

# ellipsis

2017

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Ricardo Dávila  
Laura Esponda  
Laura Moreno  
David Moreu  
Diana Zerda

## Editors

Natalia Cárdenas Morales  
Natalia Escobar  
Andrea Gaitán  
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**PUNTOAPARTE BOOKVERTISING**

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**PRINTING**

Panamericana Formas e Impresos S.A.

**ISBN**

978-958-5461-01-7

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	Cortina Butler	4
Doubts and Certainties	Alejandro Maldonado	6
The Last Third	Ricardo Dávila	8
The Most Ambitious Project	Andrea Gaitán	50
The Lord of the Henhouse	Laura Esponda	52
Spinning Thinly	Natalia Cárdenas Morales	84
The Last Day	Laura Moreno	86
The art of creating without being the creator	Cindy Herrera	122
Candelario	David Moreu	124
The exercise of deconstruction	Natalia Escobar	154
Cowardice in the Key of D	Diana Zerda	156
Ellipsis In The Hay Festival		184

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# FOREWORD

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**By Cortina Butler**

Director Literature, British Council

We are delighted to present the latest anthology of new writing by Colombian writers and editors at the start of their careers who have taken part in the British Council's Elipsis programme.

The British Council was founded to create 'a friendly knowledge and understanding' between the people of the UK and the wider world by exchanging our cultural resources including the arts, education and language. Literature plays an important part in building these connections. At its core the literature relationship is a one-to-one interaction between writer and reader. Writing helps us to articulate who we are and what we think about the world. By sharing our stories we share something of ourselves, our ideas and our cultures. Literature is also a thriving and diverse cultural sector spanning creative writing, the publishing industry, translation, literacy and libraries. In our programmes we help aim to create opportunities for readers and writers to connect with their counterparts from other countries and to connect literature professionals to share their skills and develop collaborations which are mutually beneficial.

The Elipsis programme, now in its third year, is an example of a rich international collaboration with a wide range of benefits

to those involved. For the Colombian writers and editors on the programme, it is a valuable opportunity to hone their writing and editing skills leading to their first publication, an important moment in their careers. Beyond this, Elipsis offers the participants a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of leading UK writers taking part in the Hay Festival Cartagena and the Bogota Book Fair (FILBO). The experience of meeting and sharing stories with writers from a very different background broadens perspectives and leads to professional connections which endure beyond the end of the programme.

Elipsis also supports the presentation of new British writing at these two key literary events in Colombia and we are very grateful to both the Hay Festival Cartagena and the Bogota Book Fair (FILBO) for the successful collaboration and their ongoing support.

As Elipsis enters its next round, it continues to form a bridge between the literature communities in the UK and Colombia, and makes a significant contribution to building connections between our two countries. We wish all the current and past participants in the Elipsis programme every success in their writing and editing careers.

# DOUBTS AND CERTAINTIES



By Alejandro Maldonado

My first encounter with the other participants in *Elipsis*, was not just exciting, it also provoked tremendous curiosity. I asked myself: who were the editors in the group? Who were the writers? In vain, I tried to read faces and gestures, seeking to decipher, quickly, into which of the two groups everyone fell into. It did not take long for everyone to introduce themselves and clear up my doubts. Notwithstanding, this gave way to the most imperative doubt of all: whom would we actually be carrying out the editing work with?

As we made progress through Marta's enlightening workshops, I did my best to get to know each of the writers a little. I felt, in some way, that the work to be done was not limited to an unwritten text, but also to its begetter. Much, much more so in a draft, still linked by umbilical cord, the actions taken with the writer could be the difference between a text that fills us with emotion and another that does not.

I took on the pleasant and privileged task of meeting the writers: Diana, David, Laura, Ricardo and Laura Marcela; all brilliant and brimming and facing the creative process with ideas

and concerns. At the same time, I shared thoughts about our work with my fellow editors: Andrea, Cindy, Natalia Cárdenas and Natalia Escobar. Together, their perspectives nourished my experience and our discussion made our sessions a festival of synaptic activity. Beyond that, in spite of being in constant exchange with young literature students from all over the country, deep down the cold and pragmatic task of measuring reciprocities with each writer was palpable. Despite being underscored by a kind of textual psychopathy, there was a notion of optimal symbiosis, finding the best interlocutor for editing would mean that we could both benefit equally

Finally, after so much anxiety and waiting, it was possible to have all the texts before my eyes. The answer was easy. I wanted to work with Ricardo Dávila in his story. Our previous conversations had revealed him to be an avid reader with experience in creative writing. His text was the proof of this. It was quite complete and did not require any major structural changes. Like any text, there were aspects to improve, but it could be said that in its previous incarnation, it was very close to being publishable. Even so, there were a number of elements that motivated me to ask him about certain decisions, to protest certain inconsistencies and to clean the language in certain passages.

I was fortunate to have chosen well; Ricardo proved to be a willing recipient for my observations, although he also defended, when appropriate, the narrative project of his story. Somehow, the neatness of his writing allowed him to pay attention to the biggest details. Sometimes it felt like looking for a cat's five legs, but I feel it was tremendous training for developing an editor's eye. Today, now that the process is over, I only have gratitude. I would like to thank Ricardo for doing such a precise job when he received my comments about editing; Marta, for accompanying us in each step of the process with patience and admirable thoroughness; to Alejandra, for taking the writers on a fruitful path, and to all the people of the British Council who tirelessly and unceasingly worked to make *Elipsis* in its 2017 version such an enriching experience as possible.

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# THE LAST THIRD



Ricardo Dávila

.....but no one will look into your eyes  
because you have died forever

*Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías,*  
Federico García Lorca

## I SESSION

“Fight the bull, Isidoro! don’t be a shithead! Finish him before he finishes you! Leave him crestfallen, pierce that lion – the whole Colosseum is watching you and the emperor has spent ages with his thumb down. You are bigger than both Cáceres and Rincón! You are the Valderrama of the Santamaría! you are El Rolo Sinisterra, *for whom there is no end in this land*. You can’t drop your sword and give Bogota the fingers to its face! You just can’t back down! Everyone is watching you! Even the bull is watching you! He particularly wants you to finish him off. He knows the role that each creature has in the universe.”

Although they aren’t the exact words I told him, that is what I was thinking when El Great Rolo cowered in front of the last bull during the performance that reopened the Santamaría Bullring in Bogotá, after its five long years as kind of quasi-attic for the city. He had already dispatched his first bull with such stoicism that the fucktard insults coming from all the demonstrators, vegetarians, punkers and potheads on the Fifth Avenue were barely a murmur. Indeed, they were crushed by the shouts within the Plaza itself “*Torero, Torero,*

# IT WAS LIKE HE WAS TRANSFORMED INTO STONE OR A PILLAR OF SALT, OR EVEN SHIT.

*Torero!* That's why no one, absolutely no one, expected him to stop in his tracks as if he had been put in front of the very Devil himself. The man stood in front of the bull, as he always did, with his particular style; better said, imagine Cristiano Ronaldo when he's about to drive a free kick home. Just like that, with his legs open and his brow furrowed. Then as soon as the animal, marked with the number 69, raised its head and looked into its eyes, it was as if he had seen Medusa. It was like he was transformed into stone or a pillar of salt, or even shit. He began to take steps backwards, dragging his feet as if he did not want to wake the bull up, wanting to escape without any of the fourteen thousand five hundred spectators even seeing him.

As if he were invisible! He was almost two meters tall! A rock star of bullfighters! He was the wealthiest matador in Latin America. He'd written the name of Colombia in bulls' blood on the sand in bullrings in Las Ventas, El Monumental, del Acho! I didn't know whether to pull him out, whether to tell him about his mother, whether to pray to Our Lady of the Macarena or ask for help. I had lived eighteen years in his shadow and had never seen him hesitate when choosing a dish at a restaurant or even putting on the suit of lights he was going to wear...

Nothing came together that day. But I'm telling you I didn't expect such a public to get as aggressive as they got. At the very cheapest they had paid around three hundred *lucas*<sup>1</sup> just for their seats. Despite that, they shouted nasty insults that I'd expect to hear in my neighbourhood

or shouted by the football hooligans at the El Campín stadium. They were well-off. Do you understand? "Posh". So posh, they gave us the finger that afternoon. They booed just like the vandals who shouted things at him from whenever he left his house in Rosales until he got to the Macarena, chasing his truck and screaming at him, shouting as if he were a rapist. He was insulted for being a bullfighter by those outside the bullring and by those inside the bullring for being a bad bullfighter.

Isidoro had previously thrown his cell phone to the floor just because of negative tweets about him. He'd even kicked the plasma TV because of bad reports in the newspaper or the news! This time he was still standing without flinching, without even breathing. The bull was badly wounded. Six green and orange and yellow *banderillas* hanging out of his bleeding neck! The bull scratched the floor with his legs as if he were lighting matches with his hooves, almost as if he were calling out to him. He challenged him, making sparks in the sand as if to call him a bastard in his bull tongue, but nothing happened. I screamed at him. I even went into the bullring itself in spite of whatever sanction they may have given me, but there was something between those two that didn't let me move forward, so I shouted "You're going to run out of time, Rolo! Don't let it run out! Get your cape out! Do your thing!" It didn't help. The coward's time fell apart in a moment and the president took out his green handkerchief and everything ended. The last bull of the last third was allowed to live.

A journalist from El Espectador baptised the bull "Lazarus 69", because of the body that was resuscitated. There was no other, that surely was that bull's destiny; a sure death, a death that gives life to the party. When they released the yoke of oxen that surrounded the bull, there was also a whole team of rats that surrounded the matador. It was a mess. Not only did Roca Rey and El Juli, the other matadors, seek him out; there were also dozens of journalists, businessmen, policemen, drunken fans. It was quite the carnival, almost as ordinary

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1 Translator's note: Three hundred *lucas*, or three hundred thousand Colombian pesos, are worth about USD \$100.

# I HAD LIVED EIGHTEEN YEARS IN HIS SHADOW AND HAD NEVER SEEN HIM HESITATE WHEN CHOOSING A DISH AT A RESTAURANT OR EVEN PUTTING ON THE SUIT OF LIGHTS HE WAS GOING TO WEAR...

and chaotic as those finals of the Águila League football finals. I managed to get him out with a group of bodyguards. He still appeared like a pillar of salt standing in the corner of the arena, as if in shock. We took him out, not on our shoulders as expected, but by the shoulders, almost dragging him like a madman.

Here the Doctor told me to tell you the story about my deepest scar, my deepest trauma, and no matter how much I think about it, not even one of the worst things that had ever happened to me, not even my Mum's death or that bull's horn plunged into my thigh shattering my dream of being one of the biggest bullfighters ever, compares with that Sunday in January at the Santamaría Bullring in Bogotá. No act defined my life more than El Rolo Sinisterra's ever did. Even today it strikes me as a joke in poor taste that the universally acclaimed Colombo-Spanish

bullfighter would be cowed by the final bull in the most symbolic bullfight of his career, the very performance when he reopened the bullring that witnessed his professional birth. "The bull's eyes, Braulio, you had to see the bull's eyes." That was the only thing I could get from him three days after the bullfight. That little phrase brought about what I'm going to tell you over the next few days, how my boss went from being a matador to a mere bully, just because of a bull's eyes.

## II SESSION

I hope that this story remains between the two of us. You're like priests, while I'm a sinner, a penitent who is on his knees with a rosary in my hand. But, yes, a Christian who doesn't cry, who has no guilt, who feels, beyond penance, a little proud of his sins, with a chest swollen from the courage with which he sinned.

Yes, you be careful now about recording this with you cell phone and upload it to social networks or, even worse, send it to one of those blood-sucking journalists. Those bastards are like vampires, all they want is to suck their victims' blood, the stars of their so-called scandals. The sensational press is stained red from the blood used to write it. The El Rolo case became the second Colmenares case. He was the Uribe Noguera of bullfighting, they said, as if there was any kind of similarity... Armero beats that woman up, he sheers her hair off in rage, and nothing happens! He simply returns to the pitch, because of his flavour, because he is one of the 'people,' because he's come up from the working class. However, as El Rolo is a Sinisterra, his sin has not been forgiven.

I'm sorry Doctor, I know I have to calm down, but I get pissed off when I think about how the press made everything worse. How they played the role of a petty neighbour, a satanic serpent, all to sell El Rolo as a heartless, millionaire monster. That's why they put him in with the all the othe crimes with media-friendly surnames.



WHILE I WAS DOING  
FACTORS AND  
TRACING THE MAP  
OF COLOMBIA ON  
TRACING PAPER,

HE PREFERRED TO  
RIDE A HORSE AND  
CHASE THE COWS IN  
THE HACIENDA AND  
OTHERWISE JUST  
ARSE AROUND.

I have known the Sinisterra family intimately since I was thirteen years old. My Mum, and my Mum's mother, my aunt, were the hacienda's permanent housekeepers. They both had all the keys and that's why they could enter all the rooms and know all the secrets. That's what my mother used to tell me when she made fun of me, when I, tied to her apron strings, bombarded her with questions. I used to spend time with her because I got into a lot of trouble in the Kennedy District... the neighbourhood kids used to bully me saying that my mother was the servant to social-climbing, corrupt snobs. I knocked one of those bastard's teeth out and, the kicked me around like a mongrel. My Mum started to take me to work every day with her, and that's when I started hanging out with Isidoro. He was homeschooled, with teachers and everything, as Colombian schools were producing spoiled brats. We were practically classmates as I, how can I say this? I used to sponge off his classes. I'd sit on a small stool nearby and take notes. At first, he was very unfriendly and he'd snub me. If I tasted a fizzy drink he wouldn't drink it and the like, until I started doing his homework for him. That's how I won him over. So, while I was doing factors and tracing the map of Colombia on tracing paper, he preferred to ride a horse and chase the cows in the hacienda and otherwise just arse around. It was like that always, even after he entered the Gimnasio Moderno school as he never had friends. All that time I was doing his homework, because as I said Isidoro wasn't exactly bright and good at studying. In other things like football, girls and animals, he was a total matador.

A portrait of Isidoro's grandfather, Don Josep Sinisterra, was hung on the highest part of the main wall in the living room of the hacienda in Sopó. Everything began with him. The old man came to this bleak, upland city during the years of Civil War in Spain. He was one of the few remaining Republican leaders. He had to flee one Wednesday as he couldn't even eat his soup in without fearing it was poisoned. In any case he still hadn't decided where he wanted to live; he took that decision on the Transatlantic boat that came directly to Latin America. He had the money to settle anywhere and had no wife or family. He only had a cocker spaniel

**THEY KNEW  
EVERYTHING ABOUT  
THE SINISTERRA  
AS IF THEY WERE  
TALKING ABOUT  
THEIR MOLES,  
THEIR CAESAREAN  
SECTIONS OR THE  
CALLUSES ON THEIR  
FEET. AND I BELIEVE  
SOMEHOW THAT I  
INHERITED THOSE  
MOLES, BECAUSE I  
ALSO FEEL THOSE  
STORIES ARE MINE.**

that he had stuffed after it died. He's now standing stiffly on two legs under of his master's picture in the living room, his glass eyes all shining. As he had no roots other than his dog, he left the decision to chance. And such is life, after losing a fortune in the casino on the boat that, he went to the piano room and there he saw a beautiful young Colombian girl playing one of Erik Satie's Gymnopédie pieces. She became his fiancée that very night. She was Dona Maria Susana Carvajal. She'd been Paris finishing up sixth grade in school. That's how, instead of going to either Mexico or Argentina like everyone else, Don Josep ended up right in the middle of the two, going into exile with his dog and bride and everything else in Cartagena de Indias.

Everything I'm telling you was told to me by my aunt or my mother, while they folded sheets, cleaned the glassware, or the sword collection in the studio. This was the task that most terrified my mother. The sword edges reminded her of the how my dad died. He and his partner were stabbed by the rats when they were on duty at the energy towers over there by the Laches to steal the cables. My Mum started delegating tasks to me over time and I was happy. They knew everything about the Sinisterra as if they were talking about their moles, their caesarean sections or the calluses on their feet. And I believe somehow that I inherited those moles, because I also feel those stories are mine.

At that time "Jamones y Quesos Sinisterra" became the largest producer and importer of Iberian hams and cheeses of origin in the region. Isidoro and I spent all day gulping it all down – Serrano ham, Manchego cheese, Pata Negra shoulder ham, Gran Reserva wine, rather, anything I could possibly crave. We used to eat it with everything, even cereal... No, I'm taking the piss! Look at the doctor's face! But the truth is that we had a piece of something in our hands or in our mouths all the time, it was almost like our chewing gum. There were so many huge legs hanging up in the kitchen. So many. They were moored from the roof like huge-headed bats. I believe that if we'd continued to eat this way, they could have produced an exclusive and quality product with our meat! A premium, all white,

## EL ROLO AND I PRACTICALLY GREW UP TOGETHER.

acorn-fed sausage made from Isidoro's back! On the other hand, me, my skin is normal coloured – it has a more humble complexion! Yes, they'd have made a line of cheap cold cuts from us! Or rather, he'd be sold in Pomona and I'd be sold in D1. Anyway, I always ramble, don't let me get distracted or just talk about me... Ah yes, Serrano ham. Well, the point is that this hacienda always smelled of salt, and no one will ever get that smell off me. There came a point where even the mere salty whiff of my sweat and tears reminded me of those afternoons at the Sinisterra estate.

El Rolo and I practically grew up together. Like two young bulls. Since his older brother was not there, our homework and other tasks, not to mention the animals brought us closer together. We were like a pair of balls, and inseparable scrotum! Don Josep, who changed politics for cattle became a specialised breeder. He used to take us every day to see areas around the farm were just open fields and get us to feed the animals. Once we even helped in the birth of a young bull. Isidoro called him Chalo, in honour of his brother Gonzalo.

One afternoon Isidoro arrived home from school with some classmates. We went to see that Chalo had a pair of spectacular horns. They looked like two daggers that were hanging in his father's studio. I didn't get along well with the kids over in Patiobonito, my neighbourhood in the South, because if I talked to them about Satie or Serrano ham, they wouldn't understand and they would beat me up. But I could never get on with Isidoro's snob friends. They had no idea what it was like to have to dye a pair of pants in the

# THE LITTLE BEAST RAN, CLUMSY BUT BRAVE, ALWAYS FURIOUS, PISSSED OFF THE MOUNTAIN, AND WE ALL RAN LIKE PIGS EVERYWHERE, CLIMBING THE FENCE,

pressure cooker, take a bus or even buy 2 x 1 offers. I only got on with Isidoro. I only ever talked to him, even to talk to the others. And so we all knew how to get on with each other, even without getting on with each other. That was then when we all began to bother the bull using a red flag with the logo of the family company and a kitchen rag with the same pattern. El Rolo never lost that knack. He liked that piece of fabric because it had his last name and it was as if we were a team or something. The little beast ran, clumsy but brave, always furious, pissed off the mountain, and we all ran like

pigs everywhere, climbing the fence, every man for himself. That was always the game, even when we got older. It was always the same: a volunteer distracted the bull while someone else pulled Chalo's tail and then ran for his life to the fence, which was what they told Don Josep.

Over the years we continued going to wherever Chalo was. He was already quite the bull, with brown and white spots, strong like the unique bastard he was... We were still playing at our Colombian San Fermin festival. Still, the only one of us who didn't run scared shitless was Isidoro. He only ran a little way, but he didn't run. I think it was Chalo who was afraid of him. That's why what happened at the Santamaría was something more than the fear of being attacked, because he was only frightened of numbers. Remember that he had told me, the only time he was afraid was one night when he was going to fuck the English teacher at school and he didn't have anything response from her. He had it arsewards. He'd killed the tigress and got spooked by her skin. Of course, Isidoro was going to pull her. When he graduated high school, he went back to look for her and I don't know if he paid her or what – she hadn't spoken to him since he let her down, but they went and they evened the score at the Anapoima farm where he rode that mare on the table all weekend. I was so jealous of that teacher, but hey, as they say, the bulls, themselves, gore you while God, himself, distributes it.

I understand from your body language that I've used up my time today already, I'm sure I was quite the chatty big-mouth. But let me tell you about a detail that escaped me and is really the key to this whole mess. Our routine was perfect, it was a dream life. We had the luxuries of Bogotá: movies, restaurants, parties while having the calmness, the pure air of the countryside in Sopó and an enormous hacienda full of animals and food at the same time. Then, without warning, until Gonzalo Sinisterra arrived from Spain, one afternoon and without warning. Like that our idyll, our San Fermín was over, and the idiotic almost inseparable scrotum that we were was cut off in one fell swoop by the two-legged Chalo, as if to castrate us.

## III SESSION

Doctor, don't be scared, it's me, Braulio. No, don't stop, continue doing your somersaults and don't call anyone I'm begging you. I know that this isn't the time or the place, but I noticed you get up early morning to do yoga and I thought it would be the perfect opportunity. It's a good thing you don't have much more left. I do hope I'm not bothering you. No, to my knowledge none of the lads saw me. Sure, as I'm not going to be well, I'm well! Look at my packaging! since I got here I look like a lulo fruit! But you know that what I have is even more inside, it's more like pulp than skin... I came so urgently because my nightmares have continued. They're like tenants in my head. Once again, I try to get up and my horns weigh me down. They're like two concrete blocks on the forehead, and when I finally manage to stand up, after many attempts, the weight returns and defeats me. I'm stuck to the mattress, bleeding from my forehead like a Jesus Christ himself with thorns and everything and then I get a migraine from another world. Doctor... you already know the story, it's the same as always. I sleep restlessly, Doctor, almost like Gregor Samsa before he was turned into a cockroach. That's why as I still haven't been transformed, I need to finish my confession... I know that my session is in the afternoon, Doctor, but believe me I can't tell what's next to that crazy group. And if I stop, if I miss my appointment, you won't understand what happened to Isidoro at the Santamaría. I'm bothering you right now in this garden to tell you, to help you save me, just listen me, you don't have to do anything else, you can stay there in your sweatshirt if you'd like.

What's coming next is delicate... seriously Doctor, it's really delicate. I know I always say that, but it's not to get attention, as you'd be the first to know. Nobody knows what I know. Even I didn't know what I knew. I made a fool of myself with what happened, because I always knew how to keep Isidoro's secrets. They aged in my heart until they fermented into a heady guarapo moonshine, the information I safely guarded getting me drunk on my own, until

## WHO KNOWS, I MIGHT EVEN BE CAPABLE OF SOMEDAY GETTING TO SLEEP

the secrets I had swallowed disappeared into my veins and I forgot them forever, just like my mother and my aunt.

Well, this space that you gave me is the time to throw away that accumulation of fluids... What would I tell the police? The only thing those nosy bastards want is to get a 'slice of the great Sinisterra ham. And I'd be with the cops instead of here with you... That's true, I didn't believe in talking about things for the healing. I always laughed whenever I saw that in the movies or in Coelho books, but since I am talking to you with your bright and attentive eyes, and you're not judging me, I feel less bitter. I'm even beginning to suffer less and less at night. Who knows, I might even be capable of someday getting to sleep

"Take my bags to my room." That was the first thing the two-legged Chalo said to me when he saw me. Isidoro said that he'd already sent someone else. Chalo was two meters six centimetres tall, and looked like his little brother on steroids, only with greener, more snake-like eyes, only responded "And who the fuck is this?"

Chalo was a pilot, just like his father, but he piloted helicopters. This is important for my story.

Don Josep practically maintained the five-acre property in Sopó by himself as Consuelo, Isidoro's mother spent all her time either in El Nogal and church and, her husband, Joaquín, the boys' father, was a boss in an airline that specialised in importing and exporting products and correspondence, so he was always traveling from port to port. In other words, there was never anyone around and that's

# THAT SILENCE WAS ETERNAL, ALMOST AS ETERNAL AND HEAVY AS AT THE SANTAMARÍA BULLRING WHEN EL ROLO BEGAN TO RETREAT FROM LAZARUS.

the way it was always. When we got chickenpox and looked like corncobs, it was my Mum who cleaned our pustules and bathed us in oatmeal. No one else approached the attic room where we were shut away. El Rolo was raised by a couple of black credit cards. They were so black because they were endless. They were like the sea that never has insufficient funds.

Anyway, Doctor, that's what they say. Our roles were getting more and more blurry; sometimes I was clearly a worker, a servant, a bodyguard, with many other times I was his partner, his brother, the other ball! I was even his 'guardian' at school and went to his Christmas presentations. That's why when Chalo asked who the fuck I was, it was bloody hard for us to know how to respond. Nothing was

clear. That silence was eternal, almost as eternal and heavy as at the Santamaría Bullring when El Rolo began to retreat from Lazarus. "Chalito, he's my boy, my sword boy. We haven't seen each other for a while now. I'm bullfighter, the best fucking bullfighter in this dusty shithole. I haven't had my *alternativa* ceremony<sup>2</sup> yet, but you'll see," Isidoro finally answered. I know that phrase by heart. It's like it was recorded as a song and I could change the order as I pleased. It's a lyrical *ranchera* song that never stops playing. I was his boy, the matador's boy.

He didn't take it well that his younger brother hadn't gone into any of the family businesses in order to become a "butcher dressed up like a fag," which was what he always said when they broached the subject. So, we all had to stop being ourselves while the two-legged Chalo spent his summer holidays at home. Of course, that's a way of saying it, because they weren't often at the house. They spent their time hammered and high, wherever they went. During the time he was there El Rolo didn't pay any attention to me. He wasn't affectionate with anyone. He was a totally different boy. I spent my time helping my mother with the cleaning and locked in the studio polishing the swords and then I stayed in Don Josep's library, which was like another house. It even had stairs and rows of books and infinite stacks of books.

Chalo dominated Isidoro. He broke him like a colt. I can tell you that in one of their famous adventures they got Ramiro, my cousin, fired. He was the only driver those two had. He got thrown out like a filthy, mongrel dog because the two 'gentlemen' plied him with drink one night and they ended up ramming the Mercedes into a post in Boyacá. Once he lost his job, Ramiro, to get his own back, told Dona Consuelo that he had taken her children "on safari" on more than one occasion around the Bronx district as well as on 'vagi-sex tours' through the Santafe brothels. However, she got even angrier with him for enabling them and threw his out of the hacienda. She only

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: the *alternativa* is like a graduation ceremony for bullfighters.

told them not to show such poor taste, that they had done was fifth rate, and she became totally hysterical with the fear that someone might have seen them. This when Don Josep made me the boys' driver, as I left no book without a cover or sword unpolished.

Summer ended and the two-legged Chalo decided to stay one more season to everyone's misfortune. I would drive to wherever they told me, sometimes I would go in with them and sometimes I would act as a watchman. Isidoro had abandoned everything for his brother: his current girlfriend, bullfighting, and me. I was the only one who went to visit the four-legged Chalo. He was made into a stud and was stiff and beautiful as only he could be. I would pull his tail and run, but the beast would stand there, perfectly still, and snort. It wasn't fun without Isidoro, not for him and certainly not for me. I didn't even want to taste ham. I almost became a vegetarian like those potheads outside the Santamaria Bullring. I only used the hanging legs like punching bags. I hit them, one two, one two, one two seeing Chalo's eyes in the red meat, and one two, one two.

As kids, we'd never had much contact with Chalo. Only some vacations had overlapped. But whenever he arrived, the atmosphere in the house changed. My aunt was tense and much more servile than usual. Of course, with such a gruesome mastodon, who, due to his two meter-plus height, inevitably looked down at you.

The thing is that when they together they competed over everything, and nobody ever said it, but that was the real reason why they couldn't live together. Neither could stand losing. Everything was a bet and a very high one at that. They bet on who could pull that bird, who belched more, who could tame spirited horses, who could win more at the casino, who could win in Fifa, who could swim faster, who could endure the hottest food, who could drive the car faster... And I was always on the side-lines, back in the South, hiding in my house for Chalo to leave so I could breathe calmly again.

The fact is that the guy got the dad to loan him one of the helicopters that belonged to the family airline fleet, and like he were a giant bumblebee he'd fly with his brother or with any expensive call-girl in the Bogota skies, between the Eastern Hills, looking down

on us, on the whole world from his metallic altar as if he were God himself. Now that I think about it, Doc, I think Chalo was so stuck up because he was so used to seeing the world from above. You know, like when you see people like little ants from an aeroplane, you know? Well, that bastard kept on looking down at people like that even after getting out of his helicopter. I can tell you, he never, not even once, let me get into that helicopter. Maybe God acted, and that's why what happened to him happened to him.

One Wednesday, when the holidays were over, he decided to take his brother by helicopter to Mesa de Yeguas in Anapoima, and, for the first time, Dona Consuelo said no. She didn't give her permission because she thought it was in poor taste, not because of anything else. The fact is that the Sinisterra brothers were so drunk that Don Josep told me to drive them, so that he could send on the groceries while we were on the way.

On the way there, Chalo decided to tell Isidoro that he was sick of fucking insipid snobs and paying whores, that he wasn't a fat narco who was into that shit. He had an idea how they could have a great time – and it'd be free. We stopped so he could puke up in the middle of the road and I asked him if we should get back. Instead of answering, he told Isidoro to tell his boy if he were to interrupt him again, he'd have me thrown out on my arse like Ramiro. "No, thank you, Braulio, don't stop," said Rolito. Chalo went on with the story, asking him if he remembered Jeny, the cashier at the bakery in town. That he'd promised he'd fuck her, and that it would happen that afternoon. Isidoro laughed loudly telling him that that was bullshit as she wasn't a call-girl, hell, she was a good girl who wasn't even sixteen years old, and that there was no way she'd act like that. They always leered at the baker's daughter in Anapoima. Can you imagine Doctor? She had light eyes and long, long black hair down to the bottom of the non-existent pockets in her jeans. Her exquisite figure – and bust – could be seen and admired in spite of her baker's uniform. The Sinisterra brothers knew where she lived and everything, and if they were around the town they were always used to go in and bother her. But the girl's dad was always

# NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, DOC, I THINK CHALO WAS SO STUCK UP BECAUSE HE WAS SO USED TO SEEING THE WORLD FROM ABOVE.

around, watching her like a Rottweiler, and nothing happened. Of course, they always left extravagant and pointless tips! Twenty or fifty thousand pesos for the purchase of some chewing gum or for just using the lighter. They said “keep the change, you’ve earned with those eyes,” and they climbed into the truck. But it never went beyond a game and arsing around. They just had fun flirting with a small-town teenager. Until that afternoon when her dad and his watchful eyes weren’t around to save her.

Chalo took out a bottle of yohimbine from his bag. I imagine, Doctor, you know what it is... Exactly. It’s not a myth. I’ve seen what it can do with my own eyes. Gonzalo grabbed his brother’s head with euphoria, like he’d just scored a goal, and said “The other day I watched Granddad dose Juana with this. Juana, the cow who’d tense up and not let anything mount her. You remember, don’t you, you wanker? With a just a tiny bit of this stuff she went mental and that bull, that fucking bull, seized the advantage and gave her a proper

punishing.” He said this in an accent that can only be described as snobby Bogota mixed that of a country Spaniard. He described how with just a few drops of that in her drink, Jeny the baker would turn into Juana, the crazy cow-in-heat, and he’d be just like the four-legged Chalo, doing his name proud. Isidoro just laughed and his brother made me to turn up the volume of the radio to the max.

We made impressive time. We left Sopó at eleven-fifteen and it was barely two thirty. We arrived at the town in the truck with reggaeton blasting out. The music ringing in my ears – and guts. The lyrics of the song were very uncannily similar to Gonzalo’s plans.

Isidoro told him to turn down the volume, saying that he was acting like a chav. I turned down the volume without Gonzalo’s authorisation and said nothing. We stopped in the village for lunch and Chalo told his brother to eat up quickly because Jeny was going to leave school and if she got to the bakery they wouldn’t be able to do anything. He’d already planned everything and this was the only time they had. They arrived at the school entrance and found her in her uniform and a ponytail, eating chola with two other friends. I was in the parked van, quietly waiting for them. I never knew what they told them, but minutes later Jeny climbed excitedly into the van with another friend. Her hair was almost as long as she was but much darker, almost like mine! It must have been something with modelling or some movie bullshit, because Chalo was telling them if he could see they had chemistry with his friend, the bullfighter who was going to be the star, they’d be in the video. If you could only see how those little girls were looking at El Rolo... It was like he was Maluma and this is their chance to be stars. Especially Jeny, with her bright aquamarine eyes.

On the way, the brunette, who was closer to Chalo, got out and ran. She told Jenny that they’d catch up later, that she couldn’t appear in any video as her mom would hit her. I thought that the animal would grab her or the like, but he left her run away freely, as if it were part of his plan. He made me put on more reggaeton at the highest volume and they opened a bottle of champagne that almost broke the van’s polarised windows and finally we arrived at the farm.



I won't go into details worthy of the cover of *El Espacio*, you know how much I hate those bloodsuckers that feed on their victims' blood. Anyway, everything I could see was from a cherimoya tree just stick a little kid. It was Gonzalo who wouldn't let me stay around while they were getting on with things. I stayed with Don Rosendo, the man who kept everything in order in the house there. I was feeling resentful because of Isidoro and we drank and drank to get rid of that feeling. We were at it until Rosendo left and curiosity made me climb the tree.

I, as they say, I wish I hadn't seen how they were. The first time I climbed the tree, I saw nothing but hands. But that was just the beginning, in the space between the curtains I could only see bits of flesh. I could hear groans and euphoric shrieks of pleasure. But then, at dawn, I had seen more than enough. I gave into my jealousy and got down from the cherimoya tree. I got as close as I could, going through the bushes and shrubs of the garden trying to see a little more, trying to see the body of El Rolo and not Chalo riding Jeny...

Finally, once they moved into the living room, I could see, for just a few seconds no more, the two bodies of the Sinisterra brothers, stuck to the little baker's girl, as if she were a plug, each on one side... Time passed and it happened and it didn't end. My jealousy turned into pity and girl's body only made me feel sadness... You don't know how 300 kg mares get with just a few drops of that stuff, imagine what would happen to a skinny girl who weighs no more than 40 kg! To make matters worse, in addition to whiskey, these barbarians had quenched their thirst with cans of redbull, which of course, Jeny had also drunk. If this girl had had a heart attack or not was a matter of dumb luck.

It went on until dawn. I didn't sleep a wink all night. Finally, the sunlight gave me the courage to enter that house. You can't imagine what my eyes saw. It looked like the slaughterhouse of the Sopó estate mixed with a nightclub. Isidoro was naked, only wearing the yellow jacket of the suit of lights. It was not like I imagined him. He was huddling in a corner, like when he was a child and used to hide from his grandfather so he wouldn't get punished for doing something wrong. A few meters away was Jeny, lying as God made

## IF THIS GIRL HAD HAD A HEART ATTACK OR NOT WAS A MATTER OF DUMB LUCK.

her on the sofa, as naked and dirty as a newly born baby. Bathed in blood, with her loose black hair that covered her bust and part of her face for that moment, at least. In spite of her hair, you could still see those glass eyes, completely open, with her gaze fixed on the fan that was going at the minimum speed, in slow motion. Near her there were all kinds of objects and crap from everyday life, God knows what they were used for, they were covered in blood and fluids... Doctor, every kind of object was there, bottles, brushes... even a broken broomstick. It was like diabolical movie scene. When I was going to approach her, to see if I could save her, Gonzalo took me by the collar and practically lifted me up and told me to give him the keys to the van and that I was going to take Jeny home. I asked him how I was going to take her home, when I should take her to the doctor. He grabbed me by my neck and told me to take Isidoro home, and that if I ever said a word about what I had seen, he'd slip the same drops into both my Mum's and my niece's soup. We returned in the quietest and most expensive taxi ride of my life.

In Bogota, Isidoro didn't say a word for seven weeks after we got back from Anapoima. Dealing with the bombardment of questions about where the van was, why Isidoro was silent or, indeed, where Gonzalo was, the only thing I could tell Dona Consuelo and Don Josep was that the young Sinisterra had flown away with a very beautiful young girl, without saying where he was going.

## IV SESSION

Hello, gentlemen, ladies... Doctor. I apologise for being late. It's incredible that Colombians will even arrive late to their own funerals! If I were to tell you that I was meant to be born in March, but I actually arrived in May! How could I not be unpunctual? But, to tell you the truth, what happened is that this morning, for the first time in a long time, I was able to get some sleep. I slept all morning like a king! I remind you all that I dreamt nothing! My dreams were blank and that was the best part! After Dora, it's my turn? Ready, thank you, Doctor.

After what happened in Anapoima with Gonzalo... Of course! I already told you, what happens is that many of you have the memory of a goldfish... Nothing, El Rolo's brother flew away with a very beautiful, light-eyed young lady who got very sick during their honeymoon. He took her away and he never said where he took her. And, as I told you that day, El Rolo became very withdrawn when he brother left and got married so suddenly and decided to stop talking, God knows if it was because he also liked the light-eyed lady himself and felt doubly jilted by both his brother and his "sister-in-law"...

I suffered more during the time El Rolo was mute than whenever Gonzalo was there. His silence made me feel likeshit. He arrived at the house and went straight to where the animals were and locked himself in the corrals or in the stables where he would smoke for hours. He finally spoke during the seventh week, on the same day that Don Joaquin unexpectedly arrived for an extraordinary family meeting. Everyone was in the room: Don Josep, Consuelo, my mother, my aunt, the cooks and the uncles and friends closest to the Sinisterra. They hadn't settled in. They were still getting comfortable and taking off their coats when Don Joaquin announced that Gonzalo, his son, had died the night before. He added, after a long and uncomfortable silence, that he had to ask us for our total reserve about the subject, that we should not say anything about Gonzalo or the family whenever the press asked us for information. The man had crashed his own helicopter against a mountain range

in Medellín. "Was he alone?" That was the phrase with which my Rolo broke both his silence and the general silence in the room.

No one else understood the question, only me. They said that, apparently, he had fallen asleep when he was flying at night, but I was convinced that he allowed himself to fall. He never slept. I was convinced that he closed his eyes and squeezed them until he felt the mountain on top of him. No one said anything that wasn't logistical. What could be felt were the sighs from each guest. It almost felt like a gale. There were sighs coming from all over the house, from every corner, wherever they went. Yes... if I were to tell you the truth, they were pure sighs of relief, they weren't the sighs of a lover who lost love of his life in a train, or exile who misses his land, or mother without a child... They were sighs of pure relief, as when you drop a heavy load on the ground or you're told that the very worst is over.

Isidoro asked me a few days after the mass if I still liked bulls. I simply responded that bulls were my life, that he had to have known that I also wanted to be a bullfighter or *banderillero* or *picador* or sword boy or whatever. Don Josep, dealing with Gonzalo's absence, focused his attention even more on his grandson and built a bullring at the farm. It was even larger than Sogamoso's! It was just for him. Many great bullfighters went open it and they prepared him in style for his *alternativa* ceremony in Bogotá. It was there, training with these people, that a bull gored me in the middle of my thigh. That's how I got lame. But hey, that scar doesn't matter! It's the least important detail in this whole story. What is really meaningful is that the same day he asked me that question, we went to see our old friend, old four-legged Chalo, with whom he had begun this whole dream.

That great brown and white beast was there when we arrived. I prepared Isidoro as if it were for an official bullfight; I shrouded him. I put gel on his muscles and another one on his combed-back hair. I put on his coat and green vest with gold embroidery, brought over especially from Córdoba, and, of course, I adjusted the *taleguilla* pants tight to his crotch. The great El Rolo came alone to fight Chalo. I was his only spectator. I passed him the swords and acted like an

excited audience. I whistled, I shouted 'Ole!' at every pass made by El Rolo. I was even the jury and president. We played along as if we were kids again and when he asked me permission to end the life of the bull, I gave it to him, without thinking that he was really going to really kill him, that he would massacre the four-legged Chalo and split him apart as if he were only a piece of Serrano ham. He rammed that sword through his shoulder blades as if he were half a tonne of butter. The bull collapsed, and Isidoro, way beyond our games and theatre, kept stabbing him, over and over again, and again and again and, until it was impossible to re-assemble the bull and know which body part was which. We never could get the stains out of that suit of lights.

These images have only come to my head from talking to you all. I realise right now that I knew how to act the idiot all this time. So much so that, for example, when I was accompanying him in his hotel after everything that happened in the Santamaría, I couldn't believe that the same artist in the bullring had turned into weird, mute, cowardly fellow who was smoking nonstop, lying in bed in just his underpants and his jacket from the suit of lights, without showing any signs of ritual or even respect for the wardrobe or the like.

When Don Josep died, the fight over the inheritance between his partners and children, even Isidoro's own mother, was so intense that Isidoro decided to settle in Spain definitively and he cut himself off from Doña Consuelo. We were never at the same place as she was. I missed the hacienda because we could be more distracted there, we could go to the bullring that his grandfather had built, and there we could see if El Rolo could ever be the same again, I'm sure we could have chased away any ghost that might have been bothering him... I don't know. That's what I thought and that's what I told him. But he never answered me, or if he did, he'd tell me that if he'd only seen the eyes of the bull, that he was sure I'd seen them as well, that Lazarus was the only bull that didn't have black eyes. I answered that no bull had light eyes, that it must have been a trick of the sunlight. But he continued like that for all of our flight back to Madrid. When we arrived, we found out that things in Bogotá had

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got very intense and that a small bomb had exploded that very morning in the middle of Fifth Avenue only a few meters from the La Macarena market and the Santamaría bullring.

The scandal was even worse in Spain than it was in Colombia. El Rolo was the only relevant Colombian in years after Rincón. They were the first to call him El Rolo. The matador's cowardice had been even more condemnable there. They quoted famous parts from Hemingway's books, and I remember one that said something like everyone is afraid, but that the job of the bullfighter is to master that fear, otherwise every shoeshine boy in Spain would be a bullfighter. In the only interview he ever gave to TVE, they asked him if it was because of the violence in the country that he had backed off and he shook his head, silently, for long seconds in full prime time, until finally he said, without looking either at the presenter or at the camera, that it was only because of the bull's eyes, they would have had to have seen them to understand.

This continued until the fear turned to hatred thanks to an email sent by Octavio, a friend of the family who owned a cattle farm. That bloke told him that 69 was living the life in one of his fields. For however much their lives may have been returned, the bulls are killed unless they are pardoned and become stallions. That is, yes, Isidoro lost, but Lazarus didn't win either, because there was no performance. Octavio told him with a tone of indignation that the cattle farmers had decided to cure him, despite what the entire board may have said, arguing even if there had been no real performance to prove his bravery, but with all that, Lazarus 69 had made the legendary El Rolo cower with only a look.

Attached to the email was a link to a newspaper story that had as its headline "The Hunting of the Hunter," a story that narrated all the details of the "antiperformance" at the Santamaría. With that news, El Rolo Sinisterra knew that he wouldn't be left in peace anywhere in the world while Lazarus 69 was still alive. While those eyes of his kept watching. He bought two tickets and three days later we travelled to Bogotá on a direct flight to deal with the bull again, wherever. It had only been a month since the bullfight at the Santamaría.

## V SESSION

I'm getting to the point, ladies and gentlemen. We arrived in Bogota with Isidoro more hidden than a flea on a mutt, as they'd say in Patiobonito. We fooled in. Here things were still pretty excitable. On the one hand, the scandal was still very fresh and Isidoro's name was still on everyone's lips. He'd even been turned into an anti-bullfighting symbol by the anti-bullfighting hippies. On the other hand, the country'd been split right down the middle. Everything was divided: rich-poor, peace-war, conservative-more conservatives, *Paisas-Rolos*, bullfighting-antibullfighting, fags-machos, Catholics-atheists, North-South, private-public, Car-Bicycle, *Millos-Nacional*... All that stupid shite broke out. There was no street without its own demonstration at the time. There could be a group of ladies and old men protesting against gays in one street, while the next one over you'd have all them multi-coloured flags in response. Merely being around all here that was shite. In any case, El Rolo, as always, was obsessed with his own shit and I was there right behind him as both his light and his shadow.

We had to stay at my cousin's house, you know his former driver Ramiro, in the south by Santa Isabel because folk will do anything for money. That bloke, in his heart, hated Chalo not El Rolo, like everyone else who'd been at the house. Ramiro's place was our operations centre. We'd heard through Octavio and other inquiries that Lazarus wasn't exactly in La Holanda farm in Mondoñedo, rather another farmer had bought him when he was resold. A man who worked for them had set up his own cattle ranch in a lot nearby. That beast was his holy grail. It was his gold mine, his treasured bull... Did you get my little joke? It's just to help me take the whole tragedy of my life a little less seriously. Well, the story is that we put together a plan with Octavio, who'd given us the bull's exact location, and Ramiro, who knew them all, to cheat the owner of that lot out of his precious bull. Finally, when we worked out how we'd do it, a question arose among us all, that for some reason during several days of work

and planning, no one had actually asked Isidoro “And after you have the bull in front of you what happens next?”

That made El Rolo reconsider and discard our previous strategy of vans entering with on all sides. He changed the van for a lorry, and he told the three of us men that we had to add some hitmen, someone with balls who could control the *Llanero* and his foremen for a long time. I asked him: “Why do you want a truck and a hitman? Is it that you don’t just want to fight him and kill him, you also want to steal the bull away and take him to an apartment or what?” They all laughed and began to take the piss that the two of them were going to get hitched and that Isidore, the dog that he was, would make the bull’s horns even bigger and so on. We messed around until Isidoro’s silence and his gaze steadily focused on the photos of the farm and the unrolled plans on the table got to us all and we suddenly shut up. We realised that was exactly what Isidoro wanted to do – he wanted to kidnap the bull.

We meet up with some heavies recommended by one of Ramiro’s mates in in a tawdry bar close to Cuadra Picha in the Primera de Mayo neighbourhood. One of the rats backed out, raging that he didn’t want to participate in “doing a job on an innocent bull,” and that wasn’t “the shit he was into.” We all burst our shit laughing and we just got on with planning everything, divvying up the jobs and the money with the other two still on board. We celebrated with whiskey. I hadn’t seen Isidoro as elated in a long time. He sang and danced salsa as only he could. It was strange for me to see him there transformed. It was really weird to see him, a Sinisterra, happily getting plastered at a dive bar in the south of Bogota with no airs or graces.

Three days later, if the weather report wasn’t wrong, as soon as the sky cleared and the downpour began, the six of us would go, in two vans and a truck, to kidnap a bull in the outskirts of Bogotá.

## VI SESSION

Thank you m’dear, but don’t you worry, as Javier Fernández says, it doesn’t matter, you really don’t have to give me your turn, that way our chats are shorter, and we still have two more sessions left. I’m going to give you as much as I can, for me finishing telling my story is just as or even important...

As I once read in a young lassie’s journal, “The days in Bogota can’t make up their minds, they’re cold, and hot, and cold...” The same thing happens with those carcinogenic sunny lapses that are intense for a few hours until the sky is covered by spindly clouds that spit tsunamis; it’s all very poor taste, as Doña Consuelo would say. That old woman was fucked up; according to her, it’d still rain in London and Manchester, but there wasn’t as much mud, it wasn’t so changeable, and they certainly have to put up with so many wet Indians. Anyway, I’m still off commenting on my tangent, that’s why we haven’t been able to finish and I’m worried we won’t. The fact is that the computer wasn’t wrong and late that Wednesday evening there was the most impressive downpour.

When it rains heavily, some bulls are herded into pens and so it’s much easier to grab them than if they are loose in the middle of the savanna. That’s why this downpour was the most blessed of all. God listened to my prayers to make Isidoro happy and he gave us that impressive rain, which was also really useful for use because of the chaos and confusion that it caused. My role, the good minion or swords boy that I was, during what was surely the most important bullfight in El Rolo Sinisterra’s career, was to distract and provoke Lazarus to make him get on the truck. Otherwise I’d have to shoot him with a tranquiliser dart. I’d have to provoke him myself, me all lame and with no talent, instead of him, the greatest of all bullfighters! The other lads, the really dodgy lot, would take care of the humans, and hopefully try to make sure there’d be no deaths.

Because it was so close to Sopó, most of us who were there knew the lay of the land pretty well. We knew when we had to accelerate

# I'D HAVE TO PROVOKE HIM MYSELF, ME ALL LAME AND WITH NO TALENT, INSTEAD OF HIM, THE GREATEST OF ALL BULLFIGHTERS!

hard to get up a hill. The idea was to make it look like there'd been a robbery at the main house so that all the attention was focused there and that, in the meantime, the rest of us could work on Lazarus with more time. It was perfect.

The first part went very well. The only problem was that due to clumsiness, we hit a calf standing in an odd place and busted out the lights on the Toyota. We had to drive almost cross-eyed along that dark track. The truck arrived a little late to the party. Still we thought it couldn't have gone better up to that point. I really didn't know whether to cheer up or not. I'd hated the whole plan and had only agreed to take part in it to help rescue Isidoro, to see him happy again... I did everything for love. When they headed off we got in through the roof. Lazarus was there, lying down, still recovering from the fight at the Santamaría, with his back held together with of stitches closing the deep wounds made by the picador. He nervously stood up, we were making quite the noise. He was more scared than we were. He was spinning around like crazy. It occurred to Ramiro to whistle hard and the bull got distracted and went over to where the noise was coming from. Looking down from the bars above him, I started to whistle and

blow him kisses. He wasn't interested. I had to try to hit him. As soon as he saw the first faded cloth at the entrance to the truck, this was the same cloth we used when we used to play with four-legged Chalo, he ran at it as if it were a large female in heat. He went in there alone, not knowing what was in store for him. Isidoro waited in the truck, with his eyes closed, unable to see the bull. His gaze, still scared, still made of salt, still made of shit.

Love made me bold. I got on the truck and, like an expert *banderillero*, I stuck two darts in his arse and that beast collapsed like a Twin Tower. From the truck, Isidoro asked me if he could get in and I signalled him that yes, he could. Lazarus's eyes were closed. He'd been blindfolded so that Isidoro wouldn't have to see them anymore. El Rolo climbed in and approached him. Because of the rain, his hand was soaking. It trembled. He didn't dare to touch the bull. I got in and took his forearm and placed his hand on the animal's rump. I continued guiding him, explaining the animal's mass oto him. El Rolo stroked giant Lazarus 69 with his fingertips. He traced out the bull's ribs and then passed his white, wet hand to the bull's enormous balls. Ramiro moved quickly and shook us out of our trance by shouting "Hurry up, you fagots, the hacienda's got hot." We got into the truck and went out the back with everything and truck, bursting through the stick fence that separated us from the road.

The hacienda got hot?... That was an understatement. Apparently, those hired hands we'd picked up in Cuadra Picha were some prize fuckers, forgive me for saying so, but not only did they take joy in looting the hacienda but they ended up whacking two of men who worked there. One of them died in cross fire. The other two we never saw them again. They didn't even return to collect the half they were owed.

Doctor... I'm sorry to talk to you like that, but I wanted to thank you, I know I still have my final session, but you never know, I'm not sure I'll have the time to tell you what I feel and that it never happens again. I'm really grateful to you. You and your compassionate expressions have been more powerful than any Xanax, than any valerian pill to help me sleep.

## VII SESSION

If I asked you for confidentiality for previous sessions, I have to specifically tell you to never mention the contents of this final session to anyone, not even to yourselves. This is how the shit hit the fan. I would have preferred to write a diary, but I couldn't ever manage to write about it. I was always a reader, but the idea of writing, of turning all that dirty sewage that we have inside of us into scribbled pages – only writers can do that, as long as they're not journalists. On the other hand, I've made my living all my life by knowing when to talk and when to shut up, by getting to know people and being able to get a spark out of the darkness in which we all live.

Like the salt in my sweat that reminded me of my childhood, every drop of the Bogota rain makes me think of something related to El Rolo Sinisterra. Imagine, then, how much I think about that gentleman. That there are things in life that remind you that someone you loved has their good side, because things you didn't think were worth anything beforehand, like ham, a tree, the tip of a sword, a pole in any given corner, or a piece of a song, become pieces of that person. The bad thing is, of course, the other side of the coin, the other side of that pretty face, that each thing you find can cause the most wicked damage in the world, stabbing you like the best *picador* right in the centre of your chest. Because whoever left you has also left a rank stench. Everything is tainted by his smell, his tricks, his opinions, his shit... And you walk around, and you study, and you sing, and you eat, and it's almost as if nothing had happened. But everyone can see that you are completely broken... Right?

Well, we left Lazarus in a shed, one of the few remaining square meters that still belonged to the Sinisterra. They had sold everything and scattered themselves all over the world, Isidoro didn't know what to do with his nemesis... He walked around, as if he were in waiting room of a hospital operating room waiting for news. We told him that the other side of job hadn't gone all that well that night. People had died in the chaos. And he just said that he needed to be alone with Lazarus.

He told me to piss off and take the others with me, but could I do him one last favour and tie the bull to the pipe and leave him blindfolded.

I was always his Alfred. I always did everything he asked me and this wasn't the exception. As I did what he asked. I felt that this was the last time I was going to see them both and I kept biting my tongue to not scream. The bull, no matter how dim he was, could feel it too, I think... I could feel he respected me as he didn't move at all, he was almost affectionate and complacent as the *vallenato* goes. He was the bravest brute beast I've ever dealt with. Impatiently, El Rolo began to throw things to the floor and shouted at us telling us to disappear and cast us out like the mongrels that we were.

I went to Bogotá to stay at Ramiro's house in Santa Isabel. I slept like three days in a row. I don't really remember much about that week... could it be that that's why I haven't been able to fall asleep for over a year since I went back to where El Rolo was? God alone knows... There was a very heavy atmosphere in the city, the bull's courage was through the clouds. A kind of mafia war had been organised, but between ranches and entrepreneurs, that is, between the owners of the country's owners. In other words, the very people who are behind everything took Lazarus and the dead from that day as a symbol of treason. The police there began to stir everything up and it was in all the papers. The thing was that while Ramiro and I were eating a tamale at the neighbourhood bakery, a Breaking News bulletin came out interrupting the Jota Mario morning programme, he'd was messing around with a model, trying to spit and get spit on... When the journalist came on telly, interrupting the program, with a serious, military-like expression, she said that evidence had been found that could clarify the entire "Case of the Beast." A large old, red rag had been found in the middle of the scene of the crime with a blurry logo of the Colombian-Spanish company "Jamones y Quesos Sinisterra." I almost choked on the carrot in the tamale and I couldn't help screaming like a mad woman. Because of me, because of my carelessness, we'd got stuck in the eye of the storm.

I rushed out on the dual carriageway, driving like an ambulance, crashing through traffic lights and getting into the Transmilenio lane.

AND YOU WALK  
AROUND, AND YOU  
STUDY, AND YOU  
SING, AND YOU EAT,  
AND IT'S ALMOST

AS IF NOTHING  
HAD HAPPENED.  
BUT EVERYONE  
CAN SEE THAT YOU  
ARE COMPLETELY  
BROKEN... RIGHT?



There were coppers parked at the petrol station drinking coffee. For a moment, I remembered that I didn't have car papers with me. Traffic laws and regulations were bollox to me, so I didn't bother to stop. I later thought that they were turning a blind eye because I didn't see them again, not even when I went through the toll booth. I soon forgot about them. I needed to save my patient. I needed to warn Isidoro that they were looking for him and that they already knew he was in the country. I knew they were going to hunt him, we had to escape together... I needed to tell him that I was going to protect him from everything, even the eyes of that beast that didn't stop looking at him.

I finally arrived, I don't know how, but I got there. I got out of the car and left the radio on. Before I went in I felt the same tightening in my chest that I had felt that morning that in Mesa de Yeguas; the same thing I felt when I was approaching him in the Santamaría to save him, when he was palisaded in the area. I got my guts together and walked to the red, metal entrance. The midday sun hit me right in the face, as if were judging me, only me, and ignoring all other mortals. The door was closed, of course, as was the one at the front as well. Everything was closed up and the windows were covered with garbage bags like at a youth club disco. I tried to open them with a knife but nothing, I screamed and nobody answered me. Desperate, like a firefighter in the fire, I went down to the truck and took the extinguisher from the road kit, I ran back to the door and gave it with all my strength, venting all my shit from all these years against that sheet on the door. It all burst and from the hollow of that cave emerged a stench of abandoned slaughterhouse that almost knocked me down. My automatic reaction was fire off the fire extinguisher until it emptied... The door and the floor of the entrance were all shrouded with white powder. I walked across the smoky, dark room. The air was heavy with talc. I turned on the light and instead of lighting up the shed, the light merely changed the black to an intense red like something you'd see in a cheap motel. Everything was lit in red... and if you have never been to a motel then think about those rooms where they develop photos. I still can't explain why it was like that, maybe it was to scare the bull.

There was no life in that room. Isidoro was not there. Lazarus 69 was still tied to the tube in which I left him and still had his eyes bandaged. Before approaching him, I ran to pull the rubbish bags out of the windows and the light came in through patches like shots from the sky. One of those jets of light illuminated a kind of board in which El Rolo had written a series of calculations. I thought it was strange for him considering how much of a brute he was for numbers. The handwriting and the numbers weren't his. The belonged to another person whose writing I couldn't recognise at that time with the pain in my eyes. They were very precise calculations, like medicine. I kept reading and there was a large rule of three with the name "Lazarus" and drawings and the like next to an inscription that said "5 litres of blood (for each cut)," beside it it said "457 kilograms per 25 litres in total..." I finally understood that what they were trying to decipher was how many cuts would necessary to empty the 25 litres of blood in the bull's veins without it killing him immediately. Next to it was a laminated diagram of the detailed anatomy of the bull, with "x" and little dots everywhere. In other words, someone, perhaps Herrera, the family's long-time veterinarian, had assisted and advised the Sinisterra matador to systematically torture Lazarus, slowly... little by little... without running the risk of him bleeding him out in one fell swoop because of a bad cut in an artery.

I walked away from those macabre maths and went to see the bull. He looked like a deflated ball, just like he'd bitten by a pit bull. He was covered in flies and decorated with more than a dozen banderillas of all colours. While I was getting to him, my shoes almost stuck to the floor because of the giant, sticky puddle of blood, strangely shaped at the edges. I knelt among all that blood and began to wallow and mourn like newly born, like the bastard I always was... I don't know if I cried for the bull, for Isidoro, for me, or for Isidoro without me. The truth is that I think my tears raised that puddle by at least six centimetres...

The swords that I had polished so carefully and often, that I passed to Isidoro during each and every one of his bullfights around the world, were all lying on the floor, abandoned around the earless

bull. His suit of lights, the red cape and his capote were just lying on the floor there, next to empty cans, just like in the days of hell in the hotel. I wonder now if he went out into the street starkers. I wonder if he's still running around the world starkers, wearing only a jacket.

I was going to go when, standing face to face with the Lazarus 69, I got an irresistible desire to remove the blindfold, to look him closely into the sockets and pupils, nerves, muscles and eyelashes that had taken Isidoro from me. I tried to untie the knot that I, myself, had made, but I had bitten my nails so far down that I couldn't. I looked for my knife and as I couldn't find it, I took one of the many swords that lay around on the floor. I found nothing more and nothing less than Isidoro's rapier. It was the rapier with which he killed more than a hundred and fifty animals, and now I used it to uncover the last bull of the last third of his life.

I picked up that beautiful eighty-eight-centimetre metal blade and, using only the tip of it, I finally cut the knot of that blessed bandage that fell into the soupy mess below. Now I could see them, now they were clear, the same clear, almost glassy eyes. They completely open... It was the same expression the little baker girl had watching the fan revolve in slow motion. The only difference was that those of Lazarus's eyes no longer had any brightness and those of the little girl, for that moment, still had some little light among the many busted veins.

I embraced the animal's head with the strength that I had left and in another soap opera twist I picked up his blindfold and tied it around my own eyes to feel the same... To see nothing more in this world. And as is wont in this life with its black humour, I understood that the joke was on me. A police officer came in with a gun in one hand, and the other covering her face in a vain attempt to avoid the nauseating smell of an abandoned slaughterhouse. She called out to her partner, ordering him to ask for reinforcements and an ambulance, because they were just motorway coppers who'd followed me to the end of the world just to give me a traffic ticket...

In the case report it appears like I was a victim of kidnapping. They found me, blindfolded, in a shed on the outskirts of the city,

## I HAVE NEVER SPOKEN. I HAVE NEVER OPENED MY MOUTH UNTIL NOW, ONLY TO YOU LOT, ONLY WITH THE DOCTOR...

beside a tortured bull, covered in dust and blood. My kidnapper must have fled. Fortunately, it hadn't been too late, because only the animal had died. I never denied anything nor did I lie anymore, because I never actually said anything. They didn't relate me to the guy in the truck because of the tinted windows, and because the signs seemed too clear: Isidoro Sinisterra Carvajal was the executioner in this whole story. They didn't even want to check the car tracks or anything. The press devoured the case even more quickly than any prosecutor and very soon invitations came for me to appear on La Noche or on Séptimo Día or any other red, sensationalist, morbid gutter programme. I never went on anything on TV. I have never spoken. I have never opened my mouth until now, only to you lot, only with the Doctor...

Perhaps finally, I'll be able to get some sleep.

## THE END.

# THE MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT



By Andrea Gaitán

I started my undergraduate degree with the idea of becoming an editor one day. On the one hand, my love of books as a physical object, their colours, smells, histories and formats. On the other hand, I admit I might have thought that, maybe, editing might be easier than writing, that accompanying and supporting an author was easier than actually creating texts myself. Now I know that the question is not about what is easier or more difficult, because editing, just like writing, is an act of creation and creativity. Today, I want to become an editor because I want to do something for literature. I am excited about the idea of creating books and reflecting about them.

In a country like ours, where the editorial training still has a long way to go, being an editor is learned mainly through practice. Only limited spaces are available. In this panorama, *Elipsis* was an opportunity for me, a space for me to gain editorial practice, to explore and role play. I was allowed to imagine myself for the first time as editor, as someone who evaluates content, who seeks a justification for each element, who takes care of every detail and questions everything.

My work with Laura, with her text, as well as the relationship that we established, is without doubt the most rewarding thing that *Elipsis* has given me. Even if we live in a society where human relationships perish in the distance, we formed a bond in spite of her being in Armenia and my being in Bogotá. Ours was a creative bond that gave me joy as a person, because I believe that our desires, our dreams and needs complemented each other. Laura wanted to write a good text, opportunities like this are not taken lightly for those who dream of writing and being published. For this goal, she needed the help that both Marta and I could offer her, and in my attempt to help Laura as much as possible, she, with her text, gave me this experience that I wanted and needed to take a step closer to my own. dream of becoming an editor.

I remember that we chatted for more than an hour by phone before Laura sent me the first version of her text. Together, in that conversation, we tried to solve the initial problems that Marta, Alejandra and I had identified in a brief meeting. We discussed formal questions of the text, such as: who was his character? where did he live? what was his conflict? how were his actions going to develop? etc. But then we moved on to more personal issues, such as Laura's fear of not being able to appropriately address situations as sensitive as those that appear in her story. For me this conversation, with all its details, is a fond memory, and I mention it here because that is where everything began to take shape, as much our bond as our exceptions, but especially the text.

With regard Laura's text, Marta once said that it was a very ambitious project, because what she wanted to achieve was not easy in narrative terms. I commented, after reading the first draft, that of all the stories, Laura's was the one that needed the most work. Maybe we were both right. After seeing the evolution of Laura's text in each of its versions, today I am glad that I made the decision to edit it. It was problematic text, ambitious text, grotesque (the grotesque fascinates her). I'm glad to have been part of it. It only remains for me to say that I thank *Elipsis* for this learning experience, and Laura for our time of reading and listening.

ellipsis

2017

# THE LORD OF THE HEN- HOUSE



Laura Esponda

I still remember the first moment I contemplated her beauty. The force of her gaze could immobilise you. Over 1,200 threads hung from her legs. She wore a flared skirt that revealed two large thighs.

-“You’re a fucking moron! You’re in love with Ana, and now you want to give her a home and bring her to this country house. I’m sure you’ve already told her your pure love for her and planned a future together. Don’t worry about getting her to love you, just work out how you’re going to fuck her.”

-“I could only ever make love to her with tenderness! I detest when you speak with violence. You always advocate violence as a solution to problems. You have never experienced love and kindness. Let me enjoy this moment! Let me just watch her and enjoy her presence. Since she got here, this home is less funereal.”

-“Every night I contemplate her body. I imagine how beautiful she would be wearing a tight, white dress with pretty lace boleros and feathers to decorate her waist. Her hair, gathered into a plait decorated by red roses! She’d look beautiful! She’d almost be as beautiful as Mama was when she got married.

“Her face is crass when compared to Mama’s. She doesn’t have the same curly wave in her hair, or that big mole on her cheek. Although she does have a delicious body with a pair of juicy, big tits.”

-“Don’t talk to me about her breasts! You still don’t understand! I don’t see Ana as a skin to be penetrated or even as a source of desire, I really love her. I have fantasised about holding her body in my arms. Since I got her, I have only felt understanding and affection for her.

“Can you believe it? Ana, with all her silences and her fixed gaze, gives me the love I need. She gives me permission to kiss her and doesn’t feel disgusted when I try to touch her arms. She seems to enjoy my company and every morning when she wakes up I’m just happy to see her.”

-“You idiot, you’re overestimating her. Don’t believe that all her silences mean she loves you, or that her body burns with desire for you.

“Look and tell me you don’t think those two huge tits look nice and juicy? Don’t you want to move your mouth all over them, drooling over those black nipples? Giving her goose bumps with the brush of your teeth on her skin!

“I know you want her! Behind all your bullshit and all that shit you talk about the beauty of love, you’re a red-blooded man who gets as hard as a rock. Come on, I know you can fuck this woman as God intended!”

-“Ana cannot be compared to the past. Seriously, she needs to be pampered and respected for the wonderful woman she is.”

-“Of course, comfort her, rub her breasts and ask her three wishes, I’m sure she’ll grant you what you ask...

“Gently touch the inside of her crotch, rub her pussy... and lick her there, if necessary, to make her feel even more loved. Lick her! Lick her again! Quickly tongue her in the pussy. I’m telling you, even the wetness of your own drooling will turn you on.

-“Shut up! Ana is not an object to be penetrated. She’s is the love of my life.”

- “You moron. Don’t even think about it anymore. All that beautiful meat is there for you to eat. You’re hungry, feed yourself!”

-“All the time I have to listen to your ridiculous talk... Be silent. Please, don’t speak... Let me contemplate Ana’s serenity, observe her while she sleeps, memorise the curvature of her eye as well as the small deviation of her septum.

**YOU HAVE  
NEVER  
EXPERIENCED  
LOVE AND  
KINDNESS.  
LET ME ENJOY  
THIS MOMENT!  
LET ME JUST  
WATCH HER  
AND ENJOY  
HER PRESENCE.  
SINCE SHE GOT  
HERE, THIS  
HOME IS LESS  
FUNEREAL.**

**WE ARE  
INSEPARABLE  
AND INVINCIBLE!  
COME ON!  
SMILE! YOU'RE  
NOT ALONE,  
YOU'VE NEVER  
BEEN ALONE.  
I'LL FOLLOW  
YOU WHEREVER  
YOU GO.**

"Be silent while I measure again the thickness of her lower lip with my index finger so I never will forget the details of her beautiful mouth. I want to be able to contemplate that sincere and almost maternal kiss forever.

"Be silent... If only for now...

"You cunt, I don't have to shut up... I'm only giving you advice, trying to protect you, can't you see that?"

"That's not true, you are my curse. Your disgusting presence is all I have left from Mama. It's amazing how she could possibly have given birth to you! How did you come out of her sacred body?"

"Don't be surprised, Mama gave birth to us with pleasure. A huge head came out of her pussy followed by a healthy and dark body. That's how she described the birth.

"Besides, I don't know why you complain. Didn't Mama and Papa leave you this farm?. You're the owner of the henhouse, all this disgusting crap is yours. The most important thing is that you've never been on your own. Look, we're still together! We are inseparable and invincible! Come on! Smile! You're not alone, you've never been alone. I'll follow you wherever you go."

"Your company has never been useful to me. Your talk only causes me problems."

"You do not have to look at me like that, I'm not your executioner."

"Of course you are! I still remember when we were kids and you demanded to go to the henhouse. At first it was terrible for me to have to walk through that pile of stinking feathers and birds. The dirt made the outer edge of my rubber boots filthy and the hens ran all around the henhouse. I felt helpless because I could not grab them with a single swipe, so I was violent. When I finally caught one of those birds, the poor thing had no choice but to peck at me. It was only natural. She was just trying to defend herself from a stranger.

"Like the oppressor that I was, I tried to control her by grabbing her little crest and rubbing her body with feathers. The caramel-coloured feathers tangled in my fingers. Calmly, the hen rested her beak in the space between my forefinger and my right thumb. Her body stopped shaking. She was no longer hysterical and quietly enjoyed the swing of my arms.

"How serene she was, resting there, it moved me a little... Violence and strength were not the best strategies for getting Bertica to come to me. I had to earn her trust, I had to treat her with respect... Every time I wanted to hold her again, I would caress her body, and her caramel feathers one by one."

"You should thank me! It was thanks to me you could meet Bertica, a most beautiful and fertile hen. From your first contact with the henhouse you became a true man, you lost your cowardice and

learned to love. Come on, the warmth of those feathers made you fall in love with life.”

–“After my first encounter with Berta, I had to go back to the henhouse, I couldn’t help it. I had to watch them constantly to make sure they were okay. That grassy texture that they loved so much had to be tended to so that there wasn’t more than an inch of undergrowth. They had to have a sufficient amount of water, no surface could be dirty. I still use small cotton swabs to disinfect the edges and corners of the trough and drinking fountain.

“I learned compassion and care with Berta. My heart overflowed with so much love for her that I still visit the henhouse in the evenings and continue with my cleaning routines. I love Berta and all her housemates... I can’t help it.”

–“You shouldn’t waste your time cursing me. You should thank me! It’s because of me that you’ve known love. Because of me you loved Berta! But most of all, it’s because of me, and don’t you deny it, you have Ana all to yourself. You must feel lucky! It’s too bad you could never show the love you had for Mama, I always insisted that you had to love her, but coward that you are, you got scared and preferred to run away.”

–“You don’t have to soil the honourable memory of our mother with those words...”

–“Why do you think I don’t deserve to mention her? I do have the right to, I came from her womb. Have you forgotten that we both came from the same pussy?”

–“Don’t talk about Mama, you have no right...”

–“Please! You can’t forbid me anything! Perhaps you forgot that while you were shitting yourself with fear, not understanding why you got hard when you saw her in her pyjamas, I had the courage to fantasise about her pretty, black nipples. While you spent your sleepless nights thinking about how her ass moved so deliciously when she mopped the house, I had the balls to go up to her and touch her huge buttocks. You know that I almost could slip my little index finger in...

“I have always had more strength and more courage than you... it is inevitable, you will always be my lackey.”

–“Do not talk about Mama like that, it’s disgusting when you refer to her as an object of pleasure. I never touched an inch of her beautiful brown skin...”

–“You didn’t touch her because you never had the balls to do it. But I know you were gagging to feel her nipples in your mouth again. Don’t deny it! I know you too well and I know your intentions.”

–“That’s not true! The idea of having those soft, dark nipples in my mouth again makes me sick.”

–“You don’t have to hide it from me, I know very well who you are.

“Stop wasting time, fuck Ana. I already know that she is not unfamiliar with your desire either. You must accept it, she is delicious”.

–“Of course not, I will not touch her body until we are consecrated before the word of God. Understand that we love each other and we want to spend all our lives together.

“Last night I told her of my desire to share the running of the farm and the henhouse with her. Everything on the property would also be hers, the hens would be at her disposal. Our three children will be happy running around all around the farm. We have an amazing life ahead of us.”

–“Don’t waste your time, nothing guarantees that Ana will always be yours. Come on, take advantage of the fact that you have her close by. Hurry up! You don’t have much time left...”

–“I don’t have much time? Ana won’t leave here, she knows that I am her destiny. She needs nothing from outside this house. Her future is with me.

–“You are a total moron if you really think that Ana will always be here with you looking after this crap and you think that you will be a nice, happy family. Wake up! When Ana is lying in bed waiting for you to kiss her lips and she sees your body, scratched up and covered with feathers, and a dick covered in birdshit, she’ll want to run away from here. She’ll want to get up and flee. She’ll abandon you. You’ll be laughed at. You’ll lose the respect that you once had... Imagine

**YOU MUST FEEL  
LUCKY! IT'S TOO  
BAD YOU COULD  
NEVER SHOW  
THE LOVE YOU  
HAD FOR MAMA,  
I ALWAYS  
INSISTED THAT  
YOU HAD TO  
LOVE HER,  
BUT COWARD  
THAT YOU  
ARE, YOU GOT  
SCARED AND  
PREFERRED TO  
RUN AWAY.**

what your life will be like when she finds out you love that cesspit out back there in the henhouse.”

“That’s not true. Ana wouldn’t have to run away. What happens in the henhouse has nothing to do with sex or violence. On the contrary, I have made that place into a temple of love, unlike Papa, who only ever fed the hens in the mornings and changed the fetid water in the drinking troughs every now and again. His care for them could best be described as the need to have laying hens, the more eggs they laid, all the better for him. The profit from the henhouse was worth it, especially with Bertica, she was the favourite. Every morning, she always lays a large, hot egg.

“Furthermore, I never saw any of these beautiful birds as objects. My first contact with Bertica taught me about compassion. When I held her, docile in my arms, I understood that we are both children of the same earth and product of the same creator.

“I have dedicated my whole life to taking care of them and getting to know them better. I know that Rocío never liked how she has been cared for, so I have always cut small squares of tomatoes and one inch strips of cabbage and cooked them for her. Only I know where Martina hides her eggs and how she acts when they are found! I also know that Consuelo always enjoys digging in the right corner of the henhouse that points north... I’ve learned all about their behaviour.

“My constant interaction with them allowed me to understand that none of them, not Bertica, Rocío, Martina, Consuelo, or any of their other henhouse companions were happy. Their life was summarised by confinement. None had known a vigorous cockerel. They had never felt the protection of a male.”

“Do you really think that when you took them up the shitter that you made them happier?”

“I never ‘took’ them. It never happened with such savagery. I only ever took care of them. I gave them all the love that not even the cockerels, or even Papa, could give them. I was always sweet and very tender. Each time we’d meet again and become one, they’d close their little eyes... at the end, because they wanted it. I’d let



go of them close to the ground, near the watering trough. They ran out to lie down somewhere in the henhouse. I'd clean myself up a little and go back to the house with the certainty of having made someone in this world happy."

"That's such a lie! You never fucked them as a favour, you fucked them because you were turned on by that small, feathered hole. I always knew that it would bother you to see their cloaca full of shit. Once you said that it felt warmer. I suppose it made it easier to slide your prick inside..."

"Their orifices never produced any excitement in me. On the contrary, when I admire their feathered bodies and hold them in my hands, I understand one of the dimensions of love. I understand that they need my affection, that they want a man who cares for them and makes them feel important. A true male who is aware of his food, his drink and hygiene, not like Papa who was only interested in collecting his eggs... No one thought about the hens, until I arrived and made them happy."

"You're so gross! I have never understood how you could get turned on by those feathered bodies, you love to be pecked at and shit on."

"Now I make you sick? It was your idea to go to the henhouse. It was you who forced me to violently take the hen... You told me every single day just how delicious it would feel. You said that heat would feel comforting, that there'd be no consequences..."

"You asshole, it was never serious, please! It was just a kids' game. The hens were merely an escape to control the desire you felt for Mum. Everything was a simple kids' game."

"It has never been a game. Berta is really happy by my side. All the hens are happy when they see me arrive. They cackle six seconds more than usual and move their wings trying to make slight jumps."

"You disgust me... ten years later and you're still playing the game. Whenever I remember it, I feel that smell of shit filling my lungs."

"No, it's not a game. I am a sensitive and compassionate man. I see beyond sex. Every single morning, I wake up to offer them love. I take care of all the details and I pamper them as if they were queens."

"Your incapacity to approach women has made you such a loser all your life. You never could be even close to Mama, whatever about touching her. Never did you even use the excuse of childish innocence to hang off her legs to look upwards to watch how her melons used to rise. You didn't even manage to touch her cheek or sit on her lap and feel loved."

"You never knew how to approach a woman and now you excuse yourself saying that what you do with the chickens is pure charity... You are an asshole!"

"Mum was unreachable, I could never touch her. Her hardness and moodiness prevented me from doing it. All her life revolved around Papa's shit."

"It's true, Mama spent sleepless nights imagining what Papa was doing away from home, how many women he was fucking, wondering why he wasn't fucking her. She tried, in vain, to hold her place in front of her husband and she never gained his respect. She only ever had nights of complete hysteria. I'm sure that more than once she had to fantasise that a man touched her... And I, cunning as ever, would decide to make an appearance in her room."

"Dad used always to drink with his friends and whores at a seedy bar in the centre of town. One of those nights Mum wore those nice red pyjamas that left her two black nipples exposed. Seeing those big breasts, I became obsessed with kissing the points that stood out. I had to run away, so she wouldn't ask me about my erection. I quickly locked myself in the bathroom and roughly pulled on it. Fearfully, a small jet came out."

"Every night I would appear in that room and end the day fantasising and enthusiastically wank."

"Her body was so sacred that I am disgusted by imagining how you could touch her skin."

"Bullshit, it doesn't disgust you, it turns you on. It makes you want to be brave like me. You regret not listening to me and letting me be the one to touch Mum. I know you were dying for her... I'm sure that more than once you got hard and you got scared, your veins were bursting! I know you wanked thinking of her... you can't hide anything from me."

-“No, no, no. I love my mother and I would never violate her body with the dirtiness of my skin. I didn’t have the right to stain her with my caresses, I’m not even worthy of touching her... Her beatings and insults were meant to correct me.”

-“You talk like a loser. You already lost the opportunity with Mama! Don’t miss it with Ana! Take her! Make her feel complete! Wet her with a little bit of you spit, touch her slowly, and softly put it inside her, when, at last, she realises that you’re totally inside her, ready to shoot.”

-“No! Stop insisting, I’ll do things my way. Give her time, she’s a lady and ladies require time and space.”

-“Lady or not, doesn’t matter; she’s been lying around here for quite some time, she must be gagging for it... Take advantage, sink your tiny prick inside her. Take her to paradise! You, oh, you so benevolent and charitable man! Act compassionately – and fuck her! Maybe I won’t be with you tomorrow. Do you want to see how you lost the love of your life?

“Don’t think about it! Act now!”

-“I’m not going to do it, I’m tired of hearing your rumbling voice giving orders all the time. Let me do things my way. I know that Ana can’t leave. She doesn’t have to. She’s happy here with me. Whenever I go into her room, the right corner of her pretty lips is slightly curved, forming a small, waning, crescent moon.

“Tell me, would an unhappy woman have to smile all the time?”

-“So, tell me then, an unhappy woman who wants to run away from an asshole who isn’t able to touch her, or make her feel like a woman, you don’t think she wouldn’t constantly grin to distract the moron and so run away without the slightest suspicion?

“Come on! Go into her room and look at her. Isn’t she mouth-watering? Touching her a little won’t hurt you.”

-“I don’t want to hurt her.”

-“Come with me, go into her room and watch her as she sleeps. Let me see her.”

-“Don’t go near her! I don’t want you to touch her, let alone look at her. You can’t gaze at her.

## EVERY SINGLE MORNING, I WAKE UP TO OFFER THEM LOVE. I TAKE CARE OF ALL THE DETAILS AND I PAMPER THEM AS IF THEY WERE QUEENS.

“If you go in there, I know you’ll try to seduce her and turn her against me. Maybe you’ll manage it and she won’t see me in the same light again. She’ll want to be with you and I would lose her forever.”

-“You don’t have to worry about that. Fuck her a little. It wouldn’t hurt us for you to get a little action.”

-“No, I won’t go into her room until you leave.”

-“What are you saying? You asshole! Remember that I can’t leave. We’re stuck together.

-“If Ana sees me coming in it is of no importance at this moment, it’s been hours since you went in there, and I haven’t heard her snore for several minutes.”

-“And what about it? Maybe she woke up or tossed around the bed until she felt comfortable.”

**I'M SURE THAT MORE  
THAN ONCE SHE  
HAD TO FANTASISE  
THAT A MAN  
TOUCHED HER...**

**AND I, CUNNING  
AS EVER, WOULD  
DECIDE TO MAKE  
AN APPEARANCE IN  
HER ROOM.**

-“Are you sure she’s sleeping in her room? What if she woke up and overheard all our conversation?”

-“No, I don’t think so.”

-“Ah, no?... We’ve been talking and making decisions for quite some time: if you fuck her or not, why not with Mama but yes with Bertica... Maybe she felt humiliated because she found out that you prefer Berta’s shit and not her, the beautiful woman of your dreams. It would be a pity if Ana were to run away and make you look ridiculous...”

-“It’s not true, Ana doesn’t have to listen to our conversations. Besides, as I’ve already told you, she does not have to feel jealous of Bertica. My contact with the hens taught me how rewarding it is to help others. What I do in the henhouse are acts of solidarity.

“Stop trying to turn her against me...”

-“Don’t be an idiot, I would never turn her against you. If I want you to fuck her and to swallow her whole, it’s because I’m thinking of you... I feel sorry for you knowing that you’ve been fucking only hens all this time... I feel sick when I think that your prick is smeared to your balls... I’m so grossed out by it, I haven’t been able to go back to the henhouse. Only you are capable of visiting that shithole.”

-“The henhouse will always be my favourite place...”

-“I know that it is important for you, as is Ana. It’d be a pity if she found out and left...”

-“If she left? No, she doesn’t have to leave, she doesn’t not have to, she has nowhere to go.”

-“Yes, I’m sure she left... I’ve been telling you for a while that I stopped being able to hear her, she’s not sleeping anymore, she fled... she’d no choice. Shame consumed her. She couldn’t stand the idea of having to compete against a load of fowl... I’m sorry, I’m really sorry.”

-“It’s not true! Ana can’t leave! She can’t leave! She can’t leave me alone with you... I know she’s still sleeping in her room or if she woke up she is waiting for me. She wants me to look after her and look at her. She adores it when I do her hair up into a high bun, just like Mama used to wear hers... She can’t leave! She can’t! She needs

me. She knows that nobody else would take care of her like I do. Nobody else would clean her or would touch up her nails...”

-“But that’s not everything for a woman... They also want to feel wanted. She would have loved it if you wet her with your juice... I know that your tiny prick would live happy in her cavern... but Ana couldn’t bear your truth.

“I have to go see her, I have to know that she’s all right, that she’s still comfortable in bed”

-“Don’t waste your time, you won’t find her.”

-“Shut up! I am going to make sure that she’s still at home, that all your lying and that she’s is waiting for me to pamper her and take care of her as only I can. Don’t talk anymore... I’m going to see her.”

...

-“I told you so! She can’t leave! Our love is so pure that she really wants to share her life with me.

“My love, don’t worry! Here I am. I’m going to take care of you. You know I will never let you go.”

-“So much silence scared me a little and I thought Ana had gone. Finish squandering your compassion on this poor woman... But look at her so clean lying on the bed! Look at those legs! My God! You must help her!”

-“I know that she needs me and that’s why she can’t leave me. She loves how I take care of her. She has never told me, but I know that her silence when I brush her hair is the purest demonstration of love... She always remains still when I arrange her hair in a big inch-and-a-half high bun and tie it around the centre of her head with a pink ribbon.”

-“The same colour Mama used to use.”

-“No, that’s not true. The ribbon that Mama used to use was a more intense pink, with around two inches tangled up between her curls.”

-“Don’t waste your time with tying her hair, her baldness is consuming her. Better dedicate yourself to giving her all the love and warmth she needs. Look at her, she’s so cold...”

-“Of course not, she loves to look beautiful, she also loves her hairstyle and the makeup on her face. She’s pale now because she hardly ever comes out in the sunlight. She’s allergic and can’t expose her skin. So, I gently apply a brown cream over her whole body, to make it that colour. She looks beautiful!”

-“Her brown skin reminds me a little of Mama’s.”

-“No, Mama’s skin was a beautiful caramel that highlighted the black of her intense eyes.”

-“Mum was the beauty of the entire county. More than one man was gagging for her. It’s a pity that she didn’t know how to take advantage of how much we men wanted her. She wasted her life with our idiot father.”

-“It makes me sick to think how many men wanted to be in her room, Papa was more than enough.”

-“You know she was a beautiful woman. She had no rivals. That’s why I so enjoy and love this game where you pretend that Ana looks like Mama.”

-“It is not true. It’s impossible. Nobody is as beautiful as Mama. Besides, I don’t try to make Ana look like anyone. I just spend my days taking care of her and making her beautiful.”

-“If you think that’s not true, then tell me, what is Mama’s favourite red skirt doing on Ana’s scrawny body?”

-“No, you’re getting it wrong, that red skirt, like all Mama’s clothes, has been here since she died. I didn’t dare to throw away any of her clothes.

“When Ana arrived, her clothes were filthy and I had to put this pretty skirt on her.”

-“That garment’s texture reminds me of all the times I hung on Mama’s legs just to be close to her sex. I felt how those red wool stitches brushed my cheeks when I moved my head in circles, pretending to be affectionate but I really was just crazy with desire... I want to touch the skirt! I want to feel those little stitches again.”

-“Of course not, that skirt is now Ana’s. Therefore, it now belongs to me. You have no reason to touch it. I will not allow you to dirty that fine cloth with your oily face.”

**SHUT UP! I AM  
GOING TO MAKE  
SURE THAT SHE’S  
STILL AT HOME,  
THAT ALL YOUR  
LYING AND  
THAT SHE’S IS  
WAITING FOR  
ME TO PAMPER  
HER AND TAKE  
CARE OF HER  
AS ONLY I CAN.**

-“You forget that all that is yours also belongs to me. That skirt is mine too, but pull off all those feathers that you stuck on the edges. Like that it will never get me hard.”

-“I won’t tear them off! Ana loves them. I, myself, stuck them on by hand, one by one. Every time I cleaned the henhouse, I collected all the loose feathers in a plastic bag, I then selected only

the feathers that were four inches long and kept them carefully in Mum's box. I knew that one day they would be useful. And see how those 25 feathers brushing against Ana's skinny legs make her look so beautiful.

"Every time I move her to clean her or tan her, those feathers tickle her. She enjoys the friction."

"Those feathers are not funny at all. They're stupid decorations for you to believe you're next to a hen. You're sick, leave your obsession with these birds and behave yourself. Just get it over with and fuck her."

"We have little time left. In a while it will only get worse than what it is now and we will lose everything."

"Ana won't get sick or leave. She will always be with me. She knows that she belongs to me and that makes her happy."

"That's right, my love, you don't want to leave, do you? I know that you are happy with me and that the world out there will never offer you as much affection as I do. You are already all mine and you don't have to run away, I will never hurt you."

"Take advantage of her! Make her happier! Lift up that skirt and fuck her! Make her get wet! Get rid of that dryness and let's fuck her!"

"There is no us. There's only Ana and I. You have no place in this relationship."

"Of course I do. Only I can give you what you need so badly."

"She isn't totally happy. Her eyes don't even shine, her mouth is terrible, her smile isn't even natural. You can see that you haven't made much effort to make her look minimally happy."

"Why does it take so much for you to accept that she really is happy by my side? That she can't stop smiling? That she has been in paradise with me? That there is no one who loves her like I do and that I am the driving force of her life, that without me... without me she'd be stretched out, dying of cold, on some motorway."

"Ana, my love, I know that that guy's voice scares you. Don't listen to him! Pretend you can't hear him! He always gets angry when he's ignored."

"She doesn't have to ignore me. Very soon she'll realise that she wants me, the brave, vigorous, macho who knows how to satisfy her, who would finally make her scream with pleasure... I can already hear her moaning, calling out my name, demanding that I sink my prick up to my balls in her to satisfy that appetite."

"Don't listen to him darling! Please don't listen to his voice... he can't get close to you and offer you all the love that I have to give you. He only wants to hurt you. He'll pretend that he is making love to you, but it's not true. He wants to turn you against me, but nothing he says is true, don't pay attention to him."

"Of course not, I won't turn Ana against you... she'll realise what a loser you are."

"Do you think she'll get goose bumps on her skin if I touch her nipples? It doesn't really matter if her flesh has already lost its feeling, her pussy still is open... maybe I'll give it to her from behind."

"Ana, don't listen to him, he won't touch your breasts, he won't be able to hold your hand... I'll cover your breasts with feathers, that'll make him stop looking at you with desire."

"I know that glue will stick to your skin and that I won't be able to remove them, but be calm, my love, the feathers will look beautiful. You'll look very beautiful!"

"Do you really think that covering her breasts with feathers will keep me away from her? Nothing can stop me. She's already in my sights. Nothing escapes the predator. She'll be my dinner. I'll fuck her, full stop. There'll be no more discussion."

"I won't let you take her... you can't take her away from me, you can't take her anywhere."

"I don't want to take her away. I can fuck her right here in Mama's room. I don't have a problem with the place."

"Eight feathers, honey, I'm almost done..."

"You can also fuck her here as well... Cheer up! I was only joking about the tiny prick... If your prick can give pleasure to hens with a hole the size of an egg, you can reach paradise with Ana and her smaller hole!"

# SHE ISN'T TOTALLY HAPPY. HER EYES DON'T EVEN SHINE, HER MOUTH IS TERRIBLE, HER SMILE ISN'T EVEN NATURAL.

-“Fifteen feathers...”

-“Come on, take it off, take off your pants and shake it a little...”

-“Seventeen...”

-“Don't worry, Bertica doesn't have to know anything! She's safe in her henhouse! This will be our secret! Just the three of us will know! And tomorrow when you wake up you can go back to the henhouse!”

-“Twenty one...”

-“It's a total crime that you're hiding those two melons and cover her two nipples, they look exquisitely dark... how I love women with black breasts!”

-“Twenty-five...”

-“Anita, you look very beautiful, but I think something is missing...”

-“Twenty-eight...”

-“She's missing the mo...”

-“Thirty. Now she's covered. She can feel the feathers against her skin all day. I'll always see her smile.”

-“A great mole on the left cheek...”

-“A mole?”

-“Of course. I need you to colour in the mole on her left cheek to make her more beautiful.”

-“What mole are you talking about?”

-“Mama's.”

-“Ana has nothing to do with Mama, I already told you.”

-“But you can fantasise that you are with Mama. Don't you think it's an entertaining idea?”

-“Don't compare her... Mama is too much of a woman to look like Ana.”

-“You are right, you can't compare them, but we can pretend she's Mama... Look at her black hair, just like Mama's, all tied-up, just like she used to do it. She's wearing her favourite skirt, the one that she never took off. Mum always said that she loved red... Ana has the same dark, almost black nipples... Before you covered them, you could see little balls that give texture to the aureoles, a nice detail, I like to cover them with my tongue and let them go wild in my mouth... The only thing missing is the mole on her face and we'll have an imitation of Mama, not as beautiful as the original, but still penetrable.”

-“I won't touch her face...”

-“Don't worry, I'll do it...”

...

-“Look at that dot, it's just the same as Mama's! It would be terrible if Ana saw her face all painted up.”

-“She looks...”

-“Say it!”

-“She looks beautiful.”

-“I know. It's the most perfect imitation of Mama. I haven't seen Mama in years... But look, there you have her, all to yourself!”

-“She's beautiful.”

-“Don't try to hide it, you're getting hard...”

-“Of course not.”

-“You can't cover yourself, I think your skin will tear.”

I KNOW. IT'S THE  
MOST PERFECT  
IMITATION OF  
MAMA. I HAVEN'T

SEEN MAMA IN  
YEARS... BUT  
LOOK, THERE YOU  
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YOURSELF!



-“No, I already told you, no!”

-“Your pants are getting in the way of your desire... take it out! Nobody has to find out...”

-“She’s so beautiful I can’t stop looking at her body...”

-“I know, I know she’s beautiful and she’s all for us. Come on, get off your pants, don’t be afraid.”

-“I can’t... I can’t do it, it’s Mama...”

-“Of course not. It’s a replica. It’s Ana, a beautiful woman who loves you and wants you... She only wants your warmth... She has been here for a long time. She is dying of cold! Give her warmth! Come on! Don’t be selfish!”

-“Her body is covered. She can’t feel cold anymore.”

-“She’s still cold. It’s her fourth day at home. Her skin is already frozen and rigid. Neither the feathers nor the blankets will be able to replace the heat of our hands when we touch her. It has been a long time since she’s been truly touched... Let’s not leave her gagging for it! We can give her everything she needs. Don’t be selfish!”

-“Does she need caresses?”

-“Yes. Like Mama, she needs a man who really warms her at night and who fucks her with passion... Don’t you remember when Mama got all hysterical and cried all the time? Don’t you remember that Papa always ignored her and only fucked her when he needed to? Don’t you remember that he would put a talc on his body and throw her out of bed and ask her to get him some food? Have you forgotten?

“Papa’s carelessness was the trigger for our mother’s unhappiness...”

“Don’t make Ana suffer. I know that she fell asleep with the desire to be loved.”

-“For a moment, I forgot Mama’s cry.”

-“You know it was Papa who made her suffer. After that pancreatic cancer killed him, Mama had no choice but to continue, condemned in her unhappiness. Every day she regretted Papa’s contempt. She always wanted to be desired... but she never got his attention.

## NOW SHE’S COVERED. SHE CAN FEEL THE FEATHERS AGAINST HER SKIN ALL DAY. I’LL ALWAYS SEE HER SMILE.”

“Do not condemn Ana, she does not deserve to be unhappy, let’s go... Touch her!

“Ana has been lying here for so long that she has surely forgotten what a caress is...”

-“She’s forgotten...”

“I can approach her body gently and see how she reacts to my presence...”

-“Of course, touch her slowly...”

“Don’t be afraid, lift up her skirt, explore everything she has.”

-“I can’t...”

-“Of course you can, push the skirt up just a bit... Just rub it a little... A little will be fine.”

-“Only a little. Just so she can feel that we’re here.

“So that she does not believe that we will make her unhappy, so that she realises that I only want to see the happiness reflected in her face.”

-“Of course, I also want to see her happy, so touch her.”

-“She has a beautiful mound... her hair is curly and thick.

# IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE SHE'S BEEN TRULY TOUCHED... LET'S NOT LEAVE HER GAGGING FOR IT! WE CAN GIVE HER EVERYTHING SHE NEEDS. DON'T BE SELFISH!"

"Rub it, looking at it isn't enough."

"I'm afraid to lose myself in the curls of her hair."

"Don't fear it!" Your treasure is in all that hair, go find it!"

"It's silky... if I touch it deeply I can find a small point. Bertica's body is not as perfect, nor does it have as many details as this..."

"Of course not, Ana's body is perfect."

"And that point is a mine, now you must dig. Rub it very smoothly in circles."

"It feels good to touch this button."

"Of course. Now, slowly insert your middle finger into her deepest hole. Do not be afraid to hurt her, she can't be hurt anymore."

"All of it?"

"Of course, stimulate her... make her want you."

"Every time my finger sinks into her hole, I feel my blood pumping more quickly... I think I'm going to explode."

"Don't worry, your penis is reacting to the smell coming from her crotch, it's staining your fingers. Take advantage her body is moist now... You can smell her desire from all her pores! Take your pants off! Don't be afraid, everything is safe here."

"Take my pants off?"

"Yes, there you go, unbuckle your belt."

...

"Very good. Now, unbutton those three buttons that squeeze your crotch. You're doing fine. Unbuckle them all. Take your legs out of those pants... Okay, take off your shorts and get into position, imagine it's Bertica or any other bird... you already know what the ramming is like."

"It's Mama... I can't compare her to hens."

"No, it's not Mama... Imagine the rubbing of that torso against your chest, it's a made-to-measure hen! Penetrate it, fuck it with the same passion as you do the hens! Let your penis party between those vaginal walls! You'll stop eating chicken shit. Take advantage of the worms that you will find in this pipe... let them squeeze you, tickle you, but don't fear it, don't take it out, keep penetrating deep, so that the bugs, you and I will be one."

"I know you can do it. I believe in you. Our shared body needs to be satisfied, don't fear it anymore. Take it! Come on!... Let's explode!"

"I can..."

"Of course, put her into position and let's ride!"

"I can get a little on top of her, maybe it will take her cold away."

"And the rigidity, do not forget how stiff her body is."

-“I can make her feel better and take away her shyness, she must be stiff with fear, to see us here on top of her.

-“Now, my love, don’t be afraid, don’t make any noise, see that it’s already late and the hens are sleeping peacefully in the henhouse. Don’t panic, we won’t hurt you. I know you are tense with panic, but don’t be afraid, I won’t do anything you don’t want me to do... Are you cold? God! Look at that skin and those hard feet, but don’t worry, I’ll warm you up.”

-“How good you are! You know she’s dying from the cold and you will do everything possible to make her feel comfortable. What a good man!”

-“Of course. She’s been here several days and I haven’t paid her enough attention. I have only thought about my pleasure in taking care of her and I have forgotten about her other needs.

“Forgive me, darling, I’ve neglected you a little. Let me clean you. So many bugs around you stealing your beauty. They don’t stop roaming around the house.”

-“Ignore those animals... they’re part of the landscape.”

-“I can’t... there are so many bugs crawling on Ana’s body I can’t concentrate. Move them! Get rid of them now!”

-“Ready, a little bit of insecticide never hurts.”

-“Now, my love, where were we?... don’t worry, it won’t hurt at all. I’ll just lie down a bit on you; like that, I will give you a little of the love you so badly need, like this... a little... little by little...”

-“Fuck her!”

-“Little by little... let me get into her body and take it with me to paradise.”

-“I feel how it goes in deeply...”

-“I will rock a little, just so that the friction will produce more heat. Just a little, my love.”

-“Touch her! Caress her! I can feel how our penis touches her ovaries... sink all of it in her, once and for all! I need to feel it”

-“I love having her body in my hands, I love feeling its plumage on my chest. I know she’s scared and that’s why she can’t answer my words of love, but her crotch and body are speaking. I know she

## I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT. I BELIEVE IN YOU. OUR SHARED BODY NEEDS TO BE SATISFIED, DON’T FEAR IT ANYMORE

loves me as much or even more than I love her. I know she can’t leave, because nobody loves her the way I do... Look love, we’ve found where you belong, here alone with me.”

-“Alone with us, Ana.”

-“Don’t panic, ignore the worms!”

-“Just feel how our penis navigates through your crotch. Feel how we explore your pussy full of flies.”

...

-“The rigidity of this cavity excites us more.”

-“It’s a delight to explore her cloaca.”

-“It is a great pleasure to have our body in her body.”

-“If she continues to be this silent, maybe we’ll sink it in from behind, we’ll both be happy: you would finally feel loved and we, in our joint body, can burst with desire.”

# SPINNING THINLY

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By Natalia Cárdenas Morales

When I started the editing process with Laura's text, my biggest concern was being too invasive. Although we had talked about the key points for intervening in the story, up until the very last moment I doubted the barrier between suggestions and actual imposition a part of the process that also comes from good communication.

Regarding this communication, sometimes it was difficult to find the right tone or the precise words, because in the construction of the story itself I could feel tied to the story's events, but I also had to get away from that feeling in terms of being able to look at it critically, as, since I needed help organise the pieces instead of merely gathering them together.

Additionally, each revision presented new challenges. Firstly, I had to deal with the technical resources that either helped or hindered the text, then I had to look at the essential moments of the story and, finally, I had to go over the details woven into a fabric that was constantly receiving new stitches.

On the other hand, I believe that the editing process can always find new ways to spin even thinner, because each change presents possibilities that may or may not help the course of the story, and this constant decision-taking, although it may be suggested by the editor, must go hand in hand with the writer's vision. Therefore, the choices that produce the final text come from the agreement of the best possibility for the text

ellipsis

2017

# THE LAST DAY



Laura Moreno

## 1.

And, well, my last day... It really wasn't an odd day in any real sense. There were no big parties or presidential elections or news of lost children or avalanches in poor countries or anything of the sort. Only the boring dawn of a normal January 29th when I had to get up early to set the course of the rest of my life, or something equally dramatic and momentous. Just the boring break of day on a morning when I turned off the alarm. I hit it with my fist, just wanting to go back to sleep. I grabbed a pillow over my head to return to my dream, filled with strange images running around in my mind like the trailer of some idiotic action flick and, despite being dead knackered, I couldn't fall back to deep sleep or even into a vegetative coma, as I would have liked. I just closed my eyes a little and then felt something buzzing nearby. I stretched out under the covers until, confused by the noise rumbling from my bedside table, I returned from that other dimension with heavy eyes, only wanting to stay, half-asleep or even, perhaps, unconscious, in my bed. I didn't use my alarm all that much and, that day, well, there it was drilling a hole into my head.

The dream that my alarm interrupted had become pretty repetitive. It always started the same: I was outside, in my back garden. I could see perfectly into the living room like there were no curtains. And I could see myself in front of my

# A YEAR BEFORE MY OWN LAST DAY, LAST JANUARY 29TH, JUAN ALSO HAD HIS

Dad and he's just screaming at me. However, in this particular dream, the room suddenly went dark. By the moonlight filtering through the windows, I could see my Dad, hands behind his back sitting at the table. His receding hairline emphasised his extended and wrinkled forehead. He looked worried and glanced to one side. He pulled a pack of fags out of his back pocket, put one in his mouth, feeling the first, rough, draft of smoke hitting his throat. He frowned and coughed a little. Once again everything went dark and only an intermittent, red flicker could be seen.

Although this was my usual dream, it was stranger that night, it was almost like scenes had been cut or something. But it made sense, I mean, that's what people do when they're nervous, they hide. I like strange dreams because I can sit down and write them down in my notebook. Writing's cool, it's almost mysterious; I like to read then try to write just like the authors. I've always liked that.

I thought my family cared about what I wanted or, at least, they understood. At the very least that Mum and Juan, my brother did. My Dad is another matter. You don't expect him to understand. He is the kind of 'gentleman' who won't let others talk in conversations,

but begins to say one thing, then another, then another, then another until he wears people out and they leave him sitting in his leather chair with the words still in his mouth right in front of his old-fashioned desk with the green-cloth inlay. But before walking out of his office, you lower your head, stare at the dirty carpet, and you hear whatever he says as he bellows it out. That's just how old Gregorio is, and how he acts all misunderstood.

A year before my own last day, last January 29th, Juan also had his. Everything that had happened up until that 29th — recognising him in the morgue, his funeral, his burial and the hours weighed down by silence following his death — were like nylon strings that tied everything in the house together, window to window, door to door. I was eighteen when he died, and I was supposed to plan out the next forty years of my life? Writing, my son, that's just a hobby! I didn't do well in Spanish at school at all, I really couldn't write very well, I made many spelling mistakes as well, and I never read what they set us in class. I wasn't really aware of my own abilities, but seeing as I really didn't have any other expectations it wasn't that much of a dream to give my life over to it or something like that. I'd spent a year since Juan's death arsing around doing nothing. Even so, I had to do something, so why not devote myself to writing? I might even improve over time. What about becoming a teacher, "Mister Padilla?" Teaching is just as honourable, and even more respectable, than merely being an occupationless writer!

Before January 29th, I hadn't thought about the hardships, the instability or the pity in the eyes of all those who saw me as a pathetic arsehole, just a poor slob of a kid who went around with his head in the clouds, writing stories that Juan laughed at believing them idiotic inventions from watching too much telly. Sometimes I miss Juan because he was nice, like that time we went to Dad's office when he had an important meeting with gringos, and he took the rap for the mess we had made. He could be sound at times.

Anyway, that night before that final alarm on January 29th, I had a fight with my Dad. It had got dark early and there was almost no one walking in the streets. I always assumed that was

because of the brothel that tried to pass itself off as a hostel; it used to steal the neighbourhood's breath every time a door opened. Everyone acted the idiot about what went on there. Loads of posh cars were speeding around, so I had to take care crossing to avoid being smashed into by some idiot in a posh people-carrier or the like in their quest for "company". This was actually pretty common. And the arseholes couldn't even get out of their vile people-carriers to see if the poor bastard they hit was dead or not.

But, anyway, I arrived home around five o'clock, I suppose. I'd spent all afternoon with a friend at her place and I was pretty happy, maybe even calm.

Gregorio is a big, heavy-set man, with massive bones and heavy muscles. He's not at all like Mum, who is rather thin and short. Both had lost weight since my brother's death and had dark circles under their eyes that made them look like drained boxers after a fight. That day, their blood seemed to boil up ready for them to finally fight back. Opening the door, her eyes flooded. Gritting her teeth, she tersely told me to go into the dining room. She didn't even say hello.

Gregorio was standing in front of the dining table where no one was actually eating. I could see the envelope, stuffed with the papers from the university, which he had been hiding for almost a month. Some carelessness must have betrayed me. The fact is I can't remember it all very well. At some point, my Dad screamed at me "Get out of my house, you arsehole." Mum shakenly pleaded "It's for your own good." Their rowing, my losing my patience, finally, my Dad's blow. It was by no means an epic assault, as I would have noticed that, but it still left me so shattered that I had to lock myself in my room and wait for the heat to go down so I could sleep. Gregorio always makes me look bad. He knows how to. What I never can get is if he does it on purpose because it's always a massive blow-up when he wants you to do something or you're not actually doing it. He's always baring his teeth, that's it.

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So, when I woke up the next morning, hearing that bloody alarm and wanting to sleep on, it came to my head that it was my last day, my final opportunity to flee or stay rooted in the quagmire of my house. I heard the alarm again at about ten in the morning, because, obviously, I'd fallen asleep without realizing it. When I rolled over, I saw my calendar, LAST DAY had been scored into it in lines that almost broke through the paper in the square for January 29th. Despite having turned off the alarm, the sound was still embedded between my ears.

## 2.

Juan once took me to an amusement park which had a maze with mirrors everywhere, the kind of mirror maze where you run to an exit and then crash into a mirror because it wasn't really an exit at all; it was just a reflection. Well, all that year after my brother's death I kept running into mirrors. Fuck that shit.

Going back to that morning, the truth is that I didn't even know how to make my bed. During that week, my mother hadn't been able to clean my room because she was so busy preparing for Juan's Mass for the Dead. After getting up, I grabbed the sheets and bundled them up together, put the clump on top of my headboard and sat down in the desk chair. Maybe I hadn't made that much of a difference. Just like today, the room was full of magazines, wrinkled shirts, rolled-up socks stacked on top of piles of clothes, knotted plastic bags filled with rubbish, not to mention dishes with food still on them. But, in the midst of the pigsty, something that was out of place: the manila envelope creased by Gregorio's hands, hands that take everything apart.

I took it from the desk where I had left it and thought of Mum. It still hurts me to remember her like that, her eyes full of tears, standing in the door hoping that we wouldn't come to blows, because I was almost as tall as my dad was then. It was the first time in her life that I had seen her that unhappy, she looked like a wounded animal. When I tried to confront Gregorio, when we were just getting into it, getting aggressive, she grabbed by arm and pulled me back. "Go to your room now and don't leave until your dad leaves," she said.

As I climbed the stairs I heard a rumble. I turned and I could see him closing his eyes, breathing like an animal, his veins about to explode. Mum was picking up the fragments of a plate that had shattered on the floor. Well, maybe it wasn't a plate... I'm not sure. The fact is I'd heard a thwack and ran away fearing that the next one was meant for me. I'm still a pretty tolerant lad, seriously. I'm even obedient, just like everyone else. But you don't constantly keep

asking teenagers all the time: "Why don't you do this, Miguel?" "Why don't you do that?" "I told you at the beginning of the year." "What is this pigsty?" "Stand up, Miguel." "Why don't you listen to me?" No. A lad should be allowed to run free, like the wind. At least, until he gets hungry... What do I know?

Anyway, going back to the 29th, the morning went by slowly. When I was near the window I saw Gregorio as he got into the car. He appeared even more imposing than the night before. His bad mood made his face strangely hard. At no time did he lift his eyes up to the window where I was watching him from. He is a practical man, always searching for ways to make everything faster and better quality, looking at the world as if it were his very own business. I watched him get into his Chevrolet and drive away.

When I went downstairs, I could see my mother standing in the kitchen with her back to me. She'd kept her black, shoulder-length hair in a ponytail at the nape of her neck since Juan's funeral. She usually completed the look by wearing the black heels that she'd hardly taken off since then, and that certainly still had traces of the soil from his grave. Tender, old Imelda. The kitchen was as immaculate as a church. There wasn't even a jar out of place. White light came through the window just above the dishwasher. She was wearing a similar-coloured jumper. It made it look like she was emerging from the light. I didn't dare interrupt her, I just made a noise standing in the door frame so she would realise that I was there. "It's getting late... Did you see where he left it for you?" she said without even looking at me.

After what had happened the previous night she couldn't find a less tense way of speaking to me. I remember her words because they were just weird. She said them with a fake tone, like when you want to appear like you're speaking respectfully, but really you just want to spit on the other person. It was as if nothing had happened the night before. She moved with such confidence that it made me seriously think that we were going to forget everything and move on. But when I answered that I had seen it and left it on my desk, she turned around and looked me straight in my eyes. I saw, once again, the swollen, red



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eyes of a fighter against the ropes, with a swollen and bloody nose, ready to end everything and throw in the towel. She continued to act like I'd had known her to all my life, always asking for a favour, even when giving orders. "Please cover the dishes with napkins when we sit down at the table to keep the insects off them." She hadn't made triangle-shaped cheese sandwiches in ages, because they were Juan's favourites, but now she decided to be nice to me again, and be a dedicated mother again.

She sat down in complete silence to have breakfast with me, as if nothing had happened. There wasn't anything else to talk about, nothing to listen to or protest. Nothing. She was going to do what Gregorio wanted – make me pay attention, do everything that was needed. I quickly ate my breakfast. As I was getting up with the excuse of taking the dishes to the kitchen, something I never usually did, she grabbed my arm. "You are grounded, Miguel. You are to come home as soon as you finish running your errands," she said as she pulled me towards her.

She always gave herself away when she tried to sound stern. This was why nobody in the house ever paid attention to her.

From the moment you are born, you are controlled by your mother. She choose clothes for you, forces you to go with her on visits to friends, forbids you from doing what you like, from eating what you like and even saying what you think. The truth is that at fifteen I got tired and bought my first heavy metal shirt. Emblazoned with elongated Gothic script, blood streaming from the capital letters. I never even listened to metal, but it pissed Mum off to see me in it. That's why I kept it. That day I took it out from the bottom of the laundry basket. Even after three years, I still had it. I put it on, sticking out my chest like a man. I took out the most worn pants I had and put them on without a belt. I then put on my Converse. They were dirty and black. I'd let my hair grow long just because I thought it was cool, and so I became a vague kind of metalhead... a poor one at that, but a metalhead at last.

As I was about to leave, I found her standing in front of the door with a blue shirt, dark trousers and a tie hanging from her forearm.

“You do have the envelope, right? It was just lying there! As if I wouldn’t tell your Dad?”

The same old nagging sermon. I moved forward, taking advantage of the fact that she had moved close to me to turn the knob and run out the front door. The stained glass shook when I slammed the door.

It had been raining a lot, but there are days and days. That day, the sun shone brightly in the centre of the sky. When I opened the door, I felt a hot stench, floating in the air. It looked like water glimmering in the distance. It was the kind of day that leaves you exhausted. I began to feel sweat at my temples, under my long hair. And then, I felt her behind me like a ghost.

“Miguel! Come here! Miguel!”

I screamed at her for the first time ever. I told her to stop pissing me off before I ran away.

Well, you couldn’t even think under that day’s tremendous sun. It was weird, but I felt the sound of the heat. It was like a stale hum at noon. It was dry, trembling, trapped in my throat. And like the stupid asshole that I still am, I didn’t have anything refreshing to drink, not even a sup of water. I was about an hour and a half from the university where I had to take the registration papers, but after ten minutes of walking I was sweating like a pig, a stabbing pain was draining my stomach juices and the soles of my feet throbbed. My stomach hurt and I wasn’t in the mood to do anything. I walked to bus stop slowly so as to not make the pain worse, to get the bus I needed to take to get where I had to go. I wanted to run and hide in some field on the outskirts of the city, in a pasture. I would live on the fruits that I would steal from crops and stores, but only when I was very hungry of

## **SHE ALWAYS GAVE HERSELF AWAY WHEN SHE TRIED TO SOUND STERN. THIS WAS WHY NOBODY IN THE HOUSE EVER PAID ATTENTION TO HER.**

course. And I would continue to wander, walking alone, accompanied by the clouds, right above me, clouds that change colour every minute, with an infinite void above me. And I would read a lot, I would beg for books in the villages, or wherever. I would have to carry a notebook to write down anything I might think of.

That’s why, just like when I didn’t get up early, I let several buses pass me by as I got to the bus stop. I could have run, but I used a traffic light that was far away, and I let the light change several times before using the pedestrian crossing. Every minute I wasted was mine. Only mine, it wasn’t useful to anyone else other than me. Even if it was the last day deadline to hand those papers in, it was still my time... And it’s always good to be a good citizen. Juan didn’t cross the road where it was supposed to be safe and it didn’t go so well for him. You can also be a rebel when you comply with norms.

### 3.

Although I really didn't know how much time it'd take me to get to college, it was obvious that I wasn't going to kill myself running anywhere. I called Laura when I was still sitting on the aluminium bench at the bus stop. We agreed to meet up at her place. I heard her laughter on the phone and I could almost visualise how her curls bounced and fell onto her back and shoulders, covering her forehead, her eyes, and how she lifted it with one hand and looked at me. She liked to laugh a lot. In fact, I only ever saw her laugh. She laughed all the time over anything. Man! It's amazing when people are happy; you can get up to so much when you have a happy accomplice.

Just when I was setting out for Laura's, the sky suddenly darkened. It's normal here. I didn't have a bloody umbrella in spite of all the thought I had put into everything I put in that stupid bloody bag that I had pulled out of my wardrobe. I was going to get wet. All I could do was frown and close my eyes, while the raindrops fell on my eyelids. It rained the day we buried Juan as well. Few people even cried or blubbered. We felt the rain drops on our faces, our hands were cold, our noses were dripping, the weather made it appear that no one was even breathing. There was total silence. A dead man's image is a strange one, because it's just his shell that's lying there, because he's no longer there. It is difficult to get your head around that idea when you remember how he laughed, screamed, ran, played... Especially Juan, who was always appeared electrified as if possessed by a spirit that simply couldn't leave him alone. The sheer amount he could get done in a single day was amazing. He always was up to something, whether it was working, reading, meeting people, moving. I remember that even when I approached him to look at him, I didn't feel anything. Mum hugged me and my shoulders filled with water.

It started to rain and, as I didn't have an umbrella, I had to wait under the awning of a cafeteria for the downpour to pass. I dragged myself over to the corner where there was an abandoned chair far from the tables. There are many things that I can't remember

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very well. One of them is why I began to think what I thought at that moment. I had these strange visions that sometimes crossed over into reality. In front of me was a random guy, a complete stranger. He appeared to be Juan's age. All of us there were soaking. We'd all been hit when a car sped through the puddle in front of the shop. Even the stranger. While I waiting for it to stop raining I imagined him bathed in blood, even if he had no visible wound. I pictured him still

and covered in blood. It was all very casual. The light made him look really pale. If he had been all bloody, it would have been very... funny. Laura called me and I got distracted by the call. When I tried to focus on the guy again, he had disappeared without ever turning around. I didn't have to, but I guess I needed to see it. I wanted to hide my face when I started laughing as I had to wipe my eyes with my sleeve; my tears fell and my throat burned.

Laura picked me up a few minutes later under a transparent umbrella. When we got to her home, I couldn't take my eyes off her while she looked in her pockets for her keys to open the door. She knew I liked to pull the hairs that loosened out of her yellow plait. She was laughing so hard she couldn't find them.

Once inside, I looked for the corner of the window where a breeze came in. Laura's house had many places where it was easy to find cracks and clutter, it was part of the charm of her crazy house. Despite it all, it was pretty cosy. I couldn't go there as much as I wanted because Laura's mother didn't agree with religious classes in schools. She thought that they "didn't allow free thought and the development of spiritual autonomy." My Dad thought that her daughter needed them, especially as "she didn't have a father at home to make sure that she was on the straight and narrow." My Dad is one of those who offer advice to people who really don't want it.

So, for that reason, we ended up meeting up alone. We'd lie on the grass in the park near the school in the afternoons. Every time we went to her house, she insisted that we go the long way to check out a homeless guy who lived nearby. She would stare at him and mock my fear that we might be mugged, saying that my family should have loosened their hold on me. I only ever smiled with her, at her mockery. She was my only friend and was a little crazy. It wasn't that I was bad with girls, but they were all pretty stupid, and she wasn't. It's that even the silence with Laura was different. When her mother wasn't there, we'd sit down to watch a movie or to follow the raindrops on the window pane until they got lost on their way to drain on the hinges of her windows. We kept each other company. I remember one day when it rained a

lot, I hugged her as the electricity was cut. And even when the light came back on, we just stayed there, holding each other. That's why she was my friend.

When I felt her cold hand on mine I realized that she had sat very uncomfortably close to me on the sofa, as if she wanted to sit on my lap. She took my hands and even placed my arm around her shoulder. She asked me what was in my envelope as she'd seen it when I opened my bag to take my mobile phone out. It didn't matter. I told her I was going to do my Granny a favour in the hospital. She was surprised. I supposed she liked me being nice to Granny. I asked her if she had already decided what to do with the rest of her life, as far as I knew it'd never been decided. Confused, her face turned red and her eyes dropped. I thought she looked really pretty when she did that, poor thing. She told me she wanted to travel, I really don't remember where to, as well as many other things. It is strange how people have this ability to think about many things, to imagine themselves doing crazy things and dream that they can do everything they have ever wanted to in life.

I sat straight up and grabbed her hands while she spoke. I felt inspired and asked her to run away with me, to live like the characters in a film, to hitchhike out of the city, to take temporary jobs that wouldn't stretch us much, and live on the road... We'd see the country, the continent, if she only wanted to. But we'd had to leave right then.

She kissed me on the mouth and almost ran out of the room, like a pony in a meadow, or the like. It was an acceptance, an agreement between us. We were going to escape. I just had to wait a little longer.

She came back after a few minutes. It was pretty clear what she was looking for. She had changed her clothes and put on a short skirt, lipstick and perfume. She sat next to me, crossed her legs and took my hands. I didn't know what to do. Of course, I liked it, but I stiffly remained in the chair. She started asking me things and making jokes, but I didn't listen to what she said. I don't know, I wasn't in the mood. I really don't think it's necessary to go all that

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far to get to know someone; friendship was more important and we really couldn't waste time, we had to plan our escape.

I asked her to go for a walk, for fresh air, to plan some details before our departure. When she didn't answer me with her usual everlasting, bright smile and her almost-closed eyes. Her silence froze my hands. I couldn't add anything before everything changed. And, right there, right while I was standing by the door thinking of something to calm her down, I felt my mobile phone vibrate. I didn't answer it obviously. It was Gregorio, who surely wanted to scream at me once again, just like he had during our fight the night before, and every other day of my life for as long as I can remember.

I would have liked to stay at Laura's house until later that night, until we had everything ready to go but she had to fuck things up by talking to that bloody moron. Maybe she didn't call him and he only arrived on spec. I don't know how or why he ended up at her place that afternoon, but he was there when we left. I recognised him instantly, he was her neighbour Ivan who lived in front of her place.

He grabbed her by the waist, hugged her tightly, and had the nerve to stare at me when he held out his hand. He was the kind of man you use a tight handshake with to get your point across.

She didn't look up. She fidgeted while we were waiting. She removed stones from the surface of road with the tip of her shoe. Ivan and I both started talking at the same time. He fell silent and, when I thought he'd let me speak, we both started speaking at the same time again. We must have made a terrible noise. Laura reacted and started towards the house. As we both tried to enter by the front door, we both hit our arms against the door frame. I beat him by a few seconds and sat in the middle of the only sofa in the room, while he looked around for a stool to sit on.

The smell of pot got into my nose every time I tried to speak to him. She was still pretty laidback, happy, laughing. She had mentioned Ivan to me many times, but she was low on brains and always forgot to tell me the most important details about her friends, if they smoked weed a lot or if they invited themselves

around to other people's homes. Talking to Laura was like collecting bits and pieces from a million past conversations.

Actually, the worst part was that she looked at him and they continued to laugh, staring at each other. I didn't know what to do. I understood her like nobody else, and if she behaved so confidently with someone, I knew it meant something had happened between them. No one could get it out of my head that she and that idiot had had something. For over an hour they talked about their futures and I kept waiting for Laura to boast about ours, but she kept it to herself all that time. What a couple of bloody morons.

He was that idiot who never gets over that one year of school when he was the best at everything — his marks, sports or whatever activity was highlighted by his inane tastes, say he liked reading and believed that he could write and actually be good at it or that he was going to pull some bird who'd love him — those whose lives are over when they finish school as they've no motivation to do anything and cling to their pathetic dreams or useless efforts, to questions of what might have been, without seeing that they'll simply never be happy because they have nowhere where they can even fall off their perch. We all need something to cling to, but it has to be real and give you money, it can't be a stupid teenager's bloody dream.

The guy looked very relaxed, his black shirt had a hole at the neck and he was wearing very wide pants with old and broken trainers. His looked fucking ridiculous. Everything was black, even his hair. I decided to stay, although it was already three in the afternoon and I only had three hours to hand the papers in, because she'd promised to run away with me. It had to happen as soon as we got rid of her fucking moron of a mate. I took Laura's hand and linked her fingers with mine. I'm sure if you ask her does she remember that, she'll say no. She was very busy thinking about the beer she'd like to have with her mate Ivan, even if it meant going out in the rain to buy it.

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He was a stupid fuckwit. I still had to know why they were so close. When I asked the moron, he started with the dirty talk, the crap he got up to with his mates, clearly to provoke me into giving him about details my exploits with my only friend. Obviously, I invented a shag of biblical dimensions... I didn't continue as Laura appeared in the corridor, closing her umbrella, and smiling at us holding a bag in her hands. The moron acted all innocent and they kept talking. When I could, I grabbed her hand. Jealous people piss me off. I could puke on them. I'm not sure, but I suppose I'm probably one myself.

At times, I added to their conversation. I told them that I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to read a lot and that's pretty much it. I'd work out what I wanted to do with my life later on, but that I wanted to dedicate myself to writing and become famous. I felt free to tell everything to that pair of moronic dreamers. Laura became happy again. We saw ourselves touring Machu Picchu and the Pampas, but Ivan started laughing after I finished telling them about my plans. And he kept laughing for an hour. There was no reason for him to laugh, it really wasn't that funny. I got bored as our conversation didn't go anywhere interesting.

Even if I didn't look at my mobile phone, I knew Gregorio had phoned me at least six times.

His giggle was grating. Then I heard him mention my name and compare me to Moe Szyslak. I responded by telling him that he was a bullshitting idiot who'd surely be a barely-employed loser for the rest of his life. Laura then kicked me out of her house; mind you, he didn't hold back either. I'd always thought that having each other as mates would be enough. She was my only mate. That was it and I thought she didn't need anyone else as well. I could have broken Ivan's jaw for being a moron who thought he was so fucking impressive. I could have called Laura out on her bad taste, and told her she was a moron for choosing him over me, but I didn't. I got up and left. It was still raining and even if I didn't feel like it, I had to. I had to hand in the fucking papers. I was fucked at that moment as I had no other mates to hang out with.

## 4.

I once told Juan that I didn't want to go to university because it meant changing one jail cell for another. I never did well in school, and it wasn't because I'm dense. Honestly, I'm not. I just wanted to be free for a while, to waste my time on what I like without stressing. Ever since the funeral, since the day I saw him and I couldn't cry, I get dizzy when I think about it. That day the silence began. Then the rules emerged from what had been previously suggestions... my time of arrival and what I could eat, how I should dress, what I should do in each situation, all ordered by Gregorio, the boss of my whole life. But that afternoon with Laura and Ivan I'd drowned just the same. It was another January 29th that kept repeating itself over and over again. After Laura kicked me out of her house, I was left alone with that bloody envelope.

The intense sun that day was suffocating, definitely the earth was doomed to end. The heat that made the asphalt shimmer in the distance. I could only drag my feet, blow into the collar of my shirt and wait for rain or for a bus. I took the envelope out of my bag to throw it in the next bin that I saw. Laura was a moron, she had kicked me out and clearly preferring the pervert who must have fantasised about groping her even when they talked. And all because of that stupid envelope that I had to deliver to be able to enrol in the degree programme that my dad wanted me to do at the university he had chosen for me to have the life he had lived. Juan had followed Dad's path because they had shared everything. They shared the same tastes in food, clothes, the very same beliefs and principles. It even seemed that Mum thought they were both her husbands. She looked after them with the same expression but she didn't even look at me when she did stuff for me. I even thought they looked equally knackered when they'd sit in that dark room, smoking cigarettes secretly, with the same distrustful expression every time they spoke to someone, the same condescending pat on my back, the same cruel smile, the same strict routine from morning to night

# I SLID ONTO THE PAVEMENT AND STARTED TO CRY AND TO HICCUP LIKE CRAZY. I WAS FULL OF SNOT.

all planned according to some stupid belief about how business time works; the same irreverence when they talked about the morons who listen to a sixteen-year-old boy but not to them. They even had the same need to give advice to people who don't ask for it. They were the same person, divided into two bodies. It is obvious what happens when someone dies and leaves behind a useless moron to fill their place. Maybe if it had been me that night and not him I'd have been a martyr, a miraculous child-angel or, rather, a piece of shit mentioned on the news.



I found a rubbish bin outside a closed shop, but I couldn't toss the crumpled envelope in my hand. I stared at the silver basket in front of me and couldn't move. I could not move! I was stuck in the middle of the street and I wasn't able to move! Feeling the smoke in my nose, I was bumped by passers-by. People were pushing and insulting me. The sweat slid down my back. I just stood there in front of the light post and I didn't move. My mobile phone kept vibrating in my other hand. Seriously, Gregorio wouldn't give up. He had to take care of the only child he had left, I guess. I don't know. That's the way it is, but it really fucks me up.

I slid onto the pavement and started to cry and to hiccup like crazy. I was full of snot. I felt that everyone was staring at me sitting there on that pavement crying like a baby. I kept on hiccupping and wiping my face with the sleeve of the jacket. Somehow, I was getting the envelope wet. A bracelet salesman, dressed up like Bob Marley, saw me and came over. He sat next to me on the ground and tried to comfort me. It was very sad, you could see his ribs and he smelled manky. He told me not to cry so much, that there'd were always be better days. Poor crazy bastard. I then got spooked and left, positive he wanted to sell me all his bracelets.

I kept walking and hiccupping. I had already got used to the mobile phone's vibration, but I decided to answer the call. He acted the victim and wouldn't shut up. He kept on just speaking and speaking. Everything was for my own good, that I should try to be successful to help my mother feel less worried. She'd suffered a lot already and only wanted me to be happy, the literary thing would never work out, I should only look at last year's marks. In other words, I shouldn't be stubborn, after all, who needed a life of dreams, fighting against reality when it was better to accept things as they really were.

When I spoke with Gregorio, it was like that Tom Cruise flick, when Captain Jessep is on trial and they're screaming and Jessep says: "You can't handle the truth!" And all that proud sailor bollocks about his very honourable work ends with "I would rather that you just said "thank you" and went on your way. Otherwise, I suggest

you pick up a weapon and stand at your post." Fucking tyrants like Jessep and Gregorio are like that, they are just unfair bastards in their own petty category.

There was already a role for me to act and I just needed to get into character, even if it wasn't completely right for me, just like the watch I wore that day, it'd once belonged to my brother – he'd inherited it from Gregorio. I guess it weighed on Juan like it did me every day... at least until that day when he was knocked over and only his right arm remained intact.

"You haven't let us see you stumble even once, Miguel," said my mother during breakfast that 29th, the deadline to hand in the papers.

By then, she'd stopped going into the dining room in the dark, waiting for Juan or my father to arrive. They never both arrived at the same time. I hadn't. The night of the funeral, Gregorio sat down in the dining room as if he was going to smoke, but this time he dropped his head in his hands and shrank into the chair. For the first time, I saw him crushed by the weight on his back. His son was dead. How could he not mourn? And a year later here he was harassing me on the phone to find out if I had obeyed his order or not. I suppose that, again, he felt like he was being crushed, like when you suffocate with something that is actually inside your chest it burns everything inside out. After the telephone disaster, after not being able to throw the envelope in the bin, after that crazy homeless bloke who offered me his patience for my generosity, I got on the bus and fell asleep as soon as I sat down. It was a miracle that I woke up at the bus stop at 19th and 30th, just before the detour. I went into an old cafe to hang out for a while. It had taken me over two hours or more to get from the fight with Laura to that café, and all the while my Dad kept calling me. It was already getting pretty late.

The steam in the café hung around the tables. It visibly moved every time the door was opened. I walked in there in an exhausted stupor, my mobile phone still vibrating in my pocket.

# FOR THE FIRST TIME, I SAW HIM CRUSHED BY THE WEIGHT ON HIS BACK. HIS SON WAS DEAD. HOW COULD HE NOT MOURN?

If I answered him, he would shout at me; if I didn't, he would still yell at me, only later, so why bother? There was no need to hear even more of his (or Mum's) screaming, or anyone else's for that matter. Even so my Imelda couldn't shout at me anymore. She was always doing things to distract herself. If she wasn't doing household chores, she looked for things to keep herself busy and tire her out: crafts, cooking, lots of television. Mum only had one friend in the neighbourhood. They'd often meet up and they'd even cooked together. But the friend left. She was the one who got her to write in that magazine for fortyish women, as Juan put it. It was a job she could do from home, and that's why Gregorio gave her no hassle for it. And then that thing with my brother happened. Maybe I didn't get over it because it was hard. I was someone else then and I needed my own space. It was different with my brother, he listened though he never really paid attention. He pretended to do so while combing his hair in the mirror next to the front door or while he adjusted his shirt and put his cigarettes in his pocket, but at least he tried.

I concentrated on the TV in the café. They were showing a programme on doctors who were walked and talking in corridors of Gringo hospitals. I remembered when they took me to the A&E where they treated Juan on the night of the accident. It was chaotic. Everyone cried, aunts, uncles, cousins... They all hugged each other. I was more frightened by everyone's reactions than by the bloody sheets that covered his face. The hospital was very clean, but the floor under the stretcher was cluttered with bloody refuse. My dad hadn't allowed them to take Juan down to the morgue yet because he didn't believe it was him. He was convinced it was someone else. Juan couldn't be that half-disfigured body who hadn't survived the fifteen-minute journey there in an ambulance. I could hardly recognise him like either, that's why I had my doubts. Obviously, it was Juan. There was the tattoo he'd had done on his right arm, hidden next to his armpit. But he kept saying that it wasn't his son. Hospital series are atrocious. They never show what happens to the people in the waiting rooms.

So there I was, determined to escape. I had, at the most, an hour to either take the papers or run away. I ran out of the café, dodging students and jumping over the sewers to get to the bus stop. In every road in Bogota there's always the same chaos. Everyone else walked around slowly and I didn't know if it was just me who was anxious, or if anything else was going on. I was a sweaty mess. I sat down to wait, watching the office workers leave for their bus stops. I was never going to make it to that fucking university. Who puts a building on a hill?!? I got on the first bus that came by. It was very small, but as I was fifteen blocks from the university, I had to put up with it. The passengers on foot had to stoop to let other people off. They had to push through everybody's complaints and mutual elbowing. It was rush hour. Hanging from the door on the last day. That's fucking life. Because of that bloody traffic jam, I really thought I wasn't going to make it in time to hand the papers in. The potholes on Nineteenth Street would make your kidneys jump. The bus, with its wet-dog smell, wobbled about from one side to side, its windows were all fogged up. People fell around on top of each other. The sound of massive car horns was deafening. It all felt very removed from my father's Captiva. I was used to its leather chairs and heating, not to the horrible chaos that threw people about as they moved from one place to another. Finally, the afternoon cooled down somewhat at last.

I felt bad again. A stabbing pain in my stomach began to stir in my guts. I wasn't going to make it to the university with the papers. How could I face old Imelda that night if I arrived with the envelope intact? It made me want to throw myself off a bridge, but with the traffic jam, I figured it wouldn't actually kill me. At most, all I'd get would be a broken leg. It was too late. The traffic didn't let up and the rain, coming through a leaky skylight on the bus, soaked my back. My head throbbed from it all — the heat of the closed, fogged-up windows, the yellowish light, loud headphones, the sleeping office workers who were knackered to their very suits and heels. I got off and looked for another bus to return home.

While I was changing lanes, in the middle of the cars, it started to rain. It cooled my head somewhat. I had the impression that everyone was watching me. I changed lanes and got on another more comfortable bus. I saw that the road that side was almost empty. The traffic sped along, splashing the pavements with black water, but our bus's motor was quiet, broken and couldn't even move, just like in that country blues song *Feel like a broke down engine, Momma, I ain't got no drivin' Wheel* that I heard on the first day, at home, when we talked about my going to college.

They looked at me as if I were crazy when I got back on the bus. There wasn't much time left in reality and I knew it because my mobile phone kept on vibrating in my pocket. Gregorio was calling again. I just stared out the window. The traffic was starting to move, I was getting closer and the minutes were falling apart on my wrist. I remember that the person sitting behind me started screaming for a phone and, as my mobile phone was still ringing, I answered the call from my Dad. It was one of the few times in my life that I felt happy about people shouting near me. The guy at the back turned red, opened his eyes, and Gregorio was like a monotonous singsong. When he got tired of fighting and started cursing everyone, I hung up.

At five forty I arrived at the main door of the university. It was a big, old, plain building with yellow walls. At the end of a long corridor there was a space with many windows. All had a grey shutter that left a tiny space where a white light filtered out, the light of that other world. It was rather lonely. The security guard gave me approximate instructions on how to get to the admission offices and told me to run. I did. I moved quickly, my breath burning in my chest, crying a little, looking everywhere, looking for the letters that would indicate where to take what was weighing me down in the bag. I would hand it over as if I were throwing a bomb, or as if I myself were an ISIS soldier. When I finally found the office, a crowd in the waiting room was checking their positions in the queue. They reviewed the list of documents: an

# EVERYTHING WAS SILENT AGAIN, EXCEPT FOR THE OFFICIOUS SOUND OF STAMPING, UNDER A LIGHT THAT REMINDED ME OF HOSPITALS.

authenticated (and signed) copy of my secondary school diploma; a certificate of last year's grades, a letter of recommendation from my secondary school; a certificate with a record of the interview; a duly-completed registration form; a registration receipt; and my ICFES exam certificate.

The secretaries who checked the envelopes didn't pay any attention to anything that happened in the queue of stressed people. I collapsed in a chair. It was the moment and, at least, I was already there. Don't quite get this... Everything was silent again, except for the officious sound of stamping, under a light that reminded me of hospitals. There was a desk but you could only see its legs, it was that full of papers, manila envelopes, sewing machines, ball-point pens, inkwells, all kinds of folders. A fat girl with red hair hid behind all that chaos. My turn was 107, but they were at 100, so it wasn't so bad after all. When Juan was taken to register on the very first day of the call, my parents went with him. They were very excited. But, obviously, it was different that day, nobody was going to celebrate my arrival in that paralysed waiting room. I knew that, at least, they would feel more relieved. When it was my turn, my stomach emptied, but I managed to hand over the envelope. I was shaking. The fat girl looked at me, but said nothing. She just mockingly looked at me. That's how they all are, especially if they are older, ugly, and have to work to keep themselves. Finally, she picked up my documents and, after checking everything with a frown, told me that a photocopy was missing, but not to worry, she'd kindly allow me to get one made, while she dealt with someone else.

When I went out to get the photocopy, it was already very, very dark and the place was full of dodgy-looking people. I had to walk two blocks. When I was going to cross to over second avenue, I heard the screech of brakes, and a driver popped his head out the window to scream insults at me. I thought the light was further away, I didn't realise it was beside me. The tiredness made me a little dizzy, but it wasn't that bad. The noise was horrible as it was only inches from me. My family had already lived through something like that, it was only natural and even twisted that it could happen to another one of us. The light that dazzles, the roar of that animal so close to the skin, the wind that blasts and stops to look. I don't know how to explain it, maybe it doesn't even make sense.

## 5.

It always happens that you don't find what you need when you're looking for it. I couldn't get the bloody photocopy that fat girl needed. How was I going to have the strength to keep walking? No one had energy at that time of day. Nothing was going my way, not even the guy who accelerated after telling me to fuck off, or even the fat girl who passed out sheets, and put stamps on documents and stapled folders, and signed things without looking at them and looked for names and made lists and screwed people over the smallest and most useless details, such as the photocopy of the registration receipt.

It was ten minutes to six and no one was in the corridors, the doors on either side were closed, the rooftops empty and the rooms were silent, a silence that was interrupted only by the drops that fell from the windows. The downpour had been very powerful. It had left an air that was claustrophobic, like the previous night. I ran back to the desk where I had to bend over to talk to a girl who probably didn't give a damn what I was going to do. They didn't care, they just needed me to sign an agreement and there I was enrolled in the university.

I wasn't Juan. He would have gotten up early, would have left everything in order, cooked a breakfast for everyone, washed everyone's clothes, he'd even have watched the news before running his errands and be the first in the queue. He was always first. Juan ran to his work, he arrived at night, he acted the role of a perfect, dedicated son, and then he'd vanish, spending several hours lost until he returned and sat in the living room to smoke as he had surely learned from my father who, surely because of age, didn't take part in such adventures anymore. He melted into the walls in the darkness, into the cracks of the wood beneath our feet. Sometimes I saw him arrive all happy and smiling and singing, with bright eyes and he'd stay like that all night, bouncing and blowing smoke with cigarettes in the middle

of the dining room. Other times he hardly walked, rather he'd drag his feet without opening his eyes. And whenever he arrived after all that lost time, the dining room table was impregnated with an odour that sometimes was like flowers, sometimes like perfume, cigarettes or something rotten... I don't know what. They were hours we never knew about. He had too many friends, but he never introduced them to anyone in the house. It was weird. Once I confronted him on the stairs, when he went to the bathroom, and after ignoring my question, he told me that he had been out exercising and laughed.

I had watched both of them during my childhood, my dad and Juan. I had seen their faces looking into the darkness while they smoked a cigarette in silence, with their broken backs reclining in the chair, getting ever more hunched. Old Imelda saw it too. Many times I watched her in the hall waiting for them, avoiding looking out the window. At breakfast, everyone would act as if nothing had happened, they'd eat in silence, smiling at each other as if everything were a secret that we all would enjoy keeping. After Juan's funeral, my parents confronted each other. The fight was full of guilt, but what good was it if we never told each other the truth? We only smiled in the morning, at breakfast, as if the light wiped everything clean. Except on the 29th, the anniversary of Juan's death. They were asking me to fill an empty place because I had never started creating one myself. I had dragged myself along the walls like a ghost for a long time, but now it was my turn to take things on, grab the life they offered me by the balls and smile just like they wanted me to, because that's what they'd always worked for.

I once read something about the solitary confinement of the skin itself. I didn't understand it very well, but it sounded pretty deep to me. I felt it somewhere in the chest or at the base of the stomach. And if everything was ready, why not do it? Nothing that really mattered at that moment was going to change. Those feelings of freedom were only inventions, they were unreal, made up. I suppose that when you grow up you realise that it's better

not to sacrifice your life for a baseless dream. It's better this way. You don't hurt anyone, you don't have to think anymore and everyone can tolerate it. I wasn't going to be a bloody writer or to travel the earth walking with the clouds, or anything like that. A crazy aunt used to say: "You don't have to be wise to enter a trap." And it's true.

If I couldn't fill Juan's shoes either, so what? Nobody remembered what he was like now. He was a shadow, a caricature that never cried, never got angry, never protested, and always obeyed. Every time the light would go out on an electric pole, he got closer and closer to where, finally, that drunken arsehole ran him over. He walked — he or I or, indeed, anyone, it really doesn't matter — among the shadows that would appear at the same time every day. They'd eat the same. They'd look for the same things. They'd forget their own names as well as other people's. They'd pass by seeing everything between dark stains, rocked by the wind or trapped by the sound of static inside a television, with no possibilities of anything else.

I decided, at that moment, that I'd get up in the morning and walk slowly to the classroom where I would smile at people who don't care, and I would resign myself with each step. I decided that even if I was in the middle of an avenue, even if I had music blasting in my brain, I'd do everything in silence, with no air in my lungs, watching and waiting for the end of the day. Then, I'd arrive to my room in the afternoon and I wouldn't even be tired. I'd just sit and look out the window until it got dark. I wouldn't have a single thought in that time, I'd only look at the landscape changing colour in the distance, beyond the window. And every day would have the same dawn, the same sunset, the same voices circulating in some invisible atmosphere that vanishes and returns like a mosquito flight in the midst of darkness.

From the moment that Gregorio's gaze moved from Juan's grave to my face, it had all been decided. I signed when the fat girl handed me the registration form and she finally made a single red mark by my name.

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# THE ART OF CREATING WITHOUT BEING THE CREATOR



By Cindy Herrera

Editing is a profession between professions. It appears dislodged and disconnected from thought because it opens itself, and the editor, with all the voices, flutters in each interpretation, developing his perspectives not just in debate with himself, but also with the work itself and with its creator. Everything comes from the writer as a whole but it is the editor who breaks it down, mismatches it, disputes it, reprimands it and even makes it his own in apparent objectivity. His look is both conscious and vivacious.

Becoming part of the *Elipsis* 2017 project organised by the British Council and being involved in this process has been a valuable opportunity, an introduction to the professional life of writing as well as to begin daring to intrude in the writing of others. I must acknowledge and thank the work carried out by the teachers and the team of the British Council for their closeness, understanding and human qualities.

I edited *Candelario*, written by David Moreu. I can now confess to him that had I been in his position, I would have requested a change of editor. Working with me could not have been more shattering, more limiting, and with just the right amount of time. I came across a human story and a process of constant lessons. At some point, I came to think that the characters were so close to me that I wanted to tell the

story myself or to give them voices myself, a drive I had to suppress, I thought. I learnt without a doubt to think outside of creation, to debate, to confront my opinions with his, even without being so close. What he left resolutely in his text was surely something that he, as its author, was defending. It was very satisfying to agree with the Professor Marta's comments. It was a constant and feedback-based learning. David read and understood the corrections, tried tirelessly and to transform what we agreed upon, piece by piece. Sometimes he complained and questioned parts that he wanted to maintain. But I am aware that it strengthened the narrative, gave identity to its characters, gave meaning to silence, friction, trembling and ironic laughter that can shake you out of your comfort zone. I would choose this story again, I would give it all the possible opportunities for it to be narrated again, because it was from this exercise of creative duality with "Candelo" and with David Moreu, where I recognised stories with nothing more extraordinary than the life's ordinary beauty, where I understood what they told us since we began this journey: "the exercise of creation is only one; an editor and a writer read the same texts, the same theory, they are two, but they work as one, because they must work for the same purpose." The editor makes the work, reading and criticism worthwhile.

ellipsis

2017

# CANDE- LARIO



David Moreu

Candelario tried to touch the oven once more, but contact with the metal produced an unbearable pain in his hands. Then, hoping to forget about the pain he felt, he walked slowly through the Segundazos de Ilde shop that was located in the centre of Riohacha, diagonal diagonally opposite from the Almirante Padilla Hotel. The shop had been founded many years ago by Ildefonso Aguilar and Dairis Moreno, a couple of traders who had been quite successful selling contraband appliances in Maicao. They had done so well that they decided to open another business in the capital of La Guajira, specialising in selling second-hand culinary items. The place was almost empty. There was only an old man who carefully studied a set of silver plates and a couple who were looking at the price of each and every stove. Candelario walked around the shop several times. He found old kitchen furniture, several appliances in good condition and the occasional tool for making pastry. But the smell of rust caught his attention. It came to him in short and precise moments. Whenever he was about to track it to its origins, it vanished immediately. After pottering around the shop, Candelario returned to the oven and, while examining it, thought he could distinguish a familiar aroma that came from inside it. He opened the doors with the difficulty that making any physical effort caused him, and distinguished



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the smell of wood in its nooks and crannies. They reminded him of the old oven that had once belonged to his in-laws.

That particular device was the mainstay of the small bakery that his wife's family had in the Getsemaní neighborhood in Cartagena. Candelario had started working there as a waiter; his wife Esperanza, his girlfriend at the time, was in charge of cleaning the place, and her parents were in charge of the kitchen. Over

the years, his father-in-law began to suffer terrible back pain, and his mother-in-law, tired of the high level of stress caused by the business, convinced him to leave it in the hands of his only daughter. Initially, the plan was for Candelario to take over the management of the business while Esperanza, who already knew the ancient recipes of the family by heart, would obviously take over the kitchen. But to everyone's surprise, including Candelario himself, what happened was precisely the opposite. As a child, little Candelario had seen the cakes his mother prepared for his rough-around-the-edges father to take to work, and she did so with such unforgiving dedication that he finally realised that the preparations were nothing more than a culinary tactic to keep the man, who understood life only through appetite and drink, happy. Therefore, perhaps as a way to satisfy a need that his own mother never could, Candelario developed an interest in cooking that he had tried to restrain for a long time, being of the opinion that trades such as baking were intended only for women, for housewives like his mother, who, to his undeveloped mind, had an obligation to keep their husbands happy through attractive desserts. Being able to observe how his father-in-law before his illness enjoyed working in the kitchen with the help of his wife in an enviable serenity had given a more mature Candelario the necessary impulse not only to accept, but if it were also possible, to confess his secret inclination. After Esperanza's parents informed both their daughter and their son-in-law about their decisions, Candelario contemplated the possibility of learning to cook for several weeks. When he finally decided to tell them the truth, he made arrangements with his wife and her family, to tell them about his repressed tastes and future plans. The family, who at first could not help feeling surprised by the unexpected confession, ended up welcoming Candelario as just another baker, and, over time, they taught him all the tricks of the trade. Candelario started with his favourite part, learning about the different types of flour and the wide variety of doughs. Then he had to learn about the technical aspects, which frustrated him the most. He did not understand the operation of the scales

and it seemed a waste of time to have to adjust everything to the amounts dictated by the recipe books of the family. As is usual, he made mistakes in trying to choose the right mould, and when he finally got the necessary one, he focused on something else and the plate stuck and ended up getting damaged. After several months of trial and error, he developed his art to the point of achieving a certain mastery. Indeed, it was only then that he actually began to enjoy it. After that he felt confident enough to invent all kinds of recipes which eventually became famous among the customers of the bakery. He created the “Walled Cake,” a puff pastry filled with marinated chicken whose shape resembled small city walls. The roll he called the “Roll of Gethsemane” was noted for its sweet and perfumed flavour, which Candelario obtained by mixing honey with pieces of fruit such as pineapple or mango. But the most desired of all was the “Arm of the Sea”, a re-interpretation of the popular Queen’s Arm, which instead of being a roll filled with strawberries and whipped cream actually had corozo jelly inside, and was covered with coconut candy, all of which he prepared himself from scratch in an artisan way. Esperanza had accompanied him both during the hard months of learning as well as during these episodes of invention and re-invention. After several years of working together, they developed a strong bond which strengthened the foundations of their business, which was also their home and, when possible, a place for them to rest. In the evenings, when the bakery had closed, Candelario took out his recipe book from a hiding place, sat in the kitchen next to Esperanza, and spent long hours reviewing and baptising the last dishes he had created. The oven was what made everything possible. More than a tool, it had been his companion, a witness of the good years. That is why, now he was admiring the oven in front of him, he could not help but feel the desire to buy it and to recover through it his business, his family, and the possibility of having a good old age.

Candelario closed the oven door, approached the salesperson with timid steps and asked the price. It was too expensive for him.

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But every time he remembered the smell of wood that still lingered inside, he was convinced that there must be some way to get it. He tried to persuade the person in charge to give him a discount, and even offered him an exchange. But she turned all his proposals down, mocking him and stating that compared to any new device, the price was really low. Frustrated, Candelario returned to the oven and in a sign of farewell tried to touch it again, but had to move away when he realised that, probably from stress, his hands had begun to feel numb. In the midst of that annoying stillness, he could not avoid looking at them: skinny and tight, furrowed by deep lines that seemed to tie his movements rather than let them flow; his hands were swollen and had no strength or freedom. Months ago, the growing pain in his joints had forced him to retire from the bakery where he had worked for more than twenty years. Now, his family lived on what little they had left of the liquidation they had given him, and on the income that Esperanza received for making the occasional dessert and from selling homemade sweets outside their children's school. Candelario took a breath in an attempt to recover from the numbness as Dr. Mena had taught him. Dr. Mena was an alternative physiotherapist who believed that respiratory problems and body rigidity were at the root of all health problems. Then, following the doctor's instructions, he rubbed his hands gently and discreetly. He finally put them carefully into his pockets, so the nerves could lengthen and the joints relax more. Then, when he felt ready, he took them out into the air one more time, and left the shop.

Esperanza looked at her watch. It was three in the afternoon and it was time to have lunch. At that hour, the sun was beginning to burn like a threatening eye that dodged the eaves and eluded the cornices to observe the sellers and passers-by from its unreachable height. Esperanza had been selling sweets in front of her children's school since nine in the morning, and had endured the embarrassment of wiping sweat off with the same kitchen towel that she took with her every day. She dealt with the group of insistent children that surrounded her as quickly as possible, then she called

Toño and Albertico, who were waiting for her in the shade, to take them back home. Before they went in, Esperanza put the car in the garage. Once she got inside the house, she opened the fridge and poured herself a glass of iced water. Then she looked around and noticed that there were several pans piled up in the sink. On the stove was a half-eaten dessert, covered in ants who were trying to remove it piece-by-piece making long lines that reached the wall. She entered the main room and saw her husband lying on the bed, cross-legged, looking at the ceiling. She asked for help cleaning the house, especially with the pans that were already starting to smell, or, at the very least, with the ants that had invaded the dish that he had not even bothered to pick up. Candelario turned his head to look at her, and then remained watching the void in total silence. Esperanza shook him. He did not resist and remained silent as before. She continued to shake him, and her original, simple shove turned into a frantic jolting that she could not stop. Candelario tried to stop her, and as he did so, his hands began to feel numb again. He struggled with her for a few minutes until he felt such numbness in the joints that he could only remain static, with his hands clenched on his chest. Esperanza released him and left the room still agitated and a little stunned by her unexpected loss of control. Candelario, remembering the advice of the wise Mena, lay down on the bed and rubbed his hands, inhaling and exhaling air in slow and continuous cycles.

That night, the cramps in his arms and hands attacked him incessantly until they managed to break into his sleep. He took an Ibuprofen and sat restlessly in one of the rocking chairs in the room. It rocked for a while, and the pain, while not disappearing, did eventually decrease. He started several unfinished reflections and remembered various events. And when he got bored with his memories and the monotony of his thoughts, he went out in search of something that would allow him to forget the boredom and swelling.

The first thing he felt at the beginning of the journey was the salty breeze that warmed his arms and embraced his joints for several seconds. In the vacant lot that was diagonally opposite to

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BOREDOM AND  
SWELLING.

the house two dogs were play-biting. Candelario looked at them with little interest. At a nearby shop, several acquaintances were discussing a football match. When they saw Candelario pass by, the leader of the conversation invited him to have a drink of rum, which he rejected with an indifferent smile to continue his journey. He walked aimlessly for a few minutes, enjoying the sea breeze, which from time to time returned to visit him with its delicate pulsations. At a given moment, his feet asked him for rest, and he sat down on the sidewalk. Then he realised that he had stopped right in front of Chepe's shop, where he used to go to placate the fatigue anchored to his body after long hours of work with laughter and the odd drink. He entered and sat down at one of the free tables. He was distracted by the television. The news anchor announced that the Riohacha mayor had been imprisoned for stealing the money for the school feeding program. Most people watched with reluctance, some commented on the news in a low voice, while the rest preferred to avoid misfortune by concentrating on their beers. A voice shouted in the distance: "They don't respect the cash for the kids!" And further back, a cry: "That is the dumb mayor: the dumbest idiot of Riohacha," which was received with much laughter and occasional applause.

Candelario thought he recognised the shouting voice that had provoked the laughter of the public, and he struggled to find its owner of said loud voice among the crowd. It was Víctor, a man from Envigado who stood out in Candelario's memory because, unlike so many other Paisas, he hated the anise flavour of aguardiente and was obsessed with the wooden aroma given off by whiskey and the slightly sugary taste of the rum. Candelario also could not think of anyone else who could drink as much as Víctor. Candelario did not forget old times when the Paisa had forced him to drink up to five shots in a row, then gargle for exactly five seconds, and then, without taking a break, continue with five more shots. Next to Víctor there was a group of drunks who were doing the gargle challenge, and, when they were not drinking or joking, they shouted enthusiastically at the television just as the Paisa

had done. Candelario had not seen him for several months as he had stopped frequenting Chepe's shop. One of the most important rules that Dr. Mena had given him was not to consume alcohol, because he believed that along with stress and bad breath, the consumption of certain drinks and foods was one of the main causes of inflammation of the joints. But now that Candelario had noticed the presence of his old drinking companion, he could not avoid the need for a conversation in which they could discuss all the recent events of their lives, accompanied by just one beer. A beer that, Candelario was convinced, if it were drunk in small sips to let his body digest it with patience, surely would not affect him too badly. Candelario watched him for a long time, but Víctor was so immersed in the hubbub that there was no way to catch his attention. At one point, the Paisa received a call, ducked his head under the table and covered one of his ears tightly to hear better. Then he stood up from the chair and went to the pavement in front of the store. He talked there for a while. When he was back and sitting at his table, Candelario brushed his arm; Víctor immediately turned around. When he realised that it was Candelario, he put him a hand on the shoulder that made him fall back, and then point with his index finger and warned him "Hey Candelito, you owe me a drink, you bollocks!". Then he sat him at his table, introduced him as "Don Candelo" and made him greet each of his compadres with a strong handshake. Candelario suffered in silence with a nervous smile and a swollen chest. When they sat in a corner of the table, at a small distance from the others, they talked about their old friends who also used to frequent the bar. They remembered "Gordo" Herazo, a fruit vendor who had been crippled by a traffic accident and who now spent the days at the entrance of his house, melting into his wheelchair and telling stories that everyone knew were total exaggerations, although he depicted them as amazing realities: his almighty legs had enabled him to swim to the very deepest parts of the sea, or had kicked the arse of some of the best boxers in the country. They also remembered "Pichón" Acosta, a sullen fisherman with the face of a child, who, over time,

had lost his mind to the point of believing that he was a cowboy. Nowadays, he could be seen on the Riohacha streets with a black, wide-brimmed hat, and a branch in the shape of a gun, pointing to some invisible rider who was disappearing over the horizon. After several hours of remembrances, they reached a silence that Victor tried to save by asking him about his work as a baker. Candelario frowned and stared into the bottom of his beer. Only a little foam remained. Victor, trying to avoid the muteness that was already taking shape, told him that after months of debt and even possible foreclosure, he had finally finished paying off his taxi. He also mentioned that now that he was debt-free, he could afford to pay for his daughter's nursing studies at a well-known university in Bogotá. After listening to all of his friend's comments, Candelario watched the television in silence, and Víctor, who had already run out of resources to keep the conversation going, poured himself several shots of rum that he savoured with tranquillity. Candelario showed him his swollen and trembling hands. He told him that, because of them, he had lost his job a few months ago, and that now he felt like a nuisance to his whole family, "like a black, useless mass," he commented. Victor asked him if he had already seen a doctor. Candelario, trying to see the comic side of the tragedy, told him about the eccentric Dr. Mena, about his peculiar treatments ranging from garlic and ginger to strange yoga positions. Both burst out laughing and did not miss the opportunity to toss out one scathing joke after another. After the conversation revived, they went from the extravagances of the doctors to practical annoyances. Candelario told him of his nocturnal pains, that same night they had pushed him towards the bar. He also spoke of the sudden annoyances such as those he had felt that morning when, probably because of tension, his hands had become numb. Then he directed the talk to the topic of the oven, which, he said, he could not forget as it was one of the most beautiful devices he had ever seen. "Modern, but classic," he declared, "such an oven that gives a crunchy texture to everything it could touch." He then confessed that, owing to his lack of work, he did not have the

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money to be able to afford it as the person in charge of the shop had not been persuaded by the classic haggling techniques which usually helped him obtain a number of discounts at the markets and pawnshops. After all these confessions, silence returned. Victor took advantage to serve drinks and to toast the fortuitous meeting of old friends. Candelario also proposed toasting for what was "lost" and "impossible," and both quickly knocked the drinks down their throats with few complaints.

At that moment, Candelario put his hand on Victor's shoulder, as he had done before, and proposed that they steal the oven.

Victor tried to laugh, but after only a few seconds his laughter turned into a nervous cough which he pretended was him clearing his throat. He offered Candelario another drink, and while he finished it, asked him if he was serious. Candelario only nodded. Then Victor smirked say that, as it was late and he was sure his illness would only get worse, it was best that Candelario go home and get some rest.

"So you won't help me?" Candelario asked him. "Candelo, you're drunk. We'd better talk tomorrow," Victor said in a low voice as he picked up the glasses from the table. "And I was telling you, compadre..." Candelario murmured, more to himself than to his friend, who was now trying to help him stand up from his chair. "That's not it, Candelo," Victor managed to tell him, while Candelario staggered away and waved an empty bottle of beer that he did not even realize he was still holding in his hands.

Candelario got up at nine in the morning with his clothes soaked in sweat and a strong hangover. His children had already left for school and in a note Esperanza had left on the night table, she said that she had gone with the neighbour to the market. Candelario showered, letting the cold water wash away his sweat and relieve his still swollen joints. He ate some of the arepa with scrambled eggs left by his wife, and then lay in the hammock that was hanging on the balcony. Without realising it, he fell asleep again. He dreamed of an immense kitchen, the size of an auditorium. It had scales, jars, bowls of all types and colours, as well as moulds, trays and grids arranged throughout the place. Several desserts, still uncooked, were placed uniformly on the tables. In its centre was a huge oven that smelled of firewood and baked bread. Candelario put on his gloves and opened the door carefully. He put his hands together and felt a crunchy mass, which disintegrated every time he tried to hold it. He tried to do it over and over again, until he got

tired and smelled his fingers. At that very moment, he breathed in the same stench of rust that he had smelled in the store. He looked around and all the furniture began to rust, the desserts slowly melted and the floor tiles and walls became broken permitting a thick black mass to emerge which slowly climbed up his legs and spread all over his body. When he got up from his nightmare it was already noon. Once again, he was covered in sweat and his whole body throbbed with nerves. Instead of taking a shower, he decided to take off his shirt and then sat in the rocking chair in the living room. He thought about ovens, both from his youth and in the one he had discovered the day before. Then an idea lit up in his head. He put on his favourite outfit: a brown suit, striped beret, and black shoes that took several minutes to polish. Then he went to the used goods store. However, as he had been so busy getting ready, he forgot that they closed for lunch around that time. So he pottered over to a florist shop where he bought a bouquet of sunflowers. Then he went into the second-hand shop and walked back and forth looking for the manager, until he found her sweeping up a corner full of dust. He noticed that she had a necklace of brilliant, orange stones. Seizing on the opportunity, he told her that carnelian was his favourite gemstone. She looked at him strangely, and he pointed towards her chest.

"I didn't know it was called that," she said, and holding the stones between her fingers.

"Well now you do. Nice to meet you, Hilario Hernández."

"Astrid Cassiani, nice to meet you."

"Where did you buy the necklace, on First Street?"

"No, it was a gift."

"Ah, from your husband, I suppose."

"No, I don't have a husband, my father gave it to me."

At that same time Candelario held out the sunflowers. When she stretched out her hand for the flowers, Astrid dropped the broom from her hands.

"Thank you," she said, struggling to pick up the broom without getting dirty herself.

"A pleasure, Astrid," replied Candelario, who tried to both help her and avoid any possible complications owing to the clumsiness of his hands.

They continued to chat while she finished cleaning the dust and dealing with the occasional client. He told her that, in fact, he knew her boss, Ildefonso, because both had studied at the same school. "One of the few ones that existed back then," said Candelario. He also let her know that he had once worked in a warehouse for second-hand goods, but for musical instruments, not kitchen stuff.

"You do like music, right?" Candelario asked her.

"Of course," she responded, sweating from the effort.

"Boleros or vallenato?"

"Both. Especially vallenato. But old school, I'm not a fan of the new wave."

"Kids today don't know how to appreciate good music. They just want something to jump about from one side to the other. Or to dance tightly stuck together."

Astrid let out a laugh and Candelario asked her what she'd thought about the sunflowers.

"I like them. And they smell good."

When he felt that he had gained a little confidence, Candelario went on to ask about specific things about the place, such as closing and opening hours, and if there was a guard who, in addition to accompanying her, would also take care of things. She replied that they only had security in the big stores in Maicao because their bosses didn't think it was necessary to incur such expenses for a used goods store. They continued talking for a while longer, and once Candelario considered that he had all the necessary information he was looking for, he said goodbye to her, promising that he would visit her at an early opportunity.

"And next time we can listen to some vallenato," said Candelario smiling.

"But the old ones."

"Why not!?! See you later my dear Astrid," said Candelario, as he made his way to the door.

A few hours later, Candelario arrived home. He greeted his wife indifferently. She was in the kitchen trying to remove stains from an old pot, and when he was about to enter his two children's room to greet them, he saw them wrestling with Victor, who moved his massive body from one side to another while Toño, the eldest, hung around his neck, and Albertico hugged one of his legs with the vain hope of slowing his movements just a little. As soon as he saw his friend standing in the doorway, Victor lifted Toño from his shirt and put him on the highest bunk bed. He then grabbed Albertico by the arm and placed him on the bunk bed below. Candelario gestured for them to go to the living room, and they sat on the sofa.

"I'm sorry brother," was the first thing Victor had managed to say.

"What for?" Candelario asked him, faking surprise.

"Well, you know, about yesterday."

At that moment, Esperanza approached the sofa and handed Victor a mango juice.

"It doesn't matter compadre," said Candelario, and then emphasised in a lower voice. "It was a stupidity that came to me at the time."

"Well Candelario, the truth is I was thinking... and I'm sure it can be done."

Candelario, had spent the entire conversation calmly watching and massaging his fingers one by one, lifted his head and stared at Victor with undisguised and alert excitement in his twinkling eyes. "If you want, tomorrow we'll meet up at the same time in my house and we'll make plans together," said Victor. He then knocked the mango juice back in one gulp, stood up from his chair and said goodbye to Candelario.



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When he was alone in the room, Candelario felt a pang in his stomach that revealed the hunger he had felt for a few hours but had been ignoring. He then busied himself by taking care of all matters related to the theft. He went to the kitchen and when he was about to open the fridge, Esperanza, who was now hanging clothes, asked him about Victor's sudden visit. Candelario replied that he was just looking to apologise for the previous night's drunkenness, and that he wanted to finalise the details of a business deal they were both planning. "That Victor was born with a bottle in his hand," was the only thing that Esperanza replied. She hung up the last piece of clothing and left the kitchen to go and rest in the living room. Candelario took the last piece of cheese from the fridge, roasted it for a moment and then put together a sandwich that he ate with gusto in the dining room, remembering his friend Victor he made a hopeful smile.

The next day, Candelario arrived at Victor's apartment in the afternoon. It was a small compound in the centre of the city, a couple of blocks from the beach. When he entered, Victor proudly handed him a news story that he had cut out himself. The article spoke of a case of robbery committed in the city of Barranquilla. Five thieves disguised as security guards entered a pharmacy in the morning. One of them pointed at the guard and immobilised him, while the others were responsible for breaking the security system that covered the till, and sliding it out of the store using several watermelons. Candelario read the news with a mixture of fascination and disbelief. He was amazed by the fact that someone could be so inventive when committing a crime, but at the same time he doubted the effectiveness of the strategy. Candelario asked him if he planned to do the same thing with the oven and Victor responded with a secure nod of his head. Candelario stood up, and began to walk in circles with a constant and hesitant step, until at one point, he stopped at the centre of the room, and asked "Don't fuck with me Victor but... could that shit work?"

Victor, without thinking too much, went to the kitchen and rooted around. After several minutes, he came back with several

watermelons. He went back to the kitchen and came back with a waist-high oven that, according to him, even after years of failed attempts, he had not been able to repair. He put his arm around Candelario's shoulder and pointed to the oven and the fruit scattered throughout the room and said "Well, brother, it's time to give it a try!"

They spent all afternoon cutting up watermelons, frugally eating what was edible, and carefully placing the peels on the oven's corners of the oven so that it could quickly slide around the obstacles and the floor's unevenness. By eight o'clock that night, they managed to discover the best possible way (out of the many they had tried) to transport the oven using their newly invented fruit prosthesis. They then proceeded to sit on the balcony and rest. Exhausted, they admired Riohacha's dark sea. Víctor told him that they had an appointment, within a week, at the transport terminal, to get the vehicle that would help them transport the oven once it had been taken out of the store. Then, before Víctor's wife arrived from work and his daughter from the university, they had to clean up the room, and remove all traces of watermelons scattered throughout the apartment. A few hours later, Candelario arrived home with stiff arms, legs shaking and a numb back. He changed as best he could, threw himself into the bed, and in only a few seconds sank into a deep sleep.

A week later Víctor and Candelario were sitting in front of the bus station. It was three in the afternoon and the heat, which was constantly increasing, forced people into the shadows. Men opened the buttons of their shirts to reveal sweaty chests while women fanned themselves using any paper they had in their hands. Several bus company workers harassed visitors with different travel deals at the entrance to the bus station. Drivers refreshed themselves with a soda or a glass of water in the cafeterias before embarking on their new journeys. Victor's friend had had a traffic accident, which prevented him from getting to the appointment early and forced Victor and Candelario to wait for him for several hours. The topics of conversation had been

exhausted, as was the long series of beers that Víctor drank with effort and the glasses of icy water that Candelario asked for to withstand the inclement heat of the afternoon sun. After a long time waiting, a van arrived at the bus station and a fat, bald man with a perfectly-combed mustache got out. His name was Rubén and according to Victor, he was a rich thief, a looter of wealthy families. Although he preferred to describe his profession more elegantly, referring to it rather shamelessly as the "acquisition and transfer of other people's property." Something akin to a Riohacha Robin Hood, with a strict work ethic and who only ever associated with trusted old friends, like Victor who happened to have married one of his sisters. To begin with, Rubén only stole from certain types of people, whom he carefully studied until he deemed it valid for him to take possession of their possessions. Also, every theft in which he took part had to be planned scrupulously, with no improvisation. He was only ever responsible for transportation. Finally, and this condition had been emphasised emphatically by Victor before Rubén arrived, after the robbery, all participants must be impossible to track. Therefore, Victor planned to take advantage of the circumstance to stay a while with his family in his homeland, and warned Candelario to think about what would be his strategy to distance himself from the crime.

They spoke with Rubén for only half an hour, during which he resolved all matters related to the theft in a brief and efficient manner. He started with "recognition questions", such as who was the owner of the assets, the place of the operation and the members of the group. He continued with the "general plan of appropriation," which Rubén put together with such mastery that it chased all uncertainty from Candelario's turbid mind. It ended with an "analysis of details," which foresaw possible complications and their corresponding solutions according to the actual conditions of the robbery. According to Rubén, everything would be done within three weeks, and it would be carried out in the following way: Candelario would produce a small fire that would force both the salesgirl and all possible customers to leave the shop

and convince everyone to get as far away from the accident as possible. Victor, who had the necessary strength, would be responsible for dragging the oven as well as another device that would be Rubén's reward for all his work. Rubén, meanwhile, would be responsible for collecting the goods at the premises' back door and driving them to a safe place, where Víctor and Candelario could later pick them up. According to the plan, in principle everything would look like an accident, and when the theft of the merchandise was discovered, there would be no way to trace or even locate the culprit. When the conversation ended, Ruben said goodbye to both with a handshake, carefully combed the only hair that was left on the back of his head and quickly departed in his van. Víctor and Candelario looked at each other in silence, just as they had when they met a few days ago at Candelario's house, or when they had sat down to rest after trying out the watermelon trick in the knowledge that they would participate in a criminal act caused them both fear and emotion. They were confident that, should the theft really be possible, they would be the only ones, together with Rubén, who would know the truth about the cause of the supposed accident that would occur suddenly at the Segundazos de Ilse shop.

At six in the afternoon, while they were walking down 15th Street back to their homes, Candelario stood in front of a bakery. He asked Victor to come in and eat something. He ordered a roscón with arequipe and he bought Victor a millefeuille. Victor devoured his pastry while Candelario barely bit off the ends of his. He was absorbed in contemplating the place. He watched every table, every advertisement, every machine, or rather, he palpated each corner of the bakery with his eyes.

"It's got the same name," Candelario said, almost whispering.

"What?"

"It's got the same name as my bakery."

"What's got the same name?"

"This place."

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Immediately, Victor noticed a sign on the box that read in blue letters: Mar de Cristal.

"Compadre, I know it was not the greatest thing, but it was mine – and my family's. It was a space where we could just be."

"Yes, you're right," Victor answered in a serious tone, trying to match the unexpected seriousness of his claims.

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Candelario tried to finish his roscón, but after a couple of bites, he left half on the table.

"I was thinking about what you told me: to get away, and I think I'm going back to Cartagena." He kept a brief silence, and continued. "When I have the oven, I could open my Mar de Cristal again.

"Candelo, if that is what really moves you, do it! Look, I might even go visit you, and eat one of those walled cakes you told me about," Victor said, putting his huge hand on Candelario's arm.

Candelario sighed and smiled a small smile, then stood up from the chair, went to pay the bill and returned with Victor to 15th Street, where they walked for a while, joking about Rubén's moustache.

A few weeks later, Esperanza woke up earlier than usual. She checked that Candelario was asleep, took out a chest from the back of the closet and then locked herself into the bathroom. She took out a couple of photographs of their children, one of Toño riding a donkey in the desert of Uribia, and another of Albertico buried on the beach of Tayrona Park, the few jewels she had inherited from her mother and grandmother, and a bag of banknotes that she counted carefully. When she finished, she realised that together with day's earnings, she would have enough money to make her big purchase. Then she went to prepare breakfast, and get the children ready. By five thirty in the morning she was already standing in a corner of the school selling her merchandise. She was there until four in the afternoon. She then left the car in the garage and her two children at a neighbour's place. She walked to the store, feeling that her beating heart might fly out of her chest to fall and roll down one of the city streets. But when she reached her destination, her excitement turned into uncertainty, as she saw small streams of smoke emerging from the building and a crowd of impressed passers-by watching everything.

Standing by the entrance was a short woman and a dark and thin man. They were surrounded by three policemen. Esperanza could not avoid approaching. Taking several steps, she realised that

# **SHE WALKED TO THE STORE, FEELING THAT HER BEATING HEART MIGHT FLY OUT OF HER CHEST TO FALL AND ROLL DOWN ONE OF THE CITY STREETS.**

standing right in front of her was her husband, Candelario. Judging from the policeman's words, the woman, named Astrid, seemed to be in charge of the shop, while Candelario appeared to be guilty of property damage. Apparently, the watermelon strategy hadn't worked, and Victor had fled with Rubén to avoid capture. Candelario had been distracting people. When the authorities arrived, one of the customers who had escaped the fire, accused him of having caused it. Now the policemen proceeded to handcuff him and put him in the back of the truck. Esperanza, who had watched the

# CANDELARIO ACCEPTED THE BLOWS OF PUNISHMENT WITH RESIGNATION, TRYING TO SEE THEM AS A KIND OF PURIFICATION.

whole process with astonishment, approached the policeman in charge, took him by the arm and asked to speak to him alone. When they were a little away from the others, she took out a wad of bills and stared at it with big, watery eyes. At first the policeman made a gesture of disgust and moved away as if he were preparing to handcuff her as well. But then he grabbed the bills with dissimulation and when he finished counting them he said: "I'll let him go, but I would have to give myself a little more". She reached into her purse and pulled out another pile of money, the last of what she had saved to buy the oven. The policeman counted the bills again, and smiled "Now, yes. But just in case, I'll let him go far from here." He returned to the other two policemen, and said something she did not quite understand. They stayed talking to the woman, while he got into the truck and invited Esperanza to come up as well.

The policeman left them on the other side of the city. He said goodbye with a guffaw and wished them luck. Candelario tried to say something to Esperanza, but she immediately shut him up, walking over to slap him. Candelario accepted the blows of punishment with resignation, trying to see them as a kind of purification. But after enduring being hit several times, he clung to her in a final embrace that sought to stop the onslaught. Esperanza tried to get away, but Candelario used his last strength to hold on to her. She had no choice but to become calm, rather more from fatigue than from will, and she accepted the only apology that her husband was able to give her after everything that had happened. As they embraced, Esperanza noticed that it was getting dark, and it seemed to her that the reddish glow in the clouds was like something she really had not seen for a long time. She was distracted for a while looking at that glow that with the passing of minutes became reduced to just a small purple spark. Then they separated, Esperanza noticed that Candelario had been paralysed, his hands and arms shaking slightly. Esperanza approached him, massaged him for a few minutes. Only when Candelario began to move did they start to make their way homewards together.

# THE EXERCISE OF DECONSTRUCTION

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By Natalia Escobar

The possibilities of changes, transformations and the most significant learning of life are always woven in terms of relationships with the other. As Lacan would say, I am always the other. Editing is not an exception to this relationship, although, by necessity, it has a particular peculiarity: its silence and general anonymity. From this reflection that remains from my *Elipsis* experience, and to break the silence of editorial work in some sense, I would like to point out four aspects that I consider are the most relevant for my own learning about editing.

I will begin by stating that editing is an occupation that is as arduous as writing. It consists of reading the text as many times as was necessary, exhausting all possible questions until the story acquired independence, sharpening perceptions to understand the writing's very transformations and make listening an exercise of care so that the text remained a product of whoever wrote it, but also had a result from this shared experience

This joint construction is the second aspect that I want to underline, as the writing-editing encounter in the *Elipsis* program, did not happen between two people, but rather four: two apprentices

and two teachers. If the work of participants in the editorial component takes place places of silence, for me it is important not to add another silence and I must recognise the role of Marta's and Alejandra's as they generously taught us about the profession and, fundamentally, about working as a team.

From this experience of team-work emerged a third learning moment: editing is a process. The rereading took on the value of being a link in a chain as returning to the text required recognising chains of meaning that were becoming consolidated and also finding new questions for the text. Likewise, the rereading was intended to identify aspects that we did not recognise in the first reading but which made it possible to build together not just a cleaner result, but also a particular experience with the story.

Finally, I want to highlight the value of rereading from a critical and constructive perspective. Merely destroying a text is not editorial, rather deconstructing it is the most difficult task. Thus, to ensure that the door remains open for each word, comment and question for the writing itself to acquire new possibilities is, perhaps, the greatest challenge and learning of editorial work

ellipsis

2017

# COWAR- DICE IN THE KEY OF D



Diana Zerda

Sun is shining, clouds have gone by  
All the people give a happy sigh  
He has passed by, giving his sign  
Left all the people feeling so fine

*The Wizard*

It was Sunday night and she hadn't made it home in over two days, or rather, made it to her parents' home. It had all begun on Friday with a punk rock gig, a couple of mates, some cheap beer and even cheaper whiskey at a dive bar on the Caracas. The place was on the second floor of an old house with a facade full of graffiti signatures. Inside, the walls were lined with serigraphs of Sex Pistols and The Clash. The air was suffocating from heat that came from the bodies, making its way through smoke and darkness. It was one of Camila's favourite places, a place where there are no plans for the future and you don't have to pretend to have an idea of what you do in life or for life. However, it did have the same problem as the rest of the bars in the city, it closed at three in the morning when the party usually just getting started. That Friday, after Camila and her mates had been kicked out of the bar, they decided to potter through the Chapinero streets and carry on drinking, smoking and chatting about everything and anything. The party should have ended at six o'clock in the morning at a Transmilenio station, but, as usual, Camila didn't want to go back home



and so she crashed at a mate's place. The next day she would recharge the energy she needed and get back into music, this time in a tiny blues bar where a live band would distract her, even if the tables of the place were jammed and there wasn't enough space to breathe. She felt that she could give up everything for music, for that space of time of total escape from everything, but before everything was fear. Notwithstanding, any place where there was music was enough for her, she gave herself over to it, through either dance or experiencing the emotions and possibilities that the different sounds awoke in her. She'd frequently considered that being a music journalist would be her ideal job, being paid to out new sounds in different genres, explore new places and meet new people that the songs gathered together. Of course, she also thought about composing several times, but it was too already late. She was 24 years old and had never actually learnt how to play an instrument.

Music sounds different depending on the occasion. At least, that's what Camila thought. Consequently, her Sunday playlist had nothing to do with the one she had listened to on Friday night before she left home, or the one she listened to when she travelled around the city or, indeed, any of her other playlists. Camila understood this better than anyone else because the only thing that terrified her more than her fear of adulthood was not being able to find the song that matched how she felt at a given moment. This sensation filled her with anxiety as it made her face her reality, the reality she dealt with by lapsing into automatic pilot each week and strenuously avoided in her spare time.

Sundays were something else. They were the days when she had no more energy left and she had to recharge her energy to be able to cope as a student. This particular weekend, like so many others, had left her feeling hopeless. Her post-party, post-weekend, pre-Monday fatigue, or whatever you want to call it, wasn't only physical, it was also mental and emotional. Every Sunday was a battle lost in favour of frustrating her own desires. The feeling of defeat began with her parents' disapproval of her having disappeared for almost three days, and underscored by their questions about her way of life

## EACH STATE OF DEFEAT WAS A DESCENT INTO HER VERY OWN HELL FROM WHICH, THANKS TO MUSIC, SHE COULD CUNNINGLY ESCAPE.

and her future up to her giving herself the very same interrogation. Each state of defeat was a descent into her very own hell from which, thanks to music, she could cunningly escape.

This time Camila was calmer despite her mother's tedious nagging that started as soon as she walked through the door: "Why don't you even answer your mobile to let me know where you are? Do you think this house is a hotel?!" Nothing mattered. She was focused only focused on what she needed to hear: The Wizard. With a precise song in mind, she only had to cross the room, walk down the hall to get to her room and lock herself in. She'd then turn the laptop on her bed on and play that song. For a couple of weeks now, that song had become her anthem. For her, the magician's attitude and the sounds of the melody itself represented the charm of letting go, of being herself without having to justify anything. The sound of the harmonica, especially, had a power similar to that of

a snake-enchanting Pungi. That harmonica seduced her as it was the perfect soundtrack not only for her to let go of her fears, it also strengthened her desire to go in a new direction, her own. Lying on her bed, staring at the ceiling, she listened to the song for the tenth time that day. She'd already forgotten it was Sunday, that her parents didn't determine who she was and that she had a long list of college stuff she'd left pile up, all thanks to the feeling of comfort that the composition produced in her.

The insistence on the song came from the amount of possibilities that crossed her mind. At first, she thought of looking for the words to write a review about the melody, but she suddenly no longer felt that a review would be appropriate, rather she should try to write a story. She tried to write a story, in the first person, that represented the effect the song had had on her:

*No matter the place or the degree, it always comes down to the same thing: studying economics, studying finance, abandoning them, trying again with journalism. A tedious road that has only been useful for teaching me about what I refuse to do in life. I don't even know if I want to live that stable life that a degree is supposed to give. Ever since childhood, my parents used to tell me that every decision in life has an opportunity cost. When I was eleven years old, and I found a small, old keyboard at home. I wanted to learn how to play it so much, I asked Laura, my best friend, who was getting piano lessons, to teach me everything she knew. She taught me how to play Estrellita and Happy Birthday. I practised tirelessly but needed a guide, so I showed my parents what I had learnt and begged them to enrol me in a piano course. They didn't care. They didn't see the sense of spending money on piano lessons. According to them, it was more productive to invest in private math classes, a subject that wouldn't beat all useful for anything in life. So, there was really no point in my continuing to practise the keyboard anymore. It wasn't all likely that I, by myself, could know how to reach my full potential. That was the opportunity cost. Each decision, by default, discarded a lot more and, according to my parent, I always had to "try to make the best possible decision," in other words the one that helped to*

*work towards a stable future, based on numbers, getting a degree, buying a house and having a family that later on would prevent you from making your dreams a reality, having children on whom you can take out your frustrations. I don't want that life. I never wanted that life. I don't want a degree and then to continue along a future path already mapped out for me, I just want to live. Whenever I try to explain this to my parents, they answer my question with another question, "What are you going to live on? You have to get a job where you can establish yourself and then you can use your free time to do whatever it is you want to." That question always stumped me. I could never answer it when I was in school, or during my first try at college. I couldn't even answer it during the second try! I tried many times to answer them with a determined "whatever I bloody well want!" But this argument fell on its own weight as it was more of a weak evasion than a forceful response. So, I had no choice but to take all the right decisions along a safe path, because the path that has already been traced out is also the easiest, right?*

When Camila reread what she had written, she didn't feel like going anywhere. The song had disappeared, in her writing she was alone and her frustrations. Literature wasn't enough to reproduce the feelings evoked by the song, the words weren't enough and led her off on unnecessary detours. She'd rather imagined herself playing the harmonica with the same skill as the composer, wandering around the world, making living from it. Suddenly, she found she'd taken a decision. On Monday, early in the morning, she would go to buy a harmonica and fully dedicate herself to music. She would take the emergency exit from her life, an escape route which, up to then, had been a mere abstract and imaginary flirtation. This new determination made her feel light, as if she were floating over her bed. Her usual Sunday tiredness had dissipated, giving way to enthusiasm.

The next day she got up early. Her every movement was accelerated, as if she was anxious to get to a gig. As she was walking around the apartment, Camila felt that her parents looked at her surprised and distrustful due to this unusual proactivity

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that Monday morning. Surely, they were suspicious as if they were still looking for an excuse to continue hassling her. It really didn't matter, Camila was sure that they wouldn't ask her anything as they were still offended and frustrated by her wanderings and disappearances each weekend.

She left home, lighting up a cigarette to pacify her enthusiasm, and walked towards the avenue where she used to take the bus that left her in the university. On the bus, Camila sat on a seat by the window, pulled her iPod and earbuds out of her bag and put them in her ears. Beside her was a lady who was probably on her way to work, she had an air of incessant judgment about her. The first song that rang out randomly was The Nameless by Slipknot. Camila's earbuds were loud enough for the woman to be startled by the song's "infernal" and distorted sounds. Camila was already used to these reactions, but she still smiled in satisfaction whenever something like that happened. She stopped the random playback to listen to *The Wizard*. She totally forgot about the woman beside her all, now that she was looking out the window and mentally singing: *"Misty morning, clouds in the sky, without warning, a wizard walks by casting in shadow weaving his spell, funny clothes, tinkling bell."* She arrived at university, took out her earbuds and put them and her iPod back in her bag. She walked along a different route than normal and headed to the music shop that she'd seen all the times she'd walked through the neighbourhood. Before going in to it, she looked at the shop front, noticing for the first time that the shop appeared to have every single musical instrument, except wind instruments. She didn't know whether to go in or not. Sure, if she took another bus that would take her up Seventh Avenue, where she'd find more music shops and have more options, but she was so impatient that any other postponement or bus ride would feel endless and tedious. She narrowed her eyes and decided to go in when she saw saxophones and trumpets in a corner. Inside the shop, Camila let her eyes wander in all directions. She felt small in the middle of the instruments that she listened to so frequently, but which she knew next to nothing at all about. As she walked amongst the guitars and

bass guitars, she imagined what it would be like to learn about each instrument in the room and this fantasy filled her with excitement as buying a harmonica was the first step of an exciting musical journey. If she could manage to play the harmonica, the obstacles would fall away, little by little, from her path by themselves and she would no longer be afraid to start experimenting with any other instrument.

She approached the saleswoman and asked for a harmonica. The lady brought out five boxes and she put them on the counter, apologising that they were the only ones she had. "What is the difference between each one?" Camila asked.

"The difference is the brand. For example, Hohner is our best seller. It's the company that has been making harmonicas for the most years. It's quite a recognised brand." The saleswoman responded.

Camila asked her, "Could you tell me which is the most suitable for beginners?" Gaining the response from the saleswoman, "In reality, I don't think there is much difference between one and another, the main difference is just the brand itself."

Camila bought the Hohner. As soon as she received it, she left the shop to open the box and walk aimlessly. Inside the box, there were some brochures, all of which she ignored, and a small plastic box containing the silver and metallic instrument. There were ten holes with numbers above them. She couldn't understand it all, but this rather gave her motivation to learn. She sat on the bench in a neighbourhood park to study this new acquisition more closely. She began to play randomly, putting her lips on number one and dragging the harmonica to number ten and back again, while blowing through it. As she repeated this she soon realised that the sound was deeper at one and it became increasingly highly pitched on the way to ten. She also noticed that blowing out produced a different sound than breathing in. By the time she looked around, she could see people walking around, with their dogs, and she couldn't help feeling silly, as if everyone knew that she didn't have a clue how to play it at all. She left the park and went home to have the privacy she felt she needed, not only to feel less embarrassed, but also for her to be able to avoid all possible distractions.

**EITHER OF THE TWO OPTIONS AVAILABLE WOULD BE IN FAVOUR OF MUSIC. CAMILA HAD DECIDED THAT HER LIFE FROM THEN ON WOULD BE A MUSICAL JOURNEY IN WHICH HER MAIN AIM WOULD BE TO FIND NEW SOUNDSCAPES AND TO LEARN WHAT SHE COULD ABOUT THEM.**

On her way back, Camila read the brochures that came inside the box. They talked about the history of the harmonica, the way it was made and the boom it had among American soldiers during the war because it was easy to carry and it provided them with entertainment. She thought that surely the soldiers couldn't have had advanced musical training when they began to play it. This thought strengthened her determination that, if she only tried hard enough, she could learn fast enough to take her on this brand-new path.

Looking towards this promising future, Camila then turned to thinking about what would happen when she could play this instrument really well. She couldn't decide between buying another instrument and learning it or taking a trip around Colombia and then South America to start making a living from her music and travelling around different places and meeting new people. Either of the two options available would be in favour of music. Camila had decided that her life from then on would be a musical journey in which her main aim would be to find new soundscapes and to learn what she could about them. She thought that, for some time, her life had revolved around music in her free time. So far, she had spent time in bars, concerts, plays and parties where music had always been the main attraction. Conversations with her mates were about nothing else. They always talked about their new discoveries, different musical events, what was happening in Colombian music from the most industrialised to the most independent genres. When booze made them all, her mates or fellow attendees at musical events, more mystical they'd talk about how important it was to actually listen to the music and just how little other people actually did so. It's obvious that everyone listens to and enjoys music, but almost nobody stops to think about or really feel what they are listening to. That's how Camila saw it. She'd even organised trips with that same goal, recently going to Medellin for the first time to the Guns N' Roses concert. Now everything was going to revolve around music, she wouldn't have to wait for the weekend or for the holidays to come so she could dedicate herself to it and, even better yet, with her harmonica she'd be able to actively participate in this world.

Thinking about all this made her impatient to get home, lock herself in her room and just start to play.

It was noon and Camila was already back in her room, her little room that she hadn't really noticed for a long time as she only used it to sleep in after spending whole days at college, talking to classmates and messing around. She also spent her Sundays there but the actual space didn't really matter as she usually just wanted to escape. When she arrived with her harmonica, she saw the room with clear eyes. The room wasn't hers. Its white walls were decorated with pictures of her school mates, whom she hadn't spoken to in years. There was a pile of photocopies and academic books that had never really interested her on a small desk. There was a TV on the wardrobe. She hadn't turned it on in years. To be able to play her harmonica, Camila decided that first she had to tidy her room to make it suitable for practising in. She pulled the photos off the walls, threw out her college photocopies and took the books that she'd been keeping under the bed because she'd decided to sell them when she was next in the centre. She stuck the tickets from the last concerts she'd had gone to on the walls. The tickets took up a little less than a quarter of one of its walls, but she was determined that over time she would fill this in, as well as expand her small musical library, which she had placed on a shelf, the few CDs that she owned: Marilyn Manson's *Mechanical Animals*, Janis Joplin's *Greatest Hits*, Radiohead's *The Bends* of Radiohead and Fiona Apple's *The Idler Wheel* as well as a few mp3 discs she'd compiled a few years ago owing to a decided lack of money, and therefore, inability to acquire the originals. The room looked more airy without all the clutter, and the environment under construction not only marked a starting point, it would also constantly remind her of her new goal.

She was finally able to set out exploring the sounds of her new instrument. She didn't want to learn scales and chords, rather she sought to familiarise herself empirically with its sound. She tried to make some initial random chords so that they'd sound all right. She tried to exhale into and inhale out of a single hole, using her fingers to cover the holes on the sides of the harmonica. Her technique was

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still too clumsy, but in her freshly tidied room, far from people's ears, she felt that she was far away from everything. She was sure that she just had to concentrate and continue practicing to improve, but, for time being, it really didn't matter at all if she failed.

She spent all afternoon there playing her new harmonica until her parents arrived home from work at six o'clock. As soon as they entered the apartment, Camila felt them and imagined their surprise at the sounds she was making with her harmonica. She

knew it was odd for them to find her at home so early. Besides, honestly, they wouldn't have a positive opinion about her harmonica playing. For this reason, she stopped playing to try to listen to her parents' muttering in the living room. It was obvious, they were speculating about whether she had invited one of her friends around. Unimpressed, they ranted, imagining that their daughter was accompanied by an amateur musician, who had no degree – or future. Her parents were constantly disappointed by their daughter's sentimental inclination towards decadence. They had never accepted any of her potential boyfriends or even friends for that matter. Camila, inside her room, heard her father angrily mutter from the living room and she knew what was coming. In just a few moments her mother would burst in and hassle her for whatever it was she was doing wrong. Sure enough, soon her mother charged into her room without knocking ready for that serious conversation. Her attempts were frustrated by the surprise she felt when she saw her daughter's neat bedroom, and her daughter, sitting on the bed, holding a harmonica in her hands.

"You've tidied your room. It's a miracle!"

"Yes," Camila replied scornfully.

Camila generally couldn't stand her parents even when they tried to be nice to her. Sometimes, as in this case, they tried to say something positive but she never felt it wasn't meant to be offensive or sarcastic. She'd been bored by their constant misunderstandings for a long time and, instead, opted to evade any and all real topics of conversation by giving only monosyllabic answers. As it happens, her mother was able to get her attention willingly when she asked about the harmonica in her daughter's hands. The subject of the harmonica dissipated the tension that had accumulated due to her disappearance that weekend. Her mother even appeared satisfied by her new hobby and her father made no comment, not even under his breath, which was enough for Camila to feel that a good start had been made. Maybe later

they would understand that she didn't see her instrument as a hobby but rather as the first step of her new life, but for now it seemed too early to talk about it, after all it was her life, she'd taken her decision and they wouldn't be able to interfere. Instead, she'd have enough time to avoid a ridiculous number of problems as well as save herself from unnecessary arguments.

And that is how Camila spent those first few days in her room at home, a place where she had previously felt suffocated, but that was now the stage where all her plans were developing. Now all her concentration and energy were focused on her harmonica. Her friends called her a couple of times to see how she was, to invite her out, but nothing surpassed her enthusiasm for her harmonica. When one of her classmates, with whom she usually did group work or, more correctly speaking, those who actually did her work for her, called her to ask about her absence, Camila excitedly told her about her new plan.

"You mean you're actually going to dedicate yourself to playing harmonica? You have got to be taking the piss," her friend replied.

"Not at all. I don't think I've ever been so serious in all my life."

"Jesus mate, be realistic. You've never played any kind of musical instrument before. Now I'm not saying don't do it, but for fuck's sake – you're talking about a bloody harmonica. How many musicians have made it by playing a harmonica?!?"

Camila was so sure of her decision or, rather, she was stubborn enough that this and other similar responses from her college classmates didn't actually discourage her. Everyone could piss right off, except for her mates who shared her love of music. They, on the other hand, supported her and encouraged her, telling her she was going in the right direction, admiring her courage and determination. She even inspired a couple of her mates, and part-time guitarists, to share her dream.

All of these conversations took place via mobile phone or text messages, because for the first time in a long time, Camila didn't feel

# DESPITE NOT BEING ABLE TO SPEAK IT, SHE FOUND MUSICAL LANGUAGE TO BE A SOURCE OF ENDLESS SENSATIONS.

any motivation to actually leave her house. Everything she wanted was at her disposal: a place to listen to music and practice it in. It felt good. Perhaps the most difficult decision she faced daily was to choose the right song to start her day. This decision was an equation that consisted of a host of variables, starting with her mood, goin the weather, the colour of the day, musical genre and ending with the possibilities that occurred to her at the time, because despite loving music, who can remember at any given moment all the songs they gave heard and liked throughout their life? It was a decision that Camila took very seriously. Choosing the wrong first song was like spilling chocolate on your shirt at the very beginning of an important day or getting up out of bed with the wrong foot.

During that first week, she would get out of bed when her parents had already headed off to work. After breakfast, she would then divide her time between listening to songs, reading music reviews on *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone* and *Resident Advisor* and practising. One of her hobbies was reading reviews about the new music releases as she listened to them. It had always seemed interesting to her how certain journalists wrote about songs with both precision and poetry. Despite not being able to speak it, she found musical language to be a source of endless sensations. Previously, she had intended to be able to learn it empirically through words, to appropriate it as the best music journalists had, but after *The Wizard* that aspiration didn't just get lukewarm, it also had stopped making sense. Words devoid of melodic power never satisfied her enough. Camila needed to speak in that same language, to experience the world through it, to express herself and communicate through it once she had mastered it.

After exploring the harmonica's sounds and tones, she was confused by the path she should follow from then on. Searching for a tutorial on Google seemed such an ignoble, not to mention pathetic act in the life of any musician. She had never actually heard of anyone who had spoken, either for or against, about this way of learning music. However, she saw this as a kind of unspoken maxim amongst 'proper' musicians. None of the ones she admired had been educated by Google. She spent hours on her bed as she looked at the ceiling and meditated on this moral crossroads she had come to. From time to time, she glanced at the computer located on the desk next to her, but evaded it quickly, almost as if it were an actual living being and capable of responding to her intentions with pure mockery. She looked at the ceiling again and wasn't sure what was more pathetic – believing that the computer could judge her, thinking that a mere machine's judgment could affect her or believing that there was an ethical code amongst musicians, whom she did not know, and that she, on the contrary, actually did know. The harmonica had been lying on her chest during all these many reflections. She now felt it throb as if it were rhythmically controlled



by her heartbeat. She picked it up and randomly played it hopes that magically a melody would start to flow by itself, which wasn't about to happen. She decided that she was letting herself stall because of ridiculousness and decided to sit down at her desk and look for tutorials for learning how to play the harmonica. After all, she had to start somewhere.

She ended up watching videos on YouTube of different people teaching harmonica, but she had no idea how it worked. Each tutorial assumed that she already had a decent understanding of music theory, but all she knew about was the C major scale. She didn't understand when they talked to her about rhythms, let alone chords. Luckily, they didn't talk about full, half, or quarter notes because her frustration would have been even greater. However, she didn't give up and tried to learn what she could from each video. She used her harmonica to guide herself, but she felt that the tutorials were not enlightening enough. During her research, which largely consisted of jumping from one tutorial to another, it turned two o'clock in the morning. Her mother had already shouted at her from the next room to go to sleep and not waste so much electricity. As this clearly wasn't working, her next move was to tell her to stop playing the harmonica because she wasn't letting them sleep. Not one of her mother's shouts had made her even aware that dawn was breaking. She was so stubborn that she simply didn't bother to measure time as she used to do before she got her harmonica. In any case, she finally decided to go to sleep as she still couldn't find a basic tutorial that was at her own pace, although she had learnt a few breathing exercises.

The next day she woke up, but she didn't want to get up. She huddled under her blankets as if the weight of gravity had increased, if only just for her. She remained in bed facing the back of her desk where her bedside table was. The packaging for the harmonica was still sitting on it. After going to the music store, she had reviewed and studied all the brochures it had contained, but hadn't checked the information that was printed on the box. She looked at the box aimlessly and noticed that the brand offered a free, online course

for thirty days to start playing the harmonica. She got up and turned on her computer to register. That course taught her the basics. Videos showed her how to use her mouth to play better and how to put different techniques into practice. The first few days of the course were spent in front of the bathroom mirror exercising her jaw and tongue. First, she learnt to shape her lips like a fish so that they formed a small hole to be able to play one note at a time. This helped her overcome her previous rather rudimentary technique of covering the holes with her fingers to play a single note. She then learnt how to use her tongue to make the notes sound clean. Each one of these exercises had to be carried out in front of a mirror, initially without the harmonica, and later with it. With the harmonica, the issue was complicated because she felt constant dizziness and her jaw hurt doing the exercises. This made her feel a bit frustrated, so she searched among the support materials that the course offered for something that could be useful. She finally found breathing exercises and realised that it was all about getting air down to the diaphragm and being able to breathe more deeply, hold her breath for longer and adjust the speed of the air. She also knew that she had to quit smoking (she smoked five to six cigarettes daily) and, while doing the breathing exercises, she knew that her performance still wasn't good enough for her to make progress.

Camila hadn't been to class for three weeks, but she wanted to make sure her parents didn't find out. For now, she needed time to improve her harmonica skills and save up the pocket money they gave her. She could then think about starting and playing in bars, maybe even renting a room in the city centre and living off her music. She wanted to save as much as she could, which is why Camila had stopped going out those last few weekends. She also wanted to avoid fighting with her parents so they wouldn't interfere in their affairs. However, one day her father went to lunch at home and caught her there. She was clearly unwashed and playing her harmonica. He must have begun to suspect that his daughter wasn't going to class at that very moment. But, as always, he preferred to keep silent and to talk with his wife so that she would be the one

to actually confront his daughter. When she saw her father arrive, Camila knew that nothing would happen, if they hassled her about it later she could say that she hadn't feel well enough to go to college that day. She also decided to always have a shower before lunch, just in case it were to happen again. Indeed, nothing happened later that day. Her parents seemed to trust her more because of her new, mature attitude, as she wasn't going out anymore, and instead, appeared to be dedicated to study and playing music.

Camila had already learnt to play a few songs like *Happy Birthday* and *Jingle Bells*. Her online course hadn't actually taught how to play her any song yet, but when she got bored of practicing exercises she went to Google and looked for the notation of easy songs to learn them. She still didn't know how to read music, but luckily, there were pages on the internet that indicated the numbers for her to play each tune. She had tried to find *The Wizard*, but the instructions told her she had to play certain notes with *bending*, which encouraged her to continue with her course. In it she learnt how to *bend*, which is a technique for going from a high-pitched to low-pitched notes without sounding discordant. To achieve this, Camila had to move her tongue by retracting it to control the amount of air she breathed in or breathed out. She had been practicing in front of the mirror for a couple of days, but she still couldn't get it quite right as she saw in the video. She felt tired and dizzy once again and the harmonica reproduced cacophonous and asphyxiated sounds. Demoralised, she decided to go to bed early in absolute silence.

When she woke up she didn't feel like playing any song. she didn't even want to play, she was tired of practicing bending and not getting it. Even if she wanted to listen to a song she didn't know what one she wanted to hear and she was too exhausted to tolerate another failure. She spent the day in a foetal position and didn't get out of bed. Around noon her father arrived for lunch. This was unusual, but from the first time he'd seen Camila around that time he'd had gone to the apartment another couple of times. Whenever he arrived, she would disappear into her room, but he'd always find her. She handled the situation with excuses like "I went

to college but I returned home" or "I have class in the afternoon." This time the situation pretty self-explanatory and her dad didn't hold back like he used to.

"How long haven't you been to class?"

"Dad, I do go, but I'm not feeling great today."

"Stop lying to me! You haven't left the house in ages. We're supporting you for you to go to college. What do you plan to do? Do you plan to live locked in your room with that harmonica? Stop lying!"

Camila felt too exhausted to even fight and stopped responding, although her father kept hassling her until he had to go back to work. That afternoon, her mother was the first to arrive. Camila was still in bed. She insisted that her daughter get up as the three of them had to talk. She also threw it in her face that she knew she'd been lying, that she thought Camila was wasting her life and all the opportunities that they, as her parents, were trying to give her. When her mother stopped speaking, Camila finally got out of bed and went into the bathroom. She could see from the door, how her father was smoking frantically. He was sitting beside her mother in the dining room. They were both waiting for her. She sat down and her mother began to speak in a tone that was clearly intended to sound calm and reasonable.

"I can't believe that you have been lying to us all this time. How long has it been since you last went to college? We need an explanation. We simply can't understand why you are wasting our money and our time. Life isn't about getting drunk every weekend or about locking yourself in the room to play an instrument that makes it sound like you're in jail! What do you want? Why are you doing this to us?"

"Look you both know that I hate university..."

"That isn't true! You've never said anything to us. You haven't even looked for other options. Now with your lies you're trying to make us responsible for your own decisions. You can't continue

thinking like a fifteen-year-old girl who has a tantrum every time she gets bored of something and blames others. You're over twenty! Take responsibility for your actions and your decisions. Start what you finished and graduate. You can then dedicate yourself to whatever you want."

"I am taking my decisions..."

"How?" her indignant father intervened for the first time. He had finished his cigarette and his face clearly showed that there was no way to calm his anger down.

"I'm going to make music with my harmonica," Camila spoke with a confident tone, like when she decided to take the first step that Sunday night. Her exasperated father gestured at the table and stood up from his chair.

"How is this even possible? All this time we have spent a fortune on an education that you are going to throw away to devote yourself playing an instrument associated with criminals and prisoners! Is that what you want? That's just what we needed, Camila!" Her father had stopped trying to control his anger and it looked increasingly probable that he would go over to Camila and belt her.

The argument got even more intense. Her father didn't actually hit her, but her mother did. They constantly told her that they hadn't broken their backs all their lives for her to be a mere drop-out and pseudo-musician. Camila retorted that they'd never agreed with anything she did and that if she was unhappy, it was because of them. They reached a dead end. No one was going to give in. Finally, her mother kicked her out of the house. Camila could have fought to stay and they probably would have let her, but she was so tired of it all that she agreed and went straight to her room to pack a suitcase. She didn't sleep all night. She cried with rage and helplessness while she packed. She cried at her parents' unfeeling incomprehension, and then she cried with fear because she hadn't anything planned.

She packed some clothes, her computer, her harmonica, and a couple of economics books to sell in the city centre. She decided to

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THEY WERE BOTH  
WAITING FOR HER.**

start practicing the bending on the harmonica. She sounded much better. She had managed it for the first time. She decided to play *The Wizard* as she couldn't leave her house without having playing it. The beginning of her life had started and she was ready to take it on. However, the song just didn't sound right. Sometimes because she didn't cover the right holes, but even when she did, the song still didn't sound like it did when Ozzy Osbourne played it. It was already five o'clock in the morning, her parents had shouted at her from their room to let them sleep or to leave at once. But she didn't stop. Apparently, nobody could sleep that night.

It had barely dawned when Camila left the house, unsure about where she was heading to. She took the bus that took her to the university with her bags. On the way, she listened to *The Wizard* on repeat on her iPod. She needed to hear and understand the difference between her version and the original. When she arrived at the university she realised that it was a Saturday and that her friends wouldn't even be there. She went to the park where she played the harmonica for the first time. On the way, she passed by the music shop, which was still closed. She then realised she had no one to talk to about her situation. She spent time practising, although she got frustrated at not being able to make it sound good, so she decided to call one of her guitarist friends who had supported her when she had taken her decision. It was eight o'clock in the morning and her friend sounded like he had just woken up. However, he did recognise Camila's voice.

"Hello, Juan, what's the story for today?"

"Camila don't you know what time it is? What are you doing? Where are you?"

"I'm close to the university, my folks kicked me out, I'll tell you all about it later. Can you put me up?"

Juan lived near the university and the music shop, so she didn't have to walk all that far to get there. Even so, she realised how tired she was on her way over there. She arrived in ten minutes. Her friend

asked what had happened and she replied that she would tell him everything once she had had some sleep.

It was three in the afternoon when she got up. Through tears and anger, Camila told Juan what had happened with her parents the night before. She insisted on her decision to live from her music. The conversation didn't focus much on that particular subject. Later there'd be time to think about what to do. Camila now wanted to go out dancing and Juan told her about that night's gig with Brazilians who played postpunk music at the bar with serigraphs on the walls. Concentrating on making plans for that night made Camila stop thinking about her harmonica and her parents.

"Let's have something to drink!" Camila said.

"Don't you want to eat first? You haven't even had breakfast!"

"I want to have aguardiente for breakfast!"

Juan agreed. It was evident that Camila wasn't all right, but he admired her courage and determination. His apartment was quite small and had only one large room where there was a sofa-bed, a small shelf with books, a desk, a guitar and a very small dining table. The kitchen and bathroom were in two separate rooms. He took some brandy out of the refrigerator that had been left over from a previous session at his place. They started drinking and he asked Camila if she wanted to listen to any song in particular. She still didn't quite know what she wanted to her, but she took the computer and mechanically typed "*Going Backwards* - Depeche Mode" into YouTube. Her friend asked about the harmonica and Camila told him she was having some trouble playing *The Wizard*. Juan didn't know anything about harmonicas, but he did know something about music theory, so he asked about her instrument what notation it was in. However, in the courses that Camila had taken, musical notes were still related to numbers and she didn't understand her friend's question. Juan could see that the harmonica was tuned in the key of *La* or A, largely owing to the "A" painted to the left of the holes. Camila had completely ignored this detail because she didn't know

# IT WAS EVIDENT THAT CAMILA WASN'T ALL RIGHT, BUT HE ADMIRERED HER COURAGE AND DETERMINATION.

what the musical notation system was in English, so this aspect had completely passed her by. Juan tried to explain a little about musical notation to her. He began by illustrating how the times were on the staff and, later, he mentioned the equivalence in letters to each of the notes, the scale of C major and La. At this point, they had already had more than a few glasses of aguardiente, so they gave up talking about the harmonica and they devoted themselves to listening to the postpunk group whose gig they were going to all the while making comments about how good they were and how well they synthesised their voices to the rhythm of the bass using distortions.

The next day, when Juan woke up, Camila asked him what had happened the night before.

"Nothing really, we got to the gig at about eleven o'clock, but they wouldn't let you in because you were clearly wasted. I had to bring you back here because you were about to have a fight with the bouncer. Then, you cried in the taxi because you could not play *The Wizard*. Anyway, I'm not sure you can remember anything."

"Was I really bad..."

"No worries. I was pretty wasted as well... Last night, when we arrived, you fell asleep and I borrowed your harmonica. I saw that you were sad because you couldn't play that Black Sabbath song and I wanted to see if I could help you with it... Do you remember what I explained to you yesterday about harmonicas and tuning? Well, the reason why it doesn't sound good isn't because you're not doing the bending right, what happens is that the harmonica used in the song is tuned to Re, so for it to sound exactly the same, you need another harmonica."

After a while of explanations, they decided to change the subject and both of them got up to go have breakfast. While they ate, Camila barely spoke even though Juan made many attempts to revive the conversation. She felt exhausted – with her friend, with the harmonica, with her hangover. She just wanted to go back home, to her room, to her bed. She decided to leave as soon as she finished eating. During the ride home, she knew she had to give some kind of explanation to her parents, but she didn't want to think about it, she felt the weight of her bag on her back, with all the weight of her dreams and frustrations. Gravity appeared to be twice as strong as normal and she just wanted to get into her own bed. As luck would have it, there was no one there to explain anything to when she got home, so she went straight to her room and got into her bed and slept. When she woke up again later that night she heard her parents' voices in the next room. On her desk to her left was a plate of food. She ate it and wanted to go back to sleep. She hadn't completely recovered from her fatigue and hangover.

It was already Monday when she woke up and without thinking she went to the bathroom to have a shower. As soon as she got ready, she left her house with an almost empty bag because she had only shoved an iPod, a notebook and a couple of biros into it. She took the bus that took her to the university, went over to her faculty and walked into her class.

# ELLIPSIS IN THE HAY FESTIVAL

ellipsis

2016-2017

Hay Festival Cartagena de Indias is a meeting place of cultural exchange in which authors and readers can come together to exchange stories and experiences. The British Council, as one of the Hay Festival's global partners, regularly promotes events that bring British authors together with Colombian audiences.

For the XII edition of the festival, two of our special guests were Hisham Matar and Philippe Sands. These renowned authors had the opportunity to have a close look at the Elipsis program, while their participation in several workshop sessions provided a valuable exchange of ideas and significant support for the students who were able to clarify their doubts and supplement their vision of the craft of writing.

Hisham Matar is a Lebanese writer. His first novel, *In the Country of Men*, was a Booker Prize finalist in 2006. In the same year, he published *The Return. Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between*, a book reflecting his memory of his father's disappearance, which was awarded the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for autobiographies.

Philippe Sands is a prestigious French-British lawyer who specializes in Human Rights. He has written 16 books on international laws such as *Lawless World* in 2005 and *Torture Team* in 2008. His most recent book, *East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, won the Baillie Gifford Prize in 2016 for non-fiction.

For Elipsis, it was an honor to have these outstanding writers join us. The following quotes -fragments of interviews recorded during the festival- reveal their experience and vision of the program.



The following quotes are part of the original interviews recorded during the Hay Festival. (Complete podcast series available on: [soundcloud.com/artsbritishcouncil/](https://soundcloud.com/artsbritishcouncil/))

“I THINK THE ELLIPSIS PROGRAMME IS VERY POSITIVE BECAUSE THE CONVERSATIONS THAT YOU CAN HAVE AROUND BOOKS ARE VERY INTERESTING BECAUSE THEY INVOLVE YOU INTO OTHER AREAS THAT ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO GO TO IMMEDIATELY, SUCH AS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO A CERTAIN SORT OF EMOTION, TO HISTORY, TO IDENTITY OR TO NATURE, TO NATIONS, TO FAMILIES. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO MEET A COMPLETE STRANGER AND START TALKING ABOUT THESE INCREDIBLE INTIMATE COMPLEX THINGS. LITERATURE ALLOWS YOU THE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT OUT OF A KIND MODEST CURIOSITY, ABOUT HOW DO YOU FEEL, IT IS MORE HOW ALTOGETHER HUMAN BEINGS CAN EXPLORE THE NATURE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN BEING.”



Hisham Matar

“DURING THE ELLIPSIS PROGRAMME, I MET FIVE COLOMBIAN WRITERS AND EDITORS, AND IT WAS ACTUALLY VERY JOYOUS. THEY WERE EXTREMELY ABLE YOUNG PEOPLE, VERY INTERESTING. WE HAD A VERY GOOD EXCHANGE; THEY HAD TERRIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FINE LINE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION. IT WAS A TERRIFIC ENRICHING CONVERSATION.”



Philippe Sands

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