

## THE BLOOD OF OTHERS

Simone de Beauvoir

'Hélène!'

He choked back a cry. The veins are swollen and the mouth is half-open. She is sleeping; she has forgotten that she is going to die. A moment ago, she knew it; now she is dying and she does not know it. 'Do not sleep, wake up.' He bent over her. He would have liked to take her by the shoulders to shake her, to implore her; by blowing with all his strength on a dying flame he could manage to revive it. But there is no passage from my mouth to her life; she alone could make herself flame up again towards the light. Hélène! She still has a name, can I no longer call her by it? Her breath is rising with effort from her lungs to her lips; it goes back, grinding from her lips to her lungs; life gasp and labours, and yet she is still complete; she will be complete until the last moment: won't you use it for some other purpose than to die? Each beat of her heart brings her nearer to death. Stop. Inexorably her heart continues to beat; when it no longer beats, she will already be dead, it will be too late. Stop at once, stop dying.

She opened her eyes and he took her in her arms. Those open eyes no longer saw. Hélène. She no longer heard. Something remains which is not yet absent to itself, but is already absent from the earth, absent from me. Those eyes still have a look, a frozen look, a look which no longer sees anything. The breathing stops. She has said, 'I am glad that you are here; but I am not here; I know that something is happening,

But I cannot watch it; it is not happening here or elsewhere but beyond all presence.' She breathes once more, the eyes cloud over; the world detaches itself from her, it crumbles; and yet she does not slide out of the world; it is in the heart of the world that she becomes the dead woman that I hold in my arms. A spasm draws down the corner of her lips. Her eyes see no more. He closes the lids over the lifeless eyes. Dear face, dear body. This was your forehead, these were your lips. You have left me; but I can cherish your absence; it keeps your features; it is here, present in that motionless form. Stay, stay with me. . . .

He raised his head again. He must have remained for a long time with his forehead resting against her silent heart. That flesh which was you. He looked with anguish at the motionless face. It had not changed, but already, it was no longer she. A relict, an effigy, no longer anyone. Now her absence has lost its shape, now she has finally glided out of the world. And the world is as full as yesterday; nothing is missing: there is no flaw. It does not seem possible. As if she had been nothing on this earth.

As if I were nothing. Nothing and everything; present to all mankind throughout the entire world, yet separated from them forever; as guilty and innocent as the pebble on the road. So heavy and yet so light.