

The minuet

Salvatore Di Giacomo

Sweet and mild June, he had smiled at things with his last tepid day. The little old man sat in an old armchair still plump, in the corner of the window. Hands caressed the arms' knobs; slightly bending his head over his chest, his eyes half closed, he was overcome by languor, in the rosy poetry of sunset.

That vague, golden light spreads through the silent room that gives to the skin a complexion color, as a candle gives it to the hand that shields a flame. It entered from everywhere, softly wetting the ancient silhouette of that furniture, the yellowed portraits of which the frame clearly emerged from the wall, all scattered with bouquets of flowers that also aged on a background of blue.

Everything in there was ancient, of that baroque, not much exaggerated, to which still grasps the old age of our times that smiles at the habits of its times and the dear environment surrounds itself to sadly evoke memories. That old age that keeps covering its head with a brown velvet skullcap, embroidered with gold and lined with silk; from the voluminous black tie of which it wraps three times the neck and which then knots under the chin; from the fine linen shirts that smell good of which the starch swells on the chest; from the cuffs attached to the shirt, with rounded edges, closed by a simple smooth button of smooth pad, attached with the thread.

An old age that is pleased with long bottle green overcoats, with a high lapel, of soft cloth breeches that do not make creases to stand on and barely touch the hem of the ribbon-shaped shoe, allowing the rough and white stocking to appear. An old age who loves snuff, but who on occasion knows how to become youth and woo beautiful ladies, and give himself the bay in time, before others give it to him, and tease him while he leans down to kiss a plump hand or stiffens offering his steady arm to let female acquaintances walk around the house. Out of jest he once said that he wanted to die humming, in front of the spinet, with the lights on in the hall, while a ballet was getting ready and pearl giggles played amidst a rustle of silky trains.

Alas, poor illusions! Now, for a long time, in his parched heart they died, as every sound died in his ears, all those joyful carelessness.

A severe deafness had seized him. It had been a hum at first, as if waking up from a tiring sleep, then it was an eternal silence. He no longer heard even the thunderous slamming of the doors that the servant Clementina was pulling behind. In the early days, when she, astonished, had to make him understand with acts of her hand what she wanted to tell him, he took a fever due to the great pain, and stayed five days in bed. Clementina let off steam in the kitchen, sobbing, as if someone had died, in front of the hen house, where many chicks were chattering.

Little by little the little old man resigned himself.

But in serious silence, in which he felt lost, an invincible drowsiness burdened him. He wanted to die falling asleep. For three years he hadn't written anything else. He spent the whole holy day alone, in his favorite armchair, following free flights of swallows migrating over the rooftops, fantasizing, reading the *Poliorama pittoresco*, of which he kept the whole collection.

With him, that in the ways and in the clothes had never changed, the little room harmonized. Half-century habits had left their mark, a perfume of old age in the gilded furniture, of which, like the elbows on the master's overcoat, the worn corners shone a deliberate adjustability on the shelves of the white marble, in the shadows, full of mystery. A melancholy smile hovered between the walls, like regret; the room had been sleeping for a long time.

One oval mirror, with a white gold threaded frame, covered with dust on the glass, reflecting confusingly, as in a fog, the things of the shelf on which stood: two artificial flower pots, a large gilded bronze clock of which, for five years, the hands marked the touch, a porcelain tray with its Pompeian medallions cups, and a small naked Venus, made of bronze. The Amorino, who the beautiful goddess went into her arms, put his little hands over her eyes.

From the face wall a Rossini, in pastel, with the dedication, watched over the room, the fingertips in the overcoat shot, the eye small and alive, full of malice.

From the face wall a Rossini, in pastel, with the dedication, watched over the room, his fingertips in the shot of his overcoat, with a small and lively eye, full of malice. All over the room, here and there, placed in order next to furniture, chairs from yellowed straw, with flat and wide back, painted in white, decorated in the half by figurines of knights in wig and ponytail, which, pressing to the chest the lamp hat, they bowed to ruddy damsels, who smiled wrinkled, the fan of feathers crumpled. Near the main door, where a curtain hid a compartment, there was a tall, rigid-brimmed felt hat resting on one of those chairs. A stick with an ivory knob leaned against the chair.

It seemed that the master, in moments, would have to leave the house. Two embroidered slippers hid in a corner.

In the background, in the gentle and even light, the dark shape of the spinet attracted the eye, with its motionless tranquility. Soft reflections descended on the clean wood, fading on the carpet, staining that piece of furniture with white sheen.

From his chair the little old man glanced at the music stand, at the music papers piled up beside it. The eye caressed the pale keyboard row, the eager hands quivered on the armrests of the chair. Finally the spinet triumphed.

The little old man slowly rose up; he took two steps in the room, he stopped, breathed loudly, as if to take a great weight off his stomach. He rubbed his hands lightly, getting ready, all inclusive of his little emotion. From a tray he took out a bottle of cinnamon liqueur, filled a frosted glass, sipped, clucking his tongue, coughing,

beating small taps in his chest. Finally he bravely faced the spinet; he sat down in front of her, passed a large snot of dark thread on the keyboard, which from below began to scream, in discord.

The old man's hands were shaking so strongly that he had to pause for a while to calm down. Then they rushed suddenly for a semi-set ladder. The spinet woke up in a roar of hopping notes.. God, what a rush! goodbye old age! The heart did: tic-tac, tic-tac, on the rhythm of the music, the blood ran to the knobs of the cheeks, the eyes shone, the lips murmured.

He sat back in the tambourine chair with his arms outstretched, his eyelids half closed. A fury of merriment, of andantini, of breezes, of whirling escapes, swirled inside his soul.

He tried to reconcile. Gently, barely touching the keyboard with his fingers, he

He murmured, swinging his head:

Darling, don't doubt it...

Cimarosa... Ah! Cimarosa! Why did he always remember it, always?... The foot beat the time on the mat, the voice continued like a breath.

Before dawn rises in the sky

Quietly quiet, at a slow pace,

We will descend down below,

That no one will hear us...

The old man let himself be carried away:

We will run away slowly,

Through the garden door ..

And the melody filled the bedroom. It set you back the time of the past, the good weather of that time. It trembled in the air, skimming the walls, passed over the furniture like a caress, rose to the ceiling like a perfume like a scent of time. A whisper would start from walls, from the furniture, from the portraits, from all the corners full of shadow and memories; the whole room vibrated, applauding. The last languid notes died in that whisper; the spinet fell silent.

Now the old man bent down to rummage, impatient hands, among the musical cards, certainly looking for his minuet, written in the days of his cheerful youth. Finally he found it, finally laid it on the lectern from which he had been a long time, a long time away.

He put his glasses on and turned his eyes to the paper, he read, with his soul suspended, his heart in great palpitations. The hands slipped on the keyboard...

But suddenly, his face changed; his eyes no longer laughed behind the shining glass no longer laughed. Relentless and violent the disgrace of the deafness, the music died, the harmony died in a deep silence. The old man dropped his hands on his knees, disconsolate.

What poor luck that minuet had! And yet how many heartaches he had sweetly accumulated there! The title came from the sentimental coquetry of a damsel - who always smiled, still, in the gilded frame, on the shelf. A little blonde with blue eyes, smooth pink skin, a lovely mouth, dressed in a scarlet peasant's bodice with puffs of antique lace, a mole under the eye, the powder in the hair. Then she said: - The minuet sounds very nice; let's call it Confession... He said: - Of what? - She laughed, showing two small strings of pearls, a little treasure. - You do it, you put in a few more words. He stammered: - Of love? - and became the color of that bodice. She laughed and finally let herself be taken by the tapered hand...

The old man, smiling at the memory, put his hands back on the keyboard, tried a few notes of the adagino, a delightful *F minor* for which she closed her eyes and left his head lightly on the sofa cushions. The first impetus of anger, as no harmony came to his ear. He bent over, put his head close to the keyboard: the fingertips struck, two, three times... Nothing, nothing; something so indistinct, so vague, a sort of breath. Really everything was over, just over. An immense bitterness squeezed his heart, his hands got cold and wet. The old man, leaning his arm on the corner of the spinet, resting his head on the arm, remained motionless. He seemed to be asleep.

He wrote down his row; It was dark, the shadows would thicken in the chamber, placing large patches of darkness all around which everything swam in a sweet confusion of lines.

His people and the roar; an imprecise murmur went up and an imprecise murmur, he entered the room like a breath. And the little room was silent, in a great peace.

Still, the melancholy silence was broken from time to time. One would have thought that there, behind the spinet, in the shadows, someone was sobbing.