

DO WE HAVE to? asks Eurydice. Hermes smiles, he is silent. As they walk, darkness parts before them and immediately closes after them. They pass through countless gates.

—Is it necessary? asks Eurydice. Orpheus is old, I won't live with him much longer. I have forgotten the herbs I used for his throat which was sore

from singing. I have forgotten what it is to get up at dawn. Or what a man wants when he touches my belly.

—Your memory will come back, Hermes says, gently and without conviction.

—You want to cheer me up, says Eurydice.

The road goes uphill, it is not a road but an obedient parting of cliffs. Flints smell like dried lightning. The small pebbles underfoot have completely forgotten the sea.

—Does he see us? Eurydice asks with concern.

With a motion of his head, Hermes denies it.

—I see his back. Always, when I was alive, I was moved by a man's back; it is helpless. But I don't feel this any longer. Tenderness—what is tenderness?

—The joy of touch, Hermes answers, a kind of lower ecstasy.

—My fingers are no longer alive, complains Eurydice. I couldn't thread a needle or remove a mote from the eye of someone I loved.

One more turn and the descent begins. Darkness, as if slanted, leaning over another deeper darkness.

—Eurydice, Hermes says in a low voice, I will reveal the secret of your fate. Orpheus will soon die in suspicious circumstances. You will be free and take as husband a healthy athlete with shoulders like the branches of an

oak. He will be a young man, without imagination, wise enough not to desire

unattainable things. You can't imagine how invigorating it will be after a life

with a talented crybaby.

—I think, Eurydice says quickly, they would stone me to death rather than permit a second marriage. I will become a national widow, an advertisement

for faithfulness and poetry. They will put me on a cliff where I am supposed

to mutter inspired prophecies, or imprison me in a temple, which amounts to

the same thing. Then I will die for a second time. How does one die a second

time? I hope it isn't as painful and difficult as the first.

Orpheus hears all of this through the pouring darkness. For the first time he admires Eurydice's wisdom. Is it really necessary to die in order to become an adult?

A basalt landscape opens before him, as stately as a burnt forest, motionless as the eye of a volcano or the inside of thick matter. Azure of night burnt by nothingness.

*I sang dawns the coronations of the sun
the journey of colors from morning to evening
but I forgot about you
eternal night*

Orpheus suddenly turns toward the shadows of Eurydice and Hermes and shouts in rapture—I've found it!

The shadows disappear. Orpheus comes into the light of day. He bursts with joyful pride that he has experienced a revelation and discovered a new

kind of literature, called, from now on, the poetry of reflection and darkness.