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CHECK IT OUT HERE

Dream

Carlos Alberto M.G. Mota.

(English translation by Alison Barbara Burrows)

“Dream” occurs sometime in the near future. It may be considered science fiction writing. It is possible that some informed people will consider what is said here to be outdated. Behavior can be controlled, and this is mentioned in this text. Maybe the methods here described won’t be used. We will see?

“Hu said nothing, yet again. He was almost a professional mute, because he wasn’t mute, he just assumed a lack of voice, just as he had assumed a lack of own ideas. Gustavo and Booze-Bottle also belonged to an immense legion of people who only had a voice amongst their peers, they were “mutes” to everyone else. Gustavo thought about the silliness of this situation. How many “mutes” were there in this world?”

To all my readers, my Thanks.

Carlos Mota.

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1-Walls

Gustavo looked at the walls as he always did, or rather, as he used to do. He looked at them and wondered whether they had been built from the top to the bottom or from the bottom to the top and then thought about how silly his ideas were. In fact, none of it mattered. It would actually be interesting if the walls were built from the top to the bottom, though it didn't seem likely. Nor did that "Freedom" exist, Gustavo thought! What Freedom existed? As a young boy he had moved to that neighbourhood, that area, that place, that home.

- I remember Banana, Windy-Bag, Booze-Bottle, grunted Gustavo in the general direction of his friend Emílio. Remember them? No, and I don't care to. What is the point of remembering what doesn't exist anymore? You're right, Emílio, it doesn't exist anymore. But it does exist, deep down it exists because it is what made what exists now exist, it exists because it exists in us, it still exists... Stop with the old man's stuff, Gustavo! Not even you exist, have you thought about that?

Gustavo became slightly annoyed and continued talking to himself. Emílio was too much of a realist for his taste. Deep down he considered himself a "great demystifier", as Gustavo would tell him. But he wasn't. Neither him nor anyone else, actually.

He had spent many years there, in the Bairro de Santa Clara, between Víboras and Camelo, number 31, as it appeared on his postal address. Had he seen the World or had he seen nothing? He had been travelling for a few years, today he didn't know if it had done him any good, if it had harmed him, if it had done anything to him at all! He had recently met a young man. He would be around twenty-seven years old, a kid, he was a doctor, who knew a lot more about life than he did! At least he, Gustavo, thought that. His travels hadn't given him any special knowledge, maybe they had even made him a more confused person, kind of mystical,

without a sense of objectivity, without any real knowledge of anything necessary. After all, any doctor knew more than he did and was much more useful than he could ever be! He had heard of a powerful man of Good, an Indian, who cured from a distance. He had been there, in India and hadn't learnt anything, he now thought. Can you learn something amidst the deepest misery? Maybe you can learn resignation. Is resignation a gift? An art? A wisdom? He looked at his hands. The palms of his hands. There were people who mixed scientific knowledge with the reading of palms, with a search for signs. None of this made sense, he thought. Hands were like walls. They told stories. But they told them with little accuracy: they could easily mislead. The lines on hands were like rock paintings. What would his hands tell a stranger? Nothing. That was most likely.

- Stop being silly and come eat. I'm coming, Emílio. They set out. The Sun was getting stronger. It fried, it didn't burn. Before, a long time ago, it had burned; for some years now the Sun fried, it became increasingly harder to bear.

- Do you know anything about the Shelter? We will be going past the door... Yes, you can hear noises over there, replied Emílio. The new legislation which was published is more restrictive, you know? No, what's up? Well, it was on television. From the age of sixty-five confinement in the Shelter is mandatory.

- Hum, with the confusion that's going on, I don't know if they can implement that!

- They can! There is confusion, everything is in a bad state, you can see that, but it's easy to put that step into practice. And, furthermore, who would want to avoid such a thing? Old people get in the way, they occupy spaces, they complain, they eat. At the Shelter they are taken care of, nothing more happens, I think it's good. In fact, if it weren't for you I would have nobody to talk to. At the Shelter I will always have somebody, it's fatal! The number of people there are there! It's only natural that amongst all those people I will find somebody to talk to. Out here it is harder. You were talking about people I hardly remember, but they existed, I know; so what? Where are they?

- We are here. The smell is weak today! It smells of the same old meat Gustavo! You are very demanding! No, Emílio, you are very

patient! It doesn't matter, eat!

They ate in silence. Silence was compulsory, after they had sat down. Some two thousand people filled the huge, long tables, full of "meat", something like a sausage with rice from times past. All mixed up, it was eatable. You didn't pay, you drank beautiful liquid. It was like perfume, that liquid. It was said that it had vitamin supplements. Kind of greenish, it would slide down the throat in a viscous flow, thought Gustavo.

- Viscous! He suddenly remembered hearing a woman scream that several years ago. He was on the street, he had just arrived. It was another time. She sold glue for shoes. It was a sunny day, a warm wind blew from the harbour, the huge rusty ships sailed in lazily. Gustavo stepped back, he heard a woman cry "Viscous!". He approached her. They loved each other and how! He never thought you could love someone like that, just like that! But every time he mentioned it, Dayna replied.

- And how do you love someone? Isn't it always just like that? Do you want to explain everything? What for? What do you get out of that?

They hadn't had children nor had they felt the need to. By that time the so-called "pill" had already killed the white man.

- The dick is counteracted by the effect of the pill, Banana would say, one of the first friends Gustavo had made when he arrived there. And it will be the end of the white man, Banana would also say, laughing.

In that time he had worked a bit as everything. He had painted walls, fixed pipes, studied at night, became a teacher. In between times he was with Dayna. They would escape to the most unlikely places and devour each other. There really wasn't any explanation for the desire they felt for one another or for the empathy which also united them in the most absurd details. They spent many years like that, aging at a snails pace. Slowly, they became older. When he had nothing to do, Gustavo stayed at home. Dayna had a large circle of friends she went out with, sometimes for days and days, until she returned again and always to the company of Gustavo. She liked going out, not actually to see anything new, but just to get out. He stayed. He thought there was nothing new, he used to say that everything would become more alike, in the future,

just as it was becoming then.

- What was the point of travelling the world? The whole Earth is a grain of sand, in the Universe! Yes, Gustavo, but we are a grain of sand in relation to the Earth! So it is important to travel.

Dayna was right, Gustavo pondered, but only in part. He had travelled and he didn't feel like travelling any more. It wouldn't make a difference to him to see any more. That way he stayed at home, he looked after Dayna's rooster. She held that rooster in high regard! She called him little one, fed him, the creature was very tame with her. Gustavo suffered some rooster pecks. He got irritated but then it would pass. Humans need pets so they don't feel their loneliness!

- Yes, Gustavo, I agree! We have telephones in one pocket, we talk to people all over the planet, but we are lonely! It is the great theme of our days. And we are also lonely because we want to be. We are not made to be...

- We are, Dayna! We choose a lifestyle which leads to loneliness! We don't want the company of friends, or acquaintances, or of our old folks, we don't have children, we don't want them, we need pets. Without them we would die even more alone!

- I don't need all that. It is important to know how to live with yourself. We have to get used to living with ourselves, to like ourselves. If we can do that then we are fine when we are alone.

- But you like your group of friends, Dayna!

- I also like you, silly, but I can easily handle what you call loneliness. I truly think that is the way: finding a way to be alone, to enjoy being alone, so we will never be in a bad way. When we are old, if we are experiencing unbearable physical suffering, I am not against ending our lives; it is better to die than to live in immense physical pain.

- Yes, it probably is. Living for living's sake is absurd.

- It's not, no! You're wrong, Gustavo! It has long been known that life wants to live! It seems odd, but it is just that: living beings want to continue living!

He spent a lot of time that afternoon scraping a wall at Mister Bien-Li's house, a very wealthy Chinese man with a lousy temper. It was said that Bien-Li was even aggressive and dangerous. He paid badly, but at that time Gustavo was in need of money and

after scraping the wall at Bien-Li's house, he started to paint it. He wanted a dark red, he Bien-Li, the connoisseur, Gustavo thought that colour was horrible for an outside wall, but the client had the last word. The client, that client had the last word increasingly more often, not only the colour of the walls of his house but in many other things, he had the last word in the town's commerce, he had the last word in goods and in their distribution, he lent money with interest, he controlled prostitution. He was a powerful man, an ugly mug, kept his distance, he spoke very little and in a fierce voice. He gave orders, he didn't talk.

Gustavo thought a little, he thought out loud, while he scraped the wall, what led powerful men throughout History to look so alike (as they seemed to)?

As far as he knew, powerful men had always been like that, like Bien-Li! Not given to trusting, not generous, often having bad taste, involved in businesses which he, Gustavo, found repugnant, but they were and had so they became powerful men.

- Maybe that's why they are powerful and you are not! Windy-Bag stepped away from him, huge and fat, abusing his famous flatulence which had earned him his nickname.

- You are an idiot, Windy-Bag! Make sure you show up, later. The fat man walked off and didn't answer. Gustavo liked him but he had to carry on with the work for Bien-Li.

That evening he told Dayna that thought he had had about powerful men.

- Well, we are all predators! Just that. Some more than others, a little more, not much more. That guy is not even powerful. Nothing is powerful, on this small planet!

- But you said that we are small in relation to the planet, therefore it is big and there are people who are powerful in relation to others!

- Look, I don't feel like arguing with you today. I'm going to be stupefied. Gustavo knew she was going to watch television. He would spend a while on the phone, then read something, he didn't even know what, and go to sleep. They said it was going to rain the following day and he had to continue the work for Bien-Li. Better still he should finish the work. The guy could get fed up and decide not to pay. He was well-known for doing that kind of thing.

Thankfully he now had his small wage as a teacher. He remembered the time when Bien-Li, or rather his father had arrived. But even that had always been like that! There are people who arrive, very careful at first, then they settle in, later on, when they are properly settled in, they start to become important, telling people what to do and even becoming dangerous! And there are others, those who witness their own decadence and don't realize it or don't want to see it and do nothing about it.

- Decadence, progress, white man, black man, all that is anthropocentric talk, Dayna interrupted.

- What do those ideas matter? What really matters is the species, maybe it will survive, but not in its current form, some will still exist, but only after the necessary evolution. That's what I think.

- Yes, Dayna, you can always see a great deal of foolishness in everything I say, haven't you noticed?

- No, I haven't noticed; it's not true. You do say lots of foolish things, but you can improve; you just have to want to improve, learn, be humble, instead of expressing your opinions that way, just like that, random things.

- All right, I will shut up. I'm going to see if I can finish the wall job today, Booze-Bottle is going to help me.

- Make sure he doesn't take that awful wine; you've had too much of it three times already!

- Come on, Dayna, I don't even drink, I can't drink, I don't like drinks!

- Shut up, I know what I'm saying, you've been drinking too much!

The afternoon went by with Booze-bottle helping. They painted the whole wall, it seemed to them like a job well done. In the end they spoke to Hu, one of Bien-Li's servants. Hu looked at the work, he made an indifferent, undecipherable face, he didn't say anything.

- So, Gustavo asked, knowing that Hu wouldn't answer, he would say nothing before he knew what his boss would say.

After a while Chang appeared, one of Bien-Li's many children. He looked at the wall, made a few odd sounds. He seemed to be talking like that on purpose. Hu said nothing, yet again. He was almost a professional mute, because he wasn't mute, he just assumed a lack of voice, just as he had assumed a lack of own ideas. Gustavo and

Booze-Bottle also belonged to an immense legion of people who only had a voice amongst their peers, they were “mutes” to everyone else. Gustavo thought about the silliness of this situation. How many “mutes” were there in this world?

- Mute in the World, Gustavo remembered: that is what a guy once said we were! I remember hearing that, he didn't even know how accurate what he said was! Gustavo felt a sudden pang of excitement and exclaimed:

- Mutes!

Giving a voice to the mutes was a teacher's job. (In fact, it was just another task).

You can only talk when you know how to talk; some people write without knowing how to write, but that's another story! Not everybody can be "geniuses", many have to work on building sites. Not everybody can be singers, heroes, punishers of the "badly-behaved".

How many people go through their lives without having been able to say a thing; and yet a lot of those people had something to say. So many people had something to tell and they hadn't even learnt to read...

There are also the mutes through choice. It is a matter of where you are in this world. Mute in the World! – What a great chorus! It is not "Changing the World" – changes aren't wanted, silences are wanted, so that there is calm. I know people who support such a wise attitude: "enter mute and exit quiet". For very different reasons, I think that is how most of mankind passes over the crust of this planet: they are the thousands of millions of mutes, silenced for the most varied reasons. He was quiet. Hu returned. He turned to them.

- Boss says job is bad! All wrong, all wrong! Boss didn't like, Estavo!

- Yes, he never likes, and the payment?

- Here. Take these cents. Boss won't give more. You work bad. He bring in more people to do these jobs. You do it all wrong. Don't work well.

Gustavo left, he and Booze-Bottle, with the sad payment. But it was better than nothing.

Dayna lived from her job, like everyone. She was a piano teacher.

It seemed strange, in times like these, but many people wanted to learn how to play the piano. Maybe it wasn't strange, maybe that too was down to loneliness. The piano or some other musical instrument helps conquer loneliness, or to cope with it. Dayna's students were mostly people between fifty and sixty years old. Young people and children almost didn't exist. Even so some children also learnt music. Huddled at home, at night, they heard the echoes of the night. Sometimes it would rain. On the whole it was hot, insects could be heard. Insects which took over the space. Gustavo often retreated to his home, whenever he didn't have jobs to do and whenever he didn't have classes to teach. He had studied at night, learnt a mixture of things. He taught subjects similar to general studies in a kind of "Senior University", or rather a University for the Third Age. Education had achieved a curious goal. It had become something which accompanied people "from cradle to grave", although not so much "from cradle", in numerical terms. Just as there are those eternal courtships, sometimes called "twilight engagements", so did education seem to want to cling to its students like someone would cling to a precious prey, without letting it go, to the grave. It was possible to say that whoever fell into the clutches of education would never leave.

2-Streets

It might not have seemed like it, because it was lethargic, but the city which Gustavo went to live in was big. It wasn't huge, like many that can be found on the planet. He had been to some of those urban monsters. That wasn't the case with his city. But it was a lot bigger than it seemed. A calm, hot city, where four or five people knew each other, was big. Gustavo used public transport with Emílio, to hear what he had to say. He thought Emílio's comments were funny. Not because they were funny, in truth they were not funny at all, but because they were pertinent.

- Notice the silence; people are incapable of talking to one another. They look at their own shoes, it is the best way they find to avoid having to look at other people's faces. Let's get off and get inside a building. So they did.

- Come, let's ride the elevator. People feel uncomfortable in elevators. Not because they are claustrophobic, but because they hate the proximity with others. They seem to suffer from a horror of dirt, they deal with others as if they are dirty. But it isn't possible to clean them. In elevators passengers feel desperate because of the length of the trip. It seems long, uncomfortable, invasive. Elevators were horrible: they had human beings. And on top of that the humans were close by. They could touch each other, feel each other's breath.

- The only defence is to do as they do: stare fixedly at the ceiling of the elevator. Every time it stops you can feel a chill, an anger, because this means the trip will take longer. When you reach the destination and the door opens, you pass between the other passengers trying not to touch them. It is a huge relief to get out of the elevator.

Gustavo wandered round the streets of the city. They were wide and long. The coast road, beside the not-always calm sea made a curve, adjusting to the geography. Why were there so many coastal Avenues with this slight bend? He knew many, some only from photographs, but he knew they were like that. The streets were paved with tarmac. There was a time when they would have been made of stone, not any more and Gustavo couldn't remember that time, before tarmac. The buildings were mostly worn and dirty. They functioned with problems. There were damaged pipes, walls in need of repair, fresh paint was a rare thing. Guttered doors, already rotten iron bars, the city appeared to be frozen in time. But it wasn't so. New bits appeared round every corner. Surveillance cameras were all over the place. Some were meant to be seen, others were high up, all, however, were meant to be perceived as a method of control. Citizens were curious, in their rapid walk. They wouldn't talk to strangers, that was considered ridiculous and synonymous with a lack of intelligence and culture. People had given up the famous "cell phones" with pictures. They preferred the ones which didn't have any pictures at all. They preferred talking without seeing people "on the other side". That way it was like talking alone. Many people entertained themselves for hours with computer games. Individual games were much appreciated. Being at home, watching television, talking to

someone without being seen were interesting occupations. Some theorists had even predicted the decline of television, but they had been completely wrong. Far from losing interest and fans, television had gained more and more fans. There were many channels and they had taken a curious path: fusion! Channels were all similar and they weren't "thematic". They all transmitted everything! Female mud wrestling, motor sports, circus, political rallies, all kinds of films, newscasts for all kinds of mind, actually, as a presenter, Carlos, used to say "television today is the circus which embraces all circuses; and it goes to your home, you don't have to go to the television!". Gustavo had been bemused, when he first heard this definition. He didn't like this Carlos, he didn't like any Carlos, there were "Carloses" like this working for every single one of the numerous available television channels, but he had to admit that he was right! Furthermore, all the channels seemed to be an infinite repetition of the same thing, such were the similarities in the programming schedules. A contest where a father would be murdered and eaten by his adoptive children had been approved in a country with a weird name. Even though it was illegal to have such a contest here, it had been broadcast. And it had had huge ratings. Meanwhile the national "must" was another contest where a child seduced his own mother and the two had sex for the cameras! Gustavo didn't know what to think about these things. He thought he was still scandalized, but he couldn't be sure of it. His friends, when he asked them about these subjects, replied that he watched these programs he criticized, too.

- I don't watch them! Stop being silly, Gustavo! I know you do what everyone else does: you watch! Booze-Bottle's observations irritated him. But after all, everyone he knew, from Dayna to Emílio, including Banana or Windy-Bag, thought the same: "it's life", they would comment. And they would watch whatever they felt like watching.

- You have to understand that life is difficult, really very difficult, you have to make money!

- I know that, Gustavo would say.

- And that's not all; if those were our only problems, how well off we would be! We have very serious problems, we arrive home tired, we want to forget. Television programs are manna!

- But you say you are going to be stupefied, Dayna!
 - I say it, and I am, but I am aware that it is doing me good, do you understand?
 - So television is good for you, Gustavo would try. It is, it helps you live. And never mind, it's true: if only those were all our troubles!
- The streets of the city were empty, normally. During the day people would work and apart from the few who spent their time fixing the gutted buildings, where several families lived, the others would not see each other on the streets. At night people were tired and would retreat home early. Entertainment was home-made, until it was time to sleep. The street wasn't the centre of the city. The home was, even though it was old, run-down, with problems, the home was the centre of life. In that time you no longer saw foreigners. Gustavo recalled a different time when it was normal to travel, or to see foreigners in our own towns. That had ended. Travelling had been considered a deviant behaviour. There were many reasons for that. Gustavo agreed with this analysis. The Multinational League had decided to restrict travelling. Diseases, wrong ideas, wasted financial resources, it should all be fought. The "wrong ideas" had been somewhat contested, in the legal provision adopted. But it was true: if an idea had to be propagated, good or bad, argued Steve McLaren, President of the League, that would happen through television! The Vice-President, Michael Apple had also underlined the importance of conserving Nature, achieved by ending the travel of millions of individuals. He was right, no doubt about it! On the whole, Gustavo felt that both McLaren and Apple were true thinkers, as well as brilliant managers.
- The cities become sadder, because of it. Yes, Booze-Bottle, but consider Apple's argument carefully: we are guaranteeing the conservation of Nature. And notice: this is precisely how I think! What's the point of travelling around the planet if it is a grain of sand on an infinite beach? Where are we going? Even going to Mars, in cosmic terms, would be the same as staying put! So stay put from the outset; it saves a lot of resources!
 - Yes, but many people have lost their jobs with this legislation!
 - They lost, but they gained! They gained tranquillity, peace of mind, calmer streets, cleaner beaches, in short, each to their own

land, that's fine by me!

- But don't you think that the cities are degraded?

- No. They are how they are and look: if lots of people came here, it would be worse.

Gustavo wandered through the streets. Ever since he had arrived at what would be his final city, he knew that was the way it was going to be, he didn't know why but he knew. He walked on through the streets of the city, he covered loads of kilometres, he went up hills and came down, he discovered corners, noticed details which apparently nobody saw and learnt to love those buildings, the streets, the pavements. With time, after Dayna's death his ideas started changing.

Dayna passed away unexpectedly. She had always prepared him for this. She often told him that people in her family didn't have long lives.

- Less than seventy years, just so you know!

- I don't want to know that, don't tell me these things!

But in fact that is what happened. Suddenly Dayna's life started to escape her, as if evaporating, becoming a spirit, a breath. The doctors either couldn't explain it, or weren't interested. There were some Rehabilitation Centres where citizens under the age of sixty-five could go, if they were ill. They went to one of those centres several times. Every time, they sent Dayna home.

- A slight pain; there is nothing wrong with you. Take pragamol, it's not aggressive, it's cheap and it helps.

- Pragamol? Is that good or bad? I don't think it does anything, but it's cheap, Emílio told him.

- Never mind! It's life! Dayna irritated him with this cold calm with which she faced everything, even death itself! She started not wanting to leave her room, she would seek refuge in front of the television, she turned the sound off, fell asleep. Pragamol seemed to induce sleep. Is that why they prescribed it? Gustavo knew there was no money to treat anybody, it had been like that for a long time. Sadness flooded over him, a strange sensation, it wasn't even anger. Acquaintances, Banana, Emílio, Booze-Bottle, Windy-Bag and even Dayna, thought everything was natural. He didn't think everything was natural, he didn't know why. He ought to think that it was natural for things to be as they were; it would be better

for him and even for everyone else.

Dayna was fading away, as they say in Castilian. He had never cared for that way of describing death, but that is how it is said in Castilian.

When the end came, the required mortuary official showed up. Months later, some remains arrived through the mail, contained in a sealed ceramic vase. "Dayna M.", was the only inscription.

By that time Gustavo was already in a very bad way. The streets smothered him, whether it was cool or the usual heat. The houses seemed to dance in front of him, they gave the impression that they would meet at the top and fall on him. His friends paid no attention. They had spent some time with him, but it wasn't possible to put up with him any longer. Even Dayna's sister, who had never really liked him but who liked Dayna, told him to take it easy!

- Life is like that! Take it like a man!

He became furious. Like a man? Ry, Dayna's sister, had always had an attitude in favour of equality between men and women and now she said something like that? But there was no point in arguing.

Gustavo started taking increasingly more Trazamal, a drug which Emílio got him. Sometimes, when he missed her the most, he would mix it with Booze-Bottle's wine and be unconscious for hours. He knew he could die of a heart attack, he was afraid of that, deep down he didn't want that, but there were times of very intense pain which he overcame like that.

3-Flying

It was from the mixture of the drugs and his pain that Gustavo found a new way to face his existence: flying! Flying over things, that was the best. He also discovered that he had never thought about it, but it was what all the people he knew and everyone else did. He was sure of it, even though he didn't know. He didn't need to, because we are all alike, even those we hate!

He would take a little Trazamal climb a roof and contemplate the harbour. It was so beautiful! He had never realized how beautiful that harbour was. And yet he had come to the city more than twenty years ago. At that time, when he arrived, you were allowed to travel. They were old things. The ships arrived idly and left, also slowly.

At the end of one afternoon, watching the ships, he had a thought which he had never had before. It was something which invaded him suddenly, like the fear which sometimes overtakes us suddenly, overwhelmingly, controlling us. We all live in cities, there are more cities all the time, we are surrounded in these cities! He felt surrounded, himself, as if thousands or millions of enemies surrounded him, ready to attack him, without allowing him room to escape! He shook himself. He was on top of a roof. There was no enemy there! He understood that his clairvoyance was off limits to others because they weren't crazy like him.

Then he started to dream and his dream became increasingly stronger. He wanted to get out of there! He knew that it was forbidden, the legislation that he had so often praised established this prohibition, but now he understood, he was against this legislation. It was foolish to expect that every person (except a very few like sailors) to spend all their life in the same place.

He decided to talk about this to the only person he dared tell this "behavioural deviation": Emílio.

- I have thought about that for a long time, Gustavo! I never answered you, because, as you know, they know what we think. I don't mean us, for example, who don't matter, but they could know about us and that is not good!

- But do you think that we should be able to travel?

- I have already said that I do, Gustavo. However it is forbidden. I feel sorry for you. I understand you. I comprehend you! This city has lost its meaning for you, hasn't it? Look, but this, the meaning, isn't, I mean, doesn't live anywhere. You should know that. I shouldn't feel sorry for you either, I'm sorry I feel that way, but it is what I feel! I have a present for you, something that might help you handle your sadness, at least to cut down the amount of that rubbish you take, so you can carry on living. But you mustn't tell anyone at all what I'm about to show you! If you do, we will both

be off to the Central Deposit. Do you want that?

- That's awful, Emílio! Of course I don't want that! Nobody wants such a thing! He thought about what was said about the Central Deposit, a slave factory created inside a large empty oil tanker. There, shackled prisoners produced clothing for the entire population, without timetables, without food, almost without drink, thrashed by whips. The minimum you got was twenty years jail time, but nobody lasted twenty months. Even so, with this hideous image in his head, Gustavo wanted to know what surprise Emílio had to show him.

- Come with me. They walked along endless streets. As usual there was nobody in sight. It was hot. That was normal. They turned up an immense street and, in an old place, some letters read "zette". Emílio went up to an old door, gave it a calculated push, they hurried in, closed the door.

There was light on in the old house. Paper, a lot of old paper everywhere. Emílio signed to him.

- Pick one up carefully and read. You'll like it. This is where I spend most of my days. But I don't tell anyone.

Gustavo picked up a wad of paper and read a title: "Gazette". That's what it was, what was outside. That "zette" was the ending of "Gazette".

- What is this?

- A newspaper, Gustavo, something that hasn't existed for many years, but there used to be many before the constitution of the New Stability. Are you not from that time? I thought you were.

- I can't remember, but I'm going to read

After some hours Gustavo left the house. He was happy. He had read stuff that he wasn't sure what it was. It seemed like the television information, but it was written! He had never seen anything like it.

- Has this kind of thing been forbidden, Emílio?

- Yes, but cheer up: I know that they are going to allow them to exist again. With control over what is written in it, but this kind of thing, as you say, will exist again.

Gustavo knew that Emílio had something more to his life than he seemed to. In fact he knew it and everyone who knew him best knew it, it wasn't a public matter, Emílio wouldn't brag about

being something different, but it was a known fact that he was. Maybe that's why, because he was how he was, Emílio knew things that Gustavo didn't know. For example, this thing now, of newspapers existing again. Emílio had been away, many times, Gustavo knew it. He had an impressive physical presence, without being a monster. But it was impressive. He liked getting into fights and was very effective when he did. Far larger men than him feared him. Emílio told Gustavo that he had been in different places, a long time ago and had been a part of a special guard. He knew how to handle weapons, something that Gustavo and most citizens didn't know. Gustavo asked him what the places he had been to were like. He told him about interesting situations. He had been to some Asian kingdoms, he said. And then what? Then, said Emílio, one day I found myself thinking: where does the chief of this want to go after all? And what about the others, where do they want to go? We see poor people, we see people with an education, there is prostitution, but where isn't there? It isn't scientific, but it is human, they think that they are not doing badly, all things considered. There is authoritarianism, but not overtly. People treat each other with respect, as they do in many other places. We leave it like that with the thought "I don't know what to think anymore", going away from those places which are so ordinary after all...

- But that is interesting, Emílio! Is that what you found, throughout this planet, on these jobs you did?

- Yes, look, it really is interesting, especially when we look back on it, so many years later; not even I knew what I was doing; was I spying on people? But people is all of us, we are all people, with better and worse characteristics. In essence I was ordered to check if those people were people and I would go there and return and write secret reports (I don't even know who read them, or if they were read) in which I would report that they were humans!

- Fascinating, Emílio. You spent most of your life risking your life to be able to say commonplaces?

- Yes, at the end of my duties I ended up thinking the same. And worst, what made even less sense was that by that time there were already so many ways to spy on others without risking anybody's life. That side of it ended up making me feel bitter, I mean the idea

that they had exposed me to great dangers unnecessarily, worse, without reaching any different conclusions than they would have achieved by other means, without using somebody else's life, like they used mine, with complete indifference. I thought about that often. From a personal point of view I had many advantages. I receive a good sum, even now, I know people, they don't bother me with silly things, and also because they know I understand that I can't do certain things. But who doesn't understand that? Sometimes I wonder if I acquired some kind of special knowledge in relation to other people and I doubt it... You, for example, also know very well that you can't do certain things, that you are watched, in a discreet way, as we all are, but you are watched, you also know that. So what did I learn that was so special? Nothing, probably.

- You know I think that about myself? What did I learn that was so special? Like you, though less so and in a different way, I also travelled, I wandered the planet and I often ask myself those very questions. What more did I learn, in relation to others, to those who didn't travel?

- Maybe we learnt something, Gustavo. We learnt that the planet is full of very similar people, all over the place. We learnt that societies are also very alike, as strange as it may seem there are people who have never really understood that, people who think that the inhabitants next door are grass eaters, children eaters, who aren't afraid, who don't cry, who don't have sorrows, who don't love, who don't die, who don't suffer. And after all they are all that, they suffer the same things we do. That is what we learnt clearly, for a fundamental reason: because we saw it was true.

- Maybe. And I have thought that it is important to see with our own eyes, even though it is important to read, to study, certain subjects, human subjects can only be learnt by seeing them, living them, don't you think so, Emílio?

- I do, Gustavo, we do reach that conclusion. I was telling you that newspapers are going to make a comeback. In a different way from what they used to be, they will be a kind of written television, they will fulfil an important task that the television often can't fulfil.

- What task, Emílio?

- Come on, Gustavo, the renewed newspapers will enable stupefaction as Dayna used to say, in a very subtle way. What she realized, I often heard her say it, will no longer be possible with the new newspapers: people will be stupefied without even realizing it! An interesting idea, don't you think?

- I think it's another idea. But I'm not even sure it is necessary. I think that people already agree with the need for stupefaction. In fact that's what Dayna meant when she always finished with that expression of hers "that's life", do you remember?

- I remember, I remember very well, Gustavo. Maybe you are right. People already agree with the need to be stupefied. Life is unbearable without a certain dose of stupefaction! Since you've said it, I'll mention it next time I'm with my boss. He also thinks that way, I think.

- You know, Emílio, I think we reach a curious question mark. People are willing to believe in everything and at the same time not believe in anything! It is that point of "I don't know what to think anymore" which we mentioned earlier, only if you think about it, applied to everything. There is a feeling that things are as they are because they have to be, it gives the feeling that nothing could be different from what it is.

- You're right, Gustavo, and maybe it is like that! Nothing could be different from what it is and the proof is that everything is as it is, in reality, or not?

- I don't know, Emílio. We are having a very strange conversation. But think carefully about it: nothing is different from what it is? Do we know that for sure? Things are as they are, or do they just appear to be a certain way? If everything is as it is and it can't be any other way, is there a need for stupefying people? If there is, it's because it's not like that, don't you think?

- I don't know, Gustavo. We really are having a strange conversation. I don't even know if it is strange. It seems to me that it is a conversation about wrong things and as you know we are not allowed to think about them.

And it was like this, in this natural way like all the things usually were in his world which was his city, that Gustavo became a reader of the "New Gazette". He read, reread, read over again. He got used to reading. He read news he already knew. All kinds of things

happened there, but everything there was the same as what happened on television. However, he didn't know why, but reading the Gazette felt special. After having something to eat, at lunch, he would have a bevvvy, a drink he never knew what it was, he also drank the Gazette of the day. Some subjects were repetitions of news he had heard the previous evening. Other subjects were really new. Crimes, for example. They got talked about more, a lot more, than on television. The Gazette had a disadvantage: it had a price. He soon remembered that that is the trade value expressed in coins, that is to say, reading the Gazette was equivalent to brushing and painting a piece of Bien-Li's wall. His, because nearly nobody else even bothered to get their walls fixed. The classes he taught brought next to no profit, but that was an old custom, there had always been a popular expression which stated that "Cockroaches and teachers come cheap" In Spanish, with the word "cucaracha", the humour of the pun was completely lost, but not everything has to be funny. Sometimes it was even hard to find a copy of the Gazette. At those times, sought solace with Windy-Bag. His characteristic windiness annoyed many people. But he wasn't a bad person, on the contrary. He had never had a wife, Windy-Bag. His name was Jaime, but nobody called him that. The gases he frequently let loose had earned him the nickname which he wore without concern. He was tall, he had a protruding belly, bald, he liked to eat. Windy-Bag was the kind of person who was always happy. Gustavo remembered that Dayna used to say of him "he is happy because he was born", trying to be realistic, which with her was an obsession, but also trying to show how unintelligent Windy-Bag was. A kind of faithful friend, he was in an odd frontier between friendship and mere acquaintance. Gustavo referred to his acquaintances as friends, though he recalled that Dayna always used to say that it was necessary to distinguish friends from acquaintances. She used to say many more things, he thought. It is necessary to distinguish "good humour" from "good education", from "good manners", from "being a good person". She had taught him many things, Dayna. She was right about those distinctions of hers. They are in fact all different categories. Windy-Bag was a good person, in Gustavo's opinion. Maybe because he wasn't very bright. Were all good

people not very intelligent? Maybe, Gustavo thought. Are powerful men good people? This reminded him of a conversation he had with Dayna. He still thought that men who are powerful are so because they are not good people. But Windy-Bag, who didn't work except when he was helping him out, he and Booze-Bottle, had time for everything. Including finding him the Gazette. He didn't know why, but the print-run of the Gazette was small. Sometimes there weren't enough newspapers for all the buyers. That was bizarre, because nothing that was printed there was a secret, or was it? He, Windy-Bag and Booze-Bottle, would sit by the sea and read the Gazette after lunch. They did that often. It's not like there was much else to do. Or rather, there was but it was only Gustavo's secret. While they read the Gazette, him and the others, an imperceptible transformation occurred in his brain. What he read fused with who had written it, the story he was reading also fused with his mind. He saw the things he read like a kind of film. He, the author of the story (and they were short stories) and the story itself existed in a fusion. For any reason and no reason at all, the same thought came to mind. To leave! After Dayna's death, without realizing it, what he longed for the most was to start over, or start, it didn't matter, far away from there, somewhere where nobody knew him. He thought about it so much that he only felt good when he was thinking about it. He had come to a difficult point: he wanted to escape! But it wasn't easy, it wasn't simple, it wasn't allowed. It was his biggest desire. Was it crazy? It wasn't a Utopia, he thought. He could fulfil his wish, he told himself. Meanwhile, he read lazily. Time went by and Gustavo, Booze-Bottle and Windy-Bag became known as the Gazette guys. Everywhere they went they took a copy of the Gazette. They strolled by the sea, took their time reading. Gustavo would dream about the day he managed to get out of there. He had to leave, to start over, he argued with himself and agreed. The person who seemed to him to be the most intelligent among the two million inhabitants of the city, the one he most enjoyed talking to, was Emílio. And yet Emílio didn't consider himself to be particularly intelligent. Just like Dayna who always used to say about herself "I'm a completely ordinary person", Emílio would say the same. Gustavo had reminded one and the other of the

difficulty of this concept. And of its probable uselessness. How often had he told Dayna that he loved her, only for her to reply that she was a completely ordinary person! He would whisper to her “great”; to me you’re not, but I think it’s quite good if others find you horrible, or even normal, banal. To me you are the one I love and the “to me” is everything. Emílio was everything but completely ordinary. He had led a life full of grey areas, which he wouldn’t reveal to anything or anyone. He would take some of the things he knew with him to the grave. Whether out of fear, complacency, or a combination of the two he would not reveal much of what he knew. That afternoon Emílio looked Gustavo in the eye and said:

- I will describe Booze-Bottle’s personality to you.
- You have that tendency, Emílio, of describing other people’s personalities.
- I do. He is called Garamondo, did you know? A name that fills your mouth when you pronounce it. He is an alcoholic who hasn’t cared about life since he was very young. Some people say he started on wine when he was thirteen years old, it could have been earlier, nobody knows. Garamondo doesn’t even want to study, deep down he thinks that it is too much of an effort and isn’t worth it. He doesn’t want to live, but he doesn’t feel like (is it fear?) killing himself. He thinks he is aware of the futility of most of our actions, he laughs at other peoples’ efforts. He knows that none of that matters to him. Sometimes he questions others about the truths of life and the mysteries of death. He has never worked, in the usual sense of the word. He will leave respect, jealousy, feelings of fear, people who loved him. He is not an example for young people, relatives, friends, acquaintances, but everyone who knows him acknowledges (maybe in secret) that his behaviour disturbs them. That’s what I think of Booze-Bottle, Gustavo. It’s not much more than that, but that’s enough. Look, as incredible as it may sound, it can be said of him that he “is not a completely normal person”. However, from his passing, on the planet nothing will remain.
- Yes, I can believe that, Emílio. I think that yours is an insightful description of Booze-Bottle. But, as a matter of interest, if you see life like that, what do you think will be left of us after our passing

on this planet?

- Don't irritate me, Gustavo! I am talking to you seriously, I'm not joking, nor do I wish to make caricatures of others. They are only my thoughts, some are a result of careful reflection, I didn't make these speeches up just like that, all of a sudden!

- Yes, Emílio, but what I asked was not meant to irritate you! I don't think we should put other peoples' lives on such a complicated scale! What will remain of us, more than will remain of Booze-Bottle?

- I have a daughter, for example, answered Emílio.

- Does that mean that you, Emílio, will remain here because your daughter will be here, after your death? Don't you think that that is not really special?

- Look, Gustavo, I can answer that. In reality our existence doesn't have meaning because we have children and cease to have it because we don't but we can't talk about such subjects. As you know they are wrong thoughts. I always end up talking about this kind of thing with you. It is time we were careful and stopped doing that.

- Yes, Emílio, but I like talking to you. Believe me I do! It is important to talk to someone who understands you.

- Today is an excellent day, Gustavo. It's not hot or cold. The Sun is tamer than usual. You should do what I suggest: go to the beach! How long has it been since you've done that? Gustavo thought about it. He couldn't remember.

- You're right, Emílio. I'm going to the beach!

The beach was magnificent that afternoon. So magnificent was the sea, its temperature, the colour, the salt, that for the first time in a long time Gustavo forgot that he intended to escape that place, that was his undisclosed secret. He dived into the waves. He was alone. Or maybe not. He felt her there, close to him. As if he had never lost her. It was her. Her with a big "H", Dayna. He had never met such a complex character as she was, who used to say she was simple, maybe to seem even more complicated to figure out. Dayna made him think about loneliness. She had studied music, for a long time, she had been a piano teacher. But she had also studied other things, that is how it was in those days. Things that Gustavo would never understand. She analyzed concepts, ideas. She called herself

a researcher, sometimes. In some kind of trance, he felt her hand which was pulling him deeper, into the sea. He forgot to breathe, he didn't need to. She smiled at him and said:

- I know you are sad. But don't be. It's not worth it, it won't help you. You feel lonely. Haven't I told you everything there is to say about this?

Even so it has to be said that loneliness is inherent to existence. We are an unavoidably lonely being. We are not team spirits, maybe that is why we get caught by loneliness. In fact, as with everything, we are a general contradiction. We like our own space, but we feel great pain in being alone.

That is what we call loneliness. There are cures for loneliness. Drinks, pills, casual company, people we know don't wish us well.

We are afraid of loneliness because it reminds us of death. Worse still: loneliness reminds us of the suffering that is our almost constant companion, along the long corridor until death. Loneliness fills us with fear because it reminds us of old age. We also know how time hastens. Loneliness is a dual state: we both feel it and fear it, because we shudder when we think it will attack us. It is located in the past and in the future, it is a diluted surrounding. It is sad and ferocious. Sadness, in its general form, leads us to a state of resignation; loneliness takes us to the dread of its inevitability.

- What a conversation to have, Dayna! Not even from you I would expect such a thing! Did you read that, or did it come from your mind?

- Neither one nor the other. It is not just "from our mind", or not. Because look: when we know a theorem, for example, it also belongs to us, I mean, it is also part of our mind, as you said; it is not necessary to create everything which belongs to our thinking. If it were, we would all be even more uncultured, do you understand?

They continued to swim. The sand was white, very white, beautiful, the sea was green. How wrong he had been, he could have come here to swim so many times, to the beach, and he hadn't! Deep down, as always, Emílio had given him an excellent suggestion! Coming to the beach, that reunion he was having now with Dayna, were even better than the accomplishment of his secret idea, to

escape.

- Why did you stay with me for so long? I am not very cultured, or intelligent, there is nothing special about me...

- Me neither, Gustavo! You are the one who couldn't see that everything about me was completely ordinary. I could stay with you or with anyone else or... with no-one! I stayed with you because you had a certain detachment, a humility that arose from your low self-esteem, and then, then you were a good guy, you know, maybe I never told you that, but that was it: you were a good guy.

- You would stay with a good guy? Is that all?

- Maybe. I have told you: I didn't even need to have company. Didn't I just explain all that to you when I told you about loneliness? Loneliness is inside of us, or it's not. It depends. Some people get along well by themselves, alone. Some people entertain themselves roaming round the house, people who don't need any other beings. There are also people who replace human beings with animals. That might even be a good option. Animals thank the hand that feeds them, even if that hand also closes the door to their cage, even if it is the hand that keeps them captive, animals won't bite it; people are different, they are capable of biting the hand that feeds them. So it might be a good option, as I said, to replace human company for animals. I never considered myself to be superior to you. On the contrary: I was more limited. But you, by being more boundless, were also less objective.

Gustavo wanted to carry on there listening to her, feeling her next to him, swimming in that water, near the corals, on an immense beach, a total pleasure for the sensation of fulfilment he had. Something was troubling his conscience, he didn't know what it was, but something was unnerving him, bothering him.

- Gustavo! Gustavo! He heard shouting, he couldn't understand it clearly.

- Gustavo! Suddenly he opened his eyes. A familiar face leaned over him, nearly touching him. Man, I gave you that so you could have a good time, did you take too much? What happened?

- Nothing, but what is the matter? What's happened that's what I want to know!

The familiar face was still there. It pulled him by the arm. It hurt

him, he wasn't expecting this, especially now that he felt so well! The Sun was beating down hard, it wasn't as gentle as it had been a few moments ago, when he had just been there swimming with Dayna. The sea was beautiful, but it too wasn't as stunning as it had seemed, only moments before. The sand burned. Even it was not as soft as he had remembered it being. What was happening? He couldn't understand!

- Get up, Gustavo, we have a lot to do! You have to help me. It is time you learnt to do something with your life.

- I'm dizzy, can't you see? And I have reason to be! I was so comfy here! Why didn't you leave me be? Are you sadistic?

- Stop whining, man! Take it like a man!

- That phrase annoys me! Stop talking like that! Without knowing why, he felt odd, bothered. In time, he sat up, he took a better look at the familiar face. He began to understand why he felt so bad. It wasn't who he thought it was. He never expected that face to be there, looking closely at him, questioning him, treating him in a friendly way but as you would treat someone inferior. However that was what was happening to him!

- What are you doing here? What are you doing here, you? I don't understand this, you are here, why?

- Because I am I, what a question! You ask such ridiculous questions, man! You ask why I am here? I'm sure there must be a reason, don't you think? Or there may be several reasons, what do you think? Anyway, if I am here it is because it must be so. Hurry up, we need you! Get your clothes, get dressed! I have to take you, we are in a hurry. You are going to help us, you will justify your existence, you might even manage our indulgence, our forgiveness for the daft things you are always saying!

Gustavo looked again. The face answering his look wasn't the one he expected.

- Where is Emílio?

- He died, the guy answered.

Gustavo became strange. He was afraid. Shivers ran down his back, cold sweat appeared on the palms of his hands. He looked at that man who he thought he knew and felt insecure. He didn't know what was going on anywhere after all. He didn't know who was who, what each person did, he didn't know why that guy who

Emílio had sometimes characterized, always lingeringly, was there. But apparently, was that it? Apparently Emílio had been wrong, and had misled him, Gustavo. So often had Emílio spoken of this guy, described him basically as idle, incapable, a sad person, a guy devoid of intellectual or manual abilities.

- He can't even fix a wall, Emílio had told him. You are infinitely superior to him! But he has no problems, the guy. His father left him a lot of money, it will always be possible for him to lead the life he leads without too much hassle. That while you will have to fix walls and teach your classes, to keep on surviving. And you are not one of the ones who are worst off, believe me! He lives between his home and the Cubicle, he drinks bevvies by the dozen and eats. That is the life he leads. Gustavo knew that, he remembered how Emílio had described the guy who wouldn't stop watching him, inspecting him, while he got dressed. And gave him orders, orders and more orders, in an increasingly more obvious tone, like someone who is in fact talking to someone inferior. His surprise couldn't be greater. Just moments ago he thought he was in paradise. His existence balanced out again, with Dayna's return. But now, in a sudden moment, everything was the same, I mean, as it had been a long time ago and this guy, the most unlikely amongst all he knew, had not only woken him up from his wonderful world, but had also told him that Emílio had died, gave him orders, he wasn't kidding, he told him what to do, questioned him.

- Tell me, what is going on?

- Shut up and come on. I don't have the patience to put up with you and I don't have to.

- But... Gustavo was interrupted. The other one had had enough. He gave him a violent kick in the ribs. He rolled over in pain. He felt like crying. He did nothing. He began to feel physical fear of this guy. And he never thought he would feel that!

- Leave me! Let go of me! I'll follow you, I'll do what you tell me to. I'll go where you want, but you don't need to treat me badly, you know that!

The other guy looked at him. He seemed to become confused. His expression softened.

- Forgive me, Gustavo! Honestly, forgive me! I know I was stupid. I don't need to get physical with you. I know that. I am very

nervous, today. Strange things have happened. You can help. That is all: we need you to help us!

4-Banana

He was fat and short. Blondish, light-skinned, an arrogant look about him, Banana had studied. Gustavo had met him through Emílio, at the Cubicle in fact, so many years ago... Banana lived near there, he made the Cubicle a kind of office. He studied but not too much. He didn't like to work. His father had left him a huge fortune, that's what people said, nobody knew how Banana made his living, not him or his mother. It was known that his mother told him what to do. He spent his day between the Cubicle and home. He didn't do anything else except drink a few bevvies and talk. He talked a lot but said very little. He didn't talk about anything with any interest. He wasn't sure himself if he had any interest as a person. Nobody could understand why he talked so much. The truth is he did, but maybe he talked for the sake of it, to feel less lonely, for company, it ended up being all the same. He was a person incapable of heroic acts, different from the absolute ordinariness which Dayna talked about. Though she seemed to be wrong, because she was an extremely interesting person, while Banana, a completely ordinary person, was extremely uninteresting. He didn't talk about any specific subject, which seemed to be absolutely in keeping with the time and space which they lived in. In fact more people talked more and more about nothing at all, though they did talk. Spaces like the Cubicle were quite full, full of people who talked about nothing. It was Emílio who introduced Banana to Gustavo. Gustavo was somewhat impressed by Banana, from their first meeting.

- He only says banalities, exclaimed Emílio.
- They should change his name to Banality, instead of Banana, then!
- It's not worth it: Banana doesn't even deserve to have the name he was given, a long time ago, changed. In fact it was curious watching a Banana conversation. He talked about illnesses, he

mentioned a friend who died recently, he described the evolution of the illness, all without a trace of emotion, and also without a trace of knowledge. That is because Banana had no knowledge about Medicine, he couldn't even give such a description if he wanted to, though the idea that Banana didn't want to describe anything lingered in the air. It was also possible to hear Banana pontificate about people who suffered from famine like someone who mentions it has started to rain. All things were like this, devoid of any interest, their only interest was in being talked about, always superficially, without the slightest intention or ability to analyze them. He also mentioned the friends he had had who had moved away. There was no hint of nostalgia, he didn't miss them. He just spoke about them for the sake of conversation. Talking about others was to follow a tradition.

- He is not the worst of them!

- He isn't, Emílio? No. He sometimes, rarely however, ends up badmouthing; most of them are capable of something else: "bad-doing".

- Hum, I see. That was Banana's life. He always greeted Gustavo when he saw him, though, like in everything he did or that you could imagine him doing, without enthusiasm. Gustavo returned the greetings and usually left it at that. Emílio described Banana's personality to him, several times. It wasn't necessary, just one time would have been enough for Gustavo to understand.

- He is weak! Totally incapable! Emílio always referred to Banana like that, when he spoke about him. Gustavo went for long periods without seeing him, only because he didn't used to hang out at the Cubicle, the so called "office" where Banana could always be found. It had been rumoured lately that Banana had married one of Bien-Li's daughters. It was something that took everyone by surprise, starting with Bien-Li himself and including Hu. It was even said that Hu had been severely punished for not having realized in time what Banana's intentions were. But his daughter, strangely or not, had married Banana. In addition, there were some who said that now, with the fortune his father left him almost spent, Banana done good for himself, advised by his mother. Whether that was the case or not, nobody knew. What was obvious was the love with which Bien-Li's daughter treated her husband.

Banana continued to hang out at the Cubicle, living at his mother's, though now with his wife, and greeting Gustavo in the same way. He also continued to talk a lot, without saying anything. Gustavo thought that was a very strange matter; there was something there that wasn't right, but he didn't waste time thinking about it. Now he began to understand! Banana had a lot more energy than it seemed; he was strong, an unsuspected physical strength. Furthermore he had determination, a strong and cutting voice, a voice which he never had allowed to leave his mouth when he spoke for days and years on end, at the Cubicle. There he kept his voice down, appearing to lack strength, a numbing speech, not only because of the lack of subject but also because of the tone of his voice, weak and monotonous. Now he spoke to Gustavo with a voice that seemed to come from the depths of his being. A genuine roar stunned Gustavo. It wasn't really a voice, it was more of a roar, a collection of animal-like yells that made whoever heard them tremble.

- To start, Gustavo, I would like to tell you that Emílio hasn't died. I told you that to wake you up faster. But he could die, we'll see! Just like you! It depends how you behave. That said, he took one of Gustavo's arms and dragged him.

- We have a car waiting, come! They walked at an extraordinary speed, they headed quickly in direction of the Avenida Marginal, they entered a horrible vehicle which smelt of rot.

- Let's go! The driver took off. They travelled for a long time, Gustavo had already figured out where they were going. It was hot and the air was stuffy. The guy was a fake lazy person, Gustavo thought! This is what he lives off after all! Who would have imagined something like that, after seeing him as a dork at the Cubicle? All of a sudden Gustavo remembered the story of Banana's marriage to Bien-Li's daughter! It hadn't been a matter of chance, they had pretended that it happened like that! After all Banana and Bien-Li were powerful men, they had reached some kind of agreement. Everybody had wondered about it, thinking back on all the information they had fed him about Banana, the mother, the wife, Bien-Li's anger, the punishment Hu had suffered! Crikey! You couldn't trust anyone! He recalled that he himself had believed it was possible that such a marriage had

taken place out of love, he who should have known better that that couldn't be possible! And Emílio, had he been wrong, once again, about Banana? But that didn't matter; what mattered was that Banana wasn't who he appeared to be. The vehicle started to head up a street that Gustavo knew well. The street was enormous, they started to slow down, they were nearing their destination. Banana looked around.

- Let's go, faster!

The driver accelerated. He didn't utter a word to Banana. Gustavo froze when he saw that the driver, that driver was a guy that he had seen around for a long time, at the Cubicle. He had never spoken to him, he had never paid him much attention, nor had the driver given him any, apparently, but they had known each other for a long time, from the same place where you could drink some bevvies.

He also remembered that he had never seen Banana talk to the driver. Was that by chance? Maybe. It could be that they had spoken in public and that Gustavo had never noticed them. He didn't know. But he had the strange feeling that they hadn't, they didn't talk to each other when they met up, at the Cubicle. There were more people like that, Gustavo thought. It was possible that there were more, many more people, quite a lot more people, people who spent their time finding out what other people were up to and even trying to find out what they were thinking. Emílio had already told him that once! You had to be careful, even though it didn't seem like it. He had told him "they want to know what we do and think", something like that Gustavo recalled. What was most interesting was that they didn't appear use sophisticated methods. Or did they? Gustavo had dreamt about Dayna, he now remembered; he couldn't rush to conclusions! Who had given him a Trazamal tablet? Had it been Emílio? He couldn't remember! Now it seemed to him that it had been Banana who had given him the pill! But that was absurd, how had he trusted Banana? The fact is that they had given him something and it wasn't Trazamal! He was perfectly aware of the effects of that medicine. It was basically a "forgetter", there were even people who joked and called it "forget her". What they had given him was very different. And he had been with Dayna, a complete Dayna, her memory was

absolutely restored, the Dayna that he had loved for so many years, that he knew so well! It was her, because it was him who had recreated her, with that drug! The most intriguing thing was to think that there was a drug that made you remember things selectively, good memories in this case. Possibly, “they” had other drugs, all you had to do was imagine they had something which worked the other way, something that made you retrieve “bad” memories! It must be terrible to go through an experience like that. Banana looked at him occasionally. He looked strange. When he had stopped hitting him, at the beach, he seemed human, warm even, if you can think something like that of someone who kicks you in the ribs! Now he seemed strange again, he scared him again. He noticed that the green glasses that Banana had always worn, which had always seemed so ordinary to him, like the owner, now seemed threatening, strange, awful. And yet they were the same glasses that Gustavo had known, on Banana’s face, for so long. And they weren’t even especially dark, they allowed apparently bovine eyes to be seen, still rather than tranquil, devoid of intensity, of expression. But they also didn’t show kindness. They just showed that they could see, nothing more. They looked at Gustavo the same way that they had looked for many years, the situation was different, totally different; only he and Banana were the same.

- We are not going to harm you, Gustavo, don’t worry! Banana’s words, rather than calming him, caused him dread. He didn’t want him to address him, he had come to fear him since the kicking at the beach. Answer me, Banana continued.

- All right, I believe you. If you say that you don’t mean to harm me I believe you. I have never acted wrongly, you can believe me!

- I don’t know, Gustavo, I don’t know about that! That is what we will see. If indeed you did nothing, you have nothing to fear. And you can believe that too. But we have to check some things and they are rather complicated. What were you and Emílio up to at the old Gazette offices? You see, it is just a small doubt we have, to start with, but we have many others. Are you thinking about doing something, something odd, now that Dayna has died? We also don’t know that, but we will find out, do you understand? And what have you been talking to Emílio about? You see, these are the

kind of questions we will be asking you.

They reached the building which Gustavo knew had once been the editorial offices of the Gazette. They went in. Things were different, it looked like they had been tidied up. There was no dust, or piles of rubbish, or old newspapers on the floor. Instead now there were shelves, many shelves. People with a business-like look about them examined pieces of newspaper. Others worked on computers. They didn't pay much attention when Banana, the driver and Gustavo entered.

- Let's go to the room upstairs.

- Yes, boss, replied the driver. They gave a sign and Gustavo went up some stairs which he had been up many times before. It seemed like it had been so long ago and it hadn't, but that's how it was. They knocked on a door and waited. A light came on; it was a red light.

- We have to wait, said Banana. We can sit down. You never know if it will be a long wait or not. Relax, Gustavo! Calm down, man! Do you want something to drink? I'm going to have a bevvy. Do you want one too?

- Yes, all right. He had stopped calling him Banana. He had never known his real name, only now, after what had happened, did he realize that! He thought that he didn't mind being called Banana, but that was before, now he wasn't sure of anything; it was wiser not to call him anything at all. An impersonal treatment and a permanent display of docility was the smartest attitude in a situation like the one he was in right now. Dayna had told him a few times. He remembered that.

- We have to be docile. They expect it from all of us.

The bevvies arrived and Gustavo noticed that Banana swallowed his at an amazing speed. The driver wasn't served. Gustavo picked up his drink and sipped slowly. Curious! It was tasty, he had never had a bevvy like that before! The guys looked after themselves! But it was only natural that they looked after themselves, thought Gustavo. You couldn't expect that people with power, and therefore money, wouldn't look after themselves. He spent his life thinking that he reached absurd conclusions, because they were obvious conclusions! After mulling it over, thinking about things, he always reached the conclusion that what happened that way

because it was only natural that it should happen that way. Now that was stupid! Thinking that things that happen because they really must happen doesn't add anything to any matter. It is like saying "a=a". He didn't know but it was true. Saying that is for sure, but saying "a=a" is a tautology, a truth that adds nothing, perfectly self-evident. It was one of the secrets of that world, Gustavo suddenly thought. Making everything that happens happen in a way so that you would think that it couldn't be any other way. And could it? Of course it could, thought Gustavo! What happens is not destined, it doesn't have to be like that. But thinking this would be to have "wrong thoughts", they constantly told people not to have them. That also made you think. If things were so evident, was there really a need to convict people who thought about alternatives? While he was waiting with the driver and Banana, he thought about life, this life he had, that everyone had. Now that he thought about it, there were many curious things, without answers! The driver, as he called him in his mind, he had never heard his name! Did the man not have a name? However Banana, who didn't seem to have a name too, also didn't call him by any name and he accepted the situation, as if, just as in many other situations, it was like that and couldn't be any other way. And it could, for sure! The sea air came in through a window. Gustavo found himself thinking about the sea; there was something about the sea, something more than being salty, something more than being blue, or grey, or green. Something more than being located off land, something more important than providing fish, than being a road for shipping, the place where one swims at beaches. But Gustavo couldn't remember what was so special about the sea, so special that he thought about it here, now that he had been arrested. He didn't feel afraid. He had done. It now seemed to him that neither Banana nor the driver were paying him much attention, maybe they thought the same way he did: he was someone of no importance, he couldn't understand why he had been arrested. The sea air came in through the window and Gustavo remembered swimming in the sea, swimming, swimming, and so emigrating, leaving there, escaping and swimming! He stopped, meditated.

- Am I insane? What thoughts are these? Swimming, swimming?

Emigrate by swimming? Where to?

All of a sudden something changed. He didn't see it, but Banana called.

- The light changed: we must pay attention; it is now yellow! What a method this is, thought Gustavo. Red light, yellow light, possibly green light to go in. Was all this performance necessary? But was it a performance or something to be taken seriously? He found himself imagining a world with more multiple meanings in words and sentences. After all everything here seemed to have a unique meaning, there was no place for what some call humour, you could only call it an "amusement". For that reason, given these circumstances of this particular world, the lights fitted on the door that remained closed ought to be something serious, to be taken seriously. Banana didn't laugh about anything, just like the driver. They didn't forge a laugh or a smile when referring to the lights which commanded people who were waiting to enter. They waited without protest, as it was always best to do. Isn't that what Dayna had told him so many times? The need for us to be docile? In their own way, even Banana and the driver were docile towards those who gave them orders. He had always been docile... or had he? He was disturbed by this question he had asked himself. He probably hadn't always been docile! As a matter of fact, he hadn't! He had had that idea of escaping, this didn't conform to a correct thought process, it wasn't a docile way to think and act! Was that why he had been arrested? But he hadn't told anyone that secret! How could they know what he thought? He didn't believe in the possibility of them knowing what each and every one of the citizens thought. It was impossible. Nevertheless, in his case, they seemed to know that he had wanted to emigrate, to get away from that place.

5-Memória

- The light has turned green! Let's go in, come on! Quickly! Banana opened the door and entered, while the driver pulled

Gustavo by one arm and they both went in, with difficulty, because they almost didn't fit in the space.

- So, dear friend? Is everything all right with you? I am sorry you had to wait, but I had many things to take care of. Fortunately they weren't matters like yours, they were more complicated problems. Anyway life is full of this, have you noticed, of waiting! We have to be patient. I once had a girlfriend who always used to tell me: love is waiting, or knowing how to wait! I ended up agreeing with her, she was a very important person to me, she taught me many things, like that for example. She taught me that love is often rejection, it is patience, the day-to-day courage, it is knowing how to wait, not waiting for the sake of it, but waiting because you understand that the Other, the one we love, needs us to wait, they have their own life, their own needs, their work. We can't just think about ourselves; that is selfishness. Life is made up of waiting, even when it costs us, it is part of our brief existence, and what's more, waiting often while our own existence passes by... I hope you are enjoying this, Gustavo; I feel inspired today. This speech isn't bad, is it? Look, it's not often I talk like this! Normally I don't express myself very well, but sometimes I do think I say a few things. Oh well, it is what we can manage! For you, friend, I would always try something nice. Jorge, did you offer our friend something?

- Jorge? So that was Banana's real name! It had taken so many years to find that out, and he had found out now in these bizarre circumstances!

- Of course, boss, I had someone give him a bevvv.

- Is that enough for you, Gustavo? I don't want you to feel bad!

- It is enough... He felt stunned. He couldn't understand anything. He thought about that sentence which had occurred to him, or that someone had told him, increasingly more "I don't know what to think". It turned out that the head of Surveillance, or the man who coordinated the control of the population was someone he knew, had known for a long time! He felt unnerved, exhausted, he felt like he had been betrayed by his own stupidity. He had trusted this guy and told him a wrong thought: his idea of leaving that place! The man had heard him. He remembered thinking that he was the only person who he could tell such a thought to and had done it,

when possibly that man, who he now looked at from head to toe, should have been precisely the last person he could have confessed a wrong thought to!

Emílio turned to him, looked at him. He didn't speak to him straight away. He took a deep breath. He didn't seem to feel anger when he looked at him, or contempt, just curiosity. And it remained curious, because Emílio knew him extremely well!

- Don't you know why you are here? Don't lie, answer! I will try, Gustavo told him. Is it because I read the Gazette? Or because I told you I would like to emigrate, to leave here?

- A bit of both, Gustavo. But mostly because you wanted to emigrate!

- I don't really understand any of that, Emílio! I didn't harm anyone! What do you want from me? To kill me?

- That never! If you are here, Gustavo, it is precisely because we don't kill anyone, I mean, only in circumstances absolutely specified by current legislation can we eliminate someone; we think that isn't your case. We will find out, but we don't want to kill you, you can relax.

- I have to question you, we need to inject you with a medication. Do you agree?

- That is a good one, Emílio! I am here under arrest, at your disposal and you still ask me if I agree with something that you want to do to me?

- I have told you that you know nothing about the limitations we have in the use of power! You can refuse, though in fact, that won't help you... All right, Emílio, let's say I can refuse, theoretically, is that it?

- No. You really can refuse. You shouldn't for your own good and also because you save us a lot of work, but you can.

- Well in that case, taking note of the kindness, the care with which you are treating me, I agree!

- You bet we treat people with care, Gustavo; one day it will be our turn, we want this school to be maintained.

- Maybe that is why Ba... I mean Jorge, kicked me around at the beach?

- I have already reprimanded him; he admitted to being wrong. And don't exaggerate! It's true that he was wrong, but he didn't

cause you any severe injury, did he?

- All right, look, I agree to that business of the medication.

- Jorge, inject him.

He felt a peace rise up through him, head down, it took him over. He saw himself in the sea. It was a warm sea, but there was something that bothered him. Bodies floated by him. Some had wounds, there were some pieces of wood too, they seemed like random debris floating in the waters of that sea, distorting it. The sea was calm. He remembered that sea, he knew he knew it well, but it wasn't from there; he felt like he had swum in that sea before, but after that day, in other places. He felt confused; the future came to visit him in the past. There was a smell of low tide which he also thought was familiar. It was like he knew where he was without that being possible. A bigger wave caught him unawares, he swallowed water. He tried to head to land, he could see land nearby. He was wearing a vest which kept him afloat, but he felt like a cork, with no strength, bobbing in a tank of rapid waters. He couldn't control his path. He tried to swim but gave up. The sea had a very strong current; he couldn't make his way anywhere. He waited. A small boat started making its way towards him and the wreckage. All of a sudden, before the boat reached him, he remembered! He had been travelling on the Praia Monte, a Portuguese oil tanker, it was a huge ship, heading to the United States of America! He had made that voyage many times, that one and many others. He remembered perfectly that the oil tanker had been hit by a terrible hurricane, it had suffered a lot of damage. They had tried everything to save the ship, to save themselves as well. How small the enormous tanker was compared to the Ocean! It had snapped like a toothpick, it had spilled its cargo, it was drifting, just like himself, utterly unable to impose a route on the Ocean. The tanker and him, incredibly enough, were alike in their smallness! He had never thought about that, he had never been through an experience like that: are there situations you only truly think about when you live them, when you go through them, or are all situations like that, do we only truly think about situations when we go through them, when we experience them? The boat neared him. It was enough, much smaller than the tanker which he could no longer see, but much better; for now it was great. It was

called “Niña del Mar”. Two men came out in a small boat, they hauled him on board and spoke to him. He felt dizzy. They spoke to him in Spanish. Castilian, isn’t it? They took him to the boat. He now felt like he was answering questions, but not the seamen’s’, instead he heard Emílio’s voice. Then they spoke to him. They told him he had been lucky, he was the only survivor of that disaster. There are many hurricanes around there, but the ship on which he was travelling had been a victim of a lot of bad luck. “It happens”, they told him. “It’s life”, he thought. He had studied for a good many years, he wanted to be an officer of the merchant navy and he had managed that. The boat turned around, after inspecting the wreckage one last time. Gustavo knew it wasn’t even worth the effort, he had checked himself that no other crew member was still alive.

- Another boat will come to collect the bodies, they told him. He felt sad, miserable, he cried. He had friends amongst the crew. And he didn’t have any enemies, furthermore he didn’t wish death on anyone. The boat entered a large harbour. At the top of a tall mast was a blue and white striped flag, with a red triangle with a white star on the left side.

- Bienvenido a Cuba! That is what he heard. Then he lost consciousness. He didn’t know how long he was like that, for his existence from that moment became strange. He had never known that, because he had never had the opportunity to know. He couldn’t tell if he had been asleep for days, weeks, months, decades, or hours!

- Viscous! He remembered that and meeting Dayna. But that had no connection to his previous experience, it had nothing to do with his life in Portugal, his studies, the ship, the hurricane, the shipwreck and the rescue! He remembered perfectly that he couldn’t remember any of that, for years. But the concept of calendar which he now recalled, he also hadn’t had. He hadn’t measured time by dividing it very strictly, during almost a lifetime he didn’t think about what year he lived in, it was curious how that became important to him and then, purely and simply, it stopped existing in his mind, in his thoughts, in his plans, in existence! He knew he had lived with Dayna and he also knew that he would never again be sure about where he lived. He remembered that he

had always had the strange feeling that he spoke a language which wasn't his own, but he had also never managed to understand that clearly, he ended up forgetting about it while he increasingly more wrote and spoke in Castilian. He felt that he had been happy there, but that he wanted to leave, after Dayna's death. He remembered Emílio, Booze-Bottle, Windy-Bag, Banana and other characters, not many, who he had known without being aware that he had only known them as an adult.

A light started to enter his eyes. He woke up in a good mood. He had been operated on twice (he remembered that now) and the feeling of waking up from a general anaesthetic was very different from this. When he had had the operations, he had felt an absence (something like death?) but afterwards, in the recovery room, he felt bad. Not now. He had a peaceful awakening. The drug they had injected into him wasn't an anaesthetic either, thought Gustavo. It was more of a "rememberer". Curious, you could also divide this word: "remember her".

- So, Gustavo, what did you think about the experience? Were we bad to you?

- No, Emílio, you weren't. You made me remember so many things! My own name, which I have never used here, I had forgotten it!

- Yes and it is not worthwhile wanting to use it. It is not a common name here. Is Gustavo enough, or not?

- It is, of course. I don't need any other name. But I still don't understand the reason why I'm here!

- Hum, that is easy. We have seen that you are not a troublemaker. You took a forgetfulness-inducer, something that provokes a situation similar to Alzheimer's disease. But we know how to control these things, we didn't give you the disease!

- What year are we in, Emílio?

- That doesn't really matter to you, Gustavo, but I will tell you this: you arrived here in 2040, according to the old calendar, now we would be in 2080, that's it.

I'll explain to you what happened. It was something that changed life for the whole planet, it caused changes everywhere, including at a political level. Two days after you arrived the changes began, it was all unforeseen! A giant volcanic explosion occurred in

Sumbawa, in Indonesia, just as had happened in 1815, according to the old calendar, so you can understand. But this explosion was even bigger. If the first was considered to be equivalent to sixty thousand Hiroshima bombs, this one nobody knows, purely and simply! Maybe it had been the equivalent of six hundred thousand Hiroshima bombs, but that is just speculation. An immenseness of cubic kilometres of ashes, dust and other debris spread through the atmosphere. The sun rays couldn't reach the surface of the Earth. The explosion of 1815 caused a perceptible cooling until 1816. This explosion caused climate changes for ten years. In that period, China suddenly invaded Russia. It was something which was expected, because China's ambition was to conquer the sparsely populated Russian territories, for sure. The Russians couldn't fight back with conventional means so they retaliated with nuclear weapons! Fortunately their leaders realized that was not the best time for this kind of fooling around! The hostilities stopped, but that all happened after the second explosion of Sumbawa. The planet was full of people, as you know. About four billion people died as a result of these events. The situation remained very difficult for a very long time. Here we were dominated by the fear of an invasion and we had shelters because of the hurricanes. We suffered casualties, even for us things became a lot harder. However there is something fascinating about the human race! An American president, a republican and old man, who no one expected anything new from, proposed the end of nations as we knew them, establishing a kind of "World Council". Countries still existed, but we understood that we had to do new things. Gustavo was amazed. It was understandable.

- What things, Emílio?

- Cooperate, Simplify, Depollute. It was the order of the day adopted in planetary terms. That is what occupies us, everyone. Those are our fundamental questions. You were very shaken up with everything that happened. For years you were committed to a mental institute. We developed a social model based on free initiative, we simplified the "Governing". Medicine and sciences which were considered fundamental, all sciences related to life, received funding. We developed simple and cheap medication, we invested in depollutants, we cooperated internationally. But the

situation remains hard. According to the standards of your youth, all countries today are dictatorships. They all have secret police forces, they all have poor and rich, but, nevertheless, we survive. Furthermore a limit (in principle) was established for human life: sixty five years. It may seem horrible to you, but it isn't; it is just pragmatism. And we are aware that we must respect each other.

- And with me, what happened?

- You met a mad young woman, we thought that we didn't have to interfere. I was put in charge of monitoring you and making sure a new medication, which was developed in what used to be Canada, worked. It is based on a planetary principle, one of the three adopted principles: Simplicity. We have known for a long time that information is carried outside the brain, with the help of chemical "messengers", the neurotransmitters. These "messengers" help this information from the brain pass to different parts of the organism. One of them is acetylcholine, an important to aid memory. So, a cheap medicine was developed, Trazamal, which uses a kind of "anti-acetylcholine". The intention is to cause a kind of controlled Alzheimer's disease in people who have suffered very deep psychological shock.

- But that means I forgot everything, I loved Dayna, she died, during that time I felt maladjusted, but do you think that that justifies what you did to me?

- And what did we do, Gustavo? Did we harm you that much? No, think about it, we did not do any of that. Notice that all we did was to control you. We brought you here, we checked how you were doing.

- And why?

- Why, Gustavo? Not for your sake, my friend, for the sake of the cooperation relations that we have to maintain with the whole planet! Have you wondered why Trazamal's effect was wearing off? How many millions of individuals do you think are alive today, on the whole planet, complete lives, happy and productive lives, thanks to the medication introduced after the catastrophes? Do you know how many? You don't! And you know what's more? I don't either! I don't even know if that is quantified! It is only known that life became so hard that many millions of people only live because they take their (larger or smaller) dose of Trazamal! It

is necessary to forget to be able to live!

- And Cuba, tell me, does it still exist?

- Nothing exists as it did at the time when you were shipwrecked. There is a Multinational League which we all try hard to respect, which runs the planet. It governs with the agreement of everyone. We lost the arrogance we had when you were young. Deep down our species has evolved, it was either that or it would end. But we aren't bothered by that today. Today, many of the problems of the past seem childishly foolish. It even seems incredible how it was possible to make so many mistakes in the name of irrational principles, but it is a fact that this happened. The planet is poor, attention; we didn't make any material profits, we profited in terms of gaining wisdom!

- Emílio, now that you have spoken to me about dictatorships, explain one thing to me...

- Yes? Yes, because you said that today everything is a dictatorship in relation to the standards of the time when I was young?

- Don't forget the principle of "Simplicity" which we adopted. This isn't a game! The so called "Democracy" never worked well. How to conciliate discipline with freedom? That was a problem which we had to solve quickly, during a critical state of things. We adopted discipline, to the detriment of freedom. If one day we can manage more, we'll see.

- In the end it won't work!

- Maybe, but "Democracies" were also loaded with contradictions even when you were young, were they not? There were ways of conditioning people's vote, from voting for political parties to voting in institutional terms, for example. How many organizations officially had a "democratic management" which was easily overtaken and faked? And it was also true that in many countries, when you were young, "Democracy" was limited to the rotation of power between two main parties, remember?

- That's true, I thought about that many times.

- There you have it.

About other matters, you'll see that we are right. We conducted a study on human beings, on their evolution and this is what we think: man is a predator. That said it is utopian to try to make egalitarian societies! It make sound simplistic, but it isn't! The

poor man dreams of being rich, he prefers to struggle and think that one day he will become rich rather than to live in an apparently classless society (this is very difficult, if not impossible to carry out in practical terms). In keeping with the principle of Simplicity, we gave up the idea of trying something different from a society with a market economy. Naturally we set some limits on the market. For example we are aware that the planet is in a very bad state, another of the principles we follow, as I said, is “Depollute”. Now, we know that we cannot enter into infinite productive spirals, because the resources of this small planet are finite. We realized when we studied you that you had no understanding of any technological alteration which was strange to you. That too has an explanation: we don’t produce anything new as such, except in the field of Medicine and of the Depollutants. Cars, houses, road surfacing, lighting probably didn’t seem strange to you, also for that reason. But they suffice, don’t they? I mean, as you would have said when you were young: we abandoned the “Consumer’s Society”. Do you understand? We couldn’t continue down that road. That was probably one of the biggest mistakes committed in the past, in my opinion. To think that it was possible to produce useless things, in ever-growing numbers, convincing people to build a market to consume these useless things! How much resources, humans and materials had been wasted to produce objects that plainly and simply weren’t necessary? Have you thought about that?

- I feel tired, Emílio. What are you going to do to me?
- Nothing, Gustavo. You will remain here. When you reach sixty-five years of age (you’re nearly there) we will see.
- There is something else I have been meaning to ask.
- Go ahead.
- I noticed that, after all you have told me, the way in which you enforce power is curious. I mean, there is television, now there is even a newspaper, at least here, but the Police, what you call the “Vigilantes” have old-fashioned methods. I would even say methods you could find in any 20th-century dictatorship in my calendar, as you say. But you are successful; the domination you impose is achieved, what I mean is you are effective!
- I am not an expert in politics, I am a doctor, Gustavo, though I

admit that might be hard for you to believe! But I think that I can also explain this aspect of current society to you, it isn't difficult and you will see that it is profoundly logical.

We base the continuity of our political objectives on Cooperation, as I have already told you. That means that there is no point in calling the government of a place into question, because there is no point in escaping to somewhere else, it is all the same! Then, as I told you, we try to follow humanist standards, we don't repress for the sake of repressing, we never do. There is a planetary declaration on this. Regarding the role of television and newspapers, this is fundamental. We have also known for a long time that there is "hard power" and "soft power". A human being can be forced to behave in a certain way through the use of force (and we use it) but also by conditioning the mind, and the more constant this is, the more effective it is. We call that "soft power", power which is gentle, if you like. Stupefying television, the newspaper too, but didn't they do that when you were young?

- They did, they did and a lot!

- Of course they did it and badly! Because they made people want to consume useless things, to have wrong behaviours from an ecological point of view!

- Yes, but you have programs about sex between mother and son!

- We do, but we admit that we want to stupefy! And notice that the great problem that we have is still the recovery of the planet in ecological terms! Apart from that we are not moralistic! Moral is perfectionist, we just want the best possible, not the ideal! When it comes to this, I can tell you that with the help of the medications and the television we have reached most of our objectives. I mentioned that millions and millions of people, all over the planet manage to live, produce, love, have a decent life, with the daily use of medication which controls their behaviour and by watching television programs. We already knew this was true with many people when you were young, interestingly at that time, just like today, not many people were aware of this fact!

- And the matter of police methods, Emílio?

- As you can see from your own experience, these methods are effective. Well we have decided (as I told you) to adopt the principle of Simplicity. It has also been known for a while that

police who are too sophisticated end up by getting tangled up in absurd technicalities; at other times they gain too much power, they become as they used to say when you were young “a State within a State”. That has nothing to do with what we want, on a planetary scale. One of the differences in relation to the state of the planet which you can notice when you talk about the political polices of your 20th century is that quite often they were rivals. Today they cooperate, which means that they achieve much better results with the same means. The police today have limited power in fact, but, in relation to the methods, it may disappoint you but I’m going to let you in on a big secret! The human being has long been understood by the police, by repressive organizations! The crucial aspect of human behaviour when it intends to disturb or alter the existing social order and politics is fear! That’s right, fear! Now, the police, governments, repressive organizations have to know how to handle fear. Then there is the age-old maxim of wisdom which comes from the ancient Romans, the thing about “bread and circuses”. See how this works not only in collective terms, but also in individual terms. It’s like this: you have to give people a minimum amount of bread, otherwise nothing works, but we do that, and the circus too, within reason. We also have to give people that circus. That is the role of television, which as you must remember is the circus that manages to encompass all circuses, it goes into people’s homes, it is practical, varied, enchanting. And lastly, Gustavo, I’m going to tell you something: it has also been known for millennia that most people aren’t interested in making social change, but only in living. Don’t be fooled: if the majority of people want to knock down a political system, they can do it. The mission of doctors like myself, of the medication I prescribe, of television and the newspaper I recommend, isn’t a new mission. I believe it has existed for ages! Tell me something, Gustavo is there anything you would like to ask?

- Yes, it just occurred to me... Does Portugal still exist?
- Good question; I’ll have to look that up. I don’t think so... How do you feel, Gustavo, after all these emotions?
- I feel tired, Emílio, I am not sad, but I am tired. I didn’t expect to find out all these things like this, in one afternoon.
- All right. I understand. Would you like a dose of Trazamal?

There has been some development in the medication, would you like to try it?

- I would, Emílio, you are a good friend.

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