

ENCOUNTER IN A DARK ROOM

NADJA WALKS ALONG the paths in the cemetery and knows that she's become pregnant. It happened at the minister's house, at a party in a closed room where Nadja chanced to mess around with a fellow who was so seductive, that she said to herself, he tempts me every time he looks at me with those wild eyes, he has such aesthetic madness it makes me think how good it would be if this moment were to become eternal and there were no tomorrow in need of linking pegs of love and disdain and I were only just this instant with this beautiful man with his solidly rigid thighs and his look of honey and spice and lips that know how to kiss the way they're kissing me at this moment when I surrender myself like an animal with no need for excuses or explanations, a fluid discourse of the body that begins to reveal itself, for already the buttons are undoing themselves on their own. We are one flesh says the Bible, but I don't want to think about the Bible right now as I begin to sense a fatal ecstasy.

"We are mortal" he proclaims.

"Still virgins nonetheless" I reply moistly.

And still in the locked room, we two in total and complete darkness. We do not want to arouse suspicion because he told me he was the son of the minister. Then I remembered I'd seen his picture in Zozimo's society column, he was with a Nordic blond who had an unpronounceable name with many t's and p's. Don't know whether I told him, don't know anything, I only want to rest on his chest (which by the way has red hairs), because now the burning has subsided. It was quick, but we are sated. What a crazy story I babbled and he asked huh and said he was very sleepy but could not sleep, his wife was at the party, she must be looking for him by now, or maybe not I said, maybe she hasn't even noticed your absence, he replied she's crazy about me. But he did not get up, he remained there, lying down for a long time while we talked about things that gave me a kind of tickling sensation.

There he was, naked, with shoulders held high like a good F. Scott Fitzgerald character. Yes, there he was, saying he was the son of the government minister and that he wanted me to know about his life. I suddenly remembered I had been arrested in 1970 and that I'd barely

escaped death. I felt my scar and felt I wanted this man. He had an elegant air. He was telling me he also wanted this moment to last forever and wished we could remain there like damned souls. I felt wounded. And told him I did not want the ecstasy of the damned. I spoke of Sartre, of *Huis Clos*. He said he'd studied at Columbia and had met Marcuse at a party. Marcuse was discussing "unhappy consciousness." Bogdanovich and his girlfriend were at the party also. But he hadn't been able to speak with Bogdanovich. He tried to approach him, but the one he was able to approach was his girlfriend. Bogdanovich was looking intently at his watch.

This man I desire doesn't know I am suffering. I know I'm crying on the inside. Alone. And I tell him I want him. I run my hand over my vagina and feel it burning. My pubic hairs stand on end but only I see. There's a moon behind the window. "I want . . ." shouts a voice deep inside. "I want . . ." I beg. He hears my voice and is already dressed. "Let's go" he says.

But I say, no, let's not go, let's stay here a little longer, I want you to hear my story, my story has neither Marcuse nor Bogdanovich, but it has a man who stabbed me seven times through the heart, and this man no longer exists, this man is mine. Wanna see? My name is Matilde Osório. I was born early, when in the interior of Rio Grande all the children were grazing. I learned very early that being a woman is an ontological problem. Just as being man is also. Do you understand? Do you understand that there is no possible alienation from our bodies? Do you understand love? And when I said "love" I saw in the dim moonlight that he felt faint and had to support his head on my lap. I didn't hesitate to run my hands over his straight black hair that seemed almost blue in the moonlight. "Do you understand what I'm saying, love?" I begged. I think he said my monster. My little monster, I sobbed. His body smelled of fresh sperm. We could hardly see each other. The darkness and the silence made it seem there wasn't a party at the minister's house; I even thought they'd died. All of them. And I took his hand and touched it to my scar. He shuddered and asked why? I knew that if I spoke of my imprisonment he would hate me. And still I confessed. Bogdanovich was looking intently at his watch. But his girlfriend seemed very alert and wanted comments. Then I remarked that I found her boyfriend a bit stiff, aloof. She said not at all, it's just today. It'll pass, I concluded. Bogdanovich doesn't like fried food or whiskey. They say he snorts coke. He's sour today, Bogdanovich is!

Marcuse is much more pleasant, he sits and talks to me about the “unhappy consciousness,” runs his hands over his gray hair and always has something to say. He yawns but doesn’t seem to be a bit tired. He says he likes social gatherings. He admits he spends all afternoon getting ready, brushes his clothes, his shoes, gives his dog a bath. No, no, his dog doesn’t go with him to parties. He simply feels like giving him a bath. The dog snorts in the tub, bites Marcuse’s hands, the more sensitive say he even laughs. I’ve never seen a dog laugh. How can a dog laugh without having the slightest flexibility in the mouth? How can it, I retorted, how can it, how can it, how can it? I saw his surprised white teeth. Are you surprised that I want you? He doesn’t answer, he closes his lips. I run my nails over his lips. And sing a lullaby softly. He said he remembered. When I was about to ask him what he remembered, I noticed he was naked again. Like me.

*translated by Maria Duarte*