

Gisèle Prassinós

A Nice Family

We are a nice family.

My sister Brindille, the first-born, used to be married. She had an hourglass which indicated the time when the water of the ocean would reach a secret point on the hill. Every year, at that time, her husband, mounted on a wave, would be making his way home. He was a Black Man with long hair, full of sea plants, with an enormous body, incrustated with fishing nets and whole anchors,—he lived on immersed barges.

Before he embraced us, he made his shining skin quiver and a big fat laugh shook his shoulders. Then we saw his stomach completely swell up, while a stream of small dead fish escaped hissing from his mouth and came down into the apron of our triumphant mother.

Then there were the big hugs of reunion, the necessary rest after that long year of labor, and in the evening when the tide fled in a parallel way with the rise of the moon we accompanied the empty traveller all the way into the waves where he disappeared while smiling at us.

From that moment my sister Brindille lived only for his next visit, incapable of doing anything to help in the house and did not sleep until the ocean touched the foot of the hill, at which moment she knew that he would soon come back.

Our mother dried the fish by cooking them plain in a red hot frying pan, then burying them during winter in the snow, until that season went away.

My brother Moco fought in the war. His big stomach was

riddled with small double pockets of skin, and when pressing on them with a finger, we could touch something hard which was the bullet of an exploded shell.

He loved to make us believe that he was dead. Sometimes when I came into his room in the morning to give him some mulberry leaves which he used to nibble at while waking up, I would cry out in grief upon seeing him stiff on his bed, his stomach kept open by dozens of small daggers driven in to the hilt. But I was soon calmed when I understood that the hollows of his scars served him as second wounds in order to frighten us. He then got up while laughing . . . and shook himself in a special way so that the small blades planted themselves in the wall in alignment.

He died playing; one of the small daggers having pierced his heart.

My brother Abel came from far away to see him for the last time. He is so handsome and elegant that we have asked him to stay close to us forever. My mother attracted him by showing him the small dry fishes which started to show through the snow and he said: "yes."

My brother Abel has a very small and tight stomach, but it is very nice. He has not fought in the war but in the revolution and he was not wounded. To reward him the king of the foreign country gave him an admirable gift. It was a small dial clock which they slipped under his skin, which was rendered transparent at that spot, and he is happy when he comes home at night to answer immediately if we ask him: "Abel, what time is it?" He is very rich and never works. He is very much in love with the husband of my sister Brindille and goes to meet him sometimes at the bottom of the ocean.

Last year the Negro came, but instead of small fishes he laughingly deposited into my mother's apron the pretty body

of our brother Abel. "The foreign country deserved him better," said my mother, and, without a word, we all followed him to the wood-shed where our brother Moco is already buried.

"I no longer have a brother," I said crying, and our mother suddenly remembered that a very small brother still existed in Norway and that he could come to fill the painful void. We wrote to him at once. He made haste and we are happy to confirm that instead of the blond child we had expected it is a big gentleman, strong and intelligent, who wants to squeeze us in his arms. Our mother, my sister Brindille and I paint his beard and moustaches so that he shall look even more handsome and we sit him down in an easy-chair, close to the boiling pot. It is our brother Genty, he is young, his body is firm and supple, but his navel is much too large, hollowed and lugubrious.

Our brother Genty died yesterday. The Negro who came carried him away in his enormous arms to throw him in the water, because there is no longer any room in the wood-shed. My sister Brindille followed him in the end; in future she wants to live close to him in the waves. They will not come back, our mother will have no more fish and we remain alone with two dead men.

Translated from the French by Ellen Nations

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