

THE HOUSE ON CHRISTOPHER STREET

You unlock the gate to the house on Christopher Street No. 85. With pride, since few are the fortunate who get to live here. In the portal of love, in the anus of the West. The latch clicks sickly behind you and you take off the coat of haughtiness, for inside the truth is different.

The dwelling A1 is empty, guarded by sharp vapours of fresh paint. Somebody passed away. The rent jumped from three to fifteen hundred dollars. A replacement will be found, that's for sure. For decades A2 has been occupied by a lady of German origin. Every summer she is choked by the foulness of the decaying rubbish which blooms at the end of the narrow courtyard. It is overlooked by the only window that A2 possesses. She closed, sealed, glued and barricaded it. She defends herself with joss sticks and rose water, with mirrors, lavender curtains, ruffles and chiffon. Instead of the sun, a violet lamp flares. Chests, lace doilies, plastic flowers. Pictures, photos, peep holes into the past. As if all is wrapped in a cyclamen gauze. This is Sartre's fleshy, pale pink and willing Marcelle. This will be Ajar's madame Rosa. An invisible man squats in A3. He has a large dog and had a small one. He copulates regularly with the big one, so the general opinion goes. Recently, for whatever reason, he mounted the little one. Desperate whining accompanied a tearing of the ass. Presumably it didn't work. The man lost his nerve, strangled the mongrel and destroyed the family idyll. All has been quiet since then. Mourning in the house. The lovers fondle carefully, so as not to offend the deceased. The loneliness doubled. Reggae and the odour of good grass emanate day and night from the cavern next door. At odd times it swallows or spits out a quartet of gauged faces.

A5 and A6 are rented to respectable citizens, identified by the exact trotting of the soles and penetrating smell of clean clothes and Elle perfume. A7 is Arthur, the piano player in the Indian summer of life, gay, exquisite manners, very extravagant. From here on, gas masks are obligatory. The unpleasant stench, which on the ground floor merely pinched the nostrils, becomes unbearable; it almost wrenches the nose off your face. You'd run if the heat hadn't already sucked out the last milliamperes of strength.

You pass another lonely man with a German shepherd. Two best friends, for a change. Now speeding past Amparo from Puerto Rico, an astute evaluator of us people. By 13, a den of two weakened old women,

venting the suffocating reek. They scold each other constantly, complicate their life, and thus gnaw on. Yet another day. Yet another victory. The door is usually kept wide open. The food fossils in burnt pans are creeping, the worms are restless, looby-looing on the teflon. The old women watch the corridor, always greeting extremely amiably. You return a smile of pure sympathy, trying to suppress the urge to vomit. Your Lover's apartment definitely seems like a paradise when you are finally rescued, dashing to the window, ajar. The street is still swarming. The fire escape is luxuriously spacious, a convenient location for a real Sunday picnic. Pity it's dangerously corroded by rust. Coming to your senses again, you plant a fleeting kiss on Lover's ear lobe. Everything is somewhat crooked — low ceiling, rotting floor, drunk walls and furniture. You lift the cover of transparent plastic into which real pennies, dimes, quarters and even a dollar bill are sealed. You sit down so it won't spray, and piss with relief. The hairs on your balls dance like the tendrils of an irate octopus. You step to the sink. Softly you feel around her waist, bosom, you charm the neck with a cooling breath and gentle lip crawl. The collar-bone twitches, the shoulders rise, the head tilts to your side. Her hair flutters over your ears and face. The moment of love turns towards you, embraces you as morning sun rays do a numb reptile, presses onto you, quivering. You kiss. You lick where it's sweet, salty, sour, you stretch all the way to the bitter. A visit to saliva geysers, across the gums and dwellings of assorted germs. You glide towards uvula, touch the palate. It's palatable. The mattress sighs discreetly. With chessman's patience, you repeat the process of rediscovering each other's bodies. You dive into yourselves, like grebes after fish. Underneath your bed dwarfy mice go about their daily tasks. They gorge, shit, multiply and watch TV. Steel wool puffs in their holes don't interfere with their *joie de vivre*. Same with glue traps. Through the ceiling penetrates the cough of an older leftist film maker, her hair like a sea sponge. The rumour goes that she never washes it. That because of lice her woman left her. She lives amidst impenetrable heaps of old Village Voices and similar magazines. She is determined to catch the nauseating Establishment in a lie. So revealingly, that it will forever sink into a grave of shame. Lover is now completely yours. You rummage through her most secret pockets. Lucky you. Along the edge of a sill, above your heads, cockroaches defiantly march by. In devotion, you cover her eyes so she doesn't have to watch. You swallow stringy spittle. You try to concentrate, to belong to this one, the only one. Amparo is angry, she fusses loudly. She says you have a bad temper. The neighbours are also

having sex, if your ears don't deceive you. They're so normal, it's obscene. The film maker detests men. Nothing more understandable in this world. Her neighbour is her own daughter. Slender as the Flat iron Building. Various lovers are passing the baton. The apple falls far, far from the tree. Ends up in a glass bottle, with preservatives without a name. You too swallow her furtively with your eyes. You'd stick the knotty elongation wherever you could. You'd like to feel something. Some prickly warmth inside, a proof that there is something in you. That something is happening. Caution, ejaculation.

Through the steamy smog, the summer is hammering the flat roof, melting the rug of tar cardboard. Still as a praying mantis, but not as green, you lie on a towel, on top of carefully spread-out newspaper sheets. It's too far to the ocean. Greasy sweat dribbles down your butt gorge. Soaks one of the standard speeches of President Georgie B. Lover is roasting only a foot away. Exposing the pelvis, the loins and the white skin above her private property. Sucks in the burning electrons. A human battery. Already full. Spilling over. The satin cleft emits familiar aromas. You are well hidden. In American freedom, this is how you're allowed to be a nudist. You don't touch, since the towel can shift and get soiled forever. Lover may as well be dead. You too. You can't resist the assault of the rays. You peep over the roof top. Moving matter bustles about in the blurred cauldron. An olive house rests on the corner of Bleeker and Christopher. During the Gay Pride Day parade, when hundreds of thousands were flowing by, there was a naked posterior hanging out of every window. A rainbow of saturated peaches. A trace of relaxing wit in a slightly different day.

You sleep as if on toothpicks. The noise from outside launches you to the window. Three toxic fellars are beating up a middle-aged black man. A popular sport for the guys from across the river. Drudgery of work throughout the week, crusades into the Mecca of entertainment at the weekend. Violence extends beyond disbelief. The day is breaking out vehemently. The most deprived jobholders are rushing to trade in their life juice for readies. They turn around for a second and keep on hurrying. How tiny they all are! You're too cut off to call anybody. What was that number anyway? The old women across the hall surely are fast asleep. Their rubbish dances a slow tango. Without any panic the insects whirl to life, hoard riches, devise the future. Small creatures with their feet firmly on the

ground. The more intellectual castes feed on you; thoughtfully digesting Genet, they are pricking you lazily now and then. The plagued air triggers your asthma. Your sweetheart who sometime, somewhere, was treasuring your love, has oozed away like jelly. You try to keep her together, not to lose her through your fingers. You try to protect her, not knowing from what. What happened? In your lungs squats sorrow, bitterness, guilt, in your heart ruthlessness, in your liver anger, in your kidneys fear, in your spleen worry, between your balls and anus insecurity. Soon the alarm clock will croak. You'll have to get up, give your blood submissively, to prolong your apathy with bread, water and shelter.

translated by Monika Zagar