The Trip

Gregory Djanikian

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For several months, he had been untangling himself from her, uncomfortable about what kept lingering, the caresses that sometimes went too far now, the flirtation that had no place at their table.

They were driving back from a week-end stay in a city she had always wanted to see, and he was thinking of the river which wound through its heart, remembered his feeling that the future was a far off place, everyone else heading for it, everyone waving goodbye.

She asked him suddenly whether he had ever loved her, a question which took him by surprise, brought him back to her where he was used to being.

“Yes” he could have said, “of course,” the old comfortableness setting in, but he had been led now to the edge of something, maybe a declaration which was different from any he had made before, something riskier and with the notion of change in it.

“I don’t know,” he said, “I can’t tell, maybe not.”
He saw her face tighten,
half wanted to stop the car, kiss her hard—
this is what I want, he imagined saying, this!—
half wanted to let it ride,
a turmoil inside him making him
stupid and flushed.

He let the moment pass, then for miles,
the grey silent landscape between them,
until there was no going back
with retractions, no undoing her hurt

or the way he had to think of himself now,
as a man with another man inside him
he would soon have to bargain with.