Thump after thump, the woodcutter’s axe sunk into the trunk of the lemon tree standing in the courtyard of the house. From time to time, interwoven with the chops of the axe, the whines of a young idiot came up to the window overlooking the alleyway, near which sat Samiha. Like a blind beggar’s wretched knock, the fragrance of the lemon tree infiltrated the room and embedded itself in the air.

The groans of the idiot drew out; to Samiha’s ears they were broken and harsh, and an angry wild beast behind them called to some creature awakening in her veins. She could see the idiot jumping in the alley, circled by a group of children taunting and throwing orange skins at him. Samiha was sure that in his eyes slept two fevered tigers in a dark bush clearing.

Samiha’s father was a decrepit old man made crabby by illness. The scent of the lemon tree had irritated him and he decided to finish with it. He summoned the woodcutter, ignoring Samiha’s pleas; for the lemon tree had been her childhood friend, at its most beautiful at the onset of winter when the raindrops shimmered on its leaves, the greens glistening and sparkling until it seemed that at any moment they must soon burst into flames.

The idiot’s moans picked up again, catching the grief of the lemon tree in its death throes. A strange fear crept up Samiha’s spine. It struck her that her sky was choked with the waning stars of her broken dreams. She was a woman whose youth had only just flowered, but had been divorced by her husband some months before.

For all that she had been a proper wife, and had cooked the food and washed the clothes and cleaned the rooms and surrendered herself to the man her husband as if on heat, live and frenzied. When she had been ten years old her father had hit her about harshly because he had seen her dress riding up her thighs, but shortly after that, on the eve of her wedding, her married female relations had instructed her on how to twist her body at the moment of its union with man, and how to wind up her voice for him in intimate harmony and intoxicated lust.

But when night fell and she lay pulled against him, she was disgusted and recoiled from his hands as they touched her. She froze into a lump of meat, silent and motionless, surrendered to the weight of man. Her husband angered and exasperated, could not accept life with her. He wanted a woman who would sigh for him, whose body would tremble even when she caught the scent of a man in the distance.
Samiha returned home to her family, and lived on forsaken, to help her mother with the housework, and then to fritter away the rest of her daylight hours sitting near the window, watching those who passed down the alley, and the wailing young idiot, who never left it, even when he leaped down its length chasing the children.

The blade of the axe still fell on the trunk of the lemon tree, cutting further and further into its body. With each chop of the axe Samiha felt that she was gradually losing her childhood; in the old days she had been a child who laughed for no reason; but the moon had frightened her and that it was just a solid disk reflecting white rays had never satisfied her.

Samiha heard a strange sharp yelp, which she immediately knew must have come from the idiot. Looking from the window she saw the idiot squatting on the ground, squeezing his head with his hands as blood flowed from between his fingers. After one of them had thrown a stone at him, the children had fled.

Samiha withdrew from the window and threw herself down on the sofa, prey to an unknown terror. The wails of the idiot wove into the chops of the axe and the scent of lemon. She closed her eyes as she gave herself up to a violent shaking, feeling fingers pressing on her throat, throttling her. She wanted to cry for help before she suffocated, a heavy weight of pain was crushing her, cutting through her whole body. Then it retreated, leaving her gasping for air and peace. The relief with which she breathed was mixed with a residue of fear.

Suddenly she caught sight of the dark man that used to storm through her dreams at night. He was tall, completely naked, and his skin was covered with a thick layer of coarse black hair. How much she wanted to touch him. But she couldn't move.

The axe still struck remorselessly against the trunk of the lemon tree. Standing near the door, the shadow man smiled, his eyes flashing. In a strangled voice Samiha said: “Go away.”

He smiled broadly and his teeth showed white against two lips of coagulated scarlet blood. She would have loved him to have said just one word, above all she wanted to hear his voice that could only be like the roar of a wave crashing against the boulders of a coast lost in the distance. Samiha tried to flee when he started to come close. For the second time she repeated: “Go away.”

The man paid no attention and continued his advance. He stretched out his open hand and touched her dangling hair, his lips mouthing noiselessly, although Samiha was certain that he said to her: “My beloved.”

The idiot screamed. The shadow man took Samiha’s hand, drew her, and, overpowered by a sweet tranquillity, she followed him, docile. She