

One night
I woke
up at
three o'clock
in the morning

with an intense desire to operate. Once upon a time, when the urge took me, I would find myself in my laboratory, opening and closing animals, but now that my research was shelved and the lab was taboo there was nothing for me to do, and in any case there was nothing left for me to operate on, since dissecting dead bodies bored me stiff.

At the bottom of my heart I knew I must not, must not go into the baby's room. He was sleeping soundly. I advanced on him wearing my green surgeon's uniform, undressed him and laid him on his belly on the cold metal table. He shivered with cold. I counted his vertebrae. It seemed to me that there was one missing. I counted them again and again, and after I was one hundred percent, two hundred percent — and so on in arithmetical progression up to a million percent — sure, I started feeding all kinds of data on my child into the computer, until it began to groan like a woman in labour.

The baby was still lying on his stomach. I put him to sleep, even though I still didn't know where I was going to cut. I tried desperately to suppress this drive of mine to mess with the child,

I tried to fob it off with a simple enema — but to no avail.

I took a knife and began cutting here and there. I drew a map of the Land of Israel, as I remembered it from the Biblical period, on his back, and marked in all those Philistine towns like Gath and Ashkelon, and with the blade of the knife I etched the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River which empties out into the Dead Sea that goes on evaporating for ever.

Drops of blood began welling up in the river beds cutting across the country. The sight of the map of the Land of Israel amateurishly sketched on my son's back gave me a frisson of delight. At long last I felt that I was cutting into the living flesh. My baby screamed in pain — but I stood firm. When I had finished marking all the points my neglected education succeeded in pulling out of the creaking drawers of my mind, I went back to being what I am — a doctor — and I disinfected and dressed the cuts, and sewed them up where necessary.

I contemplated the carved up back: it was the map of the Land of Israel, nobody could mistake it. (...)

* * *

One day, let's say in March, the twenty-second of March, or maybe the thirtieth of December — only you, God, know what's happened to my memory — two Concords collided over Dolly City with a mighty crash. I lay on a bench and watched all the people and their parts falling down. The rescue teams prevented the crowds from turning the survivors into kebabs.

But the people of Dolly City had never taken any notice of anyone's pleas in their lives, and they went ahead and did what they had to do.

I too was hungry. I was really dying to get my teeth into something, say a chocolate croissant, but the cakeshops were shut, people wanted to eat meat. I went into the graveyard of the French soldiers who had fallen in World War One. Pale crosses with all kinds of Jean-Claudes and Jean-Pauls. I lay down on the charged earth and took a nap.

I opened and closed my eyes. I knew I had to get up — people have to get up, they have to stand on their own two feet! And if they don't want to — too bad. They have to get up!

I got up and stood on my feet and felt dizzy. I could hardly straighten my back. My vertebrae hurt. I went back to town. People were walking in the streets, they were drinking beer in bars, they were fucking behind curtains. I went into a cafe, I asked for a glass of water, and swallowed eighteen pills at one go, to get out of my depression. But it didn't have any effect, those pills are useless. I walked down the street until I found a bib with a picture of Donald Duck on it hanging from an electricity pole. I climbed up the pole, I took the risk for that bit of cloth. I rescued the bib, I looked at it, it looked more or less okay to me, and I set out for the home established by my sister, the social worker, a shelter for battered children and debilitated old folks.

"What's that?" asked my sister, whose hair had turned a little grey.

"A bib."

"Who for?"

"The kid." I recoiled. "Are you trying to tell me that he's dead?"

"No."

"So where is he?"

"In the pool."

"What pool, have you got a pool?"

"There's a little lake inside the volcano." She cast a glance at the bib. "That's too small for him," she said.

"Too small?"

"The child's thirteen years old, Dolly. How dumb can you get? You think that if you haven't seen him for six years, he's stayed the same as the last time you saw him?"

She went inside, and I followed her. Her curls were tied back with a black ribbon. She had grown thinner, she looked like a stick.

A group of merry youngsters passed by us. I tried to look for the kid among them, but I didn't find him. I found him in the pool, lying in a black rubber inner tube. My sister turned on her heel and walked away.

I looked at this creature inside the tube, and I couldn't communicate with him, I couldn't find the words, I couldn't even say hello, because of all the residues of the past. I said to myself,

this is it, Dolly. The monster you created in your madness. Get ready for the worst — I said to myself — but I knew that there were no limits to the imagination of reality, no limits at all.

The boy let his head fall back with a blissful expression and wet his long, black, curly hair. Although he looked familiar — I wondered if it was him at all. I had one way of making sure.

“Get out of the water, that’s an order!” I shouted.

He giggled, but nevertheless he obeyed, jumped out of the tube and swam to the ladder. When he got out of the water and came towards me I noticed that his stomach was scarred, but anyone’s stomach could be scarred.

“Turn around,” I said.

He obeyed me, and I saw the map of the Land of Israel which I had etched on his back so many years ago. The map was amazingly accurate and up to date, someone had gone over all the lines and expanded them according to the child’s growth. I examined the map, and one thing stood out: he had returned to the ‘67 borders, it was beyond belief!

Yes, that’s the generation gap for you, I reflected. My mother spits on the Arabs, I look them straight in the eye, and one day my son will lick their arses.

He went to get dressed, and I waited for him impatiently outside the showers. Things change. I grow fat or thin, swell up or shrink, and my son grows tall, and looks down his nose at me.

He came out to meet me neatly combed and elegantly dressed, in comparison to the rags worn by the inhabitants of Dolly City — clothes without rhyme or reason — my son was wearing jeans and a coloured T-shirt.

“Shall we go?” he said.

“Where to?” I asked him.

He didn’t answer, but began walking towards the gym. We crossed the gym, where boys and girls two or three years older than him, or younger than him, were exercising. Twelve year old girls were walking on bars, and other kids were doing corkscrew somersaults in the air. An impressive place, this place my sister’s built I said to myself as we left.

We emerged into the street. Although it was only a quarter

of an hour, maybe half an hour, since I had walked down the street — it seemed to me that five years had passed. The air seemed different, I myself seemed different, the streets seemed to have broadened, the buildings to be a little further apart, and here and there I even saw a few flags, but I couldn't tell which countries they belonged to. From what I could see when I looked up — the sun was shining behind the buildings, the sky was above me, even the moon was stuck up there in its usual rut. I looked at my son, at his profile — I said to myself, his profile — I never touched his profile, that's why he's got a profile.

My son talked and talked, as if he'd swallowed a radio. He met people, people shook his hand, he slapped them on the shoulder, he stopped to exchange a few sentences with them about some rock concert, I wasn't really listening. I was busy realising myself. We went on walking aimlessly, or so I thought, but after a while it turned out that he was leading me to a barber-shop. He asked the barber to trim his black curls.

"Isn't that a shame?" I asked him, but again he didn't answer me.

I sat down behind him and looked at his hair falling to the floor. There was a woman there having her hair set with rollers, and another one who had bits of silver paper stuck onto her hair, and whose face looked quite alarming. The assistant barbers moved about, dancing attendance on the head-barber, who was busy joking about the situation with my son, who displayed surprising curiosity and even more surprising knowlegableness. He knew all about the regional conflicts, he understood all about the interests of the surrounding states, he even understood the motives of the more distant ones, and argued with the barber about Churchill and Chamberlain and all kinds of other people whose names begin with Ch, like Che Guevara. I looked into the distance at the mountains in the large landscape painting at the other end of the barber-shop. I asked myself when it was coming, in other words, when was he going to ask me about all those scars, and exactly what diseases he had suffered and was suffering from. I dreaded this moment, because I was already worn out by all that medicine and disease, I didn't want to hear another word about it...