



—So, the Mathematician says, to Washington, what is confused in people and horses is clarified by observing the mosquito.

—The mosquito, Leto repeats.

—The mosquito, right, says the Mathematician.

—The mosquito, Leto repeats again, assuming a reflexive intonation.

—The mosquito, the mosquito, the Mathematician says, shaking his head affirmatively.

Their pace, now well-harmonized, is neither slow nor fast, more regular than ever, as if it had taken their legs, their entire bodies, several blocks to find the common rhythm that surrounds them, transforming them into a kind of machine that regulates the differences between their two bodies and calibrates their proportions to obtain a common output. From the outside, the rhythm is so regular it appears deliberate—from the outside, no? And yet you couldn't find two people who were more different than these two: the athletic and rational rugbyman, picture perfect from a physical standpoint, dressed completely in white, including the moccasins he bought that August in Florence, whose father, a liberal *yrigoyenista* lawyer is, nevertheless, the owner of a majority of the farms surrounding Tostado, the Mathematician, as I was saying, no?, fond, for some reason, of swimming in the colorless river of premises, of propositions, of postulates, and to whom Tomatis—who gave him the nickname—claims those same premises, propositions, and postulates give a sick satisfaction, something that Leto, to tell the truth, has never been able to verify, and which could be more about Tomatis's intent, using the Mathematician as a pretext, to slander the exact sciences in general. And the other, Leto, Ángel Leto, no?, skinny, his legs a little crooked, much smaller and younger, slightly myopic, whose shirt and whose pants, of three or four times poorer quality than the other's white outfit, combine less elegantly, Leto, who has lived less than a year in the city, which he came to following Isabel, his mother, who fled the evidence of a suicide like it was a worldwide catastrophe, Leto, who keeps, for a living, several accounts, and who that morning, for reasons as inexplicable as those inclining the Mathematician toward syllogisms and theorems, instead of going to work, decided to get off the bus and start walking down San Martín to the south. Impossible to be more different, although something, in spite of it all, equalizes them: not just them, no?, the identity that's generic to individuals

of the same species, individuals who, after all, speak the same language and, though they come from different cities, were born in the same country and even the same province and therefore possess common fragments of experience—no, nothing like that, which of course is their own and shared with their co-provincials, their so-called compatriots, their countrymen—no, nothing like that, but rather something more particular and at the same time less definite, an impression, a feeling they both carry deep down inside themselves—and never suspecting that the other, or others, also feel it gives it a particular tint and above all reinforces it, the feeling, I mean, of not completely belonging to this world, or, as a result, to anyone else, of never being able to perfectly fit the internal to the external or vice versa, and no matter how hard they try they will always find thin gaps between themselves and everything else, something which, for obscure reasons, they blame themselves for, a feeling so confusing and inconsistently applied that it is confused for thought and for flesh, where the self is the stain, the error, the asymmetry that with its solitary, ridiculous presence clouds the radiant body of the universe. Now, as well, since they began walking down the straight street together, along the shady sidewalk, a new, impalpable tie binds them: the false memories of a place neither of them has seen, of events neither witnessed, and people neither have met, of a day at the end of winter that is not inscribed on their experience but which stands out, intensely, in their memory, the illuminated pavilion, the encounter between El Gato and Botón at the School of Fine Arts, Noca coming from the coast with his baskets of fish, the stumbling horse, Cohen turning the coals, Beatriz constantly rolling a cigarette, the golden beer with a white head of foam, Basso and Botón picking vegetables at the back, shadows moving confusingly as darkness falls, and which, without it being clear how, and above all why, are swallowed by the night. [. . .]

Maintaining their identical, regular pace, Leto and the Mathematician step off the sidewalk into the street and start to cross. A slow-moving car intercepts them, and when it slows at the intersection, they move ahead of it, both at the same time, without stopping or varying their pace, without even looking at it, like two robots with a preprogrammed electronic mechanism which makes them automatically avoid obstacles, and when they reach the opposite sidewalk both, simultaneously, bend their left leg and lift it over the cable. ■