IMAGINATION DEAD IMAGINE

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No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not
dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure,
verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the
whiteness the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure. Diameter three feet, three
feet from ground to summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB CD
divide the white ground into two semicircles ACB BDA. Lying on the ground
two white bodies, each in its semicircle. White too the vault and the round wall
eighteen inches high from which it springs. Go back out, a plain rotunda, all
white in the whiteness, go back in, rap, solid throughout, a ring as in the
imagination the ring of bone. The light that makes all so white no visible
source, all shines with the same white shine, ground, wall, vault, bodies, no
shadow. Strong heat, surfaces hot but not burning to the touch, bodies
sweating. Go back out, move back, the little fabric vanishes, ascend, it
vanishes, all white in the whiteness, descend, go back in. Emptiness, silence,
heat, whiteness, wait, the light goes down, all grows dark together, ground,
wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all the greys, the light goes out, all
vanishes. At the same time the temperature goes down, to reach its minimum,
say freezing-point, at the same instant that the black is reached, which may
seem strange. Wait, more or less long, light and heat come back, all grows
white and hot together, ground, wall, vault, bodies, say twenty seconds, all
the greys, till the initial level is reached whence the fall began. More or less
long, for there may intervene, experience shows, between end of fall and
beginning of rise, pauses of varying length, from the fraction of the second to
what would have seemed, in other times, other places, an eternity. Same
remark for the other pause, between end of rise and beginning of fall. The
extremes, as long as they last, are perfectly stable, which in the case of the
temperature may seem strange, in the beginning. It is possible too,
experience shows, for rise and fall to stop short at any point and mark a
pause, more or less long, before resuming, or reversing, the rise now fall, the
fall rise ,these in their turn to be completed, or to stop short and mark a
pause, more or less long, before resuming, or again reversing, and so on, till
finally one or the other extreme is reached. Such variations of rise and fall,
combining in countless rhythms, commonly attend the passage from white
and heat to black and cold, and vice versa. The extremes alone are stable as is
stressed by the vibration to be observed when a pause occurs at some
intermediate stage, no matter what its level and duration. Then all vibrates,
ground, wall, vault, bodies, ashen or leaden or between the two, as may be.
But on the whole, experience shows, such uncertain passage is not common.
And most often, when the light begins to fail, and along with it the heat, the
movement continues unbroken until, in the space of some twenty seconds, pitch black is reached and at the same instant say freezing-point. Same remark for the reverse movement, towards heat and whiteness. Next most frequent is the fall or rise with pauses of varying length in these feverish greys, without at any moment reversal of the movement. But whatever its uncertainties the return sooner or later to a temporary calm seems assured, for the moment, in the black dark or the great whiteness, with attendant temperature, world still proof against enduring tumult. Rediscovered miraculously after what absence in perfect voids it is no longer quite the same, from this point of view, but there is no other. Externally all is as before and the sighting of the little fabric quite as much a matter of chance, its whiteness merging in the surrounding whiteness. But go in now briefer lulls and never twice the same storm. Light and heat remain linked as though supplied by the same source of which still no trace. Still on the ground, bent in three, the head against the wall at B, the arse against the wall at A, the knees against the wall between B and C, the feet against the wall between C and A, that is to say inscribed in the semicircle ACB, merging in the white ground were it not for the long hair of strangely imperfect whiteness, the white body of a woman finally. Similarly inscribed in the other semicircle, against the wall his head at A, his arse at B, his knees between A and D, his feet between D and B, the partner. On their right sides therefore both and back to back head to arse. Hold a mirror to their lips, it mists. With their left hands they hold their left legs a little below the knee, with their right hands their left arms a little above the elbow. In this agitated light, its great white calm now so rare and brief, inspection is not easy. Sweat and mirror notwithstanding they might well pass for inanimate but for the left eyes which at incalculable intervals suddenly open wide and gaze in unblinking exposure long beyond what is humanly possible. Piercing pale blue the effect is striking, in the beginning. Never the two gazes together except once, when the beginning of one overlapped the end of the other, for about ten seconds. Neither fat nor thin, big nor small, the bodies seem whole and in fairly good condition, to judge by the surfaces exposed to view. The faces too, assuming the two sides of a piece, seem to want nothing essential. Between their absolute stillness and the convulsive light the contrast is striking, in the beginning, for one who still remembers having been struck by the contrary. It is clear however, from a thousand little signs too long to imagine, that they are not sleeping. Only murmur ah, no more, in this silence, and at the same instant for the eye of prey the infinitesimal shudder instantaneously suppressed. Leave them there, sweating and icy, there is better elsewhere. No, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere, and no question now of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness, to see if they still lie still in the stress of that storm, or of a worse storm, or in the black dark for good, or the great whiteness unchanging, and if not what they are doing.