

Lightness

TEXT Anne Maurel

Because we tend to confuse it with fickleness, we often forget that lightness is close to grace. To be or to feel light is to experience the nearly miraculous sensation of being released from the ground, being closer to the sky. Of being endowed with heightened, less acquisitive senses that make us caress, rather than grasp, something. We no longer want to grab, to hold onto, to cling to, to be anchored in reality. We prefer to brush our fingertips over it, honing our awareness of what is most tenuous about it. A piano tune wafting out of an open window, played by a girl whose face we'll never see; the refinement of lace, called *frivolité* in the 19th century; the delicacy of purposeless ornaments; scents along a footpath; swallows in flight; evanescent pleasures; all the fleeting things of beauty in the world can bring delight without sparking a desire to possess them.

This state of grace, achieved effortlessly, without constraint—lightness is a frame of mind—delivers us, at least momentarily, from the laws of gravity, from the duties and profundities of daily life, adds a gracefulness to our actions, our movements, our discussions. When we feel light, we are shrewd, subtle, nimble and detached, lighthearted, able to find humor in small things, taking pleasure in our fleeting steps or words. Walking nearly feels like dancing. Conversation glides from one subject to the next, without stalling.

Lightness is the art of skimming surfaces and moments, shying away from depths, preferring the sketch to the drawing, the rough draft to the final work, flirtation to commitment. You can condemn it but you may just be a little envious. When describing people of loose morals, the French use the word *papillonner*—to flit about like a butterfly from one thing to the next. ▀