

## CHAPTER ONE

“I think it’s today,” she said. “Now,” she finished, her voice stronger, touching him on the arm because he’s often distracted. Yes, distracted, who knows? Someone temporary, perhaps; someone that, at 28 years of age, still hasn’t begun to live. Strictly speaking, except by a host of happy anxieties, he doesn’t have anything, and isn’t exactly anything yet. Yet this skinny being, of an aggressive – almost offensive – joy, saw himself facing the pregnant woman as if, only then, had he grasped the extent of the fact: a child. One day he’ll be here, he laughed, excited. Let’s go! The women who, in all senses of the word, had supported him for the last four years, was now being supported by him as they waited for the elevator, at midnight. She looks pale. The contractions. The water, she said – something like that. He wasn’t thinking about anything – in terms of newness, tomorrow he would be as young as his child. Nevertheless, one needs to play. Before leaving, he remembered a small whiskey bottle, which he put in his other pocket; in the first pocket, he’d put the cigarettes. A cartoon: a man is smoking one cigarette after another in the waiting room until the nurse, the doctor, someone, shows him a bundle and says something very funny, so we laugh. Yes, there is something funny about the wait. It is a role we play, the flustered father, the happy mother, the crying baby, the smiling doctor, the faceless stranger that comes out of nowhere, congratulating us, the vertigo of a time that, now, accelerates in desperation, spinning dizzily and relentlessly around a baby, only to stop and settle a few years later – perhaps never. There is an entire backdrop that has been set up for the role, and in it, one must show happiness. Pride, too. It deserves respect. There’s an entire dictionary of appropriate sentences for the birth. In a way – by now he was starting his yellow VW beetle (they don’t speak, but they feel something good in the air) and took care not to graze the bumper on the parking lot columns, which had already happened twice – he was also being born now, and he liked this more or less edifying image. Despite continuing to not be where he was – this is a permanent sensation, which is why he smoked so much, an unrelenting machine asking for gas. It is an entire landscape of ideas: stepping on him, we don’t have anything, just the expectations of a vague and badly delineated future. But I don’t have anything yet, he would say, in a kind of metaphysical competition. No house, no job, no peace. Well, a son – and, always joking, he saw himself a pot-bellied, strict man, working in something that was finally solid, a picture-perfect photo of the family plastered to the wall. No: he is in another sphere of life. He is predestined for literature – someone that is



necessarily superior, a being for whom the rules of the game are different. Nothing ostentatious: real superiority is discreet, tolerant and merry. He lives on the margins: that is all. There is not resentment, because he is not mature enough yet for resentment, a force that, at some point, can put us aggressively in our place. Perhaps the beginning of this counterforce (but he would not be capable of knowing this, as he was so close to the present moment) is the fact that he had never managed to make a living from his work. From his real work. A tension that almost always finds its escape through laughter, it is the escape he has.

In the counter of the maternity ward, the kind lady asks for a check as a guarantee and things move on too quickly, because someone is already taking his wife far away, yes, yes, the water broke, he hears, while he deals with the bureaucracies – and once again he hesitates when it comes to filling in the space marked “profession” and he almost says “it’s my wife that has the profession. I” – and he still manages to find the time to say something, the woman too, but the warmth turns solemn under the eyes of spectators – something bigger, it seems, is happening, a kind of theater is being drawn in the air, we are too delicate for birth and we need to disguise all the dangers of this life, as if someone (the image is absurd) were taking his wife to her death and this represented something completely normal. It’s back: the horror he feels towards hospitals, public buildings, solemn institutions, columns, halls, payment stalls, domed ceilings, queues, their granite stupidity – bureaucracy’s grammar repeats itself here too, a small and private space. Later, he realizes he is in a room facing his wife on a stretcher; pale, she smiles at him and their hands touch, shyly, almost as if they were committing a transgression. The sheets are blue. There is a sterility about everything, a brutal absence of objects, his steps echo as if in a church and once again he experiences the anguish of the falseness, there is a prime mistake somewhere and he cannot place it, but soon he doesn’t think about it anymore. The seconds are going down the drain.

They say something he cannot hear; and, while he waits, he loses track of time – what time is it? Late night. Now he’s alone in a hallway beside an empty ramp and across from two revolving doors, with a circular glass in the middle of each blade through which he peaks but sees nothing. He doesn’t think about anything but, if he were to think, maybe he would say: I am as I have always been – alone. He lit a cigarette, happy: and that is good. He took a sip from the whiskey bottle in his pocket, playing his small role. So far, things are going well – he wasn’t thinking of his child, he was thinking of himself, and that included the totality of his life, wife, child, literature, future. He knows that he hasn’t ever written anything that was actually good. Piles of bad poetry, from the age of 13 up until last month: *The son of Spring*. The poem drags him mercilessly to the “kitsch”, pulling him by the hair, but something must be said about what is happening and he doesn’t know exactly what is happening. He has the vague sensation that things will work out, because they are the result of desire; and those that are on the margins take risks – or he would be put into the system’s sub-life, this whole shit, he almost exclaims, and takes another sip from the whiskey



bottle and lights another cigarette. He's 28 and he still hasn't finished his Literature degree, which he despises, he drinks a lot, laughs for too long, inconveniently, reads chaotically and writes texts that had been crammed into a drawer. An atavistic hook still ties him to the nostalgia of a theatre community he sees once a year, in a prolonged dependency on his childhood guru, an endless and unsolvable gymnastics to adjust today's clock to the phantasmagoria of a stopped time. A late son of the 1970s, impregnated with the superiority of the periphery's periphery, he uses intuition to sniff some way out. It is hard to be reborn, he will say, some years later, a colder man. Meanwhile, he teaches private lessons on essay writing and, concentrated, revises PhD and Master's theses on any subject. Grammar is an abstraction that accepts anything. He gave up being a master watch maker, or the profession gave him up, a medieval dinosaur. If only he were gifted as a salesman, behind a counter. But alas: he chose to repair watches, a childish fascination with the mechanisms and useless daintiness of manual work. And yet he feels like an optimist – he smiles, looking at himself from above, as if in an imaginary cartoon, now a real figure. Alone in the hallway, he takes another sip of the whiskey and starts to feel overwhelmed by the euphoria of a father being born. Things start to fit in. An advertising image, he laughs at the paradox: almost as if the simple fact of having a child meant the definite compliance to the system, but isn't necessarily a bad thing, as long as we are "whole," as long as we're "authentic," "true to ourselves" – he was still fond of these words, which rang loudly in his own use, the mythology of the powers of natural purity against the dragons of artifice. He is already beginning to mistrust these rhetorical totalities, but he lacks the courage to break free of them – in fact, he never truly rid himself of the imaginary, which, in the depths of his soul, meant keeping one foot back, attentive, during all moments in life, not to be devoured by the violent and never-ending power of that which is cliché and that which is impersonal. He needed the "truth" to leave the rhetoric and transform itself into permanent disquiet, a brief utopia, a glimmer in the eye.

Such as now: he sipped again from the drink, almost entering into the realm of euphoria. He wanted to create the solemnity of that moment, a solemnity that was for his own use, intimate and non-transferable. Like the director of a play pointing out the details of the scene to the actor: feel this way; move over there; smile. Look at how you take the cigarette from its case, sitting alone on this blue bench, while you wait for your son's arrival. Cross your legs. Think: you didn't want to be there during labor. It has just begun to be cool for fathers to be present at their children's birth – an almost religious participation. Everything seems to be turning into religion. But you didn't want to, he hears himself saying. It's that my world is mental, maybe he would say, if he were older. A son is the idea of a son; a woman is the idea of a woman. Sometimes, things coincide with the ideas we have of them, sometimes not. Almost always not, but then time has already gone by, so we occupy our thoughts with new things, that fit into another group of ideas. He didn't even want to know if it would be a boy or a girl: that heavy stain on the ecograph, that



primitive ghost that projected itself on a dark screen, moving in the darkness and in the heat, does not translate into gender, just into being. We prefer not to know, that's what they told the doctor. All is well, it seems, that's all that matters.

There then was, finally, the feeling of a stopped, suspended time. In that illuminated silence, in small distant rumbles – steps, a door that closes, some low voice – gained the seriousness of a brief echo, he imagines the change to his life and tries to anticipate some sort of routine, so that things don't change that much. He has enough energy in him to go on for days sleeping badly, drinking beer in the intervals, smoking heavily, laughing and telling stories, while his wife recovers. He would now be a father, which always dignifies one's biography. He will be an excellent father, he is certain: he will make sure his child is the arena of his worldview. He already has an entire cosmogony prepared for him. He remembered some verses from *The son of Spring* – his teacher friend will publish them in the magazine *Revista de Letras*. Yes, the verses are nice, he dreamed. The poet is good at giving advice. Do this, be like this, breathe this air, look at the world – the metaphors, one by one, evoke the goodness of human beings. A Kipling from the province, he feels impregnated with humanism. The child will be definitive proof of my qualities, he almost says out loud, in the silence of that final hallway, a few minutes before his new life. It was as if the communitarian religious spirit that was secretly blossoming in the country's soul, the entire dream of natural utopias concentrating their subtle irrationality, their ethereal transcendence, the celestial peace of God's lambs relived now without borders, rituals or text-books – anything goes, o Lord! – had also found in the marginal poet, perhaps especially in him, its refuge. The irrational endeavor of utopias: long hair, Franciscan sandals, the doors to perception, natural life, free sex, we are all authentic. Yes, a counterweight was necessary, or the system would kill us all, as it did many times. There is an arrhythmia in this supposedly personal project, but this he doesn't know yet, in the chance of an intractably temporary life; my life hasn't started yet, he liked to say, as if trying to defend himself from his own incompetence – so many years dedicated to... to what, again? To lyrics, to poetry, to an alternative lifestyle, to creation, to something bigger, which he knows not what it is – so many years and nothing to show for it! Being alone is a good defense. Living in a city with aggressive geniuses on every street corner, he thinks about the meekness of his stories, finally published, where he finds more mistakes every time he turns a new page. The young adult novel launched nationally will be terminated in the first edition, forever, after a ridiculous spat with the editor from São Paulo, in a few months. "You have to take out this paragraph in the second edition because the small town school teachers are complaining." He gave up on the book.

He doesn't know it yet, but he already feels that this isn't his literature. Three months previously, he had finished *The lyrical terrorist* and it seems like something better starts from there, though still shapeless. Someone flailing to get rid of the influence of the guru, trying to get away from



the world of messages to the world of perception, under the coldness of reason. He had forever lost the feeling of the sublime, which, although it may sound old-fashioned, is the necessary fuel for writing poetry. The idea of the sublime is not enough, he begins to understand – with it, we only achieve the simulacrum. You need to have strength and guts to call forth the language of the world, without sounding ridiculous. There is something incompatible between me and poetry, he tells himself, defensively – admitting to poetry, it seems, is like admitting to religion and he has, since forever, been someone completely lacking in religious sentiment. A being that moves in the desert, he would perhaps write, with a certain degree of splendor, to define his own solitude. Solitude as project, not as sadness. I still have not managed to be alone, he concludes, with a shred of anguish – and now (he looks at the revolving door, without thinking) never again. He had recently started to write another novel, *Essay on Passion*, in which – he imagines – he will start his life afresh. And other people's lives too, with the language of satire. No one will be saved. Three chapters were ready. It is a happy book, he supposed. I need to start, once and for all, he tells himself, and only by writing will he find out who he is. So he hopes. There are too many things to organize, but perhaps it is because of that that he feels well, happy, inhabited by plans.

Suddenly, the doctor – towards whom he never felt much empathy and, therefore, had no expectations – opens the revolving doors, as always without a smile. There's nothing new about the lack of a smile, which is why, the young dad, barely hiding the mini whiskey bottle, was not troubled. The man took off the green gloves, like someone who had just finished an unpleasant task – for some reason, that was the absurd, definitely false, image that he recalled from that moment.

“Is everything okay?” has asks. It's a rhetorical question: his mind is already on the following month, seven months later, a year and three months, five years ahead, his son growing up, his spitting image.

“It's a boy” – no surprises there: *I was certain he would actually be the son of Spring*, he would have said, if he had spoken. “The mother is doing very well.”

And he disappeared off to where he had come from.

