

Name: TT1.1 Forgotten Journey. Available in: Ocampo, S. (2019) Forgotten Journey. Translated by S. J. Levine and K. Lateef Jan. San Francisco: City Lights Books, pp. 119-122

¶1: She was trying to remember the day she was born and frowned so much that every few minutes the grownups would interrupt to make her smooth her brow. Which is why she could never reach back to the memory of her birth.

¶2: Before they're born, children would be stocked in a big department store, the mothers would order them, and sometimes went directly to buy them. She would have liked to see them unwrap the package, open the box in which the baby would come wrapped, but they had never called her over in time in the houses of the newly born. They would all arrive crushed from the journey inside the box where they could barely breathe, and that's why they were so red and cried incessantly, curling their toes.

¶3: But she had been born one morning in Palermo making birds' nests. She didn't remember having left the house that day, and had the sensation that she had made the trip without an automobile or a carriage, a journey filled with mysterious shadows in which she awoke on a road lined with casuarina pines, smelling their strong scent, where she was suddenly making birds' nests. The eyes of Micaela, her nursemaid, followed her like two guards. Building the nests wasn't easy: they had to have several rooms, as well as a bedroom and a kitchen.

¶4: The next day, when she returned to Palermo, she went looking for the nests on the road of casuarinas. There were none left. She was on the verge of crying when her nursemaid said, "The birds carried the nests to the tops of the trees, that's why they are so happy this morning." But her sister who was cruelly three years older than her, laughed, and pointed with her knit glove to the gardener of Palermo who was blind in one eye and who swept the street with a broom of gray branches. Together with the dead leaves he was sweeping away the last nest. And at that moment she felt like throwing up, as if she were hearing the sound of the swings in the garden of her house.

¶5: And afterwards, time had passed since that day, distancing her desperately from her birth. Each memory was another little girl who, however, always had the same face. On every birthday the circle of little girls surrounding her grew more stretched out until there weren't enough hands to form a circle around her.

¶6: Until one day playing in the study room, the French chauffeur's daughter said to her horrible and blood-thirsty words: "The children that are born do not come from Paris" and looking around to see if the doors were listening she said softly but it seemed louder as if raising her voice: "Children are inside the bellies of their mothers and when they're born they come out of the bellybutton," and who knows what other dark words burst like sins from Germaine's mouth, and she said them without even turning pale.

¶7: Then children began to be born everywhere. There had never been so many kids in the family. The women had big balloons on their bellies and each time the grownups spoke about some newborn baby, an intense fire spilled over their faces, making them bend down looking for something on the floor, a ring or a handkerchief that had fallen. And all eyes turned toward her like lamps shedding light on her shame.

¶8: One morning, just getting out of the bathtub, looking at the drain plug while the nursemaid dried her wrapping her in the towel, she confided her awful secret to Micaela, laughing. The nursemaid got very mad and reassured her that babies came from Paris. She felt a slight relief. But when night would fall, an anxiety jumbled with sounds from the street would rush over her whole

body. She couldn't sleep at night even though her mother would give her many kisses before going to the theater. The kisses had lost their value. And so it was many days later and many long black hours on the enormous clock in the kitchen, in the deserted hallways of the house, behind doors filled with grownups whispering secrets, when her mother sat her on her lap in her dressing room and told her that children did not come from Paris. She talked to her about flowers, about birds, which all became jumbled with Germaine's horrible secrets. But she desperately maintained that children came from Paris.

¶19: A moment later, when her mother said she'd open the window and she opened it, her mother's face had changed completely under the feathered hat: it was a lady who had come to visit. The window was shut tighter than before, and when her mother said that the sun was lovely, she saw the black sky of night where not a single bird was singing.