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# **Preface: Being born**

It all started one lunchtime, as I went to drop my bag in what was to be my room for the next few days. All I saw, when I got there, were two beds. One was too big for just one person.

The other was tiny; in fact it was no more than a basket on wheels. I was expected to fill that little bed with a child whose name and sex I didn't yet know. The thought took my breath away in a manner I had never known. Throughout nine months of pregnancy, no single image had ever spoken to me so poignantly about giving birth. I, one single person up to that point in my life, was about to become two. From then on I would always be plural. Just a few hours later, I began to understand what the company of a little girl meant. I started to find out, though still in a very blurred way, that from now on my room would always have two beds. The

image lodged in the back of my memory with an intensity that few memories ever achieve.

A few years later, when I again opened the door of that room, I saw for the second time, those two beds. One was still too big for me alone. The other awaited a son. For days he had been pottering around his own little garden, undecided on whether to prolong his stay a little longer or to come out and see the world. When we finally met each other for the first time, both of us with our eyes still shut, nothing happened for a second. Children don't let themselves be added up, I immediately realised. They are like countries waiting to be discovered. 'How are we going to draw a map of this?' I asked myself.



It had been floating around in my head for a long time. I could never find the moment. Even so, the anecdotes, carefully stored in my memory, gradually approached each other and wove a web that would shine when lit up by some chance comment. But it was always in some inappropriate place: a crowded bus, the end of the fishmonger's queue, the evening before a holiday, between one traffic light and the next or in a hospital room. Always revealing itself fleetingly like a flash of lightning, without time available to record the thunderbolt.

One day, I remarked out loud that I could not really distinguish between whether I wanted to write about those moments spent in the company of children, or whether I really needed to do so. 'If you want to write, start reading,' advised a friend of mine who is very familiar with my doubts. So I went back to reading my old books, and, little by little, I gradually rediscovered the scenes that to me, with the passage of time, have become stories for thinking. And when I finally did set about writing, I eventually reached the conclusion that all too often, we live life the wrong way round. We think that a straight line is always the shortest distance between two points, when, in reality, one of the best parts of arriving is being able to recognise the meandering nature of the path. 'Reality,' wrote Hungarian writer Sándor Marai, 'is only details.'