Though the years vanish as swiftly as ever, sorrow, and life coming to an end make time seem too long. I spend entire days observing nature, the gradual calming of nature: at such times my ideas become vague, undecided; without tiring them, a wild sadness rests in my eyes, and my gaze wanders over the rocks all around; every place here is a friend I am happy to see again. And somehow places I am not familiar with become my property; there is one spot there, high up on the cliff, from which the limestone humps descend ceremoniously and lethargically down to the water; and it's as though a faint recollection were telling me that I'd lived there — or in the water long ago — though the exact trace of that time has been erased in me.

I was born, said Beeklam, in a house on a hill of boulders. Then he fell silent.

Ataraxic at the sight of the boulders, I opened the window to something very “fine” and welcome reaching me from the cracks between the rocks — an echo, repeating the last two or three syllables of a sentence, or by omitting one letter, resounding like a reply or a warning, perhaps even a hiss. Or a condemnation.

Shh shh shh, said my father, interrupting in a low stinting voice, announcing the death of his wife (and my...
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mother) Thelma. Who hasn’t seen children laugh while adults cry? Though, so as not to disturb him, I was laughing almost soundlessly, almost ruefully. Much has been said of the crystalline, celestial, happy laugh of children. I had often noticed the laughter of children, of the few I’d had a chance to meet: those few would laugh about everything—at themselves, at cool and collected dromedaries, at the boats of the Yucatan, at iridescent fish scales, and so on, ad infinitum: at their mothers, at the ample arms that held them, at the mighty arms that held me, too, when they came to our house as though in life-boats to convey their solidarity with our mourning and silence. Those arms clasped me to them, hot gusts frosted my ears. In a detached tone of voice, as though surprised by the many visitors, I discussed the matters of the day. Mournful backs rested against our ample armchairs, and the blend of voices seemed to me melodious.

Approaching from one side the seated people, I became aware of something multicolored—words pronounced distinctly, an attitude unaccustomed to ceremony, the slow movements of girdled bodies—I was even caught unawares by a nuanced red cherry resting on a hat (and that Ceres basket on the head was filled with other meaty berries as time sped by all too quickly).

Fragments of shadow announced day’s end.
“Ladies,” I said, rising on my stilts, “thank you, and goodbye.”
I continued to wave goodbye even from the staircase. They bent the flesh of their pale faces, Chinese porcelain
cups in hand, and fingers waved back automatically, swiftly, rustling, remote. I climbed up to my room to greet the decline of light, perhaps so as not to forget the exact descent of night that day, that social day of the loss of my mother.

Like an island rising out of the mud, some joie de vivre spread its glow around the empty chair’s silent tyranny. The chair in which Thelma (just like the spiders that silently spin) used to weave was wrapped in a tight-fitting slipcover.

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**BEEKLAM:** I saw the widower, long and narrow, as though in flight, sit, patiently undoing the petit point on its stretcher, that lovely harmony of a mountain landscape swept away by the man’s reckless fingers; such was his skill (as though he’d done little else in life) and zeal in untangling the colored threads that soon that perforated skein displayed its natural tint—of soggy snow.

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Following a blind alley in Amsterdam, not far from the harbor, one reaches a dark stone building almost unwittingly. Metal screens clatter on the windows. The front gate is always open. White porcelain tiles cover the floor of the entrance; propped up by the mighty, almost black stone arms of two broken sirens, its vault holds the open eye of a window. Stumps of other arms are scattered across the ceiling. Little remains of the pink flesh color, some of the cobalt blue, and a few gold stars. It was once a sky. This is where Beeklam lived.
BEELAM: Shut the doors.
VICTOR: They are double doors and they are shut.
BEELAM: So what’s that light filtering in endlessly?
VICTOR: There are cracks.
BEELAM: Well, block them off.
“The cracks,” Beeklam repeated, raising his head by about three finger widths, “or untimely passersby. Yesterday they were down by the wall, standing stiff, with black sashes at their waists and a positive look in their eyes. Were they meditating? Our orbs clashed. I’d lowered my gaze heavily. When I opened my eyes again, I saw them crouching over the magnolias. I went up to the window: they had pointed beards that stood out against white ruff collars.”

“Thank you,” I said in a falsetto, clearing my throat, and on tiptoe: “Call me a thief, a thief of ceremonies.” My words were met by a rustling of fibers.