

O.

or, Xeroderma

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He might have contemplated forms and landscapes of the wide world that surrounded him. Unaware, he might have listened to the murmur of clear water and rivers, he might have smelt the sweet scent of fresh-blown flowers, admired the pink lights of dawn in the cloudless sky while the sun was not up yet. He was too young to remember, too young to appreciate. Darkness wrapped him, and covered his eyes. Illness condemned him to live in the dark, kept away from the daylight, like a nocturnal and silent animal.

He was only two when, a few months after his disease's outbreak, his father left. As if he wanted to wake up from the bad dream of having conceived a disabled and failing son, deprived of future and lights, whose life could only be a long and miserable wandering in a dry and barren desert, cut off from the world. He had laid a curse on his son in spite of himself, and he felt like he had also cursed himself at the same time. Although cowardly, it appeared to him that escape was his only chance, the only way of denying the obvious, his original, genetic guilt, over which he never had any power, any right.

Sometimes,
He was travelling.

In that flat where neither day nor night were distinguishable through the tinted windows, giving a feeling that hours were banned from there, O. only lived with his mother. When his hand was going out of the full suit he always had to wear, his mother was the only human and living form he could touch and describe, apart from him. His fingers went to and fro on her forehead, her cheeks, her eyes. He only had hazy and coloured memories of her face, which he endeavoured not to forget, like a painter drawing again the lines of a precious work which would have been exposed to sunlight for too long a time.

She was the one he could talk to, fearless of any wound, any joke, any rejection. She was his only intermediary between the desperately closed universe of the child of the moon he was, and the other one, the one the sun gave birth to every morning. Being blind, he couldn't see what it looked like. So it was his mother who answered each of his questions about the universe surrounding them, describing the whole space, concerned with detail. She told and explained it all. O. for his part was trying to fathom, to understand it all, in his own way.

Sometimes,
He was dreaming.

The day or the night, the night or the day, he did not know. Awake or asleep, asleep or awake, that did not matter.

In his dark, virgin and naked world, imagination was his only friend. An idea might dash through his mind like a shooting star, without giving him time to seize and catch it. So his brain was beginning to enumerate, generate dozens, hundreds of situations, searching for it all over the forest, then on the invisible tree of his feelings, until he finds, by a stroke of good fortune, the place where that idea had arisen. And then, he was going on the same way as it, trying to catch it on his own. He followed a path where everything was becoming clear, sweet and misty at the same time. He was getting lost, but he knew. He knew that he was elsewhere, in a place he had always dreamed of.

He was flying away
 for other possible worlds,
Flying
 for other universes,
 for other forms
 for other shapes,
 for the light
 and the beauty of the unknown places.

O. used to keep so accurate feelings and memories of his dreams that it appeared to him that he was recovering his sight each time he was dreaming. As if his own imagination had bewitched his eyes, so that he could see each time he would embrace it. Bewitched his skin, so that it becomes smooth and white each time he would let it spread and wrap him. Bewitched his body, taking him to places he had probably seen in the past, although he had the feeling that their aspect was radically different from the original one. But that didn't matter. It was his own world. A world traced on the real one, from which only the best had been kept, the worst had been repainted to fit his desires and cravings. He used to see the universe through the prism of his blind and blinded mind, watching it with colors and shapes that only existed for him.

Sometimes, a new city was outlined. Streets lamps were slowly turning into huge trees he had never seen, but only he knew their aspect and that of their leaves. Their stems of steel were losing their shapes and colours, while at their top, lights bulbs were exploding into a bunch of palmate leaves. As he wished to see a beautiful landscape he could contemplate nowhere but there, some cars, which were similar to plastic toys, vanished, replaced by nice ships with coloured and shiny sails, silently floating along on the current. With pavements, he did a large and straight expanse of sand, with the road, a channel flowing into the very close sea, and with that apartment building, a high lighthouse, at the top of which he was standing, touching its heavy and wet stones. Seagulls and albatrosses suddenly appeared, flying in the sky, calling and chirping happily, whereas the sand was exhaling a sweet and salty smell going up to the cloudless sky. When he finished convoking the elements, he remained thoughtful, contemplating the sight he had just invented, touching the transparent window pane of his smooth and moist hands, anxious to taste the generous light of the star overlooking his world. "Do it!" the birds seems to say.

So he opened the window and leaned out of it, feeling the warm sunshine on his whole face.

Like an insect back to light,
Like a butterfly getting out of the dark.

Now the enchantment was broken. He had just left childhood behind. It was the morning of his thirteenth birthday. Or the evening. Hours did not exist on this islet of darkness, lost somewhere in an ocean where life was regulated by dawn and dusk. Waking up from his dream, O. fluttered his eyelashes and saw nothing but the uniform darkness of the ordinary days. However, his cheeks were warm and painful as if they were sunburned. His fingers rubbed the dry and thick skin of his face. He had the feeling of stroking a heap of ashes with irregular outlines.

He got up and, like any other day, he dressed up in the body suit which kept him from natural and artificial light. He dreamed of a lighthouse and he was standing on a deserted and unmanned island, given back to the ungrateful and unfair nature. He had dreamed of being that firefly, that phoenix of the seas, taking lost ships to harbours around the troubled waters of the night. He wished that someone remembered his existence. But that great and thick sheet reminded him of the fact he was on the contrary a simple moth, a ghost haunting the perpetual night, a creature that was ignored until it disappeared. Sometimes, he thought that opening that window would have been easier. He could have become this torch, burning away in the sun that never wanted him, falling on the ground with its beams. But he did not feel strong and brave enough to do that.

So he was dwelling in the dark, feeling neither desire, nor longing for anything, turning his back on the world. That was how days and time flew, crossing the present with indifference. Sometimes, he was rambling, gathering strange and sundry things and ideas, as if to get lost in his thoughts easier, as if to go through that gate quicker, that gate beyond which everything was becoming better, everything was becoming fairer – where he was finally like the others, where he was recognized by somebody, where he would have been remembered by somebody. But he didn't succeed. He didn't succeed anymore in finding the key of that anteroom of a paradise that was his. Was it exhaustion, or was it pain, the pain due to that fire which inexorably sapped his cheeks and upon which were dancing invisible flames, that the irregular flows of his tears couldn't put out? Or the distress, the injustice of having to die without knowing what life is? The distress of having never had friends, the distress of having never loved, the distress of having never been loved, abandoned by a father who didn't want him? The distress of bringing sorrow to his mother despite himself, involving her in his own suffering, which he knew neither he nor she would survive? He took his feverish head into his hands. How he wished he never had to realize! He wished he could continue to escape from reality, to take refuge in his dreams, leaving for ever the nightmare of his own life. But he didn't succeed, he would never succeed anymore. He knew it.

He knew he wasn't dreaming,

He knew

He wouldn't dream anymore,

He couldn't dream anymore.