

Cousin Alonso

Prohibitions to fight the Great Pandemic of 2020 have led to the opening of clandestine nightclubs around the world. Here in San Felix there are no less than twenty but the most popular is the Crazy Girl where on Fridays and Saturdays there is already a full house at ten in the evening. Here we eat, dance, play poker and everything is limitless, with the only exception of alcohol: one can only drink as long as he stands up, after which he is thrown out. Fabio Sbarella, the owner, stays in the kitchen where he comes out from time to time to take a look and his blood-stained apron and slicing knife, hanging around his neck, are enough to calm the most nervous customers. Last night I caught a glimpse of Inspector Basillis who, when he has nothing to say to me, prefers to stay away. Tonight, however, I cross Barnaba who immediately approaches because he is dying to tell me the news: “Do you know that in the city

there is someone who looks a bit like you and who boasts of being your cousin?” “And who would it be?” I ask. “His name is Alonso. He is tall, thin, has a mustache but the funny thing is that he always hangs around with his accountant. It seems that Alonso’s favorite phrase is: *I don’t get my hands dirty with money*. He is an interesting man, with a kind manner and seems to be very, very rich”. I interrupt him: “Okay. Next time you will tell me everything you can know about this guy.”

The street where I live is poorly lit and when I already have the key to my door in my hand I see a corpse, leaning with his back against the wall of the opposite building, with his legs stretched out on the sidewalk, his arms at his sides, his head bent on one side and eyes open as if staring at my house. Who knows how many have passed this way without notifying the police, who now only move for the murders while for everything else everyone has to do it on their own. I approach to establish that that face doesn’t tell me anything and this is enough to guarantee me a peaceful sleep until the already high sunlight wakes me up. I open a window on the street and the dead man is still there. What if someone put it in front of the house to send me a warning? The man, one meter and seventy tall, of large build, elegantly dressed,

shows no signs of injury or traces of violence. I go down to search the dead man and actually find in a pocket a handwritten sheet inside a white envelope, with no sender and no recipient. After the Great Civil War the postal system no longer exists and an anonymous person sent me his personal registered letter with return receipt. Before returning to the house, I drag the body – it will weigh no less than one hundred kilos – for as many meters, to the nearest intersection and I take some photographs of it as a souvenir. Closed the door, I open the envelope and read this sentence, written in block capitals: THE DEAD DO NOT SPEAK BUT IN LIFE I WAS A FRIEND OF ANTONIO EUGENIO ZERM.

In the evening I am among the first to sit on a chair at the Crazy Girl and from here I can check who enters. Commissioner Basillis has had the same idea as me and takes his place next to me. “We need people like you”. I tell him immediately; is my favorite phrase and I recommend it because everyone likes it, the good ones no less than the bad ones. And then I pursue him: “What do you know about a certain Alonso, someone who says he is my cousin?” “Today – he replies – is my birthday: forty-seven years to be exact but it’s not the years that weigh on my shoulders, it’s the experience that makes

me slower. Ten years ago, a guy like Alonso would have already arrested him but now I'm more cautious and I want to understand where he gets all the money he spends and spreads." Then the inspector changes the subject until the silhouette of Barnabas Barnabis appears, who pretends not to have seen us since the inspectors and detectives are like cats and dogs. I reach him and Barnabas immediately attacks: "I know everything about that guy ..." "Okay, but not here". And I signal him to follow me and, when we are outdoors, Barnabas begins: "Alonso was born in 1988, the same year as his mother's death. He was a very thin child, ribs could be counted and he always left everything on his plate. Loredana, his current woman, is also very thin". "Barnaba – I stop him – it is true that I asked you to tell me everything you would have discovered but now I am satisfied with almost everything". "Ok. I found out that his grandfather had two children with his first wife, who died giving birth to the second, and three children with his second wife who already had a previous daughter, Alida; remember this name for the simple reason that it is Alonso's mother. So, the grandfather had an affair with Alida who was sixteen at the time and, when the girl became pregnant, to avoid the scandal, the child was reported to the registry office as the

legitimate son of his grandfather and his second wife. It was easy because the family lived in the countryside and the midwife was called at the last moment”. “Well – I say grateful to my friend – you did a good job. We need people like you”. “Ah – replies Barnaba – I was about to forget this detail. It was only at the funeral of his grandfather that it was discovered that the man supported another third family in the city with two other children”. “But what did this grandfather do?” “He had a farm where the first two families lived and a supermarket in the city, where he had placed the third family above”. I immediately had the impression that this genealogic tree would bear bitter fruit. There are many dark sides in Alonso’s story but Barnaba cannot go further, as the two know each other. The thought immediately goes to Attilio, an old-fashioned investigator who would not stoop to frequent the Crazy Girl.