

The Little Faun

Fabulario (1969), Eduardo Gudiño Keiffer

While the Little Faun lived without discerning life— playing the syrinx , eating wild grapes and sleeping under the sun—, everything was wonderful. A vine shoot crown sufficed to beautify the day. And it was so unsettling to run through the twists and turns of the forest, chasing his own shadow; or trying to catch the idea of an idea, sometimes realised in hair in the wind, watery laugh, smooth thigh or fugitive silhouette! Yes, the Little Faun was happy. Happy for the sake of it, happy most of all when he played the instrument he himself had crafted with a few reeds cut beside the Castalian Fountain : the syrinx from which he would tear out laments , lullabies, voices and even words— or maybe everything that words could not say —. So captivating was the Faun’s music, that to listen to it fish arose from the water along with the wet naiads, dryads opened millenia old oak trunks, she-wolves suckled lambs, from among the myrtles and the laurels appeared dishevelled silvani. But—not only logically but also mythologically—happiness that lasts... is no longer happiness. One day, Philomela, shaken by the Faun’s music, flew to such height she bumped into Apollo’s chariot:

“What are you doing here, so far away from your forests?” asked the god.

“I’m soaring upon the Little Faun’s music!”

Of course, her response upset Apollo, who took his gold lyre and descended to the shadowy place where a simple faun dared to make music that could drive birds to the skies. Oh! You should have been there to listen to such a formidable counterpoint! At the first chord of the lyre, trees trembled. But at the first moan of the syrinx , they shed green tears. At the first chord of the lyre, the fountains fell silent, but at the first moan of the syrinx, they ceased to flow. Eurus took the sounds to Olympus. Upon the sound of Apollo’s lyre, one of the divine banquets was interrupted. But upon the sound of the syrinx, Ganymede spilled his cup on Zeus’s tunic, who by chance was not in that moment turned into some animal trying to seduce someone. Apollo came to the conclusion that Faun’s music was far superior to his own. So he decided to get revenge as only the gods know. Reluctantly dropping the lyre, and pointing to Faun’s feet, he started to roar with laughter. The gods, leaning on the cloudy balconies, looked at where Apollo was pointing and laughed as well. And so did the nymphs and the dryads, the naiads and the she-wolves and the lambs, the birds and the trees and the rocks. The world burst out in despicable laughter. The Little Faun lowered his eyes. Just then did he discover that he had goat legs.

“Do not defy the gods, lest you discover you are goat-legged”