

Excerpt

DESTINY AND DESIRE

by Carlos Fuentes

Permit me to introduce myself. Or rather: introduce my body, violently separated (you know this already) from my head. I speak of my body because I've lost it and will not have another opportunity to introduce it to all of you, gentle readers, or to myself. In this way I can indicate, once and for all, that the following narration has been dictated by my head and only my head, since my detached body is nothing more than a memory: one that can be transmitted and left in the hands of the forewarned reader.

Forewarned indeed: The body is at least half of what we are. Still, we keep it hidden in a verbal closet. For the sake of modesty, we do not refer to its invaluable and indispensable functions. Forgive me: I will speak in detail about my body. Because if I don't, very soon my body will be nothing but an unburied corpse, a slaughtered fowl, an anonymous loin. And if you, being very well bred, don't want to know about my bodily intimacies, skip this chapter and begin your reading with the next one.

I am a twenty-seven-year-old man, one meter seventy-eight centimeters tall. Every morning I look at myself naked in my bathroom mirror and caress my cheeks in anticipation of the daily ceremony: Shave my beard and upper lip, provoke a strong response with Jean-Marie Farina cologne on my face, resign myself to combing black, thick, untamable hair. Close my eyes. Deny to my face and head the central role my death will be certain to give them. Concentrate instead on my body. The trunk that is going to be separated from my head. The body that occupies me from my neck to my extremities, covered in skin the color of pale cinnamon and tipped with nails that will continue to grow for hours and days after death, as if they wanted to scratch at the lid of the coffin and shout I'm here, I'm still alive, you made a mistake when you buried me.