**The Lion Cage**

She paces back and forth like the sentinels out at the edge of the fortifications, where there is nothing left. And as in the sentinels, there is homesickness in her, heavy homesickness in fragments.

As somewhere down in the ocean there must be mirrors, mirrors from the cabins of sunken ships, fragments of mirrors, which of course no longer contain anything: not the faces of the travelers, not one of their gestures; not the way they turned and looked so strangely awkward from the back; not the wall, not the corner where they slept; still less what swayingly shone in from there and outside; nothing, no. But as nevertheless a piece of seaweed perhaps, an open, sinking polyp, the sudden face of a fish, or even just the water itself, floating, parted, coming together again, evokes resemblances in those mirrors, distant, oblique, false, soon abandoned resemblances with what once existed --:

thus memories, fragments of memories, lie, broken-edged, in the dark at the bottom of her blood.

She paces back and forth around him, the lion, who is sick. Being sick doesn’t concern him and doesn’t diminish him; it just hems him in. The way he lies, his soft bent paws intentionless, his proud face heaped with a worn-out mane, his eyes no longer loaded, he is erected upon himself as a monument to his own sadness, just as he once (always beyond himself) was the exaggeration of his strength.

Now it still twitches here and there in his muscles, it tenses, here and there small spots of anger are forming, too distant from one another; the blood bursts angrily, with a leap, from the chambers of his heart, and certainly it still has its carefully tested turns of sudden decision when it rushes into the brain.

But he just lets things happen, because the end hasn’t yet come, and he no longer exerts any energy and no longer takes part. Only far off, as though held away from himself, he paints with the soft paintbrush of his tail, again and again, a small, semicircular gesture of indescribable disdain. And this takes place so significantly that the lioness stops and looks over: troubled, aroused, expectant.

But then she begins her pacing again, the desperate, ridiculous pacing of the sentinel, which falls back into the same tracks, again and again. She paces and paces, and sometimes her distracted mask appears, round and full, crossed out by the bars.

She moves the way clocks move. And on her face, as on a clock dial which someone shines a light onto at night, a strange, briefly shown hour stands: a terrifying hour, in which someone dies.

*Rainer Maria Rilke*