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I often think that dream, taken to its broader sense, forms the backdrop of reality. This one, to start with, closely follows contours, appearances and uncertain aspects similar to dream evanescent characteristics, to its precarious and puzzling looks, giving, first, rise to hope, and then, with a reversal of fortune, showing a grimacing aspect of existence.

I wonder, based on the uncertainties of reality and the often incredible speed of its metamorphosis, if I deserve this blissful feeling, this beatitude and financial security I have enjoyed for the last two years or so; if I deserve this indescribable joy of teaching philosophy at the State University, ethics at the school for adolescents; of being an associate at the *Legal Laboratory* where skilled lawyers work wonders in the field of legal science.

Then, I catch myself casting doubt about the value of today's topic as subject of discussion in the classroom attended by second year college students: *one in many* and *many in one*.

Probably, the anatomy of the real imposes on us a certain structure responding to a close harmony between one and many. However, such anatomy has never stopped confusing us, throwing us to a world of doubts,

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to the possibility of waking up, one day, with an ashy taste in our mouths, when we may learn that we have made mistake about this existential arrangement and that *one* has always collapsed into *many*.

Indeed, nobody has grasped thoroughly the intimate principle underlying the harmonious functionality of the *one* which has no resemblance with the constituent parts (above all at the level of life, mainly at the level of animal life).

Then, the puzzle gets tangled at the level of human personality responding to a unifying «I», « me », despite the framework of its history and the multiplicity of its parts coming first from the mother, then, from the father, at last from nature itself with its array of chemicals, starting with childish confusion to consciousness, « this panacea» for knowledge.

I should feel incredibly happy to discuss these exciting subjects with young, curious and idealistic minds like me.

Then, why has my optimism wavered? Why have I thought of the hideous *shadow of malice*?

Undoubtedly, these questions come from daily experiences.

Indeed, not long time before, the *shadow of malice* had covered me with its thick (almost opaque) veil, to such a par that I got assailed with somber ideas and thought of committing suicide.

Fortunately, at that time, I had taken interest in spirituality and in the works of great masters of thinking. Thus, a thought, apparently simple,

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had served me as guiding light. It goes as follows: “One needs an extra soul, in life.”

Yes, one needs it, for, this reality, despite its dream-like instability, often hides a moment of hope in a recess of history, or one of its crossings.

Everything seemed to go well. As the youngest child of the family, I *inherited* the older children’s *wisdom*. I became an entity thirsty with values and knowledge.

In primary and secondary school, I learned fast.

In the meantime, my brothers and sisters had been married one after the other.

In the blink of an eye, six children had left the family house, and their departure had caused a true psychological vacuity.

From that point on, at my return from school, I would find a house apparently abandoned, until mama Alberta and papa Maurice’s return from work.

My parents had already betrayed signs of weariness and ageing, and, soon, they would take their retirement and stay home, doing absolutely nothing, like two horses that have reached the end of their tether.

Irony of existence, breathtaking speed of *dream-like reality*: The family album, which I enjoyed going through, informed me that, in a recent past, my parents were glowing with beauty and vitality. How can we fully comprehend this ineluctable aging, this headlong running toward nothingness?

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The laws of existence seem too harsh for me.

Because of their imminent ageing, my parents started to turn crabbed, fussy and tired of the «youngest child » of the family.

I embodied the last step to struggle up to discharge their parental duties. Apparently, this last step seemed to be the hardest of all and, gradually, took the complexion of a *Golgotha* impossible to climb up.

A lesson I have learned from my family experience, which I won't stop repeating to prospective young couples: nothing is wrong with having children (above all the new born are so adorable). However, to respond to the wish of the *Holy Scriptures* and have, blindly, too many children may coincide with a dangerous recipe.

The younger children may not always enjoy the same parents' solicitude for the older children, when, mad with love and passion, these parents had given themselves up to each other and had consented to all kinds of follies for the first fruits of their communal life.

Occasionally, at that time, my parents whispered a statement which got me scared, while, by the same token, it awoke my pride and my equanimity.

“Mo, my beloved, I am tired of raising children,” stammered my mother one day.

“Darling, I understand you well,” acquiesced my father. “We have accomplished our duties. But, we have paid a heavy price for that!”

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“Mo, my beloved, be careful about what you say, » warned ma mother while pointing at me.

“Darling,” insisted my father, “I must express my feeling, otherwise, I will have a nervous breakdown.

“I am at the end of my tether, on the verge of having a depression. For the first time in my live, I yearn after my retirement.

“Berta, I feel like an empty shell.

“Oh, no, sweetie, hold on. I would get lost without you. I need you on my side. Time flies. Soon, Henriot will have his own place.

“Listen, Mo, once he reaches eighteen, we won’t be responsible for him.”

“As far as I am concerned, it’s a long way to go. I feel completely empty of energy, of vitality.

“In that case, we must have a family reunion, as soon as possible....”

Years had passed. My brothers and sisters had already started multiplying, like my parents, in harmony with the *Holy Scriptures* wish, “be fruitful and multiply”.

“They no longer had time to relax; they worked like slave to maintain their middle class status. Once or twice a year, they visited us, dragging behind them their flocks of children.

At these particular moments, my parents were full of joy and their own importance, taking all the credit for this multitude. They had fulfilled well their role as Aristotelian deities by imparting the first push to this

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profusion of human reality, to set it in motion and cause its expansion in space and time.

However, this expansion already threatened to suffocate me and to make my presence less and less meaningless in the bosom of my family.

The *precious visitors* often, from hand to hand, passed the plates of foods over my head, which would make my favorite sister scream, “We have forgotten Rio! How can that happen to my precious Rio?”

Another one would state in a natural fashion, “Oh! That’s ok. Help yourself, Henriot; otherwise, you will die of starvation in this world of competition.

“You must manage better than that. The crumbs won’t fall into your mouth without a bit of effort.

“Do you understand what I want to say, my little brother?”

I did my utmost not to take offense of such observation full of unexpressed meanings.

For some unexplained reason, Ariana, from my earliest childhood, had betrayed a certain weakness for me. I bet that she had already felt the need to show her maternal instinct: she had showered me with true motherly tenderness.

Indeed, she had introduced me to the habit of cleanliness; she had reminded me to wash up, brush my teeth, moisten my armpits, my earlobes, and my chest with her deodorant; she also washed my dirty socks and many more little things I couldn’t fully assess...

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One day, she told me a “secret”, “Rio, you know, I will get married soon.”

I stood there open-mouthed.

I had assumed that Arianna would devote her entire life to look after me. She had spoiled me more than my mother who had run out of tenderness because of her numerous progeny.

As I am thinking about it today, I firmly believe that my mother had awareness of Arianna’s weakness for me and capitalized on it to *catch her breath*.

“Ana,” I said (as I have always called her), “I feel happy for you.”

“But, dear, what will become of you without me?” she asked. “Frankly, I am concerned...”

“Don’t worry,” I replied. “You must think about yourself.

“I will manage more or less.”

I took a short pause before adding, “Moreover, my beloved sister, don’t worry.

“Don’t forget, Ana, that you’ve accomplished your job, as far as I am concerned. You’ve introduced me to the basics of a sound life. Anything else will depend on me.

“Free yourself from worries. Fly on your own. You have the right to enjoy a personal and romantic life.

“Soon, you will have your own children who will have the good luck of having a mother as affectionate and devoted as you.”

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We kept silent for a while. Then, I inquired abruptly, “Do you really love Rodriguez?”

She played with my hair before insinuating smilingly, “I detect a pinch of jealousy. I understand your reaction: you are my beloved brother.”

“Not at all,” I protested. “Ana, I just ask you a question. I have nothing else in mind.

“Try to understand me.

“My favorite sister, who has showered so much tenderness on me, will leave me for a prince charming.

“I don’t know him. I’ve seen him in our home, but I don’t really know him.”

“Rio, I really love Rodriguez.”

“Then, this is the beginning of happiness for you...”

“Except that,” she started regretfully.

“Ana, what is it?” I inquired alarmingly.

“Well, Rio, he is jealous and a little hot-tempered. Otherwise...”

“It’s not the end of the world. Moreover, your natural sweetness and generosity will eventually calm him down and “tamed” him.

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes, Ana, I do. Don’t forget that marriage aims at unifying various tendencies.”

“I certainly hope so.”

After a sigh of relief, she added, “I think that our love is mutual.

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“And whenever there is love, there is also hope.”

“That’s so true,” I acknowledged.

I could have been ten. Against my will, I attended the nuptial ceremony, which I would like to last eternally.

Then, when the reverend pronounced the traditional word, “You may kiss the bride”, I had the poignant feeling of losing a real mother.

I would admit later on that my concept of life and reality hadn’t evolved with time and that I had betrayed a persistent conservatism during my earliest childhood. I would conclude that my parents, my brothers and sisters hadn’t dropped me because of imminent ageing of the former and of increasing responsibility of the latter.

All this could matter; except modern social life had changed; human relationships turned more and more unstable and fragile; feelings adapted to modern way of life: time of more and more accelerate speed of actions; time of technological, scientific and economic innovations; time of limited love. Men and women had no longer time to practice stable values such as friendship, family mutual aid, generosity. They said hello to each other, they patted each other on the back, and promised to “call one of these days”.

Only idealists, like me, still took interest in these kind of values I had thought about.

I only found consolation from my friendship with Pamela Julian, a schoolmate coming from a wealthy family.

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For reason remained to clarify, we had never felt any social barrier caused by wealth difference.

In my humble opinion, our mutual love for dialogue had acted as a magnet for our mutual liking.

We had already, from age of ten, stayed away from other schoolfellows and adults “mediocrity”, who gave themselves to “drivels”, “meaningless considerations” and “stories known to everybody”.

I remember the first moments of our encounter as if it was yesterday.

We were sitting in the canteen to have breakfast. We shared our table with about ten other children.

One of the girls asked two chubby male students, “How did you spend your holyday?”

“Very well, my dear little Yolanda” answered one of the boys in a natural fashion.

The other boy, shortly after, tried pitifully to give a more or less precise account of their occupation during that framework the female student had in mind, “We ate plenty of meat, peas, and bananas. Then, we drank plenty of iced lemonade...”

This small talk triggered an *endless idle chatter*, which changed our schoolmates into *very old folks*, ready for retirement, even before reaching an active life.

For some unexplained reason, Pamela and I kept silent, but a silence full with meaning, for, occasionally, we instinctively looked at the ceiling

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as a witness to our “mental suffering” or we exchanged conspiratorial looks.

The day after, we would enjoy being together instinctively. For the first time, I found a female friend already interested in controversial questions that seem to challenge mankind through the ages:

What’s the very nature of God?

Is He pure spirit?

Where did He come from?

Can we just take for granted the teaching of older persons such as the reverend coming twice in our classroom to spread the Word, or our teacher of morality...?

How about life itself?

Where does it come from?

Because of our ingenuity and lack of culture, we couldn’t bring satisfactory answers to these question, but at least our wobbling thinking endeavor kept us from our *precocious retirees’* nonsense and waffle.

Our friendship hadn’t changed during the school years until our last day in high school. Both we had passed the state exam with flying colors.