

Mandado a la Chingada:

slang, idiolect, & transitivity in translating the discourse of alienation in José Revueltas' "Los Errores."

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Brief

The brief that will guide the translation process and inform decisions made within it is as follows:

New Directions Publishing has commissioned a translation of “Los Errores” by Jose Revueltas with a view to publishing the finished translation as a globally-marketed commercial release, and therefore has requested that American English be used. New Directions are the only publisher to have released any of Revueltas’ previous work in English, having published an English language translation of “El Apando” (The Hole) in 2017. The translation rights have been secured and there are no issues regarding copyright infringement. The translation is ready to go ahead. New Directions has a long history of publishing experimental and translated literature, including English language versions of books by Octavio Paz, Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges. New Directions have also published seminal books of Avant Guard poetry by the likes of Dylan Thomas, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams.

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<p>15</p> <p>20</p> <p>25</p> <p>30</p>	<p>detenía al coche en cada cruce. No hubo nadie que contestara en el departamento de Lucrecia. A los quince minutos de furia, una tras otra, las puertas de los vecinos, en el corredor, inquirían por turno con la estúpida mirada impertinente de mujeres aburridas y cansadas hasta el odio, con sus delantales pringosos, las manos húmedas del fregadero, los cabellos en desorden enredándoseles entre los labios y la actitud perversa, maligna, de quien está a punto de satisfacer una venganza desinteresada e improbable, pero que ha venido esperando con pertinaz y amarga devoción. Nadie. El silencio desesperado de <i>algo</i> que acaso contuviese la respiración al otro lado de la puerta. Mario había dejado de oprimir el timbre para golpear con la punta del pie, con los puños, mientras las mujeres, de nuevo en el corredor, ahora sin querer regresar a sus sórdidas cocinas, a sus grasientos desperdicios, miraban cínicas y atentas, confiadas con tranquilo reposo en el espectáculo que habría de sobrevenir.</p> <p>—¡Al carajo, pinches viejas alcahuetas jijas de la tiznada! —Era imposible, imposible que Luque estuviera dentro y se negase a</p>	<p>nobody who answered at Lucrecia’s place. After 15 minutes of fury, the doors of her neighbors, in the corridor, one after another they probed with that stupid, impertinent gaze of women tired and bored to death, with their greasy aprons and hands wet from the sink, their unkempt hair getting tangled up between their lips, and the perverse, malign attitude of someone about to take a disinterested and improbable vengeance but who had been waiting with a persistent and bitter devotion. No one. The desperate silence of <i>something</i> that might be on the other side of the door holding its breath. Mario had stopped ringing the doorbell in order to attack the door with his heel and his fists while the women who, cynical and attentive, had now returned to the corridor, no longer wanting to go back to their squalid kitchens, to their greasy scraps of food, watched on in peaceful stillness, confident of the spectacle that would surely take place.</p> <p>“Fuck you, dirty fuckin’ tramp sluts!” There was no way, no way that Luque was inside and was refusing to open the door. He would give</p>
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<p>35</p> <p>40</p>	<p>abrir. Daría su alma por encontrarla en la calle, en cualquier lugar, tan sólo para asegurarse de que no estaba dentro, toparse de pronto alegremente con ella, al salir, a la entrada del edificio. Bajó a saltos la escalera y todavía se detuvo algunos minutos, como un imbécil, a esperar allá abajo. Pensó en el puesto de comidas de La Jaiba donde Lucrecia cenaba antes de entrar en el cabaret. Era temprano, pero tal vez estuviese ahí por alguna causa.</p>	<p>his soul to find her in the street, anywhere, just to assure himself that she wasn't in the apartment, to happily cross paths with her at the building's entrance on his way out. He bounded down the stairs, yet stopped and waited for a few minutes at the bottom, like an idiot. He thought about <i>La Jaiba's</i> food stall where Lucrecia ate before going to the cabaret. It was early, but perhaps she would be there for some reason.</p>
<p>45</p> <p>50</p>	<p>Le molestaba terriblemente no haber tomado otro coche, pero no tuvo tiempo, de advertirlo. El chofer terminaría por enloquecerlo con aquellos deseos atormentadores que le hacía sentir de no oírlo toser más. Llevaba un viejo capote de soldado y junto a él iba su mujer, con el aire firme, distante (un aire tenso, una forma de la ternura, con un horror y una desolación apenas diferidos) de quien no escuchaba las toses húmedas, cóncavas, blandas; de que no existían, de que eran inocentes, sin que entrañaran amenaza o peligro alguno para su hombre, como si no fuesen otra cosa que el fingimiento despreocupado de esa rabia convulsa y opaca con que los pulmones</p>	<p>It annoyed him terribly that he hadn't taken a different car, but he hadn't had time to notice it. The driver was going to end up driving him crazy with those excruciating desires he was producing in Mario of not hearing him cough any more. He was wearing an old soldier's cloak and had his wife with him, who had the firm, distant air (a tense air, a kind of tenderness, yet with a horror and desolation which were barely differentiated) of someone who didn't hear the wet, concave, weak coughing, for whom it didn't exist, for whom it was harmless and entailed no threat or danger to her man, as if it were no more than an insignificant pretense of that convulsing, opaque rage with which, inside, his lungs would be</p>

55	<p>desgarrarían por dentro las sanguinolentas paredes. Ella simplemente era un animal aterrado que no podía expresarse sino por estupefacción, como cuando la tierra tiembla. El mismo</p>	<p>tearing apart those bleeding walls. She was merely a terrified animal which could not express itself through any other means than</p>
60	<p>sobrecogimiento de las bestias en los temblores, al despatarrarse, rígidas y obscenas, los ojos abiertos más allá del propio impulso de su miedo, hasta ya no parecer ojos suyos. El ojo de la mujer, degollado en el espejo retrovisor, anhelante y fijo encima del hombre, mirándolo toser. El tipo estaba listo. Reventado y listo para el embarque; de eso ni hablar. Las calles, las esquinas, los ángulos, las casas, invadían el automóvil por el parabrisas, por los lados, con el airecito frío de diciembre. El ojo</p>	<p>beasts experience during an earthquake, legs spread out, rigid and obscene, eyes open far beyond the impulse of their own fear until they no longer seem to be their own eyes. The woman’s eye, in the rearview mirror, its throat slit, longing and fixed on the man, watching him cough. The guy was ready. Exhausted and ready to</p>
65	<p>degollado de la mujer seguía ahí autónomo, vigilante, estúpido, amoroso. Era un ojo que hablaba sin moverse, sin reaccionar: el ojo con la inteligencia más absoluta de la muerte.</p>	<p>ship out, of that there was no doubt. The streets, the corners, the angles, the houses, invaded the automobile through the windshield, from all sides, with the cold December breeze. The woman’s eye, its throat slit, remained there, autonomous, vigilant, stupid, loving. It was an eye that spoke without moving, without reacting: the eye with the absolute intelligence of death.</p>
70	<p>—¿Por qué no cierras el cristal de tu ventanilla? —Ya casi delatándose, ya casi diciéndole (el ojo del espejo se resistía a llorar, ese ojo abandonado en el mostrador de un carnicero), ya casi dándole a entender que no tenía remedio, que estaba listo, que ya no había nada que hacer y era lo mismo cerrar o no la</p>	<p>“Why don’t you close your window?” Now almost giving herself away, now almost telling him (the eye in the mirror fought back tears, that eye abandoned on a butcher’s block), now almost making it known that he had no way out, that he was ready, that there was no longer anything to be done and it didn’t matter if the</p>

75	<p>ventanilla, pero que de todos modos supiese cuando menos que ella le tenía cierta especie elemental, bronca, torpe, solitaria, de amor miserable, inconsciente, sin luz.</p>	<p>window was closed or not, but that in any event he knew that, if nothing else, she had a type of elemental, unbroken, clumsy, solitary of love for him, miserable, unconscious and without light.</p>
80	<p>Mario Cobián los odiaba, mucho más a él, sin comprender esta cosa sucia, esta horrible piedad. Ya se habrían olvidado que iba en el coche. Ellos ya no se dirigían a ninguna parte. Los ojos del chofer se clavaron en el espejo. El espejo retrovisor era una especie de punto de vista para dejar recados, una transferencia de cada quien para no encontrarse directamente, como si dialogaran a través de otra persona.</p>	<p>Mario Cobián hated them, especially him, not understanding this dirty thing, this horrible piety. It now seemed that they had forgotten he was in the car. They were no longer heading anywhere. The driver's eyes were fixed on the mirror. The rearview mirror was like a vantage point to leave messages, a transmission from each of them so as to avoid finding each other directly, as if they were dialoguing through someone else.</p>
85	<p>—Sentado así como estoy —dijo con una lucidez sorprendente en la entonación de las palabras, confiado por completo en que no moriría pronto—, siquiera la tos me deja en paz.</p>	<p>“Sat here like this,” he said with surprising lucidity in the intonation of the words, completely certain he would not die soon, “even the cough leaves me in peace.”</p>
90	<p>Respuesta de mariguano, pensó Mario Cobián. Tuberculoso y mariguano. Se contestaba a sí mismo, a sus tercicos y miedosos pensamientos, no a lo que había oído. Otras cosas, como si todo marchara bien. Como si estar sentado ahí, tras del volante, lo ayudara en algo, el frío de estas noches de diciembre que lo</p>	<p>Response of a reefer-smoker, thought Mario Cobián. Consumptive and reefer-smoker. He was answering himself, his own stubborn and fearful thoughts, not what he had heard. Other things, as if everything were going fine. As if sitting there behind the wheel helped him in some way, the cold of these December nights that</p>

<p>95</p> <p>100</p> <p>105</p>	<p>esperaba durante la velada, una noche de escupitajos y de toses, junto a la mujer con su ojo de perro angustiado en el retrovisor. Debían ser ya más de las seis de la tarde, se dijo Mario. A las seis entran los choferes que trabajan de velada. Casi todos se hacen acompañar de sus hembras, aunque nomás lo hagan por desconfianza de que no se acuesten con otros. O vaya a saberse por qué. Como soldaderas. Jovita Layton había sido soldadera. Había sido de todo antes de conocerlo y de trabajar con las serpientes y el enano. Le contaba cómo era la cosa en los cuarteles, por las noches. Mario Cobián se moría de risa. Pero hoy era para morirse de rabia. Las parejas dormían en el suelo, unas junto a otras, formando una hilera encima de sus petates. La soldadera acariciaba a su hombre dormido, vuelta hacia él, los rostros muy juntos, mientras el vecino le iba por entre las piernas, sin más ni más. Putas hasta la pared de enfrente. Todas. La Lucrecia no le habrá querido abrir por eso, metida con algún otro ahí dentro.</p>	<p>awaited him on the night shift, a night of spitballs and coughing, together with the woman and her anguished dog's eye in the rearview mirror. It must be after six in the evening now, Mario said to himself. At six the drivers who work the night shift show up. Almost all of them make their women come with them, although they only do so due to a lack of faith in their not sleeping with other men. Or maybe it would never be known why. Perhaps as <i>soldaderas</i>, like during the revolution when the soldiers brought their wives to live with them in the barracks. Jovita Layton had been a <i>soldadera</i>. She had been everything before meeting him and working with the snakes and the dwarf. She told him how it was in the barracks, at night. Mario Cobián would laugh himself to death. But today it was rage he was dying of. The couples would sleep on the floor, one next to another, forming a column on top of their bedrolls. The <i>soldadera</i> would caress her sleeping man, facing him, their faces almost touching, while their neighbor was in her between her legs. That's just how it was. Down to the far wall, whores. All of them. Lucrecia wouldn't have spread them for that, with another man stuck inside her.</p>
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110	<p>No había podido resistirse a ir en su busca después de que dejó encargado elveliz con don Victorino. El gusto y la satisfacción con que esperaba encontrarla para confiárselo todo, el robo, la nueva vida que iban a hacer juntos, Mario había decidido que en Tijuana, a donde llegan tantos gringos y se gana en dólares.</p>	<p>He hadn't been able to stop himself from going in search of her after he left the valise in the care of Don Victorino. The pleasure and satisfaction with which he hoped to find her to confide everything to her, the robbery, the new life they were going to build together, Mario had decided on Tijuana, where there were lots of gringos and there were dollars to be earnt.</p>
115	<p>—Agarre por Lecumberri para que después se meta por Ferrocarril Cintura —el chofer se volvió ligeramente, menos que de tres cuartos.</p>	<p>“Could you swing past Lecumberri prison, please? Then you can get on <i>Ferrocarril Cintura</i>.” The driver turned slightly, less than three quarters.</p>
120	<p>—Por ahí mismo iba yo a tomar, señor —había una especie de desencanto profesional en el hecho de que el cliente se le hubiese adelantado a indicarle el camino—. Tengo más de veinte años en el volante, señor. Usté dirá si no he de conocer bien las calles por donde agarro —en su voz no había el más leve tono de agravio, sino más bien un orgullo triste y cansado. Un</p>	<p>“That’s the way I was gonna go, sir.” There was a kind of professional disappointment in the fact that the customer had anticipated a need to intervene and give directions. “I got more than 20 years behind the wheel, sir. Wouldn’t you say that I might know the streets I work?” There wasn’t the slightest tone of grievance in his voice, but rather a tired, sad pride. A feeling, a mix</p>
125	<p>sentimiento, mezcla de cólera y desprecio, hizo a Mario echarse hacia atrás en el asiento: veinte años de no haber sido en la vida otra cosa que un simple chofer, como si un tribunal invisible le hubiese descargado encima esa sentencia de trabajos forzados.</p>	<p>of anger and contempt, made Mario sit back in his seat: 20 years of being nothing more than a simple taxi driver, as if some invisible tribunal had dropped a sentence of forced labor on him from above. And now the coughing fit. The driver pulled over on to the</p>

130	<p>Y ahora el acceso de tos. El chofer detuvo el coche pegado a la acera, mientras se sacudía por dentro con el ruido de una lluvia de municiones sobre una lámina herrumbrosa, y trataba de ahogar la tos sobre un gran paliacate con el que se cubría los labios.</p>	<p>sidewalk while he cleaned his insides out with the noise of ammunition raining on a rusty sheet of metal and tried to suffocate the cough with a large bandana he used to cover his lips.</p>
135	<p>La mujer se volvió hacia Mario con la expresión aprensiva, suplicante, mientras se le quebraba una sonrisa con la que parecía subrayar aquel miedo de que el cliente abandonara el vehículo.</p>	<p>The woman turned to face Mario, her expression apprehensive and pleading, while she flashed him a smile that seemed to underline that fear that the customer would get out of the car.</p>
140	<p>—Dispense usted, joven. Orita se le pasa. El pobre anda muy resfriado. No vaya usted a creer que es la tis —si el cliente huía ante el temor de un contagio, ahí se acababa todo para su hombre, ya no iba a tener fuerzas para seguir luchando.</p>	<p>“Would you ‘scuse him, young man? He’ll be ok in a minute. The poor guy’s freezin’. Don’t go thinkin’ it’s TB now, would you.” If the customer ran off for fear of infection, everything was over for her man, he wouldn’t have any desire to keep on fighting.</p>
145	<p>Hasta este momento se daba cuenta Mario de lo espantoso que era el rostro de la mujer, con ese cabello cortado a tijeretazos y los ojos redondos, fijos y muertos, como en un chimpancé tristísimo. Bastaba con mirarla para advertir que el hombre no tenía salvación, igual que si estuviera muerto ya. Sería divertido saber si, pese a todo, también lo engañaba. Pero cuándo no.</p>	<p>Mario was still realizing how hideous the woman’s face was, with that badly-cut hair and round eyes, fixed and dead, like those of an impossibly sad chimpanzee. To look at her was enough to make it clear that the man was doomed, as if he was already dead. It would be amusing to know if, in spite of everything, she was also unfaithful to him. They do it all the time. There was always</p>

150	<p>Nunca les falta con quién. Otro mono como ella. Encontraría a Lucrecia en el puesto de La Jaiba, caso de no haberse quedado acostada con alguno. Un cliente habría sido distinto, pero Lucrecia jamás llevaba un cliente a su propio departamento. Comenzaba a explicarse por qué no quiso nunca darle una copia de la llave, la muy méndiga. Arrancaron antes de que el chofer terminara de toser.</p>	<p>somebody for them to do it with. Another ape like her. He would find Lucrecia at <i>La Jaiba's</i> food stall, unless she was still in bed with someone else. If she was with a customer, that would be different. But Lucrecia never took customers to her own apartment. He was starting to figure out why she never wanted to give him a copy of her key, the little tramp. They pulled up before the driver finished coughing.</p>
155	<p>El ojo asombroso y entontecido en el retrovisor, pero ahora el ojo de él —ella se había echado hacia la derecha— mirándola rencorosamente, con un aire lastimado quizá por aquello que dijo de la tis. Lo que Mario quería era llegar, le importaban un demonio los dos, que reventaran cuanto antes. De pronto se sobresaltó, desprevenido en absoluto ante algo en lo que no se le había ocurrido pensar: el agente viajero, su nuevo aspecto de</p>	<p>The astonished and stupefied eye in the rearview mirror, although now it was his eye -she had turned to the right- looking at her resentfully, with an injured air, perhaps due to what she had said about TB. Mario wanted to arrive, he didn't give a dam about them, they could drop dead, the sooner the better. All of a sudden he gave a start, totally taken aback by something that hadn't yet</p>
160	<p>agente viajero. Habría que darle una explicación a La Jaiba, en primer lugar. No estaba previsto que se encontrara con ninguna de sus antiguas amistades, las amistades de El Muñeco, ni antes</p>	<p>occurred to him: the travel agent, his new guise as a travel agent. He would have to give <i>La Jaiba</i> an explanation, before anything else. It hadn't been foreseen that he would find himself with among any of his old friends, Pretty Boy's friends, either before or</p>
165	<p>ni después del golpe. Luque y él solos para siempre, eternamente, ya sin vínculos con el pasado, limpios, tranquilos, y de repente</p>	<p>after the heist. Just him and Luque forever, eternally, without any connection to the past, clean, peaceful, and suddenly he had</p>

170	<p>olvidaba que se había convertido en otro hombre e iba a encontrarse con La Jaiba como si no hubiera pasado nada, otra vez El Muñeco de siempre, sólo que bajo su disfraz de agente viajero. Era preciso inventar algo, lo que fuera, cualquier cosa. La culpa era de Lucrecia.</p>	<p>forgotten that he had become another man and that he was going to meet <i>La Jaiba</i> as if nothing had happened, newly that same old Pretty Boy, only beneath his disguise as a travel agent. It was crucial to make something up, whatever it was, anything. It was Lucrecia's fault.</p>
175	<p>La pareja, en el asiento delantero del coche, discutía sordamente, a medias palabras, con furtiva complicidad.</p>	<p>The couple, in the front seat of the car, argued voicelessly, with half-words, with furtive complicity.</p>
180	<p>—Nomás a que te maten, nomás a que te maten —objetaba ella en relación con algún asunto impreciso, pero ajeno, indeseado, que parecía imponérsele al margen de todo. Aquí la calle ya no estaba asfaltada y a cada tumbo la pareja se mecía sin el menor sentido, como si sus cuerpos no tuvieran peso y entrechocaran de un modo voluntario, consciente.</p>	<p>“Just to get killed, just to get killed,” she protested in regard to some vague but alien and unwanted affair that seemed to impose itself on the periphery of everything. There was no longer any asphalt on the road and with every jolt the couple lurched pointlessly, as if their bodies were weightless and collided together voluntarily and consciously.</p>
185	<p>Esta apariencia de intención voluntaria en el moverse de sus cuerpos, atrayéndose y rechazándose, rebotando uno con otro, abandonando la cabeza a un balanceo inerte, de objeto autónomo y no vivo, los desprendía de la realidad inmediata, el vehículo en que iban, los baches de la calle, el cliente que</p>	<p>This seemingly willful intent with which their bodies moved, attracting and rejecting each other, bouncing off of each other, their heads abandoned in a motionless roll, like autonomous and inanimate objects, detached them from immediate reality, the vehicle in which they were travelling, the potholes in the road, the</p>

<p>190</p> <p>195</p> <p>200</p>	<p>llevaban en el asiento de atrás, y les daba la condición precisa de dos locos, aprisionados dentro de un círculo de ideas y propósitos intraducibles, pero que tampoco se comunicaban entre sí a modo de que fuesen comprendidos mutuamente.</p> <p>—Nomás a que te maten, nomás a que te maten —repetía la mujer con una voz desafinada y patética, de campana rota—. Con lo malo que estás —los ojos del hombre miraban hacia adelante, por el parabrisas, pero conducía como si mirara otra cosa, un precipicio seguro y desconocido, del que era necesario precaverse con ese pánico abstracto, interno.</p> <p>—Orita no discutas, viejita; orita no —trató de acelerar la marcha a pesar de los baches. Había que desembarazarse del cliente lo más pronto posible, antes de que la mujer hablara más de la cuenta. Tomó en dirección de la calle de Los Herreros, hacia donde comenzaban las interminables hileras de puestos de comidas. Eran unas barracas horribles, con el aspecto de cenicientos murciélagos que tuviesen las alas desplegadas.</p> <p>—Con lo malo que estás —repitió la mujer—. No vayas, es mejor que no vayas. Prefiero verte preso. Ahí siquiera estarás seguro</p>	<p>customer they had in the back seat, and imparted on them the exact quality of two lunatics, imprisoned in a ring of ideas and untranslatable intentions, yet who didn't communicate between themselves to try and mutually understand one another.</p> <p>“Just to get killed, just to get killed,” the woman repeated in a pathetic, out of tune voice, like a broken bell. “And in the state you're in.” The man's eyes looked back towards the rear windshield, but he drove as if he was looking at something else, a certain and unknown precipice, from which it was necessary to take precautions with this abstract, internal panic.</p> <p>“Lay off, honey-pie, just for now.” He tried to speed the journey up, in spite of the potholes. This customer needed to be gotten rid of as soon as possible, before the woman ran her mouth off. He headed in the direction of <i>Los Herreros</i> street, towards where the endless rows of food stalls began. They were horrible shacks, with the appearance of hoary bats with their wings unfurled.</p> <p>“In the state you're in,” repeated the woman. “Don't go, it's better that you don't go. I'd rather see you in jail. At least there you'd be</p>
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225	<p>antes de que éste pudiera retirarlo, el rostro vuelto hacia él en la actitud de una urgencia desesperada, sin alternativas.</p>	<p>of the way, she turned to face him with the air of urgent desperation someone, now out of options.</p>
230	<p>—¡Por vida suyita, joven! —exclamó—. Si mañana mi viejo se mete en eso de la huelga, me lo van a matar. Endenantes le dije mentiras: pero ya la maldita tis no me le da reposo. ¡Mírelo nomás cómo está! Sólo con que lo metan preso se me salva.</p>	<p>“On your life, I’m beggin’ ya, kid!” she implored. “If my old man gets involved in that strike, he’s gonna die on me. I lied to you earlier, but I can’t give him any relief from this goddam TB. Just look at the state he’s in! The only hope I got is that he gets arrested. There’ll be shootin’, you can count on that, and he’s one</p>
235	<p>Tenga por seguro que habrá balazos y él es de los meros jefes del dichoso comité. Avise usted a la policía. Con que apunte las placas del coche, con esotiene.</p> <p>El chofer la tiró de los cabellos con una mano y con el puño de la otra le dio un golpe seco y preciso en los labios. Su voz tenía el mismo diapason opaco, suplicante y amoroso.</p>	<p>of the top bosses of the committee. Couldn’t you tell the cops? Note down his license plate and give ‘em that?</p> <p>The driver grabbed her by the hair with one hand and with the fist of the other gave her a hard and precise smack in the mouth. His voice had the same opaque tone, pleading and affectionate.</p>
240	<p>—¡Cáallese, cabroona! Usted no sabe de esas cosas luego, hacia Mario—.</p> <p>No le haga caso, señor —en un tono cortés, de disculpa.</p> <p>Mario Cobián, a tiempo que bajaba del coche, hizo en el aire un ademán apresurado e indiferente.</p> <p>—¡Muy bien hecho! —aprobó por el golpe. Ya en la acera, se</p>	<p>“Say, shut your trap, goddam bitch! A person like you don’t know nothin’ about all this,” then after, to Mario, “take no notice, sir,” with a courteous, apologetic tone.</p> <p>Mario Cobián made a hurried and indifferent gesture in the air as he got out of the car.</p> <p>“Nicely done!” he said, approving of the smack. He took a few steps down the sidewalk then paused. “Old buddy, don’t worry,</p>

	<p>detuvo unos pasos más adelante—. Conmigo puedes estar tranquilo, mi viejo —dijo hacia el chofer—.</p>	<p>you ain't got no problem with me," he said to the driver. "I ain't no rat!"</p>
245	<p>¡Yo no soy ningún chiva!</p> <p>Escuchó a sus espaldas, mientras se alejaba, un acceso de tos, hueco, subterráneo, y la voz de la mujer.</p> <p>—¡Perdóname, mi viejito santo! Yo nomás lo que quiero es que no te mueras.</p>	<p>As he walked away, behind him he heard an outburst of coughing, hollow, subterranean, and the woman's voice. "Baby, honey, please forgive me! It's just that I don't want you dyin' on me."</p> <p>They could both get fucked," Mario Cobián said to himself.</p>
250	<p>Que se largaran mucho los dos al carajo, se dijo Mario Cobián.</p>	
	<p><u>Capítulo XII: La Jaiba</u></p>	<p><u>Chapter XII: La Jaiba</u></p>
255	<p>La mujer mantuvo el brazo suspendido en el aire durante unos segundos, sin decidirse a vaciar en el plato el cucharón que rebosaba de garbanzos, como si la interrogante proviniese del brazo mismo y no de ella.</p> <p>—¿Lo quiere con pollo o sin? —un brazo robusto, con la madura y tersa redondez de la carne todavía firme y despierta.</p>	<p>The woman left her hand hanging in mid-air for a few seconds, without making up her mind whether or not to empty the ladle overflowing with chickpeas into the bowl, as if the doubt came from the arm itself and not from her.</p> <p>"Did you want it with chicken, or not?" A sturdy arm, with the mature and terse roundness of flesh which was still firm and awake.</p>
260	<p>—Le dije que sin pollo ¿o no? —Olegario ya no estaba seguro de</p>	<p>"Hadn't I already said without chicken?" Olegario was no longer</p>

265	<p>la forma en que pidiera el caldo, por la sencilla razón de que hoy tenía dinero. Por eso mismo tal vez sin darse cuenta le dijo que con pollo. La mujer terminó de llenar el plato con un encogimiento de hombros. El pobre diablo no tendría ni donde caerse muerto, con esa decidida cara de hambre y los ojos con que miraba caer los garbanzos en el plato. Le pondría un poco más: a saber si era lo primero que se llevaba a la boca, y ya iban a pasar de las seis y media de la tarde, seguro. Siempre tan</p>	<p>sure how he had ordered his soup, for the simple reason that today he had money. For that same reason, perhaps, without realizing it, he had told her with chicken. The woman finished filling the bowl with a shrug of her shoulders. The poor devil probably didn't even have a place to drop dead with that determined, hungry face, whose eyes looked on as the chickpeas fell into the bowl. She'd give him a little extra: god knows, it might be the first thing to pass his lips that day, and it must have been 6.30 in the evening already.</p>
270	<p>compadecida, pero no importaba, había que ser buena en algo, al modo que fuera y sin fijarse mucho en ello.</p>	<p>Always so benevolent, but it didn't matter, good had to be done, in whatever way and without much attention given to it.</p>
275	<p>Olegario inclinó la cabeza en actitud reflexiva sobre el plato humeante. Advertía que la mujer lo miraba con curiosidad.</p>	<p>Olegario tilted his head in a reflexive attitude over the steaming bowl. He noticed that the woman was watching him with curiosity.</p>
280	<p>«Es posible que los comunistas tengamos algo raro por fuera: en la forma de hablar, de ser, o quién sabe. No nos conducimos como todo el mundo —rió para sus adentros—; siempre traemos sobre las espaldas el peso de la historia, del <i>proceso histórico</i>». Volvió a sonreír, en su interior, ante otro descubrimiento: simplemente no había pedido el caldo con pollo porque el dinero no era suyo, sino del Comité de Huelga,</p>	<p><i>Maybe we communists have a weird air about us, a way of speaking, of being, who knows. We don't carry ourselves like other people, he smiled to himself, we're always carrying the weight of history, of the "historical process", on our shoulders.</i> He smiled again, internally, after making another discovery: he hadn't ordered his soup with chicken simply because the money wasn't his, it belonged to the Strike Committee, although he did have</p>

300	<p>—¡Pues nada, mi Jaibita chula, nomás vine a despedirme de las buenas amistades! Mañana me voy pa Monterrey a trabajar.</p>	<p>“Nothin’ much, my dear old <i>Jaibita</i>, I just dropped by to say goodbye to my good buddies! Tomorrow I’m leavin’ for Monterrey, I got work.”</p>
305	<p>Las exclamaciones de la mujer eran incrédulas y alegres, afectuosas. Jaibita, se repitió Olegario; le dicen Jaibita. Tenía la elocuencia en los brazos, su modo de comunicarse con el mundo; pero tan sólo a partir del instante en que le hizo la pregunta a Olegario, a partir de ese momento nada más, la piel franca y retadora, que brotaba desde las axilas, que hablaba. Olegario no se sentía con fuerzas para abstraerse del diálogo que escuchaba, abandonado a una seducción estúpida.</p>	<p>The woman’s exclamations were incredulous and joyful, affectionate. <i>Jaibita</i>, Olegario repeated to himself; they call her <i>Jaibita</i>. She had eloquence in her arms, her way of communicating with the world: but only from the moment she had asked Olegario the question, from this moment on and nothing more, the frank, challenging skin, that blossomed from his armpits, that spoke. Olegario didn’t feel like he had strength enough to withdraw himself from the dialogue he was hearing, abandoned in a senseless seduction.</p>
310	<p>—¿De veras de veras, Muñeco?</p> <p>Era una inercia alarmente. Como si temiera pensar en otras cosas, sedijo.</p>	<p>“No kiddin’ Pretty Boy?”</p> <p>It was an alarming inertia. As if he were scared to think about anything else, he told himself.</p>
315	<p>—Y me llevo a Luque. Vine a buscarla porque no la encontré en su cantón.</p> <p>Lo asaltó una vivísima molestia contra sí mismo. Eso era: no</p>	<p>“And I’m takin’ Luque with me. I came here to look for her ‘cos I couldn’t find her at her place.”</p> <p>An intensely vivid anger with himself assaulted him. That’s what it was: not wanting to think about things whose very name provoked</p>

<p>320</p> <p>325</p> <p>330</p> <p>335</p>	<p>querer pensar en las cosas cuyo solo nombre le producía una especie de laxitud moral, una desesperación, un miedo infame. Al diablo, al diablo. Bien; ya estaba. Pensaría, pues. Pensaría con todas sus fuerzas, sin temor al análisis. Se repitió las palabras de Jacobo, hacía veinte minutos, «el asunto de que no pudimos hablar ayer». La voz denunciaba un verdadero sobresalto por el teléfono, insomnio. Claro, por supuesto lo que era de esperarse, pensó: el <i>asunto de Emilio Padilla</i>. En seguida un miedo; no, más bien algo que sólo podría describirse, con la más extraña y hasta hoy desconocida de las imágenes, como una enfermedad de la historia: <i>angustia de partido</i>, la indefinida sensación de culpa, de incertidumbre —y horrorosamente, la de ya no ser una persona humana, sino un espíritu vacío, sin nadie. Verdaderamente, ¿qué pensar de las cosas de <i>allá</i>? Allí. Su conciencia se negaba, aun ante el silencio y la soledad de ella misma, a pronunciar lo que el adverbio sustraía. Unión Soviética. Olegario, incluso, no supo del todo cómo pudo llegar hasta el puesto de comida. No recordaba en absoluto la forma en que abandonó el local de la Cámara Unitaria del Trabajo, después de que había vuelto a colgar el</p>	<p>in him a sort of moral laxity, a desperation, a despicable fear. To hell with it, to hell with it. Fine; it was done. He would think, then. He would think as hard as he could, not fearing analysis. He repeated Jacobo’s words to himself, from 20 minutes ago, “the business that we couldn’t talk about yesterday.” The voice betrayed a genuine shock through the phone, insomnia. Of course, he thought, that was it, what to expect: <i>the business of Emilio Padilla</i>. Fear immediately followed; no, more like something that could only be described, with strangest and so far unknown of imagery, as a disease of history: <i>party angst</i>, the indefinite sensation of guilt, of uncertainty – and horrifyingly, of no longer being a human being, but rather an empty spirit, with no one. What to make of the events over <i>there</i>, truthfully? There. His conscience refused, even faced with its own silence and solitude, to pronounce the words which the adverb removed: The Soviet Union. Olegario wasn’t even fully sure how he had arrived at the food truck. He couldn’t remember anything how he had left the Chamber of Labor’s premises, after having hung up the headphones. Someone nearby was listening to a radio crime comedy: police sirens,</p>
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340	<p>audífono. Alguien escuchaba por ahí cerca una comedia policiaca de radio: sirenas de policía, disparos, enfrenar de llantas, cláxones enloquecidos.</p>	<p>shooting, screeching tires, frenzied horns.</p>
	<p>—La que no para de venir a preguntar por ti todos los días es La Magnífica.</p>	<p>“The one that don’t stop askin’ after ya’ is <i>La Magnifica</i>, every day she does.”</p>
345	<p>Olegario respiró profundamente. Volvía a convertirse en un ser humano: ahora escuchaba de nuevo la conversación idiota — pero viva, real— de estas gentes.</p>	<p>Olegario breathed deeply. He became a human being once more: he was once more hearing these peoples’ idiot -but living, real-conversation again.</p>
350	<p>Con un rudo y cariñoso empujón de ambas manos contra los hombros, La Jaiba rechazó a Mario hacia atrás sobre la banca del puesto, a guisa de regocijados y fingidos celos, como entre dos camaradas que se admiran recíprocamente y con sinceridad, lo que subrayaba al mismo tiempo cierto orgullo varonil por el amor que El Muñeco despertaba en <i>todas</i> las mujeres. No había una en que no.</p>	<p>With both her hands on his shoulders and feigned, playful gusto, <i>La Jaiba</i> dismissed Mario with a rough and affectionate shove back towards the bench, under the guise of delighted, feigned jealousy, like between two comrades who sincerely admire one another, and which, at the same time, underscored a certain masculine pride Pretty Boy had of the love he was capable of arousing in all women. There wasn’t a single one in which he didn’t.</p>
355	<p>Mario Cobián hubiese caído de espaldas de no haber estado sujeto con la punta de los pies al travesaño de la banca. Devolvió el empujón suavemente a la mujer, también con cariño.</p>	<p>Mario Cobián would have fallen over on his back had he not had his feet hooked under the crossbeam of the bench. He softly returned the push to the woman, also with affection.</p>

380	<p>violenta belleza, una como más fiera y precisa intención en la mirada pura, salvaje, que tenían. El Muñeco aún se dejó admirar durante unos segundos más, con una sonrisa retorcida y satisfecha, mientras adelantaba los labios en una especie de simulada repulsa.</p>	<p>Pretty Boy continued to allow himself to be admired for a few seconds more, with a twisted and satisfied smile, while he stuck his lips out in a kind of simulated repulsion.</p>
	<p>—¡Pobre Magnífica, pero qué quieres que se le haga! Me llevo a la Luque conmigo a Monterrey. Allá le pondré casa y nos cortamos para siempre de esta vida de aquí.</p>	<p>“Poor little <i>Magnífica</i>, but what do you want me to do with her? I’m takin’ Luque with me to Monterrey. I’m gonna make a home for her there and we’ll get out of this life for good.”</p>
385	<p>Olegario había vuelto a poner la vista en la pareja desde que los dos comenzaron a empujarse uno al otro en una forma tan incomprensible. «¿Por qué lo hacen? ¿Qué sentido tiene?». El género de relaciones amorosas que habría entre ellos —si a eso se le pudiera llamar amor («aunque ¿por qué no, en realidad?»).</p>	<p>Olegario had returned to place his gaze on the pair of them as once more they bafflingly began to push one another. <i>Why are they doing it? What’s it about?</i> Whatever kind of romantic relationship they had with each other -if it could be called romance (<i>although, was there really any reason why not?</i>) It was something that he</p>
390	<p>Algo que le resultaba difícil concebir, una pura satisfacción física, hastío, rabia, golpes, y vuelta a encontrarse, ese amor sórdido de casi toda la gente. «De todo el mundo, Dios mío». Pero otra vez se sustrajo en seguida, ausente de súbito, no obstante sin apartar los ojos de la pareja. La voz de Jacobo por el teléfono y en medio de tantos endiablados problemas como</p>	<p>found very difficult to comprehend, a purely physical satisfaction, boredom, anger, punches, and coming back to the moment, that sordid love that almost everybody had. <i>Everybody’s at it, dear god.</i> But instantly he let his mind wander once more, all of a sudden distant, yet without lifting his eyes from the pair. Jacob’s voice on the phone and in the middle of so many goddam problems like the</p>

395	los de esta noche, imprimir el manifiesto del Comité de Huelga,	ones the other night, getting the Strike Committee manifesto
400	la reunión con ese camarada Eladio Pintos, a quien se había designado como enlace con el buró político, tantas cosas. No estaba dispuesto a ocultarle la menor información a Jacobo. De ninguna manera. Por más amargo que resultara para los dos.	printed, the meeting with that Eladio Pintos comrade who had been designated to be the connection with the politburo, so many things. He wasn't willing to withhold even the slightest detail from Jacobo. No way. No matter how much it soured things for the both
405	Esto quería decir que puede uno cumplir sus tareas, luchar, pensar, peligrar, como sonámbulo, medio roto por dentro del alma. Para ser justos, un poco más que medio roto: perfectamente dado a la chingada. Emilio, Jacobo. Luego pensó, con un frío en la mente que parecía un trozo de acero, idéntico a lo que el mismo nombre significaba: <i>Stalin</i> .	of them. What that meant was that one can fulfill one's obligations, fight, think, put oneself in danger, but like a sleepwalker, with your soul half-broken inside. To be fair, a little more than half broken: perfectly fucked. Emilio, Jacob. Then he thought, with a shiver in his mind like steel slab, identical to what that same name meant: <i>Stalin</i> .
410	Emilio Padilla, ese nombre torturante. Se había llevado el bock de cerveza a los labios. Era un tarro de vidrio verde, sólido y corriente, igual al otro en que Emilio Padilla ya daba grandes tragos, con ansiedad, y la cerveza no había hecho espuma ni siquiera al principio, cuando Emilio acudió al mostrador para	Emilio Padilla, that agonizing name. He had lifted the mug of beer to his lips. It was a sturdy, everyday mug made of green glass, like the one from which Emilio Padilla was now taking large gulps, anxiously, and the beer didn't have a head even when it first came out, when Emilio had approached the bar serve it to himself before

415	<p>hacérsela servir y luego trajo él mismo los dos bocks a la mesa donde ambos se encontraban.</p>	<p>returning with the two mugs to the table at which they were both sitting.</p>
420	<p>—En estas cervecerías, ¿sabes?, el consumidor debe atender a su propio servicio. En general los camareros son una excepción aquí, hasta en los restaurantes. El país no puede distraer en una actividad tan estéril la fuerza de trabajo que representan los miles de camareros que se necesitarían nada más para Moscú. ¿Te imaginas?</p>	<p>“In these bars, customers have to serve themselves, see? Generally, they don’t have waiters here, even in restaurants. Moscow would need thousands of waiters, the country can’t be diverting workers to such a pointless activity. Can you imagine?”</p>
425	<p>A Olegario le pareció magnífico. ¡Qué demonios! La construcción del socialismo no es ninguna broma. Emilio invitaba, por lo demás, y él mismo fue quien sugirió el local de la cervecería.</p>	<p>It seemed magnificent to Olegario. Goddam! The construction of Socialism was no joke. Emilio had offered to pay and, as it happens, had also suggested meeting in a bar.</p>
430	<p>Gente, gente, gente («... como si Rusia se hubiera vuelto otra vez nómada»), recordó Olegario un verso de Mayakovski, pero sin seguridad alguna en las palabras <i>otra vez</i>: podrían ser diferentes, pero en todo caso con igual sentido. Miles, sin duda miles de transeúntes en este bulevar Pushkin, como en una manifestación de masas, casi formados con cierta ordenación regular, y las maravillosas parejas de muchachos y muchachas,</p>	<p>People, people, people (...<i>as if Russia had once more turned nomad</i>), Olegario recalled a Mayakovski verse, but with no certainty in the words <i>once more</i>: they might be different, but in any event, have the same meaning. Thousands, no doubt thousands of transients on Pushkin boulevard, like a mass manifestation, formed almost with some kind of ordered regulation, and the splendid couples of boys and girls, piled up in</p>

435	amontonados del modo más absurdo —tres y cuatro parejas en una banca apenas suficiente para dos—, unidas en besos	the most absurd way – three or four couples on a bench barely big enough for two – united in inseparable kisses, eternal, without
440	inseparables, eternos, ya sin movimiento: ya, desde luego, sin respiración, a la luz de la tarde en la calzada central de la avenida, brazos y piernas como en alguna escultura de Vishnú u otro dios brahmánico, rodeados de la multitud nómada, hermosos amantes fuera del mundo, del planeta, cabelleras rubias caídas hacia atrás sobre un antebrazo de tela oscura, el rostro enteramente oculto por la gorra del compañero (la que no se quitaba de la cabeza, sino simplemente se había echado hacia la nuca), invisibles ambos rostros hasta el éxtasis, desde los cristales de la cervecería donde Emilio y Olegario se encontraban.	movement: now, obviously, without breathing, in the light of the afternoon in the central carriageway of the avenue, arms and legs like a sculpture of Vishnu or some other Brahmic deity, surrounded by the nomadic multitude, beautiful lovers from another world, another planet, blond hair dropping back over a forearm of black fabric, the face completely hidden by their companion’s cap (which had not been removed from the head, merely pushed back towards the nape), both faces invisible and in ecstasy, from the windows of the bar where Emilio and Olegario were sat.
445	—Tengo enorme curiosidad por saber una cosa que jamás se me ocurrió preguntarte. Dime, Olegario, ¿qué sentiste, durante los tres días aquellos que estuviste metido en el caño del drenaje, cuando tu fuga de la cárcel de Belén?	
500	Emilio formulaba la pregunta rodeándola de esa chocante y lamentable superfluidad de detalles del mal dramaturgo que,	“I’m really curious to know something that never occurred to me to ask you. Olegario, what did you feel during those three days you spent in the sewage pipe, when you were escaping from Belén prison?”
		Emilio surrounded the question with this jarring and woefully superfluous level of detail as he formulated it, like an incompetent

<p>525</p> <p>530</p> <p>535</p>	<p><i>médium</i> que concentra su atención en recoger de un espacio lejano y silencioso aquellas transparentes comunicaciones que sólo él percibe. No había cambiado mucho en estos tres años, apenas un poco más sólido de cuerpo, quizá, y las canas, desde luego, las canas que blanqueaban como hilos sucios entre el pelo rojo-amarillo. El olor del agua pegajosa era lo que recordaba. Los desperdicios de comida disueltos en el agua del drenaje; un olor espantosamente humano, puedes estar seguro; las paredes del caño, capilares, con vellos, con pelos, bajo una capa de las más increíbles vegetaciones, como mandadas a recubrir con todos los escupitajos del mundo. Sin embargo, no pensaba decirle nada. No podría. Hay cosas que no pueden decirse a nadie, por más que uno quiera. Nada, a nadie. Fue él solo quien lo vivió, allá, en la cárcel de Belén, él solo, y por eso era algo incompartible, sin palabras para ser dicho, algo que otro no podría comprender nunca, aun cuando se lo dijera.</p> <p>Pero en esta resistencia de Olegario ya estaba contenida la inexorable invocación de un obediente recuerdo que aparecía en el momento mismo, al roce más leve e intencionado. Un</p>	<p>attention on receiving those transparent communications from a distant and silent space that only he perceives. Not much had changed in these three years, his body slightly sturdier, and the grey hairs, obviously, the gray hairs whitening like dirty threads among the strawberry blond hair. The smell of sticky water was what he remembered. The dissolving scraps of food in the sewage water; a grotesquely human smell, of that you can be sure; the walls of the pipe, furry, with strands of hair, fuzzy, beneath a layer of the most bizarre vegetations, as if ordained along with all the spit in the world to cover everything. But he wasn't planning on telling him anything. He couldn't. There are things that can't be said to another person, no matter how much one might want to. Nothing, to no one. It was he alone lived that lived it, there, in Belén prison, alone, and was therefore something that couldn't be shared, there were no words with which to say it, nobody else could ever understand it, even if it were told to them.</p> <p>But this resistance of Olegario's already contained the inexorable invocation of an obedient memory that appeared that same moment, at the slightest and most deliberate touch. An</p>
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540	<p>doble recuerdo que se encimaba, vivo y asfixiante, que galopaba en sus sienas con una sustantividad atroz, la propia sustantividad de Olegario, señalada, emplazada, condenada. Moscú. Sus calles, el bulevar Pushkin, Ojodni Riad, el Internazionálnaya Gaztánitza, el Kino-Centr, la calle Frunze,</p>	<p>overlapping double-memory, vivid and suffocating, galloping behind his temples with an atrocious substantivity, Olegario's own substantivity, marked, localized, condemned. Moscow. Its streets, Pushkin Boulevard, Ojodni Riad, el Internazionálnaya Gaztánitza, Kino-Centr, Frunze Street, Ólenka Delnova, the Comintern building,</p>
545	<p>Ólenka Delnova, el edificio de la Comintern, Milskoskaya, Emilio. Y adelante o atrás, la otra cara del recuerdo: las ratas en un caño de la antigua cárcel de Belén.</p>	<p>Milskoskaya. Emilio. And in front and behind, the other face of the memory: the rats in a pipe in ancient Belen prison.</p>
550	<p>Olegario miraba a La Jaiba y a Mario con una fijeza alucinante, en absoluto sin verlos, mientras jadeaba, las mandíbulas endurecidas, fijas hasta dolerle los dientes, avanzando sobre los codos desollados, sin saber a dónde iba, después de que había podido meterse en el caño por el conducto que descubrió debajo de los lavaderos de la prisión, de esto haría poco más de seis años...</p>	<p>Olegario looked at <i>La Jaiba</i> and Mario with astonishing tactfulness, without seeing them at all, while he panted, his jaw hardening, so firm his teeth hurt, advancing over his skinned elbows, not knowing where he was going, after having managed to get into the pipe through the duct that he found under the prison laundry rooms, that must have been just over six years ago...</p>
555	<p><u>Capitulo XIII: Luque</u></p>	<p><u>Chapter XIII: Luque</u></p>

<p>560</p> <p>565</p> <p>570</p> <p>575</p>	<p>Esa orgullosa complacencia, la admirativa gratitud y alegre vanidad con que La Jaiba aceptaba, diríase que como propias, las ardientes y sumisas pasiones que Mario sabía despertar en las mujeres, terminaron por tranquilizarlo, por restituirle en gran medida su sentido de seguridad y desdén, lo máspreciado y eficaz de sus recursos profesionales. Comenzaba a sentirse a gusto, otra vez en su reino: cuando menos esto ya no era la rabia anterior, la impotencia desconsolada, humillante hasta hacerlo sentirse el más infeliz de los infelices, ante la idea de Luque encerrada en su departamento, desnuda entre las sábanas junto al cuerpo también desnudo del otro hombre (¿quién, quién, por la santísima Virgen?) a lo mejor hasta los dos riéndose, mientras Mario golpeaba la puerta como un endemoniado. Esperaría aquí tanto como fuera posible a que Luque llegase, y luego —se le ocurrió con inesperada delicia—, de no aparecer Luque (pero aún con tiempo por delante para lo de don Victorino, digamos una hora), le pediría a La Jaiba ya no aceptar ningún otro parroquiano, cerrar el puesto, e irse ambos por ahí, a gozarla. Una hora es suficiente para que un hombre y una mujer,</p>	<p>That proud compliance, the reverential gratitude and joyful vanity with which <i>La Jaiba</i> accepted, almost as her own, the burning and submissive passions that Mario could provoke in women, had a pacifying effect on him, as it restored a great deal of his sense of self-assurance and contempt, the most prized and effective of his professional resources. He was beginning to feel comfortable, back in his kingdom: at least he was no longer feeling that rage had experienced earlier on, that disconsolate impotence, so humiliating it made him feel like the most miserable bastard in a world that was full of miserable bastards, whenever he thought about Luque locked in her apartment, naked between the sheets with another man's naked body (who, who, in god's name?) perhaps the both of them were even laughing while Mario was banging on the door like a man possessed. He would wait here for Luque to arrive as long as he could, and after -it occurred to him with unexpected delight- if Luque didn't show up (but still with enough time for the business with Don Victorino, an hour, let's say), he would suggest to <i>La Jaiba</i> that she stop serving, close up, and they both get out of there, so he could enjoy her. One hour is plenty of time for a man and a</p>
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<p>580</p> <p>585</p> <p>590</p> <p>595</p>	<p>camaradas de antiguo, se diviertan en la cama sin inútiles regateos. Hasta iba a serle muy conveniente y provechoso a fin de tener los nervios descansados y en calma para cuando llegase al despacho del prestamista. Ah, pero una cosa más todavía — pensó, otra vez furioso y con una bullente y vengativa crueldad. Un recado, un recado para Lucrecia, escrito sobre los tablones con que el puesto se cerraba. <i>Luque, como no llegabas, La Jaiba y yo nos fuimos a rebalsarlas. No te enojas. Mario.</i> Una cosa más o menos parecida. Sintió una alegría despiadada y feliz. No se contuvo, sin embargo, en un nuevo intento de indagación: —¡Qué raro que La Luque no haya estado en su casa y que tampoco viniera por acá! —aventuró al desaire, pero, en sentido opuesto, con una entonación equívoca, insegura. Al volver la vista se sintió prendido, sujeto a la quieta mirada de Olegario como por un violento e incómodo mandato, ajeno a su voluntad, que lo desazonaba e irritaba con la imprecisión de un presagio o de una amenaza todavía sin nombre.</p> <p>El rostro de La Jaiba se encendió de malicia.</p>	<p>woman, old comrades, to enjoy themselves in bed together, without needless haggling. It would actually be very beneficial and advantageous for him to give his nerves some respite and get them calm and ready for his arrival at the moneylender’s office. “Ah, but there’s one more thing,” he thought, now furious once more and seething with a vengeful cruelty. A message, a message for Lucrecia, written on the boards which served as the stall’s shutters. <i>Luque, seeing as you didn’t arrive, me and La Jaiba went off to screw. Don’t get sore. Mario.</i> Or something like that. He felt a ruthless and uplifting joy. However, he couldn’t help himself from making another attempt at some detective work.</p> <p>“It’s weird that Luque wasn’t at home and ain’t been here either!” he hazarded with a scorn which contrasted the equivocal, insecure intonation he spoke with. When he looked back he felt transfixed, locked in Olegario’s quiet gaze as if by a violent and perturbing decree, beyond his own will, which upset and irritated him with the vagueness of a prophecy or threat that was yet to be named.</p> <p><i>La Jaiba’s</i> face began to blaze with malice.</p> <p>“I reckon that little fishy don’t wanna bite no more” she said as she</p>
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600	<p>—Se me hace que esa pulga ya no quiere brincar en tu petate — dijo a tiempo que se acodaba sobre el mostrador del puesto, el mentón apoyado en el hueco de las manos abiertas sobre las mejillas, casi tocando la nariz de Mario con la suya, excitada, con la respiración anhelante. Su voz se hizo queda y espesa—.</p> <p>¡Quihubas, mi Muñeco! ¿Cierro el puesto y nos vamos a mi casa? ¡Tú dices! —como si le hubiese adivinado el pensamiento.</p>	<p>leaned on the counter of the stall, her chin resting in the cavity made by her hands, open against her cheeks, her nose almost touching Mario's, excited, with eager breath. Her voice became soft and dense "Whaddya say old Pretty Boy, why don't I close up and we go to my place? Just say the word!" as if she had read his mind.</p>
605	<p>La miró con asombro, con una suerte de miedo e instantáneamente sin deseos. (El tipo de enfrente no apartaba de él sus ojos tensos, ávidos, sin expresión). Las cosas habían cambiado de un segundo al otro a causa del rencor que suscitaba en su alma el imbécil dicho de la pulga. ¿Estaba enterada La</p>	<p>He looked at her with astonishment, with a kind of fear and instantly without desire. (The guy in front of him kept his tense, avid, expressionless eyes fixed on him). In just a second things had</p>
610	<p>de que Lucrecia iba a tirarlo al frío, a largarse con otro, o qué? (El hombre miraba, miraba, parecía un muerto, sin cerrar los párpados). «Ya no quiere brincar en mi petate; se ha de querer ir con algún otro cabrón», pensó con la falta de esperanzas de un sentenciado a muerte. Se sentía solo y dolorido, en medio de</p>	<p>changed, an account of the resentment stirred in his soul by that idiot expression about the fish. Did <i>La Jaiba</i> know something about Lucrecia? Could they have been gossiping about how Lucrecia was going to leave him hanging and take off with another guy, or what? (The guy was watching, was watching, looking like a cadaver, without closing his eyes). <i>Don't wanna bite no more; she must have it in her head to take off with some other bastard</i>, he thought with the same hopelessness as a prisoner on death row. He felt hurt and</p>
615	<p>esta nueva ira, casi letal.</p>	<p>alone, enveloped in this new, almost fatal ire.</p>

620	<p>—Tú dices, Muñeco. Cierro el puesto y nos vamos. Tú dices, ándale —la voz de la hembra le soplabá en los propios labios, vaporosa y cálida, igual a una diáfana epidermis de aire, sin despedir olor alguno, un fuelle limpio que espiraba rocío.</p> <p>Bueno, ¿y por qué no? ¿Qué más le daba? La revolvería en la cama para después entrarle a golpes, a puntapiés, a puñetazos, hasta dejarla hecha mierda.</p>	<p>“Just say the word, Pretty Boy. I’ll close up and let’s go. Just say the word, come on man,” the woman’s voice blew on his own lips, warm and steamy, like a transparent skin of air, not giving off any odor, an immaculate bellows exhaling dew. Fine, why not? What did he care? He’d screw her and then stomp her, with punches and kicks, make shit out of her.</p>
625	<p>—¡Noooo! —exclamó cuando menos lo esperaba nadie, en un áspero berrido, la voz atropellada y bárbara, encima del rostro súbitamente desconcertado y estupefacto de La Jaiba.</p>	<p>“Nooooo!” he cried, taking everyone by surprise, screeching it in a raw, barbarous voice that assaulted <i>La Jaiba’s</i> suddenly disconcerted and stupefied face from above.</p>
630	<p>Los ojos vidriosos, artificiales y concretos de Olegario se recobraron al escuchar la exclamación de El Muñeco, regresaron de sus evocaciones con un brillo relampagueante de inquieta indignación. «Es idiota. Ahora comenzará a golpearla y yo no podré impedirlo de ningún modo. No puedo ni debo meterme en líos». Rechinaba los dientes y apretaba los puños con la sensación de una pesadilla paralizante. Iba a suceder y no podría impedirlo, no podría mover un dedo para impedirlo. ¡Maldita sea! De no estar metido hasta los huesos en el problema de la</p>	<p>On hearing Pretty Boy’s outburst, Olegario’s glassy, artificial, and material eyes reappeared, returning from his evocations with a burning flash of anxious indignation. <i>He’s an idiot. Now he’ll start beating her up and I won’t be able to do anything to stop him. I can’t and shouldn’t get involved with crap like this.</i> He gritted his teeth and clenched his fists as if he were in a paralyzing nightmare. It was going to happen and he going do anything to stop it, couldn’t move a finger to stop it. Goddam! If he wasn’t already up to his neck in it with the problems from the strike, he’d go and bust that sorry</p>

<p>635</p> <p>640</p> <p>645</p> <p>650</p>	<p>huelga, ahora mismo le rompería toda la madre al padrote infeliz. Olegario respiraba con dificultad, agitado, tembloroso de cólera, pálido como la blanca superficie de un papel. —¿Te asustaste? —preguntó Mario a La Jaiba en una transición de milagrosa suavidad, mientras le sujetaba la mano, reteniéndola, y hacía esfuerzos por sonreír con la crispada mueca de sus labios, aún indóciles al requerimiento—. No era contigo, Jaibita —añadió—; es que me dejaste pensando diatiro muy feo, con eso que dijiste de La Luque. Pero no te creas. De plano ella ya no me dejará nunca, nomás que sepa lo felices que seremos con la nueva vida que le voy a dar —no apartaba la vista de Olegario, mirándolo al sesgo con torvas intermitencias—. Ora que se largue el tipo ése, cierre pues el negocio y nos vamos donde mandes tú. Eso mismo era lo que yo quería desde hace rato, mi Jaibita del alma —la trataba de con ternura para compensarla del exabrupto anterior, pues, en efecto, la repulsa no había estado dirigida a ella ni a su invitación, sino a lo que Mario pensaba de que Luque, en verdad, estuviera resuelta a dejarlo. Sus ojos se volvieron otra vez hacia el desconocido.</p>	<p>pimp’s ass. Olegario’s breathing was labored, quivering with rage, white as the blank surface of a piece of paper.</p> <p>“You get scared?” Mario asked <i>La Jaiba</i> in a miraculously smooth transition, while he held her hand, keeping hold of it, and trying force the tense grimace of his lips into a smile, an order his lips were refusing to obey. “It wasn’t with you, my dear old <i>Jaibita</i>,” he added; “it’s that you got me thinkin’ all ugly all of a sudden with what you said about Luque. But don’t be so sure. There’s no way she’s ever goin’ to leave me, not when she realizes how happy we’re gonna be with the new life I’m gonna give her,” he said without lifting his gaze from Olegario, squinting at him in baleful intervals. “Tell that guy to get out of here, then close up and we’ll go wherever you want. That’s exactly what I’ve been wantin’ to say for ages my dearest <i>Jaibita</i>, my love.” He was tender to her to compensate for his earlier outburst as, in fact, the scorn hadn’t been directed at her or her invitation, but rather at what Mario was thinking about Luque, that she was surely resolved to leaving him. His eyes returned once more to the stranger.</p>
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655	<p>Oprimió con un impulso rudo y perentorio la muñeca de La Jaiba al mismo tiempo que sentía un vuelco dentro del estómago, igual a cuando un automóvil desciende de golpe la empinada y repentina cuesta de una carretera. ¿Por qué estaría tan pálido el tipo de enfrente? Pálido, con las mandíbulas trabadas, con las manos sujetas a las tablas del mostrador, en la actitud de quien se dispone a lanzarse de un salto contra alguien, los ojos enloquecidos e inyectados de sangre. Además, con la talla y la fuerza de un búfalo.</p>	<p>An aggressive and peremptory impulse made him squeeze <i>La Jaiba's</i> wrist, and at the same time he felt his stomach churn, like when a car suddenly begins an abrupt descent. Why is the guy over there so pale? Pale, with his jaw clenched, his hands fixed to the counter, like somebody getting ready to jump up and throw himself on somebody, with those crazy, bloodshot eyes. Plus, he was built like an ox.</p>
660	<p>—No hagas polvo —silbó Mario lo más quedamente que pudo al oído de La Jaiba para prevenirla con ese giro convencional, de uso común en el hampa, a que no diera muestras de alarmarse o sorprenderse—. El tipo que está aquí, en el puesto. Míralo de refile pa que no se malicie de que ya estamos al alba. Seguro que es un agente que me anda pastoreando.</p>	<p>“Take it easy,” whispered Mario as softly as he could in <i>La Jaiba's</i> ear, using that conventional expression, widely used among the underworld, to tell her not to show signs of alarm or surprise. “That guy there, at the stall. Check him out, but be cool so he don’t smell a rat and see that we’ve made him. He’s gotta be a cop who’s casin’ me out.”</p>
665	<p>La Jaiba obedeció, consternada, girando la cabeza por lo bajo para ver de soslayo, de refile, como dijera Mario. «¿Un agente? ¿Qué es lo que hiciste o qué es en lo que andas metido?», hubiese querido preguntarle, pero prefirió callar, aterrada ante</p>	<p><i>La Jaiba</i> obeyed, uneasy, turning her head to sneak a sideward glance, from the corner of her eye, as Mario had said. She would have liked to have asked “a cop? What’ve you done, what are you mixed up in?” but she decided to keep quiet, terrified at the infinite</p>

675	<p>el vacío sin límites que se abría en su mente. Examinaba al tipo por encima del hombro, hacia atrás, la cabeza inclinada, y en tal forma, sin haberse desprendido aún de la mano con que Mario la retenía por la muñeca, daba la impresión de que se retorció de dolor, como si el hombre la torturara furtivamente, con un sadismo cómplice y secreto, cuyo goce era la hierática tranquilidad, el mudo fervor con que se consumaba.</p>	<p>vacuum that would have opened up in her mind. Over her shoulder, she examined the guy, looking backwards, her head inclined in such a way as, not having released herself from Mario's grip on her wrist, she gave the impression that she was writhing in pain, that the man was quietly torturing her, with a complicit and secret sadism, whose pleasure was the hieratic tranquility, the mute fervor with which it was being carried out.</p>
680	<p>Los ojos de La Jaiba recorrían la figura de Olegario con lento y asombrado análisis. Ella, que se figuraba que no sería sino un pobre hambriento. La cabeza y el cuello de un toro, una mandíbula ancha y fuerte, la frente muy grande, demasiado, la nariz derecha, los labios suaves y los ojos, a pesar del resplandor</p>	<p><i>La Jaiba's</i> eyes traversed the figure of Olegario with slow and appalled scrutiny. She had thought that he was nothing but a poor, hungry man. The head and neck of a bull, a wide and strong jaw, a huge forehead, too big, a straight nose, soft lips and eyes which, despite having a murderous brilliance at that exact moment, were actually rather sad and thoughtful, as that's how they had looked</p>
685	<p>asesino de estos momentos, más bien tristes y pensativos, porque así se los había visto cuando estaban en calma. La Jaiba echó la cabeza sobre su hombro opuesto, el correspondiente a la mano que Mario aún mantenía sujeta en el puño, para poder hablarle en la fingida actitud de ruego, de sometimiento</p>	<p>to her when they were calmer. <i>La Jaiba</i> leaned her head towards the opposite shoulder, towards the hand which Mario still held in his fist, so she could speak to him in that feigned attitude of imploration, of romantic submission, that she thought would be the</p>
690	<p>amoroso, que pensaba como la más eficaz para el disimulo de la situación.</p>	<p>most efficient way to disguise what she was doing.</p>

695	<p>—Sonríete, Muñeco, para que oigas lo que te voy a decir sin que él se dé cuenta —le dijo antes que nada y ella misma dejó escapar una risita histérica, a causa del miedo que sentía y lo siniestramente cómico que le resultaban sus palabras—. Como si te fueran a tomar una fotografía —aquí la nerviosidad de su propia risa se desbordó de modo espontáneo, con esa idea de la fotografía, a un extremo tal, que adoptaba el carácter de un franco ataque de histeria. Mario casi sentía destemplársele los</p>	<p>“Smile, Pretty Boy, so that you hear what I’m gonna say without <i>him</i> noticin’,” she said to him first of all, and she herself let out an unrestrained giggle, a product of the fear that she felt and how sinisterly comical her own words seemed. “Like you were gonna have your photo taken,” then the uneasiness of her own laughter spilled over involuntarily, with that idea about the photograph, to such an extent that she genuinely appeared to be having an attack of hysteria. Mario felt like his teeth were about to crack under the</p>
700	<p>dientes a fuerza de apretar las mandíbulas, tras la sonrisa disecada, atroz, de sus labios blancos e inmóviles.</p>	<p>force with which his jaw clenched, behind the dissected atrocious smile of his white and immobile lips.</p>
705	<p>—¡No te pongas como una pendeja loca! Tampoco ha de ser para tanto. ¡Dilo! — bisbiseó. Ahora oprimía la muñeca de La Jaiba con toda su fuerza, hasta causarle daño. La mujer hablaba en medio de la irrupción de sus risas y sollozos, pero muy quedamente, con terror.</p>	<p>“Don’t get so goddam crazy! You’re overdoin’ it. Tell me!” he hissed. He now squeezed <i>La Jaiba’s</i> wrist with all of his strength, until it hurt her. The woman spoke between eruptions of laughter and sobbing, but very softly, terrified.</p>
710	<p>—¿Mataste a Luque, Muñeco? —ésta era la súbita conclusión a que La Jaiba había llegado. Si no por qué el disfraz del Muñeco, ese nomás estar pregunte y pregunte por la Luque. Y el polizonte ahí, haciéndose el disimulado. Por toda respuesta</p>	<p>“Did you kill Luque, Pretty Boy?” this was the sudden conclusion that <i>La Jaiba</i> had arrived at. Pretty Boy’s disguise was enough to raise questions about Luque. And that flatfoot there, playing dumb. Mario’s only response was to tighten his grip on the woman’s pulse.</p>

<p>715</p> <p>720</p> <p>725</p>	<p>Mario apretó más el pulso de la hembra. La mano comenzaba a tener un color morado—. Sí, sí Muñeco. Te van a agarrar preso. El tipo es agente —hizo una pausa para seguir de corrido—. Vino para caerte encima porque ya descubrieron que la mataste; ni lo niegues, Muñeco, mataste a la pobre de Lucrecia. El tipo es de la policía. Míralo bien, trae un pantalón de casimir viejo y parchado, pero la chamarra de mezclilla y la cachucha de camionero son nuevas, acabaditas de comprar. Anda disfrazado, como también andas tú —la mujer dejó de hablar por unos segundos, y luego, en un tono desgarrado y pequeñito, a toda prisa, como si musitara para ella sola una oración sobresaltada y sin sentido, con un aire de extravío, repitió por más de veinte veces las mismas palabras—. Ora tendré que irme contigo para siempre, ora tendré que irme contigo para siempre, para siempre, para siempre, para siempre — parecía en realidad haberse vuelto loca y estar sufriendo como una bestia.</p> <p>Mario sentía que la tierra le faltaba bajo los pies. ¿Por qué las cosas tomaban este giro absurdo, caprichoso, de grotesca pesadilla? El plan no se había desarrollado conforme a lo</p>	<p>The hand was starting to go purple. “Yeah, yeah, Pretty Boy. You’re gonna get arrested. The guy’s a cop.” She paused, then continued steadily, “he came to pinch you ‘cos they found out that you killed poor Lucrecia. The guy’s a cop. Look at him good, he’s got patches on them old cashmere pants, but the denim jacket and that trucker’s cap are new, they’ve only just been bought. He’s in disguise, just like you,” the woman stopped speaking for a few seconds, then, in a forlorn and minute tone, hurriedly, as if she was muttering to herself and herself only a worried and meaningless prayer, with an air of loss, she repeated the same words over twenty times. “Now I gotta go away with you forever, now I gotta go away with you, forever, forever, forever, forever.” It genuinely seemed as if she had lost her mind and was suffering like a wounded animal.</p> <p>Mario felt the ground give way beneath his feet. Why had things taken this absurd, preposterous twist, like something from a grotesque nightmare? The plan wasn’t going as expected, and</p>
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<p>730</p> <p>735</p> <p>740</p> <p>745</p>	<p>previsto, sino que tomaba sus caminos propios, inventaba recursos, encadenaba acontecimientos distantes, anticipaba situaciones, aunque no se tratara de algo diferente al plan mismo, sino, por el contrario, de materiales y cosas que le pertenecían, que estaban comprendidas dentro de él para realizarse, pero que tomaban destino y elegían ocasión por su cuenta, apareciendo bajo un aspecto nuevo, como en un espejo encantado en que se miraban del modo en que siempre habían querido mirarse y no como lo eran en el punto que les ordenara serlo aquella voluntad humana personal. Mario no podía hacerse estas consideraciones ni razonamientos, pero adivinaba en todo el asunto la existencia de una jugada tramposa y socarrona, no urdida por nadie en particular, pero de la cual él mismo se hacía propia víctima, quién sabe por qué, ni movido por quién. «Ora tendré que irme contigo para siempre, para siempre». La Jaiba estaba convencida de que él era el asesino de Lucrecia y nadie podría sacarla de ahí. Las circunstancias de Mario habían condicionado los supuestos en que ella basaba su convicción, dándoles un inobjetable encadenamiento causal:</p>	<p>instead was taking its own course, devising resources, chaining together unconnected events, anticipating situations, which were not necessarily different from the plan, but rather, on the contrary, consisted of materials and things that belonged to it, things contained within it which were supposed to materialize, but that controlled destiny and chose their moments autonomously, appearing in a new guise, like in a magical mirror in which they were seen as they had always wanted to be seen and not what they were at the point at which they had been organized according to any personal human will. Mario wasn't able to put this kind of consideration or reasoning to himself, but he was figuring out everything about the existence of deceitful and caustic hoax, neither masterminded nor operated by anyone in particular, but, God knows why, of which he had become the victim. <i>Now I gotta go away with you forever, forever.</i> La Jaiba was convinced that he was Lucrecia's murderer and that nobody could take her away from there. Mario's situation had shaped the assumptions on which her convictions were based, giving them an irrefutable causal relationship: only the actual appearance of Luque before her eyes,</p>
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750	sólo podría desvanecerlos la presencia misma de Luque ante sus ojos, en estos precisos momentos. Parte de la jugada tramposa	at that exact moment, could have dispelled her belief. Part of this
755	en que nadie intervenía era la sorprendente actitud de La Jaiba, pues aun considerándolo el asesino de Luque, de buenas a primeras, y sin que Mario lo hubiese sospechado, le daba la demostración más palpable de que toda la vida lo había querido,	unexpected attitude, as, though believing him to be Luque's murderer from the word go, without Mario even suspecting it, she was giving him the most palpable demonstration possible that, for all her life, she had loved him, for all her life and truly, touchingly
760	toda la vida y de verdad, conmovedoramente de verdad. «Ora tendré que irme contigo para siempre, para siempre, para siempre...». Las cosas no se sujetaban a su previa y definida ordenación. Era como salir uno de su cuarto y encontrar, a la vuelta, todo en distinto sitio, todo, pero lo abrumador y absurdo que, de modo imperceptible, ceñido a una lógica propia y rigurosa. El tapete, no colgado del techo, sino tan sólo ligeramente corrido hasta la entrada de la puerta del baño;	and truly. <i>Now I gotta go away with you forever, forever...</i> Things were not governed according to their previous and determined arrangement. It was like leaving a room and finding everything in a different place on returning, everything, but absurdly and amazingly, imperceptibly arranged to a certain rigorous logic. The rug, not hung from the ceiling, but rather ever so slightly redirected towards the porch of the bathroom door, the cushions, not inside the toilet bowl, but instead attached to the wall, halfway along the bed and perpendicular to it, like on a <i>chaise-lounge</i> , which was pretty good too. Changes of such a subtle nature that only by coming into contact with them could one notice that things had been betrayed, and likewise, that things were heading, now
765	los cojines, no dentro de la taza del W.C., sino adosados a la pared, a la mitad de la cama y perpendiculares a ésta, como en una <i>chaise-longue</i> , lo que tampoco estaba mal. Cambios de una naturaleza tan sutil que sólo hasta entrar uno en contacto con ellos advertía la traición de las cosas, y así, éstas se	without the faintest trace of scruples, cynically and with impunity,

770	encaminaban, ya sin el menor escrúpulo, cínica e impunemente, a paso de carga, con inexorable y burlona	hastily, with inexplicable and derisive resolution, towards
775	decisión, hacia la catástrofe. ¿De dónde podría haber llegado ese agente de la policía? ¿Cómo pudo dar con su pista, si es que en eso andaba en realidad? Lo primero que se le ocurrió a Mario fue pensar en el empleado del hotel, con su maligna actitud llena de sospechas. Claro, había tenido tiempo suficiente de dar	catastrophe. Where on earth had this cop come from? How did he get a lead on him, if that's what he was really up to? The first thing that occurred to Mario was to think about the hotel employee and his malign attitude, full of suspicion. Of course, he would have had plenty of time to give the warning before Mario had left, so calmly, with the dwarf inside the enormous trunk, while the cops must have already been on his trail, casing him out with the greatest of ease. Then they must have followed him to Don Victorino 's office.
780	aviso antes de que Mario saliera, tan tranquilo, con el enano dentro del enorme veliz, mientras los agentes ya iban a sus espaldas, pastoreándole con gran comodidad. Lo habrían seguido entonces hasta el despacho de don Victorino. Una intensa transpiración, que le brotaba por cada uno de los poros,	An intense perspiration that gushed down each of his pores, instantly drenched his underwear and t-shirt as he considered this possibility. It occurred to him that it would be best to abandon the dwarf to his own fate. He could get fucked there in that box, in Don Victorino's office. Lucrecia, Lucrecia, Lucrecia, she was the guilty party in all of this, that was certain. Because Mario had nowhere to go after leaving Don Victorino's office; because Mario wanted to see her and hadn't found her; because he was alone, because he loved her, because he wanted to start a new life; because he had
785	le empapó en un instante los calzoncillos y la camiseta al medir esta probabilidad. Se le ocurrió que lo mejor era abandonar al enano a su propia suerte. Que se jodiera solo, allá adentro del veliz, en el despacho de don Victorino. Lucrecia, Lucrecia, Lucrecia era la culpable de todo, de esto no cabía duda. Porque Mario no tenía a dónde ir, después de haber estado en el despacho de don Victorino; porque Mario quería verla y no la	nothing else to do before the robbery and he had two immense

790	había encontrado; porque estaba solo, porque la amaba, porque quería vivir una nueva vida; porque no tenía ninguna cosa que hacer antes del robo y le quedaban por delante dos inmensas horas vacías y desoladas: sin ocupación, sin amigos, sin relaciones, dos horas de absoluta soledad y aburrimiento en mitad de la tierra. Lucrecia tenía toda, toda la culpa.	hours in front of him, empty and desolate: with nothing to occupy him, without friends, without relations, two hours of unalloyed solitude and boredom, stuck in the middle of the planet. It was entirely, entirely Lucrecia's fault.
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Link to full ST: <https://1drv.ms/w/s!AoqNfSe7R-YT1xh5kFo6nJXmCcHr>

Word count: 7,013

Mandado a la Chingada:
**Slang, idiolect, transitivity in translating the discourse of
alienation in José Revueltas' "Los Errores"**

*There is no religion in which everyday life is not considered a prison;
there is no philosophy or ideology that does not think that we live in alienation.*

Eugene Ionesco

*What I ask of [the writer] is not to ignore the reality
and the fundamental problems that exist.
The world's hunger, the atomic threat,
the alienation of man,
I am astonished that they do not color all our literature.*

John-Paul Satre

Para mí, las rejas del apando son las rejas de mi vida, del mundo, de la existencia.

José Revueltas

2. Introduction

The objective of the present dissertation is the transference of subtext across the linguistic and cultural barriers that separate one communicative event from another. As will be made clear below, subtexts pose the greatest challenge to the literary translator not when they occur at the level of narrative, but rather when they are encoded into the text's language, when delicate nuances in an author's writing elevate our chosen ST from realist descriptions of a surface reality into a richly symbolic existential allegory: social status is clearly delineated using linguistic markers to place characters on the margins of mainstream society, shifts in register are employed to increase and decrease social distance between characters and motivated stylistic choices serve to organise a reality in which human agency is suppressed. Such characteristics pose considerable challenges to the literary translator when seeking to successfully transfer between linguistic and cultural frameworks the communicative potential contained in a complex and carefully crafted literary text such as the one discussed in this thesis.

This dissertation is structured as follows: Section one consists of the introduction; section two reviews the relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework employed during the translation process; section three describes the methodology; data will be presented and analysed in section four, with section five offering some conclusions and some potential avenues for further search.

3. Literature review and theoretical framework

3.1. Slang

Language is a marker of social identity (Wardaigh and Fuller, 2014; Blake, 2011). Slang can be defined as language which deviates from standard usage on several levels, with the resulting "sub-standard" usage playing a crucial function in social life as means of

constructing identity, forming cohesion between social groups and excluding members of different groups (Sonrig, 1981; Halliday, 1976). It is often within groups on the margins of society that this linguistic mutation is at its most dynamic and, therefore, the slang created within such groups serves as a crucial marker of a *marginalised* social identity (Mattiello, 2009; Sonrig, 1981; Halliday, 1976). Revueltas makes full use of the linguistic resources available to him in his SL to mark characters as belonging to a group with low socioeconomic status which engages in criminal activity, and which is therefore marginalised and alienated from mainstream society. Consequently, slang serves a crucial function in operationalising the sub-text of alienation in our chosen ST and therefore such concerns regarding how to successfully encode the connotative values produced by slang in translation are of the utmost relevance to the present dissertation. There have been several recent studies which have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to engage constructively with the challenge posed by slang translation as it relates to literary texts. Some, such as Nosek (2016) and Mashady and Pourgavi (2013), have focused on linguistic comparison between the ST and TT to document how shifts in register occur when slang is translated using standardised language. One of the strengths of both of these studies is that they are both conducted within a sociolinguistic theoretical framework which recognises the social functions of slang in everyday life and its aesthetic functions in literary texts. However, while such empirical reports shed light on the strategies favoured by translators in certain circumstances and are undoubtedly of great use for translators and researchers seeking documentary evidence on which approaches to slang translation are most commonly employed by literary translators, they are of little use when attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of said strategies or indeed propose a coherent theoretical framework to adopt when translating slang in literary texts. Much more useful is Holst-Warhaft's (1990) critical evaluation of the aesthetic and literary function of slang in Greek *Rebetika* song lyrics, which concludes that style is an indispensable factor of slang's potential to communicate meaning. According to Holst-Warhaft, to translate slang with its 'literal equivalent is to misrepresent that duplicity of signifiers that is the essence of slang' (p. 188). What Holst-Warhaft recognises is that standardising approaches to slang translation distort vital aspects of the meaning by rendering stylistically marked language which functions to relay conative values regarding the speaker's social and cultural background into stylistically neutral language, ultimately failing to reproduce the relay the connotative values of the original. In doing so, Holst-Warhaft furthers the debate surrounding slang translation by offering some solid theoretical explanations for the inadequacy of standardising approaches. Čerče (2017) echoes these claims, focusing on how standardising approaches to translation of Steinbeck's novel's from English to Slovene distorted the social and cultural context of the original novel; particularly pertinent to Steinbeck's work are the themes of class and social status, themes which are realised linguistically by slang and sub-standard language against the backdrop of a narrative. Given the thematic overlap between Steinbeck's novels and those of Revueltas, such concerns apply with equal urgency to the current dissertation.

Essentially, when slang is understood as a literary device to mark social identity and characterize speakers via a series of deviations from standard or prescribed usage, the inadequacy of rendering deviant language with a standardised unit becomes instantly apparent: the loss in connotative values that can occur in a standardising translation approach has the potential to distort the cultural and social reality the ST seeks to describe,

as well as the social relations between characters within it. The translator, therefore, must seek TL equivalents which, in addition to conveying the semantic content of the ST, also convey them in a style which reproduces the intended pragmatic effects of the ST, thereby capturing the full communicative and “sociosemantic force” of the original (Sornig, 1981, p. 48). In order to achieve this, speakers must be placed in a context from which the target reader (TR) may be able to perceive the connotative values necessary to experience the intended pragmatic effects of the ST, an outcome that will inevitably entail a degree of domestication. While the potentially problematic implications of adapting deeply culture-bound aspects of speech to forms of expression deeply embedded in another, more dominant, cultural and linguistic framework must be acknowledged, as highlighted by scholars such as Venuti (1995), this dissertation works from the assumption that, without relocating speech into a setting from which target readers are able to perceive the intended connotative values contained in the ST, the translation will fail to render the full range of pragmatic effects afforded by the original, which in the case of our chosen ST would result in a failure to transfer the ST subtext and discourse across the linguistic and cultural barriers which separate ST and TT. In order to ensure the successful transference of the ST subtext, we must move away from notions of linguistic equivalence and instead concern ourselves with how to translate a marginal social *identity*, using TL linguistic markers to attempt to reproduce the social reality of the ST, without undue domestication of its cultural context.

Pertreghella (2002) contributes to the debate surrounding what degree of domestication should take place in the translation process by describing several strategies which theatre translators have adopted in an attempt to bridge this gap between source culture (SC) and TR. She makes a reasonable argument in favour of translating regional dialects with a TL dialect with parallel social and cultural connotations. It must be acknowledged that, while it is crucial to find parallels between SC and TC in order to transport ‘strong cultural, historical, social, and local features ... into another, alternative linguistic and cultural frame’ (Pertreghella, 2002, p.45), the use of a highly-regionalised TL variant (such as cockney or Glaswegian) to translate a regional dialect risks eradicating the cultural context of the original. This dissertation follows on from Berman’s (2000) anxiety that translating using a highly regionalized variant ‘winds up merely ridiculing the original’ (p.250) by replacing the social reality of the SC with a target culture (TC) social reality. This anxiety is echoed by Brescia (2011), who advocates translating dialect with sociolect so as to convey the character’s socio-economic status without damaging the cultural context of the TC. Brescia acknowledges that avoiding reproducing the regional flavour of colloquial speech will result in a ‘massive loss of nuances’ (2011, p. 7) but, given the impossibility of fully reconstructing the original cultural context, perhaps this is inevitable. Furthermore, given the thematic orientation of the ST towards economic status and social relations in a capitalist society, it seems to make sense to understand the socio-economic values of slang in “Los Errores,” as being of greater importance than regional or cultural ones.

Working from the premise that translation is a cross-lingual and cross-cultural transfer of meaning, Mattiello (2009) asserts that the success of such communicative activity depends on the identification of parallel socio-cultural sets and modes of expression between languages and cultures. To this end, Mattiello proposes a set of ‘descriptive criteria’ with which to produce a clear taxonomy of slang characteristics, with equivalence determined according to the extent to which the translations fall within these descriptive criteria. She

argues that applying this methodology will result in the reproduction of ST pragmatic effects. What is entirely absent from her analysis, however, is an awareness that equivalence need not always be measured at the word or phraseological unit-level, but rather at text-level, as proposed by Baker (2011). Mattiello's limited understanding of the levels at which equivalence can take place pre-empts her from recognising how a strategy of compensation can be successfully employed to deal with those instances where, due to structural differences between SL and TL, a lack of cultural overlap between SC and TC or a lexical deficiency in the TL, the ST linguistic oddity or stylistic deviation cannot be directly reproduced in the TT. Scherbek (2015) and Čerče (2017), on the other hand, both identify how, when seeking to reproduce the connotative force of colloquial language, a strategy of compensation has the potential to produce a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text. It is clear from the above discussion that by adopting translation strategies informed by text-linguistic theoretical considerations and reconceptualising the level on which equivalence can take place to that of text, the conscientious literary translator is free to make full use of the linguistic resources available in their TL to produce a TT which exhibits the same degree of communicative potential as the ST to communicate marginal social identities; by expanding the concept of equivalence to above word-level, a notion that can be most effectively textually realised via a strategy of compensation, a descriptive criteria, similar to that envisioned by Mattiello, can indeed be an invaluable methodological component of slang translation which has the potential to produce a TT which is both semantically and pragmatically equivalent.

3.2. Idiolect

Closely related to the concept of slang is that of idiolect. Idiolect, as defined by Formica and Cicioni (2006) is a person's "speech pattern(s) which according to sociolinguistic theory are the result of each person's particular social configuration". Idiolect, therefore, has the communicative potential to relay connotative implications regarding the specific intersections between factors of a speaker's identity, such as race, culture religion, class, politics and age. As idiolects subsume features from cultural, temporal and social forms of linguistic variation, they are occasionally overlooked by translators of literary texts who fail to recognise the function they play in communicating discursal meanings. For example, Formica and Cicioni identify instances of idiolect in Ginzburg's novel *Lessico Familiagre* and formulate a compelling interpretation of the function performed by idiolect in the text, arguing that previous translations have failed to understand how idiolects, when understood in the context of the text as a whole, can serve to operationalise underlying subtexts and discursal meanings, echoing Linder's (2014) claim that seemingly insignificant features of a literary text may well in fact be 'embedded in a grid of textual cues' which 'trigger(s) a whole host of underlying meanings' (p.339).

Hatim and Mason (2005) further the debate on the role of idiolects in literary texts by claiming that idiolects have the communicative potential to relay attitudinal meanings, i.e. to express how a speaker experiences towards the world around them and their relationships with people which inhabit it. Using Shaw's play "Pygmalion" as a case study, the authors delve into the ways in which features of colloquial speech which satisfy functionality criteria can develop into systemic, functional idiolects, capable of conveying additional layers of (idiolectal) meaning and, in the case of "Pygmalion", serve as an indispensable plot device. The authors use instances of the Flower Girl's colloquial speech

patterns to demonstrate how features of colloquial speech which are shared by many language users from the same social, cultural and historical context, in this case working-class Londoners at the turn of the century, when understood against the backdrop of the play's plot and in relation to other textual clues, cease to be peripheral idiosyncrasies which serve no significant rhetorical function, but rather systemic, functional linguistic features which serve to characterize the speaker and develop the narrative by expressing shifts in attitudinal meanings on the part of the speaker:

- a) I'm a good girl, **I am**.
- b) He ain't got no call to meddle with me, **he ain't**.
- c) He's no gentleman, **he ain't**.
- d) You ought to be stuffed with nails, **you ought**.

The Flower Girl's habit of "tagging" her statements is a common feature of speech among speakers from a specific temporal, cultural and social context, and could be understood as an element of low-register language used simply as a device to express informality. However, when the utterances are examined beyond their surface manifestations and instead in concert with the text as a whole, it becomes apparent that such features serve a higher function than simply communicating informality: their use here is motivated by a communicative intention to convey more than just a speaker's social, economic, cultural or historical background, but rather certain attitudes they possess in regards to the world around them and people within it. In regards to the above examples, Hatim and Mason argue that translators of "Pygmalion" into Arabic have correctly identified that the Flower Girl's "tagging" serves a rhetorical function beyond expressing informality or denoting her as belonging to a specific socio-economic group, yet have incorrectly interpreted this feature as being motivated by an underlying communicative intention to express defiance on the part of the Flower Girl. Instead, the authors argue that, understood contextually, the Flower Girl's use of these common colloquial speech patterns functions to relay an attitude of insecurity and lack of confidence, with the "tagging" of her statements informed by a need for reassurance from others, an attitude which fluctuates throughout the play as her character evolves and is reflected in changes in her speech. This interpretation is justified with reference to clues contained in other parts of a text. The result, they argue, has been to distort the sender's original intention, producing incongruencies with the text's original textuality. We see, therefore, how idiolectal variation can serve as indispensable characterization and plot device, as the fluctuations in the Flower Girl's speech reflect her development as a character as the plot progresses. These shifts in attitudinal meanings require moving beyond core register theory and into the pragmatics of communication.

In literary texts, therefore, idiolects relate to underlying discourses and, when proven to play a rhetorical function in that text, acquire the heightened communicative potential to relay additional layers of idiolectal meaning, which concern attitudinal meanings within the discourse of a text. The most pertinent aspect of language use in which idiolectal meaning is manifested in our chosen ST is that of register, as will be discussed later on.

3.3.Transitivity

There is a wide body of literature on how the underlying discourses and subtexts of literary texts can be projected on to the structural features of language via certain syntactic organizations and grammatical patterns (Ammer, 2012; Cunanan 2011; Keiss, 1990; Oduaran, 1988). The starting point of analysis for these studies is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which analyses the system of language in relation to its underlying function in communicating meaning (Egins, 2004; Halliday, 1994). In the Hallidayan terminology, it is the 'ideational' or 'experiential' metafunction of language which expresses content, ideas and discourses (Halliday, 1994). Fowler (1986) concludes that the ideational metafunction serves to interpret, organise and classify the subjects of discourse so as to construct a coherent world view in a literary text. This is achieved by understanding the formal elements of language in a literary texts in relation to its cultural and situational context, with a view to making observable how the underlying discourses and ideologies are imbued into grammar and syntax via "consistent and systematic foregrounding" of specific features (Oduaron, 1988, p. 341). The pragmatic effects afforded by such regular and systematic semantic organisation can best be appreciated at the text level, where recurrence of specific grammatical patterns operate in concert with one to organise the text's reality according to a specific configuration. These motivated and systemic stylistic decisions which give expression to a text's ideational metafunction are realised through the system of transitivity (Egins, 2004), which functions to transmit ideational and experiential meanings by representing "any phenomena that can be expressed by a verb" in terms of the relations between the central participants, namely actor and goal (Halliday, 1994, p. 159). Transitivity analyses verbs and their predicates in terms of the semantic relationships between its participants, with a view to determining if the verbs express actions which are wilfully and consciously initiated towards a goal, or events, states or processes, which occur independently of any human causation. By determining whether a given text exhibits a higher degree of action or processes predicates, it can be argued that objects in the world of discourse are being organised according to underlying ideational functions, ie. a high degree of action predicates may imply a world view in which participants have a high degree of agency than those who appear in a text which exhibits a higher degree of process predicates.

Ammer (2012) applies these analytical concepts regarding the underlying functions of language to the translation of what she terms 'the discourse of alienation' (p. 11), using Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty-four' and Haggi's 'Saint's Lamp' as case studies. The author furthers the debate surrounding the role of syntax and grammar in creating meaning potential in literary texts by demonstrating how consistently attributing the role of actor to inanimate objects creates an atmosphere of helplessness within which human beings lack any means to affect their environment. This reality is heightened, according to Ammer, when human beings are assigned the role of grammatical object, framing them as being the passive recipients of actions and processes, further undercutting any sense of human agency. An SFL analysis conducted within the framework of transitivity can reveal how the ST reality is organised according to an underlying discursal semiotic, with the foregrounding of syntactic choices corresponding to certain forms of discourse, rather than being neutral carriers of grammatical meaning.

Keiss (1990) makes an invaluable contribution to the debate by identifying 11 complimentary stylistic strategies used to suppress human agency in Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four." The most relevant to the current dissertation are:

1) Passive constructions: passive constructions foreground grammatical objects and the processes acting upon it, rather than the subject and the action it is engaged in, thereby serving to organise a reality which is lacking in explicit human agency.

2) Patientive verbs as main verbs: patientive verbs, such as "get", "hear" and "see" (as opposed to agentive verbs such as "give", "listen" and "watch") imply that the grammatical subject of a verb plays a passive rather than active role in events which are taking place. Using a patientive verb as the main verb assigns the grammatical subject, or actor, a patientive role rather than an agentive role, allowing human beings to be placed in the position of grammatical object in a predicate without being attributed a high degree of agency.

However, translating literary style is not simply a question of privileging ST stylistic requirements: notions of TT acceptability also come into play, meaning that the translator has to strike 'a balance between the demands of the ST -of its style- and a sense of naturalness of the TT in the receiving culture' (Marco, 2004, p. 81). Such anxieties may be particularly pertinent to instances of speech as, as stated above, in order for the pragmatic effects to be produced, the conative values of their speech to be perceived by the TR, a degree of domestication is necessary. This clash of constraints will involve a negotiated approach to translation by traversing the spectrum between dynamic and formal equivalence and oscillating between adequacy to the ST and acceptability in the TT.

It is clear from the above discussion that applying linguistic concepts to the study of language in literature can afford a degree of objectivity and measurability to the study of literary texts, and is therefore a fruitful avenue of inquiry. This is especially true when dealing with texts such as the one discussed in this dissertation, which is clearly orientated around a specific discourse.

4. Methodology

This dissertation will aim to strike a balance between adequacy to the ST and acceptability to the TR (Toury, 1995) by adopting a predominantly qualitative methodology consisting of foreignizing and domesticating strategies used concurrently.

Regarding slang, rather than seeking to reproduce specific instances of linguistic deviation, what we are seeking to reproduce is the pragmatic function served by SL linguistic markers in constructing a marginalised social identity; as both SL and TL have their own distinct set of linguistic markers which serve to communicate low socio-economic status by deviating from prescribed usage, TL linguistic resources will be exploited to domesticate speech to an extent, thereby maximise the possibility of transferring this marginalised social identity into a parallel TC context by using the corresponding TL stylistic markers which connote low socio-economic status, with a view to reproducing the pragmatic effects of the ST. These resources are not necessarily analogous and deviations will require variation in reproduction via a strategy of compensation, thereby producing a deterritorialised vernacular which

relays the most relevant aspects of the original using forms of expression which are legitimate and natural in the TL. To achieve this, a descriptive criteria of deviations will be elaborated, as proposed by Mattiello (2009), to determine to what effect prescribed language use is subverted in the ST and to describe how this can be reproduced in translation, with samples categorised as lexical, semantic, grammatical and phonological deviations.

Instances of idiolectal variation will be identified by relating speech acts to the underlying discourse of alienation, thereby determining the function they play in operationalising discursal meanings. The success of the translation of such items will depend upon the TR perceiving the appropriate attitudinal meanings, meaning that the TL will need to be formulated in accordance with TR expectations regarding communication of the concepts being communicated in the ST.

In terms of transitivity and stylistics, care must be taken to ensure that language in the TT must be formulated so as to serve the same aesthetic and communicative function as the language in the ST. Achieving this goal will involve identification of structures which serve this ideational metafunction and their reproduction in the TT. This fidelity to ST grammar and syntax, far from being a passive, non-interventionist and overly literal approach to translation, will be an informed and active approach to translation, the result of the translator understanding and responding to underlying experiential meanings present in the ST to produce a TT which is sensitive to finer nuances of meaning linguistically encoded at the level of grammar and syntax.

5. Discussion

5.1. Slang

5.1.1. Relexicalization

(701)

polizonte >>>> flatfoot

The ST term *polizonte* here denotes a policeman, but the term itself is culturally specific example of a private 'insider' (Blake, 2011) language, in this case originating from the criminal underclass to which the characters belong, used to forge cohesive group identities and place linguistic barriers to comprehension to those from other social groups (Halliday, 1994), thereby characterizing the speaker has a member of a specific (semi)criminal underclass. The term 'flatfoot' fulfils all the criteria to be considered an equivalent in terms of both semantics and pragmatics, as it expresses the same semantic content via a term that has a similar degree of specificity to a roughly equivalent TL socio-cultural context (see glossary), thereby succeeding in communicating the full range of conative values of the original and reproducing its pragmatic effects.

5.1.2. Semantic deviations

Table one presents some instances in which it has been possible to preserve both the referential content and the semantic indeterminacy of ST units:

Table 1: semantic deviation with equivalents at word/phrase level

Line	ST term	Literal equivalent	TT term
116	<i>agarrar</i>	to grab, to take	swing by
710	<i>caer(te) encima</i>	to arrest (you)	pinch (you)
245	<i>chiva</i>	goat, police informant	rat
153	<i>méndiga</i>	beggar (pejorative)	tramp
616	<i>revolcar</i>	to knock down	screw

Chiva poses a particularly interesting translation problem: the recurring animalization motif is a communicative strategy employed by Revueltas to dehumanise his characters (Cherron, 2014, Sianz Paz, 2017), meaning a figurative allusion to an animal is necessary to maintain loyalty to the ST unit’s rhetorical function. Luckily, there are ample resources available in the TL to do so: ‘canary’, ‘stool-pigeon’, or ‘rat’ satisfy this criteria, in a way that ‘snitch’, ‘narc’, or ‘grass’ do not, and are all also congruent with the historical and social context in which this speech act takes place (Green, 2020). ‘Rat’ (see glossary), with its additional connotations of being a dirty, unpleasant animal, seemed to be the most appropriate solution, and, arguably, succeeds in capturing the full sociosemantic force of the original and conveyed the full range of values conveyed by the original in a way that is coherent with the text as a whole.

Line (659) where Mario and *La Jaiba* use a highly stylised insider language evocative of a criminal underclass to conduct a private conversation in public demonstrates how, via the identification of parallel social sets in the TC, it is possible to render such language in a way that is semantically, stylistically and functionally equivalent:

[659]

No hagas polvo —silbó Mario lo más quedamente que pudo al oído de La Jaiba para prevenirla con ese giro convencional, de uso común en el hampa, a que no diera muestras de alarmarse o sorprenderse—. **El tipo que está aquí**, en el puesto. **Míralo de refile pa que no se malicie de que ya estamos al alba. Seguro que es un agente que me anda pastoreando.**

>>>>>

“Take it easy,” whispered Mario as softly as he could in *La Jaiba’s* ear, using that conventional expression, widely used in the underworld, to tell her not to show signs of alarm or surprise. **“That guy there, at the stall. Check him out, but be cool so he don’t smell a rat and see that we’ve made him. He’s gotta be a cop casin’ me out.”**

Note that the ST phonological deviation *pa que* has been reproduced in a different part of the TT (gotta) and that the TT exhibits an additional grammatical deviation (he don’t) which is not present in the original. Further explanations for such apparent discrepancies in grammatical deviations between ST and TT will be given later.

Compensation

However, there were instances in which translating the ST unit with a term which displayed

the same degree of semantic determinacy as the ST unit could not be done without distorting the referential content:

(316)

cantón >>>> place

The above example exhibits a clash between higher-order and lower-order constraints: in terms of referential content, in this context *cantón* refers to a house or a home, yet this concept is expressed via a stylistically marked term which distorts the standard semantic relationship between sign and signifier. The lack of an expression in the TL which reproduces both these characteristics forces the translator to choose which level of meaning to prioritise in translation. Given that the reader already knows that Mario was searching for Lucrecia at her apartment and not at any other physical location, privileging the stylistic signifier over what is signified by using a TL unit that deviated stylistically from standard language use in a way congruent with the social and cultural context of the scene but which failed to communicate the concept of 'home' would create inconsistencies in the narrative and damage the integrity of the plot and the reader's ability to experience the text as a credible piece of literary fiction. For example, translating *cantón* with 'joint', a word which exhibits similar a degree of semantic indeterminacy and duplicity as the ST unit and sounds congruent with the social and cultural context the ST has been transposed into, but referentially refers to a 'bar' or 'restaurant', would create discontinuity in the book's narrative. A potential solution could be to render *canton* as 'crib', a word which captures both the referential content and the semantic indeterminacy of the ST unit. However, a degree of cultural understanding must be employed: the word 'crib', as synonym for 'home', originated in African-American vernacular (Deák, 2007, p. 110) and evokes inner-city hip-hop culture and, therefore, while satisfying the semantic equivalence criteria, its use here would be incongruent with the cultural setting, damaging the context of the scene and disrupting the text's texture (Baker, 2011; Hatim and Mason, 2005). Instead, in this instance we must understand that the referential content is the higher-order constraint and privilege this in the translation, sacrificing a degree of stylistic value, which in this instance represents the lower-order constraint, in the process. We cannot discount issues of form entirely, however: 'place' is a relatively informal way of referring to someone's home and harmonises far more closely with the informality of Mario's voice than would 'residence', or 'dwelling', and therefore proves to be a satisfactory, although imperfect, translation decision. Furthermore, this loss, as it is, has been compensated for in other parts of the text, as demonstrated in the following example:

(582)

Luque, como no llegabas, La Jaiba y yo nos fuimos a rebalsarlas. No te enojas. Mario

>>>>

'Luque, seeing as you didn't arrive, me and *La Jaiba* went off to screw. Don't get sore. Mario.'

The above TL unit in the example above exhibits a higher degree of linguistic deviation than its corresponding SL unit. This has been achieved by rendering the stylistically neutral

expression *no te enojas* with a TL unit which is stylistically marked with a higher degree of informality than that present in the SL unit (see glossary), therefore compensating for the loss described earlier on.

5.1.3. Grammatical & phonological deviations

(288)

—¡Quihubo, Muñeco! >>>> Whaddya say, Pretty Boy!

Here it was possible to directly recreate the phonological and grammatical of the ST unit in the TT. The ST phonological deviation is realised by the corruption of the standard *que* with a non-standard *qui*, and the contraction of the words *que(i)* and *hubo* into a single word which can be categorised in terms of formal grammar as a question, yet here functions as a greeting, thus deviating from prescribed grammatical usage. The phonological and grammatical deviations have been preserved in the TT with by the merging of the three stressed sounds ‘what do you say’ into ‘whaddya’, a phonological corruption of a question that functions as a greeting in the TL.

Compensation

However, such deviations often require variability in reproduction as, due to structural differences in the formal characteristics of ST and TT respectively, it is far more difficult to directly reproduce grammatical and phonological deviations:

In (119) a phonological deviation which is not present in the ST has been added (*iba yo a tomar* - gonna go), as this contraction is a very common stylistic marker used in English to mark speech as non-standard and to denote the speaker as belonging to a low social class. If we use the text as context for this utterance, we see that preserving the standard use of the ST segment would create incongruencies in the TT, damaging the harmony between text and context. Instead, the text serves to contextualise lexical items contained within it and, understood in this way, we can see how preserving the form of the ST segment would fail to communicate the character’s working-class identity and would therefore damage the context of the scene. The addition of a phonological deviation not present in the ST has been offset later in the same paragraph when, due to structural differences between ST and TT, it has not been possible to reproduce the ST phonological deviation *usté* in the TT. The same process is at work throughout the text, where the pragmatic communicative function of ST phonological deviations such *usté* (114) and *orita* (134), are reproduced at different points in the TT (“scuse us’, ‘ain’t’), creating a similar overall effect, with language serving to characterise speakers as belonging to social backgrounds which correspond, at least in some degree, to the social backgrounds of the ST characters. This strategy of stylistic compensation has been used throughout the translation process in an attempt to allow the TR to perceive and respond to the characters in a similar way to the way the SR readers despite the absence of analogous features SL and TL.

To summarise, what has become clear is that sub-standard language is manifested via contrasting stylistic devices in the SL and TL respectively. For example, the TT exhibits a higher degree of phonological and grammatical deviations. The most common types of phonological deviation in the TL are apocope, the omission of the final sound of a word, a

characteristic that features heavily in colloquial spoken English partly due to the fact that gerunds all end with 'g', which is characteristically omitted (casin' talkin' thinkin'), as well as the merging of stressed syllables into single words such as got to > gotta; and want to > wanna (Čerče, 2017). Additionally, the fact that English is a non-inflected language affords a degree of grammatical flexibility not available in Spanish, allowing for grammatical deviations such as "he don't." These features, however, while not directly present in the ST, serve to produce the same pragmatic effects produced by the ST, ultimately recreating the marginalised social identity necessary to transfer the subtext of alienation from ST to TT, resulting in equivalence being attained at text level. We also see that deviations on a given level can be compensated for by deviations on any other level, phonological for grammatical, for example, as long as these deviations correspond to a TC social and cultural set which has parallels with the socio-cultural context of the ST,

5.2. Idiolect

A highly relevant aspect to the progression of the scene which culminates in the taxi driver assaulting his wife (3 - 251) is the tension between registers in the characters' speech, which reflects the tension in the interpersonal relationships between the three of them, conveys social distance and communicates the fact that, despite their close physical and social proximity, each one is 'trapped in their own alienating process' (Sainz Paz, 2017, p.22). This tension is linguistically realized via the combination of the formal terms of address and the impersonal way the characters treat each other, which contrast with the markers of low social status and informality simultaneously contained within their speech. For example, the driver's reticently indignant rebuttal to Mario's insistence on giving direction (122: *Tengo más de veinte años en el volante, señor. Usté dirá si no he de conocer bien las calles por donde agarro*), demonstrates these conflicts between high and low register, with the combination of both registers serving to simultaneously convey both low social status and social distance. The semantic indeterminacy of colloquial expressions for driving (*en el volante, agarrar*) mark the driver's low socioeconomic status and convey an informal attitude to his work, while the inclusion of polite/formal terms of address such as *señor* and *usté* (sic) serve to mark his speech act as belonging to a high register, a contrast further confounded by the phonological deviation which *usté* itself constitutes. This tension accumulates throughout the scene and eventually culminates with the taxi driver's physical assault on his wife, which causes Mario to abandon his cold indifference to the driver and start to identify and empathise with him, a attitudinal shift which is communicated linguistically, namely via Mario's switching from the formal *usted* to the informal *tu*, and his use of a term of endearment marked with connotations of the same low social class both he and the driver belong to (line 244: *mi viejo*). Here, register is a device used to communicate social distance, while colloquial language simultaneously serves as a device to place the three characters within a similar socio-economic group. Both elements must be preserved in the translation to ensure accurate transference from ST to TT of the complex interpersonal dynamics which form a part of the discursual meaning.

This aspect of meaning can only be relayed by going beyond core register theory and examining the pragmatics of this communicative event. Given the structural differences between SL and TL, there is no direct way to replicate the use of the formal *usted* term of address in English and, in certain communicative events, there could be a case to be made for simply discounting the high-register activated by its use and rendering the speech

without regarding the implications posed by register. However, given the communicative function of register here, such an approach would be entirely unsatisfactory. As register here operates as a crucial characterization device by communicating attitudinal meanings, the fluctuations in register must be understood in relation to the underlying functions of language present in this interaction and Mario's switching between formal and informal forms of address must be seen as a functional idiolectal feature which expresses attitudinal meanings (distance, indifference) in the context of the ST discourse (alienation) (Hatim and Mason, 2005).

In an attempt to linguistically realise in the TT the same tensions in register and fluctuations in attitudinal meanings which characterise this scene, Mario's formal imperatives become modal questions, achieving functional equivalence by using TL linguistic markers which communicate the necessary level of formality and social distance required to faithfully convey the ST attitudinal meanings, with the same tension in register being produced by employing TL stylistic markers to convey the characters' working-class identity. To relay the shift in attitude in which the scene culminates and on which it hinges, the phrase 'don't worry' (239), which is not present in the ST, has been added to communicate the crucial decrease in social distance and greater empathy Mario feels towards the taxi driver after watching him engage in criminal and morally reprehensible activity, characterising him as a person who can only identify with other people who impose their will on others via physical force. This attitudinal meaning was expressed in the ST using a linguistic resource not available in the TL yet, by understanding this speech act relation to its underlying function in operationalising discursual meanings, linguistic resources available in the TL can be fully exploited to produce functionally equivalent units, thereby successfully transferring the ST subtext to the TT. This attitudinal meaning has been further embedded in the TT via a reformulation of the SL unit: by placing the phrase 'old buddy' (241), which itself has been embellished from simply *mi viejo* to further convey a greater sense of intimacy in Mario's attitude to the driver, in a position of thematic prominence at the beginning of the sentence, followed directly by reassuring phrase 'don't worry', the syntax now serves to foreground the shift in attitudinal meanings that has taken place by placing it in a position of thematic eminence in initial sentence position (Baker, 2011), ensuring that the cumulative effect which builds up throughout the scene can be perceived by the TR. The resolution of this problem demonstrates how, by focusing on concepts being communicated rather than the form in which they are encoded, the creative literary translate can successfully reproduce relevant aspects of attitudinal meaning in spite of structural differences between languages: by understanding Mario's switching between registers as an idiolectal feature which expresses attitudinal meanings in relation to the discourse of alienation which underpins the text, we have succeeded in communicating ST discursual values.

5.3. Transitivity

5.3.1. Transitivity analysis

A survey of predicate types according to the framework of transitivity revealed that there was a total of 52 action predicates in which inanimate objects played the role of actor. Of these 34 were transitive and 18 intransitive. Of the 34 transitive predicates, 18 of these were actions directed towards a human being. The agentive role played by inanimate objects and the passive role played by human beings, respectively, must be understood as a motivated stylistic decision on the part of the sender, serving to structure the ST reality in

such a way that human beings, rather than being active and conscious initiators of actions, are instead the goals of actions, with inanimate objects displaying a much higher degree of agency, meaning destiny is not something which is planned by and shaped according to human will, but something which is observed and experienced passively. The TT must be formulated in a way which harmonises with the ST sender's communicative intentions, for example:

(124)

Un sentimiento, mezcla de cólera y desprecio, hizo a Mario echarse hacia atrás en el asiento: veinte años de no haber sido en la vida otra cosa que un simple chofer, como si un tribunal invisible le hubiese descargado encima esa sentencia de trabajos forzados.

Analysing this segment in terms of its transitivity patterns reveals that inanimate and intangible forces are here demonstrating high degrees of agency by participating as the active initiators of transitive verbs in which human beings are the object. Given that language here is formulated to realise the ideational metafunction of the text, the translation must privilege the stylistic demands of the ST over considerations regarding form and fluency in the TL. Rendering this segment as follows, for example, would fail to maintain the necessary configuration of relationships between the participants:

- Mario sat back in his seat, feeling a wave of emotion, a mixture of anger and contempt: 20 years of being nothing but a simple taxi driver, as if he had been given a sentence of forced labor by some invisible tribunal.

This translation communicates the same propositional content of the original, yet frames it in such a way as to distort the causal relationships present in the original, foregrounding elements in such a way as to attribute the human participants a far higher degree of agency than is intended in the ST. The prominence of the agency exercised by inanimate objects of human beings must be maintained in translation:

- A feeling, a mix of anger and contempt, made Mario sit back in his seat: 20 years of being nothing more than a simple taxi driver, as if some invisible tribunal had dropped a sentence of forced labor on him from above.

In such instances, successful translation of ST units depended on the translator's ability to correctly identify the function played by ST syntax by relating it to the underlying discourse it serves to reproduce, resulting in successful translation of the ST's ideational function. As stated above, such fidelity to ST grammar and syntax, far from being automatic and uncritical, is in fact motivated and informed by a keen awareness of the discursive meanings present in the ST, meaning such instances of syntactic fidelity constitute active interventions on the part of the translator who makes an active decision to privilege adequacy to ST discourse and resist the temptation to reformulate syntax in such a way as to distort ST discourse.

5.3.2. Passives and impersonals

Other elements of ST style which correspond to the discourse of alienation have been preserved in the translation at the expense of fluency, such as:

Passive structures:

(530)

Hay cosas que no pueden decirse a nadie... >>>> There are things that **can't be said** to another person...

(534)

...aun cuando se lo dijera. >>>> ...even if it were **told to them**.

Impersonal structures:

(163)

No estaba previsto que se encontrara con ninguna de sus antiguas amistades... >>>> **It hadn't been foreseen** that he would find himself with among any of his old friends...

(532)

...por más que uno quiera... >>>> ...no matter how much **one might want to...**

Line 163, for instance, has made use of impersonal constructions to convey a sense of passivity: by placing the dummy pronoun 'it' in thematic sentence initial position as the grammatical subject, the syntax serves to deny any human causation to events taking place, foregrounding processes over actions and ultimately suppressing human agency. Such structures may sound slightly awkward or stilted in the TL but, given they serve a crucial rhetorical function, must be reproduced in the TT in spite of the TR expectations regarding fluency.

However, there are times when ST style must give way to higher-order constraints regarding TR expectations, particularly when dealing with speech which, as explained earlier, must be transposed into TL modes of expression in order to produce the necessary pragmatic effects:

(380)

—*¡Pobre Magnífica, pero qué quieres que se le haga!*

Mario's utterance makes use of the passive voice in a way that, arguably, constitutes a stylistically motivated decision to communicate a lack of direct human agency. Preserving this configuration of semantic relations, however, would result in an unnatural-sounding speech pattern that would create incongruencies in Mario's voice and disrupt the TR's perception of him as belonging to a recognisable socio-cultural context:

—"Poor little *Magnífica*, but what do **you want to be done with her!**"

Here, loyalty to ST style has damaged the context of the TT. Instead, the translator must intervene to adapt the ST mode of expression to a TT one:

-“Poor little *Magnifica*, but what do **you want me to do with her!**”

The TT segment has shifted from a passive, impersonal structure to an active, personal one, in the process affording Mario a higher degree of agency than does the ST. This has produced a shift in attitudinal meanings, distorting the ST discourse. The fact that Mario occupies the position of actor and therefore plays an active role in initiating actions more frequently than the other characters, further justifies this negotiated approach to translator intervention in the sender’s style.

5.3.3. Pronominal verbs

Given that the translator faces several options when choosing how to render Spanish pronominal verbs into English, care must be taken to ensure that they are understood contextually so as to be translated in such a way that creates a coherent textuality:

(250)

Que se largaran mucho los dos al carajo >>>> They **could both get fucked,**”

(698)

—*¡No te pongas como una pendeja loca!*— >>>> “**Don’t get** so goddam crazy!”

(773)

Que se jodiera solo, allá adentro del veliz >>>> **He could get fucked,** alone there in that box,

Rendering these pronominal verbs as reflexive verbs in the TT would result in too high a degree of human agency, presenting humans as initiators, rather than recipients of actions. Consider, for example, the difference between (a) he could fuck himself, and (b) he could get fucked: example (a) attributes a degree of agency to the human participant in this predicate by organising semantic relations to frame them as being the initiator of an action. Instead, the translator must make their discursive presence known by making their own stylistically motivated choices regarding language in the TT: by using the patientive verb ‘get’, which serves to foreground processes and frame the human characters as passive objects on whom forces act, beyond the control of any animate actor; by representing the event that takes place as a *process*, whose causation cannot be attributed to any animate object, instead of an action consciously initiated by a human actor, we contribute to thematic harmonisation between ST and TT.

5.3.4. Verbs in the 3rd person plural with an undefined subject and a human object

The same considerations apply to these structures, which are sometimes used in Spanish to represent the passive voice and, in the context of the clearly established ST discourse, the lack of a defined actor strengthens the interpretation that the author’s intended intention

was to convey a sense of passivity. Using a subject pronoun such as ‘they’ would imply a degree of human agency incongruent with the ST discourse. To resolve this dilemma and reproduce the pragmatic effect of the ST, again the patientive verb ‘get’ has again been employed to frame the human participant as lacking in agency by framing the event described as a process rather than an action, while the lack of any agentive ‘by’ phrase to explain who the active initiator of the action further contributes to the recreation of ST textuality:

(175)

—*Nomás a que te maten...* >>>> “Just to get killed...

(691)

Como si te fueran a tomar una fotografía... >>>> “Like you were gonna have your photo taken...”

(708)

Te van a agarrar preso. >>>> You’re gonna get arrested.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate that, equipped with a thorough understanding of the subtext and discursal values contained within a given ST, the literary translator is able to recognise how linguistic elements function as surface manifestations of underlying meanings, the communicative potential of which can be reproduced via a systemic and consistent approach to translation which includes compensation strategies, thereby achieving equivalence at text level by producing a TT with a textuality consistent with that of the ST. What is also evident is that there is a need for further studies. Additional research on comparative stylistics would be massively advantageous to translators seeking to deepen their understanding of the different literary devices used to encode discourse into literary texts in Spanish and English respectively; empirical surveys of the stylistic features used to communicate alienation and a lack of agency in Spanish would complement the growing literature on the same subject in English-language literature, and would afford literary translators working in that language combination to attain a higher degree of measurability and reproducibility in their methodologies, allowing them to move beyond theoretical and intuitive approaches.

Commentary word count: 7,924

ST extract word count: 7,016

Total word count: 14,400

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8. Glossary (begins on next page)

Glossary

SL term	Definitions and synonyms	TL term	Definitions	Use in context
al carajo (interjection, pejorative)	<p>1. expr. malson. U. para expresar un fuerte rechazo de algo o de alguien. <i>Al carajo tus consejos.</i></p> <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/carajo?m=form</p>	fuck (you) (interjection, perjorative)	<p>1. (<i>idiomatic, offensive, markedly vulgar</i>) <i>Expression to show discontent with the other party, or to show contempt.</i> quotations ▼</p> <p><i>You dare come here dressed so horribly? Well, fuck you! What made you decide to maltreat him? Fuck you, that's that...</i></p> <p>2. (<i>idiomatic, dismissive, offensive, markedly vulgar</i>) Go away! Go to hell!</p> <p><i>Fuck you—I'm not giving you any! You've done enough to ruin our outing, so fuck you!</i></p> <p>Source: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/fuck_you</p>	<p>SL: 'Manda al carajo a líderes petroleros; López Obrador dijo que no cedió ante peticiones'</p> <p>Source: https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/manda-al-carajo-a-lideres-petroleros-lopez-obrador-dijo-que-no-cedio-ante-peticiones</p> <p>TL: 'Thank you I say to kill the silence with my mouth, meaning fuck you, meaning die you shoulder-shrugging fusion of chipped chromosomes and pus, meaning enough.'</p> <p>Source: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50810/spirit-ditty-of-no-fax-line-dial-tone</p>
cabrona (n, a)	<p>1. <i>adj./s. m. vulgar</i> Se dice de la persona que hace cabronadas o malas pasadas a otra</p>	bitch (n)	<p>1.</p>	<p>SL: '¿Seré mujer modelo? cabrona sin careta me presumo, mi actuar así de fácil lo resumo.'</p>

	<p>Source: https://es.thefreedictionary.com/cabrona</p>		<p>a female dog or other female canine animal, such as a wolf</p> <p>2. <i>derogatory, slang</i> a malicious, spiteful, or coarse woman</p> <p>3. <i>offensive, slang</i> a woman</p> <p>Source: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bitch</p>	<p>Source: http://www.mundopoesia.com/foros/temas/cabrona-sin-careta.573806/</p> <p>TL: 'Now, when he and I meet, after all these years, say to the bitch inside me, don't start growling.'</p> <p>Source: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/35672/bitch</p>
<p>chiva (n)</p>	<p>Dícese de aquel que en sus actos y omisiones traiciona, acusa, engaña. Persona a la que no se le puede tener confianza. En algunas zonas del país se les dice así también a los policías y sus informantes.</p> <p>Source: https://www.asihablamos.com/word/palabra/Chiva.php</p>	<p>rat (n)</p>	<p>1a: any of numerous rodents (<i>Rattus</i> and related genera) differing from the related mice especially by considerably larger size</p> <p>b: any of various similar rodents</p> <p>2: a contemptible person: such as</p> <p>a: one who betrays or deserts friends or associates</p> <p>b: SCAB_SENSE 3B</p> <p>c: INFORMER_SENSE 2</p>	<p>SL: 'Cuando tocó el turno a Judas, gritaron: "Ahí está la chiva, el borrego", término utilizado para un delator.'</p> <p>Source: https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/jesus-promete-no-delinquir-otra-vez</p> <p>TL: ' "They're saying you turned rat on him." " They would. What do you think?"</p>

			Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rat	"Ditching him was all right. But throwing in with a dick and cracking the works to him is kind of sour. Damned sour, if you ask me." ' Source: https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hammettd-redharvest/hammettd-redharvest-00-h.html
delatar (v)	TRANSITIVE VERB 1 Desvelar a una autoridad quién es el autor de una falta o un delito. 2 Poner de manifiesto algo que se guarda oculto y que, generalmente, es reprobable. Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/delatar	to give away (v)	3a: BETRAY b: DISCLOSE, REVEAL Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/give%20away	SL: 'Se alegró de que la elección de ella coincidiera con su propia preferencia, pero le pareció que la respuesta delataba el deseo de consumir este sacrificio con un mínimo de ceremonia, de vacilación y de entusiasmo.' Source: See corpus TL: 'So I hope I'm not giving too much away when I tell you this is the last you'll see of our first family.' Source: https://jewishjournal.com/culture/poetry/309339/poem-vayechi/
desconocido (a, n)	ADJECTIVE & MASCULINE AND FEMININE NOUN 1 [persona] Que no es conocido. <i>el nuevo maestro era desconocido de todos; el primer premio lo ganó un auténtico desconocido en el panorama literario; no me</i>	stranger (a)	1: one who is strange : such as a(1): FOREIGNER (2): a resident alien b: one in the house of another as a guest, visitor, or intruder	SL: 'Josefina le enseñó la ventana por la que el desconocido había estado fisgando y Pablo la examinó con atención: en el alféizar había huellas de sangre casi frescas.' Source: See corpus TL: 'If there aint any white men in this town,

	<p><i>gusta que hables con desconocidos</i></p> <p>ADJECTIVE</p> <p>1[cosa] Que no es conocido. <i>Bartolomé Díaz, en su viaje por África, exploró más de 1 250 millas de costa hasta entonces desconocida; la epidemia no pudo ser controlada inmediatamente porque no existía antídoto para el desconocido virus que la provocaba</i></p> <p>2[persona, cosa] Que está irreconocible por mostrarse muy cambiado en su aspecto, su comportamiento, etc.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/desconocido</p>		<p>c: a person or thing that is unknown or with whom one is unacquainted</p> <p>d: one who does not belong to or is kept from the activities of a group</p> <p>e: one not privy or party to an act, contract, or title : one that interferes without right</p> <p>Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stranger</p>	<p>you can count on me, even if I aint only a drummer and a stranger.'</p> <p>Source: See corpus</p>
despilfarrar (v)	<p>TRANSITIVE VERB</p> <p>1Malgastar el dinero de forma insensata y sin necesidad.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/despilfarrar</p>	to squander (v)	<p>to waste money or supplies, or to waste opportunities by not using them to your advantage</p> <p>Source: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/squander</p>	<p>SL: 'Su severidad hizo de la casa un reducto de costumbres revnidas, en un pueblo convulsionando por la vulgaridadcon que los forasteros despilfarraban sus fáciles fortunas.'</p> <p>Source: http://www.secst.cl/upfiles/documentos/19072016_1207am_578dc39115fe9.pdf</p>

				<p>TL: ‘But he was a weak man and in Italy squandered the fortune they had both slaved in America to earn.’</p> <p>Source: http://www.kkworld.com/kitablar/Mario_Puzo-The_Godfather_eng.pdf</p>
enojar-se (v)	<p>1. tr. Causar enojo. U. m. c. prnl.</p> <p>2. tr. Molestar, desazonar. U. t. c. prnl.</p> <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/enojar?m=form</p>	(get) sore (a, colloquial)	<p>(mainly US) angry, irritated.</p> <p>Source: https://greensdictofslang.com/en-try/tk2zg3q</p>	<p>SL: ‘¿Cómo querías que no me diera cuenta del engaño? Cuando se enoja me prohíbe salir. ¡A ti te consta!’</p> <p>Source: see corpus</p> <p>TL: ‘If you start waving money in their faces they get sore.’</p> <p>Source: https://greensdictofslang.com/search/quotation</p>
gringo (a, n)	<p>ADJECTIVE <i>informal</i></p> <p>1Relativo a Estados Unidos de América, o a sus habitantes.</p> <p>ADJECTIVE & MASCULINE AND FEMININE NOUN <i>informal</i></p>	gringo (n)	<p>a term used in Latin America or Spain to refer to a foreigner, especially one of U.S. or British descent (sometimes used facetiously).</p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/gringo</p>	<p>SL: ‘ “si los gringos eran los únicos dispuestos a dar el dinero para las exploraciones, ¿él qué iba a hacer?” ‘</p> <p>Source: https://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0266.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘ “This driver, for example, hates gringos.” ‘</p> <p>Source:</p>

	<p>1[persona] Que es de Estados Unidos de América.</p> <p>2Que es extranjero.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/gringo</p>			<p>https://colectivotijeras.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/burroughs-william-s-queer.pdf</p>
hampa (n)	<p>1. f. Conjunto de los maleantes, especialmente de los organizados en bandas y con normas de conducta particulares.</p> <p>2. f. Conjunto de maleantes que, unidos en una especie de sociedad, cometían robos y otros delitos, y usaban un lenguaje particular, llamado jerigonza o germanía.</p> <p>3. f. Vida de las gentes holgazanas y maleantes.</p> <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/hampa?m=form</p>	under-world (n)	<p>1. singular noun [oft NOUN noun, noun NOUN] the underworld in a city is the organized crime there and the people who are involved in it.</p> <p>a. criminals and their associates considered collectively</p> <p>b. <i>(as modifier)</i> <i>underworld connections</i></p> <p>2. the regions below the earth's surface regarded as the abode of the dead; Hades</p> <p>Source:</p>	<p>SL: 'El hombre vestido de negro era, efectivamente, el rey del hampa.'</p> <p>Source: https://idoc.pub/documents/el-rey-del-hampa-marcia-cotlan-pdf-x4ewq6gdk843</p> <p>TL: 'This man's name was Salvatore Maranzano and he was one of the acknowledged <i>pezzonovante</i>, .90 calibers, or big shots of the New York underworld.'</p> <p>Source: http://www.kkoworld.com/kitablar/Mario_Puzo-The_Godfather_eng.pdf</p>

			https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/underworld	
huelga (n)	<p>1. f. Interrupción colectiva de la actividad laboral por parte de los trabajadores con el fin de reivindicar ciertas condiciones o manifestar una protesta.</p> <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/huelga?m=form</p>	strike (n)	<p>3a: a work stoppage by a body of workers to enforce compliance with demands made on an employer</p> <p>b: a temporary stoppage of activities in protest against an act or condition</p> <p>Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strike</p>	<p>SL: ‘...después de la demagogia de Lázaro Cárdenas, veinte años de protección a los intereses de la empresa, de líderes sumisos, de huelgas rotas...’</p> <p>Source: https://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0266.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘ “They let us live like pigs in the jungle, but just the minute we start a strike, they get awful concerned about the public health.” ‘</p> <p>Source: (link to PDF download): https://libcom.org/library/dubious-battle-john-steinbeck</p>
humillante (a)	<p>Que humilla o degrada.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/humillante</p>	humiliating (a)	<p>lowering the pride, self-respect, or dignity of a person; mortifying: <i>Such a humiliating defeat was good for his overblown ego.</i></p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/humiliating</p>	<p>SL: ‘Todos creían al Chivo el salvador de la Patria, el que acabó con las guerras de caudillos, con el peligro de una nueva invasión haitiana, el que puso fin a la dependencia humillante de los Estados Unidos.’</p> <p>Source: http://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/Mario%20Vargas%20Llosa%20-%20La%20fiesta%20del%20chivo.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘Humiliating punishment, which infringes on the dignity of the student, is not only invalid</p>

				and contrary to the law, but it also contradicts the teaching profession and the model that an educator should be for [their] students,’ Source: https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Humiliating-disproportionate-punishments-evident-in-Israeli-schools-report-613411
joder (v)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. intr. malson. Practicar el coito . 2. prnl. malson. Aguantarse o fastidiarse. 3. prnl. malson. Estropearse o dañarse. 4. tr. malson. Poseer sexualmente a alguien. 5. tr. malson. Molestar o fastidiar a alguien. U. t. c. intr. 6. tr. malson. Destrozar, arruinar o echar a perder algo. <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/joder</p>	to fuck (v)	<p><i>verb (used with object)</i> to have sexual intercourse with. <i>Slang.</i> to treat unfairly or harshly.</p> <p><i>verb (used without object)</i> to have sexual intercourse. <i>Slang.</i> to meddle (usually followed by <i>around</i> or <i>with</i>).</p> <p><i>interjection</i> <i>Slang.</i> (used to express anger, disgust, peremptory rejection, etc., often followed by a pronoun, as <i>you</i> or <i>it</i>.)</p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/fuck?s=t</p>	<p>SL: ‘<Tanto joderse uno – murmaba el coronel Aureliano Buendia-. Tanto joderse para que lo maten a uno seis maricas si poder hacer nada.’</p> <p>Source: http://www.secst.cl/upfiles/documentos/19072016_1207am_578dc39115fe9.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘ “You're fucked right there. It's eight years for selling this stuff and there's no bail.” ‘</p> <p>Source: https://epdf.pub/junky.html</p>
maldita sea (interj-)	Exclamación que expresa enojo. Source:	goddammit (interj-)	<i>informal</i> , mainly US and Canadian EXCLAMATION also: God damn 1.	SL: ‘¿Dónde maldita sea estaba el Oldsmobile con Pedro Livio y Huáscar?’

<p>ccion, coloquial)</p>	<p>https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/%C2%A1maldita sea!</p>	<p>ccion, colloquial)</p>	<p>an <u>oath</u> expressing <u>anger</u>, <u>surprise</u>, etc ADVERB also: goddam, goddammed, goddamned 2. (<u>intensifier</u>) <i>a goddamn fool</i> Source: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/goddamn</p>	<p>Source: http://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/Mario%20Vargas%20Llosa%20-%20La%20fiesta%20del%20chivo.pdf TL: ‘ “Goddamn, he stinks!" the soldier said.’ Source: See corpus</p>
<p>nomás (adv)</p>	<p>1. adv. Arg., Bol., Chile, Col., C. Rica, Ec., Hond., Méx., Nic., Par., Perú y Ven. no más (solamente). 2. adv. Arg., Chile, Col., Ec., El Salv., Hond., Méx., Par., Perú, Ur. y Ven. U. en oraciones exhortativas, generalmente pospuesto, para añadir énfasis a la expresión. <i>Pase nomás. Atrévase nomás.</i> Source: https://dle.rae.es/nom%C3%A1s?m=form</p>	<p>just</p>	<p>1a: EXACTLY, PRECISELY <i>just</i> right b: very recently the bell <i>just</i> rang 2a: by a very small margin : BARELY <i>just</i> too late b: IMMEDIATELY, DIRECTLY <i>just</i> west of here 3a: ONLY, SIMPLY <i>just</i> last year <i>just</i> be yourself Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/just</p>	<p>SL: ‘Todavía después, se pagaron con lo que quedaba nomás por no perseguirme, aunque de todos modos me perseguían.’ See SL corpus TL: ‘ "Sure, sure," the soldier said. "We're just going to talk to him a little; that's all." ‘ See TL corpus</p>
<p>padrote (n)</p>	<p>1[hombre] Que induce a una persona a ejercer la prostitución y se beneficia con las ganancias económicas que se obtienen de esta</p>	<p>pimp (n)</p>	<p><i>noun</i> a person, especially a man, who solicits customers for a prostitute</p>	<p>SL: “¿Y si una sale con un padrote, el mundo del padrote acabará por gustarle?” Source (link to pdf download):</p>

	<p>actividad.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/padrote</p>		<p>or a brothel, usually in return for a share of the earnings; pander; procurer.</p> <p>a despicable person.</p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pimp?s=t</p>	<p>descargar.lelibros.online > Los Detectives Salvajes - Roberto Bolano</p> <p>TL: 'The man was Max Baines, a notorious pimp, dope pusher, and strong-arm artist.'</p> <p>Source: http://www.secst.cl/upfiles/documentos/19072016_1207am_578dc39115fe9.pdf</p>
<p>pastear (v)</p>	<p>Espiar, observar con disimulo lo que otros hacen o dicen.</p> <p>Source: https://es.thefreedictionary.com/pastear</p>	<p>to case (out) (v)</p>	<p>Slang: To observe and examine someone or something, often to gain knowledge for a specific future purpose. A noun or pronoun can be used between "case" and "out."</p> <p>Source: https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/case+out</p>	<p>SL: 'El líder de esta banda fue identificado como José Alberto León Aguilar. 'Los monstruos de San Juan de Miraflores' habían 'pasteado' durante días a sus objetivos, estudiando sus movimientos.'</p> <p>Source: https://panamericana.pe/buenosdiasperu/locales/283686-monstruos-sjm-cayeron-pleno-asalto-hotel</p> <p>TL: " 'Maybe he's thinking it over right now, while he's casing me." "</p> <p>Source: https://greensdictofslang.com/search/quotation</p>
<p>payaso (n)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> m. y f. Artista de circo que hace de gracioso, con trajes, ademanes, dichos y gestos apropiados. adj. y s. [Persona] de poca seriedad, propensa a 	<p>clown (n)</p>	<p>1) a comic performer, as in a circus, theatrical production, or the like, who wears an outlandish costume and makeup and entertains by pantomiming common situations or actions in exaggerated or ridiculous fashion,</p>	<p>SL: "Vio los payasos hacienda mamosas en la cola del desfile."</p> <p>Source: http://www.secst.cl/upfiles/documentos/19072016_1207am_578dc39115fe9.pdf</p>

	<p>hacer reír con sus dichos o hechos.</p> <p>Source: https://www.wordreference.com/definicion/payaso</p>		<p>by juggling or tumbling, etc.</p> <p>2) a person who acts like a clown; comedian; joker; buffoon; jester.</p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/clown?s=t</p>	<p>TL: ' "You're making a fine pair of clowns of us. Be still while I get up or I'll make an opening in your head for brains to leak in." '</p> <p>Source: https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hammettd-redharvest/hammettd-redharvest-00-h.html</p>
<p>polizon-te (n, colloquial)</p>	<p>s. m. y f. <i>despectivo</i> Agente de policía.</p> <p>Source: https://es.thefreedictionary.com/polizonte</p>	<p>flatfoot (n)</p>	<p>(<i>also</i> flat, flat heel) a police officer, a (private) detective.</p> <p>Source: https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/eoelyfq</p>	<p>SL: 'El polizonte que gana una quienela, dijeron.'</p> <p>Source (link to pdf download): descargar.lelibros.online › Los Detectives Salvajes - Roberto Bolano</p> <p>TL: '...looking over our shoulders to see if that flatfoot was still following us.'</p> <p>Source: https://greensdictofslang.com/search/quotation</p>
<p>perentorio (a)</p>	<p>1. <i>adj.</i> Que es urgente o apremiante <i>el abastecimiento alimenticio e s una necesidad perentoria.</i></p> <p>2. Que es concluyente o decisivo <i>t u voto será perentorio .</i></p> <p>3. Se aplica al último plazo que se concede o a la última resolución d e un asunto.</p>	<p>peremptory (a)</p>	<p>1. urgent or commanding <i>a peremptory ring on the bell</i></p> <p>2. not able to be remitted or debated; decisive</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>SL: 'Llegó a tener un repertorio de excusas: exámenes, trabajos, visitas, malestares, plazos perentorios para entregar los papers.'</p> <p>Source: http://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/Mario%20Vargas%20Llosa%20-%20La%20fiesta%20del%20chivo.pdf</p>

	<p>Source: https://es.thefreedictionary.com/Perentorio</p>		<p>positive or assured in speech, manner, etc; dogmatic</p> <p>Source: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/peremptory</p>	<p>TL: “ Thus far, both the prosecution and defense have used four peremptory strikes each, in which they can eliminate a potential juror for any reason without explanation.”</p> <p>Source: https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2020/01/09/Jury-selection-Wilkinsburg-slaying-remains-six-people-so-far-Cheron-Shelton-Robert-Thomas/stories/202001090159</p>
<p>prestamista (n)</p>	<p>Persona que se dedica a prestar dinero cobrando por ello un interés.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/prestamista</p>	<p>money-lender (n)</p>	<p>one whose business is lending money.</p> <p>Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moneylender</p>	<p>SL: ‘Si había prestamistas —y siempre estaban allí, si no habían huido con los federales— declaraba nulas todas las deudas.’</p> <p>Source: https://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0266.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘Even he was sensible of the decorous atmosphere and even he began to respond to the religious stimulus. In a whisper Mr Cunningham drew Mr Kernan’s attention to Mr Harford, the moneylender, who sat some distance off, and to Mr Fanning, the registration agent and mayor maker of the city, who was sitting immediately under the pulpit beside one of the newly elected councillors of the ward.’</p> <p>Source:</p>

				https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm
puta (n, a, perjorative)	<p>1. adj. malson. U. como calificación denigratoria. <i>Me quedé en la puta calle.</i></p> <p>2. adj. malson. U. c. antífrasis, para ponderar. <i>Ha vuelto a ganar. ¡Qué puta suerte tiene!</i></p> <p>3. adj. malson. U. para enfatizar la ausencia o la escasez de algo. <i>No te ngo un puto duro.</i></p> <p>4. m. y f. malson. prostituto.</p> <p>Source: https://dle.rae.es/puto?m=form</p>	whore (n)	<p>1 <i>somewhat old-fashioned</i> : a person who engages in sexual intercourse for pay : PROSTITUTE</p> <p>2 <i>offensive</i> : a promiscuous or immoral woman</p> <p>Source: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/venal</p>	<p>SL: ‘Cuando tu Jefe descubría a su hijito borracho, rodeado de putas y amigos también borrachos?’</p> <p>Source: http://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/Mario%20Vargas%20Llosa%20-%20La%20fiesta%20del%20chivo.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘You accept judgment from a judge who sells himself like the worst whore in the streets.’</p> <p>Source: http://www.kkoworld.com/kitablar/Mario_Puzo-The_Godfather_eng.pdf</p>
resplandor (n)	<p>1. s. m. Luz muy intensa que procede de un cuerpo luminoso</p> <p>2. Brillo muy intenso</p> <p>3. Esplendor, lucimiento o gloria.</p> <p>Source: https://es.thefreedictionary.com/Resplandor</p>	brilliance (n)	<p>1) great brightness; luster: <i>the brilliance of a fine diamond.</i></p> <p>2) excellence or distinction; conspicuous talent, mental ability, etc.</p> <p>3) splendor, elegance, or magnificence: <i>the brilliance of the court of Louis XIV.</i></p>	<p>SL: ‘El Chevrolet Bel Air seguía acelerando - debía de ir a más de cien por hora ya- y el auto de adelante se perfilaba nítido en el resplandor de las luces altas que había puesto Imbert.’</p> <p>Source: http://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/Mario%20Vargas%20Llosa%20-%20La%20fiesta%20del%20chivo.pdf</p> <p>TL: ‘The eyes were</p>

			<p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/brilliance?s=t</p>	<p>brown and they had a peculiar brilliance as though points of light were shining behind them.'</p> <p>Source: https://epdf.pub/junky.html</p>
tuberculoso (a, n)	<p>1De la tuberculosis o relacionado con ella. adjective & masculine and feminine noun</p> <p>1[persona] que padece tuberculosis. adjective</p> <p>1del tubérculo o que tiene relación con esta parte de una raíz o de un tallo subterráneo.</p> <p>Source: https://www.lexico.com/es/definicion/tuberculoso</p>	<p>consumptive (a, n)</p>	<p>A consumptive person suffers from tuberculosis. <i>[old-fashioned]</i></p> <p>Source: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/consumptive</p>	<p>SL: 'Si hombres como ellos guardan silencio como es lo más probable, los otros triunfanciegamente, sin mala intención por supuesto, sin saber que ese operado, que ese tuberculoso, que ese herido desnudo en una cama está doblemente solo rodeado de seres que se mueven como detrás de un vidrio, desde otro tiempo...'</p> <p>Source: https://freeditorial.com/en/books/rayuela/readonline</p> <p>TL: 'Living in a bogswamp, eating cheap food and the streets paved with dust, horsedung and consumptives' spits.'</p> <p>Source (link to PDF download): https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4300</p>

9. SL Corpus

Juan Jose Arreola, "Parabola de Treque"

Available here: <https://ciudadseva.com/texto/parabola-del-trueque/>

Al grito de «¡Cambio esposas viejas por nuevas!» el mercader recorrió las calles del pueblo arrastrando su convoy de pintados carromatos.

Las transacciones fueron muy rápidas, a base de unos precios inexorablemente fijos. Los interesados recibieron pruebas de calidad y certificados de garantía, pero nadie pudo escoger. Las mujeres, según el comerciante, eran de veinticuatro quilates. Todas rubias y todas circasianas. Y más que rubias, doradas como candeleros.

Al ver la adquisición de su vecino, los hombres corrían desaforados en pos del traficante. Muchos quedaron arruinados. Sólo un recién casado pudo hacer cambio a la par. Su esposa estaba flamante y no desmerecía ante ninguna de las extranjeras. Pero no era tan rubia como ellas.

Yo me quedé temblando detrás de la ventana, al paso de un carro suntuoso. Recostada entre almohadones y cortinas, una mujer que parecía un leopardo me miró deslumbrante, como desde un bloque de topacio. Presa de aquel contagioso frenesí, estuve a punto de estrellarme contra los vidrios. Avergonzado, me aparté de la ventana y volví el rostro para mirar a Sofía.

Ella estaba tranquila, bordando sobre un nuevo mantel las iniciales de costumbre. Ajena al tumulto, ensartó la aguja con sus dedos seguros. Sólo yo que la conozco podía advertir su tenue, imperceptible palidez. Al final de la calle, el mercader lanzó por último la turbadora proclama: «¡Cambio esposas viejas por nuevas!». Pero yo me quedé con los pies clavados en el suelo, cerrando los oídos a la oportunidad definitiva. Afuera, el pueblo respiraba una atmósfera de escándalo.

Sofía y yo cenamos sin decir una palabra, incapaces de cualquier comentario.

-¿Por qué no me cambiaste por otra? -me dijo al fin, llevándose los platos.

No pude contestarle, y los dos caímos más hondo en el vacío. Nos acostamos temprano, pero no podíamos dormir. Separados y silenciosos, esa noche hicimos un papel de convidados de piedra.

Desde entonces vivimos en una pequeña isla desierta, rodeados por la felicidad tempestuosa. El pueblo parecía un gallinero infestado de pavos reales. Indolentes y voluptuosas, las mujeres pasaban todo el día echadas en la cama. Surgían al atardecer, resplandecientes a los rayos del sol, como sedosas banderas amarillas.

Ni un momento se separaban de ellas los maridos complacientes y sumisos. Obstinados en la miel, descuidaban su trabajo sin pensar en el día de mañana.

Yo pasé por tonto a los ojos del vecindario, y perdí los pocos amigos que tenía. Todos pensaron que quise darles una lección, poniendo el ejemplo absurdo de la fidelidad. Me señalaban con el dedo, riéndose, lanzándome pullas desde sus opulentas trincheras. Me pusieron sobrenombres obscenos, y yo acabé por sentirme como una especie de eunuco en aquel edén placentero.

Por su parte, Sofía se volvió cada vez más silenciosa y retraída. Se negaba a salir a la calle conmigo, para evitarme contrastes y comparaciones. Y lo que es peor, cumplía de mala gana con sus más estrictos deberes de casada. A decir verdad, los dos nos sentíamos apenados de unos amores tan modestamente conyugales.

Su aire de culpabilidad era lo que más me ofendía. Se sintió responsable de que yo no tuviera una mujer como las de otros. Se puso a pensar desde el primer momento que su humilde semblante de

todos los días era incapaz de apartar la imagen de la tentación que yo llevaba en la cabeza. Ante la hermosura invasora, se batió en retirada hasta los últimos rincones del mudo resentimiento. Yo agoté en vano nuestras pequeñas economías, comprándole adornos, perfumes, alhajas y vestidos.

-¡No me tengas lástima!

Y volvía la espalda a todos los regalos. Si me esforzaba en mimarla, venía su respuesta entre lágrimas:

-¡Nunca te perdonaré que no me hayas cambiado!

Y me echaba la culpa de todo. Yo perdía la paciencia. Y recordando a la que parecía un leopardo, deseaba de todo corazón que volviera a pasar el mercader.

Pero un día las rubias comenzaron a oxidarse. La pequeña isla en que vivíamos recobró su calidad de oasis, rodeada por el desierto. Un desierto hostil, lleno de salvajes alaridos de descontento. Deslumbrados a primera vista, los hombres no pusieron realmente atención en las mujeres. Ni les echaron una buena mirada, ni se les ocurrió ensayar su metal. Lejos de ser nuevas, eran de segunda, de tercera, de sabe Dios cuántas manos... El mercader les hizo sencillamente algunas reparaciones indispensables, y les dio un baño de oro tan bajo y tan delgado, que no resistió la prueba de las primeras lluvias.

El primer hombre que notó algo extraño se hizo el desentendido, y el segundo también. Pero el tercero, que era farmacéutico, advirtió un día entre el aroma de su mujer, la característica emanación del sulfato de cobre. Procediendo con alarma a un examen minucioso, halló manchas oscuras en la superficie de la señora y puso el grito en el cielo.

Muy pronto aquellos lunares salieron a la cara de todas, como si entre las mujeres brotara una epidemia de herrumbre. Los maridos se ocultaron unos a otros las fallas de sus esposas, atormentándose en secreto con terribles sospechas acerca de su procedencia. Poco a poco salió a relucir la verdad, y cada quien supo que había recibido una mujer falsificada.

El recién casado que se dejó llevar por la corriente del entusiasmo que despertaron los cambios, cayó en un profundo abatimiento. Obsesionado por el recuerdo de un cuerpo de blancura inequívoca, pronto dio muestras de extravío. Un día se puso a remover con ácidos corrosivos los restos de oro que había en el cuerpo de su esposa, y la dejó hecha una lástima, una verdadera momia.

Sofía y yo nos encontramos a merced de la envidia y del odio. Ante esa actitud general, creí conveniente tomar algunas precauciones. Pero a Sofía le costaba trabajo disimular su júbilo, y dio en salir a la calle con sus mejores atavíos, haciendo gala entre tanta desolación. Lejos de atribuir algún mérito a mi conducta, Sofía pensaba naturalmente que yo me había quedado con ella por cobarde, pero que no me faltaron las ganas de cambiarla.

Hoy salió del pueblo la expedición de los maridos engañados, que van en busca del mercader. Ha sido verdaderamente un triste espectáculo. Los hombres levantaban al cielo los puños, jurando venganza. Las mujeres iban de luto, lacias y desgredadas, como plañideras leprosas. El único que se quedó es el famoso recién casado, por cuya razón se teme. Dando pruebas de un apego maniático, dice que ahora será fiel hasta que la muerte lo separe de la mujer ennegrecida, ésa que él mismo acabó de estropear a base de ácido sulfúrico.

Yo no sé la vida que me aguarda al lado de una Sofía quién sabe si necia o si prudente. Por lo pronto, le van a faltar admiradores. Ahora estamos en una isla verdadera, rodeada de soledad por todas partes. Antes de irse, los maridos declararon que buscarán hasta el infierno los rastros del estafador. Y realmente, todos ponían al decirlo una cara de condenados.

Sofía no es tan morena como parece. A la luz de la lámpara, su rostro dormido se va llenando de reflejos. Como si del sueño le salieran leves, dorados pensamientos de orgullo.

Mariano Azuela, "Los de Abajo"

Available here (I was only able to find a PDF of this text, and therefore have not been able to copy and paste it directly): <https://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/142337.pdf>

Salvador Elizondo, "Puente de Piedra"

Available here: <https://circulodepoesia.com/2011/01/puente-de-piedra-cuento-de-salvador-elizondo/>

"Tienes que venir al *pic-nic*", le había dicho, "esa será como la prueba de fuego de tus sentimientos". Ella no hubiera querido estar sola con él allí en el campo. Pero o podía negarse porque muchas veces, desde que se habían conocido, ya le había dicho: "me gustaría estar sola contigo en un cuarto; ver cómo eres en la intimidad, cuando te sientas en un sillón y te pones a leer o a fumar". Por eso el *pic-nic* era como una fórmula de transacción. La soledad, pero no la soledad sucia del consabido departamento equívoco, pequeño y abigarrado, con los inevitables carteles de París y de Picasso, el cuadro dizque abstracto, el tocadiscos, los cigarrillos resecos, los libros que no interesan y los muebles mal tapizados, sino una soledad abierta hacia las copas de los árboles y hacia las faldas de los montes en la mañana. "Será un encuentro en la naturaleza," había dicho un poco para obligarla y un poco para que ella estuviera segura de sus buenas intenciones. Ambos gustaban, sin embargo, de estar al cubierto. Amaban el cine y los cafés, y las vueltas a la manzana en automóvil porque así siempre estaban bajo techo. Parecía como que las estrellas los inquietaban y de noche e detenían en alguna esquina solitaria y se quedaban hablando largo rato en el interior del coche. Sólo el sol de mediodía los llenaba de entusiasmo a pesar de sus inclinaciones al mediodía le gustaba encontrarse en el centro y mezclarse al bullicio de los empleados y de los turistas porque ellos eran como una isla bajo los árboles de los jardines públicos y ella le decía: "¡Cuántas veces he pasado por aquí y nunca me había parecido como ahora!" Se equivocaba quizá, pero en esa equivocación estaba contenido todo lo que él amaba en ella y le aterrorizaba la posibilidad de que su separación inminente tuviera lugar entre un estrépito de automóviles o en una *garçonnière* de mal gusto. El *pic-nic* ponía una nota neutra pero que podía interpretarse como sublime, en el recuerdo de aquella escena de despedida. Ella había aceptado. Él esperaba retenerla para siempre, pero ella, después de haber aceptado, llegaba a su casa por la noche y lloraba igual que siempre, encerrada en su cuarto mientras sus padres y sus hermanos pequeños veían la televisión. Era como una anciana o como una niña. De la ilusión pasaba al desencanto, temerosa siempre de perder la estabilidad de sus sentimientos. Pero su intuición, que las más de las veces la inquietaba, le decía ahora que ese día de campo no tendría la menor importancia. Por eso consideraba que no había hecho mal aceptando.

Él cifraba todas sus esperanzas en ese paseo. Odiaba la naturaleza, es verdad. Sobre todo, ese campo agresivo en que los perros hambrientos acudían invariablemente a devorar los restos de la comida y en donde, como las playas, siempre surgía el espectáculo de esas mujeres gordas que llevan pantalones, esos empleados deplorables que juegan fútbol con sus hijos, esos adolescentes que tocan con sus guitarras canciones de moda. Durante aquellos días hizo un minucioso inventario de las localidades y de las posibilidades que ofrecía el día de campo. El trópico no era lo suficientemente sereno para ser el escenario del diálogo que tenía previsto. El vino tal vez sufriría un efecto demasiado violento o demasiado opresivo en el calor. Sería preciso dirigirse hacia el norte. Ese paisaje alpino inmediatamente al alcance de la mano, con sus barrancas de abetos, con sus riachuelos de guijarros, con su posibilidad de detenerse un momento en la caminata para recoger una piña y exclamar: "¡Mira, está llena de piñones!", como si en esta frase quedara comprendido un vago amor a la naturaleza. Y ese frío tierno, templado, que siempre justifica una botella de vino, un queso fuerte con unos trozos de pan, un grito salvaje de efusión musical en medio del silencio que sólo estaría roto por el ruido de la corriente de un arroyo.

¿Llovería? En la tarde, quizá. Si llovía temprano, esto sería una buena ocasión para encerrarse en el coche para escuchar la radio y ponerse bajo techo. Besarse y quedarse quietos viendo resbalar la lluvia en el parabrisas y en las ventanillas sin decir una sola palabra. Todo tenía que estar previsto. No estaría por demás llamar al Observatorio el sábado por la tarde para cerciorarse de las condiciones del tiempo para el día siguiente o consultarlo en los periódicos de la tarde. De la perfección de un instante dependía la realización de un sueño. Su decisión estaba regida por un prejuicio contra la luminosidad, contra la euforia agobiante del sol y del verano. La de ellos había sido una relación mantenida bajo la lluvia, en la ventisca que hacia golpear las puertas, sombreada de nubarrones y agitada de presurosas carreras para llegar a la portezuela del coche cuando empezaban a caer las primeras gotas del chubasco. Tuvo por eso buen cuidado de cargar la cámara fotográfica con una película ultra sensible, apropiada para esa diminuta presencia de sol. El sábado por la tarde consultó atentamente los horarios de las estaciones de radio: "...12.30 p.m., canciones italianas; 1.00 p.m., preludios de Chopin...; 4.00 p.m., *La Fanciulla del West*..." En fin...

Pero en realidad era un paseo como cualquier otro. Cuántas veces lo había visto como si no fueran a volver a verse jamás. Su encuentro había sido una larga despedida que siempre se prolongaba más y más sin que sus sentimientos cristalizaran, sin que entre ellos se realizara ese contacto que lleva consigo la revelación de una verdad presentida pero siempre desconocida. Este paseo por el campo, maliciosamente inventado, maliciosamente aceptado como un hecho inevitable, representaba una definición de todos esos sentimientos desvaídos e informes. Se había impuesto una disciplina regida por la cautela. La cita tendría lugar después de que hubieran pasado varios días sin verse. "Tienes que meditar un poco acerca de lo nuestro", le había dicho él y ella había aceptado gustosa esta separación porque en el fondo le inquietaba la proximidad que ya se había establecido entre ellos. "Nuestra verdadera relación se decidirá el domingo y entonces tendremos que afrontarla".

Cuando la vio salir en pantalones y con aquella blusa ligera sintió un desencanto momentáneo. "La apariencia de las mujeres rara vez coincide con los sentimientos que nos inspiran", pensó sin saber qué responder al saludo mitad cariñoso, pero mitad irónico, que ella le dirigía sonriente desde la puerta de aquella casa ajena –la de una amiga- en la que se habían dado cita. Hubiera preferido una falda de tela escocesa, un saco de tweed, unos mocasines de cuero rojizo que fueran como la premonición de un bosque de pinos. La blusa, sobre todo, indicaba evidentemente hacia el trópico y a la vez que inventariaba sus preferencias sólo pudo decir torpemente, sin la acostumbrada entonación satírica, a modo de saludo: "Buenos días, señora condesa...", pero esta fórmula convenida entre ellos había sonado tan falsa que se mordió el labio inferior para reprochárselo. El encuentro era poco feliz desde el principio. ella subió al coche y él tuvo dificultad para hacerlo arrancar.

-Norte o sur, ¿qué prefieres? –le dijo cuando llegaron a la gran avenida en que era preciso elegir el rumbo.

-Norte –respondió ella-. Está más cerca. Vamos a Puente de Piedra.

Se alegró de que la elección de ella coincidiera con su propia preferencia, pero le pareció que la respuesta delataba el deseo de consumir este sacrificio con un mínimo de ceremonia, de vacilación y de entusiasmo.

Apenas hablaban durante la primera parte del trayecto. Ella a veces se inquietaba, de esa manera absolutamente animal en que se inquietan las mujeres ante el peligro físico. "No corras tanto", decía. Una curva pronunciada, un ciclista incauto, un perro azorado que pretendía cruzar la carretera en medio de aquel tráfico de automóviles y de camiones llenos de excursionistas, le producían un sobresalto mecánico que sólo se iba aliviando con las presencia cada vez más tangible del campo. Cuando las últimas casas quedaron atrás, una locuacidad sin sentido la invadió y empezó a desarrollar

su tema predilecto: el de su capacidad para resolver problemas de sus amigos sin acertar jamás a resolver los suyos.

-Yo no sé... supongo que no soy madura –decía sin percatarse de los primeros pinos que comenzaban a verse desde la carretera-. Supongo que nunca llegaré a serlo... Siento que me falta algo fundamental de la vida, pero me resisto... Estoy “bloqueada”, como dicen. Malú en cambio... yo no lo entiendo... con todo y que Freddy es un encanto...

Esa conversación lo irritaba. Siempre había creído que la sabiduría de las mujeres no podía ser producto más que del alcohol o del amor. “¿Por qué no habla de otra cosa?”, pensaba, “...de nosotros, de sus sentimientos hacia mí, de lo que está pasando ahora, en este paseo...”

Por fin llegaron. Era un lugar desierto bajo el cielo nublado. Había dejado que ella lo guiara hasta allí haciéndole creer que no conocía aquel lugar, pero ella no lo tuvo en cuenta y tomándolo de la mano se ofreció a mostrarle las bellezas que, ella, ya conocía.

-Allá abajo hay un riachuelo y una caída de agua- le dijo.

Descendían trabajosamente la pendiente, saltando de una roca a otra, esquivando las ramas de los pinos abatidas hasta el suelo por la lluvia que había caído durante la noche. Cuando llegaron abajo, el riachuelo y la caída de agua habían desaparecido. Un lecho de guijarros, de piedras lisas y redondas, era lo único que quedaba.

-Han secado el río... ¡pobrecito! –dijo.

Él no supo que responder, pero en ese momento sintió como que apenas se conocían. En aquella hondonada, en la proximidad de aquel recuerdo que en realidad era sólo de ella, se habían separado hasta quedar lejanos el uno del otro, como dos garabatos sin sentido. Después volvieron a escalar la cuesta, aferrándose a las ramas caídas y llegaron sofocados hasta el coche.

-Vamos a sacar las cosas.

-No; espera. Es temprano todavía.

Él quería prolongar al máximo cada una de las etapas del paseo.

-Hace frío, ¿verdad? –dijo.

-Sí, me va a dar el reumatismo.

Cada vez que pensaba que ella era un ser enfermizo la amaba más. En ese momento hubiera querido tomarla de la mano, acariciarla, expresarle de alguna manera el deleite que en él producía la compasión que ella le inspiraba. La ascensión de la barranca los había fatigado. Ella abrió la portezuela del coche y se sentó con los pies colgando hacia afuera en el asiento delantero. Con la cabeza apoyada sobre su brazo en el respaldo del asiento. Él la veía, repitiéndose a sí mismo, sin atreverse a decirselo en voz alta: “¡Qué bella te ves así!, ¡qué bella te ves así...!”

-Nunca he podido entender en qué consiste el reumatismo –dijo al fin.

-Es espantoso. Yo he tenido desde que era chica –dijo y luego sonrió tristemente, agregando-: Allá más adelante está el puente de piedra.

-Comeremos allí, si quieres... -y abrió la portezuela trasera para sentarse un momento, como ella. Luego alargó el brazo para acariciarle el cuello y la nuca mientras ella apoyaba la cabeza fuertemente contra la mano de él.

-Tengo mucha hambre.

Espera; vamos a quedarnos así un rato. Te tomaré unas fotos.

-Estoy horrible en estas fachas.

-Pásame el exposímetro. A ver si salen aquí dentro del coche.

Ella alargó el brazo hacia la cajuelita y luego le tendió el exposímetro. Él, al tomarlo, sintió tener que romper aquella caricia estática.

-Te voy a tomar una foto como del *Vogue*. Pásame la cámara.

Se puso a escrutar ese rostro largo rato a través del visor despulido mientras ella hacía caras chistosas y serias. Se deleitaba afocando y desafocando aquella imagen, haciéndola surgir de la bruma, enturbiándola luego y luego, nuevamente, haciéndola nítida.

-Te amo –dijo de pronto y ella se turbó.

En ese momento oprimió el disparador.

-Eso no vale –dijo ella-, es un truco. Te odio.

Pero él seguía mirándola a través del lente de la cámara fotográfica.

-Vamos a comer algo, te digo.

-Te digo que te esperes un momento. Otra foto.

-No; ya no. Estoy horrible.

-Estas guapísima.

-Es imposible; me estoy muriendo de hambre.

Caminaban hacia el pequeño llano donde estaban las ruinas del puente de piedra. El coche ya casi se había perdido de vista cuando escucharon un grito diminuto, apenas perceptible en la lejanía, como un gemido agudísimo y perfectamente definido en su pequeñez. Se detuvieron. Volvió la mirada hacia el coche junto al cual pudo distinguir la figura imprecisa de un niño. Era el primer ser humano que encontraban desde que habían llegado. El niño les hizo un signo informe y lento con el brazo en alto que parecía apuntar hacia el automóvil.

-¡Sí; cuídalo! –le gritó señalando vagamente en dirección del coche y luego, haciendo un gesto que describía con el índice extendido un círculo en el aire-: ¡Al rato regresamos! –agregó y siguieron caminando hacia el llano.

-¡Qué soledad! –dijo uno de los dos cuando se sentaron sobre el pasto seco cerca de los aros derruidos. Todo lo que decían era lugar común. Decidieron entonces comer en silencio, en ese silencio hecho de frases sin importancia.

-¡Hmmm... qué bueno está este vino!

-Debía haber traído unos *martinis* en el *thermos* para antes de comer.

-No me gustan los *martinis*.

-Yo en realidad prefiero el *gibson*.

-¿Qué es el *gibson*?

-Es como el *martini*, pero con cebollita.

-El camembert está en su punto... y luego con ese vino...

-Realmente está bueno.

-¿De qué año es?

-59; una de las mejores.

-Lástima que no hay nada de postre.

-Hay besos...

Ella sonrió y él encendió el radio de transistores, pero al poco rato se fue la onda.

Tampoco habían traído café. Cuando terminaron de comer se tendieron lado a lado y se quedaron largo rato fumando y viendo pasar las nubes que se aglomeraban poco a poco para hacerse lluvia. Una débil somnolencia se iba apoderando de ellos, pero se resistían tenazmente al sueño. Era preciso hablar. Era preciso resolver las cosas, hacer el balance de esta experiencia. Él se incorporó y apoyado sobre los codos le acariciaba la cabellera quitándole las briznas de pasto, rozando con las puntas de sus dedos la piel de sus mejillas y de su frente, colocando el antebrazo debajo de su cabeza para que le sirviera de almohadilla. La tomó de los hombros y oprimiéndola fuertemente reclinó la cabeza sobre su seno, escuchando su respiración, deseando poder oír su pulso. Luego volvió a incorporarse y la miró fijamente a los ojos.

-¿Verdad que eres mía?

Ella no respondió. Cerró los ojos sonriendo, fingiéndose dormida.

-Dime que eres mía...

A lo lejos, como si viniera de un mundo remotísimo, se oía el ruido de los camiones en la carretera. Ella extendió el brazo y le mesó suavemente el pelo que le caía sobre la frente, “¿Por qué me lo preguntas?, ¿por qué...?”, pensó sin atreverse a abrir los ojos, sin atreverse a encontrar esa mirada que le caía encima como un peso de plomo.

-¿Por qué me lo preguntas? –dijo apoyando su mano sobre los hombros de él, aproximándola lentamente a su cuello, atrayéndolo levemente hacia sí sin lograr que él se acercara para besarla.

-Dime que me amas –le dijo él.

Ella se incorporó con los ojos cerrados, hacia él, ofreciéndole sus labios. Se besaron. Pero no bien se habían tocado sus bocas, un grito, como un borbotón de sangre, como una carcajada en una pesadilla los separó. Ella estaba lívida y sus labios temblaban en espasmo del grito que acababa de lanzar, un grito que como un pájaro maléfico aleteó en las copas de los pinos y se perdió a lo lejos de las faldas de los montes; sus manos crispadas le clavaban las uñas en los brazos y sus ojos horrorizados estaban fijos en un punto invisible, inquietante, cercano.

-Mira... -le dijo con voz trémula, ocultando el rostro contra su pecho..., allí... atrás de ti...

Reteniéndola aún volvió la cabeza y su abrazo se congeló en un escalofrío que le cruzó el rostro como un azote. También hubiera querido gritar, pero no pudo.

A unos pasos de ellos estaba el niño. Era un albino deforme demente. Su mirada escueta, tenaz, de albino, surgía de los párpados enrojecidos como sale la pus de una llaga y su cráneo diminuto, cubierto de lana gris, se alzaba lentamente para caer, como de plomo, sobre el pecho cubierto de harapos, con un ritmo precario e informe que le hacía salir la lengua fuera de la boca desdentada, entreabierta. Su sonrisa era como una mueca obscena. Las años sonrosadas de idiota dibujaban un gesto incomprensible y sucio apuntando los dedos escaldados hacia ellos.

El retorno fue largo y silencioso. Cuando llegaron a la casa de la amiga llovía a cántaros y ella se quedó en el coche todavía unos minutos hasta que amainó. Luego descendió y desde el portón se volvió hacia él.

-Adiós –musitó haciendo un gesto imperceptible con la mano.

Aún estaba pálida y así la recordaría para siempre.

-Adiós... -dijo el como si estuviera hablando consigo mismo, haciendo un movimiento de cabeza detrás del vidrio empañado de la ventanilla.

Pero los dos estaban pensando en otra cosa.

Carlos Fuentes, “La Muerte de Artemio Cruz”

Available here (I was only able to find a PDF of this text, and therefore have not been able to copy and paste it directly): <https://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0266.pdf>

Elena Gara, “La Culpa es de Los Tlaxcaltecas”

Available here: <https://ciudadseva.com/texto/la-culpa-es-de-los-tlaxcaltecas/>

Nacha oyó que llamaban en la puerta a la puerta de la cocina y se quedó quieta. Cuando volvieron a insistir abrió con sigilo y miró la noche. La señora Laura apareció con un dedo en los labios en señal de silencio. Todavía llevaba el traje blanco quemado y sucio de tierra y sangre.

—¡Señora!... —suspiró Nacha.

La señora Laura entró de puntillas y miró con ojos interrogantes a la cocinera. Luego, confiada, se sentó junto a la estufa y miró su cocina como si no la hubiera visto nunca.

—Nachita, dame un cafecito... Tengo frío.

—Señora, el señor... el señor la va a matar. Nosotros ya la dábamos por muerta.

—¿Por muerta?

Laura miró con asombro los mosaicos blancos de la cocina, subió las piernas sobre la silla, se abrazó las rodillas y se quedó pensativa. Nacha puso a hervir el agua para hacer el café y miró de reojo a su patrona; no se le ocurrió ni una palabra más. La señora recargó la cabeza sobre las rodillas, parecía muy triste.

—¿Sabes, Nacha? La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas.

Nacha no contestó, prefirió mirar el agua que no hervía.

Afuera la noche desdibujaba a las rosas del jardín y ensombrecía a las higueras. Muy atrás de las ramas brillaban las ventanas iluminadas de las casas vecinas. La cocina estaba separada del mundo por un muro invisible de tristeza, por un compás de espera.

—¿No estás de acuerdo, Nacha?

—Sí, señora...

—Yo soy como ellos: traidora... —dijo Laura con melancolía.

La cocinera se cruzó de brazos en espera de que el agua soltara los hervores.

—¿Y tú, Nachita, eres traidora?

La miró con esperanzas. Si Nacha compartía su calidad traidora, la entendería, y Laura necesitaba que alguien la entendiera esa noche.

Nacha reflexionó unos instantes, se volvió a mirar el agua que empezaba a hervir con estrépito, la sirvió sobre el café y el aroma caliente la hizo sentirse a gusto cerca de su patrona.

—Sí, yo también soy traicionera, señora Laurita.

Contenta, sirvió el café en una tacita blanca, le puso dos cuadritos de azúcar y lo colocó en la mesa, frente a la señora. Esta, ensimismada, dio unos sorbitos.

—¿Sabes, Nachita? Ahora sé por qué tuvimos tantos accidentes en el famoso viaje a Guanajuato. En Mil Cumbres se nos acabó la gasolina. Margarita se asustó porque ya estaba anocheciendo. Un camionero nos regaló una poquita para llegar a Morelia. En Cuitzeo, al cruzar el puente blanco, el coche se paró de repente. Margarita se disgustó conmigo, ya sabes que le dan miedo los caminos vacíos y los ojos de los indios. Cuando pasó un coche lleno de turistas, ella se fue al pueblo a buscar un mecánico y yo me quedé en la mitad del puente blanco, que atraviesa el lago seco con fondo de lajas blancas. La luz era muy blanca y el puente, las lajas y el automóvil empezaron a flotar en ella.

Luego la luz se partió en varios pedazos hasta convertirse en miles de puntitos y empezó a girar hasta que se quedó fija como un retrato. El tiempo había dado la vuelta completa, como cuando ves una tarjeta postal y luego la vuelves para ver lo que hay escrito atrás. Así llegué en el lago de Cuitzeo, hasta la otra niña que fui. La luz produce esas catástrofes, cuando el sol se vuelve blanco y uno está en el mismo centro de sus rayos. Los pensamientos también se vuelven mil puntitos, y uno sufre vértigo. Yo, en ese momento, miré el tejido de mi vestido blanco y en ese instante oí sus pasos. No me asombré. Levanté los ojos y lo vi venir. En ese instante, también recordé la magnitud de mi traición, tuve miedo y quise huir. Pero el tiempo se cerró alrededor de mí, se volvió único y precederó y no pude moverme del asiento del automóvil. “Alguna vez te encontrarás frente a tus acciones convertidas en piedras irrevocables como esa”, me dijeron de niña al enseñarme la imagen de un dios, que ahora no recuerdo cuál era. Todo se olvida, ¿verdad Nachita?, pero se olvida solo por un tiempo, En aquel entonces también las palabras me parecieron de piedra, solo que de una piedra fluida y cristalina. La piedra se solidificaba al terminar cada palabra, para quedar escrita para siempre en el tiempo. ¿No eran así las palabras de tus mayores?

Nacha reflexionó unos instantes, luego asintió convencida.

—Así eran, señora Laurita.

—Lo terrible es, lo descubrí en ese instante, que todo lo increíble es verdadero. Allí venía él, avanzando por la orilla del puente, con la piel ardida por el sol y el peso de la derrota sobre los hombros desnudos. Sus pasos sonaban como hojas secas. Traía los ojos brillantes. Desde lejos me llegaron sus chispas negras y vi ondear sus cabellos negros en medio de la luz blanquísima del encuentro. Antes de que pudiera evitarlo lo tuve frente a mis ojos. Se detuvo, se cogió de la portezuela del coche y me miró. Tenía una cortada en la mano izquierda, los cabellos llenos de polvo, y por la herida del hombro le escurría una sangre tan roja, que parecía negra. No me dijo nada. Pero yo supe que iba huyendo, vencido. Quiso decirme que yo merecía la muerte, y al mismo tiempo me dijo que mi muerte ocasionaría la suya. Andaba malherido, en busca mía.

“—La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas —le dije. Él se volvió a mirar al cielo. Después recogió otra vez sus ojos sobre los míos.

“—¿Qué te haces? —me preguntó con su voz profunda. No pude decirle que me había casado, porque estoy casada con él. Hay cosas que no se pueden decir, tú lo sabes, Nachita.

“—¿Y los otros? —le pregunté.

“—Los que salieron vivos andan en las mismas trazas que yo—. Vi que cada palabra le lastimaba la lengua y me callé, pensando en la vergüenza de mi traición.

“—Ya sabes que tengo miedo y que por eso traiciono...

“—Ya lo sé —me contestó y agachó la cabeza. Me conoce desde chica, Nacha. Su padre y el mío eran hermanos y nosotros primos. Siempre me quiso, al menos eso dijo y así lo creímos todos. En el puente yo tenía vergüenza. La sangre le seguía corriendo por el pecho. Saqué un pañuelito de mi bolso y sin una palabra, empecé a limpiársela. También yo siempre lo quise, Nachita, porque él es lo contrario de mí: no tiene miedo y no es traidor. Me cogió la mano y me la miró.

“—Está muy desteñida, parece una mano de ellos — me dijo.

“—Hace ya tiempo que no me pega el sol—. Bajó los ojos y me dejó caer la mano: Estuvimos así, en silencio, oyendo correr la sangre sobre su pecho. No me reprochaba nada, bien sabe de lo que soy capaz. Pero los hilos de su sangre escribían sobre su pecho que su corazón seguía guardando mis palabras y mi cuerpo. Allí supe, Nachita, que el tiempo y el amor son uno solo.

“—¿Y mi casa? —le pregunté.

“—Vamos a verla—. Me agarró con su mano caliente, como agarraba a su escudo y me di cuenta de que no lo llevaba. “Lo perdió en la huida”, me dije, y me dejé llevar. Sus pasos sonaron en la luz de Cuitzeo iguales que en la otra luz: sordos y apacibles. Caminamos por la ciudad que ardía en las orillas del agua. Cerré los ojos. Ya te dije, Nacha, que soy cobarde. O tal vez el humo y el polvo me sacaron lágrimas. Me senté en una piedra y me tapé la cara con las manos.

“—Ya no camino... —le dije.

“—Ya llegamos —me contestó. Se puso en cuclillas junto a mí y con la punta de los dedos acarició mi vestido blanco.

“—Si no quieres ver cómo quedó, no lo veas —me dijo quedito.

“Su pelo negro me hacía sombra. No estaba enojado, nada más estaba triste. Antes nunca me hubiera atrevido a besarlo, pero ahora he aprendido a no tenerle respeto al hombre, y me abracé a su cuello y lo besé en la boca.

“—Siempre has estado en la alcoba más preciosa de mi pecho —me dijo. Agachó la cabeza y miró la tierra llena de piedras secas. Con una de ellas dibujó dos rayitas paralelas, que prolongó hasta que se juntaron y se hicieron una sola.

“—Somos tú y yo —me dijo sin levantar la vista. Yo, Nachita, me quedé sin palabras.

“—Ya falta poco para que se acabe el tiempo y seamos uno solo... por eso te andaba buscando—. Se me había olvidado, Nacha, que cuando se gaste el tiempo, los dos hemos de quedarnos el uno en el otro, para entrar en el tiempo verdadero convertidos en uno solo.

Cuando me dijo eso lo miré a los ojos. Antes solo me atrevía a mirárselos cuando me tomaba, pero ahora, como ya te dije, he aprendido a no respetar los ojos del hombre. También es cierto que no quería ver lo que sucedía a mi alrededor... soy muy cobarde. Recordé los alaridos y volví a oírlos: estridentes, llameantes en mitad de la mañana. También oí los golpes de las piedras y las vi pasar zumbando sobre mi cabeza. Él se puso de rodillas frente a mí y cruzó los brazos sobre mi cabeza para hacerme un tejadito.

“—Este es el final del hombre —dije.

“—Así es —contestó con su voz encima de la mía. Y me vi en sus ojos y en su cuerpo. ¿Sería un venado el que me llevaba hasta su ladera? ¿O una estrella que me lanzaba a escribir señales en el cielo? Su voz escribió signos de sangre en mi pecho y mi vestido blanco quedó rayado como un tigre rojo y blanco.

“—A la noche vuelvo, espérame... —suspiró. Agarró su escudo y me miró desde muy arriba.

“—Nos falta poco para ser uno —agregó con su misma cortesía.

Cuando se fue, volví a oír los gritos del combate y salí corriendo en medio de la lluvia de piedras y me perdí hasta el coche parado en el puente del Lago de Cuitzeo.

“—¿Qué pasa? ¿Estás herida? —me gritó Margarita cuando llegó. Asustada, tocaba la sangre de mi vestido blanco y señalaba la sangre que tenía en los labios y la tierra que se había metido en mis cabellos. Desde otro coche, el mecánico de Cuitzeo me miraba con sus ojos muertos.

“—¡Estos indios salvajes!... ¡No se puede dejar sola a una señora! —dijo al saltar de su automóvil, dizque para venir a auxiliarme. Al anoecer llegamos a la ciudad de México. ¡Cómo había cambiado, Nachita, casi no puede creerlo! A las doce del día todavía estaban los guerreros y ahora ya ni huella de su paso. Tampoco quedaban escombros. Pasamos por el Zócalo silencioso y triste; de la otra plaza, no quedaba ¡nada! Margarita me miraba de reojo. Al llegar a la casa nos abriste tú. ¿Te acuerdas?

Nacha asintió con la cabeza. Era muy cierto que hacía apenas dos meses escasos que la señora Laurita y su suegra habían ido a pasear a Guanajuato. La noche en que volvieron, Josefina la recamarera y ella, Nacha, notaron la sangre en el vestido y los ojos ausentes de la señora, pero Margarita, la señora grande, les hizo señas de que se callaran. Parecía muy preocupada. Más tarde Josefina le contó que en la mesa el señor se le quedó mirando malhumorado a su mujer y le dijo:

—¿Por qué no te cambiaste? ¿Te gusta recordar lo malo?

La señora Margarita, su mamá, ya le había contado lo sucedido y le hizo una seña como diciéndole: “¡Cállate, tenle lástima!”. La señora Laurita no contestó; se acarició los labios y sonrió ladina. Entonces el señor, volvió a hablar del presidente López Mateos.

—Ya sabes que ese nombre no se le cae de la boca —había comentado Josefina, desdeñosamente.

En sus adentros ellas pensaban que la señora Laurita se aburría oyendo hablar siempre del señor presidente y de las visitas oficiales.

—¡Lo que son las cosas, Nachita, yo nunca había notado lo que me aburría con Pablo hasta esa noche! —comentó la señora abrazándose con Pablo hasta esa noche dándoles súbitamente la razón a Josefina y Nachita.

La cocinera se cruzó de brazos y asintió con la cabeza.

—Desde que entré a la casa, los muebles, los jarrones y los espejos se me vinieron encima y me dejaron más triste de lo que venía. ¿Cuántos días, cuántos años tendré que esperar todavía para que mi primo venga a buscarme? Así me dije y me arrepentí de mi traición. Cuando estábamos cenando me fijé en que Pablo no hablaba con palabras sino con letras. Y me puse a contarlas mientras le miraba la boca gruesa y el ojo muerto. De pronto se calló. Ya sabes que se le olvida todo. Se quedó con los brazos caídos. “Este marido nuevo, no tiene memoria y no sabe más que las cosas de cada día.”

—Tienes un marido turbio y confuso —me dijo él volviendo a mirar las manchas de mi vestido. La pobre de mi suegra se turbó y como estábamos tomando el café se levantó a poner un twist.

—Para que se animen —nos dijo, dizque sonriendo, porque veía venir el pleito.

“Nosotros nos quedamos callados. La casa se llenó de ruidos. Yo miré a Pablo. “Se parece a...” y no me atreví a decir su nombre, por miedo a que me leyeran el pensamiento. Es verdad que se le parece, Nacha. A los dos les gusta el agua y las casas frescas. Los dos miran al cielo por las tardes y tienen el pelo negro y los dientes blancos. Pero Pablo habla a saltitos, se enfurece por nada y pregunta a cada instante: “¿En qué piensas?” Mi primo marido no hace ni dice nada de eso.

—¡Muy cierto! ¡Muy cierto que el señor es fregón! —dijo Nacha con disgusto.

Laura suspiró y miró a su cocinera con alivio. Menos mal que la tenía de confidente.

—Por la noche, mientras Pablo me besaba, yo me repetía: “¿A qué horas vendrá a buscarme?”. Y casi lloraba al recordar la sangre de la herida que tenía en el hombro. Tampoco podía olvidar sus brazos cruzados sobre mi cabeza para hacerme un tejadito. Al mismo tiempo tenía miedo de que Pablo notara que mi primo me había besado en la mañana. Pero no notó nada y si no hubiera sido por Josefina que me asustó en la mañana, Pablo nunca lo hubiera sabido.

Nachita estuvo de acuerdo. Esa Josefina con su gusto por el escándalo tenía la culpa de todo. Ella, Nacha, bien se lo dijo: “¡Cállate! ¡Cállate por el amor de Dios, si no oyeron nuestros gritos por algo sería!”. Pero, qué esperanzas, Josefina apenas entró a la pieza de los patrones con la bandeja del desayuno, soltó lo que debería haber callado.

“—¡Señora, anoche un hombre estuvo espiando por la ventana de su cuarto! ¡Nacha y yo gritamos y gritamos!

“—No oímos nada... —dijo el señor asombrado.

“—¡Es él...! —gritó la tonta de la señora.

“—¿Quién es él? —preguntó el señor mirando a la señora como si la fuera a matar. Al menos eso dijo Josefina después.

La señora asustadísima se tapó la boca con la mano y cuando el señor le volvió a hacer la misma pregunta, cada vez con más enojo, ella contestó:

“—El indio... el indio que me siguió desde Cuitzeo hasta la ciudad de México...

Así supo Josefina lo del indio y así se lo contó a Nachita.

“— ¡Hay que avisarle inmediatamente a la policía! —gritó el señor.

Josefina le enseñó la ventana por la que el desconocido había estado fisgando y Pablo la examinó con atención: en el alféizar había huellas de sangre casi frescas.

“—Está herido... —dijo el señor Pablo preocupado. Dio unos pasos por la recámara y se detuvo frente a su mujer.

“—Era un indio, señor —dijo Josefina corroborando las palabras de Laura.

Pablo vio el traje blanco tirado sobre una silla y lo cogió con violencia.

“—¿Puedes explicarme el origen de estas manchas?

La señora se quedó sin habla, mirando las manchas de sangre sobre el pecho de su traje y el señor golpeó la cómoda con el puño cerrado. Luego se acercó a la señora y le dio una santa bofetada. Eso lo vio y lo oyó Josefina.

—Sus gestos son feroces y su conducta es tan incoherente como sus palabras. Yo no tengo la culpa de que aceptara la derrota —dijo Laura con desdén.

—Muy cierto —afirmó Nachita.

Se produjo un largo silencio en la cocina. Laura metió la punta del dedo hasta el fondo de la taza, para sacar el pozo negro del café que se había quedado asentado, y Nacha al ver esto volvió a servirle un café calentito.

—Bébase su café, señora —dijo compadecida de la tristeza de su patrona. ¿Después de todo de qué se quejaba el señor? A leguas se veía que la señora Laurita no era para él.

—Yo me enamoré de Pablo en una carretera, durante un minuto en el cual me recordó a alguien conocido, a quien yo no recordaba. Después, a veces, recuperaba aquel instante en el que parecía que iba a convertirse en ese otro al cual se parecía. Pero no era verdad. Inmediatamente volvía a ser absurdo, sin memoria, y solo repetía los gestos de todos los hombres de la ciudad de México. ¿Cómo querías que no me diera cuenta del engaño? Cuando se enoja me prohíbe salir. ¡A ti te consta! ¿Cuántas veces arma pleitos en los cines y en los restaurantes? Tú lo sabes, Nachita. En cambio mi primo marido, nunca, pero nunca, se enoja con la mujer.

Nacha sabía que era cierto lo que ahora le decía la señora, por eso aquella mañana en que Josefina entró a la cocina espantada y gritando: “¡Despierta a la señora Margarita, que el señor está golpeando a la señora!”, ella, Nacha, corrió al cuarto de la señora grande. La presencia de su madre calmó al

señor Pablo. Margarita se quedó muy asombrada al oír lo del indio, porque ella no lo había visto en el Lago de Cuitzeo, solo había visto la sangre como la que podíamos ver todos.

“—Tal vez en el Lago tuviste una insolación, Laura, y te salió sangre por las narices. Fíjate, hijo, que llevábamos el coche descubierto —dijo casi sin saber qué decir.

La señora Laura se tendió boca abajo en la cama y se encerró en sus pensamientos, mientras su marido y su suegra discutían.

—¿Sabes, Nachita, lo que yo estaba pensando esa mañana? ¿Y si me vio anoche cuando Pablo me besaba? Y tenía ganas de llorar. En ese momento me acordé de que cuando un hombre y una mujer se aman y no tienen hijos están condenados a convertirse en uno solo. Así me lo decía mi otro padre, cuando yo le llevaba el agua y él miraba la puerta detrás de la que dormíamos mi primo marido y yo. Todo lo que mi otro padre me había dicho ahora se estaba haciendo verdad. Desde la almohada oí las palabras de Pablo y de Margarita y no eran sino tonterías. “Lo voy a ir a buscar”, me dije. “Pero ¿adónde?”. Más tarde cuando tú volviste a mi cuarto a preguntarme qué hacíamos de comida, me vino un pensamiento a la cabeza: “¡Al Café de Tacuba!”. Y ni siquiera conocía ese café, Nachita, solo lo había oído mentar.

Nacha recordó a la señora como si la viera ahora, poniéndose su vestido blanco manchado de sangre, el mismo que traía en este momento en la cocina.

“—¡Por Dios, Laura, no te pongas ese vestido! —le dijo su suegra. Pero ella no hizo caso. Para esconder las manchas, se puso un *sweater* blanco encima, se lo abotonó hasta el cuello y se fue a la calle sin decir adiós. Después vino lo peor. No, lo peor no. Lo peor iba a venir ahora en la cocina, si la señora Margarita se llegaba a despertar.

—En el Café de Tacuba no había nadie. Es muy triste ese lugar, Nachita. Se me acercó un camarero, “¿Qué le sirvo?”. Yo no quería nada, pero tuve que pedir algo. “Una cocada”. Mi primo y yo comíamos cocos de chiquitos... En el café un reloj marcaba el tiempo. “En todas las ciudades hay relojes que marcan el tiempo, se debe estar gastando a pasitos. Cuando ya no quede sino una capa transparente, llegará él y las dos rayas dibujadas se volverán una sola y yo habitaré la alcoba más preciosa de su pecho”. Así me decía mientras comía la cocada.

“—¿Qué horas son? —le pregunté al camarero.

“—Las doce, señorita.

“A la una llega Pablo”, me dije, “si le digo a un taxi que me lleve por el Periférico, puedo esperar todavía un rato”. Pero no esperé y me salí a la calle. El sol estaba plateado, el pensamiento se me hizo un polvo brillante y no hubo presente, pasado ni futuro. En la acera estaba mi primo, se me puso delante, tenía los ojos tristes, me miró largo rato.

“—¿Qué haces? —me preguntó con su voz profunda.

“—Te estaba esperando.

Se quedó quieto como las panteras. Le vi el pelo negro y la herida roja en el hombro.

“—¿No tenías miedo de estar aquí solita?

“Las piedras y los gritos volvieron a zumbear alrededor nuestro y yo sentí que algo ardía a mis espaldas.

“—No mires —me dijo.

“Puso una rodilla en tierra y con los dedos apagó mi vestido que empezaba a arder. Le vi los ojos muy afligidos.

“—¡Sácame de aquí! —le grité con todas mis fuerzas, porque me acordé de que estaba frente a la casa de mi papá, que la casa estaba ardiendo y que atrás de mí estaban mis padres y mis hermanitos muertos. Todo lo veía retratado en sus ojos, mientras él estaba con la rodilla hincada en tierra apagando mi vestido. Me dejé caer sobre él, que me recibió en sus brazos. Con su mano caliente me tapó los ojos.

“—Este es el final del hombre —le dije con los ojos bajo su mano.

“—¡No lo veas!

“Me guardó contra su corazón. Yo lo oí sonar como rueda el trueno sobre las montañas. ¿Cuánto faltaría para que el tiempo se acabara y yo pudiera oírlo siempre? Mis lágrimas refrescaron su mano que ardía en el incendio de la ciudad. Los alaridos y las piedras nos cercaban, pero yo estaba a salvo bajo su pecho.

“—Duerme conmigo... —me dijo en voz muy baja.

“—¿Me viste anoche? —le pregunté.

“—Te vi...

“Nos dormimos en la luz de la mañana, en el calor del incendio. Cuando recordamos, se levantó y agarró su escudo.

“—Escóndete hasta el amanecer. Yo vendré por ti.

“Se fue corriendo ligero sobre sus piernas desnudas... Y yo me escapé otra vez, Nachita, porque sola tuve miedo.

“—Señorita, ¿se siente mal?

Una voz igual a la de Pablo se me acercó a media calle.

“—¡Insolente! ¡Déjeme tranquila!

“Tomé un taxi que me trajo a la casa por el Periférico y llegué...

Nacha recordó su llegada: ella misma le había abierto la puerta. Y ella fue la que le dio la noticia. Josefina bajó después, desbarrancándose por las escaleras.

“—¡Señora, el señor y la señora Margarita están en la policía!

Laura se le quedó mirando asombrada, muda.

“— ¿Dónde anduvo, señora?

“—Fui al Café de Tacuba.

“—Pero eso fue hace dos días.

Josefina traía el *Últimas Noticias*. Leyó en voz alta: “La señora Aldama continúa desaparecida. Se cree que el siniestro individuo de aspecto indígena que la siguió desde Cuitzeo, sea un sádico. La policía investiga en los estados de Michoacán y Guanajuato”.

La señora Laurita arrebató el periódico de las manos de Josefina y lo desgarró con ira. Luego se fue a su cuarto. Nacha y Josefina la siguieron, era mejor no dejarla sola. La vieron echarse en su cama y soñar con los ojos muy abiertos. Las dos tuvieron el mismo pensamiento y así se lo dijeron después en la cocina: “Para mí, la señora Laurita anda enamorada”. Cuando el señor llegó ellas estaban todavía en el cuarto de su patrona.

“—¡Laura! —gritó. Se precipitó a la cama y tomó a su mujer en su brazos.

“—¡Alma de mi alma! —sollozó el señor.

La señora Laurita pareció enternecida unos segundos.

“—¡Señor! —gritó Josefina—. El vestido de la señora está bien chamuscado.

Nacha la miró desaprobándola. El señor revisó el vestido y las piernas de la señora.

“—Es verdad... también las suelas de sus zapatos están ardidadas... Mi amor, ¿qué pasó?, ¿dónde estuviste?

“—En el Café de Tacuba —contestó la señora muy tranquila.

La señora Margarita se torció las manos y se acercó a su nuera.

“—Ya sabemos que anteayer estuviste allí y comiste una cocada. ¿Y luego?

“—Luego tomé un taxi y me vine acá por el Periférico.

Nacha bajó los ojos, Josefina abrió la boca como para decir algo y la señora Margarita se mordió los labios. Pablo, en cambio, agarró a su mujer por los hombros y la sacudió con fuerza.

“—¡Déjate de hacer la idiota! ¿En dónde estuviste dos días?... ¿Por qué traes el vestido quemado?

“—¿Quemado? Si él lo apagó... —dejó escapar la señora Laura.

“—¿Él?... ¿el indio asqueroso? —Pablo la volvió a zarandear con ira.

“—Me lo encontré a la salida del Café de Tacuba... —sollozó la señora muerta de miedo.

“—¡Nunca pensé que fueras tan baja! —dijo el señor y la aventó sobre la cama.

“—Dinos quién es —preguntó la suegra suavizando la voz.

—¿Verdad, Nachita, que no podía decirles que era mi marido? —preguntó Laura pidiendo la aprobación de la cocinera.

Nacha aplaudió la discreción de su patrona y recordó que aquel mediodía, ella, apenada por la situación de su ama, había opinado:

“—Tal vez el indio de Cuitzeo es un brujo.

Pero la señora Margarita se había vuelto a ella con ojos fulgurantes para contestarle casi a gritos:

“—¿Un brujo? ¡Dirás un asesino!

Después, en muchos días no dejaron salir a la señora Laurita. El señor ordenó que se vigilaran las puertas y ventanas de la casa. Ellas, las sirvientas, entraban continuamente al cuarto de la señora para echarle un vistazo. Nacha se negó siempre a exteriorizar su opinión sobre el caso o a decir las anomalías que sorprendía. Pero, ¿quién podía callar a Josefina?

—Señor, al amanecer, el indio estaba otra vez junto a la ventana —anunció al llevar la bandeja con el desayuno.

El señor se precipitó a la ventana y encontró otra vez la huella de sangre fresca. La señora se puso a llorar.

“—¡Pobrecito!... ¡pobrecito!... —dijo entre sollozos.

Fue esa tarde cuando el señor llegó con un médico. Después el doctor volvió todos los atardeceres.

—Me preguntaba por mi infancia, por mi padre y por mi madre. Pero, yo, Nachita, no sabía de cuál infancia, ni de cuál padre, ni de cuál madre quería saber. Por eso le platicaba de la Conquista de México. ¿Tú me entiendes, verdad? —preguntó Laura con los ojos puestos sobre las cacerolas amarillas.

—Sí, señora... —Y Nachita, nerviosa, escrutó el jardín a través de los vidrios de la ventana. La noche apenas si dejaba ver entre sus sombras. Recordó la cara desganada del señor frente a su cena y la mirada acongojada de su madre.

—Mamá, Laura le pidió al doctor la *Historia* de Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Dice que eso es lo único que le interesa.

La señora Margarita había dejado caer el tenedor.

“—¡Pobre hijo mío, tu mujer está loca!

“—No habla sino de la caída de la Gran Tenochtitlán —agregó el señor Pablo con aire sombrío.

Dos días después, el médico, la señora Margarita y el señor Pablo decidieron que la depresión de Laura aumentaba con el encierro. Debía tomar contacto con el mundo y enfrentarse con sus responsabilidades. Desde ese día, el señor mandaba el automóvil para que su mujer saliera a dar paseitos por el Bosque de Chapultepec. La señora salía acompañada de su suegra y el chofer tenía órdenes de vigilarlas estrechamente. Solo que el aire de los eucaliptos no la mejoraba, pues apenas volvía a su casa, la señora Laurita se encerraba en su cuarto para leer la *Conquista de México* de Bernal Díaz.

Una mañana la señora Margarita regresó del Bosque de Chapultepec sola y desamparada.

“—¡Se escapó la loca! —gritó con voz estentórea al entrar a la casa.

—Fíjate, Nacha, me senté en la misma banquita de siempre y me dije: “No me lo perdona. Un hombre puede perdonar una, dos, tres, cuatro traiciones, pero la traición permanente, no.” Este pensamiento me dejó muy triste. Hacía calor y Margarita se compró un helado de vainilla; yo no quise, entonces ella se metió al automóvil a comerlo. Me fijé que estaba tan aburrida de mí, como yo de ella. A mí no me gusta que me vigilen y traté de ver otras cosas para no verla comiendo su barquillo y mirándome. Vi el heno gris que colgaba de los ahuehuetes y no sé por qué, la mañana se volvió tan triste como esos árboles. “Ellos y yo hemos visto las mismas catástrofes”, me dije. Por la calzada vacía, se paseaban las horas solas. Como las horas estaba yo: sola en una calzada vacía. Mi marido había contemplado por la ventana mi traición permanente y me había abandonado en esa calzada hecha de cosas que no existían. Recordé el olor de las hojas de maíz y el rumor sosegado de sus pasos. “Así caminaba, con el ritmo de las hojas secas cuando el viento de febrero las lleva sobre las piedras. Antes no necesitaba volver la cabeza para saber que él estaba ahí mirándome las espaldas”... Andaba en esos tristes pensamientos, cuando oí correr al sol y las hojas secas empezaron a cambiar de sitio. Su respiración se acercó a mis espaldas, luego se puso frente a mí, vi sus pies desnudos delante de los míos. Tenía un araño en la rodilla. Levanté los ojos y me hallé bajo los suyos. Nos quedamos mucho rato sin hablar. Por respeto yo esperaba sus palabras.

“—¿Qué te haces? —me dijo.

Vi que no se movía y que parecía más triste que antes.

“—Te estaba esperando —contesté.

“—Ya va a llegar el último día...

Me pareció que su voz salía del fondo de los tiempos. Del hombro le seguía brotando sangre. Me llené de vergüenza, bajé los ojos, abrí mi bolso y saqué un pañuelito para limpiarle el pecho. Luego lo volví a guardar. Él siguió quieto, observándome.

“—Vamos a la salida de Tacuba... Hay muchas traiciones...”

Me agarró de la mano y nos fuimos caminando entre la gente, que gritaba y se quejaba. Había muchos muertos que flotaban en el agua de los canales. Había mujeres sentadas en la hierba mirándolos flotar. De todas partes surgía la pestilencia y los niños lloraban corriendo de un lado para otro, perdidos de sus padres. Yo miraba todo sin querer verlo. Las canoas despedazadas no llevaban a nadie, solo daban tristeza. El marido me sentó debajo de un árbol roto. Puso una rodilla en tierra y miró alerta lo que sucedía a nuestro alrededor. Él no tenía miedo. Después me miró a mí.

“—Ya sé que eres traidora y que me tienes buena voluntad. Lo bueno crece junto con lo malo.

Los gritos de los niños apenas me dejaban oírlo. Venían de lejos, pero eran tan fuertes que rompían la luz del día. Parecía que era la última vez que iban a llorar.

“—Son las criaturas... —Me dijo.

“—Este es el final del hombre —repetí, porque no se me ocurría otro pensamiento.

Él me puso las manos sobre los oídos y luego me guardó contra su pecho.

“—Traidora te conocía y así te quise.

“—Naciste sin suerte —le dije. Me abracé a él. Mi primo marido cerró los ojos para no dejar correr las lágrimas. Nos acostamos sobre las ramas rotas del pirú. Hasta allí nos llegaron los gritos de los guerreros, las piedras y los llantos de los niños.

“—El tiempo se está acabando... —suspiró mi marido.

Por una grieta se escapaban las mujeres que no querían morir junto con la fecha. Las filas de hombres caían una después de la otra, en cadena como si estuvieran cogidos de la mano y el mismo golpe los derribara a todos. Algunos daban un alarido tan fuerte, que quedaba resonando mucho rato después de su muerte.

Falta poco para que nos fuéramos para siempre en uno solo cuando mi primo se levantó, me juntó ramas y me hizo una cuevita.

“—Aquí me esperas.

Me miró y se fue a combatir con la esperanza de evitar la derrota. Yo me quedé acurrucada. No quise ver a las gentes que huían, para no tener la tentación, ni tampoco quise ver a los muertos que flotaban en el agua para no llorar. Me puse a contar los frutitos que colgaban de las ramas cortadas: estaban secos y cuando los tocaba con los dedos, la cáscara roja se les caía. No sé por qué me parecieron de mal agüero y preferí mirar el cielo, que empezó a oscurecerse. Primero se puso pardo, luego empezó a coger el color de los ahogados de los canales. Me quedé recordando los colores de otras tardes. Pero la tarde siguió amoratándose, hinchándose, como si de pronto fuera a reventar y supe que se había acabado el tiempo. Si mi primo no volvía, ¿qué sería de mí? Tal vez ya estaba muerto en el combate. No me importó su suerte y me salí de allí a toda carrera perseguida por el miedo. “Cuando llegue y me busque...” No tuve tiempo de acabar mi pensamiento porque me hallé en el anochecer de la ciudad de México. “Margarita ya se debe haber acabado su helado de vainilla y Pablo debe de estar muy enojado”... Un taxi me trajo por el Periférico. ¿Y sabes, Nachita?, los Periféricos eran los canales infestados de cadáveres... por eso llegué tan triste... Ahora, Nachita, no le cuentes al señor que me pasé la tarde con mi marido”.

Nachita se acomodó los brazos sobre la falda lila.

—El señor Pablo hace ya diez días que se fue a Acapulco. Se quedó muy flaco con las semanas que duró la investigación —explicó Nachita satisfecha. Laura la miró sin sorpresa y suspiró con alivio.

—La que está arriba es la señora Margarita —agregó Nacha volviendo los ojos hacia el techo de la cocina.

Laura se abrazó las rodillas y miró por los cristales de la ventana a las rosas borradas por las sombras nocturnas y a las ventanas vecinas que empezaban a apagarse.

Nachita se sirvió sal sobre el dorso de la mano y la comió golosa.

—¡Cuánto coyote! ¡Anda muy alborotada la coyotada! —dijo con la voz llena de sal. Laura se quedó escuchando unos instantes.

—Malditos animales, los hubieras visto hoy en la tarde —dijo.

—Con tal de que no estorben el paso del señor, o que le equivoquen el camino —comentó Nacha con miedo.

—Si nunca los temió ¿por qué había de temerlos esta noche? —preguntó Laura molesta.

Nacha se aproximó a su patrona para estrechar la intimidad súbita que se había establecido entre ellas.

—Son más canijos que los tlaxcaltecas —le dijo en voz muy baja.

Las dos mujeres se quedaron quietas. Nacha devorando poco a poco otro puñito de sal. Laura escuchando preocupada los aullidos de los coyotes que llenaban la noche. Fue Nacha la que lo vio llegar y le abrió la ventana.

—¡Señora!... Ya llegó por usted... —le susurró en una voz tan baja que solo Laura pudo oírla.

Después, cuando ya Laura se había ido para siempre con él, Nachita limpió la sangre de la ventana y espantó a los coyotes, que entraron en su siglo que acababa de gastarse en ese instante. Nacha miró con sus ojos viejísimos, para ver si todo estaba en orden: lavó la taza de café, tiró al bote de la basura las colillas manchadas de rojo de labios, guardó la cafetera en la alacena y apagó la luz.

—Yo digo que la señora Laurita no era de este tiempo, ni era para el señor —dijo en la mañana cuando le llevó el desayuno a la señora Margarita.

—Ya no me hallo en casa de los Aldama. Voy a buscarme otro destino, le confió a Josefina.

Y en un descuido de la recamarera, Nacha se fue hasta sin cobrar su sueldo.

Angela Mastretta, "Untitled"

Available here: <http://arnebbadra.blogspot.com/2011/08/un-cuento-de-angeles-mastretta.html>

Había una luna a medias la noche que desquició para siempre los ordenados sentimientos de la tía Inés Aguirre. Una luna intrigosa y ardiente que se reía de ella. Y era tan negro el cielo que la rodeaba que adivinar por qué no pensó Inés en escaparse de aquel embrujo.

Quizás aunque la luna no hubiera estado ahí, aunque el cielo hubiera fingido transparencia, todo habría sido igual. Pero la tía Inés culpaba a la luna para no sentirse la única causante de su desgracia. Sólo bajo esa luna pudo empezarle a ella la pena que le tenía tomado el cuerpo. Una desdicha que,

como casi siempre pasa, se le metió fingiendo ser el origen mismo de la dicha.

Porque la noche aquella, bajo la luna, el hombre le dio un beso en la nuca como quien bebe un trago de agua, y fue una noche tan lejos de la pena que nadie hubiera podido imaginarla como el inicio de la más mínima desgracia. Apenas había llegado la luz eléctrica y las casas bajo el cerro parecían estrellas. En alguien tuvo que vengar esa luna el dolor que le dieron las casas encendidas, las calles bajo el cobijo de aquella luz comprada y mentirosa, la ingratitud de toda una ciudad anocheciendo tranquila, sin buscar el auxilio de su fulgor. De algo tenía que servir ella, alguien tendría que recordar su luz despidiendo la tarde, y ese alguien fue Inés Aguirre: la luna la empujó hasta el fondo de unos brazos que la cercarían para siempre aunque fueran a irse temprano.

Al día siguiente, la tía Inés no recordó un ruego, menos una orden, pero tenía una luz entre ojo y ojo ensombreciendo toda su existencia. No podía ya olvidar el aliento que le entibió los hombros, ni desprender de su corazón la pena que lo ató a la voluntad sagrada de la luna.

Se volvió distraída y olvidadiza. Pedía auxilio para encontrar el lápiz que tenía en la mano, los anteojos que llevaba puestos, las flores que acababa de cortar. Del modo en que andaba podía derivarse que no iba a ninguna parte, porque después del primer paso casi siempre olvidaba su destino. Confundía la mano derecha con la izquierda y nunca recordaba un apellido. Terminó llamando a sus tíos con el nombre de sus hermanos y a sus hermanas con el nombre de sus amigas. Cada mañana tenía que adivinar en cuál cajón guardaba su ropa interior y cómo se llamaban las frutas redondas que ponía en el jugo del desayuno. Nunca sabía qué horas eran y varias veces estuvo apunto de ser atropellada.

Una tarde hacía el más delicioso pastel de chocolate y a la semana siguiente no encontraba la receta ni sabía de qué pastel le hablaban. Iba al mercado para volver sin cebollas, y hasta el Padre Nuestro se le olvidó de buenas a primeras. A veces se quedaba mirando un florero, una silla, un tenedor, un peine, una sortija y preguntaba con la ingenuidad de su alma: —¿Para qué sirve ésto?

Otras, escribía en cualquier cuaderno toda clase de historias que después no podía leer porque con el punto final olvidaba las letras.

En uno de estos cuadernos escribió la última vez que supo hacerlo: "Cada luna es distinta. Cada luna tiene su propia historia. Dichosos quienes pueden olvidar su mejor luna".

Juan Rulfo, "¡Diles que no me maten!"

Available here: <https://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0266.pdf>

—¡DILES QUE NO me maten, Justino! Anda, vete a decirles eso. Que por caridad. Así diles. Diles que lo hagan por caridad.

—No puedo. Hay allí un sargento que no quiere oír hablar nada de ti.

—Haz que te oiga. Date tus mañas y dile que para sustos ya ha estado bueno. Dile que lo haga por caridad de Dios.

—No se trata de sustos. Parece que te van a matar de a de veras. Y yo ya no quiero volver allá.

—Anda otra vez. Solamente otra vez, a ver qué consigues.

—No. No tengo ganas de eso, yo soy tu hijo. Y si voy mucho con ellos, acabarán por

saber quién soy y les dará por afusilarme a mí también. Es mejor dejar las cosas de este tamaño.

—Anda, Justino. Diles que tengan tantita lástima de mí. Nomás eso diles.

Justino apretó los dientes y movió la cabeza diciendo:

—No.

Y siguió sacudiendo la cabeza durante mucho rato.

Justino se levantó de la pila de piedras en que estaba sentado y caminó hasta la puerta del corral. Luego se dio vuelta para decir:

—Voy, pues. Pero si de perdida me afusilan a mí también, ¿quién cuidará de mi mujer y de los hijos?

—La Providencia, Justino. Ella se encargará de ellos. Ocúpate de ir allá y ver qué cosas haces por mí. Eso es lo que urge.

Lo habían traído de madrugada. Y ahora era ya entrada la mañana y él seguía todavía allí, amarrado a un horcón, esperando. No se podía estar quieto. Había hecho el intento de dormir un rato para apaciguarse, pero el sueño se le había ido. También se le había ido el hambre. No tenía ganas de nada. Sólo de vivir. Ahora que sabía bien a bien que lo iban a matar, le habían entrado unas ganas tan grandes de vivir como sólo las puede sentir un recién resucitado. Quién le iba a decir que volvería aquel asunto tan viejo, tan rancio, tan enterrado como creía que estaba. Aquel asunto de cuando tuvo que matar a don Lupe. No nada más por nomás, como quisieron hacerle ver los de Alima, sino porque tuvo sus razones. Él se acordaba:

Don Lupe Terreros, el dueño de la Puerta de Piedra, por más señas su compadre. Al que él, Juvencio Nava, tuvo que matar por eso; por ser el dueño de la Puerta de Piedra y que, siendo también su compadre, le negó el pasto para sus animales.

Primero se aguantó por puro compromiso. Pero después, cuando la sequía, en que vio cómo se le morían uno tras otro sus animales hostigados por el hambre y que su compadre don Lupe seguía negándole la yerba de sus potreros, entonces fue cuando se puso a romper la cerca y a arrear la bola de animales flacos hasta las paraneras para que se hartaran de comer. Y eso no le había gustado a don Lupe, que mandó tapar otra vez la cerca para que él, Juvencio Nava, le volviera a abrir otra vez el agujero. Así, de día se tapaba el agujero y de noche se volvía a abrir, mientras el ganado estaba allí, siempre pegado a la cerca, siempre esperando; aquel ganado suyo que antes nomás se vivía oliendo el pasto sin poder probarlo.

Y é, y don Lupe alegaban y volvían a alegar sin llegar a ponerse de acuerdo. Hasta que una vez don Lupe le dijo:

—Mira, Juvencio, otro animal más que metas al potrero y te lo mato.

Y él contestó:

—Mire, don Lupe, yo no tengo la culpa de que los animales busquen su acomodo. Ellos son inocentes. Ahí se lo haiga si me los mata.

“Y me mató un novillo.

“Esto pasó hace treinta y cinco años, por marzo, porque ya en abril andaba yo en el monte, corriendo del exhorto. No me valieron ni las diez vacas que le di al juez, ni el embargo de mi casa para pagarle la salida de la cárcel. Todavía después, se pagaron con lo que quedaba nomás por no perseguirme, aunque de todos modos me perseguían. Por eso

me vine a vivir junto con mi hijo a este otro terrenito que yo tenía y que se nombra Palo de Venado. Y mi hijo creció y se casó con la nuera Ignacia y tuvo ya ocho hijos. Así que la cosa ya va para viejo, y según eso debería estar olvidada. Pero, según eso, no lo está.

“Yo entonces calculé que con unos cien pesos quedaba arreglado todo. El difunto don Lupe era solo, solamente con su mujer y los dos muchachitos todavía de a gatas. Y la viuda pronto murió también dizque de pena. Y a los muchachitos se los llevaron lejos, donde unos parientes. Así que, por parte de ellos, no había que tener miedo.

“Pero los demás se atuvieron a que yo andaba exhortado y enjuiciado para asustarme y seguir robándome. Cada que llegaba alguien al pueblo me avisaban:

“—Por ahí andan unos fureños, Juvencio.

“Y yo echaba pal monte, entreverándome entre los madroños y pasándome los días comiendo verdolagas. A veces tenía que salir a la media noche, como si me fueran correteando los perros. Eso duró toda la vida . No fue un año ni dos. Fue toda la vida.”

Y ahora habían ido por él, cuando no esperaba ya a nadie, confiado en el olvido en que lo tenía la gente; creyendo que al menos sus últimos días los pasaría tranquilos. “Al menos esto —pensó— conseguiré con estar viejo. Me dejarán en paz”.

Se había dado a esta esperanza por entero. Por eso era que le costaba trabajo imaginar morir así, de repente, a estas alturas de su vida, después de tanto pelear para librarse de la muerte; de haberse pasado su mejor tiempo tirando de un lado para otro arrastrado por los sobresaltos y cuando su cuerpo había acabado por ser un puro pellejo correoso curtido por los malos días en que tuvo que andar escondiéndose de todos.

Por si acaso, ¿no había dejado hasta que se le fuera su mujer? Aquel día en que amaneció con la nueva de que su mujer se le había ido, ni siquiera le pasó por la cabeza la intención de salir a buscarla. Dejó que se fuera sin indagar para nada ni con quién ni para dónde, con tal de no bajar al pueblo. Dejó que se le fuera como se le había ido todo lo demás, sin meter las manos. Ya lo único que le quedaba para cuidar era la vida, y ésta la conservaría a como diera lugar. No podía dejar que lo mataran. No podía. Mucho menos ahora.

Pero para eso lo habían traído de allá, de Palo de Venado. No necesitaron amarrarlo para que los siguiera. Él anduvo solo, únicamente maniatado por el miedo. Ellos se dieron cuenta de que no podía correr con aquel cuerpo viejo, con aquellas piernas flacas como sicuas secas, acalambradas por el miedo de morir. Porque a eso iba. A morir. Se lo dijeron.

Desde entonces lo supo. Comenzó a sentir esa comezón en el estómago que le llegaba de pronto siempre que veía de cerca la muerte y que le sacaba el ansia por los ojos, y que le hinchaba la boca con aquellos buches de agua agria que tenía que tragarse sin querer. Y esa cosa que le hacía los pies pesados mientras su cabeza se le ablandaba y el corazón le pegaba con todas sus fuerzas en las costillas. No, no podía acostumbrarse a la idea de que lo mataran.

Tenía que haber alguna esperanza. En algún lugar podría aún quedar alguna esperanza. Tal vez ellos se hubieran equivocado. Quizá buscaban a otro Juvencio Nava y no al Juvencio Nava que era él.

Caminó entre aquellos hombres en silencio, con los brazos caídos. La madrugada era oscura, sin estrellas. El viento soplaba despacio, se llevaba la tierra seca y traía más, llena de ese olor como de orines que tiene el polvo de los caminos.

Sus ojos, que se habían apenuscado con los años, venían viendo la tierra, aquí, debajo de sus pies, a pesar de la oscuridad. Allí en la tierra estaba toda su vida. Sesenta años de vivir sobre de ella, de encerrarla entre sus manos, de haberla probado como se prueba el

sabor de la carne. Se vino largo rato desmenuzándola con los ojos, saboreando cada pedazo como si fuera el último, sabiendo casi que sería el último.

Luego, como queriendo decir algo, miraba a los hombres que iban junto a él. Iba a decirles que lo soltaran, que lo dejaran que se fuera: "Yo no le he hecho daño a nadie, muchachos", iba a decirles, pero se quedaba callado. " Más adelantito se los diré", pensaba. Y sólo los veía. Podía hasta imaginar que eran sus amigos; pero no quería hacerlo. No lo eran. No sabía quiénes eran. Los veía a su lado ladeándose y agachándose de vez en cuando para ver por dónde seguía el camino.

Los había visto por primera vez al pardear de la tarde, en esa hora desteñida en que todo parece chamuscado. Habían atravesado los surcos pisando la milpa tierna. Y él había bajado a eso: a decirles que allí estaba comenzando a crecer la milpa. Pero ellos no se detuvieron.

Los había visto con tiempo. Siempre tuvo la suerte de ver con tiempo todo. Pudo haberse escondido, caminar unas cuantas horas por el cerro mientras ellos se iban y después volver a bajar. Al fin y al cabo la milpa no se lograría de ningún modo. Ya era tiempo de que hubieran venido las aguas y las aguas no aparecían y la milpa comenzaba a marchitarse. No tardaría en estar seca del todo.

Así que ni valía la pena de haber bajado; haberse metido entre aquellos hombres como en un agujero, para ya no volver a salir.

Y ahora seguía junto a ellos, aguantándose las ganas de decirles que lo soltaran. No les veía la cara; sólo veía los bultos que se repegaban o se separaban de él. De manera que cuando se puso a hablar, no supo si lo habían oído. Dijo:

—Yo nunca le he hecho daño a nadie —eso dijo. Pero nada cambió. Ninguno de los bultos pareció darse cuenta. Las caras no se volvieron a verlo. Siguieron igual, como si hubieran venido dormidos.

Entonces pensó que no tenía nada más que decir, que tendría que buscar la esperanza en algún otro lado. Dejó caer otra vez los brazos y entró en las primeras casas del pueblo en medio de aquellos cuatro hombres oscurecidos por el color negro de la noche.

—Mi coronel, aquí está el hombre.

Se habían detenido delante del boquete de la puerta. Él, con el sombrero en la mano, por respeto, esperando ver salir a alguien. Pero sólo salió la voz:

—¿Cuál hombre? —preguntaron.

—El de Palo de Venado, mi coronel. El que usted nos mandó a traer.

—Pregúntale que si ha vivido alguna vez en Alima —volvió a decir la voz de allá adentro.

—¡Ey, tú! ¿Que si has habitado en Alima? —repitió la pregunta el sargento que estaba frente a él.

—Sí. Dile al coronel que de allá mismo soy. Y que allí he vivido hasta hace poco.

—Pregúntale que si conoció a Guadalupe Terreros.

—Que dizque si conociste a Guadalupe Terreros.

—¿A don Lupe? Sí. Dile que sí lo conocí. Ya murió.

Entonces la voz de allá adentro cambió de tono:

—Ya sé que murió —dijo. Y siguió hablando como si platicara con alguien allá, al otro lado de la pared de carrizos:

—Guadalupe Terreros era mi padre. Cuando crecí y lo busqué me dijeron que estaba muerto. Es algo difícil crecer sabiendo que la cosa de donde podemos agarrarnos para

enraizar está muerta. Con nosotros, eso pasó.

“Luego supe que lo habían matado a machetazos, clavándole después una pica de buey en el estómago. Me contaron que duró más de dos días perdido y que, cuando lo encontraron tirado en un arroyo, todavía estaba agonizando y pidiendo el encargo de que le cuidaran a su familia.

“Esto, con el tiempo, parece olvidarse. Uno trata de olvidarlo. Lo que no se olvida es llegar a saber que el que hizo aquello está aún vivo, alimentando su alma podrida con la ilusión de la vida eterna. No podría perdonar a ése, aunque no lo conozco; pero el hecho de que se haya puesto en el lugar donde yo sé que está, me da ánimos para acabar con él. No puedo perdonarle que siga viviendo. No debía haber nacido nunca”.

Desde acá, desde fuera, se oyó bien claro cuando dijo. Después ordenó:

—¡Llévenselo y amárrenlo un rato, para que padezca, y luego fusílenlo!

—¡Mírame, coronel! —pidió él—. Ya no valgo nada. No tardaré en morirme solito, derrengado de viejo. ¡No me mates...!

—¡Llévenselo! —volvió a decir la voz de adentro.

—...Ya he pagado, coronel. He pagado muchas veces. Todo me lo quitaron. Me castigaron de muchos modos. Me he pasado cosa de cuarenta años escondido como unapestado, siempre con el palpito de que en cualquier rato me matarían. No merezco morir así, coronel. Déjame que, al menos, el Señor me perdone. ¡No me mates! ¡Diles que no me maten!

Estaba allí, como si lo hubieran golpeado, sacudiendo su sombrero contra la tierra. Gritando.

En seguida la voz de allá adentro dijo:

—Amárrenlo y denle algo de beber hasta que se emborrache para que no le duelan los tiros.

Ahora, por fin, se había apaciguado. Estaba allí arrinconado al pie del horcón. Había venido su hijo Justino y su hijo Justino se había ido y había vuelto y ahora otra vez venía.

Lo echó encima del burro. Lo apretaló bien apretado al aparejo para que no se fuese a caer por el camino. Le metió su cabeza dentro de un costal para que no diera mala impresión. Y luego le hizo pelos al burro y se fueron, arrebiatados, de prisa, para llegar a Palo de Venado todavía con tiempo para arreglar el velorio del difunto.

—Tu nuera y los nietos te extrañarán —iba diciéndole—. Te mirarán a la cara y creerán que no eres tú. Se les afigurará que te ha comido el coyote cuando te vean con esa cara tan llena de boquetes por tanto tiro de gracia como te dieron.

10. TL Corpus

William Faulkner, "Dry September"

Available here: https://www.pf.jcu.cz/stru/katedry/aj/doc/sukdolova/William_Faulkner.pdf

Through the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass---the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro. Attacked, insulted, frightened: none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air, sending back upon them, in recurrent surges of stale pomade and lotion, their own stale breath and odors, knew exactly what had happened. "Except it wasn't Will Mayes," a barber said. He was a man of middle age; a thin, sand-colored man with a mild face, who was shaving a client. "I know Will Mayes. He's a good nigger. And I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too." "What do you know about her?" a second barber said. "Who is she?" the client said. "A young girl?" "No," the barber said. "She's about forty, I reckon. She aint married. That's why I dont believe--" "Believe, hell!" a hulking youth in a sweat-stained silk shirt said. "Wont you take a white woman's word before a nigger's?" "I dont believe Will Mayes did it," the barber said. "I know Will Mayes." "Maybe you know who did it, then. Maybe you already got him out of town, you damn niggerlover." "I dont believe anybody did anything. I dont believe any-thing happened. I leave it to you fellows if them ladies that get old without getting married dont have notions that a man cant-" "Then you are a hell of a white man," the client said. He moved under the cloth. The youth had sprung to his feet. "You dont?" he said. "Do you accuse a white woman of lying?" The barber held the razor poised above the half-risen client. He did not look around. "It's this durn weather," another said. "It's enough to make a man do anything. Even to her." Nobody laughed. The barber said in his mild, stubborn tone: "I aint accusing nobody of nothing. I just know and you fellows know how a woman that never--" "You damn niggerlover!" the youth said. "Shut up, Butch," another said. "We'll get the facts in plenty of time to act." "Who is? Who's getting them?" the youth said. "Facts, hell! I--" "You're a fine white man," the client said. "Aint you?" In his frothy beard he looked like a desert rat in the moving pictures. "You tell them, Jack," he said to the youth. "If there aint any white men in this town, you can count on me, even if I aint only a drummer and a stranger." "That's right, boys," the barber said. "Find out the truth first. I know Will Mayes." "Well, by God!" the youth shouted. "To think that a white man in this town--" "Shut up, Butch," the second speaker said. "We got plenty of time." The client sat up. He looked at the speaker. "Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South dont want your kind here." "North what?" the second said. "I was born and raised in this town." "Well, by God!" the youth said. He looked about with a strained, baffled gaze, as if he was trying to remember what it was he wanted to say or to do. He drew his sleeve across his sweating face. "Damn if I'm going to let a white woman--" "You tell them, Jack," the drummer said. "By God, if they--" The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold glance swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor. "Well," he said, "are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?" Butch

sprang up again. The silk of his shirt clung flat to his heavy shoulders. At each armpit was a dark halfmoon. "That's what I been telling them! That's what I--" "Did it really happen?" a third said. "This aint the first man scare she ever had, like Hawkshaw says. Wasn't there something about a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago?" "What?" the client said. "What's that?" The barber had been slowly forcing him back into the chair; he arrested himself reclining, his head lifted, the barber still pressing him down. McLendon whirled on the third speaker. "Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?" "That's what I'm telling them!" Butch shouted. He cursed, long and steady, pointless. "Here, here," a fourth said. "Not so loud. Dont talk so loud." "Sure," McLendon said; "no talking necessary at all. I've done my talking. Who's with me?" He poised on the balls of his feet, roving his gaze. The barber held the drummer's face down, the razor poised. "Find out the facts first, boys. I know Willy Mayes. It wasn't him. Let's get the sheriff and do this thing right." McLendon whirled upon him his furious, rigid face. The barber did not look away. They looked like men of different races. The other barbers had ceased also above their prone clients. "You mean to tell me," McLendon said, "that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's? Why, you damn niggerloving--" The third speaker rose and grasped McLendon's arm; he too had been a soldier. "Now, now. Let's figure this thing out. Who knows anything about what really happened?" "Figure out hell!" McLendon jerked his arm free. "All that're with me get up from there. The ones that aint--" He roved his gaze, dragging his sleeve across his face. Three men rose. The drummer in the chair sat up. "Here," he said, jerking at the cloth about his neck; "get this rag off me. I'm with him. I dont live here, but by God, if our mothers and wives and sisters--" He smeared the cloth over his face and flung it to the floor. McLendon stood in the floor and cursed the others. Another rose and moved toward him. The remainder sat uncomfortable, not looking at one another, then one by one they rose and joined him. The barber picked the cloth from the floor. He began to fold it neatly. "Boys, dont do that. Will Mayes never done it. I know." "Come on," McLendon said. He whirled. From his hip pocket protruded the butt of a heavy automatic pistol. They went out. The screen door crashed behind them reverberant in the dead air. The barber wiped the razor carefully and swiftly, and put it away, and ran to the rear, and took his hat from the wall. "I'll be back as soon as I can," he said to the other barbers. "I cant let--" He went out, running. The two other barbers followed him to the door and caught it on the re-bound, leaning out and looking up the street after him. The air was flat and dead. It had a metallic taste at the base of the tongue. "What can he do?" the first said. The second one was saying "Jees Christ, Jees Christ" under his breath. "I'd just as lief be Will Mayes as Hawk, if he gets McLendon riled." "Jees Christ, Jees Christ," the second whispered. "You reckon he really done it to her?" the first said. II SHE WAS thirty-eight or thirty-nine. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, un-flagging aunt, where each morning between ten and eleven she would appear on the porch in a lace-trimmed boudoir cap, to sit swinging in the porch swing until noon. After dinner she lay down for a while, until the afternoon began to cool. Then, in one of the three or four new voile dresses which she had each summer, she would go downtown to spend the afternoon in the stores with the other ladies, where they would handle the goods and haggle over the prices in cold, immediate voices, without any intention of buying. She was of comfortable people--not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough--and she was still on the slender side of ordinary looking, with a bright, faintly haggard man-ner and dress. When she was young she had had a slender, nervous body and a sort of hard vivacity which had enabled

her for a time to ride upon the crest of the town's social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious. She was the last to realize that she was losing ground; that those among whom she had been a little brighter and louder flame than any other were beginning to learn the pleasure of snobbery--male--and retaliation--female. That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look. She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes. One evening at a party she heard a boy and two girls, all schoolmates, talking. She never accepted another invitation. She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and children, but no man ever called on her steadily until the children of the other girls had been calling her "aunty" for several years, the while their mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl. Then the town began to see her driving on Sunday afternoons with the cashier in the bank. He was a widower of about forty--a high-colored man, smelling always faintly of the barber shop or of whisky. He owned the first automobile in town, a red runabout; Minnie had the first motoring bonnet and veil the town ever saw. Then the town began to say: "Poor Minnie." "But she is old enough to take care of herself," others said. That was when she began to ask her old schoolmates that their children call her "cousin" instead of "aunty." It was twelve years now since she had been relegated into adultery by public opinion, and eight years since the cashier had gone to a Memphis bank, returning for one day each Christmas, which he spent at an annual bachelors' party at a hunting club on the river. From behind their curtains the neighbors would see the party pass, and during the over-the-way Christmas day visiting they would tell her about him, about how well he looked, and how they heard that he was prospering in the city, watching with bright, secret eyes her haggard, bright face. Usually by that hour there would be the scent of whisky on her breath. It was supplied her by a youth, a clerk at the soda fountain: "Sure; I buy it for the old gal. I reckon she's entitled to a little fun." Her mother kept to her room altogether now; the gaunt aunt ran the house. Against that background Minnie's bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality. She went out in the evenings only with women now, neighbors, to the moving pictures. Each afternoon she dressed in one of the new dresses and went downtown alone, where her young "cousins" were already strolling in the late afternoons with their delicate, silken heads and thin, awkward arms and conscious hips, clinging to one another or shrieking and giggling with paired boys in the soda fountain when she passed and went on along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes any more. III THE BARBER WENT SWIFTLY up the street where the sparse lights, insectswirled, glared in rigid and violent suspension in the lifeless air. The day had died in a pall of dust; above the darkened square, shrouded by the spent dust, the sky was as clear as the inside of a brass bell. Below the cast was a rumor of the twice-waxed moon. When he overtook them McLendon and three others were getting into a car parked in an alley. McLendon stooped his thick head, peering out beneath the top. "Changed your mind, did you?" he said. "Damn good thing; by God, tomorrow when this town hears about how you talked tonight-" "Now, now," the other ex-soldier said. "Hawkshaw's all right. Come on, Hawk; jump in." "Will Mayes never done it, boys," the barber said. "If anybody done it. Why, you all know well as I do there aint any town where they got better niggers than us. And you know how a lady will kind of think things about men when there aint any reason to, and Miss Minnie anyway-" "Sure, sure," the soldier said. "We're just going to talk to him a little; that's all." "Talk hell!"

Butch said. "When we're through with the-" "Shut up, for God's sake!" the soldier said. "Do you want everybody in town-" "Tell them, by God!" McLendon said. "Tell every one of the sons that'll let a white woman-" "Let's go; let's go: here's the other car." The second car slid squealing out of a cloud of dust at the alley mouth. McLendon started his car and took the lead. Dust lay like fog in the street. The street lights hung nimbused as in water. They drove on out of town. A rutted lane turned at right angles. Dust hung above it too, and above all the land. The dark bulk of the ice plant, where the Negro Mayes was night watchman, rose against the sky. "Better stop here, hadn't we?" the soldier said. McLendon did not reply. He hurled the car up and slammed to a stop, the headlights glaring on the blank wall. "Listen here, boys," the barber said; "if he's here, dont that prove he never done it? Dont it? If it was him, he would run. Dont you see he would?" The second car came up and stopped. McLendon got down; Butch sprang down beside him. "Listen, boys," the barber said. "Cut the lights off!" McLendon said. The breathless dark rushed down. There was no sound in it save their lungs as they sought air in the parched dust in which for two months they had lived; then the diminishing crunch of McLendon's and Butch's feet, and a moment later McLendon's voice: "Will! . . . Will!" Below the cast the wan hemorrhage of the moon increased. It heaved above the ridge, silvering the air, the dust, so that they seemed to breathe, live, in a bowl of molten lead. There was no sound of nightbird nor insect, no sound save their breathing and a faint ticking of contracting metal about the cars. Where their bodies touched one another they seemed to sweat dryly, for no more moisture came. "Christ! " a voice said; "let's get out of here." But they didn't move until vague noises began to grow out of the darkness ahead; then they got out and waited tensely in the breathless dark. There was another sound: a blow, a hissing expulsion of breath and McLendon cursing in undertone. They stood a moment longer, then they ran forward. They ran in a stumbling clump, as though they were fleeing something. "Kill him, kill the son," a voice whispered. McLendon flung them back. "Not here," he said. "Get him into the car." "Kill him kill the black son!" the voice murmured. They dragged the Negro to the car. The barber had waited beside the car. He could feel himself sweating and he knew he was going to be sick at the stomach. "What is it, captains?" the Negro said. "I aint done nothing. 'Fore God, Mr John." Someone produced handcuffs. They worked busily about the Negro as though he were a post, quiet, intent, getting in one another's way. He submitted to the handcuffs, looking swiftly and constantly from dim face to dim face. "Who's here, captains?" he said, leaning to peer into the faces until they could feel his breath and smell his sweaty reek. He spoke a name or two. "What you all say I done, Mr John?" McLendon jerked the car door open. "Get in!" he said. The Negro did not move. "What you all going to do with me, Mr John? I aint done nothing. White folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear 'fore God." He called another name. "Get in!" McLendon said. He struck the Negro. The others expelled their breath in a dry hissing and struck him with random blows and he whirled and cursed them, and swept his manacled hands across their faces and slashed the barber upon the mouth, and the barber struck him also. "Get him in there," McLendon said. They pushed at him. He ceased struggling and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places. He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to face. Butch clung to the running board. The car moved on. The barber nursed his mouth with his handkerchief. "What's the matter, Hawk?" the soldier said. "Nothing," the barber said. They regained the highroad and turned away from town. The second car dropped back out of the dust. They went on, gaining speed; the final fringe of houses dropped behind. "Goddamn, he stinks!" the soldier said. "We'll fix that,"

the drummer in front beside McLendon said. On the running board Butch cursed into the hot rush of air. The barber leaned suddenly forward and touched McLendon's arm. "Let me out, John," he said. "Jump out, niggerlover," McLendon said without turning his head. He drove swiftly. Behind them the sourceless lights of the second car glared in the dust. Presently McLendon turned into a narrow road. It was rutted with disuse. It led back to an abandoned brick kiln--a series of reddish mounds and weed- and vine-choked vats without bottom. It had been used for pasture once, until one day the owner missed one of his mules. Although he prodded carefully in the vats with a long pole, he could not even find the bottom of them. "John," the barber said. "Jump out, then," McLendon said, hurling the car along the ruts. Beside the barber the Negro spoke: "Mr Henry." The barber sat forward. The narrow tunnel of the road rushed up and past. Their motion was like an extinct furnace blast: cooler, but utterly dead. The car bounded from rut to rut. "Mr Henry," the Negro said. The barber began to tug furiously at the door. "Look out, there!" the soldier said, but the barber had already kicked the door open and swung onto the running board. The soldier leaned across the Negro and grasped at him, but he had already jumped. "The car went on without checking speed. The impetus hurled him crashing through dust-sheathed weeds, into the ditch. Dust puffed about him, and in a thin, vicious crackling of sapless stems he lay choking and retching until the second car passed and died away. Then he rose and limped on until he reached the highroad and turned toward town, brushing at his clothes with his hands. The moon was higher, riding high and clear of the dust at last, and after a while the town began to glare beneath the dust. He went on, limping. Presently he heard cars and the glow of them grew in the dust behind him and he left the road and crouched again in the weeds until they passed. McLendon's car came last now. There were four people in it and Butch was not on the running board. They went on; the dust swallowed them; the glare and the sound died away. The dust of them hung for a while, but soon the eternal dust absorbed it again. The barber climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town. IV AS SHE DRESSED for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. "Do you feel strong enough to go out?" they said, their eyes bright too, with a dark glitter. "When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything." In the leafed darkness, as they walked toward the square, she began to breathe deeply, something like a swimmer pre-paring to dive, until she ceased trembling, the four of them walking slowly because of the terrible heat and out of solicitude for her. But as they neared the square she began to tremble again, walking with her head up her hands clenched at her sides, their voices about her murmurous, also with that feverish, glittering quality of their eyes. They entered the square, she in the center of the group, fragile in her fresh dress. She was trembling worse. She walked slower and slower, as children eat ice cream, her head up and her eyes bright in the haggard banner of her face, passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking around at her: "That's the one: see? The one in pink in the middle." "Is that her? What did they do with the nigger? Did they--?" "Sure. He's all right." "All right, is he?" "Sure. He went on a little trip." Then the drug store, where even the young men lounging in the door-way tipped their hats and followed with, their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed. They went on, passing the lifted hats of the gentlemen, the suddenly ceased voices, deferent, protective. "Do you see?" the friends said. Their voices sounded like long, hovering sighs of

hissing exultation. "There's not a Negro on the square. Not one." They reached the picture show. It was like a miniature fairyland with its lighted lobby and colored lithographs of life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations. Her lips began to tingle. In the dark, when the picture began, it would be all right; she could hold back the laughing so it would not waste away so fast and so soon. So she hurried on before the turning faces, the undertones of low astonishment, and they took their accustomed places where she could see the aisle against the silver glare and the young men and girls coming in two and two against it. The lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver, and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad, while still the young men and girls entered, scented and sibilant in the half dark, their paired backs in silhouette delicate and sleek, their slim, quick bodies awkward, divinely young, while beyond them the silver dream accumulated, inevitably on and on. She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note, until the taxi came up and they helped her in. They removed the pink voile and the sheer underthings and the stockings, and put her to bed, and cracked ice for her temples, and sent for the doctor. He was hard to locate, so they ministered to her with hushed ejaculations, renewing the ice and fanning her. While the ice was fresh and cold she stopped laughing and lay still for a time, moaning only a little. But soon the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming. "Shhhhhhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhhhhhh!" they said, fresh-ening the icepack, smoothing her hair, examining it for gray; "poor girl!" Then to one another: "Do you suppose anything really happened?" their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate. "Shhhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!" V IT WAS MIDNIGHT when McLendon drove up to his neat new house. It was trim and fresh as a birdcage and almost as small, with its clean, green-and-white paint. He locked the car and mounted the porch and entered. His wife rose from a chair beside the reading lamp. McLendon stopped in the floor and stared at her until she looked down. "Look at that clock," he said, lifting his arm, pointing. She stood before him her face lowered, a magazine in her hands. Her face was pale, strained, and weary-looking. "Haven't I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?" "John," she said. She laid the magazine down. Poised on the balls of his feet, he glared at her with his hot eyes, his sweating face. "Didn't I tell you?" He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood passive, looking at him. "Don't, John. I couldn't sleep . . . The heat; something. Please, John. You're hurting me." "Didn't I tell you?" He released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room. He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off. He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars. 1931

James Joyce, "The Sisters"

Available here: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/joyce/james/j8d/chapter1.html>

THERE was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of a corpse. He had often said to me: "I am not long for this world," and I had thought his words idle. Now I knew they were true. Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word gnomon in the Euclid and the word simony in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work.

Old Cotter was sitting at the fire, smoking, when I came downstairs to supper. While my aunt was ladling out my stirabout he said, as if returning to some former remark of his:

"No, I wouldn't say he was exactly . . . but there was something queer . . . there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion. . . ."

He began to puff at his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Tiresome old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms; but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery.

"I have my own theory about it," he said. "I think it was one of those . . . peculiar cases . . . But it's hard to say. . . ."

He began to puff again at his pipe without giving us his theory. My uncle saw me staring and said to me:

"Well, so your old friend is gone, you'll be sorry to hear."

"Who?" said I.

"Father Flynn."

"Is he dead?"

"Mr. Cotter here has just told us. He was passing by the house."

I knew that I was under observation so I continued eating as if the news had not interested me. My uncle explained to old Cotter.

"The youngster and he were great friends. The old chap taught him a great deal, mind you; and they say he had a great wish for him."

"God have mercy on his soul," said my aunt piously.

Old Cotter looked at me for a while. I felt that his little beady black eyes were examining me but I would not satisfy him by looking up from my plate. He returned to his pipe and finally spat rudely into the grate.

"I wouldn't like children of mine," he said, "to have too much to say to a man like that."

"How do you mean, Mr. Cotter?" asked my aunt.

"What I mean is," said old Cotter, "it's bad for children. My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be . . . Am I right, Jack?"

"That's my principle, too," said my uncle. "Let him learn to box his corner. That's what I'm always saying to that Rosicrucian there: take exercise. Why, when I was a nipper every morning of my life I had a cold bath, winter and summer. And that's what stands to me now. Education is all very fine and large. . . . Mr. Cotter might take a pick of that leg mutton," he added to my aunt.

"No, no, not for me," said old Cotter.

My aunt brought the dish from the safe and put it on the table.

"But why do you think it's not good for children, Mr. Cotter?" she asked.

"It's bad for children," said old Cotter, "because their mind are so impressionable. When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect. . . ."

I crammed my mouth with stirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger. Tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!

It was late when I fell asleep. Though I was angry with old Cotter for alluding to me as a child, I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences. In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured, and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region; and there again I found it waiting for me. It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist

with spittle. But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis and I felt that I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniac of his sin.

The next morning after breakfast I went down to look at the little house in Great Britain Street. It was an unassuming shop, registered under the vague name of Drapery . The drapery consisted mainly of children's bootees and umbrellas; and on ordinary days a notice used to hang in the window, saying: Umbrellas Re-covered . No notice was visible now for the shutters were up. A crape bouquet was tied to the doorknocker with ribbon. Two poor women and a telegram boy were reading the card pinned on the crape. I also approached and read:

July 1st, 1895
The Rev. James Flynn (formerly of S. Catherine's Church, Meath Street), aged sixty-five years.
R. I. P.

The reading of the card persuaded me that he was dead and I was disturbed to find myself at check. Had he not been dead I would have gone into the little dark room behind the shop to find him sitting in his arm-chair by the fire, nearly smothered in his great-coat. Perhaps my aunt would have given me a packet of High Toast for him and this present would have roused him from his stupefied doze. It was always I who emptied the packet into his black snuff-box for his hands trembled too much to allow him to do this without spilling half the snuff about the floor. Even as he raised his large trembling hand to his nose little clouds of smoke dribbled through his fingers over the front of his coat. It may have been these constant showers of snuff which gave his ancient priestly garments their green faded look for the red handkerchief, blackened, as it always was, with the snuff-stains of a week, with which he tried to brush away the fallen grains, was quite inefficacious.

I wished to go in and look at him but I had not the courage to knock. I walked away slowly along the sunny side of the street, reading all the theatrical advertisements in the shop-windows as I went. I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in a mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at discovering in myself a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by his death. I wondered at this for, as my uncle had said the night before, he had taught me a great deal. He had studied in the Irish college in Rome and he had taught me to pronounce Latin properly. He had told me stories about the catacombs and about Napoleon Bonaparte, and he had explained to me the meaning of the different ceremonies of the Mass and of the different vestments worn by the priest. Sometimes he had amused himself by putting difficult questions to me, asking me what one should do in certain circumstances or whether such and such sins were mortal or venial or only imperfections. His questions showed me how complex and mysterious were certain institutions of the Church which I had always regarded as the simplest acts. The duties of the priest towards the Eucharist and towards the secrecy of the confessional seemed so grave to me that I wondered how anybody had ever found in himself the courage to undertake them; and I was not

surprised when he told me that the fathers of the Church had written books as thick as the Post Office Directory and as closely printed as the law notices in the newspaper, elucidating all these intricate questions. Often when I thought of this I could make no answer or only a very foolish and halting one upon which he used to smile and nod his head twice or thrice. Sometimes he used to put me through the responses of the Mass which he had made me learn by heart; and, as I pattered, he used to smile pensively and nod his head, now and then pushing huge pinches of snuff up each nostril alternately. When he smiled he used to uncover his big discoloured teeth and let his tongue lie upon his lower lip — a habit which had made me feel uneasy in the beginning of our acquaintance before I knew him well.

As I walked along in the sun I remembered old Cotter's words and tried to remember what had happened afterwards in the dream. I remembered that I had noticed long velvet curtains and a swinging lamp of antique fashion. I felt that I had been very far away, in some land where the customs were strange — in Persia, I thought. . . . But I could not remember the end of the dream.

In the evening my aunt took me with her to visit the house of mourning. It was after sunset; but the window-panes of the houses that looked to the west reflected the tawny gold of a great bank of clouds. Nannie received us in the hall; and, as it would have been unseemly to have shouted at her, my aunt shook hands with her for all. The old woman pointed upwards interrogatively and, on my aunt's nodding, proceeded to toil up the narrow staircase before us, her bowed head being scarcely above the level of the banister-rail. At the first landing she stopped and beckoned us forward encouragingly towards the open door of the dead-room. My aunt went in and the old woman, seeing that I hesitated to enter, began to beckon to me again repeatedly with her hand.

I went in on tiptoe. The room through the lace end of the blind was suffused with dusky golden light amid which the candles looked like pale thin flames. He had been coffined. Nannie gave the lead and we three knelt down at the foot of the bed. I pretended to pray but I could not gather my thoughts because the old woman's mutterings distracted me. I noticed how clumsily her skirt was hooked at the back and how the heels of her cloth boots were trodden down all to one side. The fancy came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin.

But no. When we rose and went up to the head of the bed I saw that he was not smiling. There he lay, solemn and copious, vested as for the altar, his large hands loosely retaining a chalice. His face was very truculent, grey and massive, with black cavernous nostrils and circled by a scanty white fur. There was a heavy odour in the room — the flowers.

We crossed ourselves and came away. In the little room downstairs we found Eliza seated in his arm-chair in state. I groped my way towards my usual chair in the corner while Nannie went to the sideboard and brought out a decanter of sherry and some wine-glasses. She set these on the table and invited us to take a little glass of wine. Then, at her sister's

bidding, she filled out the sherry into the glasses and passed them to us. She pressed me to take some cream crackers also but I declined because I thought I would make too much noise eating them. She seemed to be somewhat disappointed at my refusal and went over quietly to the sofa where she sat down behind her sister. No one spoke: we all gazed at the empty fireplace.

My aunt waited until Eliza sighed and then said:

“Ah, well, he’s gone to a better world.”

Eliza sighed again and bowed her head in assent. My aunt fingered the stem of her wine-glass before sipping a little.

“Did he . . . peacefully?” she asked.

“Oh, quite peacefully, ma’am,” said Eliza. “You couldn’t tell when the breath went out of him. He had a beautiful death, God be praised.”

“And everything . . .?”

“Father O’Rourke was in with him a Tuesday and anointed him and prepared him and all.”

“He knew then?”

“He was quite resigned.”

“He looks quite resigned,” said my aunt.

“That’s what the woman we had in to wash him said. She said he just looked as if he was asleep, he looked that peaceful and resigned. No one would think he’d make such a beautiful corpse.”

“Yes, indeed,” said my aunt.

She sipped a little more from her glass and said:

“Well, Miss Flynn, at any rate it must be a great comfort for you to know that you did all you could for him. You were both very kind to him, I must say.”

Eliza smoothed her dress over her knees.

“Ah, poor James!” she said. “God knows we done all we could, as poor as we are — we wouldn’t see him want anything while he was in it.”

Nannie had leaned her head against the sofa-pillow and seemed about to fall asleep.

“There’s poor Nannie,” said Eliza, looking at her, “she’s wore out. All the work we had, she and me, getting in the woman to wash him and then laying him out and then the coffin and then arranging about the Mass in the chapel. Only for Father O’Rourke I don’t know what we’d done at all. It was him brought us all them flowers and them two candlesticks out of the chapel and wrote out the notice for the Freeman’s General and took charge of all the papers for the cemetery and poor James’s insurance.”

“Wasn’t that good of him?” said my aunt

Eliza closed her eyes and shook her head slowly.

“Ah, there’s no friends like the old friends,” she said, “when all is said and done, no friends that a body can trust.”

“Indeed, that’s true,” said my aunt. “And I’m sure now that he’s gone to his eternal reward he won’t forget you and all your kindness to him.”

“Ah, poor James!” said Eliza. “He was no great trouble to us. You wouldn’t hear him in the house any more than now. Still, I know he’s gone and all to that. . . .”

“It’s when it’s all over that you’ll miss him,” said my aunt.

“I know that,” said Eliza. “I won’t be bringing him in his cup of beef-tea any me, nor you, ma’am, sending him his snuff. Ah, poor James!”

She stopped, as if she were communing with the past and then said shrewdly:

“Mind you, I noticed there was something queer coming over him latterly. Whenever I’d bring in his soup to him there I’d find him with his breviary fallen to the floor, lying back in the chair and his mouth open.”

She laid a finger against her nose and frowned: then she continued:

“But still and all he kept on saying that before the summer was over he’d go out for a drive one fine day just to see the old house again where we were all born down in Irishtown and take me and Nannie with him. If we could only get one of them new-fangled carriages that makes no noise that Father O’Rourke told him about, them with the rheumatic wheels, for the day cheap — he said, at Johnny Rush’s over the way there and drive out the three of us together of a Sunday evening. He had his mind set on that. . . . Poor James!”

“The Lord have mercy on his soul!” said my aunt.

Eliza took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes with it. Then she put it back again in her pocket and gazed into the empty grate for some time without speaking.

“He was too scrupulous always,” she said. “The duties of the priesthood was too much for him. And then his life was, you might say, crossed.”

“Yes,” said my aunt. “He was a disappointed man. You could see that.”

A silence took possession of the little room and, under cover of it, I approached the table and tasted my sherry and then returned quietly to my chair in the corner. Eliza seemed to have fallen into a deep reverie. We waited respectfully for her to break the silence: and after a long pause she said slowly:

“It was that chalice he broke. . . . That was the beginning of it. Of course, they say it was all right, that it contained nothing, I mean. But still. . . . They say it was the boy’s fault. But poor James was so nervous, God be merciful to him!”

“And was that it?” said my aunt. “I heard something. . . .”

Eliza nodded.

“That affected his mind,” she said. “After that he began to mope by himself, talking to no one and wandering about by himself. So one night he was wanted for to go on a call and they couldn’t find him anywhere. They looked high up and low down; and still they couldn’t see a sight of him anywhere. So then the clerk suggested to try the chapel. So then they got the keys and opened the chapel and the clerk and Father O’Rourke and another priest that was there brought in a light for to look for him. . . . And what do you think but there he was, sitting up by himself in the dark in his confession-box, wide-awake and laughing-like softly to himself?”

She stopped suddenly as if to listen. I too listened; but there was no sound in the house: and I knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast.

Eliza resumed:

“Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself. . . . So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him. . . .”

John Steinbeck, "The Chrysanthemums"

Available here: <https://literaryfictions.com/fiction-1/the-chrysanthemums-by-john-steinbeck-2/>

The high grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky and from all the rest of the world. On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot. On the broad, level land floor the gang plows bit deep and left the black earth shining like metal where the shares had cut. On the foothill ranches across the Salinas River, the yellow stubble fields seemed to be bathed in pale cold sunshine, but there was no sunshine in the valley now in December. The thick willow scrub along the river flamed with sharp and positive yellow leaves.

It was a time of quiet and of waiting. The air was cold and tender. A light wind blew up from the southwest so that the farmers were mildly hopeful of a good rain before long; but fog and rain did not go together.

Across the river, on Henry Allen's foothill ranch there was little work to be done, for the hay was cut and stored and the orchards were plowed up to receive the rain deeply when it should come. The cattle on the higher slopes were becoming shaggy and rough-coated.

Elisa Allen, working in her flower garden, looked down across the yard and saw Henry, her husband, talking to two men in business suits. The three of them stood by the tractor shed, each man with one foot on the side of the little Fordson. They smoked cigarettes and studied the machine as they talked.

Elisa watched them for a moment and then went back to her work. She was thirty-five. Her face was lean and strong and her eyes were as clear as water. Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes, a figured print dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets to hold the snips, the trowel and scratcher, the seeds and the knife she worked with. She wore heavy leather gloves to protect her hands while she worked.

She was cutting down the old year's chrysanthemum stalks with a pair of short and powerful scissors. She looked down toward the men by the tractor shed now and then. Her face was eager and mature and handsome; even her work with the scissors was over-eager, over-powerful. The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy.

She brushed a cloud of hair out of her eyes with the back of her glove, and left a smudge of earth on her cheek in doing it. Behind her stood the neat white farm house with red geraniums close-banked around it as high as the windows. It was a hard-swept looking little house, with hard-polished windows, and a clean mud-mat on the front steps.

Elisa cast another glance toward the tractor shed. The strangers were getting into their Ford coupe. She took off a glove and put her strong fingers down into the forest of new green chrysanthemum sprouts that were growing around the old roots. She spread the leaves and looked down among the close-growing stems. No aphids were there, no sowbugs or snails or cutworms. Her terrier fingers destroyed such pests before they could get started.

Elisa started at the sound of her husband's voice. He had come near quietly, and he leaned over the wire fence that protected her flower garden from cattle and dogs and chickens.

"At it again," he said. "You've got a strong new crop coming."

Elisa straightened her back and pulled on the gardening glove again. "Yes. They'll be strong this coming year." In her tone and on her face there was a little smugness.

You've got a gift with things," Henry observed. "Some of those yellow chrysanthemums you had this year were ten inches across. I wish you'd work out in the orchard and raise some apples that big."

Her eyes sharpened. "Maybe I could do it, too. I've a gift with things, all right. My mother had it. She could stick anything in the ground and make it grow. She said it was having planters' hands that knew how to do it."

"Well, it sure works with flowers," he said.

"Henry, who were those men you were talking to?"

"Why, sure, that's what I came to tell you. They were from the Western Meat Company. I sold those thirty head of three-year-old steers. Got nearly my own price, too."

"Good," she said. "Good for you."

"And I thought," he continued, "I thought how it's Saturday afternoon, and we might go into Salinas for dinner at a restaurant, and then to a picture show—to celebrate, you see."

"Good," she repeated. "Oh, yes. That will be good."

Henry put on his joking tone. "There's fights tonight. How'd you like to go to the fights?"

"Oh, no," she said breathlessly. "No, I wouldn't like fights."

"Just fooling, Elisa. We'll go to a movie. Let's see. It's two now. I'm going to take Scotty and bring down those steers from the hill. It'll take us maybe two hours. We'll go in town about five and have dinner at the Cominos Hotel. Like that?"

"Of course I'll like it. It's good to eat away from home."

"All right, then. I'll go get up a couple of horses."

She said, "I'll have plenty of time to transplant some of these sets, I guess."

She heard her husband calling Scotty down by the barn. And a little later she saw the two men ride up the pale yellow hillside in search of the steers.

There was a little square sandy bed kept for rooting the chrysanthemums. With her trowel she turned the soil over and over, and smoothed it and patted it firm. Then she dug ten parallel trenches to receive the sets. Back at the chrysanthemum bed she pulled out the little crisp shoots, trimmed off the leaves of each one with her scissors and laid it on a small orderly pile.

A squeak of wheels and plod of hoofs came from the road. Elisa looked up. The country road ran along the dense bank of willows and cotton-woods that bordered the river, and up this road came a curious vehicle, curiously drawn. It was an old spring-wagon, with a round canvas top on it like the cover of a prairie schooner. It was drawn by an old bay horse and a little grey-and-white burro. A big stubble-bearded man sat between the cover flaps and drove the crawling team. Underneath the wagon, between the hind wheels, a lean and rangy mongrel dog walked sedately. Words were painted on the canvas in clumsy, crooked letters. "Pots, pans, knives, sisors, lawn mores, Fixed." Two rows of articles, and the triumphantly definitive "Fixed" below. The black paint had run down in little sharp points beneath each letter.

Elisa, squatting on the ground, watched to see the crazy, loose-jointed wagon pass by. But it didn't pass. It turned into the farm road in front of her house, crooked old wheels skirling and squeaking. The rangy dog darted from between the wheels and ran ahead. Instantly the two ranch shepherds flew out at him. Then all three stopped, and with stiff and quivering tails, with taut straight legs, with ambassadorial dignity, they slowly circled, sniffing daintily. The caravan pulled up to Elisa's wire fence and stopped. Now the newcomer dog, feeling outnumbered, lowered his tail and retired under the wagon with raised hackles and bared teeth.

The man on the wagon seat called out, "That's a bad dog in a fight when he gets started."

Elisa laughed. "I see he is. How soon does he generally get started?"

The man caught up her laughter and echoed it heartily. "Sometimes not for weeks and weeks," he said. He climbed stiffly down, over the wheel. The horse and the donkey drooped like unwatered flowers.

Elisa saw that he was a very big man. Although his hair and beard were graying, he did not look old. His worn black suit was wrinkled and spotted with grease. The laughter had disappeared from his face and eyes the moment his laughing voice ceased. His eyes were dark, and they were full of the brooding that gets in the eyes of teamsters and of sailors. The calloused hands he rested on the wire fence were cracked, and every crack was a black line. He took off his battered hat.

"I'm off my general road, ma'am," he said. "Does this dirt road cut over across the river to the Los Angeles highway?"

Elisa stood up and shoved the thick scissors in her apron pocket. "Well, yes, it does, but it winds around and then fords the river. I don't think your team could pull through the sand."

He replied with some asperity, "It might surprise you what them beasts can pull through."

"When they get started?" she asked.

He smiled for a second. "Yes. When they get started."

"Well," said Elisa, "I think you'll save time if you go back to the Salinas road and pick up the highway there."

He drew a big finger down the chicken wire and made it sing. "I ain't in any hurry, ma'am. I go from Seattle to San Diego and back every year. Takes all my time. About six months each way. I aim to follow nice weather."

Elisa took off her gloves and stuffed them in the apron pocket with the scissors. She touched the under edge of her man's hat, searching for fugitive hairs. "That sounds like a nice kind of a way to live," she said.

He leaned confidentially over the fence. "Maybe you noticed the writing on my wagon. I mend pots and sharpen knives and scissors. You got any of them things to do?"

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "Nothing like that." Her eyes hardened with resistance.

"Scissors is the worst thing," he explained. "Most people just ruin scissors trying to sharpen 'em, but I know how. I got a special tool. It's a little bobbit kind of thing, and patented. But it sure does the trick."

"No. My scissors are all sharp."

"All right, then. Take a pot," he continued earnestly, "a bent pot, or a pot with a hole. I can make it like new so you don't have to buy no new ones. That's a saving for you."

"No," she said shortly. "I tell you I have nothing like that for you to do."

His face fell to an exaggerated sadness. His voice took on a whining undertone. "I ain't had a thing to do today. Maybe I won't have no supper tonight. You see I'm off my regular road. I know folks on the highway clear from Seattle to San Diego. They save their things for me to sharpen up because they know I do it so good and save them money."

"I'm sorry," Elisa said irritably. "I haven't anything for you to do."

His eyes left her face and fell to searching the ground. They roamed about until they came to the chrysanthemum bed where she had been working. "What's them plants, ma'am?"

The irritation and resistance melted from Elisa's face. "Oh, those are chrysanthemums, giant whites and yellows. I raise them every year, bigger than anybody around here."

"Kind of a long-stemmed flower? Looks like a quick puff of colored smoke?" he asked.

"That's it. What a nice way to describe them."

"They smell kind of nasty till you get used to them," he said.

"It's a good bitter smell," she retorted, "not nasty at all."

He changed his tone quickly. "I like the smell myself."

"I had ten-inch blooms this year," she said.

The man leaned farther over the fence. "Look. I know a lady down the road a piece, has got the nicest garden you ever seen. Got nearly every kind of flower but no chrysanthemums. Last time I was mending a copper-bottom washtub for her (that's a hard job but I do it good), she said to me, 'If you ever run acrost some nice chrysanthemums I wish you'd try to get me a few seeds.' That's what she told me."

Elisa's eyes grew alert and eager. "She couldn't have known much about chrysanthemums. You *can* raise them from seed, but it's much easier to root the little sprouts you see there." "Oh," he said. "I s'pose I can't take none to her, then."

"Why yes you can," Elisa cried. "I can put some in damp sand, and you can carry them right along with you. They'll take root in the pot if you keep them damp. And then she can transplant them."

"She'd sure like to have some, ma'am. You say they're nice ones?"

"Beautiful," she said. "Oh, beautiful." Her eyes shone. She tore off the battered hat and shook out her dark pretty hair. "I'll put them in a flower pot, and you can take them right with you. Come into the yard."

While the man came through the picket fence Elisa ran excitedly along the geranium-bordered path to the back of the house. And she returned carrying a big red flower pot. The gloves were forgotten now. She kneeled on the ground by the starting bed and dug up the sandy soil with her fingers and scooped it into the bright new flower pot. Then she picked up the little pile of shoots she had prepared. With her strong fingers she pressed them into the sand and tamped around them with her knuckles. The man stood over her. "I'll tell you what to do," she said. "You remember so you can tell the lady."

"Yes, I'll try to remember."

"Well, look. These will take root in about a month. Then she must set them out, about a foot apart in good rich earth like this, see?" She lifted a handful of dark soil for him to look at. "They'll grow fast and tall. Now remember this. In July tell her to cut them down, about eight inches from the ground."

"Before they bloom?" he asked.

“Yes, before they bloom.” Her face was tight with eagerness. “They’ll grow right up again. About the last of September the buds will start.”

She stopped and seemed perplexed. “It’s the budding that takes the most care,” she said hesitantly. “I don’t know how to tell you.” She looked deep into his eyes, searchingly. Her mouth opened a little, and she seemed to be listening. “I’ll try to tell you,” she said. “Did you ever hear of planting hands?”

“Can’t say I have, ma’am.”

“Well, I can only tell you what it feels like. It’s when you’re picking off the buds you don’t want. Everything goes right down into your fingertips. You watch your fingers work. They do it themselves. You can feel how it is. They pick and pick the buds. They never make a mistake. They’re with the plant. Do you see? Your fingers and the plant. You can feel that, right up your arm. They know. They never make a mistake. You can feel it. When you’re like that you can’t do anything wrong. Do you see that? Can you understand that?”

She was kneeling on the ground looking up at him. Her breast swelled passionately.

The man’s eyes narrowed. He looked away self-consciously. “Maybe I know,” he said. “Sometimes in the night in the wagon there—”

Elisa’s voice grew husky. She broke in on him. “I’ve never lived as you do, but I know what you mean. When the night is dark—why, the stars are sharp-pointed, and there’s quiet. Why, you rise up and up! Every pointed star gets driven into your body. It’s like that. Hot and sharp and—lovely.”

Kneeling there, her hand went out toward his legs in the greasy black trousers. Her hesitant fingers almost touched the cloth. Then her hand dropped to the ground. She crouched low like a fawning dog.

He said, “It’s nice, just like you say. Only when you don’t have no dinner, it ain’t.”

She stood up then, very straight, and her face was ashamed. She held the flower pot out to him and placed it gently in his arms. “Here. Put it in your wagon, on the seat, where you can watch it. Maybe I can find something for you to do.”

At the back of the house she dug in the can pile and found two old and battered aluminum saucepans. She carried them back and gave them to him. “Here, maybe you can fix these.”

His manner changed. He became professional. “Good as new I can fix them.” At the back of his wagon he set a little anvil, and out of an oily tool box dug a small machine hammer. Elisa came through the gate to watch him while he pounded out the dents in the kettles. His mouth grew sure and knowing. At a difficult part of the work he sucked his under-lip.

“You sleep right in the wagon?” Elisa asked.

“Right in the wagon, ma’am. Rain or shine I’m dry as a cow in there.”

“It must be nice,” she said. “It must be very nice. I wish women could do such things.”

“It ain’t the right kind of a life for a woman.”

Her upper lip raised a little, showing her teeth. “How do you know? How can you tell?” she said.

“I don’t know, ma’am,” he protested. “Of course I don’t know. Now here’s your kettles, done. You don’t have to buy no new ones.”

“How much?”

“Oh, fifty cents’ll do. I keep my prices down and my work good. That’s why I have all them satisfied customers up and down the highway.”

Elisa brought him a fifty-cent piece from the house and dropped it in his hand. “You might be surprised to have a rival some time. I can sharpen scissors, too. And I can beat the dents out of little pots. I could show you what a woman might do.”

He put his hammer back in the oily box and shoved the little anvil out of sight. “It would be a lonely life for a woman, ma’am, and a scarey life, too, with animals creeping under the wagon all night.” He climbed over the singletree, steadying himself with a hand on the burro’s white rump. He settled himself in the seat, picked up the lines. “Thank you kindly, ma’am,” he said. “I’ll do like you told me; I’ll go back and catch the Salinas road.”

“Mind,” she called, “if you’re long in getting there, keep the sand damp.”

“Sand, ma’am?. .. Sand? Oh, sure. You mean around the chrysanthemums. Sure I will.” He clucked his tongue. The beasts leaned luxuriously into their collars. The mongrel dog took his place between the back wheels. The wagon turned and crawled out the entrance road and back the way it had come, along the river.

Elisa stood in front of her wire fence watching the slow progress of the caravan. Her shoulders were straight, her head thrown back, her eyes half-closed, so that the scene came vaguely into them. Her lips moved silently, forming the words “Good-bye—good-bye.” Then she whispered, “That’s a bright direction. There’s a glowing there.” The sound of her whisper startled her. She shook herself free and looked about to see whether anyone had been listening. Only the dogs had heard. They lifted their heads toward her from their sleeping in the dust, and then stretched out their chins and settled asleep again. Elisa turned and ran hurriedly into the house.

In the kitchen she reached behind the stove and felt the water tank. It was full of hot water from the noonday cooking. In the bathroom she tore off her soiled clothes and flung them into the corner. And then she scrubbed herself with a little block of pumice, legs and thighs, loins and chest and arms, until her skin was scratched and red. When she had dried herself

she stood in front of a mirror in her bedroom and looked at her body. She tightened her stomach and threw out her chest. She turned and looked over her shoulder at her back.

After a while she began to dress, slowly. She put on her newest underclothing and her nicest stockings and the dress which was the symbol of her prettiness. She worked carefully on her hair, pencilled her eyebrows and rouged her lips.

Before she was finished she heard the little thunder of hoofs and the shouts of Henry and his helper as they drove the red steers into the corral. She heard the gate bang shut and set herself for Henry's arrival.

His step sounded on the porch. He entered the house calling, "Elisa, where are you?"

"In my room, dressing. I'm not ready. There's hot water for your bath. Hurry up. It's getting late."

When she heard him splashing in the tub, Elisa laid his dark suit on the bed, and shirt and socks and tie beside it. She stood his polished shoes on the floor beside the bed. Then she went to the porch and sat primly and stiffly down. She looked toward the river road where the willow-line was still yellow with frosted leaves so that under the high grey fog they seemed a thin band of sunshine. This was the only color in the grey afternoon. She sat unmoving for a long time. Her eyes blinked rarely.

Henry came banging out of the door, shoving his tie inside his vest as he came. Elisa stiffened and her face grew tight. Henry stopped short and looked at her. "Why—why, Elisa. You look so nice!"

"Nice? You think I look nice? What do you mean by 'nice'?"

Henry blundered on. "I don't know. I mean you look different, strong and happy."

"I am strong? Yes, strong. What do you mean 'strong'?"

He looked bewildered. "You're playing some kind of a game," he said helplessly. "It's a kind of a play. You look strong enough to break a calf over your knee, happy enough to eat it like a watermelon."

For a second she lost her rigidity. "Henry! Don't talk like that. You didn't know what you said." She grew complete again. "I'm strong," she boasted. "I never knew before how strong."

Henry looked down toward the tractor shed, and when he brought his eyes back to her, they were his own again. "I'll get out the car. You can put on your coat while I'm starting."

Elisa went into the house. She heard him drive to the gate and idle down his motor, and then she took a long time to put on her hat. She pulled it here and pressed it there. When Henry turned the motor off she slipped into her coat and went out.

The little roadster bounced along on the dirt road by the river, raising the birds and driving the rabbits into the brush. Two cranes flapped heavily over the willow-line and dropped into the river-bed.

Far ahead on the road Elisa saw a dark speck. She knew.

She tried not to look as they passed it, but her eyes would not obey. She whispered to herself sadly, "He might have thrown them off the road. That wouldn't have been much trouble, not very much. But he kept the pot," she explained. "He had to keep the pot. That's why he couldn't get them off the road."

The roadster turned a bend and she saw the caravan ahead. She swung full around toward her husband so she could not see the little covered wagon and the mismatched team as the car passed them.

In a moment it was over. The thing was done. She did not look back.

She said loudly, to be heard above the motor, "It will be good, tonight, a good dinner."

"Now you're changed again," Henry complained. He took one hand from the wheel and patted her knee. "I ought to take you in to dinner oftener. It would be good for both of us. We get so heavy out on the ranch."

"Henry," she asked, "could we have wine at dinner?"

"Sure we could. Say! That will be fine."

She was silent for a while; then she said, "Henry, at those prize fights, do the men hurt each other very much?"

"Sometimes a little, not often. Why?"

"Well, I've read how they break noses, and blood runs down their chests. I've read how the fighting gloves get heavy and soggy with blood."

He looked around at her. "What's the matter, Elisa? I didn't know you read things like that." He brought the car to a stop, then turned to the right over the Salinas River bridge.

"Do any women ever go to the fights?" she asked.

"Oh, sure, some. What's the matter, Elisa? Do you want to go? I don't think you'd like it, but I'll take you if you really want to go."

She relaxed limply in the seat. "Oh, no. No. I don't want to go. I'm sure I don't." Her face was turned away from him. "It will be enough if we can have wine. It will be plenty." She turned up her coat collar so he could not see that she was crying weakly—like an old woman.

Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall"

Available here: <https://www.bartleby.com/85/8.html>

PERHAPS it was the middle of January in the present that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light upon the page of my book; the three chrysanthemums in the round glass bowl on the mantelpiece. Yes, it must have been the winter time, and we had just finished our tea, for I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time. I looked up through the smoke of my cigarette and my eye lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock. Rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps. The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece. 1

How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it.... If that mark was made by a nail, it can't have been for a picture, it must have been for a miniature—the miniature of a lady with white powdered curls, powder-dusted cheeks, and lips like red carnations. A fraud of course, for the people who had this house before us would have chosen pictures in that way—an old picture for an old room. That is the sort of people they were—very interesting people, and I think of them so often, in such queer places, because one will never see them again, never know what happened next. They wanted to leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture, so he said, and he was in process of saying that in his opinion art should have ideas behind it when 2

we were torn asunder, as one is torn from the old lady about to pour out tea and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train.

But as for that mark, I'm not sure about it; I don't believe it was made by a nail after all; it's too big, too round, for that. I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain; because once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened. Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization—let me just count over a few of the things lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle board, the hand organ—all gone, and jewels, too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips. What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure! The wonder is that I've any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard....

But after life. The slow pulling down of thick green stalks so that the cup of the flower, as it turns over, deluges one with purple and red light. Why, after all, should one not be born there as one is born here, helpless, speechless, unable to focus one's eyesight, groping at the roots of the grass, at the toes of the Giants? As for saying which are trees, and which are men and women, or whether there are such things, that one won't be in a condition to do for fifty years or so. There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour—dim pinks and blues—which will, as time goes on, become more definite, become—I don't know what....

And yet that mark on the wall is not a hole at all. It may even be caused by some round black substance, such as a small rose leaf, left over from the summer, and I, not being a very vigilant housekeeper—look at the dust on the mantelpiece, for example, the dust which, so they say, buried Troy three times over, only fragments of pots utterly refusing annihilation, as one can believe.

The tree outside the window taps very gently on the pane.... I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts. To steady myself, let me catch hold of the first idea that passes.... Shakespeare.... Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an arm-chair, and looked into the fire, so— A shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind. He leant his forehead on his hand, and people, looking in through the open door,—for this scene is supposed to take place on a summer's evening—But how dull this is, this historical fiction! It doesn't interest me at all. I wish I could hit upon a pleasant track of thought, a track indirectly reflecting credit upon myself, for those are

the pleasantest thoughts, and very frequent even in the minds of modest mouse-coloured people, who believe genuinely that they dislike to hear their own praises. They are not thoughts directly praising oneself; that is the beauty of them; they are thoughts like this:

“And then I came into the room. They were discussing botany. I said how I’d seen a flower growing on a dust heap on the site of an old house in Kingsway. The seed, I said, must have been sown in the reign of Charles the First. What flowers grew in the reign of Charles the First?” I asked—(but, I don’t remember the answer). Tall flowers with purple tassels to them perhaps. And so it goes on. All the time I’m dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, lovingly, stealthily, not openly adoring it, for if I did that, I should catch myself out, and stretch my hand at once for a book in self-protection. Indeed, it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry or any other handling that could make it ridiculous, or too unlike the original to be believed in any longer. Or is it not so very curious after all? It is a matter of great importance. Suppose the looking glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people—what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in. As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps—but these generalizations are very worthless. The military sound of the word is enough. It recalls leading articles, cabinet ministers—a whole class of things indeed which as a child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation. Generalizations bring back somehow Sunday in London, Sunday afternoon walks, Sunday luncheons, and also ways of speaking of the dead, clothes, and habits—like the habit of sitting all together in one room until a certain hour, although nobody liked it. There was a rule for everything. The rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them, such as you may see in photographs of the carpets in the corridors of the royal palaces. Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths. How shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a sense of illegitimate freedom. What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker’s Table of Precedency, which has become, I suppose, since the war half a phantom to many men and women, which soon—one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go, the mahogany sideboards and the Landseer prints, Gods and Devils, Hell and so forth, leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom—if freedom exists....

7

In certain lights that mark on the wall seems actually to project from the wall. Nor is it entirely circular. I cannot be sure, but it seems to cast a perceptible shadow, suggesting that if I ran my finger down that strip of the wall it would, at a certain point, mount and descend a small tumulus, a smooth tumulus like those barrows on the South Downs which are, they say, either tombs or camps. Of the two I should prefer them to be tombs, desiring melancholy like most English people, and finding it natural at the end of a walk to think of the bones stretched beneath the turf.... There must be some book about it. Some antiquary must have dug up those bones and given them a name.... What sort of a man is an antiquary, I wonder? Retired Colonels for the most part, I daresay, leading parties of aged labourers to the top here, examining clods of earth and stone, and getting into correspondence with the neighbouring clergy, which, being opened at breakfast time, gives them a feeling of importance, and the comparison of arrow-heads necessitates cross-country journeys to the county towns, an agreeable necessity both to them and to their elderly wives, who wish to make plum jam or to clean out the study, and have every reason for keeping that great question of the camp or the tomb in perpetual suspension, while the Colonel himself feels agreeably philosophic in accumulating evidence on both sides of the question. It is true that he does finally incline to believe in the camp; and, being opposed, indites a pamphlet which he is about to read at the quarterly meeting of the local society when a stroke lays him low, and his last conscious thoughts are not of wife or child, but of the camp and that arrowhead there, which is now in the case at the local museum, together with the foot of a Chinese murderess, a handful of Elizabethan nails, a great many Tudor clay pipes, a piece of Roman pottery, and the wine-glass that Nelson drank out of—proving I really don't know what.

No, no, nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really—what shall we say?—the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago, which has now, owing to the patient attrition of many generations of housemaids, revealed its head above the coat of paint, and is taking its first view of modern life in the sight of a white-walled fire-lit room, what should I gain?— Knowledge? Matter for further speculation? I can think sitting still as well as standing up. And what is knowledge? What are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogating shrew-mice and writing down the language of the stars? And the less we honour them as our superstitions dwindle and our respect for beauty and health of mind increases.... Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs.... How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections—if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!

I must jump up and see for myself what that mark on the wall really is—a nail, a rose-leaf, a crack in the wood?

Here is nature once more at her old game of self-preservation. This train of thought, she perceives, is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality, for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency? The

Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; the Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York. Everybody follows somebody, such is the philosophy of Whitaker; and the great thing is to know who follows whom. Whitaker knows, and let that, so Nature counsels, comfort you, instead of enraging you; and if you can't be comforted, if you must shatter this hour of peace, think of the mark on the wall.

I understand Nature's game—her prompting to take action as a way of ending any thought that threatens to excite or to pain. Hence, I suppose, comes our slight contempt for men of action—men, we assume, who don't think. Still, there's no harm in putting a full stop to one's disagreeable thoughts by looking at a mark on the wall. 12

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Archbishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of.... Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the side of rivers—all things one likes to think about. The cows swish their tails beneath them on hot afternoons; they paint rivers so green that when a moorhen dives one expects to see its feathers all green when it comes up again. I like to think of the fish balanced against the stream like flags blown out; and of water-beetles slowly raiding domes of mud upon the bed of the river. I like to think of the tree itself:—first the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap. I like to think of it, too, on winter's nights standing in the empty field with all leaves close-furled, nothing tender exposed to the iron bullets of the moon, a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling, all night long. The song of birds must sound very loud and strange in June; and how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark, or sun themselves upon the thin green awning of the leaves, and look straight in front of them with diamond-cut red eyes.... One by one the fibres snap beneath the immense cold pressure of the earth, then the last storm comes and, falling, the highest branches drive deep into the ground again. Even so, life isn't done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. I should like to take each one separately—but something is getting in the way.... Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing.... There is a vast upheaval of matter. Someone is standing over me and saying—

"I'm going out to buy a newspaper." 14

"Yes?" 15

"Though it's no good buying newspapers.... Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!... All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall." 16

Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail.

Raymond Carver, "Where I'm Calling From"

Available here: <http://eslbits.net/ESL.English.Listening.Short.Stories/Where.I'm.Calling.From/01/default.html>

WE ARE ON the front porch at Frank Martin's drying-out facility. Like the rest of us at Frank Martin's, J.P. is first and foremost a drunk. But he's also a chimney sweep. It's his first time here, and he's scared. I've been here once before. What's to say? I'm back. J.P.'s real name is Joe Penny, but he says I should call him J.P. He's about thirty years old.

Younger than I am. Not much younger, but a little. He's telling me how he decided to go into his line of work, and he wants to use his hands when he talks. But his hands tremble. I mean, they won't keep still.

"This has never happened to me before," he says. He means the trembling. I tell him I sympathize. I tell him the shakes will idle down. And they will. But it takes time.

We've only been in here a couple of days. We're not out of the woods yet. J.P. has these shakes, and every so often a nerve — maybe it isn't a nerve, but it's something — begins to jerk in my shoulder. Sometimes it's at the side of my neck. When this happens my mouth dries up. It's an effort just to swallow then. I know something's about to happen and I want to head it off. I want to hide from it, that's what I want to do. Just close my eyes and let it pass by, let it take the next man. J.P. can wait a minute.

I saw a seizure yesterday morning. A guy they call Tiny. A big fat guy, an electrician from Santa Rosa. They said he'd been in here for nearly two weeks and that he was over the hump. He was going home in a day or two and would spend New Year's Eve with his wife in front of the TV.

On New Year's Eve, Tiny planned to drink hot chocolate and eat cookies.

Yesterday morning he seemed just fine when he came down for breakfast. He was letting out with quacking noises, showing some guy how he called ducks right down onto his head. "Blam. Blam," said Tiny, picking off a couple. Tiny's hair was damp and was slicked back along the sides of his head. He'd just come out of the shower. He'd also nicked himself on the chin with his razor. But so what? Just about everybody at Frank Martin's has nicks on his face. It's something that happens. Tiny edged in at the head of the table and began telling about something that had happened on one of his drinking bouts. People at the table laughed and shook their heads as they shovelled up their eggs. Tiny would say something, grin, then look

around the table for a sign of recognition. We'd all done things just as bad and crazy, so, sure, that's why we laughed. Tiny had scrambled eggs on his plate, and some biscuits and honey. I was at the table but I wasn't hungry. I had some coffee in front of me. Suddenly Tiny wasn't there anymore. He'd gone over in his chair with a big clatter. He was on his back on the floor with his eyes closed, his heels drumming the linoleum. People hollered for Frank Martin. But he was right there. A couple of guys got down on the floor beside Tiny. One of the guys put his fingers inside Tiny's mouth and tried to hold his tongue. Frank Martin yelled, "Everybody stand back!"

Then I noticed that the bunch of us were leaning over Tiny, just looking at him, not able to take our eyes off him. "Give him air!" Frank Martin said. Then he ran into the office and called the ambulance.

Tiny is on board again today. Talk about bouncing back. This morning Frank Martin drove the station wagon to the hospital to get him.

Tiny got back too late for his eggs, but he took some coffee into the dining room and sat down at the table anyway. Somebody in the kitchen made toast for him, but Tiny didn't eat it. He just sat with his coffee and looked into his cup. Every now and then he moved his cup back and forth in front of him.

I'd like to ask him if he had any signal just before it happened. I'd like to know if he felt his ticker skip a beat, or else begin to race. Did his eyelid twitch? But I'm not about to say anything. He doesn't look like he's hot to talk about it anyway. But what happened to Tiny is something I won't ever forget. Old Tiny flat on the floor, kicking his heels.

So every time this little flitter starts up anywhere, I draw some breath and wait to find myself on my back, looking up, somebody's fingers in my mouth.

In his chair on the front porch, J.P. keeps his hands in his lap. I smoke cigarettes and use an old coal bucket for an ashtray. I listen to J.P. ramble on. It's eleven o'clock in the morning — an hour and a half until lunch.

Neither one of us is hungry. But just the same we look forward to going inside and sitting down at the table. Maybe we'll get hungry.

What's J.P. talking about, anyway? He's saying how when he was twelve years old he fell into a well in the vicinity of the farm he grew up on. It was a dry well, lucky for him. "Or unlucky," he says, looking around him and shaking his head. He says how late that afternoon, after he'd been located, his dad hauled him out with a rope. J.P. had wet his pants down there.

He'd suffered all kinds of terror in that well, hollering for help, waiting, and then hollering some more. He hollered himself hoarse before it was over. But he told me that being at the bottom of that well had made a lasting impression. He'd sat there and looked up at the well mouth. Way up at the top he could see a circle of blue sky. Every once in a while a white cloud passed over. A flock of birds flew across, and it seemed to J.P. their wingbeats set up this odd commotion. He heard other things. He heard tiny rustlings above him in the well, which made him wonder if things might fall down into his hair. He was thinking of insects. He heard wind blow over the well mouth, and that sound made an impression on him, too. In short, everything about his life was different for him at the bottom of that well. But nothing fell on him and nothing closed off that little circle of blue. Then his dad came along with the rope, and it wasn't long before J.P. was back in the world he'd always lived in.

"Keep talking, J.P. Then what?" I say.

When he was eighteen or nineteen years old and out of high school and had nothing whatsoever he wanted to do with his life, he went across town one afternoon to visit a friend. This friend lived in a house with a fireplace. J.P. and his friend sat around drinking beer and batting the breeze. They played some records. Then the doorbell rings. The friend goes to the door. This young woman chimney sweep is there with her cleaning things. She's wearing a top hat, the sight of which knocked J.P. for a loop. She tells J.P.'s friend that she has an appointment to clean the fireplace. The friend lets her in and bows. The young woman doesn't pay him any mind. She spreads a blanket on the hearth and lays out her gear. She's wearing these black pants, black shirt, black shoes and socks.

Of course by now she's taken her hat off. J.P. says it nearly drove him nuts to look at her. She does the work, she cleans the chimney, while J.P. and his friend play records and drink beer. But they watch her and they watch what she does. Now and then J.P. and his friend look at each other and grin, or else they wink. They raise their eyebrows when the upper half of the young woman disappears into the chimney. She was all-right-looking, too, J.P. said. She was about his age.

When she'd finished her work, she rolled her things up in the blanket.

From J.P.'s friend she took a check that had been made out to her by his parents. And then she asks the friend if he wants to kiss her. "It's supposed to bring good luck," she says. That does it for J.P. The friend rolls his eyes. He clowns some more. Then, probably blushing, he kisses her on the cheek. At this minute J.P. made his mind up about something. He put his beer down. He got up from the sofa. He went over to the young woman as she was starting to go out the door.

"Me, too?" J.P. said to her. She swept her eyes over him. J.P. says he could feel his heart knocking. The young woman's name, it turns out, was Roxy.

"Sure," Roxy says. "Why not? I've got some extra kisses." And she kissed him a good one right on the lips and then turned to go.

Like that, quick as a wink, J.P. followed her onto the porch. He held the porch screen door for her. He went down the steps with her and out to the drive, where she'd parked her panel truck. It was something that was out of his hands. Nothing else in the world counted for anything.

He knew he'd met somebody who could set his legs atremble. He could feel her kiss still burning on his lips, etc. At that minute J.P. couldn't begin to sort anything out. He was filled with sensations that were carrying him every which way.

He opened the rear door of the panel truck for her. He helped her store her things inside. "Thanks," she told him. Then he blurted it out — that he'd like to see her again. Would she go to a movie with him sometime? He'd realized, too, what he wanted to do with his life. He wanted to do what she did. He wanted to be a chimney sweep. But he didn't tell her that then.

J.P. says she put her hands on her hips and looked him over. Then she found a business card in the front seat of her truck. She gave it to him.

She said, "Call this number after ten o'clock tonight. The answering machine will be turned off then. We can talk. I have to go now." She put the top hat on and then took it off. She looked at J.P. once more. She must have liked what she saw, because this time she grinned. He told her there was a smudge near her mouth. Then she got into her truck, tooted the horn, and drove away.

"Then what?" I say. "Don't stop now, J.P." I was interested. But I would have listened if he'd been going on about how one day he'd decided to start pitching horseshoes.

It rained last night. The clouds are banked up against the hills across the valley. J.P. clears his throat and looks at the hills and the clouds. He pulls his chin. Then he goes on with what he was saying.

Roxy starts going out with him on dates. And little by little he talks her into letting him go along on jobs with her. But Roxy's in business with her father and brother and they've got

just the right amount of work. They don't need anybody else. Besides, who was this guy J. P.? J.P. what? Watch out, they warned her.

So she and J.P. saw some movies together. They went to a few dances.

But mainly the courtship revolved around their cleaning chimneys together. Before you know it, J.P. says, they're talking about tying the knot. And after a while they do it, they get married. J.P.'s new father-in-law takes him in as a full partner. In a year or so, Roxy has a kid. She's quit being a chimney sweep. At any rate, she's quit doing the work.

Pretty soon she has another kid. J.P.'s in his mid-twenties by now. He's buying a house. He says he was happy with his life. "I was happy with the way things were going," he says. "I had everything I wanted. I had a wife and kids I loved, and I was doing what I wanted to do with my life." But for some reason — who knows why we do what we do? — his drinking picks up. For a long time he drinks beer and beer only. Any kind of beer — it didn't matter. He says he could drink beer twenty-four hours a day. He'd drink beer at night while he watched TV. Sure, once in a while he drank hard stuff. But that was only if they went out on the town, which was not often, or else when they had company over.

Then a time comes, he doesn't know why, when he makes the switch from beer to gin and tonic. And he'd have more gin and tonic after dinner, sitting in front of the TV. There was always a glass of gin and tonic in his hand. He says he actually liked the taste of it. He began stopping off after work for drinks before he went home to have more drinks. Then he began missing some dinners. He just wouldn't show up.

Or else he'd show up but he wouldn't want anything to eat. He'd filled up on snacks at the bar. Sometimes he'd walk in the door and for no good reason throw his lunch pail across the living room. When Roxy yelled at him, he'd turn around and go out again. He moved his drinking time up to early afternoon, while he was still supposed to be working. He tells me that he was starting off the morning with a couple of drinks. He'd have a belt of the stuff before he brushed his teeth. Then he'd have his coffee. He'd go to work with a thermos bottle of vodka in his lunch pail.

J.P. quits talking. He just clams up. What's going on? I'm listening. It's helping me relax, for one thing. It's taking me away from my own situation. After a minute, I say, "What the hell? Go on J.P." He's pulling his chin. But pretty soon he starts talking again.

J.P. and Roxy are having some real fights now. I mean fights. J.P. says that one time she hit him in the face with her fist and broke his nose.

"Look at this," he says. "Right here." He shows me a line across the bridge of his nose. "That's a broken nose." He returned the favor. He dislocated her shoulder for her on that occasion. Another time he split her lip. They beat on each other in front of the kids. Things got out of hand. But he kept on drinking. He couldn't stop. And nothing could make him stop. Not even with Roxy's dad and her brother threatening to beat hell out of him. They told Roxy she should take the kids and clear out. But Roxy said it was her problem. She got herself into it, and she'd solve it.

Now J.P. gets real quiet again. He hunches his shoulders and pulls down in his chair. He watches a car driving down the road between this place and the hills.

I say, "I want to hear the rest of this, J.P. You better keep talking."

"I just don't know," he says. He shrugs.

"It's all right," I say. And I mean it's O.K. for him to tell it. "Go on, J.P."

One way she tried to solve things, J.P. says, was by finding a boyfriend.

J.P. would like to know how she found the time with the house and kids.

I looked at him and I'm surprised. He's a grown man. "If you want to do that," I say, "you find the time. You make the time."

J.P. shakes his head. "I guess so," he says.

Anyway, he found out about it — about Roxy's boyfriend — and he went wild. He manages to get Roxy's wedding ring off her finger. And when he does he cuts it into several pieces with a pair of wire cutters.

Good solid fun. They'd already gone a couple of rounds on this occasion. On his way to work the next morning he gets arrested on a drunk-driving charge. He loses his driver's license. He can't drive the truck to work anymore. Just as well, he says. He'd already fallen off a roof the week before and broken his thumb. It was just a matter of time until he broke his God-damned neck, he says.

He was here at Frank Martin's to dry out and to figure how to get his life back on track. But he wasn't here against his will, any more than I was. We weren't locked up. We could

leave anytime we wanted. But a minimum stay of a week was recommended, and two weeks or a month was, as they put it, "strongly advised."

As I said, this is my second time at Frank Martin's. When I was trying to sign a check to pay in advance for a week's stay, Frank Martin said,

"The holidays are always a bad time. Maybe you should think of sticking around a little longer this time? Think in terms of a couple of weeks.

Can you do a couple of weeks? Think about it, anyway. You don't have to decide anything right now," he said. He held his thumb on the check and I signed my name. Then I walked my girlfriend to the front door and said goodbye. "Goodbye," she said, and she lurched into the door-jamb and then onto the porch. It's late afternoon. It's raining. I go from the door to the window. I move the curtain and watch her drive away.

She's in my car. She's drunk. But I'm drunk, too, and there's nothing I can do. I make it to a big old chair that's close to the radiator, and I sit down. Some guys look up from their TV. Then slowly they shift back to what they were watching. I just sit there. Now and then I look up at something that's happening on the screen.

Later that afternoon the front door banged open and J.P. was brought in between these two big guys — his father-in-law and brother-in-law. I find out afterward. They steered J.P. across the room. The old guy signed him in and gave Frank Martin a check. Then these two guys helped J.P. upstairs. I guess they put him to bed. Pretty soon the old guy and the other guy came downstairs and headed for the front door. They couldn't seem to get out of this place fast enough. It was as if they couldn't wait to wash their hands of all this. I didn't blame them. Hell, no. I don't know how I'd act if I was in their shoes.

A day and a half later J.P. and I meet up on the front porch. We shake hands and comment on the weather. J.P. has a case of the shakes. We sit down and prop our feet on the railing. We lean back in our chairs as if we're just out there taking our ease, as if we might be getting ready to talk about our bird dogs. That's when J.P. gets going with his story.

It's cold out, but not too cold. It's a little overcast. At one point Frank Martin comes outside to finish his cigar. He has on a sweater buttoned up to his Adam's apple. Frank Martin is short and heavysset. He has curly gray hair and a small head. His head is out of proportion with the rest of his body. Frank Martin puts the cigar in his mouth and stands with his arms crossed over his chest. He works that cigar in his mouth and looks across the valley. He stands there like a prizefighter, like somebody who knows the score.

11. Ethical Statement

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