



Prelude

SEVERED HEAD

At night the sea and the sky are one and even the earth becomes confused with the dark immensity that envelops everything. There are no chinks. No breaks. No breaches. Night is the best representation of the infinitude of the universe. It makes us believe that nothing has a beginning and nothing has an end. Especially if (as is the case tonight) there are no stars.

The first lights appear and the separation begins. The ocean withdraws to its own geography, a veil of water that conceals deep-sea mountains, valleys, ravines. The ocean bottom is a chamber whose echoes never reach us, least of all me, during the small hours.

I know that day will destroy the illusion. And if dawn never breaks again, then what? Then I'll think the ocean has stolen my form.

The Pacific really is a tranquil ocean now, as white as a large basin of milk. The waves have warned it that earth is approaching. I try to measure the distance between two waves. Or is it time that separates them, not distance? Answering this question would solve my own mystery. The ocean is undrinkable, but it drinks us. Its softness is a thousand times greater than earth's. But we hear only the echo, not the voice of the sea. If the sea were to shout, we would all be deaf. And if the sea were to stop, we would all be dead. There is no unmoving sea. Its perpetual motion gives oxygen to the world. If

the sea doesn't move, we all suffocate. Not death by water but by asphyxiation.

Dawn breaks and daylight determines the sea's color. The blue of the water is merely a dispersion of light. The color blue means that the solar sphere has conquered the clarity of the water, providing it with a covering that doesn't belong to it, that isn't its skin, if in fact the ocean also has skin . . . What will the new day illuminate? I'd like to give a very fast answer because I'm losing the words to tell you, the survivors, this tale.

If the newborn sun and the dying night don't speak for me, I'll have no history. The history I want to tell all of you who still live. I believe the sea lives and that each wave that washes over my head feels the earth, touches my flesh, looks for my gaze and finds it, stupefied. Or rather bewildered. Incredulous.

I look without looking. I'm afraid of being seen. I'm not what you would call a "pleasant" sight. I'm the thousandth severed head so far this year in Mexico. I'm one of fifty decapitated heads this week, the seventh today, and the only one in the past three and a quarter hours.

The rising sun is reflected in my open eyes. My head has stopped bleeding. A thick liquid runs from the encephalic mass into the sand. My lids will never close again, as if my thoughts will continue to dampen the earth.

Here is my severed head, lost like a coconut on the shores of the Pacific Ocean along the Mexican coast of Guerrero.

My head torn away like the head of a dead fetus that has to lose it so the headless body can be born in spite of everything, quiver for a few moments, and die as well, drowned in blood, allowing the mother to be saved and to cry. After all, the efficacy of the guillotine was tested first by severing the heads of corpses, not kings.

My head was cut off by machete blows. My neck is a cloth that unravels into shreds. My eyes are two open beacons of astonishment until the next tide carries them out and the fish swim into my head through the sacrificial orifice and the gray matter spills in one piece onto the sand, like an overturned bowl of soup, lost in the earth, forever invisible unless a fee is paid by national and foreign

DESTINY AND DESIRE ▲ 5

tourists. We're in the tropics, damn it! Don't you know that, you people who are still alive or who believe you are living?

My brain stopped controlling the movements of a body it can no longer find. My head abandoned my body. Without a body, what good does it do to breathe, circulate, sleep? Even if these are the oldest areas inside my head, do new zones await me in the part of my brain I didn't use in life? I no longer have to control balance, posture, respiration, the rhythm of my heart. Am I entering an unknown reality, the one the unused portion of my brain will soon reveal to me?

Those who have been guillotined don't lose their head right away. They have a few seconds—perhaps minutes—to move their bulging eyes, ask themselves what happened, where am I, what's waiting for me, with a tongue that, separated from the body, does not stop moving, loquacious, idiotic, about to lose itself forever in the mystery of finding out what happened to my trunk instead of focusing urgently on the greatest duty of a severed head, which is to recreate the body in its mind and say: This is the head of Josué, the son of unknown parents, who is searching for his living body, the one he had in life, the one he felt night and day, the one that woke every morning with a life's plan negated, of course it was! by the image in the first mirror of the day. I, Josué, whose only concern at this moment is not biting my tongue. Because although my head is severed, my tongue attempts to speak, freed at last, and succeeds only in biting itself, biting itself as one bites a sausage or a hamburger. Flesh we are and to flesh we return. Is that how it goes? Is that the prayer? My eyes without sockets look for the world.

I was a body. I had a body. Will I be a soul?