

TO LIVE THE DREAM

(short story book) by Ismael Sambra

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Prologue: Daniel Iglesias Kennedy

A short story can be a summary of intense moments. The narrator remembers something that captured his attention and breaks away from the monotony of everyday life and occupies a small spot in his memory. Protected in solitude, abstracted from uncomfortable neighbours, and hidden from the unnecessary visits, the writer ruminates in his memories, relives and recreates them, chooses the right words, conscious that his purpose is to transmit that moment which marked him and that does not allow him to be distracted with stubborn reflections nor to waste his prose with displays of verbal pyrotechnics. He has a unique and undivided objective: to make the reader to go through the same hole and experience the same virulence as the man who tells the story. Or said another way, the reader who opens this book will have the option to live not only what the author has dreamt, but simply what he has remembered. Everything else is unnecessary.

Ismael Sambra has converted a notebook with 15 short stories into a careful summary of intense episodes, taken from a vital exercise full of accidents and incidents. An informed reader could feel the unsettling effects of a confirmation; a lay reader is doomed for a revelation. But utopian and visceral readers should take precautions to avoid being upset. Because Sambra is one of the dead who has escaped heaven to let us know that God doesn't exist. And there, from where he comes, there is no paradise, just nothing. Sambra shows us without needing proof. Rip up the costume and dig deep. Then take a picture. And in each one of the narrations he leaves a precise space for the reader to draw his own conclusion. His selection of 15 moments which interrupt monotony, isolated episodes which can't conceive themselves, but like ingredients of an indigestible stew we can call Cuban Stew, compose an archive of broken feelings where surprise, betrayed innocence, and sex are united like desperate cache, the mutilated adolescence that years later endures as pending. And of course, death, always present in Cuban comedy, a word that closes the most famous of their slogans. Like a warning.

A pathetic ideology applied rigorously on defenseless individuals and submerged in a fundamental cloister to push us into the empty space which had just been uprooted. The only goal of this ideology is to provide the leader with the attire of an earthly prophet who climbed on stage and placed himself in history without anyone's request. Sambra collects the daily consequences of a social experiment incapable of recognizing a failure. It's failure. But unlike the individualistic reader who now subscribes to this prologue, the author of Living the Dream is not a total skeptic. Sambra believes. He is able to deny without denying. It's not absolute. He already demonstrated in his reflections on Jose Marti in which he defined the master with incontestable arguments as the chief opponent of Fidel Castro's regime. The humiliation of prison has not damaged the hopes of a writer who, from his resident at a cold and windy university in Toronto, dreams of living a new opportunity. Sambra suggests possible reconciliation and recovering of lost space. He hasn't joined the clan of non-believers that as it happened to the writer of this prologue doesn't consider himself an exile but rather an immigrant. And from the comfort of my country home in Toledo, I never think of going back. Not even to go through the bureaucratic bothers of a visit. With the respect that the shared illusions and the reward of reading fifteen well-written stories connected as a whole, I am pleased to recommend reading this book of short stories and invite readers, both the wise and the unaccepting to participate in a sensibility that certainly will not leave you indifferent.

Daniel Iglesias Kennedy

Cuban writer, lives in Talavera de la Reina (Toledo, Spain) Author of novels La ranura del horizonte en llamas (1987), El gran incendio (1989), La hija del cazador (1995) y Esta tarde se pone el sol (2001).