

X, THE ABSENT GUEST

I didn't sing, nor did I even play the guitar, when the couple asked me to entertain the party after the feast. I had warned them beforehand, but apparently, they thought I was joking. They were the stars of the show and believed they had the right to have all their wishes granted. Consequently, they insisted—and insisted again—in a somewhat pathetic manner. To settle the matter, and to ensure no one present viewed my stance as too extreme, I performed a single piece. We all knew they had started dating at a dance hall just as "Angie"—the famous Rolling Stones melody—was playing. At the end of my meager performance, I rested my head on the table, upon my arms. My closed eyes, deep breathing, and even my snoring must have led the guests to conclude that I was a rude, perhaps even disrespectful, character—bordering on boorish.

When I woke up, the revelry was still in full swing, though now in a blatant, unmistakable way: tongues were stumbling, and words were slurred; the tone of conversation had escalated, often rising to shouts; throats were gulping down endless streams of liquid; jackets and sweaters were draped over chair backs or piled onto the sofas. This scene confirmed my fears. A few months earlier, I used to say—quite often—that life was a theater where everyone played a part, sometimes naturally, sometimes striving for a specific effect. Upon hearing this, my fellow players would smile hypocritically, concealing their true thoughts—except for one who exclaimed: "We are human beings, not angels." "Angels don't exist; they are a creation of the hierarchies designed to make us accept our excesses and limitations as normal, so that we continue as herd animals, ready to follow the established paths", I replied.

I saw a certain annoyance and displeasure on their faces at my assessment. So—such was my dependence on "tute" (a Spanish card game)—I decided not to use that expression again: one that was so negative to some, yet so clear-sighted to me.

It wasn't so much his refusal to liven up the atmosphere with his musical performances—which, incidentally, were excellent—that bothered me; what really stung was his listless attitude toward everything unfolding around him. We had meticulously planned the event over several days, aiming to let the attendees forget their daily routines and become immersed in an experience that would stir them deeply. As you can easily imagine, X stood out—and not in a good way—against the backdrop of everyone else's enthusiasm and joy. Perhaps he was out of sorts because, just like any other day of the

week, he hadn't been able to play his game at the bar. I don't know; I don't want to judge him, either. I have no right to do so. Admittedly, I found his behavior hard to understand. I must acknowledge that he always had a very distinctive personality and generally didn't conform to conventional social norms.

They seize any opportunity to eat, laugh, drink, and shout—in short, to let themselves be swept along by currents set in motion by those who steer the masses in ways that are covert yet highly efficient for their own interests. During time off, one must indulge the body with every sort of pleasure and comfort, allowing it to forget the major problems that the workings of modern society inflict upon that so-called "middle class"—a group that encompasses the vast majority of the population. We must not forget that we tend to exhibit behavior bordering on docility. Why? Everyone will offer their own reasons—reasons likely to be varied and diverse, given that one's perception of reality depends on the unique characteristics of the individual. Unamuno famously put it something like this: "I am I and my circumstances."

We must consume—consume heavily. You are valued not for who you are, but for what you own. There is a general tendency to own the latest-generation appliances—devices controllable via mobile phone, a tool that, in turn, controls your life. This multi-party government is in the process of passing a law that will prohibit the creation of social media accounts until the age of sixteen; yet, these platforms are also affecting the mental and physical health of a broad spectrum of the adult population. Experts state that recreational smartphone use should not exceed two hours a day, and yet the average stands at four hours.

Global warming triggers ongoing natural catastrophes: droughts, the spread of desertification, torrential rains, disrupted seasons, extreme temperatures... These phenomena drive significant environmental migration in parts of South Asia. Water is an increasingly scarce resource across the planet. In summer, the Mediterranean is burning on all sides; during the other seasons, isolated high-altitude depressions frequently form, causing flooding, helplessness, and destruction. And Africa... what is there to say about Africa? Political parties that deny climate change and resist taking action against it are gaining followers. We continue to produce and purchase vast quantities of oil. The conclusion: major investors in new technologies, artificial intelligence, and "black gold"

multinationals are growing ever wealthier, while the planet becomes increasingly uninhabitable; millions of people vanish without ever knowing what basic human rights are; and our minds are manipulated by those who—using algorithms, advertising, media control, and similar techniques—decide from on high what we ought to think.

Far too irreverent. He could have led a comfortable life, but he chose defiance and confrontation. It is true that he championed principles which, had they been realized, would have represented strides toward dignity, freedom, and respect for human rights. The times were not ripe for that. He became increasingly radicalized over time and faced legal trouble due to public statements made after attending rallies and demonstrations. I remember his participation in the protests against the G7. At the last one she attended, a handful of activists tried to scale the security fence while chanting, "Another world is possible," "You are the crisis, we are the solution," "Capitalism kills, the planet is not for sale," and "Not a man, not a penny for wars." He ended up serving a few years in prison. He died of a lung disease linked to environmental pollution. What the world denied, killed X.

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