

Chapter III

*How intelligent are some beasts
How beastly are some intelligent ones*



There are proverbs that prepare and lead us to a way of life. Very often and by chance we cross with them. We adopt and repeat them until they become part of us. In fact, they aren't ideas you plunge into, but these proverbs explain clearly and simply what we are thinking. Therefore we adopt them. I remember a sentence I had read on the wall of a neighbouring club: "THE HAWK" (El Aguilucho) a block from my house. One day, overcoming every ban from my family by proxy and invited by another kid I made up my mind to know the club. It said: "Respect if you want to be respected". I thought it was really very good.

I was afraid to go in. According to my family's opinion it was a forbidden evil place where people, who go into, were eternally doomed, as among other heathen rites, at week-end-nights men and women danced tangos, congas, even rock and twist...

The only place I was allowed to go to, was at the assembly room of the Parish Church. But that place was cold, heartless even hateful, where older children used to ask me who my father was...or my mother, as if they lacked of any questions to ask.

I'd rather they ask me about my favourite football club "Racing". I was so proud of it and knew all the scores of the matches, listening to my radio "Spica", or the footballer's names, but no, they only asked if my mum and dad were married...and talked among themselves and laughed and said things I didn't understand such as "unmarried mother" and laughed and laughed....and walked swaying the ass, touching their penis over the trousers and laughed....and they said it was gossiped by a woman of the Parish....laughed and laughed. I wondered what they were told and I felt terribly sad and I wanted to go home... Besides, I had other reasons to hate the parish house. My cousin told me the priest, to teach him how to use the typewriter used to sit him on his lap. He felt something hard under his buttocks. He wanted to leave, but he couldn't the corner door, there was a big play ground with a stage on one side. On a black poster, there was the proverb, on white letters: "Respect if you want to be respected".

I considered it was an excellent proverb, but of course, I had heard so many bad things about that place, that I thought it was an evil proverb, so I'd better forget it.

I went on watching and discovering new things. On one side of the playground.

I saw two pillars with a ring on each one.

- "This is the basket ball court", explained my friend.
- "Of course" I thought, "it must be the heathen rites so endlessly repeated by my family".

There were lots of men talking and laughing. I saw the baker, the butcher, the ironmonger, the man who drove a landau in the morning...I got scared and thought":

"So these people are bad, devilish people who won't be saved? and thinking that I have loved the butcher so much... I had imagined he and his wife might be my parents.....and when I was going to buy the meat, he always gave me a sausage, the ones I liked so much....and now I saw him in such a place...)

I went on walking, there were people who threw coins (the big ones) into a box on which there was a metal frog with the mouth opened and a lot of holes on the sides. They laughed and shouted when a coin was swallowed by the frog.....I also enjoyed looking and laughing with everybody.

I went on walking. There were grown ups and kids playing and shouting at the "metegol" (a sort of a small football ground). I knew it because my cousin (who was very rich) had been given one by his parents.

- "How good if I could play" - I thought.

Nobody asked me anything, but I was on guard. One of the big boys scored a goal on the "metegol", put his arm round my waist and rose me up, while he was shouting, then he put me down and did the same with my friend.

I kept thinking if that was a heathen rite too, but it was very nice to watch everything from up there...but I didn't dare to ask him to rise me up again.

- "*Come, come, come to have the anniversary chocolate*", said a shortest fat woman with black hair. She wore eye-glasses and torn shoes.

Horried, I recognized she was the school portress.

- "If they knew at home that this woman comes to this place, surely they won't let me go back to school anymore, and I won't see Irene again (she sits next to me in the classroom) who I was so much in love with", I thought sadly.

My friend pushed me inside, the kids who were playing in the playground, rushed at the call shouting and shouting... and I also shouted, shouted and jumped... and no grown up ordered me to shut up or scolded me... Until I found out at last, what the so frightful heathen rite was like.... it was very nice and I liked it just the same...

In front of me, similar to a white road, there was a long table with a tablecloth on, and lots of glasses full of chocolate milk (like my rich cousin used to drink very day) and heaps of....yellow golden sugary fritters (churros).

Everybody yelled: "Attack" and they took glasses and fritters. My friend helped himself, and I was glad because he was good and surely he would invite me.

- "Come on, help yourself", he told me.
- "I have no money", I answered.
- "No, silly, they are free, it's the anniversary of the club", he answered me, while he was pushing to allow me to take the only glass left.

The chocolate was delicious, warm, sweet and the tasty fritters seemed endless, nobody objected if you helped yourself over and over again; the portress came with a huge jug serving you, even if you don't want any more...

All of them began singing: "Ea, ea, ea al Aguilucho no lo paran ni los tanques de Corea" (Ea, ea, ea, the Hawk won't be stopped even by Korean tanks) I joined to them and another boy put his hand on my shoulder (without asking me anything) and we jumped together.

- "Are you enrolling to the sack race?", a woman who I had never seen before, asked me.
- "O.K. yes? What's your name?", she persisted looking into my eyes.
- "Carlitos", I replied rather afraid, because I hadn't the slightest idea what a "sack race" was.

As soon as I could, I slipped away, praying not to be seen, either by my grandmother or my aunt, or they weren't told I had been in such a place.

I walked slowly the block towards my house. Everything seemed to be quiet.

I went in slyly, but my grandfather was waiting for me.

- "Didn't I tell you to go and buy tobacco for my pipe, lazy, good for nothing, you left one hour ago, and you weren't on the sidewalk....."

He began the rebuke me.

I couldn't answer him, just looked at him.

- "Don't dare to challenge me", he shouted.

He began walking towards me, furiously, but too slowly, he lifted his stick, but I only felt the air cut, but not near enough.

There was no danger, only walking slowly backwards, the old man would never be able to catch me up. He observed it and began insulting me:

- "Guacho, figlio de putana, tengo que aguantarte en mi casa, maledeto, mascalzone" (Bastard, son of a bitch, I've got to bear you in my home, damn you) in his insulting he used to mix Italian with Spanish.
- "Respect if you want to be respected". I spat out remembering what I had read on the poster at the club. It was worse. I don't know how he did it, but he increased his speed.

I had to run, not very fast, rather slowly, but run.....

- "I killed more than one at the war", he replied regarding to the 1st. World War where he had been a soldier.

Then my grandmother came and asked him to calm down, to beware his blood pressure.

- "And you go and have your milk", she ordered me, "wait and see what will happen when your aunt Giolanda comes".
- "I'm going to the bathroom", I said, trying to spare a few minutes.

I looked at myself at the mirror; I had two chocolate smears round my mouth. They were removed with water and soap.

I didn't feel like eating again, but if I refused doing it they would find out and the spanking would be worse. I thought in vomiting, but I rejected the idea. Those moments had been too precious to tear them away from me.

- "What are you waiting to come out? My grandmother shouted. "I'm having a shit", I answered, pulling down my trousers in case somebody came in to confirm that. I remained sitting on the loo until my leg began itching.....

When I went into the kitchen, a big cup full of milk (the cracked and split one, which was only mine, in case I may break it, although it had been aunt Giolanda's who spoiled it). Next to it there was a big piece of yesterday bread that I couldn't even think NOT to eat it.

- "If he doesn't eat bread, he eats meat later and it's more expensive", my grandfather had said.

Luckily, I was alone in the kitchen. My tummy was quite full up. It was unthinkable to say I was no hungry. I cut the bread in small pieces and soaked it in the milk until the cup was practically empty, so I pour the rest into the sink. Then, with firm and slyly steps I walked to the hen-house and threw the bread to the poultry that excited jumped happily like those kids that shouted at the Anniversary...

- "What have you done"?, I heard my grandmother shouting behind me.
- "You have been terrible today", She went on yelling, "you answered disrespectfully to your grandfather, threw the milk and bread to the hens, and in the morning, rocking on a chair fell down backwards.

When your aunt Giolanda comes, she'll kill you".

I was doomed. I knew she'd return about 7PM. It was 5PM. I imagined my grandmother repeating loudly: "Beat him, beat him". I started to be afraid.

"Beat him, Beat him", there were no other words in my head.

"Beat, beat", the damn clock hand went on moving forward.

"Beat, beat", what would she choose to beat me with? "Beat, beat" to make things worse

I was wearing my shorts, so the lashing would be on my skin. "Beat, beat" Will it be too painful? "Beat, beat". The grown ups never forget their threats. "Beat," if I hide under the bed, they will find me and it will be worse. "Beat" Will it be with the belt or with the poplar twig that is so painful?

"Beat". And the damn clock hand went on moving on and on. "Beat, beat".

- Mum, please come and help me. "Beat, beat, beat".

Half an hour, more. "Beat, beat, beat".

The front door was open, and it was she, aunt Giolanda. Bad luck. She returned earlier and she says her fiancé is an idiot. Angrily, she spoke a lot about revenge; now my grandmother is talking to her. I heard she opened the wardrobe door.

The beating is with the belt.

- "Where are you?, she shouts.

She is coming. I had thought I'd be all right until 7PM, but she came back before. After all it's better so I won't suffer so much waiting. She found me.

- "God, please, let it not be so painful.....please.....let it not be too painful... please...