

Triad of Betrayed

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In adultery, at least three people are fooled.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Despite everything, he never considered himself bitter. He suffered from a severe disenchantment at times. The word hurt his stomach. Disenchantment, weariness. Or something like that. Married for thirty-five years – and very well married, as he liked to repeat to his children every Sunday lunch. Fate wanted, however, that another woman, thirty years younger, went on extracting from him, day after day, the emphasis on such jargon and commonplace. In the end, he no longer insisted on the easy phrase, whose juice was long undone from its loquacity and pomp.

He had a mistress: and the existence of this adventure began to extinguish his old disenchantment. Without notice, a new man was born into his body. It wasn't difficult to see the change. He was more cheerful, more jovial and much vainer. His wife had well suspected, as his children did too, but he didn't give the fact much importance. It was time to live his life. That's what he told himself, groping his words. Until to his fifty-eight years old birthday, he lived according to. Lived for. Lived to. Now it was the moment to live, only, swallowing deeply the great intransitivity of this verb.

When the affair began – almost by accident, by the way – he thought everything wouldn't be more than a quick adventure. That it would be easy to control the game in his hands. Easy? Instead, what followed was a convulsion, a hit and run. A real lack of air. In the end, he realized he had made a mistake. And moreover, he was in love. He then decided to lay the cards on the table. After all, it wouldn't be any surprise. His wife must have already imagined what was going on. Despite the appearances, the marriage was over a long time ago. It was only necessary to formalize the separation and, not without some startle, start a new conjugal life. Since it was less pricy to begin on the good side of the party, he confided on his lover first.

For the first time in his life, he thought, he would have a frank conversation with someone. He started by disclosing a fixation he never believed he would have the courage to tell whoever. But courage came, and with it, the desperate attempt to gather together all the words that fled him. Where to begin? He took a deep breath, as though searching for something other than the thin air of that late afternoon. Very well: when he got married, on a cold rainy day, his wife was seventeen years old. Almost a child, costly breaking through the last childhood meshes and still leaving exposed, by mere provocation, the fingerprints of the newly split cocoon. He, a man in love. And the couple came to live, as usual, an initial period of relative happiness.

But shortly after the first pregnancy, to his sadness, his wife's struggle against her obesity didn't stop even for a minute. Neither truce nor success, by the way. As a result, each day, in an irrevocable march, her bony woman's vanity ended up by losing its exuberance. In its place, hurting, a somewhat intractable resigned lady took over. Since then – and to declare such thing he had to delicately measure his speech, which seemed to throw itself down the throat – he only had sex with the same seventeen-year-old girl. The girl with whom he had married and, due to fate's many mischiefs, no longer existed. Dead. For that reason, during the moments of pleasure, he had to close his eyes and unlock memory's doors. He had to think about the seventeen-year-old girl, hidden in some part of that stranger's body to whom he continued to be married. A presence that sometimes flourished in the way she pulled the hem of her dress, in the elusive way she smiled or announced lunch was ready.

The most terrible thing is that it was becoming more and more difficult, fearfully digging into the dark rooms of his past, saving from the limbo that sculpture fixed in adolescence. At last, almost impossible to him. It wasn't long before sex also became a very heavy burden. Until completely disappearing. In other words: he settled it alone, as he could – and that embarrassed him. Facing such contingency, between tiles and white tableware, he also returned to his seventeen years old. He was a boy exercising his body into astonishment. At the end, emptiness and disgust. A deaf cry telling him he had finally returned to the world. That he was born. And that no one can be born without pain, even more when leaving behind oneself the desired image, thousand times desired, in every fraction of enjoyment or contentment, only then to return to be, as if in an inside out magic spell, the same fifty-eight years old gentleman. The gentleman he was trying to escape from.

Intimately, he felt obliged to say all this. To clarify the matter. His helplessness was pressing. It was urgent to demarcate, however by chalk or charcoal on his own bones, his lover's importance in his life. It was through her – in her always diverse way of being a woman and a child at the same time – that he eventually broke free from his fixation to his wife's past. Through her he once again found his grounding in the world. From now on he had to bet, play the rest of his chips in the next spin of the roulette. And set fire in the days that had passed. He had revealed everything to his lover at last. Staring at the ceiling mirror, he waited for what might come to be a first and decisive step, an answer, a comment whatsoever, or, at least, a simple and cordial nod. But it was useless. He even added a small series of ellipses and question marks. And saw his lover's speech recoil in the rising night. He was on his own. What she told him only increased more and more, from each desperate attempt to understand, his orphanage. Still agonizing from the list of ready words he had received.

Everything his lover had said silenced him deeply now. The way she costily articulated each sentence, arguing that he was taking that adventure all too seriously. In fact, things were not quite like that. She saw him as a real father. The balance that she always lacked in her life. The companion of all hours. Thus, it would be better for both if it all ended without further sequels. If they continued to be great friends. Give themselves some time. He didn't know what to say. Suddenly he had lost language's oar. When he arrived home, he tried to tame the surrounding chaos. But he couldn't. He tried to reconstruct each gap, each bond of words, however he couldn't find the least meaning. Why had he become a father when he tried, with all his might, to be just a man?

Then he realized the mistake. Or the mistakes. He realized that, in fact, his lover never saw him the way he really was. Likewise, during all their common years, he also didn't come to really know the woman he had married. Sitting in the dark room, his head between his hands, he started to pull the wire that engendered the labyrinth. And he could already notice, close and panting, the minotaur's breathing. There, alone and without a past. At that very moment, he felt the presence of his wife. Without even bothering to turn on the light, she seemed to understand what had happened. "Would you like some coffee?" He lifted his head and once again faced his mistake. He realized they were all blind, blind and condemned, and that it would be very difficult – for any living creature – to cross an ocean of forgetfulness and find, on the opposite side, the consolation of other people. He saw that he had managed not only to

betray his wife. No: there were three, betrayed. Before everything, he deceived himself.
Could there be love in face of such equivocation?

That was when, drawing a faint smile at last, he decided to drink the strong coffee.