

Reluctantly I followed her downstairs again; then through the kitchen at the end of the hall, on the right side of the house—the side where also the dining room and the parlor were (under “my” room, on the left, there was nothing but a garage). In the kitchen, the Negro maid, a plump youngish woman, said, as she took her large glossy black purse from the knob of the door leading to the back porch: “I’ll go now, Mrs. Haze.” “Yes, Louise,” answered Mrs. Haze with a sigh. “I’ll settle with you Friday.” We passed on to a small pantry and entered the dining room, parallel to the parlor we had already admired. I noticed a white sock on the floor. With a deprecatory grunt, Mrs. Haze stooped without stopping and threw it into a closet next to the pantry. We cursorily inspected a mahogany table with a fruit vase in the middle, containing nothing but the still glistening stone of one plum. I groped for the timetable I had in my pocket and surreptitiously fished it out to look as soon as possible for a train. I was still walking behind Mrs. Haze though the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery—“the piazza,” sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses.

It was the same child—the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts—that last mad immortal day behind the “Roches Roses.” The twenty-five years I had lived since then, tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

ROMEO (to a Servingman)

What lady's that which doth enrich the hand  
Of yonder knight?

SERVINGMAN I know not, sir.

ROMEO

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
As a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear—  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear.  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows  
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.  
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.  
Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight,  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

TYBALT

This, by his voice, should be a Montague.  
Fetch me my rapier, boy.

[Exit page]

What, dares the slave  
Come hither, covered with an antic face,  
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?  
Now, by the stock and honour of my kin,  
To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

CAPULET [standing]

Why, how now, kinsman? Wherefore storm you so?

TYBALT

Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe,  
A villain that is hither come in spite  
To scorn at our solemnity this night.

CAPULET

Young Romeo, is it?

TYBALT

'Tis he, that villain Romeo.

CAPULET

Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone.  
A bears him like a portly gentleman,  
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him  
To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.  
I would not for the wealth of all this town  
Here in my house do him disparagement.  
Therefore be patient, take no note of him.  
It is my will, the which if thou respect,  
Show a fair presence and put off these frowns,  
An ill-beseeming semblance for a feast.

TYBALT

It fits when such a villain is a guest.  
I'll not endure him.

CAPULET

He shall be endured.  
What, Goodman boy, I say he shall. Go to,  
Am I the master here or you? Go to—  
You'll not endure him! God shall mend my soul.  
You'll make a mutiny among my guests,  
You will set cock-a-hoop! You'll be the man!

TYBALT

Why, uncle, 'tis a shame.

CAPULET

Go to, go to,  
You are a saucy boy. Is't so, indeed?  
This trick may chance to scathe you. I know what,  
You must contrary me. Marry, 'tis time—

[A dance ends. Juliet retires to her place of stand,  
where Romeo awaits her]

(To the guests) Well said, my hearts! (To Tybalt) You are  
a princely, go.

85

Be quiet, or— (to Servingmen) more light, more light!—  
(to Tybalt) for shame,

I'll make you quiet. (To the guests) What, cheerly, my  
hearts!

[The music plays again, and the guests dance]

TYBALT

Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting  
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.  
I will withdraw, but this intrusion shall,  
Now seeming sweet, convert to bitt'rest gall.

90

Exit

ROMEO (to Juliet, touching her hand)

If I profane with my unworthiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentler sin is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

95

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this.  
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers, too?

100

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:

They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

105

He kisses her

Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged.

JULIET

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

ROMEO

Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

He kisses her

JULIET

You kiss by th' book.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), I-v

As she came out of the wood on the north side, the keeper's cottage, a rather dark, brown stone cottage, with gables and a handsome chimney, looked uninhabited, it was so silent and alone. But a thread of smoke rose from the chimney, and the little railed-in garden in the front of the house was dug and kept very tidy. The door was shut.

Now she was here she felt a little shy of the man, with his curious far-seeing eyes. She did not like bringing him orders, and felt like going away again. She knocked softly, no one came. She knocked again, but still not loudly. There was no answer. She peeped through the window, and saw the dark little room, with its almost sinister privacy, not wanting to be invaded.

She stood and listened, and it seemed to her she heard sounds from the back of the cottage. Having failed to make herself heard, her mettle was roused, she would not be defeated.

So she went round the side of the house. At the back of the cottage the land rose steeply, so the back yard was sunken, and enclosed by a low stone wall. She turned the corner of the house and stopped. In the little yard two paces beyond her, the man was washing himself, utterly unaware. He was naked to the hips, his velveteen breeches slipping down over his slender loins. And his white slim back was curved over a big bowl of soapy water, in which he ducked his head, shaking his head with a queer, quick little motion, lifting his slender white arms, and pressing the soapy water from his ears, quick, subtle as a weasel playing with water, and utterly alone. Connie backed away round the corner of the house, and hurried away to the wood. In spite of herself, she had had a shock. After all, merely a man washing himself, commonplace enough, Heaven knows!

Yet in some curious way it was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of the body. She saw the clumsy breeches slipping down over the pure, delicate, white loins, the bones showing a little, and the sense of aloneness, of a creature purely alone, overwhelmed her. Perfect, white, solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a lambency, the warm, white flame of a single life, revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body!

Connie had received the shock of vision in her womb, and she knew it; it lay inside her. But with her mind she was

inclined to ridicule. A man washing himself in a back yard! No doubt with evil-smelling yellow soap! She was rather annoyed; why should she be made to stumble on these vulgar privacies?

D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928)