

1974

## Short Story

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## SHORT STORY

There were questions to be asked and there were answers, half answers perhaps, on the hills, with Petra, a red anemone unfolding in her fist, forcing her fist open—at last.

Was I lost, or was I waiting? I was impatient with people selling, I had no money and, besides, I hadn't gone there to buy, I was just looking. Was I lost? I looked trying to find Petra, trying to find Magda, Marlene, and Mona who had taken Petra to school.

I looked, it wasn't there, it was far away on a hilltop—I'll take you there, she said, I had not asked her to, I had not told her yet where I wanted to go—Come, her black horse pawing the cobblestones—Come, I leapt onto its back, pressed my legs around its sides—Hold fast, I held on to her waist.

Galloping on the cobblestones, the horse rose on its hind legs, suddenly, and neighed, a lizard staring at it, immobile, she lashed and the horse leapt over the lizard, she praised the horse, laughed, her neck sweating, smelling of autumn earth.

Then I thought—We are leaving town, and I thought I saw flowers in front of the last house, lilies or tulips, white, blinding, or was it snow? She reined the horse to a stop and the horse neighed, I jumped down to steal them.

Was it snow? The flowers blinding bright, then fading as the man came out—I'll sell them to you, he said—Follow me.

First around the corner, to the backyard, then farther down along the border of the town, the ground bare, scorched like Greece, and the sun setting quietly and fast like treachery; I shuddered, but followed; the man, a shadow ahead of me, seemed to know the place, but the ground still bare, no flowers, just the smell of Greece, wounding my nostrils.

I turned, saw the town, dark, but saw the first house, the last, the horse was not there, and the woman who rode it, or was it a woman? Gone too.

The man entered the house, started to talk—Treachery, I thought—And so what? It's late, hell, and entered, and the wooden floor gave way.

I held on to the edge and hung, but deeper in me I had started to fall, and the hell below black, and the flowers sinking, I saw Petra, or was it Moira? Breastless night, burning her long hair, burning, extinguishing, dark wind—the end of a dubious burden.