

CAIO FERNANDO ABREU

Beyond the Point

Translated from Portuguese by Bruna Dantas Lobato

IT WAS RAINING, raining, raining, and I was going into the rain to meet him, no umbrella or anything, I was always losing them in bars. I was holding just a bottle of cheap cognac tight against my chest, hard to believe it said this way, but this was how I was going through the rain, a bottle of cognac in hand and a wet pack of cigarettes in my pocket. At one point I could have taken a cab, but it wasn't very far away, and if I took a cab I could buy neither cigarettes nor cognac. I thought hard, it would be better to get wet from the rain, because then we could drink the cognac, it was cold, not so cold, it was more the moisture entering through the fabric of my clothes, through the holes in the thin soles of my shoes, and we would smoke, would drink without limits, there would be music, always those hoarse voices, that moaning sax, his eye having settled on me, the warm shower loosening my muscles. But it was still raining, my eyes burned from the cold, my nose began to drip, I would wipe it with the back of my hands and the snot would harden quickly over my nose hairs, I shoved my reddened hands deep into my pockets and I was going, I was going, jumping over puddles with frigid legs. So frigid my legs and my arms and my face that I thought of opening the bottle to have a sip, but I didn't want to arrive at his house half drunk, breath stinking, I didn't want him to think that I'd been drinking, and I had been, every day a good excuse, and I was also thinking that he would think I had no money, arriving on foot in all that rain, and I had none, stomach aching with hunger, and I didn't want him to think I hadn't been sleeping, and I hadn't, purple circles under my eyes, I would have to be careful with my lower lip when smiling, if I smiled, and I almost certainly would, when I saw him, so that he wouldn't see the broken tooth and think I'd been letting myself go, and I had been, avoiding the dentist, and I had been, and everything I'd done and been that I didn't want him to see or know, but thinking that gave me a heartache because I was realizing, inside the rain, that maybe I didn't want him to know that I was me, and I was. A confusing thing started to happen in my

head, this idea of not wanting him to know I was me, soaked in that rain that kept falling, falling, falling, I wanted to go back to someplace warm and dry, if there was such a place, and I couldn't remember any, or stay right there forever on that grayish corner I was trying to cross but I didn't, the cars splashing water and mud on me as they passed, but I couldn't, or I could but I shouldn't, or I could but I didn't want to or I didn't know how to stop or turn back, I had to keep going to meet him, he would open the door for me, the moaning sax in the background and perhaps a fireplace, pine nuts, mulled wine with cinnamon and cloves, those winter things, and even more, I had to stop my urge to turn back or stand still, because there's a point, I was realizing, when you lose control of your own legs, not quite like that, the tortuous realization that the cold and the rain wouldn't even let me chew properly, I was just beginning to learn that there's a point, and me divided, wanting to see after that point and also the pleasure of him waiting for me, hot and ready. A car came closer and drenched me completely, a river would come out of my clothes if I wrung them, so I decided in my head that after opening the door he would say something like look how wet you are, with no astonishment, because he was expecting me, he was calling me, I was only going because he was calling me, I dared, I was going beyond that point of staying still, now through the path of leafless trees and that blocked-off street I was seeing again in that strange way of having already been there without having been, I hesitated but I was going, through the middle of the city, like an invisible thread coming out of his head up to mine, whoever saw me wet like this couldn't see our secret, only saw a wet guy without a raincoat or umbrella, just a bottle of cheap cognac tight against his chest. It was me he was calling, through the city, pulling the thread from my head to his, inside the rain, it was for me that he would open his door, getting very close now, so close I felt a warmth rise up to my face, as if I'd drunk all the cognac, he would change my wet clothes for drier ones and would softly take my hands in his, caressing them slowly to warm them, chasing away the purple of my cold skin, it was getting dark, it was still early, but it was getting dark early, earlier than usual, and it wasn't even winter, he would make a large bed with many blankets, and it was then that I slipped and fell, all of a sudden, and to protect the bottle I squeezed it against my chest and it hit a rock, so besides rainwater and mud from the cars now my clothes were also soaked in cognac, like a drunk, stinking, we wouldn't

drink it then, I tried to smile, gently, my lower lip almost motionless, hiding the stump of my tooth, and I thought of the mud he would wipe off tenderly, because it was me he was calling, because it was me he was choosing, because it was for me and only for me he would open his door.

It was still raining, and it took me a long time to get up from that puddle of mud, I was getting to a point, I was returning to the point, in which an effort so great was necessary, an effort so great was needed, an effort so awful was needed that I had to smile even more alone and invent something more, warming up my secret, and I took a few steps, but how does one do it, I wondered, how does one do this thing of placing one foot in front of the other, balancing the head over the shoulders, keeping the spine erect, I was unlearning, it was nearly nothing, me being held only by that invisible thread attached to my head, now so close that if I wanted to I could imagine something like an electronic buzz coming out of his head until it reached mine, but how does one do it, I was always relearning and inventing, always going toward him, to arrive whole, the pieces of me all mixed up, he would lay them out unhurriedly, as if playing with a puzzle to form what castle, what forest, what worm, or god, I didn't know, but I was going on in the rain because that was my only reason, my only destination—pounding on that dark door I was pounding on now. And I pounded, and I pounded on it again, and pounded once more, and I kept pounding on it, not caring that people in the street stopped to look, I wanted to call him, but I'd forgotten his name, that is if he'd ever had one at all, maybe I had a fever, everything was very confusing, ideas mixed up, shivering, rainwater and mud and cognac pounding and it still hadn't stopped raining, but I wasn't going in the rain anymore, through the city, I was just standing by that door, for a long time, after the point, so dark now that I would never be able to find my way back, nor try another idea, another action, another gesture beyond pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding pounding on the same door that never opens.