

The Second Life

CHAPTER 1

The main artery that cuts through the city is called, as is so often the case, the Gran Vía. Like all large arteries, it is designed for parades to file pass, for persecutions to run smoothly. So that the police can search, corner and arrest demonstrators, on horseback or in a small tank. So that the next day peace can be celebrated with the gunpowder of the fireworks and that there be plenty of room for cheering the governing party. To clean with one fell swoop other period's time piled up on the ground, the windows, and on roofs. And, above all, so that the city, unbearable under a scorching sun, only has a trace of criminal beauty at night, gracefully lit up by streetlights, by metallic stamens of light that given their shape, greet—unlike their botanical model that which comes from above—all that swarms below: the bald heads, the buns, the hats, the bonnets, the dyes, the bald spots of all us who touch them; sometime we even hug them, to see if by chance some cable has been in contact with the conducting iron and strikes us down in one last act of love for the impossible life. The streetlights appear as if inspired by science fiction movies filled with lean Martians wanting to annihilate all the nihilists on Earth. Their extraterrestrial appearance very clearly reveal the little desire to live that those illuminated by its yellowish light have, whose faces seem impregnated with yolk egg pertaining to animals yet to be invented, capable of incubating, with that pale film, hatred for the first life, the one that does not return.

I know that a little further on, in some of streets of the old quarter, there are streetlights that do not turn their backs on the darkness of the sky, that try to pierce it and still have the heroic shape of light against darkness. But these lights on the Gran Vía are determined to squander their light savings, always looking cowardly at the ground, focused on a beam that continually seems to ask the same thing: “Why are you so happy?”

Yes, there are still happy people who don't want to be happy and walk proudly under the gloomy reproach of downcast light. There are still people who do not think about streetlights or agree with them, with their aberrant form of snakes under the spell of some piper truck, of weeds ordered by any kind of metallurgical demiurge turned light bulb gardener. There are still people that one comes across in an endless desire to meet someone still illuminated by the insomnia of an upright light that continues to fight against darkness.

This street represents the uprightness of a catastrophic time. It appears to have been made for a huge funeral procession to pass by for us all. Some remember how this new artery was drawn, behind the backs of the majority of the population, a little before causes like the first life had but a small group of supporters, when money had not greased the palm the very the last scruple. The unanimity was a party fighting against the destruction of the city. The medieval layout meandered

sheltering the steps with a delirium of shadows and windows. No one wanted to stop being the unknown that he or she was. Fame was still not the only goal worth reaching for anyone eager to be someone. Delay was part of achieving goals, helping to discern them more clearly, to perfect the steps that led to them. The common cause still had one last cartridge left; but no longer did anyone water the flowers on the abandoned balconies.

Before the threat of demolition, there were citizen roadblocks, standing on guard ready to sabotage any attempt by the machines. Time and time again the authorities tried to tear down the houses that had been evicted. Neighbors walked through the empty heart of the city holding a vigil for a meeting place that was already dead. Some made a stand by remaining in their empty houses and leaned out of their balconies to throw buckets of water at the town hall guards and greet those who slipped through the enclosure surrounded by narrow streets, condemned by a perimeter of barbed wire.