



ALBINO ORMA

Albino Orma was good-looking and left-handed, but he managed well with his right hand.

He told me one day that by pouring ink on a piece of paper and folding it down the middle while the ink was still wet, you could (according to the images you saw on the blots) not only draw conclusions about a person's psychological state, but also know the day and circumstances of his or her death. Since I was interested in sorcery (though he assured me that this was a scientific matter) I agreed to put it to the test. Our romance lasted a week. Sometimes I would not show up for our dates because I had to go out with Irma. One day I went out on Palermo Lake with him in a boat. We rowed to the forbidden island, where we got off. After kissing me he took out of his pocket a piece of paper and a fountain pen. He removed the cap and shook the pen over the paper until there was a large ink stain; then he folded the paper in two and pressed it with his fingers; when he unfolded it we saw a strange image that resembled a bat. He explained to me that life, like the ink blot, was symmetrical, and that there was a close relationship between the early and late experiences of one's life. Life was like that ink blot. Everything repeated itself: if eight years after one's birth one had suffered an accident, eight years before dying one would suffer a similar accident. If nine years after birth the individual had been intensely happy, nine years before death he or she would again be intensely happy for similar reasons. If at the age of three one had tasted for the first time the flavor of bananas, three years before dying one would discover, for example, the similar flavor of the custard apple. If at the age of five one had met a bearded Luis, five years before dying one would meet a bearded Juan or Carlos. With the pretext of finding out more about my lifespan, I confided in him. On the inkblot, as if on a map, I jotted the most salient events of my life, following the contours of that monstrous drawing.

I confirmed, in effect, that there was a strange, almost perfect symmetry between my early experiences and what I realized then, would be my last. That is how Albino Orma discovered my betrayal and my death, which would take place soon (because of which he forgave me). That stage of my life corresponded, according to his calculations, to my sixth year of life; Juan, the boy I had met on the square, corresponded to Albino Orma. While the nannies conversed in animated intimacy, we, Juan and I, hidden behind the bushes, played innocently obscene games. I don't remember very well what these games consisted of, because they were so complicated only a child could understand them. Devastated planets oscillated in my memory when we traveled to the stratosphere in the swings. Fornication was one of the most alluring words in the catechism book. We wanted to discover its meaning through practice. And we did. Juan was as precocious as I was and he covered me with shame when he brandished his sex like a rod against me. I withstood it heroically, but I vowed revenge and got it at the first opportunity.

Revenge sometimes engenders affection. Six years was a short time to live a love as passionate as ours. Albino was saddened; I, however, felt even more intensely the happiness of a life beginning to extinguish itself.

The fruit vendor's daughter used to come by the house with the delivery man and we became friends. We played on the square, and I withdrew from my lascivious little friend, snubbing him. The end of my love for Juan was as close to my birth as the end of my love for Albino from my death.

Out of modesty I will not narrate the details of my experience with Albino Orma; they correspond exactly to my experiences with Juan, the boy on the square. With him I also traveled to heaven on the swings, since love restores us to our childhood.