

A Selection of Horacio Quiroga's Stories

Translated by Nina Zumel

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Introduction: Reading Horacio Quiroga

Exploring the dark tales of this Uruguayan author.

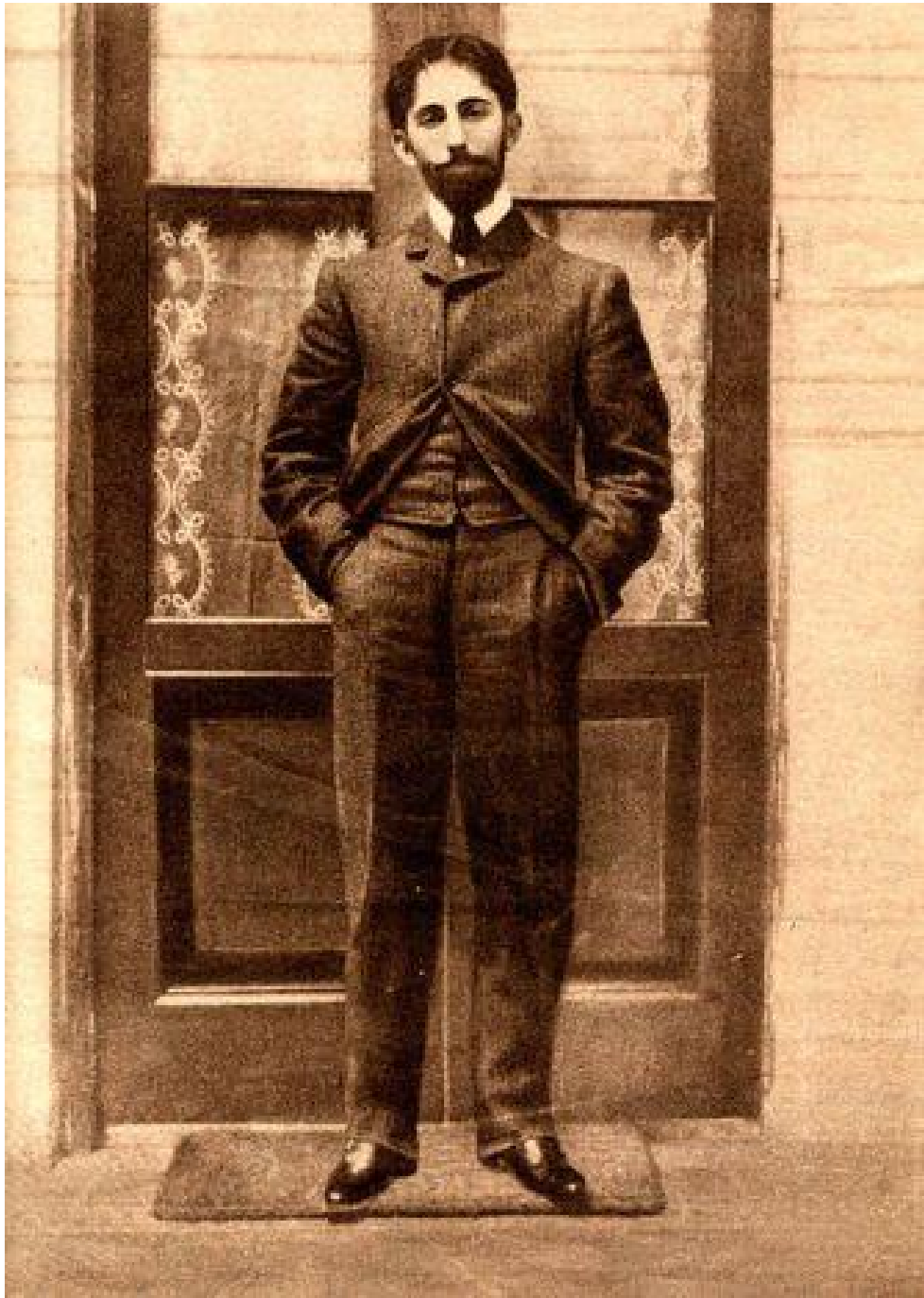
I recently found Horacio Quiroga's short story "The Dead Man" in Clifton Fadiman's 1986 collection *The World of the Short Story*, and it's given me a new hobby: tracking down all of his short stories that I can find.

I've seen Quiroga's stories compared variously to Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, William Faulkner, and Rudyard Kipling; he himself acknowledged the influences of Poe, Kipling and de Maupassant on his work. Like Poe, he had a theory of the perfect short story (one he often contradicted in his own work). Also like Poe, and he was incredibly obsessed with death, and fascinated with madness as well.

This morbid viewpoint is not surprising, given Quiroga's own life history. His father accidentally shot himself on a hunting trip and later his stepfather deliberately shot himself (apparently, Quiroga witnessed it). In 1900, when Quiroga would have been about twenty-one, his two brothers died of typhoid fever. The following year, one of Quiroga's best friends, Federico Ferrando, was challenged to a duel. Since Ferrando knew nothing about guns, Quiroga offered to check Ferrando's gun for him — and accidentally shot and killed Ferrando in the process. Though Quiroga was found innocent of any crime, his own feelings of guilt led him to leave his native Uruguay for Argentina.

In Buenos Aires he worked as a teacher. He also became fascinated with the jungle, eventually buying a farm in the jungle province of Misiones. This fascination with the jungle, in particular its indifference to human life, informs a great deal of his work (shades of Algernon Blackwood's Canadian tales!). In 1909 he married one of his students, Ana Maria Cires. The couple moved out of the city to Quiroga's farm, where they had two children. But this wilderness life didn't suit Ana, and in 1915 she poisoned herself.

It was about this time that Quiroga wrote the short story collections that established his reputation, the 1917 collection *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte* (Tales of Love, Madness and Death) and the 1918 collection of children's tales, *Cuentos de la selva* (Tales of the Jungle). *Cuentos de amor...* is, well, just like it says: stories of obsession, madness, failed relationships, brutal and deadly jungle life. *Cuentos de la selva* is lighter-hearted: tales of humans and animals coexisting in the jungle, sort of a less imperialistic *Jungle Book*. It's delightful—but there is still plenty of death and violence. I'm not sure if parents would be recommending it for their children, today.



Horacio Quiroga, 1897.

Quiroga also uses the device of telling a story through the eyes of animals in some of his adult stories, as well, though not always as benignly.



Illustration by A. L. Ripley for *South American Jungle Tales*, 1922.

Throughout the twenties Quiroga put out several more short story collections: *Anaconda* (1921), *El desierto* (The Desert, 1924), and *Los desterrados* (The Exiled, 1926), which is said to be his best collection. In addition to his usual themes of death and of brutal, unforgiving jungle life, it's no surprise that death by accidental shooting shows up a few times as well, in particular in "El hombre muerto" ("The Dead Man" — from *Los desterrados*), and "El hijo" ("The Son" — from the 1935 collection *Más allá* (Further On)).

Quiroga married again in 1928 (to one of his daughter's classmates!), and settled with her in Misiones. She left him about 1935, and a few years later Quiroga was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer. He committed suicide by poison in 1937. He was 58.

Though Quiroga is considered one of the fathers of the Latin American short story, he seems less well known in Anglophone countries than the Argentinian magical realists who came after him. I found a couple of volumes of selected stories in translation, both from the University of Texas Press: *The Decapitated Chicken and Other Stories* (originally published 1976) and *The Exiles and Other Stories* (originally published 1987). Much of his work has fallen into the public domain (at least somewhere), and you can find it readily online in Spanish. I've been itching to try some more translations, for practice; so far I've done two of Quiroga's stories, and I hope to do more.

"El almohadón de plumas" (The Feather Pillow) is one of Quiroga's earlier stories, originally published in 1904, later included in *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte*. I think every amateur who has ever tried translating Quiroga has taken a crack at this one, first of all because it's short, and second because its ending packs quite a punch. It's a good first introduction to his work, as well.

"El Solitario" (The Solitaire) is also from *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte*. When I first saw the title I read it as "The Loner" (or "The Solitary Man") — Google will translate it as "The Lonely Man." I suspect that the double meaning between *solitario* as "solitary man" and "diamond solitaire" is not accidental. This is not a jungle story, but it's certainly a tale of love and madness.

Do check them out. I hope you enjoy them. I'll update here at *Multo* as I complete more stories.

If you are up for the original Spanish, you can find much of Quiroga's writing at Spanish Wikisource. *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte* and an English translation of *Cuentos de la selva* (as *South American Jungle Tales*) are at Project Gutenberg.

You can also find a few of Quiroga's stories, translated, at the *Translated Works of Horacio Quiroga* site. I plan to try to keep my selections mostly separate from theirs, but there are few stories that I really like, and I might do them myself, anyway.

If you like Poe, de Maupassant, or generally have a taste for the morbid, do check Horacio Quiroga out.

References

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The Feather Pillow

Her honeymoon was one long *frisson*. Blonde, angelic, and timid, her husband's stern character had chilled her childish girlhood dreams. She loved him very much; yet at times, when returning at night together with him on the street, she would glance furtively and with a light shiver at Jordan's tall stature, silent for over an hour. He, for his part, loved her profoundly, without realizing it.

For three months—they had married in April—they lived in a special bliss. No doubt she would have preferred less severity in this rigid paradise of love, more expansive and reckless tenderness; but her husband's impassive countenance remained self-contained.

The house in which they lived contributed to her shivers. The whiteness of the silent patio, its friezes, columns, and marble statues, produced the autumnal impression of an enchanted palace. Inside, the glacial brilliance of the stucco, without the slightest scratch on the high walls, reinforced the sensation of bleak cold. When crossing from one room to another, one's footsteps echoed throughout the house, as if a long abandonment had made the house more sensitive in its resonance.

In this strange love nest, Alicia passed the entire autumn. By the end, she had cast a veil over her long-ago dreams, yet still lived somnolently in the hostile house, not wanting to think of anything until her husband arrived home.

It's not strange that she would lose weight. She had a light attack of influenza that dragged on insidiously for days; Alicia never recovered. Finally one afternoon she was able to go out to the garden, supported on her husband's arm. She gazed indifferently from one side to the other. Suddenly Jordan, with profound tenderness, stroked her head, upon which Alicia burst into sobs, throwing her arms about his neck. For a long time, she wept out her silent terror, redoubling her tears at the least tentative caress. Later her sobs subsided, and yet she remained for a long time, her face hidden in his neck, without moving or saying a word.

It was the last day that Alicia was able to get up. The following day she awoke, faint. The doctor examined her with great attention, ordering absolute calm and rest.

"I don't know," he said to Jordan at the street door, with his voice still lowered. "She's very weak, and I can't explain it, no vomiting, nothing.... If tomorrow she wakes like this, call me immediately."

The next day Alicia was worse. There were consultations. They verified an aggressive, completely inexplicable anemia. Alicia had no more fainting spells, but she was visibly on the verge of death. All day the bedroom stayed fully lit, in complete silence. Hours passed without the least noise. Alicia slept. Jordan almost lived in the front room, also with all the lights burning. He walked ceaselessly from one end to the other,

with untiring obstinacy. The carpet muffled his footsteps. At times he went into the bedroom and continued his mute pacing beside the bed, watching her face each time he walked in her direction.

Soon Alicia began to have hallucinations, confused and floating at first, and then descending to the ground. The young woman, her eyes wide open, constantly watched the carpet on either side of the back of the bed.

“Jordan! Jordan!” she cried, rigid with terror, without taking her eyes from the carpet.

Jordan ran to the bedroom, and on seeing him appear Alicia screamed in horror.

“It’s me, Alicia, it’s me!”

Alicia looked at him strangely, looked at the carpet, looked at him, and after a long moment of stupified contemplation, became serene. She smiled and taking his hand between hers, caressed it, trembling.

Among her more stubborn hallucinations was an ape, his fingers brushing the carpet, his eyes fixed on hers.

The doctors returned, but it was useless. In front of them was a life that was fading, bleeding out day by day, hour by hour, without them knowing how. In the last consultation Alicia lay in a stupor while they took her pulse, passing her inert wrist from one to the other. They stood in silence for some time, and then proceeded to the dining room.

“Pst...,” the doctor slumped his shoulder, discouraged. “It’s a serious case... there’s little we can do...”

“There’s something I’m missing!” Jordan sighed heavily, his fingers drumming in agitation on the table.

Alicia was overcome by the delirium of her anemia, which worsened in the afternoon, but always receded in the early hours. During the day her illness did not progress, but each morning she awoke pale, barely conscious. Only at night, it seemed, did her life leave her, on new wings of blood. She had always on awakening the sensation of collapsing into the bed under a great weight. From the third day this sinking sensation never left her. She could barely move her head. She didn’t want others to touch the bed, not even to arrange her pillows. Her twilight terrors advanced in the form of monsters that crawled towards the bed, and climbed with difficulty up the bedspread.

Later, she lost consciousness. The two final days she raved ceaselessly in a low voice. The lights stayed burning funereally in the bedroom and front room.

At last, she died. The maid, entering alone afterwards to unmake the bed, stared with surprise at the pillow for some time.

“*Señor,*” she called to Jordan in a low voice. “These look like bloodstains on the pillow.”

Jordan approached quickly and bent over the pillow in turn. Sure enough, on the pillowcase, on both sides of the indentation left by Alicia’s head, there were small dark spots.

“They look like bites,” murmured the maid after a moment of intent observation.

“Hold it up to the light,” Jordan said.

The maid picked up the pillow, but immediately let it fall, and remained staring at it, pale and trembling. Without knowing why, Jordan felt his hair stand on end.

“What is it?” he whispered hoarsely.

“It’s heavy,” the maid said, still trembling.

Jordan picked up the pillow; it was extraordinarily heavy. They left the room with it, and on the dining room table Jordan cut away the pillowcase and slit open the pillow. The upper feathers flew in the air, and the maid gave a scream of horror, her mouth wide open, her clenched hands flying to the sides of her face. On the pillow’s cover, between the feathers, slowly moving its hairy legs, was a monstrous animal, a slimy, living ball. It was so swollen that it could hardly move its mouth.

Night after night, while Alicia lay in bed, it had stealthily attached its mouth—or more accurately, its proboscis—to her temple, sucking her blood. The bite was almost imperceptible. The daily arranging of the pillow had no doubt slowed its progress, but when the young woman could no longer move, the bloodsucking accelerated dramatically. In five days, in five nights, it had sucked Alicia dry.

These parasites from birds, so small in their usual environment, under certain conditions reach enormous proportions. Human blood seems especially favorable to them, and it’s not unusual to find them in feather pillows.

From the collection *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (Stories of love, madness and death), 1917.

Translated by Nina Zumel

The Solitaire

Kassim was a sickly man, a jeweler by profession, though he had no established shop. He worked for the big houses, his specialty being the mounting of precious stones. There were few who had hands like his for delicate settings. With more ambition and commercial ability, he would have been rich. But at the age of thirty five he went on as he always had, a fixture in his workshop under the window.

Kassim, with his wart-covered body, his bloodless face darkened by a sparse black beard, had a beautiful and fiercely passionate wife. The young woman, a child of the streets, had hoped to use her beauty to marry up. She had hoped this for twenty years, provoking men and the other neighborhood women with her body. But, fearful at the end, she had nervously accepted Kassim.

But now, no more dreams of luxury. Her husband, though skilled—an artist, even—completely lacked the character for making a fortune. So while the jeweler worked hunched over his tools, she, leaning on her elbows, would maintain on her husband an intense, drawn-out stare, later to abruptly tear herself away and turn her gaze through the window at some passerby who could have been her husband.

Whatever Kassim earned, however, was for her. He worked Sundays, too, for the extra money. When Maria wanted a piece of jewelry—and with what passion she would want it!—he worked nights. Afterwards, he would pay with coughs and stabbing pains in his side; but Maria had her sparkly bauble.

Little by little the daily exposure to gems gave her a love for the work of the craftsman, and she studied passionately the intimate delicacies of a setting. But when the piece was finished—he had to send it off, it wasn't for her—she regretted more deeply the deception of her marriage. She would try on the jewelry, posing before the mirror. At last she would leave it there, and go to her room. Kassim would arise on hearing her sobs, and would find her on the bed, ignoring him.

“But I do as much as I can for you,” he would say at last, sadly.

Her sobs would grow louder at this, and the jeweler would slowly reinstall himself at his bench.

This scene was repeated, so much so that Kassim no longer got up to console her. Console her! For what? But this did not prevent Kassim from prolonging his evenings even more, to make bigger bonuses.

He was an indecisive man, irresolute and quiet. His wife now regarded his mute tranquility with an even more intense fixity.

“And you think you're a man!” she murmured.

Kassim did not pause the movement of his fingers upon his work.

“You’re not happy with me, Maria,” he said after a while.

“Happy! You have the nerve to say that! Who could be happy with you? Not the last woman on earth... Poor devil!” Concluding her speech with a nervous laugh, she left.

Kassim worked that night until three in the morning, and then his wife had new sparkles, which she considered for an instant with pursed lips.

“Hmmm...it’s not an impressive diadem!...When did you do it?”

“I’ve been working on it since Tuesday.” He gazed at her with feeble tenderness. “While you were sleeping.”

“Oh, you could have gone to bed!...Such huge diamonds!”

For her passion was for the immense stones that Kassim set for his clients. She followed his work with a crazed hunger for it to be finished then and there, and the piece would hardly be completed before she would run with it to the mirror. Then, a fit of sobs.

“Anyone, any husband, the least of them, would make sacrifices to please his wife. But you...you...not even one miserable dress do I have to wear!”

Once she has lost enough respect for him, a woman is capable of saying to her husband the most incredible things.

Kassim’s wife crossed that line with a passion at least equal to the passion she felt for diamonds. One afternoon, while locking up his jewels, Kassim noticed that a brooch was missing—two solitaires worth five thousand pesos. He looked through his drawers again.

“You haven’t seen the brooch, have you Maria? I left it here.”

“Yes I saw it.”

“Where is it?” he responded, surprised.

“Here!”

His wife stood there, with burning eyes and a mocking smile, wearing the brooch.

“It looks good on you,” Kassim said after a moment. “Let’s put it away.”

Maria laughed.

“Oh no! It’s mine.”

“Are you joking?”

“Yes, it’s a joke! A joke, yes! How it hurts to think it could be mine...Tomorrow I’ll give it to you. Tonight I’m wearing it to the theater.”

Kassim’s expression changed.

“You can’t do that...they could see you. They would lose all trust in me.”

“Oh!” Without another word, she left in an infuriated huff, slamming the door shut violently.

On returning from the theater, she put the brooch on the nightstand. Kassim picked it up and locked it away in his workshop. When he came back, his wife was sitting on the bed.

“That means you’re afraid that I’ll steal it! That I’m a thief!”

“Don’t look at me like that... you’ve been reckless, nothing more.”

“Ah! And they trust you with it! You! And when your wife asks you for just a little gratification, and she wants... you call me a thief! Disgraceful!”

She fell asleep at last. But Kassim did not sleep.

Later on, they sent Kassim a solitaire to mount, the most magnificent diamond that had ever passed through his hands.

“Look Maria, what a stone. I’ve never seen another like it.”

His wife said nothing; but Kassim felt her breathing deeply over the solitaire.

“Such admirable clarity,” he continued. “It must cost nine or ten thousand pesos.”

“A ring!” Maria murmured at last.

“No, it’s for a man... A stickpin.”

In time to the mounting of the solitaire, Kassim felt on his laboring back all the burning resentment and frustrated vanity of his wife. Ten times a day she would interrupt her husband to stand with the diamond in front of the mirror. Then she would try it with different outfits.

“If you want to do that afterwards...” Kassim ventured. “This is a rush job.”

He waited for a response, in vain; his wife opened the doors to the balcony.

“Maria, they can see you!”

“Take it! There’s your stone!”

The solitaire, flung violently away, rolled along the floor.

Kassim, pale, examined it as he picked it up, then raised his eyes from the floor to his wife.

“Well, why do you look at me like that? Did something happen to your stone?”

“No,” said Kassim. And he resumed his work at once, although his hands trembled piteously.

But at last he had to get up to see his wife in the bedroom, having a complete nervous breakdown. Her hair had fallen loose and her eyes bulged from their sockets.

“Give me the diamond!” she cried. “Give it to me! We’ll run away! It’s mine! Give it to me!”

“Maria...” Kassim stammered, trying to extricate himself.

“Ah!” his crazed wife screamed. “You are the thief, you miserable dog! You’ve stolen my life, you thief...thief! And you thought I wouldn’t get even... you thought I wouldn’t find someone else! Aha! Look at me... it never occurred to you, eh? Ah!” And she raised both hands to her choking throat. But when Kassim turned to go, she jumped from the bed and tripped, grasping for her prize.

“It doesn’t matter! The diamond, give it to me! That’s all I want! It’s mine, Kassim, you wretch!”

Kassim helped her up, pale.

“You’re not well, Maria. We’ll talk later... go to bed.”

“My diamond!”

“All right, we’ll see if it’s possible... go to bed.”

“Give it to me!”

And the bile rose again in her throat.

Kassim resumed working on the solitaire. Since his hands had a mathematical precision, he only needed a few more hours.

Maria arose to eat, and Kassim showed her the same attention as usual. At the end of the dinner his wife looked him straight in the face.

"It's a lie, Kassim," she said.

"Oh!" said Kassim, smiling. "It's nothing."

"I swear it's a lie!" She insisted.

Kassim smiled again, patting her hand with awkward affection.

"Silly! I told you it's all forgotten."

And he got up and went back to work. His wife, with her face between her hands, continued to watch him.

"And he won't say more than that..." she murmured. And with a deep nausea for that clingy, limp, inert creature who was her husband, she went to her room.

She did not sleep well. She awoke late in the evening and saw light in the workshop; her husband was still working. An hour later, he heard a shriek.

"Give it to me!"

"Yes it's for you; just a little left to do, Maria," he said hurriedly, getting up. But his wife, after that shout from her nightmare, fell back asleep. At two in the morning Kassim was finished; the diamond gleamed, secure and virile in its setting. With silent steps he went to the bedroom and turned on the bedside lamp. Maria slept on her back, in the icy whiteness of her nightgown and the sheet.

He went to the workshop and returned again. For a moment he contemplated her almost completely exposed breast, and with a faint smile he nudged her loose nightgown down a little more.

His wife did not feel it.

There was not much light. Kassim's face suddenly acquired a hard immobility. For an instant he suspended the jewel high above her naked breast, and then, holding it firmly and perpendicular like a nail, he sank the entire pin into his wife's heart.

There was a sudden opening of her eyes, followed by a slow drop of her eyelids. Her fingers arched, and nothing more.

The jewel, shaken by the convulsions of her wounded nervous system, trembled for an unsteady instant. Kassim waited a moment; and when the solitaire at last remained perfectly still, then he withdrew, closing the door after himself without a sound.

From the collection *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (Stories of love, madness and death), 1917.

Translated by Nina Zumel

The Artificial Hell

On nights when there is a moon, the gravedigger advances through the tombs with a singularly stiff step. He is nude to the waist and wears a large straw hat. His fixed smile gives the impression of being stuck to his face with glue. If he were barefoot, one would notice that he walks with his big toes turned down.

There is nothing strange about this, because the gravedigger abuses chloroform. The hazards of his trade led him to try the anesthetic, and when chloroform bites a man, it rarely lets go. Our acquaintance waits for night to open his bottle, and as he has great common sense, he chooses the cemetery for the inviolable theater of his binges.

Chloroform dilates the chest on the first whiff; the second fills the mouth with saliva; the extremities tingle at the third; at the fourth one's lips swell, along with one's ideas, and then odd things happen.

As if in a dream the gravedigger's steps have taken him to an open tomb, where that afternoon there had been a disinterment—unfinished for lack of time. A coffin was left open behind the gate, and at its side, on the sand, the skeleton of the man who had been enclosed in it.

Did he hear something? Really? Our acquaintance draws back the bolt, enters, and then after a bewildered turn around the bone man, he kneels and puts his eyes to the orbits of the skull.

There, in the back, a little above the base of the cranium, perched as if on a parapet in the roughness of the back of the skull, is huddled a little shivering yellow man, his face crossed with wrinkles. He has a bruised mouth, deeply sunken eyes, and a gaze mad with anguish.

He is all that remains of a cocaine addict.

“Cocaine! Please, a little cocaine!”

The gravedigger, serene, knows well that he himself would dissolve the glass of his bottle with his spit in order to reach the forbidden chloroform. It is, therefore, his duty to help the little shivering man.

He leaves and returns with a full syringe, provided by the cemetery medical kit. But how to give it to the tiny little man?

“Through the cranial fissures! ... Quickly!”

Of course! How had that not occurred to him? And the gravedigger, on his knees, injects the fissures with the entire contents of the syringe, which filters and disappears between the cracks.

But surely something has reached the fissure that the little man desperately clings to. After eight years of abstinence, what molecule of cocaine doesn't ignite a delirium of strength, youth, beauty?

The gravedigger put his eyes to the orbits of the skull, and didn't recognize the dying little man. There was not the least trace of a wrinkle on his firm smooth skin. His vibrant red lips were intertwined with a lazy voluptuousness that would have no manly explanation, if narcotics were not almost all feminine; and above all his eyes, which before were glassy and dull, now shone with such passion that the gravedigger felt an pang of envious surprise.

"And that's what it's like ... cocaine?" he murmured.

The voice from inside sounded with ineffable charm.

"Ah! You have no idea what eight years of agony are! Eight desperate, freezing years, tied to eternity by the lone hope of a drop! Yes, it's because of cocaine... And you? I know that smell... chloroform?"

"Yes," replied the gravedigger, ashamed by the paltriness of his artificial paradise. And he added in a low voice: "Chloroform, too... I would kill myself before I quit."

The voice sounded a bit mocking.

"Kill yourself! And that would be the end of you, for sure; you would be just like any of these neighbors of mine... You would rot in three hours, you and your desires."

"True," thought the gravedigger, "my cravings would perish with me. But his did not surrender. After eight years it still burns, that passion that has resisted the very absence of the cup of delight; that overcame the final death of the organism who created it, sustained it, and could not annihilate it with himself; that survives monstrously on its own, transmuting the causal craving in a supreme final pleasure, maintaining itself before eternity in a crevice of an old skull."

The voice, warm and slurred with voluptuousness, still sounded mocking.

"You would kill yourself... Nice thing! I killed myself, too... Ah, that interests you, doesn't it? But we are of different temperaments.... Anyway, bring your chloroform, breathe in a little more and listen to me. Then you will appreciate what goes from your drug to cocaine. Come on, now!"

The gravedigger returned, and lying on the ground chest down, leaning on his elbows with the flask under his nose, he waited.

"Your chloro! It's not much, let's say. And even morphine ... Are you familiar with the love for perfumes? No? And Jicky, by Guerlain? Listen, then. At thirty I married, and had three children. With a fortune, an adorable wife and three healthy offspring, I was perfectly happy. Nevertheless, our house was too large for us. You've seen such places. You have not...to be brief...seen that luxuriously furnished rooms seem more lonely and useless. Above all, lonely. Our whole palace existed like that, in silence, in sterile and gloomy luxury.

"One day, in less than eighteen hours, our oldest son left us following a bout of diphtheria. The following afternoon the second joined his brother, and my wife threw herself desperately upon the only one we had remaining: our daughter of four months.

What did we care about diphtheria, contagion and all the rest? In spite of the doctor's orders, the mother breastfed her child, and after a while the little one was writhing and convulsed, to die eight hours later, poisoned by her mother's milk.

"Add it up: 18, 24, 9. In 51 hours, a little more than two days, our house was left perfectly silent, and there was nothing we could do. My wife stayed in her room, and I paced nearby. Outside of that nothing, not one noise. And two days before we had three children...

"Well. My wife spent four days clawing at the sheets with a brain fever, and I turned to morphine.

"'Leave that alone,' the doctor told me, 'it's not for you.'

"'What, then?' I replied. And I pointed out the gloomy luxury of my house, which kept on slowly igniting catastrophes, like rubies.

The man took pity.

"'Try sulfonal, anything... But your nerves will not give way.'

"Sulfonal, brional, datura... bah! Ah, cocaine! So much of the infinite goes from the joy scattered in ashes at the foot of each empty bed, to the radiant recovery of this same burnt happiness, fit in one lone drop of cocaine! The wonder of having suffered an immense pain, moments before; sudden and simple confidence in life, now; an instantaneous resurgence of illusions that brings the future closer to ten centimeters from the open soul, all this rushes through the veins from the platinum needle. And your chloroform!... My wife died. For two years I spent on cocaine so much more than you can imagine. Do you know something of tolerance? Five centigrams of morphine kills a robust individual. Quincey came to take two grams a day for fifteen years; or forty times more than a fatal dose.

"But one pays for it. In me, intoxicated day after day, the dismal truths, suppressed, began to take revenge, and I had barely enough twisted nerves to throw aside the horrible hallucinations that besieged me. Then I made unheard of efforts to rid myself of the demon, with no success. Three times I resisted the cocaine for a month, an entire month. And I fell again. And you don't know, but you will know one day, what suffering, what anguish, what sweat of agony you feel when you attempt to suppress drugs for a single day!

"At last, poisoned to the depths of my being, fraught with tortures and phantasms, transformed into trembling human spoils, bloodless, lifeless—misery to which ten times a day cocaine lent a radiant disguise, only to sink me immediately into a stupor, deeper each time, in the end a remnant of dignity sent me to a sanatorium, I surrendered myself tied hand and foot for a cure.

"There, under the dominance of another's will, constantly monitored so that I could not obtain the poison, I would forcibly de-cocaineize myself.

"Do you know what happened? That I, along with the heroism to submit myself to torture, brought a small vial of cocaine, well hidden in a pocket... Now you work out what passion is.

“For an entire year after this failure, I continued to inject myself. Undertaking a long voyage gave me I don’t know what mysterious strength of resistance, and then I fell in love.”

The voice fell silent. The gravedigger, who had been listening with a drooling smile plastered to his face, brought his eye closer and thought he noticed a slightly opaque and glassy veil in the eyes of his interlocutor. His skin, as well, cracked visibly.

“Yes,” the voice continued, “that’s the beginning ... I’ll conclude at once. I owe you, a colleague, this whole story.

“Her parents did everything possible to resist: imagine, a morphine fiend! For misfortune —mine, hers, everyone’s—had put in my path a high-strung beauty. Oh, admirably beautiful! She was no more than eighteen. Luxury for her was what cut crystal is for a perfume: her natural environment.

“The first time that, having forgotten to give myself a new injection before she arrived, she saw me suddenly deteriorate in her presence, become an idiot, crumple, she fixed on me her immensely large eyes, beautiful and frightened. So curiously frightened! Pale and unmoving, she saw me giving myself the injection. For the rest of the evening, she never left off watching me for an instant. And behind those dilated eyes that had seen me in that state, I saw in my turn her neurotic defects, her hospitalized uncle, and her younger epileptic brother...

“The next day I found her inhaling Jicky, her favorite perfume; in twenty-four hours she had read how much is possible with narcotics.

“Well, now: it’s enough that two people drink in the pleasures of life in an abnormal way, so as to understand them more intimately; how much stranger is the quest for enjoyment. They immediately join together, excluding all other passion, to isolate themselves in the hallucinatory joy of an artificial paradise.

“In twenty days, that enchantress of beauty, youth and elegance hung suspended in the heady fragrance of perfumes. She began to live, as I did with cocaine, in the delirious heaven of her Jicky.

“In the end this mutual somnambulism in her house, however fleeting, seemed dangerous to us, and we decided to create our own paradise. None seemed better than my own house, in which nothing had been touched, and to which I had not returned. Wide, low couches were brought to the living room, and there, in the same silence and the same funereal sumptuousness that had incubated the death of my children; in the profound stillness of the living room, with a lamp burning at one in the afternoon; below the atmosphere heavy with perfumes, we lived for hours and hours our fraternal and taciturn idyll, I sprawled out motionless with open eyes, as pale as death; she flung across a divan, holding the flask of Jicky below her nostrils with her frozen hand.

“For we had in ourselves not the least trace of desire—and how beautiful she was with the deep circles under her eyes, her disarranged hair, and the ardent luxury of her immaculate skirt!

“For three consecutive months she was rarely absent, and never without explaining to me what combinations of visits, weddings, and garden party she had to attend to

avoid suspicion. On those rare occasions she would arrive anxious the following day, entering without looking at me, tossing her hat off with a brusque gesture, to stretch out immediately, her head thrown back and her eyes half-closed, to the sonambulism of her Jicky.

“Briefly: one afternoon, and by one of those inexplicable reactions with which poisoned organisms fire off their reserves of defense—morphine addicts know them well!—I felt all the deep pleasure that there was, not in my cocaine, but in that eighteen year old body, admirably made to be desired. That afternoon, as never before, her beauty emerged pale and sensual from the sumptuous stillness of the illuminated living room. So sudden was the jolt, that I found myself sitting on the couch, watching her. Eighteen years old... and with that beauty!

“She saw me approach her without making a movement, and as I bent over her she looked at me with cold surprise.

“‘Yes ...’, I murmured.

“‘No, no ...’ she said in a high voice, dodging my mouth in heavy movements of her hair.

“At last, at last, she threw back her head and surrendered, closing her eyes.

“Ah! Why be resuscitated for an instant, if my virile potency, if my male pride did not revive as well! It was forever dead, drowned, dissolved in the sea of cocaine! I fell to her side, sitting on the floor, and buried my head in her skirts, remaining so for an hour in deep silence, while she, very pale, also remained motionless, her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

“But the burst of reaction that had ignited an ephemeral lightning bolt of sensory ruin, also brought to the flower of my awareness how much of my masculine honor and virile shame was dying in me. The disaster of one day in the sanitarium, and the daily failure of my own dignity, was nothing in comparison to the failure of this moment, do you understand? Why live, if the artificial hell into which I had flung myself and from which I could not escape, was incapable of absorbing me altogether! And I had broken free for a moment, only to sink back into this final state!

“I stood up and went inside, to the well remembered rooms where my revolver still lay. When I returned, her eyes were closed.

“‘Let’s kill ourselves,’ I said to her.

“She half-opened her eyes, and for a minute she held my gaze. Her limpid brow returned to the same movement of tired ecstasy:

“‘Let’s kill ourselves,’ she murmured.

“Then she looked around the funereal luxury of the living room, in which the lamp burned high, and her brow furrowed slightly.

“‘Not here,’ she added.

“We left together, still heavy with hallucination, and we passed through the echoing house, room by room. At last she leaned against a door and shut her eyes. She fell at the foot of the wall. I then turned the gun on myself, and killed myself.

“Then, when at the explosion my jaw abruptly dropped, and I felt an immense buzzing in my head; when my heart gave two or three jolts, and stopped, paralyzed; when in my brain and in my nerves and in my blood there was not the most remote probability that life would return, I felt that my debt to cocaine was fulfilled. It had killed me, but I had killed it in turn!

“And I was mistaken! Because an instant later I could see, entering hesitantly and on hands and knees, through the door of the living room, our dead bodies, obstinately returning...”

The voice suddenly snapped.

“Cocaine, please! A little cocaine!”

From the collection *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (Stories of love, madness and death), 1917.

Translated by Nina Zumel

The Rabid Dog

On the 20th of March of this year, the residents of a town in the Santa Fe Chaco pursued a rabid man who, while trying to unload his shotgun on his wife, shot and killed a peón who crossed in front of him. His neighbors, armed, tracked him into the bush like a wild beast, finally discovering him climbing a tree, still with his shotgun, howling in a horrible way. They saw no choice but to shoot and kill him.

March 9.

Today it's been thirty-nine days, hour by hour, since the rabid dog entered our room at night. If there is a memory that will live on in my mind, it's that of the two hours that followed that moment.

The house had no doors except for the room Mamá occupied; since from the start she had been prone to fear, I didn't do anything, in the first urgent days of moving in, other than saw boards for the doors and windows of her room. In our room, and in the hope of more work space, my wife contented herself—under a little pressure on my part, true—with magnificent doors of burlap. As it was summer, this detail of rigorous ornamentation didn't damage our health or our fear. It was through one of these burlap portals, the one that gave onto the central corridor, that the rabid dog entered and bit me.

I don't know if the shriek of an epileptic gives to others the sensation of a bestial clamor, beyond all humanity, that it produces in me. But I am sure that the howling of a rabid dog, lingering at night around our house, would provoke in everyone the same melancholy anguish. It is a short cry, strangled, agonized, as if the animal were already breathing its last, and all of it saturated with the grim suggestion of a rabid animal.

It was a black dog, large, with clipped ears. And to make things worse, from the time that we had arrived it had done nothing but rain. The wilderness enclosed by the rain, the short, depressing afternoons; we would hardly leave the house before the desolation of the countryside, in a storm without respite, would overshadow Mamá's spirit.

With this, the mad dogs. One morning the *peón* told us that one had passed through his house the night before, and had bit one of his family. Two nights before, a reddish-gray dog had howled in an ugly way in the bush. There were several dogs, according to the *peón*. My wife and I did not give much importance to the matter, but this was not so for Mamá, who began to find our half-finished house terribly defenseless. Every moment she would go out into the corridor to watch the road.

But when our son returned that morning from town, he confirmed the news. A devastating epidemic of rabies had exploded. One hour earlier, they had chased a dog down in the village. A *peón* had had time to give it a machete-chop in the ear, and the animal, at a trot, nose to the ground and tail between its forelegs, had crossed our street, biting a foal and a pig that it had encountered on the way.

Still more news. In the farm neighboring ours, in the early hours of that same day, another dog had tried unsuccessfully to jump into the cattle corral. An immense skinny dog had run at a man on horseback on the trail to the old port. It was still afternoon when the agonized howl of a dog sounded in the bush. As a last piece of data, at nine two agents arrived at a gallop, giving us the details of the rabid dogs that had been seen, and recommending that we take the utmost care.

That was enough for Mamá to lose the rest of the courage she had left. Although she was serene through every trial, she was terrified of rabid dogs, because of something horrible that she had seen as a child. Her nerves, already on edge from the constantly overcast and rainy skies, conjured up realistic hallucinations of dogs trotting through the front door.

There was a real reason for this fear. Here, as everywhere where poor people have many more dogs than they can keep, the houses are prowled nightly by hungry dogs, to whom the dangers of the task—a shot or a badly thrown stone—have given the true behavior of wild beasts. They advance step by step, crouched low to the ground, muscles relaxed. One never notices their approach. They steal—if that word makes sense here—as much as their atrocious hunger demands. At the slightest murmur, they don't flee, because that would make noise, but move away on bended legs. When they reach the grasses outside, they crouch down and wait there calmly thirty minutes or an hour, and then advance anew.

Hence, Mamá's anxiety, since, as our house was one of the many being prowled, we were of course threatened by a visit from the rabid dogs, who would remember the nocturnal path.

In fact, that same afternoon, while Mamá, a bit forgetful, was walking slowly towards the front entrance, I heard her cry:

“Federico! A rabid dog!”

A reddish-grey dog, with its back arched, advanced at a trot in a blind straight line. On seeing me approach it stopped, the hair on its back bristling. I backed away without turning my body to search for the shotgun, but the animal fled. I went up and down the road in vain, without finding it again.

Two days passed. The countryside remained desolated by rain and sadness, while the number of rabid dogs increased. To avoid exposing the children to a terrible mishap on the infested roads, the school closed; and the already traffic-free road, thus deprived of the schoolchild racket that enlivened its solitude at seven and at twelve, acquired a gloomy silence.

Mamá did not dare to take a step outside the patio. At the least bark she peered, frightened, towards the front entrance, and just as night fell, she saw phosphorescent

eyes advancing through the grass. After dinner she shut herself in her room, her hearing attentive for the most hypothetical howl.

It was on the third night that I awoke, when it was already very late; I had the impression of having heard a cry, but I couldn't pin down the sensation. I waited a while. And suddenly a short metallic howl, of atrocious suffering, vibrated down the corridor

"Federico!" I heard Mamá's voice, shot through with emotion. "Did you hear?"

"Yes," I said, sliding off the bed. But she heard the noise I made.

"Dear God, it's a rabid dog! Federico, don't go out, for God's sake! Juana! Tell your husband not to go out!" She cried out desperately, addressing my wife.

Another howl exploded, this time in the central corridor, in front of the door. A fine shower of chills washed my spine to the waist. I don't think that there is anything more profoundly dismal than the howl of a rabid dog at that hour. Rising up above it was the desperate voice of my mother.

"Federico! It's going into your room! Don't go out, my God, don't go out! Juana! Tell your husband! ..."

"Federico!" my wife grabbed my arm.

But the situation could become quite serious if I waited for the animal to enter, and turning on the light I took down my shotgun. I raised the edge of the burlap over the doorway, and saw nothing but the black triangle of the deep fog outside. I hardly had time to step forward when I felt something firm and warm rub against my thigh: the rabid dog had entered our room. I threw its head back violently with a blow from my knee, and suddenly it lunged to bite me, but failed, with an audible clash of its teeth. But the next instant I felt a sharp pain.

Neither my wife nor my mother realized that it had bitten me.

"Federico! What was that?" cried Mamá, who had heard my halt before the bite at the air.

"Nothing: it wanted to come in."

"Oh! ..."

Again, this time beyond Mamá's room, the ominous howl exploded.

"Federico! It's rabid! Don't go out!" she cried madly, hearing the animal through the wooden wall, a meter away from her.

There are absurd things that have all the appearance of legitimate reasoning: I went outside with the lamp in one hand and the shotgun in the other, exactly as if I were searching for a terrified rat that had provided me the perfect space to place the light on the ground and kill it at the end of a pitchfork.

I traversed the corridors. I didn't hear a sound, but from inside the rooms I was trailed by the tremendous anguish of Mamá and my wife, who were waiting for the boom of the gun.

The dog was gone.

"Federico!" Mamá exclaimed on hearing me return at last. "Did the dog leave?"

"I think so; I didn't see it. I think I heard its trot when I left."

“Yes, I heard it too...Federico: it’s not in your room? ... It hasn’t got a door, my God! Stay inside! It could come back!”

In effect, it could come back. It was two-twenty in the morning. And I swear that the two hours that my wife and I passed were intense, with the light on until dawn, she lying in bed, I sitting on the bed, constantly watching the floating burlap.

I had healed before. The bite was clean: two purple holes, which I compressed with all my strength, and washed with permanganate.

I didn’t really believe that the animal was rabid. Since the previous day they had begun to poison the dogs, and something in the overwhelmed attitude of our dog predisposed me in favor of strychnine. There remained the dismal howl and the bite; but anyway I was inclined to the first theory. From here, surely, came my relative carelessness with the wound.

Finally, day arrived. At eight o’clock, and four blocks from home, a passerby shot and killed the black dog with a revolver; it had been in an unequivocally rabid state. The moment we knew, I had on my part to fight a real battle against Mamá and my wife not to go down to Buenos Aires for shots. The wound, frankly, had been well compressed, and washed with a luxurious, biting painful amount of permanganate. All this, within five minutes of the bite. What the hell could I be afraid of after this hygienic treatment? At home they finally reassured themselves, and as the epidemic—provoked by a crisis of rain without respite such as had never been seen here—had ended almost at once, life recovered its habitual routine.

But in spite of that Mamá and my wife did not leave off, and have not left off, taking exact account of time. The classical forty days weigh strongly, above all for Mamá, and even today, with thirty-nine days passed without the slightest ailment, she waits for tomorrow, in order to expel from her spirit, in an immense sigh, the everliving terror that she retains from that night.

Perhaps the only nuisance for me has been this: to remember, point by point, what has happened. I am confident that tomorrow night, with the end of the quarantine, will conclude this story that keeps the eyes of my wife and my mother fixed on me, as if they are searching my expression for the first sign of illness.

March 10.

At last! I hope that from now on I can live like any other man, who does not have crowns of death suspended above his head. I have passed the famous forty days, and the anxiety, the persecution mania and the horrible screams that they anticipated from me have also passed forever.

My wife and my mother have celebrated the joyous occasion in a particular way: by telling me, point by point, all the terrors that they have suffered without letting me see. My most insignificant lack of appetite plunged them into mortal anguish. “It’s the rabies beginning!” they moaned.

If some morning I arose late, for hours they stopped living, waiting for another symptom. The annoying infection in a finger that had me feverish and impatient for

three days, was for them an absolute proof that the rabies had begun, from which came their consternation, more anguished for being furtive.

And so the least change of humor, the slightest dejection, provoked in them, over the forty days, many other hours of worry. In spite of these retrospective confessions, always disagreeable for one who has been in the dark, even with the most archangelic good will, I have laughed heartily at all of it. "Ah, my son! You can't imagine how horrible it is for a mother to think that her son might be rabid! Anything else.... but rabid, rabid!"

My wife, although more sensible, has also rambled far more than she confesses. But now it's over, thankfully! This situation of martyrdom, of a baby watched second to second against such an absurd threat of death, is not appealing, after all. At last, again, we will live peacefully, and hopefully tomorrow the past won't dawn with a headache, and resurrect the craziness.

I wanted to be absolutely calm, but it's impossible. There is no longer, I believe, any possibility that this will end. Sidelong glances all day, incessant whispering that stops suddenly when they hear my steps, an irritating spying upon my expression when we are at table, all this is becoming intolerable.

"What's wrong, please?" I just said to them. "Do you see something abnormal about me, am I not exactly as always? This story of the rabid dog is already a bit boring!"

"But Federico!" they replied, looking at me with surprise. "We didn't say anything to you, or remember doing so!"

And they don't, however, do anything else, other than spy on me night and day, day and night, to see if the stupid dog's rabies has infected me!

March 18.

For three days I have lived as I should and I would like to do so all my life. They have left me in peace, at last, at last, at last!

March 19.

Again! Again it's begun! They don't take their eyes off me anymore, as if what they seem to want has happened: that I am rabid. How is such stupidity in two sensible people possible! Now they no longer dissimulate, and they speak rashly aloud about me; but—I don't know why—I can't understand a word. As soon as I arrive they stop suddenly, and the moment I step away the dizzying chatter begins again. I could not contain myself and I turned with rage.

"But if you talk, say it in front of me, it's less cowardly!"

I didn't want to hear what they said and I left. This is no longer life that I'm living!

8 pm

They want to leave! They want us to leave!

Oh, I know why they want to leave me! ...

March 20. (6 am)

Howling, howling! All night I've heard nothing but howling! I've spent all night waking up every moment! Dogs, there's been nothing but dogs around the house tonight!

And my wife and my mother have feigned the most placid dreams, so that only I would absorb through my eyes the howls of all the dogs that watch me!...

7 am

Nothing but vipers! My house is full of vipers! While washing myself there were three in the basin! There are several in the lining of the sacking! And there's more! There are other things! My wife has filled my house with vipers! She has brought enormous hairy spiders that chase me! Now I understand why she spied on me day and night! Now I understand everything! This is why she wanted to leave!

7.15 am

The patio is full of vipers! I can't take a step! No, no!.... Help!...

My wife is running away! My mother is leaving! They have murdered me!...Ah, the shotgun!...Damn it! It's loaded with ammo! But it doesn't matter...

What a scream she gave! I missed her... Again the vipers! There! There's an enormous one! Ah! Help, help!!

Everyone wants to kill me! They're all against me! The bush is full of spiders! They've followed me from the house!...

Here comes another assassin... He got them in his hand! He's coming and throwing vipers to the ground! He's pulling vipers from his mouth and throwing them to the ground towards me! Ah! but he won't live long... I hit him! He's died with all the vipers!... The spiders! Ah! Help!!

Here they come, everyone's coming!... They're looking for me, looking for me!... They've launched a million vipers against me! Everyone is putting them on the ground! And I have no more cartridges!... They've seen me!... One of them is pointing at me...

From the collection *Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte* (Stories of love, madness and death), 1917.

Translated by Nina Zumel

The Spectre

Every night in the Grand Splendid in Santa Fe, Enid and I attend the film premieres. Neither storms nor icy nights prevent us from appearing, promptly at ten o'clock, in the pallid half-light of the theater. There, from one box or another, we follow the stories of the film in silence and with an interest that might draw attention to us, if our circumstances were other than they are.

From one box or another, I said; because its location is indifferent to us. And although we might be missing from the same spot some night, the Splendid being full, we settle ourselves, silent and always attentive to the performance, in any already occupied box.

I don't think we bother anyone; at least, not in any appreciable way. From the back of the box, or between the young woman on the balcony and the boyfriend clinging to her neck, Enid and I, separate from the world that surrounds us, are all eyes towards the screen. And if in truth some people, with a nervous shiver whose origin they don't quite understand, occasionally turn their heads to look for what they can't see, or they feel an icy draft they can't explain in the warm atmosphere, our intruding presence is never noticed; because it's necessary to admit now that Enid and I are dead.

Of all the women that I knew in the world of the living, none of them had the effect on me that Enid did. The impression was so strong that the images and the very memory of all other women were erased. In my soul it was night, where a single imperishable star rose: Enid. The mere possibility that her eyes could look upon me with indifference would suddenly stop my heart. And at the idea that some day she could be mine, my jaw would tremble. Enid!

She had then, when we lived in the world, a more divine beauty than the epics of cinema have ever launched a thousand leagues and exposed to the fixed gaze of men. Her eyes, above all, were unique; and never did a velvet gaze have such a frame of eyelashes like Enid's eyes: blue velvet, moist and calm, like the happiness that sobbed in them.

Misfortune put me in front of her when she was already married.

There is no reason now to hide names. Everyone remembers Duncan Wyoming, the extraordinary actor who, beginning his career at the same time as William Hart, had, like him and on par with him, the same deep talent for virile roles. Hart has already given to the cinema all that we could expect from him, and he is a falling star. From Wyoming, on the other hand, we don't know what we could have seen, when right at the beginning of his brief and fantastic career he created—as a contrast to the cloying modern hero—the tough guy, coarse, ugly, careless, whatever you like; but a man from

head to toe in the sobriety, the drive, and the distinctive character of the sex. Hart is still acting, and we've already seen it all. Wyoming was snatched from us in the prime of his life, leaving performances that resulted in two extraordinary films, according to the reports: *The Wasteland* and *Beyond What Is Seen*.

But the enchantment—the captivation of all the feelings of a man— that Enid exerted over me, was balanced by a equal bitterness: Wyoming, who was her husband, was also my best friend. It had been two years since we'd seen each other; he, occupied with his film work, and I with my literary work. When I found him again in Hollywood, he was already married.

"Here you have my wife," he said to me, throwing her into my arms.

And to her:

"Give him a good hug, because you will never have a friend like Grant. And kiss him, if you like."

She didn't kiss me, but at the touch of her long hair on my neck, I felt with a shiver of all my nerves that I could never be a brother to this woman.

We lived two months in Canada, and it's not difficult to understand my state of mind with respect to Enid. But not in one word, nor one movement, nor one gesture did I betray myself in front of Wyoming. Only she read in my glance, however calm, how deeply I wanted her. Love, desire... One and the other were twins in me, sharp and mixed; because if I desired her with all the strength of my ethereal soul, I adored her with all the torrent of my material blood.

Duncan didn't see this. How could he have seen?

When winter came we returned to Hollywood, and Wyoming fell with the attack of the flu that would cost him his life. He left his widow with a fortune and no children.

But he was worried about the solitude in which he was leaving his wife.

"It's not the economic situation," he said to me, "but the moral abandonment. And in this hellhole of moviemaking..."

At the moment of his death, he beckoned his wife and me down to his pillow, and said, with a voice already labored:

"Trust yourself to Grant, Enid... While you have him, you have nothing to fear. And you, old friend, watch over her. Be her brother... No, don't promise... Now I can go to the other side..."

There was nothing new in Enid's pain or mine. After seven days we returned to Canada, to the same summer cabin that a month before had seen the three of us dining in front of the campfire. Just like then, Enid was staring now at the flames, wrapped in a glacial serenity, while I stood contemplating her. And Duncan was no more.

I must say it: in Wyoming's death I saw nothing but the liberation of the terrible eagle caged in our hearts, namely the desire for a woman at our side who can't be touched. I had been Wyoming's best friend, and while he lived the eagle didn't want his blood; it fed—I fed it—with my own. But between him and me had arisen something more solid than a shadow. His wife was, while he lived—and it would have been

eternally—beyond my reach. But he had died. Wyoming couldn't demand of me the sacrifice of the Life that he had just unraveled. And Enid was my life, my future, my breath and my yearning to live, that no one, not even Duncan—my intimate friend, though dead—could deny me. Look after her... Yes, but give to her what he had withdrawn on losing his tenure: the adoration of an entire life consecrated to her!

For two months, at her side day and night, I looked after her like a brother. But on the third month I fell at her feet. Enid looked at me, motionless, and surely Wyoming's last moments arose in her memory, because she repulsed me violently. But I would not lift my head from her skirt.

"I love you, Enid," I said. "Without you I'll die..."

"You, William!" she murmured. "It's horrible to hear you say that!"

"Anything you say," I replied. "But I love you immensely."

"Hush, hush!"

"And I have always loved you... You already know that."

"No, I don't know that!"

"Yes, you know."

Enid kept pushing me away, and I resisted, with my head upon her knees.

"Tell me that you knew..."

"No, shut up! We are profaning..."

"Tell me that you knew..."

"William!"

"Just tell me that you knew that I have always loved you..."

Her tired arms surrendered, and I raised my head. I met her eyes for an instant, a single instant, before Enid broke down and cried upon her own knees.

I left her alone; and when an hour later I returned, white as snow, no one would have suspected, on seeing our simulated and calm everyday affection, that we had just distended the cords of our hearts until they bled. Because in the alliance of Enid and Wyoming there had never been love. Their union always lacked a blaze of foolishness, excess, injustice—the call of passion that incinerates all the morale of a man and scorches a woman in prolonged sobs of fire. Enid had been fond of her husband, nothing more; and he had been fond of her, nothing more than fond compared to me, who was the warm shadow of her heart, who burned with everything that she would not get from Wyoming, and whom she knew would give refuge to everything from her that he would not accept.

And later, his death, leaving a void that I had to fill with the affection of a brother... Of a brother, to her, Enid, who was my only thirst for happiness in this wide world!

Three days after the scene that I have just related we returned to Hollywood. And a month later the exact same situation repeated itself: I again at Enid's feet with my head on her knees, and she trying to prevent it.

"I love you more each day, Enid..."

"William!"

"Tell me that some day you will love me."

“No!”

“Just tell me that you are convinced how much I love you.”

“No!”

“Tell me.”

“Leave me alone! Don’t you see that you’re making me suffer horribly?”

And when she felt me trembling, mute, at the altar of her knees, she abruptly lifted my face between her hands:

“Just leave me alone, I tell you! Leave me alone! Don’t you see that I also love you with all my soul, and we are committing a crime?”

Four months precisely, just one hundred twenty days from the death of the man that she loved, of the friend who had interposed me as a protective screen between his wife and a new love...I’ll make it short. Our love was so deep and intertwined, that even today I ask myself with amazement what absurd purpose might our lives have had if we had not found ourselves under Wyoming’s hands.

One night—we were in New York—I found out that *The Wasteland*, one of the two films that I mentioned, was finally playing; its premiere had been awaited anxiously. I, too, had the liveliest interest in seeing it, and I suggested it to Enid. Why not? We looked at each other for a long moment; an eternity of silence, during which memory galloped back among snowstorms and a dying face. But Enid’s gaze was life itself, and soon between the moist velvet of her eyes and of mine lay nothing but the convulsive joy of our adoration. And nothing more!

We went to the Metropole, and from the reddish half-light of the box we saw Duncan Wyoming appear, enormous and with a face as white as at the hour of his death. I felt Enid’s arm tremble beneath my hand.

Duncan!

Those were his same gestures. The same confident smile was on his lips. It was his same energetic figure that glided along the screen. And twenty meters from him was his same wife in the clasp of his close friend...

While the theater was in darkness, neither Enid nor I uttered a word or looked away from the screen for an instant. And silently, we returned home. But there Enid took my face between her hands. Large tears rolled down her cheeks, and she smiled at me. She smiled at me without trying to hide her tears.

“Yes, I understand, my love...” I murmured, with my lips on the end of her furs, which, being a dark detail of her outfit, likewise represented all of her idolized person. “I understand, but we won’t give in...Okay? So we’ll forget...”

For her entire answer, Enid, still smiling at me, clung without speaking to my neck.

The following night we went back. What did we have to forget? The other’s presence, vibrant in the beam of light that transported him to the screen, pulsating with life; his unconsciousness of the situation; his trust in his wife and his friend; this was precisely what we had to get used to. One night after another, always attentive to the characters, we witnessed the growing success of *The Wasteland*.

Wyoming's performance was outstanding and developed in a drama of brutal energy; a small part in the forests of Canada and the rest in New York itself. The central situation involved a scene in which Wyoming, wounded in a fight with another man, abruptly discovers his wife's love for that man, whom he had just killed from motives other than that love. Wyoming had just tied a handkerchief to his forehead. And stretched out on the couch, still gasping with fatigue, he observed the despair of his wife over her lover's body.

Seldom have the revelation of a downfall, desolation and hate risen on a human face with more violent clarity than in Wyoming's eyes in this scene.

The film's direction had drawn out that marvel of expression to the point of torture, and the scene lasted an infinite number of seconds, when a single one would have sufficed to display, white-hot, the crisis of a heart in that state.

Enid and I, close together and unmoving in the dark, were lost in admiration for our dead friend, whose eyelashes almost touched us when Wyoming emerged from the background to fill the screen, alone. And when he receded again into the ensemble scene, the entire theater seemed to expand in perspective. And Enid and I, with a slight vertigo from this effect, still felt the touch of Duncan's hair that had reached out to brush against us.

Why did we keep going to the Metropole? What quirk of our consciences brought us there night after night to drench our immaculate love in blood? What omen dragged us like sleepwalkers before a hallucinatory accusation that was not aimed at us, since Wyoming's eyes were looking off to the side? Where were they looking? I don't know where, at some box to our left. But one night I noticed, I felt to the roots of my hair, that his eyes were turning towards us. Enid must have noticed as well, because I felt the deep tremor of her shoulders under my hand. There are natural laws, physical principles that teach us how this cold magic works, about the photographic spectres dancing on the screen, mimicking to the most intimate details a life that has been lost. This hallucination in black and white is only the frozen persistence of an instant, the immutable engraving of one vital second. It would be easier for us to see at our side a dead man who had left his tomb to join us, than to perceive the slightest change in the pale trace of a film.

Perfectly true. But in spite of the laws and the principles, Wyoming was watching us. If for the rest of the theater *The Wasteland* was a romantic fiction, and Wyoming existed only by an irony of the light, if he was no more than an electric facade of celluloid without sides or back, for us—Wyoming, Enid, and I—the filmed scene was blatantly alive, but not on the screen, rather in the box, where our innocent love was transformed into a monstrous infidelity in front of a living husband.... An actor's farce? Hate feigned by Duncan for that scene of *The Wasteland*? No! There was the brutal revelation: the loving wife and the close friend in the movie theater, laughing, with their heads close together, at the trust placed in them.... But we didn't laugh, because night after night, from box to box, his gaze was turning each time more towards us.

"It won't be long now!" I said to myself.

“Tomorrow will be the day...” Enid thought.

While the Metropole burned with light, the real world of physical laws empowered us and we breathed deeply. But in the sudden cessation of light, which we felt like a painful blow to our nerves, the spectral drama caught hold of us again.

A thousand leagues from New York, encased under the earth, Duncan Wyoming lay sightless. But his surprise at Enid’s frantic forgetfulness, his ire and his vengeance were alive here, lighting up Wyoming’s chemical vestige, moving in his living eyes, which finally ended up fixed on ours.

Enid stifled a scream and hugged me desperately.

“William!”

“Quiet, please...”

“But he’s just lowered a leg from the couch!”

I felt the hair on my back stand up, and I looked: with the deliberation of a wild beast and his eyes pinned on us, Wyoming sat up from the couch. Enid and I watched him stand, advance towards us from the background of the scene, become a monstrous close-up... a dazzling flash blinded us; at the same time Enid let out a scream.

The film had just caught fire.

But in the lit-up theater all the heads were turned towards us. Some had sat up in their seats to see what had happened.

“The lady is ill; she looks like a corpse,” said someone from the orchestra section.

“He looks even more dead,” someone added.

The usher had already handed us our coats and we left. What else? Nothing, except for all the following day Enid and I did not meet. Only on seeing each other for the first time at night to go to the Metropole, Enid now had in her deep pupils a darkness from beyond, and I had a revolver in my pocket.

I don’t know if anyone in the theater recognized us as the people who took ill the night before. The lights went out, came on, and went back out again, and not a single normal idea managed to settle into the brain of William Grant; nor did my tense fingers abandon the trigger of the gun for an instant.

I had been master of myself all my life. I had been until the night before, when against all justice a cold spectre, playing his daily photographic role, raised his strangling fingers towards a theater box to end the film.

As on the previous night, no one noticed anything unusual on the screen, and it was evident that Wyoming was still gasping, glued to the couch. But Enid—Enid within my arms!—had her face raised to the light, ready to scream... Then Wyoming sat up at last!

I saw him get up, grow larger, approach the same edge of the screen, without taking his gaze from mine. I saw him come down from the screen, come towards us in a beam of light; come through the air over the heads in the orchestra section, rise up, approach us with his head bandaged. I saw him extend his claw-like fingers...at the same time Enid gave a horrible shriek, as if with her vocal cords she had ripped away all her reason and set it aflame.

I can't say what happened in the first instant. But following the first moments of confusion and smoke, I saw myself, with my body hanging off the railing of the box, dead.

From the instant in which Wyoming sat up on the couch, I had pointed the barrel of the revolver at his head. I remember this with total clarity. And it was I who got the bullet in the temple. I am completely sure that I meant to point the gun at Duncan. Except, believing that I was aiming at the murderer, in reality I aimed at myself. It was an error, a simple mistake, nothing more; but it cost me my life.

Three days later Enid in her turn was cast out of this world. And here concludes our romance. But it has not finished yet. A shot and a spectre are not enough to dispel a love like ours. Beyond death, beyond life and its bitterness, Enid and I have found each other. Invisible to the living world, Enid and I are always together, awaiting the announcement of another cinematic premiere. We have traveled the world. Anything is possible, except that the slightest incident in a film should pass unnoticed to our eyes. We have not gone to see *The Wasteland* again. Wyoming's performance in that film can no longer bring us any surprises, outside of those that we so painfully paid for.

Now our hopes are placed on *Beyond What is Seen*. Seven years ago the film company announced its premiere, and for seven years Enid and I have been waiting. Duncan is the protagonist; but we will not be in the box anymore, at least not as we were when we were defeated. In the present circumstances, Duncan can make a mistake that allows us to enter the visible world again, in the same way as our living selves, seven years ago, allowed him to animate the frozen celluloid of his film.

Enid and I now occupy, in the invisible mist of the incorporeal, the privileged position of lying in wait that was all of Wyoming's power in the previous drama. If his jealousy still persists, if he makes a mistake on seeing us and makes the least movement outward from the grave, we will take advantage of it. The curtain that separates life from death has not been drawn back only in his favor, and the portal is half-open.

Between the Nothingness that has dissolved what was once Wyoming, and his electrical resurrection, there remains an empty space. At the slightest movement that he makes, as soon as he comes off the screen, Enid and I will slip through the fissure into the dark corridor. But we will not follow the path to Wyoming's grave, we will go towards Life, we will enter it anew. And it's the warm world from which we were expelled, a love that is tangible and vibrant in every human sense, that awaits Enid and me.

Within a month or within a year, it will arrive. The only thing that worries us is the possibility that *Beyond What is Seen* will premiere under another name, as is the custom in this city. To avoid this, we never miss a premiere. Night after night, at ten o'clock on the dot, we enter the Grand Splendid, where we settle into a box; empty or already occupied, it doesn't matter which.

From the collection *El desierto* (The Desert), 1924.
Translated by Nina Zumel

Juan Darién

Here is the story of a jaguar who was raised and educated among humans, named Juan Darién. He attended four years of school dressed in trousers and shirt, reciting his lessons correctly, though he was a jaguar from the jungle; but this is because his figure was that of a man, as narrated in the following lines.

Once, at the beginning of autumn, smallpox visited a village from a distant country and killed many people. Brothers lost their little sisters, and children just beginning to walk were left without father or mother. Mothers in turn lost their children, and one poor young widowed mother took herself to bury her baby son, the only thing she had in this world. When she returned home, she sat thinking about her little child. And she murmured:

“God should have more compassion for me, and he has taken my son. In heaven there may be angels, but my son doesn’t know them. It’s me that he recognizes, my poor son!”

And she gazed out in the distance, as she was sitting at the back of her house, facing a small gate through which the jungle was visible.

Now then: in the jungle there were many ferocious animals that roared at nightfall and at dawn. And the poor woman, who remained sitting, could see in the darkness something small and unsteady that entered through the gate, like a kitten that hardly had the strength to walk. The woman bent down and raised in her hands a jaguar cub, only a few days old, for its eyes were still closed. And when the miserable cub felt the touch of her hands, it purred with contentment, because now it was no longer alone. The mother held for a long moment, suspended in the air, this little enemy of humanity, this defenseless wild creature that she could exterminate so easily. But she remained pensive before the helpless cub who had come from who knows where, and whose mother was surely dead. Without thinking much about what she was doing, she took the little cub to her breast and enveloped it in her hands. And the jaguar kitten, on feeling the heat of her bosom, found a comfortable position, purred peacefully and fell asleep with its throat against the maternal breast.

The woman, still pensive, entered the house. And for the rest of the night, on hearing moans of hunger from the little cub, and on seeing how it sought her breast with its eyes closed, felt in her wounded heart that, before the supreme law of the Universe, one life is equivalent to another...

And she nursed the little jaguar.

The cub was saved, and the mother had found immense consolation. So great a consolation that she saw with terror the moment when it would be snatched from her,

because if it came to be known in the village that she was nursing a savage being, they would surely kill the little creature. What to do? The cub, soft and affectionate—for it played with her upon her breast—was now her own son.

In these circumstances, a man who one rainy night was hurrying past the woman's house heard a raspy whine—the harsh whine of wild beasts that, even newly born, startle human beings. The man halted suddenly, and while groping for his revolver, knocked on the door. The mother, who had heard his footsteps, ran madly with anguish to hide the little jaguar in the garden. But such was her luck that on opening the back door she found herself before a calm, old and wise serpent who blocked the way. The unfortunate woman was about to scream in terror, when the serpent spoke:

“Have no fear, woman,” it said. “Your mother's heart has allowed you to save a life from the Universe, where all lives have the same value. But men will not understand you, and they will want to kill your new son. Have no fear, go in peace. From this moment your son will have a human form; no one will recognize him. Shape his heart, teach him to be good, like you, and he will never know that he is not human. Unless...unless a mother of men accuses him; unless a mother demands that he repay with his blood what you have given for him, your son will always be worthy of you. Go in peace, mother, and hurry, for that man is going to kick down the door.”

And the mother believed the serpent, because in all the religions of humankind the serpent knows the mystery of the lives that populate the worlds. So she went running to open the door when the man, furious, entered with a revolver in his hand and searched everywhere, without finding anything. When he left, the woman, trembling, unwrapped the shawl under which she had hidden the little jaguar upon her breast, and in its place she saw a baby, sleeping peacefully. Transfixed with joy, she cried a long while in silence over her savage son made human; tears of gratitude that twelve years later this same son would be forced to repay with blood over her grave.

Time passed. The new baby needed a name: she named him Juan Darién. He needed food, clothing, shoes: he was provided with everything, for which the mother worked day and night. She was still very young, and could have married again, if she had wanted; but her son's deep love sufficed, love that she returned with all of her heart.

Juan Darién was, indeed, worthy of being loved: noble, good, and generous like no one else. For his mother in particular he had a deep respect. He never lied. Was it because he was a wild being deep in his nature? It's possible; for no one knows yet what influence the purity of a soul imbibed from the milk of a holy woman's breast can have on a newborn animal.

Such was Juan Darién. And he went to school with the other children his age, who often made fun of him because of his coarse hair and his timidity. Juan Darién was not very intelligent, but he made up for this with his great love of studying.

Things were this way when, as the child was about to turn ten, his mother died. Juan Darién suffered undescribably, until time eased his sorrow. But from then on he was a sad boy, who only wanted to be educated.

Now there is something we must admit: Juan Darién was not loved in the village. The people of villages enclosed by the jungle don't like boys who are too generous and who study with all their soul. Furthermore, he was the top student in the school. And this combination precipitated the end, with an event that proved the serpent's prophesy to be correct.

The village was getting ready to celebrate a great festival, and had sent for fireworks from the distant city. The school was giving the students a general review, because an inspector had to come in to observe the classes. When the inspector arrived, the teacher assigned the lesson to the first of all: Juan Darién. Juan Darién was the most outstanding student; but the pressure of the situation caused him to stutter, and his tongue tangled up with a strange sound. The inspector observed the student for a long moment, and at once spoke with the teacher in a low voice.

"Who is that boy?" he asked. "Where is he from?"

"His name is Juan Darién," the teacher answered, "and he was raised by a woman who is now dead; but no one knows where he's from."

"Strange, very strange..." murmured the inspector, observing the coarse hair and the green reflection that Juan Darién's eyes had when he was in shadow.

The inspector knew that in the world there are things much stranger than anyone could invent, and he knew at the same time that even by questioning Juan Darién he could never verify if the student had previously been what he feared: that is, a wild animal. But just as there are people who in special states remember things that happened to their grandparents, so it was also possible that, under hypnotic suggestion, Juan Darién would remember his life as a wild beast. And the children who read this and don't understand what it's talking about can ask the grown-ups.

For this reason the inspector went up to the podium and spoke thus:

"Good, child. Now I want one of you to describe to us the jungle. You all have been raised here, almost within it, and know it well. What is the jungle like? What happens there? This is what I want to know. Let's see, you—" he added, addressing a student at random. "Come up to the podium and tell us what you have seen."

The child came up, and although frightened, spoke at length. He said that in the jungle were giant trees, creepers, and little flowers. When he finished, another child came to the podium, then another. And although they all knew the jungle well, they answered the same, because children and many adults don't tell what they see, but what they have read about what they have just seen. And finally the inspector said:

"And now it's Juan Darién's turn."

Juan Darién said more or less what the others had said. But the inspector, putting his hand on Juan's shoulder, exclaimed:

"No, no. I want you to remember well what you have seen. Close your eyes."

Juan Darién closed his eyes.

"Good," the inspector proceeded. "Tell me what you see in the jungle."

Juan Darién, always with his eyes shut, hesitated a moment in answering.

"I don't see anything," he finally said.

“Soon you will see. Imagine that it is three in the morning, a little before dawn. We have finished eating, for example... We are in the jungle, in darkness... In front of us is a stream. What do you see?”

Juan Darién passed another moment in silence. And in the classroom and in the nearby jungle there was also a great silence. Suddenly Juan Darién shuddered, and in a slow voice, as if dreaming, said:

“I see the stones that pass by and the branches that bend... And the ground... And I see the dry leaves that are crushed against the stones...”

“One moment!” the inspector interrupted him. “The stones and the leaves that pass by, from what height do you see them?”

The inspector asked this because if Juan Darién were really “seeing” what he did in the jungle when he was a wild animal going to drink after having eaten, he would also see the stones as a jaguar or panther would encounter them when it approaches the river crouched down: passing at eye level. And he repeated:

“At what height do you see the stones?”

And Juan Darién, always with his eyes closed, answered:

“They pass on the ground... they brush against my ears... And the loose leaves move with my breath... And I feel the dampness of the mud on...”

Juan Darién’s voice cut off.

“On where?” asked the inspector in a firm voice. “Where do you feel the dampness of the water?”

“On my whiskers!” said Juan Darién in a hoarse voice, opening his eyes, frightened.

It was twilight, and through the window could be seen the nearby jungle, already gloomy.

The students didn’t understand the terribleness of that recollection; but neither did they laugh at those extraordinary whiskers of Juan Darién, who had no whiskers or mustache whatsoever. And they didn’t laugh, because the child’s face was pale and anxious.

Class was over. The inspector was not a bad man; but like all people who live very near the jungle, he hated jaguars blindly, and for this reason he said in a low voice to the teacher:

“It’s necessary to kill Juan Darién. He is a beast of the jungle, possibly a jaguar. We must kill him, because if we don’t, sooner or later he will kill us all. Until now, his animal wickedness has not awakened, but it will explode one day or another, and then he will devour us all, since we let him live with us. So we must kill him. The difficulty is that we can’t do it while he has the human form, because we will not be able to prove to everyone that he is a jaguar. He appears to be human, and with humans you must proceed with care. I know that in the city there is a wild animal tamer. We will call him, and he will find a way for Juan Darién to return to his jaguar body. And even if he cannot turn him into a jaguar, the people will believe us and we can drive him into the jungle. We will call the animal tamer immediately, before Juan Darién escapes.”

But Juan Darién thought of everything except escaping, because he hadn't realized what was happening. How could he believe that he wasn't a person, when he had never felt anything except love for all, and didn't even hate vermin?

But the whispers were running from mouth to mouth, and Juan Darién began to suffer the effects. No one spoke a word to him, they moved away hurriedly when he passed, and they followed him from afar at night.

"What did I do? Why are they this way with me?" Juan Darién asked himself.

And now they not only fled from him, but the children shouted at him:

"Away from here! Go back to where you came from! Go away!"

The grown-ups too, the older people, were not less infuriated than the children. Who knows what would have happened if the long-awaited wild animal tamer had not finally arrived, on the same afternoon as the festival. Juan Darién was in his house, preparing the humble soup that he dined on, when he heard the shouting of the people rushing towards his house. He barely had time to go out to see what it was: they seized him, dragging him towards the animal tamer's dwelling.

"Here he is!" they shouted, shaking him. "It's this one! He's a jaguar! We want nothing to do with jaguars! Remove his human disguise, and we'll kill him!"

And the children, his classmates whom he loved the most, and the same old people shouted:

"He's a jaguar! Juan Darién is going to devour us! Die, Juan Darién!"

Juan Darién protested and cried, because the blows rained down on him, and he was a twelve year old child. But in that moment the people moved away, and the animal tamer, with great patent leather boots, a red frock coat and a whip in his hand, appeared before Juan Darién. The animal tamer stared at him, and squeezed the handle of the whip tightly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I recognize you well! You could fool everyone, except me! I'm watching you, son of jaguars! Under your shirt I see the spots of a jaguar! Remove his shirt, and bring the hunting dogs! We'll see now if the dogs recognize him as a man or a jaguar!"

In a second they tore off all Juan Darién's clothers and threw him into a wild animal cage.

"Loose the dogs, quickly!" shouted the animal tamer. "And commend yourself to the gods of your jungle, Juan Darién!"

And four ferocious jaguar-hunting dogs were sent into the cage.

The trainer did this because dogs always recognize the jaguar's scent; and as soon as they sniffed Juan Darién without his clothes, they would tear him to pieces, since they could see with their hunting-dog-eyes the spots of the jaguar hidden under the his human skin.

But the dogs didn't see anything in Juan Darién but a good child who loved even vermin. And they peacefully wagged their tails on sniffing him.

"Devour him! He's a jaguar! Get him! Get him!" they shouted at the dogs. And the dogs barked and jumped madly in the cage, without knowing whom to attack.

The test had not worked.

“Very well!” exclaimed the animal tamer. “Those are bastard dogs, of jaguar caste. They don’t recognize him. But I recognize you, Juan Darién, and now we are going to see for ourselves.”

And on saying this he entered the cage and raised the whip.

“Jaguar!” he shouted. “You are before a man, and you are a jaguar! Here I see, under your stolen human skin, the spots of a jaguar! Show your spots!”

And he crossed Juan Darién’s body with a fierce lash. The poor naked child gave a shriek of pain, while the people, infuriated, repeated:

“Show your jaguar spots!”

For a while the atrocious torment continued; and I don’t want the children who are listening to me to ever see any being martyred in this way.

“Please! I’m dying!” Juan Darién cried out.

“Show your spots!” the people responded.

Finally the torment ended. Abandoned at the back of the cage, annihilated in a corner, remained only the small bloody body of the little boy that had been Juan Darién. He still lived, and could still walk when they took him from the cage; but full of such suffering such as no one has ever felt.

They took him out of the cage, and pushing him down the middle of the street, they threw him out of the village. He went, falling down every moment, and behind him were the children, the women and old men, pushing him.

“Away from here, Juan Darién! Go back to the jungle, jaguar’s son and jaguar’s heart! Go away, Juan Darién!”

And those who were far away and couldn’t strike him, threw stones at him.

Juan Darién finally fell down, holding out his little boy’s hands, looking for support. And his cruel destiny was that a woman, who stood in the doorway of her house holding in her arms an innocent child, misinterpreted this gesture of supplication.

“He has tried to steal my son!” the woman shouted. “He held out his hands to kill him. He’s a jaguar! Kill him now, before he kills our children!”

This is what the woman said. And this is how the serpent’s prophesy came to be: Juan Darién would die when a mother of men demanded from him the human life and heart that another mother had given him at her breast.

No other accusation was needed to decide the infuriated people. And twenty arms with stones in hand were already rising to crush Juan Darién when the animal tamer ordered from behind in a hoarse voice:

“Let’s brand him with spots of fire! Let’s burn him in the fireworks!”

It was already getting dark, and when they reached the plaza night had closed in. In the plaza they had erected a castle of fireworks, with wheels, crowns, and flares. They tied Juan Darién high in the center, and lit the wick at one end. The thread of flame ran quickly up and down, and ignited the entire castle. And up there, between the fixed stars and the giant multicolored wheels, they sacrificed Juan Darién.

“It’s your last day as a man, Juan Darién!” they all clamored. “Show your spots!”

“Mercy! Mercy!” cried the child, struggling amidst the sparks and clouds of smoke. The yellow, red, and green wheels spun dizzily, some to the right and others to the left. The tangent jets of flame traced great circles, and in the middle, burnt from the trails of sparks that crossed his body, Juan Darién writhed.

“Show your spots!” they still roared from below.

“No, have mercy! I’m human!” the unhappy child still had time to cry. And after another ribbon of flame, his body could be seen shaking convulsively; his moans acquired a deep, hoarse timbre, and his body was changing form little by little. And the crowd, with a savage yell of triumph, could see finally emerging, under the human skin, the black, parallel, and fatal spots of the jaguar.

The atrocious act of cruelty had been completed; they had gotten what they wanted. In place of the innocent, guiltless child, there up above was the body of a jaguar dying in agony.

The flares were also going out. One last jet of sparks from a dying wheel reached the rope tied to the wrist (no: the paws of the jaguar, for Juan Darién was no more), and the body fell heavily to the ground. The people dragged it to the edge of the forest, abandoning it there for the jackals to devour the beast’s body and heart.

But the jaguar hadn’t died. With the nocturnal coolness he came to himself, and dragged himself away into the depths of the jungle, prey to horrible torments. For an entire month he didn’t leave his lair in the thickest part of the woods, waiting with the somber patience of a wild animal for his wounds to heal. Finally all the wounds healed, save one deep burn in the side that wouldn’t close, and that the jaguar bandaged with large leaves.

Because he had conserved from his recently lost form three things: the living memory of the past, the ability to manipulate with his hands like a human, and language. But for the rest, in absolutely everything, he was a beast, indistinguishable in the least detail from other jaguars.

When he finally felt healed, he passed the word to all the other jaguars in the jungle to meet that night in front of the great rushes that bordered the crops. And as night fell he walked silently to the village. He climbed a nearby tree and waited a long time, motionless. He saw pass below him, without concern, or even a glance, poor women and tired laborers, with miserable expressions; until finally he saw a man with red boots and a red frock-coat coming down the road.

The jaguar didn’t move a single twig on gathering himself to leap. He pounced on the animal trainer; knocked him unconscious, and taking the trainer by the waist between his teeth, carried him, without harming him, to the rushes.

There, at the feet of the immense reeds that rose up invisibly, were the jaguars of the jungle moving in the darkness, and their eyes shone like lights that went from one side to the other. The man was still unconscious. The jaguar then said:

“Brothers: I lived twelve years among humans, as a human myself. And I am a jaguar. Perhaps with my actions I can belatedly erase this stain. Brothers: tonight I break the last link that ties me to the past.”

And after saying this, he took the still unconscious man in his mouth, and climbed with him to the highest point of the cane field, where he left the man tied between two bamboos. Then he set fire to dry leaves on the ground, and soon a crackling blaze arose. The other jaguars backed away, frightened, before the fire. But the jaguar said to them: "Peace, brothers!" and they calmed down, seating themselves on their bellies with their paws crossed, to watch.

The rushes burned like an immense firework. The cane burst like bombs, and their gases crossed in sharp arrows of color. The flames ascended in sudden and muffled gusts, leaving pale hollows below themselves; and at the top, where the fire had not yet reached, the reeds swayed crackling in the heat.

But the man, touched by the flames, had come to himself. He saw there below him the jaguars with their violet eyes raised to him, and understood everything.

"Mercy, forgive me!" he howled, writhing. "I apologize for everything!"

No one answered. The man then felt abandoned by God, and cried with all his soul: "Forgive me, Juan Darién!"

On hearing this, Juan Darién raised his head and said coldly:

"There is no one here called Juan Darién. I don't know Juan Darién. That is a man's name, and here we are jaguars."

And turning to his companions, as if he didn't understand, he asked:

"Is one of you named Juan Darién?"

But already the flames had burned the castle to the sky. And between the sharp flares that crossed the burning walls could be seen there above a black corpse that burned, smoking.

"I'll be quick, brothers," the jaguar said. "But there is still something left for me to do."

And he went again to the village, followed by the other jaguars without him noticing. He paused before a poor, sad garden, jumped over the wall, and passing beside several crosses and headstones, stopped in front of an unadorned plot of earth, where lay buried the woman whom he had called mother for eight years. He knelt—he knelt like a man—and for a moment there was silence.

"Mother!" the jaguar finally murmured with deep tenderness. "You alone knew, among all humans, the sacred right to life of all the beings of the Universe. Only you understood that a human and a jaguar differ only in their hearts. And you taught me to love, to understand, to forgive. Mother! I am sure that you hear me. I am your son always, only yours, in spite of what happens from now on. Goodbye, mother mine!"

And on rising he saw the violet eyes of his brothers, who were watching him from behind the wall, and he joined them again.

At that moment the warm breeze brought to them, out of the depths of the night, the boom of a shot.

"It's in the jungle," the jaguar said. "It's the humans. They are hunting, killing, slaughtering."

Turning then towards the village, lit by the reflection of the burning jungle, he exclaimed:

“Race without redemption! Now it’s my turn!”

And returning to the tomb where he had been praying, with his large paw he pulled the bandage off his wound and wrote on the cross with his own blood, in large letters, below his mother’s name:

AND

JUAN DARIÉN

“Now we are at peace,” he said. And sending with his brothers a roar of defiance towards the terrified village, he concluded:

“Now, to the jungle. A jaguar forever!”

First published 1920, later included in the collection *El desierto* (The Desert), 1924.

Translated by Nina Zumel

For a Sleepless Night

No man, I repeat, has told, with greater magic the exceptions of human life and nature, the ardours of the curiosities of convalescence, the close of seasons charged with enervating splendours, sultry weather, humid and misty, where the south wind softens and distends the nerves, like the chords of an instrument; where the eyes are filled with tears that come not from the heart; hallucination at first giving place to doubt, soon convinced and full of reasons as a book; absurdity installing itself in the intellect, and governing it with a crushing logic; hysteria usurping the place of will, a contradiction established between the nerves and the mind, and men out of all accord expressing grief by laughter.

— Baudelaire (*Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works*)

We were all surprised by the fatal news; and we were left terrified when a servant brought us—flying—details of his death. Although for quite some time we had noticed signs of instability in our friend, we didn't think that it could ever come to this extreme. He had carried out the most dreadful suicide without leaving a memento for his friends. And, when we had him in our midst, we turned our faces away, prisoners of a horrified compassion.

That wet and cloudy afternoon intensified our feelings. The sky was a dull gray, and a gloomy mist crossed the horizon.

We transported the body in a carriage, crowded together by a growing horror. Night was approaching; and through the badly closed door a river of blood fell, tracing our path in red.

He was lying on our legs, and the last light of that yellowish day fell full on his face, violet with bruise-like patches. His head tossed from one side to the other. At each jolt of the cobblestones, his eyelids opened and he stared at us with his glassy, hard, and misty eyes.

Our clothes were stained with blood; and with every jolt a slimy cold drool dripped from his lips onto the hands that supported his neck.

I don't know what caused it, but I don't think I'd ever felt so disturbed in my life. At the mere contact of his stiff limbs, I felt a chill over my whole body. Strange superstitious ideas filled my head. My eyes stared at him with a hypnotic fixity, and in the horror of all my imagination, I thought I saw him open his mouth in a hideous grimace, pin me with his gaze and leap upon me, filling me with cold and curdled blood.

My hair stood on end, and I couldn't help but give a cry of anguish, convulsive and delirious, and throw myself back.

In that moment the dead man slipped from our knees and fell to the floor of the carriage, where it was as black as night. In the darkness we clutched each others' hands, trembling from head to toe, without daring to look at each other.

All our old childhood ideas, absurd beliefs, came back to life in us. We lifted our legs onto the seats, unconsciously, full of horror, while on the floor of the carriage the dead man jolted from one side to the other.

Little by little our legs began to chill. It was a cold that arose from the floor, that coursed through our bodies as if death were spreading in us. We didn't dare move. From time to time we would lean towards the floor, and remain staring for a long time into the dark, with our eyes frightfully open, believing that we saw the dead man sitting up with a delirious grimace, laughing, watching us, sending death into each one of us, laughing, putting his face close to ours, in the night we saw his eyes shine, and he laughed, and we remained frozen, dead, dead, in that carriage that drove us though the wet streets...

We found ourselves again in the parlor, all gathered, seated in a row. The casket had been placed in the middle of the room and they had not changed the dead man's clothing, because his limbs were already very stiff. His head was slightly elevated, with his mouth and nose stuffed with cotton.

On seeing him again, our bodies trembled and we glanced at each other stealthily. The room was full of people crossing at every moment, and this distracted us somewhat. Only from time to time, we watched the dead man, bloated and greenish, stretched out in the casket.

At the end of half an hour, I felt someone touch me and I turned around. My friends were pale. There, where we were, the dead man watched us. His eyes seemed larger, opaque, terribly fixed. Fate had brought us under their gaze, without us realizing, as if uniting us with death, with the dead man who did not want to leave us. The four of us were left weak and fearful, immobile before the face that from three steps away was turned towards us, always towards us!

It was four in the morning and we were completely alone. Instantly fear overpowered us again.

First a trembling stupor, then a desolate and profound desperation, and finally a cowardice inconceivable at our ages, a precise premonition of something awful that was going to happen.

Outside, the street was full of mists, and the barking of the dogs prolonged itself in a mournful howl. Those who have kept vigil over someone and suddenly realized that they were alone with a corpse, excited, as we were, and have suddenly heard a dog cry, have heard an owl scream in the dawn after a night of death, alone with him, will understand our distress, already affected by fear, and with terrible doubts at times about the horrible death of our friend.

We were alone, as I said; and, after a little while, a muffled noise, like a rapid mumbling, traveled around the room. It came from the casket where the dead man lay. There, three paces away, we saw him clearly, his chest rising with the cotton packing, horribly pale, watching us steadily and sitting up little by little, leaning on the edges of the casket, while our hair stood on end, our brows were covered in sweat, while the muttering became louder every moment, and a strange laugh rang out, extrahuman, like vomiting, stomach-churning and epileptic, and we got up desperately and began to run, horrified, crazy with terror, closely pursued by the laughter and the steps of that dreadful resurrection.

When I arrived home, opened the door of my room and pulled back the sheets, still fleeing, I saw the dead man, stretched out on the bed, turning yellow in the early morning light, dead along with my three frozen friends, all stretched out on the bed, cold and dead.

First published 1899.

Translation by Nina Zumel, except the quote from Baudelaire.

Quote from *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works* translated from the French by H. Curwen, 1873. Full translation [here](#).

The Other's Crime

The adventures that I am going to relate date from five years ago. Back then, I was just leaving my adolescence. Though not what they call high-strung, I had the highest degree of talent for gesticulation, at times carrying myself to extremes so absurd that I came to inspire real shock while I spoke. This imbalance between my ideas—the most natural possible—and my gestures—the wildest possible—amused my friends, but only those who were in on the secret of this unequalled eccentricity. My tics only went so far, and even then, not always. My friend Fortunato came later onto the scene: he who is the subject of all I am about to tell.

Poe was at that time the only author that I read. That damned madman had come to dominate me completely; there was not a single book on my table that wasn't one of his. My head was full of Poe, as if it had been emptied into the mold of "Ligeia". "Ligeia!" How I adored that tale! Adored all of them, and intensely: Valdemar, who died seven months afterwards; Dupin, in search of the purloined letter; the L'Esplanade women, desperate on the fourth floor; Berenice, dead and betrayed; all, all were familiar to me. But above all, "The Cask of Amontillado" had seduced me like my own intimate affair: Montresor, "The Carnival", "Fortunato", were for me so familiar that I read this tale without naming the characters; and at the same time I envied Poe so much that I would have cut off his right hand with pleasure for writing that marvellous intrigue. Sitting at home, in the corner, I spent over four hours reading this story with a delight of which certainly a large part was an aversion to Fortunato. He dominated the entire tale, all of it, everything. Not a smile, not any impatience of Fortunato escaped my scrutiny. What did I not know about Fortunato and his deplorable disposition?

At the end of December I read to Fortunato some of Poe's tales. He listened to me amicably, doubtless with attention, but miles away from my ardor. Hence the weariness that I suffered at the end, which couldn't be compared to Fortunato's, deprived for three hours of the enthusiasm that sustained me.

The coincidence of my friend bearing the same name as the hero of "The Cask of Amontillado" disappointed me at first, by the vulgarization of a name which had been purely literary; but soon I got used to calling him thus, and even overreached myself at times calling him for any trifle; so explicit did the name seem to me. If he didn't know "The Cask" by heart, it certainly wasn't because he hadn't heard it until I got bored of reading it. At times in the heat of delirium I called him Montresor, Fortunato, Luchesi, any name from the story; and this produced an indescribable confusion that took him a long time to clear up.

It's hard for me to remember just when Fortunato gave me proof of his strong literary enthusiasm. I believe that one can sensibly blame Poe for this unusual eagerness, whose consequences were to arouse my friend's fervor to such a degree that my predilections were a cold disdain next to his fanaticism. How had Poe's literature come to resonate in Fortunato's rude intelligence? Looking back, I'm disposed to believe that the suppression of his feelings, a daily struggle in which his entire organism unconsciously came into play, was the overall cause of this disequilibrium, especially in one so deeply unstable as Fortunato.

On a beautiful summer evening he exposed this new aspect to my soul. We were on the roof, each sitting on cloth chairs. The hot and debilitating night favored our program of wandering meditation. The air smelled faintly of gas from the nearby powerstation. Beneath us, tranquil lamplight shone from open balconies. To the east, in the bay, colorful ships' lanterns streamed over the dead water like a great fer-de-lance, luminous matches that the gentle waves bore up trembling, fixed and parallel in the distance, breaking up below the docks. The deep blue sea murmured on the shore. With our heads thrown back, our brows unworried, we dreamed beneath the vast star-filled sky, crossed only from side to side—in those nights of naval evolution—by a sudden streak of light from a patrolling cruiser.

"What a beautiful night!" murmured Fortunato. "It feels so unreal, gentle and meandering like the mouth of a child that hasn't yet learned to kiss."

He savored the phrase, closing his eyes.

"The special aspect of this night," he went on, "so still, brings to my mind the hour in which Poe approached the altar and gave his hand to Lady Rowena Tremalion, she of the blue eyes and golden hair. Tremalion of Tremaine. The same phosphorescence in the sky, the same smell of gas..."

He pondered a moment. He turned his head towards me, without looking at me:

"Have you noticed that Poe uses the word 'madness' when his aspiration is greatest? In 'Ligieia' he uses it twelve times."

I didn't remember seeing it that often, and I would have noticed.

"Bah! It's not a question of how many times he uses the word, but that on certain occasions, when he is going to rise to great heights, the phrase indicates that apologia for madness which brings with it the flight of poetry."

As I didn't clearly understand, I got to my feet, shrugging my shoulders. I began to walk around with my hands in my pockets. It wasn't the only time that he had spoken to me like that. Just two days before he had tried to drag me into so novel an interpretation of "Four Beasts in One" that I had to watch him attentively, frightened by his dizzying trajectory. Surely he had come to feel deeply; but at what a dangerous cost!

Next to that frank enthusiasm, I felt old, critical and malicious. There was in him an overflow of gestures and expressions, a lyrical mind that no longer knew how to suppress the wild faces he made. He coined phrases. I think that our position could be summed up in the following situation: in a room where we were with Poe and his

characters, I would talk to him, about them, while in the back Fortunato and the heroes of the extraordinary *Tales* would chat enthusiastically of Poe. When I understood what was happening I recovered my calm, while Fortunato continued his lyrical wandering without rhyme or reason:

“Some of Poe’s triumphs consist in awakening in us powerful old anxieties, giving a character of excessive importance to action, catching a random gesture in flight and deranging it insistently until perseverance succeeds in giving it a bizarre life.”

“Excuse me,” I interrupted him. “For a start, I disagree that Poe’s triumph consists in that. Second, I assume that action itself must be the madness of the intention to act...”

I waited full of curiosity for his response, watching him from the corner of my eye.

“I don’t know,” he said to me suddenly in a veiled voice as if the soft dew that was beginning to fall had filled his throat. “I have a dog that chases and barks at carriages for entire blocks. Like all dogs. Movement agitates them. It also surprises them that the carriages follow the horses of their own accord. I am sure that if they don’t behave and speak rationally with us, it’s due to a failure of the will. They feel, they think, but they can’t desire. I’m sure of this.”

Where would this fellow end up, who was so calm a month ago? His tense, white brow was directed at the sky. He spoke with sadness, so pure of imagination that I felt a half-hearted fever to egg him on. I sighed deeply.

“Oh, Fortunato!” And I opened my arms to the sea like an ancient Greek. I stayed that way for ten seconds, sure that it would provoke in him an infinite repetition of the same theme. Sure enough, he spoke, spoke with his heart in his mouth, spoke of all that awoke in that troubled head. Previously I said to him something about madness in general terms. I believe in the ability to miraculously escape into action during sleep.

“Sleep,” he picked up the thread and continued, “or rather, to dream while sleeping is a state of absolute madness. There is nothing of the conscious mind involved in the ability to present to oneself the opposite of what is being thought and to admit it as possible. The nervous tension that shatters nightmares has the same object as showers on the insane: the stream of water provokes a trauma that will lead to mental balance, while in dreams this same tension breaks, so to speak, the core of madness. Deep down the situation is the same: absolute disregard of opposition. Opposition is the other side of things. Of the two ways to see a thing, the madman or the dreamer only sees one: the affirmative or the negative. The sane ones first embrace probability, which is the awareness of the crazy side of things. On the other hand, the dreams of madmen are perfectly possible. And this same possibility is madness, for it gives the character of reality to this unconscious state: it doesn’t deny it, but believes it credible.”

“There are extremely curious cases. I know of a trial where the criminal faced the accusation of a witness of the deed. They asked: ‘You saw this thing?’ The witness answered: ‘Yes.’ Now then, the defense alleged that language being a convention, it was only possible that for the witness the word ‘yes’ expressed affirmation. The defense proposed that the jury examine the curious adaptation of the questions to the

monosyllables of the witness. From this it followed that it would have been impossible for the witness to say ‘no’ (then it would not be an affirmation, which was the only thing under consideration, etc. etc.)”

Valiant Fortunato! He said all this without breathing, resolute with his words, with his assured eyes in which all this chaste nonsense burned like virgins. With my hands in my pockets, leaning against the balustrade, I watched him ponder. I observed him with keen attention, though with a slight vertigo from time to time. And I still believe that this attention was actually my concern for him.

Suddenly we raised our heads: the floodlight of a cruiser whipped across the sky and swept the sea, illuminating the bay like lightning. A flash shook the horizon again, and revealed in the distance, over the burning tin water, the motionless row of battleships.

Distracted, Fortunato remained a moment without speaking. But madness, once it has you in its grip, makes incredible dizzying pirouettes, and is as strong as love and death. He went on:

“Madness also has its conventional lies and its shyness. You will not deny that the insistence of the insane in proving their sanity is an instance of this. A writer says that reason is so difficult a thing that even to deny it requires reasoning. I don’t remember the saying exactly, it’s something like that. But the awareness of a reasonable reflection is only possible remembering that this might not be so. There would have to be comparison, which is not possible in the case of a solution—one of whose causal terms is admittedly insane. It would perhaps have to be a process of absolute ideas. But it’s good to remember that the insane never have problems or discoveries: they have ideas.”

He continued on in this vein with the knowledge of a teacher and the insight of memories just awakening:

“As for the shyness, it’s undeniable. I knew a deranged fellow, a captain’s son, whose irrationality was given to manifesting itself as chemical science. His relatives told me that he read an astonishing amount, wrote endless pages, implied, by monosyllables and vague confidences, that he had discovered the complete inefficacy of atomic theory (I think he referred especially to manganese oxides. The strange thing is that afterwards he spoke seriously of the inconsistencies of oxygen). This crank was perfectly sensible in everything else, closing himself to hostile interrogation through whistles, pssts, and curls of his moustache. He enjoyed the sad privilege of believing that whomever he spoke with wanted to steal his secret. Thus the prudent whistles that neither affirmed nor denied anything.”

“Now then, I was called one afternoon to discover what was still solid in that delirious reason. I confess that for a moment I could not get my bearings through his look of perfect sanity; his only mania then consisted of whistling and gently tugging at his moustache, poor thing. I talked to him about everything, demonstrated a crass ignorance to arouse his pride, ended up expounding a theory so extravagant and absurd that I doubted if such vehement lunacy would be understandable by a simple madman.

I found nothing. He barely answered: ‘it’s true... there are things... psst... ideas... psst... psst...’ And here again were the ideas in full force.”

“Discouraged, I left him. It was impossible to get anything from that polite diplomat. But one day I returned with new strength, ready to hit my man’s secret at all costs. I spoke to him of everything again; I got nothing. At the end, at the verge of fatigue, I realized suddenly that during this and the previous conversation I had been too worked up with my own investigative efforts, and talked too much; the madman had observed this. I quieted down then and stopped chatting. The conversation ceased and I offered him a cigar. As he watched me lean over to take it, I smoothed my moustache as gently as I could. He looked at me out of the corner of his eye and shook his head smiling. I looked away, attentive to his least movements. After a while he couldn’t help but look at me again, and I in turn smiled without releasing my moustache. The madman relaxed at last and told me all that I wanted to know.”

“I had been willing to go as far as the whistle; but the moustache was enough.”

The night continued peacefully. Noises were lost to isolated tremors, the distant rolling of a carriage, a church bell tolling the quarter hour, an “ahoy!” from the port. The constellations rose in the clear sky; we felt a bit cold. As Fortunato didn’t seem inclined to speak more, I raised my collar, rubbed my hands rapidly, and let fall like a stray bullet:

“He was perfectly insane.”

On the rooftop across the street, a black cat walked calmly on the parapet. Below us two people passed. The crisp noise on the cobblestones told me that they were crossing the street; they moved away talking in a low voice. I needed all this time to tear out of my head countless ideas that the most insignificant movement would have completely jumbled up. His fixed gaze left me. Fortunato receded, receded, until he turned into a mouse that I watched. The strident whistle of an express train corresponded exactly to this monstrous mouse. Through my head rolled an immense interval of time and a massive and dizzying gyration of worlds. Three flames flashed in front of my eyes, followed by three painful stabbing pains in my head. Finally I managed to shake it off and I turned:

“Ready to go?”

“Let’s go. It feels a bit cold to me.”

I’m sure he said this without ulterior motive; but this same lack of intent made me fear some unknown and horrible impropriety.

* * *

That night, alone and calm, I pondered at length. Fortunato had transformed me, this was true. But had he driven me to the vertigo which entangled me, leaving in the thorns, like guileless sheep, four or five rapid gestures that I immediately concealed? I don’t think so. Fortunato had changed, his brain was moving quickly. But from this to the recognition of my superiority there was a vast distance. This was the key point:

I could do a thousand crazy things, let myself get carried away by a demonic logic of repeated gestures; seize a moment's occurrence and twist it to create a strange truth; leave aside the slightest meaning of any vague movement in favor of what would have struck an excessively precise madman; all this and much more I could do. But in this unfolding of an excessive self-possession, shavings from a lathe that did not prevent an absolute centering, Fortunato could only see disorders of the mind motivated by this or that favorable environment, of which he believed himself the subtle manager.

A few days later I was convinced of this. We were out walking. From five o'clock we had traversed a long path; the Florida piers, the twists and turns through the alleys, the coal bridges, the University, the breakwaters that protected the calm waters of the port under construction, whose access card was granted to us thanks to the resurgence of friendship that in those days we had with a friend of ours—now in mourning—a student of engineering. Fortunato enjoyed a perfect stability that afternoon, with all his new eccentricities, yes, but as balanced as the inmate of any asylum. We talked about everything, our handkerchiefs in hand, damp with sweat. The orange expanse of the sea extended to the horizon; two or three asbestos-colored clouds wandered across the pure sky; the sun had just disappeared behind a greenish-black hill, encircling it with a golden aura.

Three crab-hunting boys passed along the wall. They argued for a while. Two continued on their way, leaping on the rocks with their pants rolled to their knees; the other stayed behind, throwing stones at the sea. After a while I exclaimed, as if in conclusion of some internal judgement provoked by such hunting:

“For example, it would be good if the crabs walked backwards to shorten distances. Undoubtedly the way is shorter.”

I had no desire to derail him. I said this out of my habit of turning things around. And Fortunato made the regrettable error of turning my nonsense into the complete madness of an animal, and let himself reach corollaries that were both subtle and vain.

A week later Fortunato collapsed. The flame that trembled in him was extinguished, and of his unheard-of learning, of that beautiful delirious intellect that bore bitter and juicy fruit like a year-old plant, nothing remained but a distended and hollow mind, worn out in fifteen days, like that of a young woman who touched the roots of voluptuousness too soon. He still spoke, but he babbled nonsense. If he touched at times on a common thread, he would clutch at it with the unconscious, panicked grasp of a drowning man, so tightly that it would snap. In vain I tried to focus him, suddenly calling to his notice with an extended and hovering finger the edge of a piece of paper, a tiny stain on the ceiling, in order to wash away this unforgivable oblivion. He, who before had laughed frankly with me, feeling the absolute importance of these vaingloriously isolated details, was now so enraged by them that they lost that quality of beauty that was fleeting and private, only for us.

Put out of the running like this, his imbalance became more marked in the following days. I made a last effort to contain that decline by returning to Poe, the cause of his excesses. The stories passed: “Ligeia”, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Black

Cat.” Once in a while, I glanced at him quickly; he devoured me constantly with his eyes, in the most saintly enthusiasm.

He felt absolutely nothing, I’m sure of it. I repeated the overly familiar readings, and I thought about that way of teaching bears to dance, which experienced circus people discuss; Fortunato perfectly fit the role of a hurdy-gurdy. Wanting to light a fire beneath him, I asked him, with a distracted attitude, while playing with the book in the air:

“What effect do you think a reading from Poe would have on a madman?”

Absurdly, he feared a trick in my antics with the book, on which he focused all his scrutiny.

“I don’t know.” And he repeated, “I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know,” quite hotly.

“Nevertheless, they must enjoy it. Doesn’t this happen with all dramatic or singular narratives, those that show so much affinity to speculation? Probably seeing themselves represented in some Tell-Tale Heart completely liberates them.”

“Oh! No,” he sighed. “Likely they all believed they were authors of such tales. Or simply, they were afraid of remaining insane.” And he raised his hand to his brow, with a heroic spirit.

I stopped my juggling. He shot me a haughty glance from the corner of his eye. Intending to confront him, I moved away. I felt a sensation of cold attenuation on my ankles and neck; it felt as if my tie, already loose, had fallen off.

“But you’re crazy!” I shouted, getting up with open arms. “You’re crazy!” I yelled again. I would have shouted much more but I made a mistake and stuck out my entire tongue to one side. Faced with my attitude, he stood up almost at a jump, looked at me sideways, approached the table, looked at me again, moved two or three books, and went to press his face and hands against the window, drumming on the glass.

Meanwhile I was already calm and asked him something. Instead of answering me frankly, he turned his head slightly and watched me stealthily, albeit with fear, emboldened by his previous triumph. But he was mistaken. There was no longer time, he must have known it. His mind, striving for a moment of mad domineering intelligence, had cracked anew.

* * *

A month passed. Fortunato fell rapidly into madness, without the consolation that this was one of those spiritual annihilations in which the ability to speak transformed into a simple, bestial persecution of words. His insanity went straight to a gross idiocy, a black imbecility that walked every morning through the courtyards of the asylum, his face painted white. At times I worked hard to hasten the crisis, unburdening my heart of a great deal of intolerable sorrow; sitting on a chair at the extreme opposite of the room, letting fall between us the entirety of a long afternoon, sure that the twilight would come to a close without him seeing me. He made progress. At times he

enjoyed playing dead, laughing about it until he cried. Two or three times he drooled. But in the last days of February he was seized by an irreparable muteness that I could not extract him from no matter how hard I tried. Then I found myself completely abandoned. Fortunato had left, and the fury of remaining alone made me think too much.

One night, I took his arm to go for a walk. I don't know where we were going, but I was quite content to be able to guide him. I laughed slowly, shaking off his arm. He looked at me and laughed as well, content. A shop window, replete with masks for the imminent Carnival, reminded me that there was going to be a dance to celebrate the upcoming festivities, about which Fortunato's sister-in-law had spoken to me with enthusiasm.

"And you, Fortunato, are you dressing up?"

"Yes, yes."

"I understand we're going together."

"Splendid."

"And what are you dressing up as?"

"Dressing up as?"

"I already know," I added quickly, "as Fortunato."

"Eh?" he burst out, enormously amused.

"Yes, like that."

And I pulled him away from the window. I had found a solution to my inevitable solitude, so perfect that my fears about Fortunato blew away on the wind like a handkerchief. Fortunato was going to leave me? Fine. I would be left alone? Fine. Fortunato would not be at my complete disposal? Fine. And I tossed my head in the air, I was so happy. This solution could have some difficult points; but what charmed me about it was its perfect adaptation of a famous Italian intrigue, well known to me, certainly—and above all the great ability to carry it to its end. I followed at his side without bothering him. I strolled a little behind him, carefully avoiding the joints of the paving stones to walk properly: I felt so good.

Once in bed, I lay still, thinking with my eyes open. In effect, my idea was this: I would do with Fortunato what Poe had done with Fortunato. Get him drunk, bring him to the cellar on whatever pretext, laugh like a maniac... What a luminous idea I had! The costumes, the same names. And the devilish cap of bells... Above all, how easy! And finally a divine realization: since Fortunato was insane, there was no need to get him drunk...

.....

At three in the morning I decided the hour had arrived. Fortunato, completely devoted to gallant dalliances, passed by with his arms about a stray Ophelia, whose train furiously swept the floor in time to their long wild steps.

My dance partner and I stopped in front of the couple.

"Well, my dear friend! Aren't you happy in this atmosphere of boundless joy?"

"Yes, happy," repeated Fortunato, overjoyed.

I put my hand to my heart:

“Happy like all of us!”

The group broke out laughing. My broad theatrical gesture had conquered them.

I continued:

“Ophelia laughs, which is a good sign. The flowers are like fresh dew for your brow.” I took her hand and added: “Don’t you feel Pure Reason in my hand? You will see, you will heal, and you will be someone else in your loose, heavy, and melancholy white dress... And by the way, dear Fortunato: doesn’t this gallant Ophelia evoke for you a very similar creature in some ways? Observe in her air, her hair, the same ideal mouth, the same absurd desire to live only for life... Pardon me,” I concluded, turning: “these are things that Fortunato knows well.”

Fortunato looked at me, bewildered, furrowing his brow. I leaned into his ear and whispered, squeezing his hand:

“From ‘Ligeia’, my beloved ‘Ligeia’!”

“Oh yes, yes!” –and he left. He fled in a hurry, turning his head anxiously like dogs who hear barking and don’t know from where.

At three-thirty we left for home. I had a clear head and cold hands; Fortunato was not walking well. Suddenly he fell, and when I helped him he resisted, lying on his back. He was pale, looking anxiously in all directions. Drool fell from the corners of his drooping lips. Suddenly he burst out laughing. I let him be for a while, hoping it was a passing crisis from which he could still return.

But the moment had arrived; he was completely insane, mute and seated now, his eyes darting everywhere, crying his idiotic fear to the moonlight in fat, sorrowful and endless tears.

I picked him up as best as I could and we continued along the deserted street. He walked supported on my shoulder. His feet had turned inward.

I was taken aback. How would I find pleasure in the tender advice that I had planned to give him about the similarity to the other, while I showed him with prolix kindness my basement, my walls, my dampness, and my book of Poe; what would serve as the cask in question? There would be nothing, not even the terror at the end when he realized. My hope was that he would react, even one moment, to properly appreciate the lengths to which we had gone. But I went on all the same. In a certain street a couple passed by us, she so well dressed that Fortunato’s ancient soul had a belated thrill and he turned his head. It was the last time. Finally we arrived home. I opened the door noiselessly, held him up heroically with one arm while shutting the door with the other, crossed the two courtyards and descended into the basement. Fortunato watched everything attentively and wanted to remove his tailcoat, I don’t know why.

In the basement of the house there was a wide plastered hole; its intended purpose in some other timeline I completely ignore. It measured three feet deep by two in diameter. Some days before a great quantity of slabs and stone had been piled up in the corner, enough to hermetically seal the aperture. I guided Fortunato to the hole, and tried to make him descend. But when I took him by the waist he freed himself

violently, looking at me with terror. Finally! Satisfied, I rubbed my hands together. My whole soul was with me again. I approached smiling and said in his ear, as gently as I could:

“It’s the pit, my dear Fortunato!”

He looked at me with suspicion, hiding his hands.

“It’s the pit...the pit, my dear friend!”

Then a pale light shone in his eyes. He took the candle from my hand, cautiously approached the hole, stretched his neck and tried to see the bottom. He returned, questioning.

“?”

“The pit!” I concluded, opening my arms. His gaze followed my gesture.

“Ah, no!” I laughed then, and demonstrated to him clearly, lowering my hands:

“The pit!”

It was enough. That concrete idea: the pit, finally entered his completely isolated and pure mind. He made it his own: it was the pit. He was pleased at everything.

Almost nothing remained for me to do. I helped him descend, and brought my pseudo-cement nearer. After each action I held the candle closer and looked at him.

Fortunato was curled up, completely satisfied. Once he called to me: “Pssst!”

“Eh?” I leaned over. He raised a shrewd finger and lowered it perpendicularly. I understood and we smiled at each other with all our hearts.

Suddenly a memory came to me and I quickly raised my head:

“And the nitre?” Then I immediately held my tongue. In a moment I had piled on the slabs and stone. The pit was now sealed, and Fortunato inside. Then I sat down, put the candle to one side and like The Other, I waited.

“Fortunato!”

Nothing. Would he notice?

Louder. “Fortunato!”

And a muffled but horrible scream arose from the depths of the pit. I jumped, and then I understood, though wildly, Poe’s precaution in bringing his sword along. I searched desperately for a weapon; there was none. I grabbed the candle and slammed it against the ground. Another scream arose, even more horrible. In my turn I howled:

“For the love of God!”

Not even an echo. Yet another scream emerged and I fled at a sprint and on the street I ran for two blocks. Finally I stopped, my head buzzing.

Ah, of course! Fortunato was stuck in his hole and screaming. Would the sound leak out?... Surely at the last moment he recognized clearly what I was doing to him... How easily I walled him in! The pit... it was his passion. The other Fortunato had screamed also. Everyone screams because they realize too much. The curious thing is that some go more gently than the others.

I was walking with my head high, letting myself go into daydreams where Fortunato managed to get out of his hiding place and pursue me with equal cunning... How very

open his smile is!... I stopped to listen... Bah! Whoever made the hole had done a good job. And afterwards the candle...

It was four o'clock. In the city center the last trains still swept by. The dead moon descended over the clear streets. From the houses which had been sleeping for who knows how long, from the closed windows, a vast silence fell. And I continued on, savoring these last adventures with such gusto that it would not be strange if I in my turn were also a bit mad.

From the collection *El crimen del otro* (The Other's Crime), 1904.

Bellamore's Triple Theft

Some days ago the courts sentenced Juan Carlos Bellamore to five years in prison, for robbing several banks. I have some relationship with Bellamore: he is a thin and serious young man, carefully dressed in black. I believe him quite incapable of these deeds, of any deed whatsoever that requires keen nerves. He knew that he was an eternal bank employee; I heard him say so many times, and he even added sadly that his future was a dead end; there would never be anything else. I also know that if there is an employee who is punctual and discreet, it would certainly be Bellamore. Without being his friend, I held him in esteem, regretting his misfortune. Yesterday afternoon I discussed the case with a group of acquaintances.

"Yes," one of them told me, "they have given him five years. I knew him a little; he was quite reserved. How did it not occur to me that it should be him? The accusation was prompt."

"What?" I asked, surprised.

"The accusation; he was denounced."

"Lately," someone else added, "he had lost a great deal of weight." And he concluded gravely: "Me, I no longer trust anyone."

I quickly changed the subject. I asked if the accuser was known.

"It was made known yesterday. It's Zaninski"

I very much wanted to hear the story from Zaninski's lips. First, the peculiarity of the denunciation, with absolutely no personal interest; second, the means that he used for the discovery. How had he known it was Bellamore?

This Zaninski is Russian, though he left his homeland while still a child. He speaks slowly and perfectly in Spanish, almost too perfectly, with a light Northern accent. He has kindly blue eyes that he tends to fix on you with a sweet and mortifying smile. They say he's strange. It's a pity that in these days of simple stupidity we no longer know what to believe when we're told that a man is strange.

That night I found him in a gathering around a table in a café. I sat down a little ways away, preferring to listen prudently from afar.

They conversed listlessly. I waited for my story, which must inevitably come up. Sure enough, someone, examining the poor state of a paper with which something was paid, made recriminations about the bank, and poor crucified Bellamore came to everyone's mind. Zaninski was there, he had to tell the story. Finally he came to a decision; I brought my chair a little nearer.

"When the robbery was committed at the French Bank," Zaninski commented, "I was returning from Montevideo. Like everyone, I was intrigued by the audacity of the

proceeding; a tunnel of such length has always been a risky thing. All the investigations were fruitless. Bellamore, as the teller in charge of the cash box, was particularly interrogated; but nothing came out against him or anyone else. Time passed, and everyone forgot.

“But in April of last year I incidentally heard something that reminded me of the successful robbery in 1900 of The Bank of London in Montevideo. They mentioned some names of compromised employees, and among them, Bellamore. The name surprised me; I asked and learned that it was Juan Carlos Bellamore. At that time I didn’t absolutely suspect him; but this first coincidence opened the path of my thoughts, and I discovered the following:

“In 1898 a robbery was committed at the German Bank in San Pablo, in such circumstances that only an employee familiar with the cash box could have done it. Bellamore was one of the tellers.

“From that moment I didn’t doubt Bellamore’s guilt for an instant.

“I scrupulously examined the known references to the triple robbery and fixed all my attention on these three dates.

“1 – The afternoon before the San Pablo robbery, coinciding with a large entry in the cash box, Bellamore had a dispute with the head cashier; a highly noteworthy fact, considering the friendship that united them, and above all, Bellamore’s placid character.

“2 – Also on the afternoon before the Montevideo robbery, Bellamore said that only by robbery could one make a fortune these days, and added laughingly that his victim would be the bank of which he was part.

“3 – The night before the robbery at the French Bank of Buenos Aires, Bellamore, against all his usual habits, passed the evening in different cafés, very happy.

“Now then, these three datums were for me three pieces of evidence in reverse, developed as follows.

“In the first case, only a person who had passed the night with the head cashier could have taken the key from him. Bellamore had been casually upset with the cashier that afternoon.

“In the second case, what person preparing for a robbery talks about it the day before they do it? It would be simply stupid.

“In the third case, Bellamore did everything possible to be seen, showing himself, in short, so that everyone would clearly recall that he, Bellamore, was the least likely person to be tunneling underground that eventful night.

“These three features were for me absolute: perhaps daring subtlety in a thief of lower order, but perfectly logical in the refined Bellamore.

“Outside of this, there are some private details, of more regular weight than the previous ones.

“So, then, the fatal triple coincidence, the three subtle features of a cultured young man who is going to steal, and the well-known circumstances led me to the complete conviction that Juan Carlos Bellamore, Argentinian, twenty-eight years of age, was the

author of the triple robbery committed against the German Bank of San Pablo, the Bank of London and Río del la Plata of Montevideo, and the French Bank of Buenos Aires. The next day I sent in my accusation.”

Zaninski finished. After much discussion the group broke up; Zaninski and I proceeded together down the same street. We didn’t speak. On saying goodbye I suddenly said to him, unburdening myself:

“But do you believe that Bellamore was convicted by the evidence in your accusation?”

Zaninski stared at me with his kindly eyes.

“I don’t know; it’s possible.”

“But those weren’t proofs! This is insane!” I added hotly. “That’s not enough to convict a man!”

He didn’t answer, whistling in the air. After a time he murmured:

“It must be so... five years is enough...” Suddenly he burst out, “I can tell you everything: I am completely convinced of Bellamore’s innocence.”

I turned to him suddenly, looking in his eyes.

“It was too much of a coincidence,” he concluded with a weary gesture.

From the collection *El crimen del otro* (The Other’s Crime), 1904.
Translated by Nina Zumel.

Dotty

“To sum it up, I believe that words are worth as much in themselves as the concepts to which they refer, and are even capable of creating those concepts through the simple mechanism of euphony. This requires special conditions; yet it is possible. But something that I’ve experienced made me reflect on the danger of two different things having the same name.”

You know, one doesn’t often hear such marvellous theories as that. Curiously, the one expounding it was no old and subtle philosopher, steeped in scholasticism, but a man hooked by commerce since his youth; he worked in Laboulaye, dealing in wheat. With his promise to tell us the story, we quickly drank down our coffee and settled ourselves comfortably in our chairs to listen for a while, our eyes fixed on Cordoba’s.

“I will tell you the story,” he began, “because it is the best way to make my point....”

* * *

You all know I have been in Laboulaye for some time. My partner travels through the colonies on behalf of the firm all year; while I, being quite useless at that, attend to the warehouse. As you might imagine, for at least eight months of the year, my duties are nothing but paperwork, and two employees—one working with me on the books and the other at the counter—are more than enough for us. Given the scale of our business, neither the daily transaction records nor the accounts are onerous. We still maintain, however, a morbid vigilance over the books, as if this dismal thing could repeat itself. The books!... Anyway, it’s been four years since this adventure, and our two employees were the protagonists.

The sales clerk was from Corrientes, a mere youth, short with close-cut hair, who always wore yellow boots. The one in charge of the books was a gaunt man of adult age, with a face the color of straw. I don’t think I ever saw him laugh. He was silent and diligent, his accounts an orderly system of ruled lines and red ink. His name was Figueroa; he was from Catamarca.

The pair, having begun to go out after work together, struck up a close friendship. Since neither one had family in Laboulaye, they rented a huge house, one with gloomy, cavernous corridors, built by a notary who had died there, insane.

For the first two years, we hadn’t the least complaint against them. But soon after, each began, in his own way, to change.

The sales clerk—his name was Tomas Aquino—arrived one morning at the warehouse, loquacious and exuberant. He talked and laughed incessantly, searching constantly for

who knows what in his pockets. This went on for two days. On the third he collapsed with a powerful attack of the flu; but returned after lunch, unexpectedly cured. That same afternoon, Figueroa had to go home sick, suddenly overcome with desperate sneezes. But it all passed in hours, in spite of the dramatic symptoms. Soon after, the same thing happened again, and again, for a month: Aquino's delirious chattering, Figueroa's sneezing, and every two days a sudden and frustrating attack of the flu.

This was curious. I advised them to get carefully examined, because things could not continue this way. Luckily the whole thing passed, returning both of them to their old, tranquil normality, the sales clerk behind the counter, and Figueroa with his gothic pen.

This was in December. On January 14, on leafing through the books that night, I saw to my surprise that the last page of the accounts was mottled with all sorts of dots and speckles, dotty in every sense of the word. As soon as Figueroa arrived the next morning, I asked him what the hell were these dots. He looked at me in surprise, looked at his work, and muttered an apology.

That wasn't all. The next day, Aquino submitted the daily ledger, and in place of the annotations for new orders, there was nothing but dots, the entire page full of dots everywhere. Things were getting serious; I spoke to them ill-temperedly, begging them seriously not to repeat these stunts. They looked at me attentively, blinking rapidly, but withdrew without saying a word.

From then on, they both grew visibly thinner. They changed the way they wore their hair, combing it back. Their friendship had deteriorated; though they tried to stay together the entire day, not a word passed between them.

So it went for several days, until one afternoon I found Figueroa bent over his desk, stippling the cash book. He had already defaced the accounts, leaf by leaf; all the pages covered in dots, dots on the bookboards, on the leather cover, on the spine, all dots.

We dismissed him immediately; he could continue this stupidity somewhere else. I called Aquino and dismissed him as well. On inspecting the warehouse I saw nothing but dots and spots and small holes everywhere: tables, planks, barrels peppered with them. Even a stippled spot of tar on the floor....

There was no doubt about it; they were completely insane. This terrible obsession with dots, added to the current heavy rains, would drive them into who knew what kind of state.

Indeed, two days later the owner of the cheap Italian restaurant where Aquino and Figueroa dined came to see me. He was extremely worried, and asked me whether I knew what the two were up to; they no longer left their house.

"They'll be just sitting in that mansion of theirs," I said.

"The door is shut and they don't answer," he answered, watching me.

"Then they're gone!" I argued nevertheless.

"No," he replied in a low voice. "Last night, during the storm, shouts were heard coming from inside."

This time I felt a shiver down my back, and we looked at each other for a moment.

We went out hurriedly and reported our concerns. On the way to the house our group grew larger, and by the time we arrived, splashing through the water, we were more than fifteen. It was already getting dark. When no one responded, we knocked down the door and entered. We searched the house in vain; there was no one. But the floor, the doors, the walls, the furniture, the ceiling itself, everything was pock-marked: a delirious effusion of spots and stipples, dotty in every sense of the word.

Now nothing could be done for them; they had gone into a terrible frenzy of stippling, be-dotting at all costs, as if the most intimate cells of their beings were convulsed by their obsession. Even in the wet patio dots splattered dizzily, crowded together finally like an explosion of lunacy.

The trail ended at the sewers. And leaning over, we saw two large black dots, bobbing up and down heavily in the muddy water.

From the collection *Anaconda*, 1921.

Adapted/Translated by Nina Zumel

See [here](#) for a discussion about translating/adapting this tale.

Lines

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From the collection *Anaconda*, 1921.

Translated (slightly adapted) by Nina Zumel

See [here](#) for a discussion about translating/adapting this tale.

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



Translated by Nina Zumel
A Selection of Horacio Quiroga's Stories
2019-20

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