

Diggings of a Retired Writer

Translated from the Portuguese by **Desirée Jung**

Y aquel mar, que se mueve a vuestro lado,
Es la promesa no cumplida de una
Resurrección.

Alfonsina Storni

The first fright happened when he verified his reading notes in an old volume of Alfonsina Storni. Volume that he, with all certainty, had never read. Flipping through the yellowed and mouldy pages, he noticed that, undoubtedly, those were his notes. From his own hand, with the same blunt pencil of always. The problem is that – digging his memory with his nails, hammering it against his own bones – he couldn't remember, not for a single moment, having looked over that book.

But he couldn't deny having savored it. Word by word. There it was: his letter, his peculiar way of demarcating relevant passages, his obtuse exclamation points, all very well spread out through many pages. Still dizzy and frightened, without understanding rightly what had happened, he began searching on the shelf for other titles that, from what he remembered, he certainly hadn't read. It would be thus difficult to describe his startle – that unstoppable line of question marks – and his surprise when encountering, in almost all such copies, the same list of erasures and short commentaries: with what meticulous effort he had also read them!

Alone in the middle of the dusty office, he imagined, smiling, that time had put into work in his mind, already very tired from the pasture of words, an un-reading machine. Like an invisible erasure that, gradually, started to wipe off older works from his memory. Or, better saying, formerly read. Such unusual and bothersome method, but that had at least the incontestable merit of returning, fresh and alive, agitating in the virgin lime of a lost uniqueness, some readings done a while back. Despite all his discomfort, the awe that sieved his past with zeros, he could stop, finally, buying new books. "Everything has a good side." Six thousand volumes – that was his library – were enough, and with enough room, for a beautiful return. Complete and without stains. The years left in his life – he was not an old

man yet – could be well applied in the rereading of books that, for him, became newer each day.

It was when, playing, he had the sudden certainty that time kept, on the often scarce mouth of the living, the unnameable flavor of the first things. Little mattered the motives. It would have to pulse with renovated shine, day in, day out, the archaic ardor of origins. That was the juice, the condiment of life itself. “An entire metaphysics could be constructed on the shadow of such idea,” he thought, “I have to write it down.” Radiant, since he was already orphan of findings, without being able to write a single line, he got up to search for his notebook. In the middle of his way, however, before he could place his eyes on the notebook, he was grabbed by his grandson who had just arrived from a trip. In addition, he had also to give attention to his son and daughter in law, since he hadn’t seen them in a while. Between an affair and another, he ended up forgetting to make note of such “great idea” on that day, letting it slip from his eyes.

Two months later, when leaving a doctor’s office, he remembered such findings. It was a true consolation to rescue it there, in the middle of a traffic jam and the terrible heat at the end of that afternoon. He searched for a piece of paper. None. He turned his pockets inside out. Nothing. “I can’t lose this idea,” he said in high voice, “I have to write it down as soon as I get home.” He was happy to rescue from the limbo the flame that would allow him – who knows – to sparkle a new book. The flame that was born from the forgetting of other books, and that, finally, after having been forgotten as well, returned to tell him that his memory still knew how to collect the essential from the earth. That not everything was lost. He looked, with a foreign heat, the night that already began to climb the desolate back of the clocks. “I can’t lose myself from this idea,” he still whispered. Touched by the mold of that memory, grabbing inch by inch onto the buildings, the nightfall appeared more beautiful to him. He felt full, in peace with the world, surprising thus, without hurry, a blue light that didn’t escape. He was almost a child then. “I can’t...”, he insisted again. And forgot.