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ABSTRACT

Accessible Translations for an English-Speaking Audience

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This thesis presents five short stories that have been translated from the original Spanish versions into English. Though some of these short stories are widely known and celebrated throughout the Spanish-speaking world, these small insights into cultures and experiences of Spanish speakers throughout the world remains largely unfamiliar to most native English speakers. Therefore, this sampling of short stories from different authors, different time periods, and different countries is designed to give the English reader a brief and general overview into the breadth of culture and experience that the Spanish language encompasses in a manner that is easily understandable and enjoyable to read.

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ACCESSIBLE TRANSLATIONS FOR AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING AUDIENCE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. Introduction.....	1
2. La gallina degollada/The Headless Hen.....	10
3. Rosas artificiales/Artificial Roses.....	34
4. La casita de Sololoi/The Little Sololoi House.....	52
5. El pájaro azul/The Bluebird.....	78
6. La noche boca arriba/Face Up in the Dark.....	88
7. Problems in Translation.....	113
8. Conclusion.....	135
Bibliography.....	141

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Despite the fact that translations can be found all around the world, there are no exact guidelines for what constitutes a “good translation” or even a “good translator.” Legal documents should generally be translated *literally* and as exactly as possible in order to preserve their integrity and specificity, while literary texts should generally be translated *figuratively* in order to preserve the feeling and spirit of the text. However, sometimes the long friendly greeting in a Spanish legal letter can seem superfluous, invasive, and confusing to an English speaker if translated completely literally and it is possible for a story to be lost in the extensive explanation of figurative language if translated completely figuratively. Translation is not an exact science, but it is nevertheless necessary in this modern, interconnected, multilingual society. Therefore, the purpose of this collection of short stories is to provide English speakers with translations specifically designed to overcome the barrier of English being an almost universal language, in order to introduce them to the modern, multilingual, interconnected society.

According to Washbourne, “the grammar of each language does not merely *express* ideas but in fact *shapes* ideas” (7). In other words, language is the lens through which people view the world; it is how they express themselves and explain the things that happen around them. Therefore, when translating a literary text, an exact translation does not translate the true meaning and intent behind those words because the original

author wrote that text through his view of the world determined by his language. Thus, in order to translate the true meaning and intent of the author, the translator must negotiate the exact translation of the phrase with the author's linguistic intent so that the new audience will not only hear the voice of the original author, but also understand the idea and intent shaped by his original words and language. This type of translation is generally referred to as communicative translation (98).

However, there is a more specific problem in translation that is related to one element in particular: the English language. There is so much material available to English readers that was originally written, filmed, or sung in English that there is little to no need for them to read anything that has been translated. A hallmark quality of a translation is that the audience can generally tell that the translation was not originally intended for them, whether the wording seems a bit off or the structure is completely unfamiliar. As such, why would a native English speaker and reader choose a translation that doesn't seem quite right over something intended specifically for an English-speaking audience? Therefore, the intent of this thesis is to combat this bias against translations in order to introduce English readers to the culture and themes embedded in the Spanish language. The purpose is to bring the culture and ideas to the English-speaking audience in an accessible and comprehensible manner, almost as though the piece was written with the English audience in mind.

Through the use of communicative translation in several short stories that originated from all over the Spanish-speaking world, this thesis aims to provide English speakers the unique opportunity to get an inside look and understanding of a foreign

culture in order to better relate to and understand different aspects of the myriad of cultures, ideas, attitudes, and philosophies all around the world.

The first short story in this collection is *La gallina degollada*, or *The Headless Hen*. This short story was published in *Todos los cuentos* in 1909 by Uruguayan author, Horacio Quiroga. Fascinated with the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and the tales of Joseph Conrad, Quiroga used this short story to examine the intangible ideas of love, madness, and death through the plight of the Mazzini family (Berg, “Horacio Quiroga” 239-242). This dark short story examines the tragedies of a marital relationship where love is strained from failure and a parental relationship that is rejected to preserve familial normalcy. Through the introduction of these familiar themes, social stigmas, and family dynamics, this story provides a solid link between the English-speaking culture and the Spanish-speaking culture of Uruguay.

The second short story is *Rosas artificiales*, or *Artificial Roses*. It was published in 1962 by Colombian author, Gabriel García Márquez in his book *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*. A strong proponent of magical realism, a literary style where the magical is written and viewed as common (Siskind 59-60), Márquez illustrates the life of a small family on the fringe of society where the seemingly clairvoyant abilities of the blind grandmother are dismissed as being completely ordinary. This short story gives a deeper look into Latin American culture by illustrating how the lines between the natural and the supernatural were and continue to be blurred (Maurya 53-55). However, this story is not such a shock to English speakers because this magical element is treated as ordinary, so, though the feeling and hinting of this element remains, it is not hard for the English speaker to accept this slightly different reality that Márquez presents.

The third short story is *La casita de Sololoi*, or *The Little Sololoi House*. Included in a collection of short stories titled *De noche vienes*, it was written in 1979 by Elena Poniatowska, the daughter of a Mexican aristocrat and a French Count who moved to Mexico in 1942 to escape World War II (Hurley 126-129). There, Poniatowska became a journalist, where she used this social status and her authorial style of testimonial narratives, stories written from the perspective of marginalized people who were unable share their own stories, to spread the historically accurate stories of these marginalized groups (Maloof 137-140). In this short story, Poniatowska illustrates the societal misogyny that traps lower class women in traditional gender roles and strips them of their femininity and passions in the process. This is a plight that is experienced and understood by women from all linguistic backgrounds, and therefore provides another link between English-speaking culture and Spanish-speaking culture.

The fourth short story is *El pájaro azul*, or *The Bluebird*. This short story was published in *Azul* in 1888 by Rubén Darío, a Nicaraguan poet. Like Quiroga, Darío admired Edgar Allan Poe and used this short story to show madness as the foundation of artists (Levine and Levine 215-218). Through the color blue, Darío illustrates how all aspects of a poet's life are linked back to the bluebird in his mind. Darío uses this bluebird to represent how an artist is consumed by his work to the point of insanity in order to contrast the artist who freely pursues his dreams to the artist that is constrained and limited by family, society, and the government. By providing a portrait of an artist and calling to attention the beautiful and awful aspects of mental illness, the modern discussions of English speakers are directly linked to the plight and culture of Nicaraguans in the 19th century (Llopesa 16-22).

The fifth and final story is *La noche boca arriba*, or *Face up in the dark*. It was published in *Ceremonias* in 1956 by Julio Cortázar, an Argentinian author who frequently turned to surrealist thought and ideas in his work (Berg 227-231). In this short story, Cortázar illustrates surrealism by juxtaposing dreams and reality in order to illustrate that the content produced by the conscious and unconscious mind can be hard to distinguish due to how real it seems in the moment (Castro-Klarén 220-222). It is the final story in this collection because it introduces a philosophy that is uncommon in the English-speaking world and is therefore a further stretch to make relatable and comprehensible to an English-speaking audience. Nevertheless, it does emphasize the complexity of ideas that exist outside of the comfortable sphere of English.

The purpose of translating these short stories in particular is to give native English speakers the ability to experience parts of the Spanish-speaking world and to draw connections between their own culture and the cultures and ideas presented in these stories. These translations are specifically designed to encourage native English speakers to read more translations in the future, which will allow for further understanding and experiences of more new cultures and ideas. This compilation of short stories aims to open doors to new genres, authors, ideas, and ways of thinking in order to invite native English speakers to venture out of the comfortable English literature and explore other countries and cultures through their literature.

CAPÍTULO DOS

La gallina degollada¹

Horacio Quiroga

Todo el día, sentados en el patio en un banco, estaban los cuatro hijos idiotas del matrimonio Mazzini-Ferraz. Tenían la lengua entre los labios, los ojos estúpidos y volvían la cabeza con la boca abierta.

El patio era de tierra, cerrado al oeste por un cerco de ladrillos. El banco quedaba paralelo a él, a cinco metros, y allí se mantenían inmóviles, fijos los ojos en los ladrillos. Como el sol se ocultaba tras el cerco, al declinar los idiotas tenían fiesta. La luz engeguecedora llamaba su atención al principio, poco a poco sus ojos se animaban; se reían al fin estrepitosamente, congestionados por la misma hilaridad ansiosa, mirando el sol con alegría bestial, como si fuera comida.

Otras veces, alineados en el banco, zumbaban horas enteras, imitando al tranvía electrónico. Los ruidos fuertes sacudían asimismo su inercia, y corrían entonces, mordiéndose la lengua y mugiendo, alrededor del patio. Pero casi siempre estaban apagados en un sombrío letargo de idiotismo, y pasaban todo el día sentados en su banco, con las piernas colgantes y quietas, empapando de glutinosa saliva el pantalón.

¹ A short story published in *Todos Los Cuentos* (Quiroga 89-95).

CHAPTER TWO

The Headless Hen

Horacio Quiroga

The Mazzini-Ferraz couple's four idiot children sat on a bench on the porch all day. Their eyes were dumb and dull, their tongues hung out between their lips, and their heads were tilted sideways with their mouths hanging wide open.

It was a dirt courtyard, blocked in on the west side by a brick fence. A bench sat parallel to the fence, five meters away from it. They sat there: eyes fixed on the bricks, all day, completely motionless. Later in the day, when the sun sank behind the fence and the day drew to a close, the idiots would throw a party. The first thing that captured their attention was the blinding rays of the last light of the day. Bit by bit, their dull eyes would begin to show signs of life. At long last, they would start to laugh loudly, bubbling over with a sense of anxious hilarity. They watched the sun as it fell, their bestial joy shining in their intense, hungry stares.

At other times, lined up on the bench like four ducks in a row, they would hum for hours, imitating the sounds of an electric tram. The loud noises helped them to shake off their sluggishness, and they would start to run around the courtyard, biting their tongues and mooing. But most of the time, they were listless, drowning in a somber lethargy of complete idiocy, spending all day sitting on their bench, legs motionless, feet dangling off the ground, soaking their pants with the glutinous saliva dripping from their chins.

El mayor tenía doce años, y el menor ocho. En todo su aspecto sucio y desvalido se notaba la falta absoluta de un poco de cuidado maternal.

Esos cuatro idiotas, sin embargo, habían sido un día el encanto de sus padres. A los tres meses de casados, Mazzini y Berta orientaron su estrecho amor de marido y mujer, y mujer y marido, hacia un porvenir mucho más vital: un hijo: ¿Qué mayor dicha para dos enamorados que esa honrada consagración de su cariño, libertado ya del vil egoísmo de un mutuo amor sin fin ninguno y, lo que es peor para el amor mismo, sin esperanzas posibles de renovación?

Así lo sintieron Mazzini y Berta, y cuando el hijo llegó, a los catorce meses de matrimonio, creyeron cumplida su felicidad. La criatura creció, bella y radiante, hasta que tuvo año y medio. Pero en el vigésimo mes sacudiéronlo una noche convulsiones terribles, y a la mañana siguiente no conocía más a sus padres. El medico lo examinó con esa atención profesional que está visiblemente buscando la causa del mal en las enfermedades de los padres.

Después de algunos días los miembros paralizados recobraron el movimiento; pero la inteligencia, el alma, aun el instinto, se habían ido del todo; había quedado profundamente idiota, baboso, colgante, muerto para siempre sobre las rodillas de su madre.

The oldest of the four was twelve and the youngest was eight. With their disheveled appearance and utter helplessness, it was plain to see that they lacked even the slightest bit of motherly care.

Though it was to believe, these four idiots had once been their parents' dearest little darlings. After being married for only three months, Mazzini and Berta began to channel their intimate love, the love that a husband has for his wife and that a wife has for her husband, towards something much more vital for their future: a child. What greater joy could there be for two people in love than that esteemed consummation of their love? Their love was now liberated from its incessant, vile selfishness and from that which is worse for love itself: the hopelessness that their love could not be rekindled.

That was how Mazzini and Berta felt when, after being married for fourteen months, their son arrived. The little angel grew up quickly, so beautiful and blissful, until he was one and a half years old. At twenty months old, terrible convulsions shook him one night, and when he awoke the next morning, he didn't recognize his parents. The doctor examined him closely, but it was obvious that his professional attention was focused on what sicknesses or ailments the parents had that could have caused this terrible misfortune.

After a few days, the child's paralyzed limbs regained movement. But, his intelligence, his soul, even his base instincts, were gone altogether. He had been robbed of his humanity and left a complete idiot: the child they once knew had been reduced to slobbering and dangling off his mother's lap forever, essentially dead to them.

– ¡Hijo, mi hijo querido! –sollozaba ésta, sobre aquella espantosa ruina de su primogénito.

El padre, desolado, acompañó al médico afuera.

–A usted se le puede decir; creo que es un caso perdido. Podrá mejorar, educarse en todo lo que le permita su idiotismo, pero no más allá.

–¡Sí!... ¡sí!... –asentía Mazzini. – Pero dígame: ¿Usted cree que es herencia, que...?

–En cuanto a la herencia paterna, ya le dije lo que creí cuando vi a su hijo. Respecto a la madre, hay allí un pulmón que no sopla bien. No veo nada más, pero hay un soplo un poco rudo. Hágala examinar bien.

Con el alma destrozada de remordimiento, Mazzini redobló el amor a su hijo, el pequeño idiota que pagaba los excesos del abuelo. Tuvo asimismo que consolar, sostener sin tregua a Berta, herida en lo más profundo por aquel fracaso de su joven maternidad.

Como es natural, el matrimonio puso todo su amor en la esperanza de otro hijo. Nació éste, y su salud y limpidez de risas reencendieron el porvenir extinguido. Pero a los diez y ocho meses las convulsiones del primogénito se repetían, y al día siguiente amanecía idiota.

“My son, my darling son!” she sobbed, kneeling over the poor lost cause that her firstborn had become.

The father, completely devastated, followed the doctor outside.

“I can tell you this much: I’m afraid he’s a lost cause. He could improve a bit. He can be taught to whatever extent his idiocy allows, but nothing more than that.”

“Yes!...yes, of course!” Mazzini nodded. “But tell me: Do you think it’s genetic, you know, the...”

“As for his paternal genetic inheritance, I already told you my thoughts when I saw your son. In regard to his mother, one of her lungs doesn’t work very well. I don’t see anything else, but there is a raspy quality to the breathing. You should have someone take a look at that.”

His soul crushed with guilt, Mazzini redoubled his love for his son, the poor, little idiot who was paying for his grandfather’s vices. Despite these feelings, he had to focus on consoling Berta. This tremendous failure so early in motherhood had scarred her deeply.

So, naturally, the couple refocused all of their love in the promise of having another child. When he was born, they felt their future brighten: he was healthy and his laughter was so innocent. But, at eighteen months old, he suffered from the same convulsions as their firstborn, and he too woke up an idiot.

Esta vez los padres cayeron en honda desesperación. ¡Luego su sangre, su amor estaban malditos! ¡Su amor, sobre todo! Veintiocho años él, veintidós ella, y toda su apasionada ternura no alcanzaba a crear un átomo de vida normal. Ya no pedían más belleza e inteligencia como en el primogénito; ¡pero un hijo como todos!

Del nuevo desastre brotaron nuevas llamaradas de dolorido amor, un loco anhelo de redimir de una vez para siempre la santidad de su ternura. Sobrevinieron mellizos, y punto por punto repitióse el proceso de los dos mayores.

Mas, por encima de su inmensa amargura, quedaba a Mazzini y Berta gran compasión por sus cuatro hijos. Hubo que arrancar del limbo de la más honda animalidad, no ya sus almas, sino el instinto mismo abolido. No sabían deglutir, cambiar de sitio, ni aun sentarse. Aprendieron al fin a caminar, pero chocaban contra todo, por no darse cuenta de los obstáculos. Cuando los lavaban mugían hasta inyectarse de sangre el rostro. Animábanse solo al comer, o cuando veían colores brillantes u oían truenos. Se reían entonces, echando afuera lengua y ríos de baba, radiantes de frenesí bestial. Tenían, en cambio, cierta facultad imitativa; pero no se pudo obtener nada más.

This time, the parents fell into a deep despair. They were damned by their blood, by their love! Their love was cursed! He was only twenty-eight and she was just twenty-two, and somehow, in all the passionate, tender moments they shared, they couldn't manage to create a single normal atom of life. They didn't ask for a child that was more beautiful or more intelligent than their firstborn had been. No, now they only wanted a child, a child that was just like everyone else.

From this new disaster, their sorrowful love was reignited, its flames rising until they reached a frantic sense of urgency to reclaim the sanctity of their marriage. This brought about the birth of their twins, who, one after the other, fell victim to the convulsions of their first two children.

Even so, pushing past their tremendous bitterness, Mazzini and Berta retained a great deal of compassion for their four children. The children began in the limbo of the deepest sense of animality, not in their souls, but rather with the most basic instincts that had been completely destroyed. They didn't know how to swallow, how to change positions, or even how to simply sit down. When they finally learned how to walk, they ran into everything because they weren't aware of their surroundings. When they were bathed, they moaned until their cheeks grew flush. Hunger was the only thing that motivated them. But, if they saw bright colors or heard the sound of thunder, they would laugh, letting their tongues fall out of their mouths alongside the pouring rivers of drool, their eyes gleaming with a bestial frenzy. Even though they did possess an imitative faculty, they couldn't manage anything beyond that.

Con los mellizos pareció haber concluido la aterradora descendencia. Pero pasados tres años desearon de nuevo ardientemente otro hijo, confiando en que el largo tiempo transcurrido hubiera aplacado a la fatalidad.

No satisfacían sus esperanzas. Y en ese ardiente anhelo que se exasperaba, en razón de su infructuosidad, se agriaron. Hasta ese momento cada cual había tomado sobre si la parte que le correspondía en la miseria de sus hijos; pero la desesperanza de redención ante las cuatro bestias que habían nacido de ellos, echó afuera esa imperiosa necesidad de culpar a los otros, que es patrimonio específico de los corazones inferiores.

Iniciáronse con el cambio de pronombres: *tus* hijos. Y como a más del insulto había la insidia, la atmósfera se cargaba.

—Me parece —díjole una noche Mazzini, que acababa de entrar y se lavaba las manos — que podrías tener más limpios a los muchachos.

Berta continuó leyendo como si no hubiera oído.

—Es la primera vez — repuso al rato — que te veo inquietarte por el estado de tus hijos.

Mazzini volvió un poco la cara a ella con una sonrisa forzada:

—De nuestros hijos, ¿me parece?

—Bueno; de nuestros hijos. ¿Te gusta así? — alzó ella los ojos.

It seemed that the frightening tale of their offspring had ended with the twins. But, after three years, they once again fervently desired another child, and believed that the long years that had passed must have placated the terrible curse that had been thrust upon them by fate.

And yet, they still fell short of their hopes and dreams. Their fruitlessness in this time of fiery yearning had made them bitter. Up until that moment, they had both shouldered their share of the blame for the misfortune that had befallen their children. But their hopeless pursuit of redemption for the four beasts that they created, brought out that deep-seeded need to blame others, a quality usually attributed to people with small hearts.

It all started with a change in their pronouns: “your children.” And, as the insults became more and more spiteful, the atmosphere around them became more and more explosive.

One night, after he had just come in and washed his hands, Mazzini said to his wife, “It seems to me that you could keep the boys cleaner.”

Berta kept reading, as if she had not heard a word he said.

After a while, she said, “This is the first time I’ve actually seen you worried about the state of your children.”

Mazzini turned his face towards her, his lips curled into a forced smile:

“I think you meant, ‘our children’?”

“Fine; ‘the state of our children’. You happy now?” She raised her eyes up to meet his.

Esta vez Mazzini se expresó claramente:

—Creo que no vas a decir que yo tenga la culpa, ¿no?

—¡Ah, no! — se sonrió Berta, muy pálida — pero yo tampoco, supongo!... ¡No faltaba más!... —murmuró.

—¿Qué, no faltaba más?

— ¡Que si alguien tiene la culpa, no soy yo, entiéndelo bien! Eso es lo que te quería decir.

Su marido la miró un momento, con brutal deseo de insultarla.

—¡Dejemos! — articuló, secándose por fin las manos.

—Como quieras; pero si quieres decir...

—¡Berta!

— ¡Como quieras!

Este fue el primer choque y le sucedieron otros. Pero en las inevitables reconciliaciones, sus almas se unían con doble arrebató y locura por otro hijo.

Nació así una niña. Vivieron dos años con la angustia a flor de alma, esperando siempre otro desastre. Nada acaeció, sin embargo, y los padres pusieron en ella toda su complacencia, que la pequeña llevaba a los más extremos límites del mimo y la mala crianza.

This time, Mazzini clearly stated:

“I’m sure you’re not trying to say that it’s my fault, right?”

“Oh, of course not!” Berta smiled, her face very pale. “But I suppose it’s not really my fault either! No way!...” she murmured.

“What do you mean by ‘no way’?”

“Well, if anyone is to blame, it’s definitely not me. Do you understand now? That’s all I really wanted to say.”

Her husband stared at her for a moment, his eyes burning with the savage desire to insult her.

“No! We have to stop!” he said, finally drying his hands.

“Whatever you want. But if you really want to say...”

“Berta!”

“Suit yourself!”

That was just the first of their many fights. But, after each inevitable reconciliation, their desire to have another child redoubled in craze and ecstasy to create another child was redoubled in ecstasy and intensity.

Thus, a little girl was born. For the first two years of her life, they lived in a constant state of anguish for the newest flower of their souls, always waiting for the disaster that would inevitably fall upon her. However, when nothing happened, her parents focused all their delight on her, raising the little girl in the most extreme limits of poor parenting and spoiling her rotten.

Si aun en los últimos tiempos Berta cuidaba siempre de sus hijos, al nacer Bertita olvidóse case del todo de los otros. Su solo recuerdo la horrorizaba, como algo atroz que la hubieran obligado a cometer. A Mazzini, bien que en menor grado, pasábale lo mismo.

No por eso la paz había llegado a sus almas. La menor indisposición de su hija echaba ahora afuera, con el terror de perderla, los rencores de su descendencia podrida. Habían acumulado hiel sobrado tiempo para que el vaso no quedara disentido, y al menor contacto el veneno se vertía afuera. Desde el primer disgusto emponzoñado habíanse perdido el respeto; y si hay algo a que el hombre se siente arrastrado con cruel fruición, es, cuando ya se comenzó por la mutua falta de éxito; ahora que éste había llegado, cada cual, atribuyéndolo a sí mismo, sentía mayor la infamia de los cuatro engendros que el otro habíale forzado a crear.

Con estos sentimientos, no hubo ya para los cuatro hijos mayores afecto posible. La sirvienta los vestía, les daba de comer, los acostaba, con visible brutalidad. No los lavaban casi nunca. Pasaban casi todo el día sentados frente al cerco, abandonados de toda remota caricia.

Though Berta had once truly cared for their other children, when she gave birth to her little girl, she forgot all about the others. Her only memories of them horrified her, as if they were an atrocious crime she had been forced to commit. Mazzini felt the same way, though to a somewhat lesser degree.

But, this still didn't mean that their souls had finally found peace. Even the slightest sickness their daughter contracted prompted feelings of absolute terror at the thought of losing her in the same way they had lost their sons. This inevitably elicited their feelings of complete resentment and utter disgust for their offspring, those idiots that were rotten to the core. Over time, their resentment had grown, like straw being piled high on a camel's back and, if a single piece of straw was added, or a slight breeze began to blow, the camel's back would break under the immense burden. They had begun to lose respect for one another after their first venomous argument. And if there is anything that a man can feel truly miserable about and yet still derive a cruel, sick delight from, it would be when he starts off by using everything he's got to completely humiliate someone. Before, their resentment had been curbed by the fact that they were both at fault for their lack of success in raising a normal, healthy child. But now that she had come, each of them blamed themselves completely, feeling great shame about the four monsters that the other had forced them to create.

With these feelings stewing inside each of them, it was impossible for Mazzini and Berta to show any affection or care for the four older children. The maid dressed them, fed them, and put them to bed, all in an obviously brutal manner. She hardly ever washed them. They spent most of the day sitting in front of the fence, neglected and rejected, far from any sort of human touch.

De este modo Bertita cumplió cuatro años, y esa noche, resultado de las golosinas que era a los padres absolutamente imposible negarle, la criatura tuvo algún escalofrío y fiebre. Y el temor a verla morir o quedar idiota, tornó a reabrir la eterna llaga.

Hacía tres horas que no hablaban, y el motivo fue, como casi siempre, los fuertes pasos de Mazzini.

—¡Mi Dios! ¿No puedes caminar más despacio? ¿Cuántas veces?...

—Bueno, es que me olvido; ¡se acabó! No lo hago a propósito.

Ella se sonrió, desdeñosa:

—¡No, no te creo tanto!

—Ni yo, jamás, te hubiera creído tanto a ti... ¡tisiquilla!

—¿Qué! ¿qué dijiste?...

—¡Nada!

—¡Sí, te oí algo! Mira: ¡no sé lo que dijiste; pero te juro que prefiero cualquier cosa a tener un padre como el que has tenido tú!

Mazzini se puso pálido.

—¡Al fin! —murmuró con los dientes apretados. —¡Al fin víbora, has dicho lo que querías!

—¡Si, víbora, si! ¡Pero yo he tenido padres sanos! ¿Oyes?, sanos! ¡Mi padre no ha muerto de delirio! ¡Yo hubiera tenido hijos como los de todo el mundo! ¡Esos son hijos tuyos, los cuatro tuyos!

In no time at all, Bertita turned four-years-old, and one night she had a chill and a fever from all the sweets she'd had that her parents couldn't possibly say no to. And that old, deep wound was torn open as they once again as they faced their deepest fear of having to watch her die or become an idiot.

As always, when he was worried, Mazzini funneled his stress into an intense and continuous pace across the room. Consequently, neither Mazzini nor Berta spoke for three hours.

"My God! Can't you walk slower? How many times...?"

"Well, I just forgot; See, I'm done! I didn't do it on purpose."

Her lips curled up into a sneer:

"I don't believe you in the slightest!"

"You know what, I don't believe you either...you wheezing bag of bones!"

"What? What did you just say?"

"Nothing!"

"You did, I heard you say something! Look, I don't know what you said, but I promise you that I would prefer absolutely anything to having a father anything like yours!"

Mazzini went pale.

"Finally!" He muttered through clenched teeth. "Finally, you said what you've been thinking all along, you snake!"

"A snake! Of course! Well, at least my parents were healthy! Did you hear what I said? Healthy! My father didn't die from crazed delusions! I would have had normal children just like everyone else! Those four: those are your sons!"

Mazzini explotó a su vez.

—¡Víbora tísica! ¡eso es lo que te dije, lo que te quiero decir! ¡Pregúntale, pregúntale al médico quien tiene la mayor culpa de la meningitis de tus hijos: mi padre o tu pulmón picado, víbora!

Continuaron cada vez con mayor violencia, hasta que un gemido de Bertita selló instantáneamente sus bocas. A la una de la mañana la ligera indigestión había desaparecido, y como pasa fatalmente con todos los matrimonios jóvenes que se han amado intensamente una vez siquiera, la reconciliación llegó, tanto más efusiva cuanto hirientes fueran los agravios.

Amaneció un espléndido día, y mientras Berta se levantaba escupió sangre. Las emociones y mala noche pasada tenían, sin duda, gran culpa. Mazzini la retuvo abrazada largo rato, y ella lloró desesperadamente, pero sin que ninguno se atreviera a decir una palabra.

A las diez decidieron salir, después de almorzar. Como apenas tenían tiempo, ordenaron a la sirvienta que matara una gallina.

El día radiante había arrancado a los idiotas de su banco. De modo que mientras la sirvienta degollaba en la cocina al animal, desangrándolo con parsimonia (Berta había aprendido de su madre este buen modo de conservar fresca a la carne), creyó sentir algo como respiración tras ella. Volvióse, y vio a los cuatro idiotas, con los hombros, pegados uno a otro, mirando estupefactos la operación. Rojo... rojo...

—¡Señora! Los niños están aquí, en la cocina.

Mazzini exploded right back at her.

“You scrawny snake! That’s what I told you, or at least what I’ve wanted to tell you! Why don’t you ask the doctor? Ask him who is responsible for the meningitis your children had: my father or your punctured lung, you snake!”

They continued back and forth, their aggression towards the other growing with each new insult, until a moan from Bertita silenced them immediately. At one in the morning, her upset tummy had disappeared. Then, as inevitably happens with young couples who had once loved each other with intense passion, they reconciled with a love as passionate as their insults had been hurtful.

The next day dawned in splendid fashion, and, as Berta got up, she coughed up a mouthful of blood. The emotions and the bad night before were, without a doubt, to blame. For a long time, Mazzini just held her as she cried desperately. Neither of them dared to say a thing.

At ten, they decided they would eat lunch and then head out. Since they didn’t have much time, that called for the maid to go kill a chicken for their lunch.

The bright day had roused the idiots from their bench. So, while the maid was slaughtering the chicken in the kitchen, bleeding it out slowly (Berta’s mother had taught her that this was the best way to keep the meat tasting fresh), she thought she could feel something behind her, breathing down her neck. She turned around, and saw the four idiots, clinging to one another, frozen and stupefied, observing the whole process. Red...red...

“Ma’am! The children are here in the kitchen.”

Berta llegó; no quería que jamás pisaran allí. ¡Y ni aun en esas horas de pleno perdón, olvido y felicidad reconquistada, podía evitarse esa horrible visión! Porque, naturalmente, cuanto más intensos eran los raptos de amor a su marido e hija, más irritado era su humor con los monstruos.

—¡Que salgan, María! ¡Échelos! ¡Échelos, le digo!

Las cuatro pobres bestias, sacudidas, brutalmente empujadas, fueron a dar a su banco.

Después de almorzar, salieron todos. La sirvienta fue a Buenos Aires, y el matrimonio a pasear por las quintas. Al bajar el sol volvieron, pero Berta quiso saludar un momento a sus vecinas de enfrente. Su hija escapóse en seguida a casa.

Entretanto los idiotas no se habían movido en todo el día de su banco. El sol había traspuesto ya el cerco, comenzaba a hundirse, y ellos continuaban mirando los ladrillos, más inertes que nunca.

De pronto, algo se interpuso entre su mirada y el cerco. Su hermana, cansada de cinco horas paternas, quería observar por su cuenta. Detenida al pie del cerco, miraba pensativa la cresta. Quería trepar, eso no ofrecía duda. Al fin decidióse por una silla desfondada, pero faltaba aún. Recurrió entonces a un cajón

Berta came quickly; she never wanted them to even step foot in here. Even in those brief moments when she felt at peace, when she felt completely forgiven, when she was able to forget about that atrocity, when she felt she had reclaimed her happiness, even in those moments, she couldn't seem to avoid the horrible sight of them! Because, of course, the more intense her sudden frenzies of love were for her husband and daughter, the more irritated she became with the monsters.

“Get them out, Maria! Take them away! Aren't you listening? I told you to get them out of here!”

The four poor beasts, brutally shoved and jerked around, made their way back to their bench.

After eating lunch, they all headed out. The maid went to Buenos Aires, and the couple and their daughter went for a walk through the garden. They started heading home when they saw that the sun was beginning to set, but Berta wanted to stop for a moment on the way back to chat with some neighbors. Their daughter took this opportunity to take off running for home.

In the meantime, the idiots had sat, motionless, on their bench all day long. The sun had already traveled the length of the fence and, as it began to sink from view, they continued staring straight ahead at the bricks, more listless and lifeless than ever before.

All of a sudden, something stepped between their gaze and the fence. Their sister, exhausted from spending five hours with her parents, wanted to take a closer look at the fence. She stopped at the foot of it, looking thoughtfully at the top. She wanted to climb it, there was no doubt about that. After looking around a bit, she decided to use a chair without a bottom, but that still wasn't quite tall enough. She then turned to a tall box

de kerosene, y su instinto topográfico hízole colocar vertical el mueble, con lo cual triunfó.

Los cuatro idiotas, la mirada indiferente, vieron cómo su hermana lograba pacientemente dominar el equilibrio, y cómo en puntas de pie apoyaba la garganta sobre la cresta del cerro, entre sus manos tirantes. Viéronla mirar a todos lados, y buscar apoyo con el pie para alzarse más.

Pero la mirada de los idiotas se había animado; una misma luz insistente estaba fija en sus pupilas. No apartaban los ojos de su hermana, mientras creciente sensación de gula bestial iba cambiando cada línea de sus rostros. Lentamente avanzaron hacia el cerco. La pequeña, que habiendo logrado calzar el pie, iba ya a montar a horcajadas y a caerse del otro lado, seguramente, sintióse cogido de la pierna. Debajo de ella, los ocho ojos clavados en los suyos le dieron miedo.

—¡Soltáme! ¡déjame! —gritó sacudiendo la pierna. Pero fue atraída.

—¡Mamá! ¡Ay, mamá! ¡Mamá, papá! —lloró imperiosamente. Trató aun de sujetarse del borde, pero sintióse arrancada y cayó.

—Mamá, ¡ay! Ma... --No pudo gritar más. Uno de ellos le apretó el cuello, apartándolos bucles como si fueran plumas, y los otros la arrastraron de una sola pierna

filled with kerosene, and her instinctual spacial awareness kicked in: she stacked the items up vertically and finally succeeded at reaching the summit.

The four idiots, staring blankly and indifferently forward, watched how their sister patiently worked to command her balance, and how she stood on tiptoe, resting her chin on the top of the fence, in between her own two hands that were straining and struggling to pull her body up to the top of the fence. They saw her look all around, searching with her foot for a hold to help hoist herself up higher.

But the idiot's gaze was no longer lifeless. Instead, it had become rather animated: the same stubborn light that shone in their sister's eyes now burned in their own. Their gazes were completely transfixed on their sister, and with each moment, the creases in their faces were being transformed by the bestial gluttony rising within them. Slowly, they rose and crept towards the fence. The little girl had managed to wedge her foot into the fence and was trying to use this new foothold to swing herself up to the top of the fence and over to the other side when she felt someone grab ahold of her leg. Just below her, eight eyes were fixed on her, scaring her.

"Let go of me! Leave me alone!" she shouted, trying to shake her leg free. But she was trapped.

"Mom! Hey, mom! Hey, dad!" she cried, a sense of urgency creeping into her voice. She tried to hold onto the top of the fence with her hands, but felt a sudden movement behind her, and she was ripped from the wall.

"Mom! Hey, mo...." She couldn't yell anymore. One of the boys squeezed her neck, separating her curls as if they were feathers. The others dragged her by one leg to

hasta la cocina, donde esa mañana se había desangrado a la gallina, bien sujeta, arrancándole la vida segunda por segundo.

Mazzini, en la casa de enfrente, creyó oír la voz de su hija.

—Me parece que te llama —le dijo a Berta.

Prestaron oído, inquietos, pero no oyeron más. Con todo, un momento después se despidieron, y mientras Berta iba a dejar su sombrero, Mazzini avanzó en el patio:

—¡Bertita!

Nadie respondió.

—¡Bertita! —alzó más la voz, ya alterada.

Y el silencio fue tan fúnebre para su corazón siempre aterrado, que la espalda se le heló de horrible presentimiento.

—¡Mi hija, mi hija! —corrió ya desesperado hacia el fondo. Pero al pasar frente a la cocina vio en el piso un mar de sangre. Empujó violentamente la puerta entornada, y lanzó un grito de horror.

Berta, que ya se había lanzado corriendo a su vez al oír el angustioso llamado del padre, oyó el grito y respondió con otro. Pero al precipitarse en la cocina, Mazzini, lívido como la muerte, se interpuso, conteniéndola:

—¡No entres! ¡No entres!

Berta alcanzó a ver el piso inundado de sangre. Sólo pudo echar sus brazos sobre la cabeza y hundirse a lo largo de él con un ronco suspiro.

the kitchen, where they had watched a hen be bled to death just that morning, her life flowing out of her second by second.

Mazzini, in the house across the street, thought he heard his daughter's voice.

"I think she's calling for you," he said to Berta.

They listened, a little nervous, but they didn't hear anything else. All the same, they decided to say their goodbyes a moment later, and while Berta turned to drop off her hat, Mazzini walked straight towards the courtyard.

"Bertita!"

No response.

"Bertita!" he raised his voice, already feeling a little rattled.

And the silence seemed to hold a sense of dread that crept into his perpetually anxious heart. His back stiffened beneath a horrible sense of foreboding.

"My daughter, my daughter!" he ran desperately towards the back of their property. But, as he passed the kitchen, he saw a sea of blood running over the ground. He frantically thrust the half-shut door open and let loose a wail of horror.

Berta, who was already running when she heard the father's anguished cries, heard his scream and responded, in turn, with another. But, as she bolted for the kitchen, Mazzini, as pale as Death himself, stepped in the way, blocking her, holding her back:

"Don't go in! Don't go in!"

Though he blocked the doorway, Berta still managed to see the blood-soaked floor behind him. She could only throw her hands up to cover her face and sink to the ground beside him, a hoarse moan escaping from her lips.

CAPÍTULO TRES

Rosas Artificiales²

Gabriel García Márquez

Moviéndose a tientas en la penumbra del amanecer, Mina se puso el vestido sin mangas que la noche anterior había colgado junto a la cama, y revolvió el baúl en busca de las mangas postizas. Las buscó después en los clavos de las paredes y detrás de las puertas, procurando no hacer ruido para no despertar a la abuela ciega que dormía en el mismo cuarto. Pero cuando se acostumbró a la oscuridad, se dio cuenta de que la abuela se había levantado y fue a la cocina a preguntarle por las mangas.

—Están en el baño— dijo la ciega —. Las lavé ayer tarde.

Allí estaban, colgadas de un alambre con dos prendedores de madera. Todavía estaban húmedas. Mina volvió a la cocina y extendió las mangas sobre las piedras de la hornilla. Frente a ella, la ciega revolvía el café, fijas las pupilas muertas en el reborde de ladrillos del corredor, donde había una hilera de tientos con hierbas medicinales.

—No vuelvas a coger mis cosas— dijo Mina —. En estos días no se puede contar con el sol.

La ciega movió el rostro hacia la voz.

—Se me había olvidado que era el primer viernes— dijo.

² A short story published in *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (Márquez 115-123)

CHAPTER THREE

Artificial Roses

Gabriel García Márquez

Groping around in the gloom of dawn, Mina put on the sleeveless dress that she had hung beside her bed the night before, rummaging around in the trunk in search of her detachable sleeves. Then she looked for them on the nails in the wall and behind the doors, doing her best to not make any noise so she wouldn't wake up her blind grandmother who slept in the room with her. But when her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she realized that Grandma had already gotten up, so she went to the kitchen to ask her about the sleeves.

"They're in the bathroom," said the blind woman. "I washed them late yesterday."

There they were, hung on a wire by two wooden clothespins. They were still wet. Mina went back to the kitchen and spread the sleeves over the stones of the burner. In front of her, the blind woman stirred the coffee, her dead eyes fixed on the brick ledge of the hallway, where there was a row of flowerpots filled with medicinal herbs.

"Don't take my things again," said Mina. "You can't count on the sun these days."

The blind woman moved her face in the direction of the voice.

"I forgot that it was the first Friday of the month," she said.

Después de comprobar con una aspiración profunda que ya estaba el café, retiró la olla del fogón.

—Pon un papel debajo, porque esas piedras están sucias— dijo.

Mina restregó el índice contra las piedras de la hornilla. Estaban sucias, pero de una costra de hollín apelmazado que no ensuciaría las mangas si no se frotaban contra las piedras.

—Si se ensucian tú eres la responsable— dijo.

La ciega se había servido una taza de café.

—Tienes rabia— dijo, rodando un asiento hacia el corredor —. Es sacrilegio comulgar cuando se tiene rabia—. Se sentó a tomar el café frente a las rosas del patio. Cuando sonó el tercer toque para misa, Mina retiró las mangas de la hornilla, y todavía estaban húmedas. Pero se las puso. El padre Ángel no le daría la comunión con un vestido de hombros descubiertos. No se lavó la cara. Se quitó con una toalla los restos del colorete, recogió en el cuarto el libro de oraciones y la mantilla, y salió a la calle. Un cuarto de hora después estaba de regreso.

—Vas a llegar después del evangelio— dijo la ciega, sentada frente a las rosas del patio.

Mina pasó directamente hacia el excusado.

—No puedo ir a misa— dijo —. Las mangas están mojadas y toda mi ropa sin planchar. —Se sintió perseguida por una mirada clarividente.

—Primer viernes y no vas a misa — dijo la ciega.

After taking a deep breath to make sure the coffee was ready, she took the pot off of the stove.

“Put some paper under them; those stones are dirty,” she said.

Mina rubbed her index finger against the burner stones. They were dirty, but since the soot was caked into a thin crust on the stones, the sleeves wouldn’t get dirty so long as they didn’t rub against the stones.

“If they get dirty, you’re responsible,” she said.

The blind woman had poured herself a cup of coffee.

“You’re angry,” she said, pushing a seat towards the hallway. “It’s sacrilegious to take communion when you’re angry.” She sat down to drink her coffee in front of the roses on the patio. When the third bell rang for mass, Mina took the sleeves off of the burner, but they were still wet. She put them on anyways. Father Angel wouldn’t give her communion if she was wearing a dress that showed her bare shoulders. She didn’t wash her face. She wiped off the remnants of blush with a towel, picked up a prayer book and shawl from the room, and went outside. Fifteen minutes later, she was back.

“You’re going to get there after the gospel,” said the blind woman, still seated in front of the roses on the patio.

Mina went to the bathroom.

“I can’t go to mass,” she said, “the sleeves are all wet and my clothes aren’t ironed.” She could feel a perceptive glare following her every move.

“First Friday of the month and you’re not going to mass,” said the blind woman.

De vuelta del excusado, Mina se sirvió una taza de café y se sentó contra el quicio de cal, junto a la ciega. Pero no pudo tomar el café.

—Tú tienes la culpa— murmuró, con un rencor sordo, sintiendo que se ahogaba en lágrimas.

—Estás llorando— exclamó la ciega.

Puso el tarro de regar junto a las macetas de orégano y salió al patio, repitiendo:

—Estás llorando.

Mina puso la taza en el suelo antes de incorporarse.

—Lloro de rabia— dijo. Y agregó al pasar junto a la abuela —: Tienes que confesarte, porque me hiciste perder la comunión del primer viernes.

La ciega permaneció inmóvil esperando que Mina cerrara la puerta del dormitorio. Luego caminó hasta el extremo del corredor. Se inclinó, tanteando, hasta encontrar en el suelo la taza intacta. Mientras vertía el café en la olla de barro, siguió diciendo:

—Dios sabe que tengo la conciencia tranquila.

La madre de Mina salió del dormitorio.

—¿Con quién hablas?— preguntó.

—Con nadie— dijo la ciega —. Ya te he dicho que me estoy volviendo loca.

Returning from the bathroom, Mina poured herself a cup of coffee and sat against the limestone doorframe, next to the blind woman. But she couldn't drink her coffee.

"It's your fault," she murmured, repressed resentment echoing in her voice, feeling like she was drowning in her own tears.

"You're crying," the blind woman exclaimed.

She put the watering can next to the pots of oregano and went outside to the patio, repeating:

"You're crying."

Mina put her cup on the floor before joining her.

"I'm crying out of anger," she said. And when she passed by her grandmother, she added: "You have to confess, because you're the one who made me miss communion on the first Friday of the month."

The blind woman stayed still, waiting for Mina to close the bedroom door. Then she walked to the end of the hallway. She bent down, feeling around the ground until she found Mina's cup on the floor, still intact. As she poured the coffee back into the clay pot, she kept saying:

"God knows that my conscience is clear."

Mina's mother left her bedroom.

"Who are you talking to?" she asked.

"No one," said the blind woman. "I told you already, I'm going crazy."

Encerrada en su cuarto, Mina se desabotonó el corpiño y sacó tres llavecitas que llevaba prendidas con un alfiler de nodriza. Con una de las llaves abrió la gaveta interior del armario y extrajo un baúl de madera en miniatura. Lo abrió con la otra llave. Adentro había un paquete de cartas en papeles de color, atadas con una cinta elástica. Se las guardó en el corpiño, puso el baulito en su puesto y volvió a cerrar la gaveta con llave. Después fue al excusado y echó las cartas en el fondo.

–Te hacía en misa– le dijo la madre.

–No pudo ir– intervino la ciega –. Se me olvidó que era primer viernes y lavé las mangas ayer tarde.

–Todavía están húmedas– murmuró Mina.

–Ha tenido que trabajar mucho en estos días– dijo la ciega.

–Son ciento cincuenta docenas de tosas que tengo que entregar en la Pascua– dijo Mina.

El sol calentó temprano. Antes de las siete, Mina instaló en la sala su taller de rosas artificiales: una cesta llena de pétalos y alambres, un cajón de papel elástico, dos pares de tijeras, un rollo de hilo y un frasco de goma. Un momento después llegó Trinidad, con su caja de cartón bajo el brazo, a preguntarle por qué no había ido a misa.

–No tenía mangas –dijo Mina.

–Cualquiera hubiera podido prestártelas –dijo Trinidad.

Rodó una silla para sentarse junto al canasto de pétalos.

–Se me hizo tarde – dijo Mina.

Locked in her room, Mina unbuttoned her bodice and took out the little keys she had attached to the garment with a safety pin. With one of the keys, she opened the drawer inside of the closet and took out a tiny wooden chest. She then opened it with the second key. Inside, there was a package of letters written on colored paper, bound together with an elastic band. She put them inside of her bodice, placed the tiny chest back in its spot, and relocked the drawer. Then, she went to the bathroom and threw the letters to the bottom of the toilet.

“I used to take you to mass,” her mother said to her.

“She couldn’t go,” interrupted the blind woman. “I forgot that it was the first Friday of the month and I washed the sleeves late yesterday.”

“They’re still wet,” muttered Mina.

“She has a lot of work to get done these days,” said the blind woman.

“There’s a hundred and fifty roses that I have to deliver on Easter,” said Mina.

The sun warmed up early that day. Before seven o’clock, Mina had set up her workshop for the artificial roses in the living room: a basket full of petals and wires, a crate of elastic paper, two pairs of scissors, a spool of thread and a jar of rubber cement. A moment later, Trinidad arrived to ask why she hadn’t gone to mass, a cardboard box tucked beneath her arm.

“I didn’t have sleeves,” said Mina.

“Anybody could have lent you some,” said Trinidad.

She pulled a chair over to sit next to the basket of petals.

“It made me late,” said Mina.

Terminó una rosa. Después acercó el canasto para rizar pétalos con las tijeras.

Trinidad puso la caja de cartón en el suelo e intervino en la labor.

Mina observó la caja.

—¿Compraste zapatos?— preguntó.

—Son ratones muertos—dijo Trinidad.

Como Trinidad era experta en el rizado de pétalos, Mina se dedicó a fabricar tallos de alambre forrados en papel verde. Trabajaron en silencio sin advertir el sol que avanzaba en la sala decorada con cuadros idílicos y fotografías familiares. Cuando terminó los tallos, Mina volvió hacia Trinidad un rostro que parecía acabado en algo inmaterial. Trinidad rizaba con admirable pulcritud, moviendo apenas la punta de los dedos, las piernas muy juntas. Mina observó sus zapatos masculinos. Trinidad eludió la mirada, sin levantar la cabeza, apenas arrastrando los pies hacia atrás e interrumpió el trabajo.

—¿Qué pasó?— dijo.

Mina se inclinó hacia ella.

—Que se fue—dijo.

Trinidad soltó las tijeras en el regazo.

—No.

—Se fue— repitió Mina.

Trinidad la miró sin parpadear. Una arruga vertical dividió sus cejas encontradas.

She finished a rose. Then she scooted closer to the basket to curl the petals with the scissors. Trinidad put the cardboard box on the floor and started helping Mina with the work.

Mina studied the box.

“You brought shoes?” she asked.

“It’s full of dead rats,” Trinidad said.

Since Trinidad was an expert petal-curler, Mina focused on fabricating the wire stems wrapped in green paper. They worked in silence, unaware of the progress of the sun as it moved through the living room that was decorated with pleasant paintings and family photos. When she finished the stems, Mina turned towards Trinidad, her face showing exhaustion over something intangible. It was truly admirable how neatly Trinidad curled the petals, her fingertips barely moving, their legs were resting close to each other. Mina studied her masculine shoes. Trinidad avoided her gaze, and without raising her head, she just dragged her feet back towards herself and under her chair, interrupting the workflow.

“What happened?” she asked.

Mina leaned towards her.

“He left,” said Mina.

Trinidad dropped the scissors in her lap.

“No.”

“He left,” Mina repeated.

Trinidad stared at her, not blinking. A tall crinkle appeared, splitting the area between her two eyebrows in half.

–¿Y ahora?– preguntó.

Mina respondió sin temblor en la voz.

–Ahora, nada.

Trinidad se despidió antes de las diez.

Liberada del peso de su intimidad, Mina la retuvo un momento, para echar los ratones muertos en el excusado. La ciega estaba podando el rosal.

–A que no sabes que llevo en esta caja– le dijo Mina al pasar.

Hizo sonar los ratones.

La ciega puso atención.

–Muévela otra vez– dijo.

Mina repitió el movimiento, pero la ciega no pudo identificar los objetos, después de escuchar por tercera vez con el índice apoyado en el lóbulo de la oreja.

–Son los ratones que cayeron anoche en las trampas de la iglesia– dijo Mina.

Al regreso pasó junto a la ciega sin hablar. Pero la ciega la siguió. Cuando llegó a la sala, Mina estaba sola junto a la ventana cerrada, terminando las rosas artificiales.

–Mina– dijo la ciega –. Si quieres ser feliz, no te confíes con extraños.

Mina la miró sin hablar. La ciega ocupó la silla frente a ella e intentó intervenir en el trabajo. Pero Mina se lo impidió,

–Estas nerviosa–dijo la ciega.

“And now?” she asked.

Mina responded without her voice trembling at all.

“Now, nothing.”

Trinidad said goodbye and headed out before ten.

Freed from the weight of her personal life, Mina kept the box so she could throw the dead rats away in the toilet. The blind woman was pruning the rosebush.

“You’ll never guess what I have in this box,” Mina told her as she passed by.

She shook the box around, and the rats made some noise inside the box.

The blind woman focused on the sound.

“Move it again,” she said.

Mina repeated the movement, but the blind woman couldn’t identify the objects, even after listening for a third time with her index finger held up to her earlobe.

“It’s full of the rats that were caught in the traps at the church last night,” said Mina.

When she returned from the bathroom, she passed by the blind woman without speaking. But the blind woman followed her nonetheless. When she reached the living room, Mina was sitting alone beside the closed window, finishing up the artificial roses.

“Mina,” said the blind woman. “If you want to be happy, you shouldn’t confess to strangers.”

Mina stared at her without speaking. The blind woman sat down in the chair in front of her and tried to help with the artificial roses. But Mina stopped her:

“You’re nervous,” the blind woman said.

–Por tu culpa–dijo Mina.

–¿Por qué no fuiste a misa?– preguntó la ciega.

–Tú lo sabes mejor que nadie.

–Si hubiera sido por las mangas no te hubieras tomado el trabajo de salir de la casa– dijo la ciega –. En el camino te esperaba alguien que te ocasionó una contrariedad.

Mina pasó las manos frente a los ojos de la abuela, como limpiando un cristal invisible.

–Eres adivina– dijo.

–Has ido al excusado dos veces esta mañana– dijo la ciega –. Nunca vas más de una vez.

Mina siguió haciendo rosas.

–¿Serías capaz de mostrarme lo que guardas en la gaveta del armario?– preguntó la ciega.

Sin apresurarse Mina clavó la rosa en el marco de la ventana, se sacó las tres llavecitas del corpiño y se las puso a la ciega en la mano. Ella misma le cerró los dedos.

–Anda a verlo con tus propios ojos– dijo.

La ciega examinó las llavecitas con las puntas de los dedos.

–Mis ojos no pueden ver en el fondo del excusado.

Mina levantó la cabeza y entonces experimentó una sensación diferente: sintió que la ciega sabía que la estaba mirando.

“Because of you,” Mina replied.

“Why didn’t you go to mass?” the blind woman asked her.

“You know why better than anyone.”

“If it had been up to the sleeves you never would have left the house to begin with,” said the blind woman. “On the way to mass, someone was waiting for you, someone who upset you.”

Mina moved her hands in a circular motion in front of her grandmother’s eyes, as if rubbing an invisible crystal ball.

“You’re psychic,” she said.

“You went to the bathroom twice this morning,” the blind woman said. “You never go more than once.”

Mina continued making roses.

“Well, could you show me what you keep in the closet drawer then?” the blind woman asked her.

Without missing a beat, Mina slowly stuck the rose she was working on in the window frame, removed the three little keys from her bodice, and placed them in the blind woman’s hand.

“Go on and see it with your own eyes,” she said.

The blind woman inspected the little keys with her fingertips.

“My eyes can’t see what’s at the bottom of the toilet.”

Mina raised her head and then felt something very strange: it was as if the blind woman knew that she was looking at her.

–Tírate al fondo del excusado si te interesan tanto mis cosas– dijo.

La ciega evadió la interrupción.

–Siempre escribes en la cama hasta la madrugada– dijo.

–Tú misma apagas la luz– dijo Mina.

–Y en seguida tú enciendas la linterna de mano– dijo la ciega. –Por tu respiración podría decirte entonces lo que estas escribiendo.

Mina hizo un esfuerzo para no alterarse.

–Bueno–dijo sin levantar la cabeza. –Y suponiendo que así sea: ¿qué tiene eso de particular?

–Nada– respondió la ciega. –Sólo que te hizo perder la comunión del primer viernes.

Mina recogió con las dos manos el rollo de hilo, las tijeras, y un punado de tallos y rosas sin terminar. Puso todo dentro de la canasta y encaró a la ciega.

–¿Quieres entonces que te diga que fui a hacer al excusado?– preguntó. Las dos permanecieron en suspenso, hasta cuando Mina respondió a su propia pregunta –: Fui a cagar.

La ciega tiró en el canasto las tres llavecitas.

– Sería una buena excusa – murmuró, dirigiéndose a la cocina. –Me habrías convencido si no fuera la primera vez en tu vida que te oigo decir una vulgaridad.

“Why don’t you just throw yourself into the toilet if you’re so interested in my things,” she said.

The blind woman ignored the outburst.

“You always write in bed until dawn,” she said.

“You turn the light off yourself,” Mina replied.

“And then you turn your flashlight on,” said the blind woman. “I can tell by your breathing what you’re writing.”

Mina tried her best not to show her frustration.

“Well,” she said without raising her head. “And assuming that’s the case: what’s so special about that?”

“Nothing,” responded the blind woman. “Only the fact that it’s what made you miss First Friday Communion.”

With both her hands, Mina picked up the spool of thread, the scissors, and a handful of unfinished stems. She put all of it into her basket and turned to face the blind woman.

“Do you really want me to tell you what I was doing in the bathroom?” she asked. They both stayed silent until Mina responded to her own question: “I needed to take a shit.”

The blind woman tossed the three little keys in the basket.

“That’s a good excuse,” she murmured, heading towards the kitchen. “You would have convinced me too, if that wasn’t the first time in your life that I’d heard you use such vulgar language.”

La madre de Mina venía por el corredor en sentido contrario, cargada de ramos espinosos.

– ¿Qué es lo que pasa? – preguntó.

– Que estoy loca – dijo la ciega –. Pero por lo visto no piensan mandarme para el manicomio mientras no empiece a tirar piedras.

Mina's mother walked towards them from the opposite end of the hallway, her arms full of thorny bouquets.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"I'm crazy," the blind woman said. "But apparently they won't send me to the looney bin as long as I'm not throwing stones around."

CAPÍTULO CUATRO

La casita de Sololoi³

Elena Poniatowska

—Magda, Magda, ven acá.

Oyó las risas infantiles en la sala y se asomó por la escalera.

—Magda, ¿no te estoy hablando?

Aumentaron las risas burlonas o al menos así las escuchó.

—Magda, ¡sube inmediatamente!

“Salieron a la calle —pensó —esto sí que ya es demasiado” y descendió de cuatro en cuatro la escalera, cepillo en mano. En el jardín las niñas seguían correteándose como si nada, el pelo de Magda volaba casi transparente a la luz del primer sol de la mañana, un papalote tras de ella, eso es lo que era, un papalote leve, quebradizo. Gloria, en cambio, con sus chinos cortos y casi pegados al cráneo parecía un muchacho y Alicia nada tenía del país de las maravillas: sólo llevaba puesto el pantalón de su pijama, arrugadísimo, entre las piernas y seguramente oliendo a orines. Y descalza, claro, como era de esperarse.

—¿Qué no entienden? Me tienen harta.

³ A short story published in *De noche vienes* (Poniatowska 93-100)

CHAPTER FOUR

The Little Sololoi House

Elena Poniatowska

“Magda, Magda, come here.”

She could hear the childish laughter echoing around the living room, and she peered down the stairs towards the noise.

“Magda, can’t you see that I’m talking to you?”

The chorus of teasing laughter got louder, or at least, that’s what it sounded like.

“Magda, get up here right now!”

“They went out front,” she thought. “I’ve had just about enough of this,” and she went down the stairs, four steps at a time, clutching a brush in her hand. Outside in the garden, the girls were still running around as if nothing had happened. Magda’s hair whipped around, almost transparent in the early morning light, as she pulled a kite behind her. Yes, that’s what it was: a frail, delicate kite. On the contrary, Gloria had a mess of curls, so short they were almost plastered down to her head, and Alice didn’t look like she had anything to do with Wonderland: all she had on was a pair of wrinkled pajama pants hanging on her legs, and chances are they stunk of pee. And, as expected, she was barefoot, of course.

“What don’t you understand? I’m really getting tired of this.”

Se les aventó encima. Las niñas se desbandaron, la esquivaban entre gritos. Laura, fuera de sí, alcanzó a la del pelo largo y delgado y con una mano férrea prendida a su brazo la condujo de regreso a la casa y la obligó a subir la escalera.

—¡Me estás lastimando!

—¿Y tú crees que a mí no me duelen todas tus desobediencias? —En el baño la sentó de lado sobre el excusado. El pelo pendía lastimero sobre los hombros de la niña. Empezó a cepillarlo.

—¡Mira, nada más, cómo lo tienes de enredado!

A cada jalón, la niña metía la mano, retenía una mecha, impidiendo que la madre prosiguiera, había que trenzarlo, si no, en la tarde estaría hecho una maraña de nudos. Laura cepilló con fuerza: “¡Ay, ay, mamá, ya, me duele!” La madre siguió, la niña empezó a llorar. Laura no veía sino el pelo que se levantaba en cortinas interrumpidas por nudos; tenía que trozarlo para deshacerlos, los cabellos dejaban escapar levísimos quejidos, chirriaban como cuerdas que son atacadas arteramente por el arco, pero Laura seguía embistiendo una y otra vez, la mano asida a la cabeza, zas, zas, zas, a dale y dale sobre el cuero cabelludo. Ahora sí, en los sollozos de su hija, la madre percibió miedo, un miedo que sacudía los hombros infantiles y picudos. La niña había escondido su cabeza entre sus manos y los cepillazos caían más abajo, en su nunca, sobre sus hombros. En un momento dado pretendió escapar, pero Laura la retuvo con un jalón definitivo, seco, viejo,

She lunged towards the girls. They scattered, dodging her while they screamed. Laura, beside herself with frustration, caught up with the one who had long, wispy hair and, with an iron grip on the girl's arm, she led her back to the house and forced her up the stairs.

"You're hurting me!"

"And you think it doesn't hurt me that all you do is disobey me?" In the bathroom, Laura sat the little girl down on the side of the toilet. Her hair hung in a pitiful knot on the girl's shoulders. Laura started brushing it.

"Look at this, just look at it! You really got it tangled up bad!"

With each yank, the girl held her hand up to her head, holding back her messy locks in such a way that her mother couldn't keep continue yanking that section of hair. It would have to be braided, because, if it wasn't, it would be nothing more than a knotted-up rat's nest by the time the afternoon rolled around. Laura brushed hard: "Hey! Mom, that hurts!" But her mother kept at it, and the girl began to cry. But Laura didn't hear; Laura only saw hair that fell in sheets, sheets whose perfect smoothness was interrupted by a series of knots. She had to fix it, to undo them. The hair let out little whines, squeaking like a string pulled back and skillfully latched on a bow. But Laura ran the brush through it again and again, gripping the girl's head with her hand, swoop, swoop, swoop, yanking over and over again from the top of the scalp. Now the mother could sense the fear in her daughter's sobs, a fear that made her pointy, child-like shoulders tremble and shake. The girl had hidden her head in between her hands, and so the brushstrokes fell lower, on the nape of her neck, then on her shoulders. At one point, she made a move to escape, but Laura pulled her back with a deliberate, stiff, seasoned

como un portazo y la niña fue recorrida por un escalofrío. Laura no supo en qué instante la niña volteó a verla y captó su mirada de espanto que la acicateó como una espuela a través de los párpados, un relámpago rojo que hizo caer los cepillazos desde quién sabe dónde, desde todos esos años de techo descascarado: proyectiles de cerda negra y plástico rosa transparente que se sucedían con una fuerza inexplicable, uno tras otro, a una velocidad que Laura no podía ni quería controlar, uno tras otro zas, zas, zas, zas, ya no llevaba la cuenta, el pelo ya no se levantaba como cortina al viento, la niña se había encorvado totalmente y la madre le pegaba en los hombros, en la espalda, en la cintura. Hasta que su brazo adolorido, como un aspa se quedó en el aire y Laura, sin volverse a ver a su hija, bajó la escalera corriendo y salió a la calle con el brazo todavía en alto, su mano coronada de cerdas de jabalí.

Entonces comprendió que debía irse.

Sólo al echarse a andar, Laura logró doblar el brazo. Un musculo jalaba a otro, todo volvía a su lugar y caminó resueltamente, si estaba fuera de sí no se daba cuenta de ello, apenas si notó que había lágrimas en su rostro y las secó con el dorso de la mano sin soltar el cepillo. No pensaba en su hija, no pensaba en nada. Debido a su estatura sus pasos no eran muy largos; nunca había podido acoplarse al ritmo de su

yank, and a chill ran down the girl's spine. Laura wasn't sure when exactly the girl had turned around to watch her, but the look of horror that she saw in the girl's eyes seemed to push her to go harder, like a cowboy's spurs drive horses from a trot to a full gallop. It was a flash of red that clouded her vision and made the brush fall from who knows where, from all those years of dirty dishes and unmade beds and chairs left reclined, from the peeling roof: black bristles and transparent pink plastic shot with an explicable force, launching like projectiles, one after the other, and Laura couldn't control its speed and fury, even if she had wanted to. Time and time again, swoop, swoop, swoop, swoop, she couldn't keep track of them anymore. The hair didn't fall like a sheet blowing in the wind anymore, the girl was completely hunched over, and her mother smacked her on her shoulders, on her back, and on her waist. Again and again, until her aching arm stopped, suspended high like a blade in the air. Without looking at her daughter, Laura ran down the stairs and continued out to the street, her raised hand crowned by boar brush bristles.

That was when she understood that it was time to leave.

It was only when she had started walking that Laura was finally able to put her arm down. One muscle contracted, which pulled on another muscle, and another, until everything had returned to its proper place. She walked with a sense of resolve, and if she had momentarily lost her mind, she didn't seem to notice it. In fact, she barely noticed that there were tears on her face, and she took a moment to dry them with the back of her hand, all without letting go of the brush. She didn't think about her daughter; she didn't think about anything. With her short stature, her steps weren't very long to begin with; she had never really been able to settle into a comfortable rhythm with her

marido cuyos zancos eran para ella desmesurados, Salió de su colonia y se encaminó hacia el césped verde de otros jardines que casi invadían la banqueta protegidos por una precaria barda de juguetería. Las casas, en el centro del césped, se veían blancas, hasta las manijas de la puerta brillaban al sol, cerraduras redondas, pequeños soles a la medida exacta de la mano, el mundo en la mano de los ricos. Al lado de la casa impoluta, una réplica en pequeño con techo rojo de asbestolit: la casa del perro, como en los *House Beautiful, House and Garden, Ladies' Home Journal*; qué casitas tan cuquitas, la mayoría de las ventanas tenían persianas de rendijas verdes de esas que los niños dibujan en sus cuadernos, y las persianas le hicieron pensar en Silvia, en la doble protección de su recámara.

“Pero si por aquí vive.” Arreció el paso. En un tiempo no se separaban ni a la hora de dormir puesto que eran *roommates*. Juntas hicieron el *high school* en Estados Unidos. Silvia! Se puso a correr, sí era por aquí, en esta cuadra, no, en la otra, o quizás allá, al final de la cuadra a la derecha. Qué parecidas eran todas estas casas, con sus garages a un lado, su casita del perro y sus cuadriláteros de césped fresco, fresco como la pausa que refresca. Laura se detuvo frente a una puerta verde oscuro, brillantísima, y sólo en el momento en que le abrieron recordó el cepillo y lo aventó cerdas arriba a la cuneta, al agua que siempre corre a la orilla de las banquetas.

husband who seemed to have stilts for legs in comparison with her own. She left her neighborhood and headed for the green grass that filled the other yards, the grass that would have invaded the sidewalk had it not been protected by a precarious wall of toys. Located right in the middle of the lawn, all of the houses looked white. Even the door handles shone brightly in the sun, the round knobs resembling small suns that just happened to be the size of a hand, like a whole world that fit in the palm of the rich. On the side of each flawless home, there was a smaller replica with a little red roof: a doghouse, just like in the magazines: *House Beautiful*, *Home and Garden*, *Ladies' Home Journal*. What adorable little houses. Most of the windows were covered with the green-slatted blinds that children would draw in their notebooks. The blinds made her think about Silvia, in the double-protection of her room.

“But she does live around here.” She slowed her pace. Once upon a time, they’d been inseparable, even at bedtime, when they were roommates. They had even gone to high school together in the United States. Silvia! She started running, yes, it was around here somewhere, on this block, no, maybe on the next one, or perhaps over there, at the end of the block on the right. These houses all looked pretty much the same: with a garage on one side, a little doghouse on the other, big green squares of grass out front, so cool and refreshing. Laura stopped in front of a dark green door, glistening in the sunlight. She didn’t remember the brush in her hand until the moment that someone began to open the door. She quickly threw it, bristles up, into the little stream of water that always runs down the curb.

“Yo te había dicho que una vida así no era para ti, una mujer con tu talento, con tu belleza. Bien que me acuerdo cómo te sacabas los primeros lugares en los *essay contests*. Escribías tan bonito. Claro, te veo muy cansada y no es para menos con esa vida de perros que llevas, pero un buen corte de pelo y una mascarilla te harán sentirte como nueva; el azul siempre te ha sentado. Hoy, precisamente, doy una comida y quiero presentarte a mis amigos, les vas a encantar, ¿te acuerdas de Luís Morales? Él me preguntó por ti mucho tiempo después de que te casaste, y va a venir; así es de que tú te quedas aquí; no, no, tú aquí te quedas, lástima que mande al chofer por las flores, pero puedes tomar un taxi y yo más tarde, cuando me haya vestido, te alcanzaré en el salón de belleza. Cógelo, Laurita, por favor, ¿qué no somos amigas? Laura yo siempre te quise muchísimo y siempre lamenté tu matrimonio con ese imbécil, pero a partir de hoy vasa sentirte otra; anda, Laurita, por primera vez en tu vida haz algo por ti misma, piensa en lo que eres, en lo que han hecho contigo.”

Laura se había sentido bien mirando a Silvia al borde de su tina de mármol. Qué joven y lozana se veía dentro del agua y más cuando emergió para secarse exactamente como lo hacía en la escuela, sin ningún pudor, contenta de enseñarle sus músculos alargados, la tersura de su vientre, sus nalgas duras, el triángulo perfecto de su sexo, los nudos equidistantes de su espina dorsal, sus axilas rasuradas, sus piernas morenas a fuerza de sol, sus caderas, eso sí un poquito más opulentas, pero apenas. Desnuda frente al espejo se cepilló el pelo, sano y brillante. De hecho, todo el baño era un anuncio; enorme satinado como las hojas del *Vogue*,

“I told you that you weren’t cut out for a life like that, a woman like you, with your talents, with your beauty. I remember how you got first place in all of those essay contests. You used to write so beautifully. Of course, I can tell how exhausted you are right now, and it’s really no surprise with that dogged life you have. But I’m sure that a good haircut and a facemask will make you feel as good as new. Blue has always been a good color on you. Today, I’m hosting a lunch and I’d like to introduce you to my friends, they’re going to love you. Do you remember Luis Morales? He asked me about you ages after you got married, and he’s coming today. That’s why you’ll stay right here; no, no you have to stay right here. It’s such a shame that I sent the chauffeur out for the flowers, but you can take a taxi and I’ll take another one later, right after I’ve gotten dressed, and I’ll catch up with you over at the beauty salon. Come on, Laura dear, let’s do this, please, we’re friends, aren’t we? Laura, I’ve always loved you so much, and I have always regretted your marriage to that absolute moron, but you’ll feel better after today. Go on, Laura dear. For the first time in your life, do something for yourself, think about who you are, about what they’ve done to you.”

Laura felt good as she watched Silvia perched on the edge of her marble tub. She looked so young and healthy immersed in the water and she looked even more so when she emerged to dry off, just like she used to do at school; She wasn’t shy at all, happy to show off her toned, lengthy muscles, the smoothness of her flat stomach, her firm butt, the perfect triangle of her sex, the equally spaced ridges of her spine, her shaved armpits, her sun-tanned legs, her hips, a little on the generous side, but not by much. Naked in front of the mirror, she brushed her hair, so healthy and shiny. In fact, the whole bathroom looked just like an ad: huge, glossy like the pages from *Vogue*,

las cremas aplíquense en pequeños toquecitos con la yema de los dedos en movimientos siempre ascendentes, almendras dulces, conservan la humedad natural de la piel, aroma fresco como el primer día de primavera, los desodorantes en aerosol, sea más adorable para él, el *herbal-essence* verde que contiene toda la frescura como la hierba del campo, de las flores silvestres; los ocho cepillos de la triunfadora, un espejo redondo amplificador del alma, algodones, lociones humectantes, secador-pistola-automática contenaza-cepillo-dos peines, todo ello al alcance de la mano, en torno de la alfombra peluda y blanca, osa, armiño, desde la cual Silvia le comunicó: “A veces me seco rodando sobre ella, por jugar y también para sentir.” Laura sintió vergüenza al recordar que no se había bañado, pensó en la vellonería enredada de su propio sexo, en sus pechos a la deriva, en la dura corteza de sus talones; pero su amiga, en un torbellino, un sinfín de palabras, verdadero rocío de la mañana, toallitas limpiadoras, suavizantes, la tomó de la mano y la guió a la recámara y siguió girando frente a ella envuelta a la romana en su gran toalla espumosa, suplemento íntimo, benzal para la higiene femenina, cuídese, consiéntase, introdúzcase, lo que sólo nosotras sabemos: las sales, la toalla de mayor absorbencia, lo que sólo nosotras podemos darnos, y Laura vio sobre la cama, una cama anchurosa que sabía mucho de amor, un camisón de suaves abandonos (¡qué cursi, qué ricamente cursi!) y una bata hecha bola, la charola del desayuno, el periódico abierto en la sección de Sociales. Laura nunca había vuelto a desayunar en la cama; es más: la charola yacía arrumbada en el cuarto de los trebejos. Sólo le sirvió a Gloria cuando le dio escarlatina y la cochina mocosa siempre se las arregló para tirar su contenido sobre la sábana. Ahora, al bajar la escalera circular, también joligudense —miel sobre hojuelas— de Silvia, recordaba sus bajadas y subidas

she applied creams with her fingertips, the delicate touches moving ever-upward, sweet almond oil preserving her skin's natural moisture, her fragrance as fresh as the first day of spring, the spray on deodorants, all to be more appealing to him, the green *Herbal Essence* full of all the freshness of the fields and the wildflowers, the eight brushes of a queen, a circular mirror that magnified the soul, cotton balls, moisturizing lotions, and an automatic-hair-dryer with-a-two-pronged-comb. All of it was right there, right at her fingertips, all around the furry, white ermine and bearskin rug, where Silvia told her: "Sometimes I dry myself off by rolling all over it, just to play with it and feel it." Laura felt ashamed when she remembered that she hadn't bathed; she thought of the tangled fleece that coated her sex, her drifting breasts, her calloused heels. But her friend, caught in a whirlwind, a ceaseless stream of words, coated in morning dew, cleansing wipes, and softeners, took her by the hand and guided her to the bedroom. There, Silvia kept twirling in front of her, her large, fluffy towel wrapped around her like a Roman toga, an intimacy supplement, a special cream for feminine hygiene, take care, consent to it, insert it, something that only women know: bath salts, the fluffiest towel, something only we women can give ourselves. Laura saw the bed, a wide bed that knew all about love, alongside a nightgown of sweet abandon (how tacky, how truly tacky!), a balled up robe, and a breakfast tray with a newspaper opened up to the "Society and Culture" section. Laura hadn't had breakfast in bed in a long time and, what's more, her breakfast tray lay in a pile in the junk room. She had only ever served breakfast in bed to Gloria when she came down with scarlet fever, and the filthy little brat always managed to spill it all over her sheets. Now, going down the circular staircase, as Hollywoodesque as Silvia herself, – that was the icing on the cake – she once again remembered climbing up and down the

por otra, llevándole la charola a Gloria, pesada por toda aquella loza de Valle de Bravo tan estorbosa que ella escogió, en contra de la de melamina y plástico-alta-resistencia, que Beto proponía. ¿Por qué en su casa estaban siempre abiertos los cajones, los roperos también, mostrando ropa colgada quién sabe cómo, zapatos apilados al aventón? En casa de Silva, todo era etéreo, bajaba del cielo.

En la calle, Laura caminó para encontrar un taxi, atravesó de nuevo su barrio y por primera vez se sintió superior a la gente que pasaba junto a ella. Sin duda alguna, había que irse como la espesa sopa de habas que tanto le gustaba a Beto. Qué grises y qué inelegantes le parecían todos, que tristemente presurosos. Se preguntó si podría volver a escribir como lo hacía en el internado, si podría poner todos sus sentimientos en un desesperado, por original, Silvia siempre le había dicho que ella era eso: o-ri-gi-nal, un buen tinte de pelo haría destacar sus pómulos salientes, sus ojos grises deslavados a punta de calzoncillos, sus labios todavía plenos, los maquillajes hacen milagros. ¿Luís Morales? Pero claro, Luís Morales tenía una mirada oscura y profunda, oriental seguramente, y Laura se sintió tan suya cuando la tomó del brazo y estiró su mano hacia la de ella para conducirla en medio del sonido de tantas voces –las voces siempre la marearon–, a un rincón apartado, ¡ay, Luís, ¡qué gusto me da!; sí soy yo, al menos pretendo ser la que hace años enamoraste, van a ir en grupo a Las Hadas el próximo *weekend*? Pero, claro que me encantaría, hace años que no veleo, en un barco de velas y a la mar me tiro, adentro y adentro y al agua contigo; sí, Luís, me gusta asolearme, sí,

stairs, bringing the breakfast tray to Gloria, so heavy and cumbersome because of the ceramic *Valle de Bravo* dishes that she had picked out instead of the melamine and high-strength plastic kinds that Beto had suggested. Why were the drawers and wardrobes always hanging open in her house, leaving the clothes spilling out all over the place, who knows how that happened, the shoes piled high? At Silvia's house, everything was ethereal, as if it had come directly from the heavens.

On the street, Laura walked around in search of a taxi, crossing back over to her neighborhood again and, for the first time, she felt superior to the people she passed. Without a shadow of doubt, she had to disappear like the thick bean soup that Beto liked so much. Everyone seemed so dull and rough around the edges, so caught up in the dreary hustle and bustle. She wondered if she could start writing again, like she had done in boarding school, if she could put all of her feelings in one desperate attempt, in an original work. Silvia had always told her that she was just that: o-ri-gi-nal; a nice color in her hair would accentuate her prominent cheekbones, with no spark left from her sad eyes all the way to her skivvies, her lips still full, makeup was truly miraculous. Luis Morales? But, then again, Luis Morales had a deep and mysterious look about him, definitely middle-eastern, and Laura felt like she belonged to him when he took her by the arm and stretched his hand out towards hers to lead her in the midst of so many voices – all those voices always made her dizzy – to a secluded corner. Oh, Luis, what joy he gives me! Yes, it is me, well, at least it's who I'm planning on being: the one who fell in love with you all those years ago. Are they going to Las Hadas next *weekend*? But of course I would love to go, I haven't been sailing in years, on a sailboat, throwing myself into the sea, into the wide-open water with you; yes, Luis, I like lounging in the sun, yes,

Luís, el daikirí es mi favorito; sí, Luís, en la espalda no alcanzo, ponme tú el *sea-and-ski*, ahora yo a ti, sí, Luís, sí...

Laura pensaba tan ardientemente que no vio los taxis vacíos y se siguió de largo frente al sitio de alquiler indicado por Silvia. Caminó, caminó; sí, podría ser una escritora, el poema estaba casi hecho, su nombre aparecería en los periódicos, tendría su círculo de adeptos y, hoy, en la comida, Silvia se sentiría orgullosa de ella, porque nada de lo de antes se le había olvidado, ni las rosas de talle larguísimo, ni las copas centellantes, ni los ojos que brillan de placer, ni la champaña, ni la espalda de los hombres dentro de sus trajes bien cortados, tan distinta a la espalda enflanelada y gruesa que Beto le daba todas las noches, un minuto antes de desplomarse y dejar escapar el primer ronquido, el estertor, el ruido de vapor que echaba: locomotora vencida que se asienta sobre los rieles al llegar a la estación.

De pronto, Laura vio muchos trenes bajo el puente que estaba cruzando; sí, ella viajaría, seguro viajaría, en *Iberia*, el asiento reclinable, la azafata junto a ella ofreciéndole un whisky, qué rico, qué sed, el avión atravesando el cielo azul como quien rasga una tela, así cortaba ella las camisas de los hijos, el cielo rasgado por el avión en que ella viajaría, el concierto de Aranjuez en sus oídos; España, agua, tierra, fuego, desde los techos de España encalada y negra. En España, los hombres piropean mucho a las mujeres, ¡guapa! qué feo era México y qué pobre y qué oscuro

Luis, daquiris are my favorite; yes, Luis, that's the spot on my back I can't seem to reach, put the sunscreen on me and I'll put it on you, yes, Luis, yes...

Laura was so caught up in her daydream that she didn't see the empty taxis and instead continued walking for a long time after passing by the rental site Silvia had pointed out to her. She walked and walked; yes, she could be a writer, her poem was almost complete, her name would be in the newspapers, she would have a circle of dedicated fans and, today at lunch, Silvia would be proud of her, because she hadn't forgotten anything from the past: not the long-stemmed roses, or the sparkling glasses, or the eyes that shone with pleasure, or the champagne, or the men's backs in their perfectly tailored suits, all of it so different from the flannel-clad back that Beto turned towards her every night, a minute before collapsing and letting out the first snore of the night, the dreadful rasping, the surge of noise as a train lets off its steam: it sounded like a locomotive drawing to a halt on the tracks as it pulled up to a station, a locomotive that should have long since been retired.

All of a sudden, Laura saw many trains beneath the bridge she was crossing. Yes, she would eventually travel, she was definitely going to travel, on *Iberia Airlines*, with a reclining seat, a flight attendant standing next to her offering her a glass of whiskey, oh how delightful, I am so thirsty, the plane cutting across the sky as seamlessly as someone ripping a cloth in half, that was how she cut her kids shirts, the sky torn by the plane that she was going to travel in, she could already hear the music from the "Concierto de Aranjuez" ringing in her ears: Spain, water, earth, fire, from the black Spanish rooftops of old to the whitewashed Spanish rooftops of Andalucia. Oftentimes in Spain, the men would catcall the women, hey beautiful! Mexico was so ugly and so poor and so dark

con toda esa hilera de casuchas negras, apiñadas allá en el fondo del abismo, los calzones en el tendedero, toda esa vieja ropa cubriéndose de polvo y hollín y tendida a toda esa porquería de aire que gira en torno a las estaciones de ferrocarril, aire de diésel, enchapopotado, apestoso, qué endebles habitaciones, cuán frágil la vida de los hombres que se revolcaban allá abajo mientras ella se dirigía el *beauty shop* del Hotel María Isabel pero ¿por qué estaba tan endiabladamente lejos el salón de belleza? Hacía mucho que no se veían grandes extensiones de pasto con casas al centro, al contrario: ni árboles había. Laura siguió avanzado, el monedero de Silvia fuertemente apretado en la mano; primero, el cepillo, ahora el monedero. No quiso aceptar una bolsa, se había desacostumbrado, le dijo a su amiga, sí claro, se daba cuenta que sólo las criadas usan monedero, pero el paso del monedero a la bolsa lo daría después, con el nuevo peinado. Por lo pronto, había que ir poco a poco, recuperarse con lentitud, como los enfermos que al entrar en convalecencia dan pasos cautelosos para no caerse. La sed la atenazó y, al ver un Sanborns se metió, al fin: *ladies bar*. En la barra, sin más, pidió un whisky igual al del *Iberia*. Qué sed, sed, saliva, semen; sí, su saliva ahora, seca en su boca, se volvería semen; crearía, al igual que los hombres, igual que Beto, quien por su solo falo y su semen de ostionería se sentía Tarzán, el rey de la creación, Dios, Santa Clos, el señor presidente, quién sabe qué diablos quién. Qué sed, qué sed, debió caminar mucho para tener esa sed y sentir ese cansancio, pero se le quitaría con el champú de cariño, y a la hora de la comida, sería emocionante ir de un grupo a otro, reír,

with those rows of black shacks, all crowded together at the bottom of the abyss, underwear strung up on the clotheslines, all of those old clothes completely covered in dust and soot and laid out to soak up that filthy air that circles railway stations, that diesel air, the asphalt, stinky, those rickety shacks, so fragile were the lives of the men that rolled and romped in the hay over there while she headed towards the Maria Isabel Hotel's beauty salon. But why was the salon so devilishly far away? It had been a long time since she was surrounded by large stretches of grass with houses in the center, in fact it was exactly the opposite where she was now: there weren't even any trees. Laura kept going, Silvia's coin purse clutched tightly in her hand; first the brush, and now the coin purse. She hadn't wanted to take the handbag, she wasn't used to carrying one anymore, she had told her friend that, and of course, she understood that only maids used coin purses, but she was on her way to graduate from a coin purse to a handbag, along with a new hairstyle. For now, she had to take baby steps, recover slowly, just as sick people take cautious, careful steps as they begin their journey of recovery, so they don't fall down. She was suddenly overcome by thirst, and when she saw a Sanborns, she went right in, at last: a ladies' bar. At the bar, without further ado, she ordered a whiskey like the ones they have on *Iberia Airlines*. So thirsty, thirsting, salivating, saliva, semen; yes, now her saliva, dry in her mouth, would turn to semen; she would create it, just like men did, just like Beto did, who felt prowess through his own phallus and the aphrodisiac quality of his semen, like Tarzan, the king of creation, God, Santa Claus, Mr. President, who knows what else. She was thirsty, so thirsty, she must have walked a lot to work up such a thirst and to feel so tired, but it would all melt away with a good shampooing, and at lunchtime, it would be exciting to go from one group to another, laughing,

hablar con prestancia del libro de poemas a punto de publicarse. El azul le va muy bien, el azul siempre la ha hecho quererle a sí misma, ¿no decía el siquiatra en ese artículo de Kena que el primer indicio de salud mental es empezar a quererle a sí mismo? Silvia le había enseñado sus vestidos azules. El segundo whisky le sonrojó a Laura las mejillas, al tercero descansó y un gringo se sentó junto a ella en la barra y le ofreció la cuarta copa. “Y eso que no estoy peinada”, pensó agradecida. En una caballeriza extendió las piernas, para eso era el asiento de enfrente, ¿no? y se arrellanó. “Soy libre, libre de hacer lo que me dé la gana.”

Ahora sí el tiempo pasaba con lentitud y ningún pensamiento galopaba dentro de su cabeza. Cuando salió del Sanborns estaba oscureciendo y ya el regente había mandado prender las larguísimas hileras de luz neón del circuito interior. A Laura le dolía el cuerpo y el brazo en alto, varado en el aire llamó al primer taxi, automáticamente dio la dirección de su casa y al bajar le dejó al chofer hasta el último centavo que había en el monedero. “Tome usted también el monedero.” Pensó que el chofer se parecía a Luís Morales o a lo que ella recordaba que era Luís Morales. Como siempre, la puerta de la casa estaba emparejada y Laura tropezó con el triciclo de una de las niñas, le parecieron muchos los juguetes esparcidos en la sala, muchos y muy grandes, un campo de juguetes, de caminar entre ellos le llegarían al tobillo. Un olor de tocino invadía la estancia y desde la cocina vio los trastes apilados en el fregadero. Pero lo que más golpeó a Laura fue su retrato de novia parada junto a Beto. Beto tenía unos ojos fríos y ella los miró con frialdad y le respondieron con la misma frialdad. No eran feos, pero había en ellos algo mezquino, la rechazaban y la desafiaban a la vez,

and to boast about her book of poems about to be published. Blue looks so good on her, blue has always made her love herself, didn't the psychiatrist in that Kena article say that loving yourself was the first step towards good mental health? Silvia had shown her all of her blue dresses. The second whiskey brought a pink flush to Laura's cheeks, after the third she'd loosened up, and a gringo sat next to her at the bar and offered her a fourth glass. "I'm not even all done up," she thought, pleased. On the barstool, she stretched her legs out, that's what the seat in front of her was for, right? She settled back into a comfortable position. "I'm free, free to do whatever I want."

Now, time seemed to drag on, passing by slowly; there were no thoughts bouncing around in her mind. By the time she left Sanborns, it was getting dark outside and the manager had already turned on the long strand of neon lights that wrapped around the inside track. Laura was sore all over her body, feeling it especially in her upper arm as she held it high in the air calling for a taxi, climbing into the first taxi that drove up to her, instinctively rattling off her address and, when she got out of the taxi, she gave the driver every last cent in her coin purse. "Take the purse too." She thought that the driver looked like Luis Morales, or at least what she remembered he looked like. As always, the door of the house was cracked open and Laura stumbled over one of the girl's tricycles, finding so many toys scattered throughout the room, a field of toys; She waded in between the toys that reached up over her ankles. The smell of bacon poured into the room and she saw the dishes stacked high in the kitchen sink. But what hit Laura the hardest was the wedding picture of her standing next to Beto. Beto had cold eyes and she stared coldly into them and was met with a cold stare in return. They weren't ugly, but there was something shallow about them, they rejected and challenged her at the same

sin ninguna pasión, sin afán, sin aliento; eran ojos que no iban a ninguna parte, desde ese sitio podía oír lo que anunciaba Paco Malgesto en la televisión, los panquecitos Bimbo; eran muy delgadas las paredes de la casa, se oía todo y al principio Laura pensó que era una ventaja, porque así sabría siempre dónde andaban los niños. Casi ninguno volvió la cabeza cuando entró al cuarto de la televisión, imantados como estaban por el Chavo del 8. El pelo de Magda pendía lastimero y enredado como siempre, la espalda de Beto se encorvaba abultadísima en los hombros – hay hombres que envejecen allí precisamente, en el cuello, como los bueyes—; Gloria y Alicia se habían tirado de panza sobre la alfombra raída y manchada, descalzas, claro. Ninguno pareció prestarle la menor atención. Laura, entonces, se dirigió a la recámara que nadie había hecho y estuvo a punto de aventarse con todo y zapatos sobre el lecho nupcial que nadie había tenido, cuando vio un calcetín en el andén y sin pensarlo lo recogió y buscó otro más abajo y lo juntó al primero: “Serán el par?” Recogió el suéter de Jorgito, la mochila de Quique, el patín de Betito, unos pañales impregnados con el amoníaco de orines viejos y los llevó al baño a la canasta de la ropa sucia; ya a Alicia le faltaba poco para dejar los pañales y entonces esa casa dejaría de oler a orines; en la tina vio los patos de plástico de Alicia, el buzo de Jorgito, los submarinos, veleros y barcos, un jabón multicolor e informe compuesto por todos los pedazos de jabón que iban sobrando y se puso a tallar el aro de mugre que sólo a ella le preocupaba. Tomó los cepillos familiares en el vaso dentífrico y los enjuagó; tenían pasta acumulada en la base. Empezó a subir y bajar la escalera tratando de

time, there was no passion there, no drive, no spirit; they were eyes that weren't going anywhere. She could hear the television from where she was standing: Paco Malgesto was advertising the Bimbo Mini Pound Cakes; the walls of the house were very thin, you could hear everything, and Laura had originally thought that was a good thing, because that way she could always tell right where the kids were. No one turned around when she made her way into the family room, all magnetized by the TV show, *El Chavo del 8*. Magda's hair was hanging in a pitiful, tangled mess, as usual, Beto was hunched over, the enormous curve of his back pressing his shoulders forward – that's where some men hang their age, right there on their necks, like oxen. Gloria and Alicia were laying on their stomachs on the ragged, stained carpet, barefoot, of course. No one seemed to pay any attention to her. Then, Laura went to the bedroom where no one had bothered to make the bed, and she was just about to throw herself, shoes and all, onto the nuptial bed where no vows had ever been exchanged, when she saw a sock on the nightstand, picked it up without a second thought, looked down on the floor for the second one, and matched it up with the first one. "Will they make a pair?" She picked up little Jorgito's sweater, Quinque's backpack, little Betito's skates, a few diapers that stunk of old pee and took them to the dirty clothes hamper in the bathroom; Alicia was almost ready to stop wearing diapers for good and then the house would finally stop smelling like pee. In the tub she saw Alicia's plastic ducks, little Jorgito's divers, submarines, planes, and boats; she grabbed the multicolored soap chunk made up of all the leftover pieces of countless soap bars, and she began to scrub away at the ring of filth that only seemed to bother her. She gathered up the toothbrushes from the jar by the sink and rinsed them off; they had dried toothpaste all over them. Then she started going up and down the stairs, trying to

encontrarle su lugar a cada cosa. ¿Cómo pueden amontonarse en tan poco espacio tantos objetos sin uso, tanta materia muerta? Mañana habría que airear los colchones, acomodar los zapatos, cuántos; de fútbol, tenis, botas de hule, sandalias, hacer una lista, el miércoles limpiaría los roperos, sólo limpiar los trasteros de la cocina le llevaría un día entero, el jueves la llamada biblioteca en que ella alguna vez pretendió escribir e instalaron la televisión porque en esa pieza se veía mejor, otro día entero para remendar suéteres, poner elástico a los calzones, coser botones, sí, remendar esos calcetines caídos en torno a los tobillos, el viernes para...

Beto se levantó, fue al baño, y sin detenerse siquiera a cerrar bien la puerta, orinó largamente y, al salir, la mano todavía sobre su bragueta, Laura sostuvo por un instante la frialdad de su mirada y su corazón se apretó al ver el odio que expresaba. Luego dio media vuelta y arrió de nuevo su cuerpo hacia el cuarto de la televisión. Pronto los niños se aburrirían y bajarían a la cocina: “Mamá, a mediodía casi no comimos.” Descenderían caracoleando, ya podían oírse sus cascos en los peldaños, Laura abriría la boca para gritar, pero no saldría sonido alguno; buscaría con que defenderse, trataría de encontrar un cuchillo, algo para protegerse pero la cercarían: “Mamá, quiero un huevo frito y yo jotquéis y yo una sincronizada y yo otra vez tocino”; levantarían hacia ella sus alientos de leche, sus manos manchadas de tinta, y la boca de Laura se desharía en una sonrisa y

find a place for each item. How can so many useless things, so many pointless inanimate objects, pile up in such a small space? Tomorrow we'll have to air out the mattresses, find homes for all the shoes, there are just so many: soccer cleats, tennis shoes, rain boots, sandals, she would make a list; on Wednesday she would clean out the closets, just cleaning out the kitchen cupboards would take a whole day; on Thursday she would clean out the so-called library where she had once planned on writing her poetry but had been transformed into the family room because the TV fit better there, another whole day to mend sweaters, to put elastic in pants, to sew buttons on, yes, to mend those socks that slipped down to the ankles, on Friday she would...

Beto got up, went to the bathroom, and without even pausing to make sure the door was shut all the way, he peed for a long time, and as he walked out, his hand still on his fly, Laura held his cold gaze for a moment, her heart tightening as she felt the hate he directed towards her. Then he turned around and propelled his body back towards the family room. The kids would get bored soon and head into the kitchen: "Mom, we barely ate anything at lunch." They would prance down the stairs like horses, she could already hear their hooves on the steps; Laura would open her mouth wide to scream, but no sound would come out; she would look for something to defend herself with, she would try to find a knife, something she could use to protect herself, to fend them off, but they would surround her: "Mom, I want a fried egg, and I want pancakes, and I want a quesadilla, and I want more bacon"; they would tilt their heads toward her, their breath smelling of milk, their hands covered in marker, and Laura's mouth would break into a smile and

sus dedos hechos puño, a punto de rechazarlos, engarrotados y temblorosos, se abrirían uno a uno jalados por los invisibles hilos del titiritero, lenta, blandamente, oh, qué cansinamente.

her fingers that were clenched in fists, stiff and trembling, on the verge of driving them away, would open, one by one, as if a puppet master pulled on them with his invisible strings, slowly, softly, oh, how wearily.

CAPÍTULO CINCO

El pájaro azul⁴

Rubén Darío

París es teatro divertido y terrible. Entre los concurrentes al café Plombier, buenos y decididos muchachos –pintores, escultores, escritores, poetas; sí, ¡todos buscando el viejo laurel verde!–, ninguno más querido que aquel pobre Garcín, triste casi siempre, buen bebedor de ajenjo, sonador que nunca se emborrachaba y, como bohemio intachable, bravo improvisador.

En el cuartucho destartado de nuestras alegres reuniones guardaba el yeso de las paredes, entre los esbozos de rasgos de futuros Delacroix, versos, estrofas enteras escritas en letra echada y gruesa de nuestro *pájaro azul*.

El pájaro azul era el pobre Garcín. ¿No sabéis por qué se llamaba así? Nosotros le bautizamos con ese nombre.

Ello fue un simple capricho. Aquel excelente muchacho tenía el vino triste. Cuando le preguntábamos por que, cuando todos reíamos como insensatos o como chicuelos, él arrugaba el ceño y miraba fijamente al cielo raso, y nos respondía sonriendo con cierta amargura:

– Camaradas: habéis de saber que tengo un pájaro azul en el cerebro; por consiguiente...

⁴ A short story published in *Azul* (Darío 76-80).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Bluebird

Rubén Darío

Paris is a theater for the exciting and the terrible. Of all Café Plombier's visitors, all of those talented, determined kids – painters, sculptors, poets; yes, each and every one of them seeking that old, Roman laurel of triumph – none was more beloved than poor Garcin. Almost always sad, he was a heavy absinthe⁵ drinker, a daydreamer who never got drunk, and, like any unmistakable Bohemian, a fierce improviser.

In the dilapidated dump where our happy gatherings took place, among the rough sketches of future artists like Delacroix, the plaster walls held poetry, whole stanzas scrawled in the thick, lazy handwriting of our very own *bluebird*.

The bluebird was poor Garcin. Don't you know why everyone called him that? We gave him that name, and, with it, he was reborn.

It was a simple whim. That amazing boy was drowning his sadness in wine. When we asked him why, he would wrinkle his brow and stare up at the ceiling, even when we were all acting like children or laughing like fools. Smiling, he would respond with a certain sense of sorrow:

“Friends: you should know that I have a bluebird in my mind; so...”

⁵ Absinthe is a green liquor with hallucinogenic properties.

Sucedió también que gustaba de ir a las campiñas nuevas al entrar la primavera. El aire del bosque hacia bien a sus pulmones, según nos decía el poeta.

De sus excursiones solía traer ramos de violetas y gruesos cuadernillos de madrigales, escritores, escritos al ruido de las hojas y bajo el ancho cielo sin nubes. Las violetas eran para Niní, su vecina, una muchacha fresca y rosada, que tenía los ojos muy azules.

Los versos eran para nosotros los leíamos y los aplaudíamos. Todos teníamos una alabanza para Garcín. Era un ingenio que debía brillar. El tiempo vendría. ¡Oh, el pájaro azul volaría muy alto! ¡Bravo! ¡Bien! ¡Eh, mozo, más ajeno!

Principios de Garcín:

De las flores, las lindas campánulas.
Entre las piedras preciosas, el zafiro.
De las inmensidades, el cielo y el amor; es decir, las pupilas de Niní.
Y repetía el poeta: “Creo que siempre es preferible la neurosis a la estupidez.”

A veces Garcín estaba más triste que de costumbre.

Andaba por los bulevares; veía pasar, indiferente, los lujosos carruajes, los elegantes, las hermosas mujeres. Frente al escaparate de un joyero sonreía; pero cuando pasaba cerca de un almacén de libros se llegaba a las vidrieras, husmeaba, y al ver las lujosas ediciones se declaraba decididamente envidioso, arrugaba la frente; para desahogarse volvía el rostro hacia el cielo y suspiraba. Corría al café en busca de nosotros, conmovido, exaltado, pedía se vaso de ajeno y nos decía:

—Sí; dentro de la jaula de mi cerebro está preso un pájaro azul que quiere su libertad...

When spring arrived, he liked to go out to the fresh, crisp countryside. According to the poet, the forest air filled and strengthened his lungs.

He usually returned from his excursions with bouquets of violets and thick notebooks full of madrigals⁶, all written beneath a cloudless sky to the sound of rustling leaves. The violets were for Nini, his neighbor, a cheeky, rosy girl with bright blue eyes.

The madrigals were for us: we read and applauded them. We all sang praises to Garcin. He had a sense of ingenuity that shone brightly. His time would come. Oh, the bluebird would fly so very high! Bravo! Bravissimo! Hey, lad, more absinthe!

Garcin's Principles:

Of the flowers, a beautiful bellflower,
Among the precious gems, a sapphire.
Of the vast and boundless, the sky and love; namely, Nini's eyes.
And the poet repeated: "I believe that neurosis is always better than stupidity."

Sometimes Garcin was gloomier than usual.

He walked the streets; he saw the luxurious carriages, the posh people, the beautiful women all pass him by, indifferent. He would smile in front of the jewelry store window, but when he happened upon the windows of a nearby bookstore, he would peek in and, upon seeing the extravagant editions, he would wrinkle his brow and declare that he was downright jealous. He would turn his face towards the sky and sigh, letting go of his stress. Then, he would run into the café in search of us, excited, impassioned, and he would ask for a glass of absinthe and then he would say:

"It's true; an imprisoned blue bird longs for its freedom from the cage inside my mind, ..."

⁶Madrigals are short poems composed of seven or eleven verses that are centered around the theme of love.

Hubo algunos que llegaron a creer en un descalabro de razón.

Un alienista a quien se le dio la noticia de lo que pasaba calificó el caso como una monomanía especial. Sus estudios patológicos no dejaban lugar a duda.

Decididamente, el desgraciado Garcín estaba loco.

Un día recibió de su padre, un viejo provinciano de Normandía, comerciante en trapos, una carta que decía lo siguiente. Poco más o menos:

“Sé tus locuras en París. Mientras permanezcas de ese modo no tendrás de mí un solo *sou*. Ven a llevar los libros de mí almacén, y cuando hayas quemado, gandul, tus manuscritos de tonterías, tendrás mi dinero.”

Esta carta se leyó en el café Plombier.

—¿Y te irás?

—¿No te irás?

—¿Aceptas?

—¿Desdeñas?

¡Bravo Garcín! Rompió la carta, y soltando el trapo a la ventana improvisó unas cuantas estrofas, que acababan, si mal no recuerdo:

¡Sí; seré siempre un gandul,
lo cual aplaudo y celebro
mientras sea mi cerebro
jaula del pájaro azul!

There were even some people who began to believe this terribly flawed reasoning.

A psychiatrist who caught wind of the situation described it as a peculiar case of monomania⁷. After studying the behavior, he had no doubt that his diagnosis was correct.

It was undeniable: wretched Garcin was crazy.

One day, he received a letter from his father – an old, cloth merchant from Normandy – which, more or less, said the following:

“I know all about your insane ramblings in Paris. As long as you continue to entertain this madness, I won’t give you a single *sou*⁸. Come and take the books from my store and, when you have burned all your frivolous manuscripts, you slacker, then and only then, will you get any of my money.”

He read the letter in Café Plombier.

“And, will you go?”

“Will you stay?”

“Do you accept it?”

“Do you despise it?”

Bravo, Garcin! He ripped up the letter, letting the shreds float out the window, and he improvised a few stanzas on the spot, which, if I remember correctly, ended with:

Yeah: a real slacker, that’s how I roll,
a fact I revere and hail
while the blue bird’s jail
remains my mind and skull!

⁷ Monomania is a psychosis where an individual is obsessively and compulsively fixated on a single idea.

⁸ A *sou* is an old French coin that is the approximate equivalent of one cent.

Desde entonces Garcín cambió de carácter. Se volvió charlador, se dio un bano de alegría, compró una levita nueva y comenzó un poema en tercetos titulado:

El pájaro azul.

Cada noche se leía en nuestra tertulia algo nuevo de la obra. Aquello era excelente, sublime, disparatado.

Allí había un cielo muy hermoso, una campiña muy fresca, países brotados como por la magia del pincel de Corot, rostros de niños asomados entre flores, los ojos de Niní húmedos y grandes, y, por añadidura, el buen Dios que envía volando, sobre todo aquello un pájaro azul que, sin saber cómo ni cuándo, anida dentro del cerebro del poeta, en donde queda aprisionado. Cuando el pájaro quiere volar y abre las alas se da contra las paredes del cráneo, se alzan los ojos al cielo, se arruga la frente y se bebe ajeno con poca agua, fumando, además, por remate un cigarrillo de papel.

He aquí el poema:

Una noche llegó Garcín riendo mucho y, sin embargo, muy triste.

La bella vecina había sido conducida al cementerio.

—¡Una noticia! ¡Una noticia! Canto ultimo de mi poema. Niní ha muerto. Viene la primavera y Niní se va. Ahorro de violetas para la campiña. Ahora falta el epílogo del poema. Los editores no se dignan siquiera leer mis versos. Vosotros, muy pronto, tendréis que dispersaros. La ley del tiempo. El epílogo se debe titular así: *De cómo el pájaro azul alza el vuelo al cielo azul.*

From that moment on, Garcin's personality was different. He became talkative, he beamed with joy, he bought a new frock coat, and he began a new tercet poem titled:

The Bluebird

Every night at our gathering, he would read us something new from it. It was excellent, sublime, ludicrous.

He spoke of a beautiful sky, of a fresh countryside, of whole countries sprouting from Corot's paintbrush, of children's faces poking out between the wildflowers, and of Nini's big misty eyes. Beyond that, he spoke of a blue bird that the good God sent to fly above it all and, without knowing how or when, to nest deep inside the poet's mind, where it is imprisoned. When the bird tries to spread its wings wide and fly, they would hit the sides of the poet's skull; the poet raises his eyes up towards the sky, wrinkles his brow, drinks his watered-down absinthe and, as a final touch, smokes a paper cigarette.

Here is the poem:

One night, Garcin arrived, laughing a great deal, but nevertheless, very sad.

His beautiful neighbor had been taken to the cemetery.

"I have an announcement! An announcement to make! The final stanza of my poem. Nini has died. Spring is coming, but Nini is leaving. I'll leave the violets for the countryside. But now my poem is missing its epilogue. Editors won't even have to bother to oblige me by reading my poetry. Very soon, all of you will have to part ways. That's just how time works. So, the epilogue will be titled as such: *How the Bluebird Takes Flight to the Blue Sky*.

¡Plena primavera! ¡Los árboles florecidos, las nubes rosadas en el alba y pálidas por la tarde, el aire suave que mueve las hojas y hace aletearlas cintas de los sombreros de paja con especial ruido! Garcín no ha ido al campo.

Hele ahí; viene con un traje nuevo a nuestro amado café Plombier, pálido, con una sonrisa triste.

—¡Amigos míos, un abrazo! Abrazadme todos así, fuerte; decidme adiós con todo el corazón, con toda el alma... El pájaro azul vuela...

Y el pobre Garcín lloró, nos estrechó, nos apretó las manos con todas sus fuerzas y se fue.

Todos dijimos: Garcín, el hijo prodigo, busca a su padre, el viejo normando.

—Musas, adiós; adiós. Gracias. ¡Nuestro poeta se decide a medir trapos! ¡Eh! ¡Una copa por Garcín!

Pálidos, asustados, entristecidos, al día siguiente todos los parroquianos del café Plombier que metíamos tanta bulla en aquel cuartucho destartado nos hallábamos en la habitación de Garcín. Él estaba en su lecho sobre las sábanas ensangrentadas, con el cráneo roto de un balazo. Sobre la almohada había fragmentos de masa cerebral... ¡Horrible!

Cuando, repuestos de la impresión, pudimos llorar ante el cadáver de nuestro amigo, encontramos que tenía consigo el famoso poema. En la última página había escrito estas palabras:

Hoy, en plena primavera, dejó abierta la puerta de la jaula al pájaro azul,

¡Ay, Garcín, cuantos llevan en el cerebro tu misma enfermedad!

The fullness of spring! The flowering trees, the clouds: pink at dawn and pale in the afternoon, the soft air that moves the leaves and makes the ribbons on straw hats flutter, making a certain swishing sound. Yet, Garcin hasn't gone to the countryside.

He stood there: inside our beloved Café Plombier, sporting a new suit, his skin pale, a sad smile on his face.

“My friends, a hug! All of you embrace me, tightly; tell me goodbye with all of your heart, with all your soul... Today, the bluebird flies...”

And poor Garcin wept; he held us tightly, squeezed our hands with all his might, and then he left.

We all thought that Garcin, the prodigal son, was searching for his father, the old Normand.

“My Muses, goodbye; goodbye. Thank you. Our poet has decided to measure cloth like his father. Hey! A toast to Garcin!

The following day, pale, frightened, and saddened, all us Café Plombier regulars who made such a commotion in that dilapidated dump found ourselves in Garcin's room. He was in bed, on top of bloodied sheets, his skull shattered by a bullet. There were fragments of brain on his pillow... How awful!

When we had recovered from the shock and could finally cry in the presence of our friend, we discovered that he had the famous poem with him. On the final page, he had written these words:

Today, in the fullness of spring, I'm leaving the bluebird's cage door wide open.

Oh, Garcin, how many more carry the same affliction in their minds!

CAPÍTULO SEIS

La noche boca arriba⁹

Julio Cortázar

Y salían en ciertas épocas a cazar enemigos;

Le llamaban la guerra florida.

A mitad del largo zaguán del hotel pensó que debía ser tarde, y se apuró a salir a la calle y sacar la motocicleta del rincón donde el portero de al lado le permitía guardarla.

En la joyería de la esquina vio que eran las nueve menos diez; llegaría con tiempo sobrado adonde iba. El sol se filtraba entre los altos edificios del centro, y – porque para sí mismo, para ir pensando, no tenía nombre – montó en la máquina saboreando el paseo. La moto ronroneaba entre sus piernas, y un viento fresco le chicoteaba los pantalones.

⁹ A short story published in *Ceremonias* (Cortázar 131-139)

CHAPTER SIX

Face Up in the Dark

Julio Cortázar

*And at certain times, they went out to hunt their enemies;
they called it “la guerra florida.”¹⁰*

About halfway down the long hotel hallway, he realized it was getting late, so he hurried outside to grab his motorcycle from the corner where the porter next door let him keep it.

At the jewelry store on the corner, he saw it was ten ‘til nine: he would get where he was going with plenty of time to spare. Rays of sunlight spilled through the tall buildings downtown, and – to keep up his illusion of namelessness in his thoughts – he got on the machine, savoring the ride. The motorcycle purred between his legs, and a cool breeze whipped up against his pants.

¹⁰ “La guerra florida”, or “The Flower War” was a series of battles that the Aztecs engaged in from 1450 to 1519. Two enemy armies would pick a day and time in advance to meet and fight. Many historians believe that the purpose of these “flower wars” were to capture enemies for religious sacrifices and to train their own armies in combat that was usually less deadly and with less people than a typical war. However, for the Aztecs, dying in combat in a “flower war” was seen as a higher honor than dying in typical combat. The Aztecs referred to death in combat in a “flower war” as “xochimiquiztli”, which means “blissful death” or “flowery death”, and they believed that those who died in “flower war” combat were transported to the heavens where their god of war, sun, and fire, Huitzilopochtli, resided. (Isaac 412-424)

Dejó pasar los ministerios (el rosa, el blanco) y la serie de comercios con brillantes vitrinas de la calle central. Ahora entraba en la parte más agradable del trayecto, el verdadero paseo: una calle larga, bordeada de árboles, con poco tráfico y amplias villas que dejaban venir los jardines hasta las aceras, apenas demarcadas por setos bajos. Quizá algo distraído, pero corriendo sobre la derecha como correspondía, se dejó llevar por la tersura, por la leve crispación de ese día apenas empezado. Tal vez su involuntario relajamiento le impidió prevenir el accidente. Cuando vio que la mujer parada en la esquina se lanzaba a la calzada a pesar de las luces verdes, ya era tarde para las soluciones fáciles. Frenó con el pie y la mano, desviándose a la izquierda; oyó el grito de la mujer, y junto con el choque perdió la visión. Fue como dormirse de golpe.

Volvió bruscamente del desmayo. Cuatro o cinco hombres jóvenes lo estaban sacando de debajo de la moto. Sentía gusto a sal y sangre, le dolía una rodilla, y cuando lo alzaron gritó, porque no podía soportar la presión en el brazo derecho. Voces que no parecían pertenecer a las caras suspendidas sobre él, lo alentaban con bromas y seguridades. Su único alivio fue oír la confirmación de que había estado en su derecho al cruzar la esquina. Preguntó por la mujer, tratando de dominar la náusea que le ganaba la garganta. Mientras lo llevaban boca arriba a una farmacia próxima, supo que la causante del accidente no tenía más que rasguños en las piernas.

On the main street, he let the government offices (the pink one, the white one) and the chain of shops with their eye-catching window displays pass him by. And then he began the more charming part of his route, the genuine ride: a long road, lined with trees, scarcely any traffic, and spacious villas with gardens that came right up to the edge of the sidewalk, barely separated from one another by short hedges. Maybe a bit distracted, but racing down the right-hand side of the road as he should, he let the smoothness of the ride carry away the mild tension of the day that had just begun. Perhaps his unintentional relaxation hampered his ability to prevent the accident. When he saw that the woman standing on the corner had launched herself into the street, despite the green lights, it was already too late for a simple solution. He slammed the brakes with his hand and foot, veering sharply to the left; he heard the woman scream. Between that and the shock, he blacked out. It was as if, all of a sudden, he had fallen into a deep sleep.

He quickly regained consciousness. Four or five young men were pulling him out from underneath the motorcycle. The taste of salt and blood filled his mouth, one of his knees throbbed with pain, and, when they helped him up, he screamed out in pain, because he couldn't put any weight on his right arm. He heard voices that tried to encourage him with jokes and assurances, but they didn't seem to belong to any of the faces that hovered above him. The only thing that relieved him was hearing the confirmation that he did in fact have the right-of-way to cross the intersection. He asked about the woman, trying to push back the nausea that was slowly rising in his throat. As they carried him face up to a nearby pharmacy, he learned that the woman who had caused the accident had nothing more than a few scratches on her legs.

<<Usté la agarró apenas, pero el golpe le hizo saltar la máquina de costado.>> Opiniones, recuerdos, despacio, éntrenlo de espaldas, así va bien, y alguien con guardapolvo dándole a beber un trago que lo alivió en la penumbra de una pequeña farmacia de barrio.

La ambulancia policial llegó a los cinco minutos, y lo subieron a una camilla blanda donde pudo tenerse a gusto. Con toda lucidez, pero sabiendo que estaba bajo los efectos de un shock terrible, dio sus señas al policía que lo acompañaba. El brazo casi no le dolía; de una cortadura en la ceja goteaba sangre por toda la cara. Una o dos veces se lamió los labios para beberla. Se sentía bien, era un accidente, mala suerte; unas semanas quieto y nada más. El vigilante le dijo que la motocicleta no parecía muy estropeada. <<Natural – dijo el –. Como que me la ligué encima...>> Los dos se rieron, y el vigilante le dio la mano al llegar al hospital y le deseó buena suerte. Ya la náusea volvía poco a poco; mientras lo llevaban en una camilla de ruedas hasta un pabellón del fondo, pasando bajo árboles llenos de pájaros, cerró los ojos y deseó estar dormido o cloroformado. Pero lo tuvieron largo rato en una pieza con olor a hospital, llenando una ficha, quitándole la ropa y vistiéndolo con una camisa grisácea y dura. Le movían cuidadosamente brazo, sin que le doliera. Las enfermeras bromeaban todo el tiempo, y si no hubiera sido por las contracciones del estómago se habría sentido muy bien, casi contento.

Lo llevaron a la sala de radio, y veinte minutos después, con la placa todavía húmeda puesta sobre el pecho como una lápida negra, pasó a la sala de operaciones. Alguien de blanco, alto y delgado, se le acercó y se puso a mirar la radiografía.

“It barely caught you, man, but that hit made your motorcycle flip on its side.” So much was happening: opinions, recollections, bring him in on his back, gently, that’s good, and someone in overalls giving him a drink that soothed him in the small, dim neighborhood pharmacy.

The ambulance arrived in five minutes, and the paramedics lifted him onto a soft stretcher where he could lie comfortably. With complete clarity, but still acknowledging that he was in a terrible state of shock, he gave his information to the officers that were accompanying him. His arm didn’t really hurt anymore; blood was dripping all over his face from a cut on his brow. He licked his lips once or twice to drink it. He felt good, it was an accident, just back luck; a few weeks of relaxing and nothing more. The security guard told him that his motorcycle didn’t seem too damaged. “Naturally,” he said.

“Since it landed on top of me.” The two laughed, and the security guard shook his hand and wished him good luck as they reached the hospital. Bit by bit, the nausea began to return; as they wheeled him to the back wing on a gurney, passing beneath trees full of birds, he closed his eyes and wished he was asleep or unconscious. But they kept him in a room with that hospital smell for a long time, filling out a file, taking off his clothes and dressing him in a stiff, grayish shirt. They carefully moved his arm, without hurting him. The nurses joked the whole time, and if it had not been for the furious butterflies in his stomach, he would have felt really good, almost happy.

They took him down to radiology, and twenty minutes later, with the still damp x-ray placed on his chest like a black tombstone, he went to the operating room. Someone tall, skinny, and wearing white came up to him and held the x-ray up to examine it.

Manos de mujer le acomodaban la cabeza, sintió que lo pasaban de una camilla a otra. El hombre de blanco se le acercó otra vez, sonriendo, con algo que le brillaba en la mano derecha. Le palmeó una mejilla e hizo una seña a alguien parado atrás.

Como sueño era curioso porque estaba lleno de olores y él nunca soñaba olores. Primero un olor a pantano, ya que a la izquierda de la calzada empezaban las marismas, los tembladerales de donde no volvía nadie. Pero el olor cesó, y en cambio vino una fragancia compuesta y oscura como la noche en que se movía huyendo de los aztecas. Y todo era tan natural, tenía que huir de los aztecas que andaban a caza de hombre, y su única probabilidad era la de esconderse en lo más denso de selva, cuidando de no apartarse de la estrecha calzada que sólo ellos, los motecas, conocían.

Lo que más lo torturaba era el olor, como si aún en la absoluta aceptación del sueño algo se rebelara contra eso que no era habitual, que hasta entonces no había participado del juego.

<<Huele a guerra>>, pensó, tocando instintivamente el puñal de piedra atravesado en su ceñidor de lana tejida. Un sonido inesperado lo hizo agacharse y quedar inmóvil, temblando. Tener miedo no era extraño, en sus sueños abundaba el miedo. Esperó, tapado por las ramas de un arbusto y la noche sin estrellas. Muy lejos, probablemente del otro lado del gran lago, debían estar ardiendo fuegos de vivas; un resplandor rojizo teñía esa parte del cielo. El sonido no se repitió. Había sido como una rama quebrada. Tal vez un animal que escapaba como él del olor de la guerra. Se enderezó despacio, venteado. No se oía nada, pero el miedo seguía allí como el olor, ese incienso dulzón de la guerra

A woman's hands adjusted his head and it felt like he had been moved from one gurney to another. The man in white came up to him again, smiling, holding something that glistened in his right hand. That man patted his cheek and signaled to someone standing behind him.

As he dreamed, he was curious because his dreams were filled with smells and his dreams never had smells. First, there was a swampy odor, just to the left of the road where the marshland began, the quagmires from which no one ever returned. But that odor faded, and was replaced by a dark and deep fragrance, like the night he left to escape from the Aztecs. Everything felt very natural: he had to escape from the Aztecs who went hunting for men, and his only chance was to hide in the densest part of the jungle, taking care to not stray from the stretch of road known only to them, the Motecas.

What tortured him the most was the smell, as if, even in his complete acceptance of the dream, something rebelled against the unfamiliar, something that hadn't been part of the game until right then.

"It smells like war," he thought, instinctively touching the stone dagger tucked into his woven wool belt. An unexpected sound made him crouch down and freeze, trembling. Being scared wasn't a strange sensation for him: his dreams were full of fear. He waited, hidden by the branches from a nearby bush and a starless night. Far in the distance, probably on the other side of the large lake, fires must have been burning at the campsite: a reddish glow stained that part of the sky. He didn't hear the noise again. It had sounded like a branch breaking. Maybe an animal had escaped from the smell of war like he had. He slowly stood up, making his way out into the open. He heard nothing, but fear lingered in the air just like the smell: the sickly-sweet incense of *la guerra*

florida. Había que seguir, llegar al corazón de la selva evitando las ciénagas. A tientas, agachándose a cada instante para tocar el suelo más duro de la calzada, dio algunos pasos. Hubiera querido echar a correr, pero los tembladerales palpitaban a su lado. En el sendero en tinieblas, buscó el rumbo. Entonces sintió una bocanada horrible del olor que más temía, y saltó desesperado hacia adelante.

—Se va a caer de la cama—dijo el enfermo de al lado. —No brinque tanto, amigazo.

Abrió los ojos y era de tarde, con el sol ya bajo en los ventanales de la larga sala. Mientras trataba de sonreír a su vecino, se despegó casi físicamente de la última cisión de la pesadilla. El brazo, enyesado, colgaba de un aparato con pesas y poleas. Sintió sed, como si hubiera estado corriendo kilómetros, pero no querían darle mucha agua, apenas para mojar los labios y hacer un buche. La fiebre lo iba ganando despacio y hubiera podido dormirse otra vez pero saboreaba el placer de quedarse despierto, entornados los ojos, escuchando el diálogo de los otros enfermos, respondiendo de cuando en cuando a alguna pregunta. Vio llegar un carrito blanco que pusieron al lado de su cama, una enfermera rubia le frotó con alcohol la cara anterior del muslo y le clavó una gruesa aguja con un tubo que subía hasta un frasco de líquido opalino. Un médico joven vino con un aparato de metal y cuero que le ajustó al brazo sano para verificar alguna cosa. Caía la noche, y la fiebre lo iba arrastrando blandamente a un estado donde las cosas tenían un relieve como de gemelos de teatro, eran reales y dulces y a la vez ligeramente repugnantes; como estar viendo una película aburrida y pensar que sin embargo en la calle es peor; y quedarse.

florida. He had to keep moving, to reach the heart of the jungle, avoiding the swamps. Feeling his way blindly, crouching each moment to touch the hard ground in front of him, he took a few steps. He would have broken into a run, but the quagmires throbbed by his side. On the trail of darkness, he searched for the path. Then he got a mouthful of that awful smell that frightened him more than anything, and he leapt forward, desperately.

“He’s going to fall off the bed,” said the sick patient beside him. “Don’t jump around so much, friend.”

He opened his eyes. It was late afternoon, and the sun was already sinking low in the large windows of the long room. While trying to smile at his neighbor, he physically separated himself from the final image of his nightmare. His arm, in a cast, was suspended by an apparatus with weights and pulleys. He was so thirsty, as if he had been running for miles, but they didn’t want to give him too much water, just a mouthful, enough to wet his lips. His fever was slowly rising, and he could have gone back to sleep, but instead he savored the pleasure of being awake. Letting his eyelids droop, he listened in on the other patient’s conversations, answering a question every once in a while. He watched a white cart arrive and stop right next to his bed; a blonde nurse rubbed alcohol on the front of his thigh, stuck a thick needle in it, and attached it to a tube that went up to a hanging bottle of milky liquid. A young doctor came in with a leather and metal device that he fitted on his healthy arm to check something. Night fell, and the fever slowly crept down until he was in a state where everything seemed to be accentuated with rose colored glasses: everything was real and sweet at the same time: somewhat repugnant, like living in a boring movie and staying there because it seems even worse on the streets.

Vino una taza de maravilloso caldo de oro oliendo a puerro, a apio, a perejil. Un trocito de pan, más precioso que todo un banquete, se fue desmigajando poco a poco. El brazo no le dolía nada y solamente en la ceja, donde lo habían suturado, chirriaba a veces una punzada caliente y rápida. Cuando los ventanales de enfrente viraron a manchas de un azul oscuro, pensó que no le iba a ser difícil dormirse. Un poco incómodo, de espaldas, pero al pasarse la lengua por los labios resecos y calientes sintió el sabor del caldo, y suspiró de felicidad, abandonándose.

Primero fue una confusión, un atraer hacia sí todas las sensaciones por un instante embotadas o confundidas. Comprendía que estaba corriendo en plena oscuridad, aunque arriba el cielo cruzado de copas de árboles era menos negro que el resto. —La calzada— pensó. —Me salí de la calzada—. Sus pies se hundían en un en un colchón de hojas y barro, y ya no podía dar un paso sin que las ramas de los arbustos le azotaran el torso y las piernas. Jadeante, sabiéndose acorralado a pesar de la oscuridad y el silencio, se agachó para escuchar. Tal vez la calzada estaba cerca, con la primera luz del día iba a verla otra vez. Nada podía ayudarlo ahora a encontrarla. La mano que sin saberlo él aferraba el mango del puñal, subió como el escorpión de los pantalones hasta su cuello, donde colgaba el amuleto protector. Moviendo apenas los labios musitó la plegaria del maíz que trae las lunas felices, y la súplica a la Muy Alta, a la dispensadora de los bienes motecas. Pero sentía al mismo tiempo que los tobillos se le estaban hundiendo despacio en el barro, la espera en la oscuridad del chaparral desconocido se le hacía insoportable. La guerra florida había empezado con la luna y llevaba ya tres días y tres noches. Si conseguía refugiarse en lo profundo de la selva, abandonando la calzada más allá de la región de las ciénagas,

A bowl full of a wonderful golden broth was ushered in with the smell of leeks, celery, and parsley. A single piece of bread, more precious than a whole feast, was crumbled into pieces, bit by bit. His arm didn't hurt anymore; he only felt a sharp, burning pain that stabbed at his brow from time to time where it had been sutured. When the hue of the windows in front of him had faded to dark blue spots, he thought it would be easy to fall asleep. Slightly uncomfortable laying on his back, he licked his hot, dry lips and tasted the broth, sighing with happiness, and surrendered to his dreams.

At first, he felt confusion, as he was drawn towards all his senses that were dulled or muddled for a moment. He knew that he was running in the dark, yet the sky above, partially obscured by overhanging branches, wasn't as dark as everything else around him. "The path," he thought. "I veered off the path." His feet sank into a bed of mud and leaves, and it was impossible to take a single step without the branches of nearby bushes whipping against his legs and torso. Panting, knowing that he was trapped in spite of the darkness and silence that surrounded him, he crouched down and listened. Maybe the road was nearby, and he would be able to see it again with the first light of day. Nothing could help him find it now. The hand that had clung unconsciously to his dagger's handle for so long had crept up from his pants to his neck like a scorpion, where his amulet of protection hung. Scarcely moving his lips, he muttered the Motecan Corn Prayer, the one that calls for happy moons, that pleads for help from the Very High, the commander of the Motecan gods. But, as he felt his ankles slowly sinking deeper into the mud, the squatting and waiting in the darkness of this unfamiliar brush became unbearable. Three days and nights had already passed since the rising moon marked the beginning of "*la guerra florida*." If he abandoned the road in favor of the swampland

quizás los guerreros no le siguieran el rastro. Pensó en los muchos prisioneros que ya habían hecho, pero la cantidad no contaba, sino el tiempo sagrado. La caza continuaría hasta que los sacerdotes dieran la señal del regreso. Todo tenía su número y su fin, y él estaba dentro del tiempo sagrado, del otro lado de los cazadores.

Olió los gritos y se enderezó de un salto, puñal en mano. Como si el cielo se incendiara en el horizonte, vio antorchas moviéndose entre las ramas, muy cerca.

El olor a guerra era insoportable, y cuando el primer enemigo le saltó al cuello casi sintió placer en hundirle la hoja de piedra en pleno pecho. Ya lo rodeaban las luces, los gritos alegres. Alcanzó a cortar el aire una o dos veces, y entonces una soga lo atrapó desde atrás.

—Es la fiebre —dijo el de la cama de al lado—. A mí me pasaba igual cuando me operé del duodeno. Tome agua y va a ver que duerme bien.

Al lado de la noche de donde volvía, la penumbra tibia de la sala le pareció deliciosa. Una lámpara violeta velaba en lo alto de la pared del fondo como un ojo protector. Se oía toser, respirar fuerte, a veces un diálogo en voz baja. Todo era grato y seguro, sin ese acoso, sin... Pero no quería seguir pensando en la pesadilla. Había tantas cosas en qué entretenerse. Se puso a mirar al yeso del brazo, las poleas que tan cómodamente se lo sostenían en el aire. Le había puesto una botella de agua mineral en la mesa de noche. Bebió del gollete golosamente.

and managed to take refuge deep in the jungle, perhaps the warriors wouldn't follow his trail. He thought of all the prisoners they had already taken, but the number didn't matter: only the sacred time counted. They would continue to hunt for more until the priests signaled for them to return. Everything has its place and its purpose, and he was living on sacred time, directly opposite from the hunters.

He smelled screams, and leapt upright, the dagger clenched in his hand. He saw torches weaving between the branches near him: it looked like the heavens were burning.

The smell of war was unbearable. When the first enemy leapt at his throat, he almost enjoyed the feeling of sinking the stone blade deep into his chest. He was already surrounded by lights and gleeful shouting. He managed to cut through the air in front of him one or two more times before a rope caught him from behind.

"It's the fever," said the man on the bed beside him. "The same thing happened to me when I had surgery on my small intestines. Drink some water and you'll find that you sleep better."

The warm gloom of the room seemed delightful to him when compared to the night he had just returned from. A purple light stood guard, resembling a watchful eye at the top of the back wall. He heard coughing, labored breathing, and sometimes conversations carried out in hushed voices. Everything was pleasant and safe, and there was no relentless pursuit, there was no... But he didn't want to think about his nightmare any longer. There were so many other things to keep him entertained. He looked at the cast on his arm, observing the pulleys that held it so comfortably in the air. A bottle of mineral water had been placed on his nightstand. He drank greedily from the neck of the

Distinguía ahora las formas de la sala, las treinta camas, los armarios con vitrinas. Ya no debía tener tanta fiebre, sentía fresca la cara. La ceja le dolía apenas, como un recuerdo. Se vio otra vez saliendo del hotel, sacando la moto.

¿Quién hubiera pensado que la cosa iba a acabar así? Trataba de fijar el momento del accidente, y le dio rabia advertir que había ahí como un hueco, un vacío que no alcanzaba a rellenar. Entre el choque y el momento en que lo habían levantado del suelo, un desmayo o lo que fuera no le dejaba ver nada. Y al mismo tiempo tenía la sensación que ese hueco, esa nada, había durado una eternidad. No, ni siquiera tiempo, más bien como si en ese hueco él hubiera pasado a través de algo o recorrido distancias inmensas. El choque, el golpe brutal contra el pavimento. De todas maneras, al salir del pozo negro había sentido casi un alivio mientras los hombres lo alzaban del suelo. Con el dolor del brazo roto, la sangre de la ceja partida, la contusión en la rodilla; con todo eso, un alivio al volver al día y sentirse sostenido y auxiliado. Y era raro. Le preguntaría alguna vez al médico de la oficina. Ahora volvía a ganarlo el sueño, a tirarlo despacio hacia abajo. La almohada era tan blanda, y en su garganta afiebrada la frescura del agua mineral. Quizá pudiera descansar de veras, sin las malditas pesadillas. La luz violeta de la lampara en lo alto se iba apagando poco a poco.

Como dormía de espaldas, no lo sorprendió la posición en que volvía a reconocerse, pero en cambio el olor a humedad, a piedra rezumante de filtraciones, le cerró la garganta y lo obligó a comprender. Inútil abrir los

bottle. Now, he could make out the shapes in the room, the thirty beds, the glass displays of the medicine cabinets. He must not be as feverish anymore, his face felt cool. His brow barely hurt anymore; the pain felt more like a distant memory. He saw himself leaving the hotel again, riding his motorcycle.

Who would have thought that things would end up like this? He tried to focus on the moment of the accident, and it frustrated him that there seemed to be a gap there, a hole in his memory that he couldn't fill. Between the initial shock and the moment he had been lifted off of the ground, the moment of unconsciousness or whatever it was wouldn't let him see anything. At the same time, he had a feeling that the gap, that nothingness, had lasted an eternity, not just a moment. No, it wasn't time, instead it was as if, in that gap, he had passed through something or traveled an immense distance. The utter shock, the brutal blow against the pavement. In any case, coming out of that cesspit had almost given him a sense of relief as the men lifted him from the ground. The pain of his broken arm, the blood streaming from his split eyebrow, and the bruising on his elbow: all of that was a relief to him when thinking back to how he was supported and helped him regain consciousness. And that was strange. He would ask the doctor about it sometime. But now the dream came back to him, slowly dragging him down into its grasp. The pillow was so soft, and the mineral water still felt fresh in his feverish throat. Maybe he would get some real rest, sleep without those blasted nightmares. The violet eye of light gradually faded to darkness.

As he slept on his back, he wasn't surprised at the situation he found himself in once again, but the change in the smell of humidity, the sweat oozing from the rocks, closed his throat and forced him to understand where he was. It was useless to open his

ojos y mirar en todas direcciones; lo envolvía una oscuridad absoluta. Quiso enderezarse y sintió las sogas en las muñecas y los tobillos. Estaba estaqueado en el suelo, en un piso de lajas helado y húmedo. El frío le ganaba la espalda desnuda, las piernas. Con el mentón buscó torpemente el contacto con su amuleto, y supo que se lo habían arrancado. Ahora estaba perdido, ninguna plegaria podía salvarlo del final. Lejanamente, como filtrándose entre las piedras del calabozo, oyó los atabales de la fiesta. Lo habían traído al teocalli, estaba en las mazmorras del templo a la espera de su turno.

Oyó gritar, un grito ronco que rebotaba en las paredes. Otro grito, acabando en un quejido. Era él que gritaba en las tinieblas, gritaba porque estaba vivo, todo su cuerpo se defendía con el grito de lo que iba a venir, del final inevitable. Pensó en sus compañeros que llenarían otras mazmorras, y en los que ascendían ya los peldaños del sacrificio. Gritó de nuevo sofocadamente, casi no podía abrir la boca, tenía las mandíbulas agarrotadas y a la vez como si fueran de goma y se abrieran lentamente, con un esfuerzo interminable. El chirriar de los cerrojos lo sacudió como un látigo. Convulso, retorciéndose, luchó por zafarse de las cuerdas que se le hundían en la carne. Su brazo derecho, el más fuerte, tiraba hasta que el dolor se hizo intolerable y tuvo que ceder. Vio abrirse la doble puerta, y el olor de las antorchas le llegó antes que la luz. Apenas ceñidos con el taparrabos de la ceremonia, los acólitos de los sacerdotes se le acercaron mirándolo con desprecio. Las luces se reflejaban en los torsos sudados, en el pelo negro

eyes and scan around him: he was surrounded by absolute darkness. He wanted to stand up, but he felt the ropes on his wrists and ankles. He was staked to a freezing, wet slab of rock on the ground. The cold beat against his bare back and legs. He awkwardly moved his chin around his chest, feeling around for his amulet, but he realized that it had been ripped off. Now he was completely done for, not even a prayer could save him from his inevitable end. In the distance, as if it was leaking through the dungeon stones, he heard celebration drums. They had brought him to the *teocalli*¹¹; he was in the temple dungeon awaiting his turn.

He heard a hoarse scream that bounced around the walls of the dungeon. Then there was another scream that ended abruptly in a groan. He was the one that was screaming in the dark, screaming because he was alive, his whole body defending itself with a cry of what was coming, of his inevitable end. He thought of his friends that would fill the other dungeon cells, and of those who had already ascended the sacrificial steps. He let loose another strangled scream, almost unable to open his mouth; his jaw was clenched and yet felt like rubber, opening slowly, with enormous effort. The lock snapped open like the crack of a whip. Convulsing, writhing, he fought to rid himself of the ropes that bit into his flesh. He pulled with his right arm, his strong arm, until he could no longer stand the pain and was forced to yield. He saw the double door open, the smell of the burning torches reaching him before their light. Barely covered by a ceremonial loincloth, the priests' acolytes approached him, glaring at him with contempt. The lights were reflected by the sweat gleaming on their torsos and by their black hair

¹¹ In Nahuatl, *teocalli* translates directly to "God-house" and is used to refer to a pyramid-shaped Aztec temple. Religious rituals and ceremonial sacrifices often took place at the top of this pyramid-like structure. (Truettner 57-58)

lleno de plumas. Cedieron las sogas y en su lugar lo aferraron manos calientes, duras como bronce; se sintió alzado, siempre boca arriba, tironeado por los cuatro acólitos que lo llevaban por el pasadizo. Los portadores de antorchas iban adelante, alumbrando vagamente el corredor de paredes mojadas y techo tan bajo que los acólitos debían agachar la cabeza. Ahora lo llevaban, era el final. Boca arriba, a un metro del tacho de roca viva que por momentos se iluminaba con un reflejo de antorcha. Cuando en vez de techo nacieran las estrellas y se alzara frente a él la escalinata incendiada de gritos y danzas, sería el fin. El pasadizo no acababa nunca, pero ya iba a acabar, de repente olería el aire lleno de estrellas, pero todavía no, andaban llevándolo sin fin en la penumbra roja, tironeándolo brutalmente, y él no quería, pero cómo impedirlo si le habían arrancado el amuleto que era su verdadero corazón, el centro de la vida.

Salió de un brinco a la noche del hospital, al alto cielo raso dulce, a la sombra blanda que lo rodeaba. Pensó que debía haber gritado, pero sus vecinos dormían callados. En la mesa de noche, la botella de agua tenía algo de burbuja, de imagen translúcida contra la sombra azulada de los ventanales. Jadeó, buscando el alivio de los pulmones, el olvido de esas imágenes que seguían pegadas a sus párpados. Cada vez que cerraba los ojos las veía formarse instantáneamente, y se enderezaba aterrado pero gozando a la vez del saber que ahora estaba despierto, que la vigilia lo protegía, que pronto iba a amanecer, con el buen sueño profundo que se tiene a esa hora, sin imágenes, sin nada... Le costaba mantener los

filled with feathers. The ropes dropped to the ground and were immediately replaced by hot hands, as hard as bronze; he felt himself being lifted up from the ground, face up the whole time, tugged at by the four acolytes who were carrying him down the passageway. The torch bearers went ahead of them, vaguely illuminating the passageway lined with wet walls and a ceiling so low that the acolytes had to duck their heads. Now they were carrying him, it was the end. Face up, a yard beneath the rock ceiling that seemed alive, illuminated by the reflection of the torches. When instead of a ceiling, he found himself beneath the stars and when in front of him there rose a stairway alight with screams and dancing: that would be the end. The passageway never seemed to end, but it would; in a moment, he would be able to smell the air full of stars, but not yet; they continued carrying him into the endless red shadows, tugging brutally at his limbs. He didn't want to go, but he couldn't stop it since they had stripped him of his true heart, his amulet, the center of his life.

He leapt out of his dream into night at the hospital, into the comforting high ceiling, into the soft shadow that surrounded him. He thought he had screamed, but his neighbors slept silently. On his nightstand, the water bottle looked kind of like a bubble, translucent against the blue shadow of the large windows. He gasped for air, seeking relief for his burning lungs, the callousness of those images still burned into his eyelids. Every time he shut his eyes, they appeared instantaneously, and he sat up, terrified, yet at the same time, rejoicing in the knowledge that he was awake, that his insomnia protected him from that nightmare, that a new day was about to dawn, with the good deep sleep he would have then, without images, without anything...It was difficult for him to keep his

ojos abiertos, la modorra era más fuerte que él. Hizo un último esfuerzo, con la mano sana esbozó un gesto hacia la botella de agua; no llegó a tomarla, sus dedos se cerraron en un vacío otra vez negro, y el pasadizo seguía interminable, roca tras roca, con súbitas fulguraciones rojizas, y él boca arriba gimió apagadamente porque el tacho iba a acabarse, subía, abriéndose como una boca de sombra y los acólitos se enderezaban y de la altura una luna menguante le cayó en la cara donde los ojos no querían verla, desesperadamente se cerraban y se abrían buscando pasar al otro lado, descubrir de nuevo el cielo raso protector de la sala. Y cada vez que se abrían era la noche y la luna mientras lo subían por la escalinata, ahora con la cabeza colgando hacia abajo, y en lo alto estaban las hogueras, las rojas columnas de humo perfumado, y de golpe vio la piedra roja, brillante de sangre que chorreaba, y el vaivén de los pies del sacrificado que arrastraban para tirarlo rodando por las escalinatas del norte. Con una última esperanza apretó los párpados, gimiendo por despertar. Durante un segundo creyó que lo lograría, porque otra vez estaba inmóvil en la cama, a salvo del balanceo cabeza abajo. Pero olía la muerte, y cuando abrió los ojos vio la figura ensangrentada del sacrificador que venía hacia él con el cuchillo de piedra en la mano. Alcanzó a cerrar otra vez los párpados, aunque ahora sabía que no iba despertarse, que estaba despierto, que el sueño maravilloso había sido el otro, absurdo como todos los sueños; un sueño en el que había andado por extrañas avenidas de una ciudad asombrosa, con luces verdes y rojas que ardían sin llama ni humo, con un enorme insecto de metal que zumbaba bajo sus piernas.

eyes open, the drowsiness was stronger than he was. He made one last effort, gesturing with his healthy hand towards the water bottle; but he couldn't quite grab it, his fingers closed in the emptiness and they were again surrounded by darkness. The passageway was endless, rock after rock, with sudden flashes of red, and he moaned faintly on his back, because the ceiling was ending, it was rising, opening like the mouth of a shadow, and the acolytes straightened up. From high above him, the light of a waning moon fell on his face, upon eyes that didn't want to see it; he desperately closed and opened them, trying to pass to the other side, to once again find himself beneath the protective ceiling of the hospital hallway. And every time they opened, there was the night and the moon, and they were bringing him up the staircase, with his head now hanging low. At the top were bonfires, red columns of perfumed smoke, and without warning, he saw the red stone, gleaming with dripping blood. He watched the swinging feet of the last sacrifice as they pulled it and threw it over the edge, letting it roll down the northern staircase. With one last hope, he squeezed his eyelids together, moaning to wake up. For a second, he thought he had succeeded, because he was motionless again, in bed, safe from the fate of the swinging head below. But he still smelled death, and when he opened his eyes, he saw the bloody figure of the sacrificer coming towards him, a stone knife clutched in his hand. He managed to close his eyelids again, even though he now knew that he wasn't going to wake up from this nightmare, because he was awake, the wonderful dream had been the hospital, absurd like all dreams were: a dream where he had walked through the strange streets of an amazing city, with green and red lights that burned without flames or smoke, with a huge metal insect that had buzzed between his legs.

En la mentira de ese sueño también lo habían alzado del suelo, también alguien se le había acercado con un cuchillo en la mano, a él tendido boca arriba, a él boca arriba con los ojos cerrados entre las hogueras.

FIN

In that deceptive dream, they had also lifted him from the ground, someone had also approached him with a knife in his hand, coming towards him lying face up, coming towards him face up with his eyes shut between the bonfires.

THE END

CHAPTER SEVEN

Problems in Translation

During the process of translating these short stories, there were many different problems that occurred, some of which were small and easily dealt with, and others that required more creativity and artistic liberties to find the best solution for an English reader. Though some of the issues were specific to one short story, general patterns and themes emerged in the types of problems that were generally encountered in the translation process. What follows are a few examples and explanations of some of the specific, and most interesting, problems encountered in each of these areas as well as how they were eventually solved.

Spanish Use

The first thing to address in a literary translation are the instances when the source language is used in the translated text. In several of these short stories, Spanish is used when a Spanish phrase or word would not have significance to an English reader, if it is a specific title, or if it is impossible for the meaning of the phrase to be carried across into English. In these cases, there is a footnote or in-text explanation that serves to describe the meaning or general significance of the Spanish word or phrase.

In *The Little Sololoi House*, “El Chavo del 8” was kept in Spanish because it is the title of a Mexican TV sitcom. As the proper title of a TV show that has not been translated into English for viewing audiences, this title only makes sense in Spanish, and so is left in the original language. However, a small clarifying interjection is inserted before “El Chavo del 8” in order to inform the English reader that this is a “TV show.” This same solution and reasoning were applied in *The Bluebird*, with the proper name of a café, “Café Plombier.” Though this is in French, it is the proper name of the establishment, so translation into English does not make sense. However, based on the details provided in the story, as with in *The Little Sololoi House*, there was enough detail for the English reader to understand what the non-English phrase referred to, so the titles were left in the original language with no footnotes.

In *Face Up in the Dark*, “la guerra florida” is used because “the flower war” is not the name of a war that holds significance to most native English speakers. Since this is a topic that almost half of the short story revolves around, it is important that the reader understands the history behind “la guerra florida”, so the historical context, as well as the translation of the phrase are found in the footnotes. This pattern is continued throughout the story, with Spanish and Náhuatl words with historical and cultural significance being left in the source language and then translated with an explanation of their significance in the footnotes. In this way, an English reader that is unexposed to the specifics of Aztec history and culture is encouraged to read the footnotes to gain a better understanding of it in order to better contextualize the story they are reading.

Sentence length

In Spanish, sentences are generally long, with an abundance of information, commas, and semicolons contained in one single sentence. However, when one long sentence is translated into English, it does not read as smoothly because English sentences tend to be much shorter, with less detail, and less punctuation. Though the simplest solution would be to always break down the Spanish sentences into multiple shorter ones, this would not preserve the style of the author. There is a fine line to be walked between preserving the author's style and making the story understandable and readable in English, a line which was followed as well as possible during the course of these translations. As a result, many sentences are longer than the average English sentence, but not to the point that they impede comprehension and flow in English. As a general practice, when there were several long sentences in a row, the English flow began to feel off, so a sentence or two would be broken up.

In *Sololoi's Little House*, the stream of consciousness writing made this distinction on sentence length hard to follow because the endless stream of commas indicates a series of inter-related and progressive thoughts. However, in some cases, two or three sentences would take up a very significant portion of a page, and the progression of thoughts seemed to run on endlessly and be somewhat lost in translation. In these cases, semicolons were used in order to break up the sentence while still indicating that the thought was continuing and interrelated. In other words, instead of signifying the end of a thought or sentence like a period would do, the semicolon simply indicates a brief pause in the midst of a long stream of consciousness. For example:

“Tomorrow we’ll have to air out the mattresses, find homes for all the shoes, there are just so many: soccer cleats, tennis shoes, rain boots, sandals, she would make a list; on Wednesday she would clean out the closets, just cleaning out the kitchen cupboards would take a whole day; on Thursday she would clean out the so-called library where she had once planned on writing her poetry but had been transformed into the family room because the TV fit better there, another whole day to mend sweaters, to put elastic in pants, to sew buttons on, yes, to mend those socks that slipped down to the ankles; on Friday she would...”

This was originally one long sentence, with everything separated only with commas.

This was too much to manage in a single sentence in English and therefore felt very run-on and cumbersome. However, by separating the different days with semicolons rather than commas, a transition and brief pause are indicated, which provides enough relief and respite for an English reader to make it through the entire sentence without confusion or frustration.

Poetry

Poetry is a completely different kind of literary translation that comes with its own problems and pitfalls. While in stories more detail can be changed while maintaining the author’s style and intent, in poetry, there is a much finer line to walk to negotiate an appropriate balance between meaning and style. Style in poetry can be based on rhyme scheme, syllables, lines, stanzas, and any other number of things, which can make staying within this style tempting and frustrating to translators. However, in poetry especially, it is imperative to remember that the primary focus of a translator is to translate the meaning and intention of the author in a way that is understandable to the intended audience. Though style should be a consideration, it is much more important to

have an understandable meaning than to preserve the original rhyme scheme. This being said, if portions of the original style can be preserved without compromising the meaning of the poem, the translator should strive to do this as well. Furthermore, the intent of the poem and meaning can often be hard to determine or can have so many possible interpretations that the original or primary intention of the author is unknown. In these cases, the best and most educated determination must be made by the translator based on knowledge of the author, time period, location, and, in this case, the story the poem is found within.

The only poetry found in this selection of translations is in *The Bluebird*. In the first poem, the meaning of the Spanish poem was translated, and the general length and formatting of the poem was preserved in addition to one instance of alliteration, “beautiful bellflower.” However, the flow of this more free-form ballad couldn’t be maintained without sacrificing the meaning:

Garcin’s Principles:

Of the flowers, a beautiful bellflower,
Among the precious gems, a sapphire.
Of the vast and boundless, the sky and love; namely, Nini’s eyes.
And the poet repeated: “I believe that neurosis is always better than stupidity.”

In the second poem in the short story, though the alliteration that begins the Spanish poem was not preserved, both the meaning and rhyme scheme were preserved in a carefully negotiated translation.

Yeah: a real slacker, that’s how I roll,
a fact I revere and hail
while the blue bird’s jail
remains my mind and skull!

Though this preservation of rhyme and meaning appear in the final translation, the original versions of the translation did not have the rhyme scheme; the ability to preserve the rhyme scheme was something that was negotiated in the later versions of the translation and would not have been included if it compromised the meaning of the piece.

Idioms

Idioms are an aspect of language that are closely related to cultural references and are not always understandable to other cultures, even when translated. For example, one English idiom is “three strikes and you’re out.” This is an idiom that is applied in many aspects of American life, from work to dating. However, since baseball is a largely American sport that is not nearly as popular outside of the United States, even when translated, the meaning of this idiom would be lost to those outside of an American cultural background. Therefore, to translate an idiom, it should not be simply translated to the target language, but rather the meaning it portrays to the source culture should be conveyed, preferably in the term of an idiom used by the target audience.

In *Face Up in the Night*, the idiom of seeing a scene as through opera glasses was changed in English to be seeing the scene through rose-colored glasses.

“Caía la noche, y la fiebre lo iba arrastrando blandamente a un estado donde las cosas tenían un relieve como de gemelos de teatro, eran reales y dulces y a la vez ligeramente repugnantes; como estar viendo una película aburrida y pensar que sin embargo en la calle es peor; y quedarse.”

“Night fell, and the fever slowly crept down until he was in a state where everything seemed to be accentuated with rose colored glasses: everything was real and sweet at the same time: somewhat repugnant, like living in a boring movie and staying there because it seems even worse on the streets.”

In the United States, the opera is something the large majority of citizens have not experienced and is not a large part of American culture. Therefore, the significance of opera glasses would be lost to the general public. However, one common idiom used in America has approximately the same meaning: “rose-colored glasses.” Both of these idioms indicate that the scene is distorted and sickly sweet and is generally not in line with the reality of the situation or scene. As such, this is a culturally appropriate translation of this idiom.

In *The Little Sololoi House*, the original Spanish uses the idiom “miel sobre hojuelas”, which translates to “honey on cornflakes”, a phrase that does not have anything more than literal meaning in English. However, in Spanish, this idiom is used to describe something that tops the situation off in a positive way, in other words, “the icing on the cake.” This translation is appropriate and understandable for two reasons. The first reason is that this idiom carried the same meaning in English as the Spanish idiom implies in the original version. The second reason is that both of these idioms are related to food, so even though the explicit idiom is not carried through, the general tone as to relating to a food that is sweet and delectable is carried through from the original version to the translation by using idioms that reference the same category: food.

Vocabulary

One final difficulty with literary translations is related to the vocabulary used in the original version of the story. This vocabulary can be region-specific, antiquated, or used in a strange fashion, which can make determining and conveying the meaning of the

word very difficult. Some other vocabulary may be very easy to find the meaning of, but not have a recognizable or common translation into the intended language. In order to resolve these problems with vocabulary, many different solutions can be employed.

Region-specific vocabulary consists of words or phrases that are not used in the same manner or at all throughout a language, but rather that are used in one, or a few, specific geographical region(s) where the language is used. This type of vocabulary can also be referred to as regionalisms. In *The Little Sololoi House*, the author uses many region-specific vocabulary words. This means that looking up the word in multiple physical dictionaries and multiple online dictionaries yielded no results. Consequently, two main strategies were used. The first strategy was to talk to natives from that region who were able to explain the meaning of the word based on the context and their experience growing up in Mexico, the region where this vocabulary originated. For example, the word “enchapopotado” is not something to be found in dictionaries or online forums, but a few people from Mexico were able to explain that “enchapopotar” is a synonym of “asfaltar”, which means to asphalt or to lay asphalt. This strategy was also used with the term “joligudense”, which was explained to mean as something that has a sort of Hollywood feeling, image, or association, in other words, “hollywoodesque.” The second strategy was to look up recipes and images of food on a search engine, such as Google. Near the end of the story, the kids ask their mom to make them “jotequéis” and “sincronizada” which, based on the context of the story were food, but finding the food they referred to was difficult. Since the meaning was not found in online or physical dictionaries, a search of images and recipes for these two food items showed that these were Mexican regionalisms used to refer to “pancakes” and “quesadillas.”

Antiquated vocabulary refers to vocabulary that is no longer in common use in the source language today. One example of this is in *Artificial Roses*, with the phrase “mangas postizas.” “Mangas” are sleeves and “postiza” is an adjective that describes something as false or artificial. In the context of the story, “fake sleeves” do make sense because the main character feels that she cannot go to church without them because it would be immodest. However, in order to find a better or more appropriate translation of this phrase, an online image search was employed in order to get a better understanding of these fake sleeves and how they work, because searches for explanations and descriptions of “mangas postizas” had yielded nothing. In addition, native Spanish speakers from different countries said the phrase seemed to indicate “fake sleeves”, but they had never heard it used before. The image search showed both long and short sleeves that seemed to attach to another garment at the shoulder seam, and therefore a more appropriate translation would be “detachable sleeves.”

Another category of antiquated vocabulary was dealt with in *The Headless Hen*. This vocabulary is not antiquated in the sense that it was difficult to understand or define, but rather it was difficult in terms of having the vocabulary reflect the intentions and time period of the author while not using vocabulary that is culturally inappropriate or derogatory in modern times. The first line of this short story introduces the couple’s children as “los cuatro hijos idiotas.” Through seizures or some other malady during their infancy, these children had been left with diminished mental faculties and learning disabilities. Currently, the most appropriate way to refer to these children would be to recognize their humanity first and then label the disability in order not to define them by a deficiency. For example, appropriate terminology would include “children with mental

handicaps”, or “children with disabilities.” However, this phrasing has no negative or positive connotations associated with it, while in the story, the manner in which the parents refer to their children only as idiots and only give a name to the one child who is not mentally handicapped shows that the reader should feel some disdain and frustration at how the children with disabilities are identified. Therefore, the description of these four children should have negative connotations. However, the word “retarded” is much too strong and carries such a high degree of negative connotation that, even though this specifically references the mental disability and negative view the parents have of their children, it is completely inappropriate to use in a modern translation of this short story. On the other hand, the word “idiot” is not explicitly negative because it can be used in jest, but when used in regard to mental disabilities, it does carry a negative connotation, but one that is not nearly as strong as the connotation carried by the label “retarded.” Therefore, the most appropriate word to describe these children throughout the story in a way that still provokes frustration, but not outright rage is, in fact, the most direct translation from the original Spanish version: “idiot.”

Another type of vocabulary encountered in these translations were words that are still used but are not recognizable to the large majority of the population and have no other translation. For example, in *The Bluebird*, Garcin drinks “absinth”, which is an alcoholic beverage that has some hallucinogenic properties. This is important to the story because he consumes large quantities of the liquid and seems to suffer from depression and possibly other mental illnesses. However, this is a beverage that is not well known,

way that still provokes frustration, but not outright rage is, in fact, the most direct translation from the original Spanish version: “idiot.”

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Translation Problems Overall

Though it is impossible to predict the exact translation problems that will be encountered in a literary translation, there are some general problems that can be expected when translating from a specific source language to a specific target language. In other words, the problems faced in these translations from Spanish to English occurred in the majority of short stories translated in this collection because they were all translated from the same source language and into the same target language. As a result, this is by no means a conclusive and extensive list of all the problems that can be faced in a literary translation, but rather a general summation of the most frequent problems encountered in these specific translations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Literary translation is an art form where the translator attempts to convey the meaning, feeling, and intent of a literary work to an audience that the original author never had in mind. It is walking the fine line between a literal translation and a figurative interpretation in order to best convey the author and his work to a new audience in the most understandable and relatable way possible. This is why literary translations can never be finished and can never be perfect. It is also why translations have to be redone time and time again so that the next generation can understand them from their new point of view. Literary translation is a continual process, and, as such, these short stories are just the first draft of many more to follow.

The first draft of the translation was quite literal and made very little sense in English. The focus in this draft was the grammar. There were no specific vocabulary changes, or extensive thesaurus comparisons. There was no reordering of ideas or shortening sentences. The sole purpose of the first draft was to lay a strong foundation for the changes to come. After the second draft, the foundation was strong and clear, and that was when the real work could begin.

Now that the grammar was sound, and the Spanish story had been read countless times, the focus of the next draft was finally the flow and wording. These drafts involved countless hours of pondering how to make an English sentence sound more like English,

which as hard to negotiate as it sounds. There were always multiple thesauruses open alongside their dictionary counterparts. However, this step was more than just making the translation sound like it was originally written in English: this draft needed to elicit the same feelings and sentiments in the English readers as Spanish readers felt when they read the original Spanish version. This is no easy task because English words are not charged with emotion to the same degree as Spanish words are, and English speakers are therefore not as expressively emotional in their speech or in their writing. This part of the process took multiple drafts.

After the translation finally felt like it was written in English, it was put under the scrutiny of an outside party to get a second perspective. This served to show the importance of a second and third perspective when translating. In fact, there was one short story where, even after all of the drafts, one sentence had been left out of the translation. After talking through the proposed changes, the current final draft of the short story finally emerged. It sounded like English, but, in some sense, it felt like Spanish, the precarious balance that was the intent of this thesis.

Though the overall intent of this thesis was to make a variety of different Spanish-speaking cultures accessible to native English speakers, the personal intent was to experience this process of translation. There were the frustrations of not being able to find the right word or when the appropriate English wording seemed to be just out of reach. Then there was the moment when everything finally seemed to fit together just perfectly. There were the frustrations when there was more red pen on the drafts than there was printer ink. However, this was eventually followed by the excitement of a monolingual English speaker who enjoyed a beautifully crafted short story from a foreign

country for the first time. Overall, this process of translation served to prove that all of the work that goes into a translation, all of the hours of compounded frustrations, are worth the moment when it all works and when the translation is finally experienced.

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