

THE GILLETTE CLINIC

(seen by those who passed through)

“A clinic cures the patients. A caring community supports the people.”

I. The Clinic

I remember my mother telling how, in the 1960s, when she was about to give birth to me, clinics were few and the hospital was for the sick; so she chose the best place she could to do it: her own home, in her own bed.

As soon as I was born there was a woman, the one they called the midwife, and she told my mother that I had come out well — and that, if my mother did not want me, she would take me home with her.

My mother struck her with a look. But perhaps the midwife did not know that I would never belong to one woman alone, but to all the women I would meet; and twenty years later I went to her house. I am a man of my word. I could not disappoint her.

This opening is not literary irony, nor a joke. It means only one thing: the clinic, as a place, is new. It does not come down to us from the Egyptians, nor from the Assyrians or the Babylonians. It is only the product of a healthcare system that has made a commerce of pathology and a brand of its drugs.

It never sought to replace the hospitals, which remain an institution; yet it has always led the patient to believe that, by paying, he could have more — the best.

Some places perform a function. Others become a possibility.

It was the day the clinic was inaugurated in my city: the first of its kind that could offer a complete list, able to cover all of medicine, at least the basic kind — the medicine of ordinary people, so to speak.

Three chief physicians were appointed, the ones who were to build the medical structure. After holding interviews to hire the doctors, they shut themselves in a room to exchange their views on how to make the selection.

What follows I report not as truth, but as noir — told to me by a group of doctor friends just retired from the Italian health system, who used to tell it to those of us in sales to make us laugh, and to let us know that they, too, had their stories.

A tale that I personally consider a courtyard tale, one of those bitter jokes that doctors themselves used to speak of other doctors — a strange and peculiar breed, to whom I would no longer entrust even the care of my cat.

I set it down not as a verdict, but as a portrait of how much distrust ordinary people had already stored up against a medicine they no longer felt was their own.

It was told like this. The eldest of the three — a man who had also worked under the old regime — said he would explain how to choose the new doctors, by what he called the principle of number three.

If you find a doctor who understands a great deal, send him to general practice: there, with experience, he will answer most of the questions on his own.

If you find the middling ones, capable but not brilliant, put them in the operating rooms: that way, when they open, they see what they find and learn to set it right.

And the ones who understand little, or who arrive recommended by the parties and the placement lists, give them the tasks where — so the cruel joke went — nature is left to do almost all the work in their place.

That was the courtyard version, of course. And like every courtyard tale, it says less about the doctors than about the ones who told it: about how little faith they had left.

And so the clinic was born. Its true experience was made by the patients; and only the living spoke of it — those who had been fortunate, not those touched by misfortune. And when everything turned for the worse, the clinic of the North — of any nation — stood for the better part: because the North has always evoked wealth and industry, and there, paying for care gives the impression that it is better.

Then the criminal asylums were closed, and the psychiatric clinics were born — later converted toward neurological conditions. No longer were only the certified insane treated, but other pathologies as well.

II. Epilogue

A clinic is a building. A community of care is something more.

III. Author Page

This work was not commissioned.

It was not sold.

It was not made for commercial purposes.

It was written to bear witness to the value of rehabilitation, of human dignity, and of the relationship between people.

The only fee requested is a symbolic dollar — not as payment for the work, but as a testament to a shared commitment to a culture of care, hope, and responsibility.

Ferdinando