

## Give birth to me

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*To the victims of obstetric violence,  
whom no one has yet managed to count*

*Six fingers*, he said wiping his knuckles from the glistening secretion.

There was something deeply disturbing in it: perhaps, before he would make his rounds, he had picked his nose, or in the worst case scenario – I hated myself for even thinking of it – *he had examined* another postpartum woman, one with a more relaxed approach to hygiene, in the same, quite the same way he did me. On his way over here he must have touched at least three doors, with the palm of his hand or elbow, which under such circumstances was not feasible or certain given that last time, on his way out of the operating room, he reached right for the knob. He shook hands, as far as I could tell, only once, with a new father, which we surmised from the fact that he did the rounds with a bottle of brandy, and on that occasion, having licked his thumb passionately, he scratched on the surface of the metal kidney basin to remove traces of dried blood. And he succeeded: now it was under his nail.

When, after much hesitation, I tried to remind him to, I hope he didn't mind, just a little bit if he could – rinse his hands, he looked at me as if I'd just told him I got pregnant by him personally, and then, to set an example for others:

- Who's the doctor here, me or you?

Out of fear or merely out of surprise – I no longer opened my mouth.

Shortage. Needles, syringes, medical gasoline, sanitizer and, finally, sterile gloves, which we, at our own expense, sent for to the pharmacy. There was nothing. I wish my friends were here now, those who voluntarily

go through a whole series of expensive and, above all, dangerous treatments in the IVF procedure, friends that no one, and especially not the men with whom lately, as if officially tasked to do so, they have been engaging – yes, that's the word – in *sexual intercourse*, has told what awaits them once that tiny bundle of life finally, with a lot of blood, is brought into the world. After all, in the fairytales they had been brought up on the baby just falls out, like from a bottle of mayonnaise which had previously been standing on its own stopper, like little Kirikou who is born right after he says: *mother; give birth to me.*

The gynecologist on call was gone for a whole hour and then, spreading the ends of his coat as if getting ready to fly, he appeared with four, no – five young residents. From the lying position they seemed important, resembling an international delegation in whose presence you should be careful not to say anything wrong, but when I sat up, it was noticeably different. They reeked of alcohol. They'll be talking quietly, in a bantering tone, in a language I do not understand, the language of the male, the stronger; and then in the language of the profession: expulsion, episiotomy, hemostasis, CRG. One of them will, unable to contain himself, tell a joke about a Montenegrin who finds out during delivery that the father of the child is not himself but – the postman.

He will continue, as if in a play:

- Did you know that every third man raises a child to whom he is not the biological father?

- Where did you read that?

- Does it matter? I know of at least ten such cases.

- I don't know of any.

- Well the gist is that this is not something people now. If something like that happened to me...

- ...she'd start peeing breast milk. I swear to you.

They approached my bed and the smell of some type of hard liquor, I'd say – tequila, became even more intense. The gynecologist on call came closest and used his hand to spread apart my knees which, almost instinctively, kept going back into the original position. When I think about it, the whole situation, including this figure looming over me, reminded me irresistibly of a scene I had witnessed while growing up in the country: it was the sinewy arm of a veterinarian which, almost to the shoulder, disappeared in the cow's entrails. The desperate animal, not knowing what they were doing to it, kept waving its head up and down trying to tighten the rope around its own neck.

- Eight fingers. You try, colleague – he addressed the resident next to him and, thinking I would not notice, gave him a conspiratorial wink.

Just like in dreams in which a man facing imminent danger cannot move an inch (let alone run), in which vocal cords are glued together and do no call but yelp, I didn't have the courage even to protest because – what if, when the time comes, he leaves me to bleed? Contraction. The young man I was seeing for the first time shoved his fist in my vaginal opening as if somewhere inside he had lost a precious coin and now wants it back at any cost. Offensively, arbitrarily, brutally, with no awareness that at precisely that moment – though, if he were to be accused, he would have done his damndest to dispute it – I was being raped.

- There, you see it wasn't too bad – the doctor on call concluded and signed him to move on.

In the evening the pain became unbearable. Contraction, contraction, contraction.

Somehow, holding my belly as if it would fall off, I dragged myself to the room where nurses were sitting, four of them. I opened the door after which, with a devilishly red face, I was hit by thick tobacco smoke and their disinterested looks that were letting me know unambiguously they just wanted me to leave them alone.

- What is it? – one of them uttered.

- It hurts... it's starting – I replied refraining myself from screaming.

- Are you the only patient here? Go back to your bed and wait for the doctor. Have you done your enema?

- Excuse me?

- Have you cleansed yourself in the back?

- I didn't know... no?

- What a fucking idiot! You can't do without it. To the toilet first. Chop, chop!

The closest one stretched out her leg and slammed the door in my face.

Suffering is underrated. Especially mine. Especially while, squatting conscientiously on the tiles, I wait for someone to pass me the hose with an applicator that, between you and me, I don't know how to use. If I had a husband, he would pretend to know or we would, at the very least, terrified and stupid, abhor together the procedure, the system, the hospital whose organization most faithfully illustrates the quality of emerging life. *Never again* – I would threaten. If I had a husband, he would pass me a towel, hold my hand or, at my urging, beat the crap out of the resident who had stuck his hand in my flesh without asking. Since I don't have a husband, I will suffer the questions of why I don't have a husband, as well as the fact that I fainted as soon as the fecal hose slid into my anus.

I was brought to from my unconsciousness by sharp and intermittent

pain which was, instead of in my uterus, concentrated in my rectum. These were, so to speak, two separate pains that I was perfectly aware of all the time and that, due to the newly occurring circumstances, I could not divide, as usually, into *dangerous* and *harmless*. For the sake of precision, two nurses took turns sitting on my stomach, obviously trying to push out the newborn which, according to the laws of physics, if it was still even alive, should shoot out like a bullet and crash into the wall. The way they threw themselves at me was actually most akin to what kids would do when they finished the juice in the laminated bag – after they inflated it, they would step on it with their whole might to make it pop like a gunshot.

- What are you doing? - I manage to squeeze out between two waves of pain.

- Accelerated delivery. You pierced yourself with that hose, and our colonoscope is out of order so we don't know if it's serious – said one of them getting ready to jump on me again.

- Does anything in this hospital work, for goodness sake?

- That cunt of yours, like a drugstore – she retorted infuriated – I don't want to hear a word from you, or I'll leave you here to die. Is that clear?

The doctor on call was nowhere to be seen. The two nurses were soon joined by another one who, immediately upon her arrival, grabbed me tightly by my left upper arm, and then exchanged looks with the other one, who did the same, but on the right. It was a small glimpse into what was to come – the third one, whom I couldn't see well from my belly, used scissors to make an incision of a few centimeters stretching from the opening of my vagina to my rectum, the incision

because of which for the next few months I will go to defecate with the paralyzing fear of the wound opening, the same incision that after the delivery they would stitch up more than necessary. The *husband stitch*, for the husband I don't have.

- It hurts... hurts! - I jerked frantically.

- It didn't hurt when you did it! - snapped the nurse whom, in my twitching, I inadvertently hit on the chin, and then, several times in a row, she slugged me on my thigh – Push! Once again!

Had I lived on tenderness, after this I would have been no more.

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When they finally put her on my chest, I did not feel anything save for the beating of her feisty little heart which, just as after the first inhale, beat in a rapid, even rhythm. Absolutely nothing. It was supposed to be a touching, powerful, truly enlightening experience, permeated by the gentle presence of two scrawny mammals – the cub, who will always be hungry, and the adult, who has nothing more important than to serve it. Instead, silent despair, some sort of unnatural disorientation which did not allow me even to remember what could, at that moment while the nurse is going to town stitching me up with a double suture, be my motherly duty. I was just as useless as those two breasts that just could seem to let out a few drops of milk. *There, there*, my voice interrupted her warm, serious tears from which wailing, thick and sullen like a cloud, filled out the space faster than the need for love; *sh-sh-sh*, I say, *save your strength my precious*.

*Indeed, you were born a female.*