and we laughed, I thought the worst was over. We returned home. The Aids tests were still a long way off.

He asked me if I wanted to sleep alone. I said no, I preferred to sleep with him. He gave me security. What's more, I liked him. "What about you?" "Delighted."

That night I hardly slept. I dreamed of a handsome young man, someone very like one I had met on a train fifteen years earlier, someone disturbing, he pulled

a knife on me and said: “Your nipple!”, pointing at it with the knife. I lifted up my T-shirt and looked at him terrified. He had another knife in his other hand and shouted: “The other one!”, and I showed him the other one. I woke with a start. I was calm. It was a dream. My sudden movement woke him. “It’s nothing, just a nightmare. I’m fine. Knowing it’s just a dream is a real relief”.

Three or four days later we went out and I drank some mescal. I turned very aggressive. The alcohol brought out all my rage. I wanted to fuck as soon as possible to lay my ghost to rest. For a week he had restrained me with the excuse that my period had started, warning me that it would be better to wait a little longer. I was still moving too fast. I was in shock and my adrenalin was running high. I felt fine. I was happy to be alive. To have come out of hospital. Not to be there in the south, alone. I was happy to be with him, that he was curing me. After a week we made love, it was very intense, fabulous. He didn't use a condom, his trust, his solidarity made me love him even more and intensified the orgasm. He came inside me, he couldn't help it, nor could I, he had never done it before. It was a fuck bursting with life.

Everyone in the house was worried that I was so well and they sent me to a place where they practised acupuncture. I told the doctor everything and she told me she was going to prick me in places that would help me to unload, that feeling so good wasn't normal, that I was bottling things up, that it wasn't healthy, that it could even show up during childbirth if I ever became pregnant. I believed it. She put the wind up me a little, I didn't like that, even so I allowed her to insert the needles. The following morning I woke up crying, I sat up in

bed, it was the weeping of desperation. He embraced me from behind.

A few days later I plucked up the courage to go out on my own, even though the town was notoriously dangerous. I had to do it. Like I used to. I took the subway, I walked, cautious. I was wary, but at least I was out there. The day before I returned to my country a travelling salesman put his hand into his pocket to offer me something. My heart skipped a beat. I thought he was pulling out a knife. I realized just how much fear I still had inside...

August 2001