

## The flight of the Angel

There was an explosion when the champagne cork burst into the air. You had just said: I feel like a volcano about to erupt, a champagne cork about to fly. An explosion is the result of a law of physics: once the fuse is lit, the explosion expands by contagion. There were about 80 people there and all were caught up in the chain effect. The first was you, Rubina. Your hot air balloon, lighter now, was ready to take off. The last knot on the ground undone, the balloon was already drifting with the wind, lured to the sky, quivering in the altitude. After a long pause among the submarines of your past, at the last moment, young Tarpana, your flight companion, arrived. He had invited himself, in the sense that he jumped into your circle at just the right time, not a minute too soon, not a minute too late. And together you cast off the last rope. His was an act of courage and yours of trust and generosity in sharing that flight. The slim, tanned Australian had a good point: he was light and his presence reassuring.

For those who could not see, the two of you were sitting face to face with your legs intertwined. He hugged you tight, intensely, and you began to rock yourself. The winds around you were strong, we were all in the eye of a magic cyclone. The others, the eighty, got into other flying apparatus: flying carpets, hang-gliders, helicopters, DC9s, stilts, carriages with motors or horses, canoes, sail boats, submarines . . . Everyone got ready to take off and you no longer looked out. There was a great buzz of voices, an overwhelming music filled the air. I watched you whirl in his arms in a space reserved for the pure of spirit. I watched your somersaults, the pirouettes, you seemed to be measuring the immensity of space. Without fatigue you rejoiced like a swallow heralding the arrival of spring.

Your race against time was over. I knew you were in another dimension and, on seeing your face when you returned I realized that something special had happened to you. The pores of your skin had absorbed a white light that radiated around you. The expression of your new vitality caught everyone up in the vortex of movement. Fluids changed direction. Their throbbing, inside circuits, generated complex webs and bizarre tracks of light, multi-colored flashes chased one another like crazed fireflies, like fireworks, the greens, the blues, the yellows, which only a prodigious painter would have been able to reproduce.

The colors and the light of each of us kept changing. Men and women became more defined, and more detectable were the sad and the happy people. Then the game

changed: the former definitions clashed as they changed into other shapes. You would have needed a slow motion camera to catch the slight tremors of your body, Rubina, to hear the melody they created and their ability to awaken lost dreams and forgotten memories.

For you, your flight of the angel was an initiation, a baptism of being . . . when you returned to earth and translated your experience into words, you spoke of white walls in a Mediterranean landscape, a large, white, empty house with generous windows through which flowed blissfulness. It was not your imagination: but profound joy merged with the fear of dying from such intensity that broke free into laughter, loud and uncontrollable. Like a jug overflowing, a river bursting its banks, an egg breaking on the floor, a volcano ejaculating fire. Your laughter filled us and held us bewitched.

Someone said that you had given substance to the wild force of nature; others, like wet chicks felt your warmth bring out the cold that had accumulated in their bones throughout years of suffocated emotions. Suddenly you became a huge brood hen with outstretched wings under which nature's outcast sought refuge.

Your flight companion took bookings for the next flight, a woman shouted that you were pure dynamite, other voices joined in to cry out their jubilation.

The juggler who helped you unclog the bottle was called Solamor. His body exuded something undefinable, a particular harmony, a unification of dynamism and stability, a bit like a dancer who, leaping and whirling, never loses his center of gravitation.

We all felt his intensity. Yet he was also affable: his fine sense of humor diluted the drama, making the change of dimensions fluid and easy. He spoke slowly, his voice calm, his intonation typical of the English, which he was. He tried to guide people into the listening space, where the essence of truth is revealed not in thunderous stridor, but through hardly perceptible whispers and movements. The anticipation of storms, cyclones, earthquakes was dissolved by his quietness. He was well acquainted with the mental procedures that he was to undo, the old circuits he was to patiently defuse. He eliminated each contact and at the unplugging of each jack many laughed at themselves, others were marveled by the ease with which they agreed with his words, shedding their crusty, old convictions.

He continued talking, slowly, relentlessly demolishing every defense: fortresses, towers, moats, walls. The amazing thing is that he did so with a whisper, a hint, the delicate touch of a feather. His white beard and hair, his slightly sunken, piercing blue eyes, his thick eyebrows made him look like a magician, at home with talking to elves, spirits, mermaids, fairies and semi-gods in a land hidden from our world.

Solamor showed a particular knack at changing into whatever any of the eighty asked for. At once he could be a carpenter, a gardener and a sculptor modeling matter. Like a gardener he was in close contact with nature: when he picked a ripe fruit the bud of a flower appeared in its place. He looked closely at nature, like a bee hovering over the heads of flowers, he recognized the scent and the color of those trapped in their own contradictions. They entrusted themselves to him, and he helped them with unwavering attention. He watered withering plants, he pruned dead wood and let new life blossom. He upheld young plants in need of support, he blew strong winds so that the roots dug deeper, the stems learnt to bend. Pitilessly he uprooted weeds and burnt them. He had the right remedy for each plant. The carpenter within him saw beyond the gnarled bark, could tell the quality of the wood, and the sculptor felt the invisible forms waiting to be freed, the grain of the wood waiting to be brought to light from the dark dust and rough bark. Like a leader he responded to each situation alternating stillness with action. His favorite enemies were the shadows, they resisted longest to being banished, they stuck closest to those who found refuge in them. Solamor had the look of a clairvoyant, of those who know the emotions of their interlocutor by a movement of the eyes, the curve of the shoulders or a crease in the lips. Being at home in the ethereal he was able to be intransigent and was protected by detachment: which made him impartial.

When you overcame your hesitation and began to speak you didn't know what was happening. You disregarded the unwritten law that wanted you silent, you broke free from the convenience of silence and the privileges of the elite, you stretched out a bridge from your island, and enriched it with of the fruits of your fertile land. You recognized your place in the great fresco that declares all living beings connected in different ways; by delicate spider webs and deep connective tissue, casual connections and complex plots: layer upon layer of tightly woven material.

For sure, delving into that mass of interactions had made you condense a nugget of bitter sweet honey inside you. You had, at times, felt it inside like a precious metal embedded in your mortal bones. But never had you betrayed your respect by

revealing it, by breaking your silence. You would have liked to preserve that state of beatitude in silence, guard it as a privilege. Sometimes you forgot it while in the realm of loss and exile. Until your flight to new lands, you had been jealous of your possessions. You ordained yourself a vestal in a secret kingdom. Your sensations ensconced within your flesh, your sense of belonging to the universe and your liberty-loving soul rejoicing, filled you with both excitement and serenity.

As Solamor's gaze fell on you, your thoughts started leaping like wild horses. The time to entrust yourself had come, and like the blind who rely on the seeing man's arm, your mind followed him, trusting, to the unknown destination. . . You talked of some imaginary cork that prevented your champagne from flowing. You couldn't imagine such powerful magma was about to explode thanks to his mediation.

Solamor listened to you and took your hand an instant before your kaleidoscope started ringing with his voice. Entrusting yourself to this excellent guide was what allowed you to travel beyond time and space.

*Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Who is the prettiest of us all?  
You have never thought yourself pretty,  
answered Solamor, the talking mirror. . .*

That very moment a tear in the curtain, the hiss of a shot arrow, the whoosh of a flying bullet and a groan all together came from your throat. A piercing scream, ages of tears, forgotten suffering came to a head all at once.

The sarcophagus lid moved, the glass case cracked and fell into a thousand pieces. The cotton padding caught fire and the trapeze dancer took flight. The corpse wept deep among discarded bandages.

The waters broke and the enfant heaved free of the incarcerating womb. The little girl ran lightly after a fire-red, bouncing ball; skipping and singing foreign songs in front of a mirror; delighting in the unfamiliar sounds of a foreign language, inventing meaningless words and mysterious tales.

It was the sound of her own voice that took Rubina so far away: unknown lands lay waiting for her, those mysterious tales wanted to be told to nomadic people in

search of a cantor to define their adventures, while erring from east to west: a witness to the wondrous secrets longing to be told.

Where were the sounds coming from now, the voices and the footsteps? Why were so many people crowded round the entrance to the court house, pushing and rowdy? Witnesses debated on acquired rights and natural rights, on which should have precedence. There were squabbles about who should testify first . . . The trial was about to begin. The accused was you, Rubina, watching the development of the scene without surprise, as though the habit of feeling guilty had weaned you from the joy of amazement.

The lawyer, in a black toga and squared hat with a tassel, was good looking with sensual, Greek features and a lusty mouth, his large, dark eyes darting across the deep sadness of his face. Even the witnesses seemed despondent. Each one had suffered humiliation, some form of abuse. They were disheartened and you could see why beyond those laments and claims lay defeat. On their drooping shoulders weighed resignation to a fate that wanted them enslaved to themselves and to acquired conditioning: an infrangible imposition.

“Plagiarism! Plagiarism!. . .Plagiarism!” they all shouted.

“You’re just like your father” said the mother. “You have the character of a man. You’re headstrong and stubborn! You’ve been a rebel since the age of five!”

“Your nose is rather ugly. It has a bump and it’s big and bulbous. You should have plastic surgery done.” Said Alberto, her first love.

“You’re not pretty. So no one will love you. You know that only the pretty ones get courted and loved, don’t you?” said Maria Vittoria, her old aunt.

“No, no, beauty is in the eye of the beholder” replied another, younger aunt.

“You must try to be seductive, charming, attractive, amusing” said Agnes.

“Well you’re a character” said Giulio, consoling as usual.

“You’ve been convinced and you’ve convinced yourself that you’re ugly” insisted Clotilde, “ but it’s not true. It just isn’t true.”

“I’d never have thought you had this problem. No one could tell.” said others.

“But you’re so strong, I’d like to be like you” said someone envious.

Solamor spoke up again in his mysterious voice. “Ice cream comes in many flavors. Some like vanilla and some like chocolate.”

The lawyer had, in the meantime, lined up the witnesses. The judge listened agog, his eyes almost hidden under huge eyebrows which due to the frown stood on end, starched by the tension. “Silence! Silence in court!” he said with imperious voice, “Only those who really have something to say about the accused may talk.”

“Milord” started the young lawyer “we have an appeal on behalf of fifty percent of the human race: women. The secondary gender, or the first, I don’t know. . . We are all of a woman born . . . The revolution from within against myths of gender, the beauty myth . . . Is woman edible? . . . The apple and the snake are intrinsically part of the foundation on which our society is built. The female gender is an open problem. . . what can I add? Here before us is a shy girl who has become a boy to survive. We have no example of the good wife and mother. . . all we have is pervasive gender-phobia. It is a paradox and a counter-paradox. . . Women are often against themselves, even when they know they are exploited. . . Emancipation will be difficult. . . both empty and full at once. . . It’s the feminine mystique , comrade master. Here love reigns or perhaps we should start with the initiation: when girls become women . . . it’s the longest revolution. . . the broken doll. . . the household woman. Italian women confess their sins. . . To conclude, Milord: the accused is a heretic of love.”

Rubina, in the great confusion, interrupted her games, attracted by voices. Her head followed the passing of one voice to another like watching a ping pong match. She looked hypnotized, motionless with her socks rolled down around her ankles, the pockets of her shorts bulging with colored marbles. In her hands were her brother’s goal keeper gloves and on her face an impenetrable look. Her central processing unit was on input mode and, above the screen was an intermittent red light to show that registration was in progress. The click sounded in time with the conductor’s baton.

She loved fantasizing: letting herself be carried away by other personae and images that swept her into the river of imagination. It kept her hidden inside, hiding her real self. Hiding in silence, panting, flushed like a quarry into the cellar of that courtyard where not long before her friends had cried out. She had to choose: run with all her might and risk being captured, or stay motionless, melting into the shadows which the moldy walls would have enveloped with ease.

Indecision paralyzed her, but she had to reason, evaluate the risk, trust her own senses and keep her fear at bay . . . In the meantime she discovered great pleasure in that game. There had to be a connection to that other game, the same acceleration of her heart beat but with one difference: the game was for two. The doctor and the patient, the king and the queen . . . discovering what was behind the underwear, the shorts, which introduced her to the fear of being found out, had awoken her awareness of transgression. She remembered the look of surprise and embarrassment on the face of the little boy and how she, Rubina, smiled while showing off her nudity. That difference had now been accepted but she couldn't imagine that such a small anatomical difference was to cause so much suffering.

The first was that she was no longer allowed to play with the boys in the courtyard. All she had left was the mirror in the girls' bathroom. There she smothered her face with creams and lipstick. You wondered if your thoughts were visible like your body . . . and the grown-ups? Who knows what they get up to when no one is looking. Her imagination tried to grasp what was happening in those sordid photographs she had found in the bottom of a cupboard. Naked people seemed to be busy trying out acrobatic positions in different combinations.

She too wanted a secret life. Humming she returned to the mirror, she slipped her feet into large shoes with stiletto heels trying to keep balance in that extremely precarious situation.

The next scene suggested by Solamor had you actress and director of a scene performed thousands of times since the loss of paradise. Before offering yourself to the audience you needed a moment of reflection. In front of a mirror surrounded by little lights that shone on your hands, you spread and re-spread the vermillion lipstick on your lips, as if in a trance. Then pushed by an unknown impetus you got up and made a gesture at which a crowded restaurant appeared, just the place you wanted for your rendez-vous.

Everyone saw you go in, choose the table with the precision of a general about to position his troops, with the nonchalance that hid the strategy of a hunter looking for prey.

With the binoculars of desire you scrutinized the room for the face of your beloved. You had to find him in a flash and sit down nearby, in full view; not too near to be invasive but neither too far to lose control of the situation. Despite trying to

reassure yourself with this sort of ritual, you knew full well that contact would find you lacking in self defense. You turned into a concentration of awkwardness, shyness, embarrassment; and all the words, gestures used in the past became void of the new meaning you felt living within you.

You sat at a table but your thoughts flew afar, backwards and forwards in time, you tried to imagine his expression, his smile, his look. You already knew his generosity, the purity of his desire, the warmth of his embrace, the strength of his grasp, the sensual promise of his lips.

At a certain point you needed attention, to be loved. Your erotic and polymorphic request was answered. Hands groped you, bodies entwined around you freeing you from your infantile whim. You rolled among sheets and pillows; catapulted into the softness of tender embraces and caresses.

You hovered In the space of omnipotence where heroic acts and miraculous jests were enacted. Men, in their slow modification, were unknown to you, obscure, as were your limits. Your adolescent enthusiasm and your reproachable habit of day dreaming provoked an unavoidable deviation.

Prince Charming, in the meantime, was sitting placidly; his gaze was empty, he was not looking for you . . . You took this to be an insult and started mulling judgments and criticism.

“Coward!” you thought “ how can I have fallen in love with a coward!” Blinded by the betrayal of your expectations you moved towards his table. At last sitting next to him you got lost in useless conversation; where at least you learnt that no one can be forced to love.

The memorized voice of the talking mirror boomed like a thunder clap. “So I’m not pretty enough for you?” you shouted, the whirlwind of pain swept you away. You lost the ability to relate . . . In consolation you imagined reaching him, some time on, ethereally , in a dream: swimming in crystal clear torrents or hiding behind flourishing bushes, while he backed into the shadows of a tropical forest.

Your champion was not the Brazilian lad, but Gunter the Germanic warrior. He arrived unexpected two days before you. You dreamt of languid sighs and trusting embraces, you fed on dreams of dancing at sunrise and sunset, you swam for ages in the icy swimming pool at day break.



The story of your affair with Gunter was born under the sign of comedy. The farce of your first meeting was in an imaginary world of experimenters of the soul, an exchange of greetings, the usual small talk. Then, as you declined his offer, his reaction caught you unawares: he grabbed your purse, pulling the handle madly, not to steal it but to drag you with him. The use of rationale was useless, as was pummeling his large chest. Without listening to you he hauled you into his territory.

I don't know which divinity wanted your paths to meet, but by dusk you had accepted to follow him into the desert . . . His roughness didn't scare you, his vulgarity didn't offend you, but the strength of his imposing body fascinated you. His brazenness was something you hadn't experienced. Formalities and courtship, preliminaries and preambles fell listless to the sand with you flimsy, silk dress in the fraction of a second. No blankets or sleeping bags, no cotton sheets to protect your skin from the scorpions, which luckily left you unharmed.

The fight started immediately. Cactus, giant stars, the jagged horizon of the California mountains against the flaming sunset were witnesses. He held you tight, an ironic smile on his face, as if he were sure to have many arrows to shoot. Certain he could overcome a hundred enemies, his thrust his groin with skillful mastery, dosing both rhythm and depth. He accompanied the thrust of his unsheathed scimitar with shouts to strengthen the impact of the harder blows. If his was a show of undeniable virility, you had no fear of it . . . All you wanted was to accept the pleasure without sentimentalism or illusion, without convention or plans for the future; you left all your romantic dreams on the distant bedside tables of tame bedrooms.

Like two wrestlers your intertwined bodies rolled in the sand and the shape of that one, living organism kept changing, changing so quickly that if a child had seen the shadow projected on a screen he would have smiled in fascination. He would have seen strange hybrids, hippopotami with wide open jaws in the mouths of enormous crocodiles, entangled snakes, centaurs and mermaids, beetles, fishes, butterflies, gangs of arched cats performing a love dance.

You realized that you were about to take a jump into the unknown, but you didn't know when or how it would happen. The only reassurance was in one word: trust . . . There had to be an invisible bridge lost somewhere In the memory of your genes, a rainbow called Trust.

The black colt descendant of an antique Arabian dynasty with a little girl on his back now galloped happily, his hooves hardly touching the ground. His joy was in running without direction, just feeling his power. Rubina felt his gallop resound in her trodden belly and her heartbeat race with that gallop. . . .

I remember seeing you on your knees. Down your cheeks ran warm tears and, while your forehead dropped towards the ground, I heard your voice take up a song: melancholy and gay, dark and sunny, sweet and sour, deep and acute, sensual and ethereal. In that contradictory melody I recognized my prayer.