



**Prosa Chicana Contemporánea  
Contemporary Chicano Prose**



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*I was born October 30, 1937 in Pastura, New Mexico. I have haunting memories of the small pueblito: bright sun and limitless sky, herds of cattle grazing in the grass of the llano, beautiful ancianos who hobbled over dusty streets, the train forever creating dreams and fantasy of where? why?, brilliant blood-red sunsets, and immense nights that brooded over the pocket of life the village affirmed with farole-lit windows. It seemed as if we were an old people, as old as the earth, one with the llano . . .*

*I was baptized Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya.*

*My family moved to Santa Rosa, New Mexico when I was very young, I went to school there. I mixed into the herd of cabron-citos of the town and we daily sang the sun on its way in a tempestuous-dumb-beautiful way. It is strange, but seldom a day goes by that I do not wonder about my childhood friends and wonder, just as they distilled in me rare and fragrant memories sweeter than any wine, if I too might have touched their lives. Sometimes when I meet one or another, in passing, I taste again the swirling green days of school, catechism, marbles, baseball, swimming, fishing, hiking, campfires—and then I am reminded that we are grown men and women now, going separate paths, cut loose from the bonds of the herd that each day went from green to gray—*

*Both my parents were originally from the vicinity of La Merced de Atrisco, near Albuquerque, New Mexico. They had migrated to the small pueblitos around Santa Rosa. I guess people would say that we were poor, but I never sensed poverty in the large family that surrounded me. I have many brothers and many sisters. For that I am glad.*

*My family then moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1954, or thereabouts. We moved into the Barelás Barrio, and the distillation process continued. I was in a bad accident that summer, and I guess the consequences of a fractured back greatly changed my life. I finished high school in Albuquerque, went to business school but tired of the prospects of a desk-type existence. I went to the University of New Mexico in 1958, got my B.A., all the time looking carefully at a lot of life. I've been teaching in Albuquerque in the public schools for eight years.*

*I have been writing for the past ten years. I have written volumes of poems, stories, novels, burned some, saved a few. Out of a suitcase full I have, it seemed that ULTIMA distilled into something worthwhile. Writing is not easy. It is a lonely, and oftentimes unappreciated endeavor. But I had to keep creating, I had to keep trying to organize all the beautiful, chaotic things into some pattern. Writing is never quite learned. I have to rewrite and rewrite each manuscript before I'm satisfied. By the way, my writing is completely self-taught. I have never taken a writing course. It's easy. You just have to sit down and write, write, write, and write . . . hasta que te lleva la madre, y las almorranas.*

*I would like to have more time to develop my painting. I like to fish and hunt. I like the mountains in the summer, their strength, the villages of the state, the people, the Indian pueblos—I feel very close to the Indians . . .*

*I am married. My wife's name is Patricia. We do not think we would leave this state lightly. I, because its earth and sun are in me, she because she has learned to love it only as a person from without can. I've been around the states, from Califa to New York, and down into Mejico a few times, but it seems, for me, that everything is here. I have a very good feeling about where the course of Chicano literature is headed.*

BLESS ME, ULTIMA

by Rudolfo A. Anaya

*excerpts from the novel.*

[ . . . ] Cico's eyes remained glued on the dark waters. His body was motionless, like a spring awaiting release. We had been whispering since we arrived at the pond, why I didn't know, except that it was just one of those places where one can communicate only in whispers, like church.

We sat for a long time waiting for the golden carp. It was very pleasant to sit in the warm sunshine and watch the pure waters drift by. The drone of the summer insects and grasshoppers made me sleepy. The lush green of the grass was cool, and beneath the grass was the dark earth, patient, waiting . . .

To the northeast two hawks circled endlessly in the clear sky. There must be something dead on the road to Tucumcari, I thought.

Then the golden carp came. Cico pointed and I turned to where the stream came out of the dark grotto of overhanging tree branches. At

first I thought I must be dreaming. I had expected to see a carp the size of a river carp, perhaps a little bigger and slightly orange instead of brown. I rubbed my eyes and watched in astonishment.

"Behold the golden carp, Lord of the waters—" I turned and saw Cico standing, his spear held across his chest as if in acknowledgement of the presence of a ruler.

The huge, beautiful form glided through the blue waters. I could not believe its size. It was bigger than me! And bright orange! The sunlight glistened off his golden scales. He glided down the creek with a couple of smaller carp following, but they were like minnows compared to him.

"The golden carp," I whispered in awe. I could not have been more entranced if I had seen the Virgin, or God Himself. The golden carp had seen me. It made a wide sweep, its back making ripples in the dark water. I could have reached out into the water and touched the holy fish!

"He knows you are a friend," Cico whispered.

Then the golden carp swam by Cico and disappeared into the darkness of the pond. I felt my body trembling as I saw the bright golden form disappear. I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god, a thing as miraculous as the curing of my uncle Lucas. And I thought, the power of God failed where Ultima's worked; and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind. This is what I had expected God to do at my first holy communion! If God was witness to my beholding of the golden carp then I had sinned! I clasped my hands and was about to pray to the heavens when the waters of the pond exploded.

I turned in time to see Cico hurl his spear at the monstrous black bass that had broken the surface of the waters. The evil mouth of the black bass was open and red. Its eyes were glazed with hate as it hung in the air surrounded by churning water and a million diamond droplets of water. The spear whistled through the air, but the aim was low. The huge tail swished and contemptuously flipped it aside. Then the black form dropped into the foaming waters.

"Missed," Cico groaned. He retrieved his line slowly.

I nodded my head. "I can't believe what I have seen," I heard myself say, "are all the fish that big here—"

"No," Cico smiled, "they catch two and three pounders below the beaver dam, the black bass must weigh close to twenty—" He threw his spear and line behind the clump of grass and came to sit by me. "Come on, let's put our feet in the water. The golden carp will be returning—"

"Are you sorry you missed?" I asked as we slid our feet into the cool water.

"No," Cico said, "it's just a game."

The orange of the golden carp appeared at the edge of the pond. As he came out of the darkness of the pond the sun caught his shiny scales and the light reflected orange and yellow and red. He swam very close to our feet. His body was round and smooth in the clear water. We watched in silence at the beauty and grandeur of the great fish. Out of the corners of my eyes I saw Cico hold his hand to his breast as the golden carp glided by. Then with a switch of his powerful tail the golden carp disappeared into the shadowy water under the thicket.

I shook my head. "What will happen to the golden carp?"

"What do you mean?" Cico asked.

"There are many men who fish here—"

Cico smiled. "They can't see him, Tony, they can't see him. I know every man from Guadalupe who fishes, and there ain't a one who has ever mentioned seeing the golden carp. So I guess the grown-ups can't see him—"

"The Indian, Narciso, Ultima—"

"They're different, Tony. Like Samuel, and me, and you—"

"I see," I said. I did not know what that difference was, but I did feel a strange brotherhood with Cico. We shared a secret that would always bind us.

"Where does the golden carp go?" I asked and nodded upstream.

"He swims upstream to the lakes of the mermaid, the Hidden Lakes—"

"The mermaid?" I questioned him.

"There are two deep, hidden lakes up in the hills," he continued, "they feed the creek. Some people say those lakes have no bottom. There's good fishing, but very few people go there. There's something strange about those lakes, like they are haunted. There's a strange power, it seems to watch you—"

"Like the *presence* of the river?" I asked softly. Cico looked at me and nodded.

"You've felt it," he said.

"Yes."

"Then you understand. But this thing at the lakes is stronger, or maybe not stronger, it just seems to want you more. The time I was there—I climbed to one of the overhanging cliffs, and I just sat there, watching the fish in the clear water—I didn't know about the power then, I was just thinking how good the fishing would be, when I began to hear strange music. It came from far away. It was a low, lonely murmuring, maybe like something a sad girl would sing. I looked around, but I was alone. I looked over the ledge of the cliff and the singing seemed to be coming from the water, and it seemed to be calling me—"

I was spellbound to Cico's whispered story. If I had not seen the

golden carp perhaps I would not have believed him. But I had seen too much today to doubt him. He had brought me to a source of beauty whose scenes still tumbled through my mind and mixed into the new story.

“I swear, Tony, the music was pulling me into the dark waters below! The only thing that saved my plunging into the lake was the golden carp. He appeared and the music stopped. Only then could I tear myself away from that place. Man, I ran! Oh how I ran! I had never been afraid before, but I was afraid then. And it wasn’t that the singing was evil, it was just that it called for me to join it. One more step and I’d stepped over the ledge and drowned in the waters of the lake—”

I waited a long time before I asked the next question. I waited for him to finish reliving his experience. Then I asked, “Did you see the mermaid?”

“No,” he answered.

“Who is she?” I whispered.

“No one knows. A deserted woman—or just the wind singing around the edges of those cliffs. No one really knows. It just calls people to it—”

“Who?”

He looked at me carefully. His eyes were clear and bright, like Ultima’s, and there were lines of age already showing. He did not look like a nine or ten-year-old boy just telling a story to pass the time of day.

“Last summer the mermaid took a shepherd. He was a man from Méjico, new here and working for a ranch beyond the hills. He did not know about the lakes. He brought his sheep to water there, and he heard the singing. He made it back to town and even swore that he had seen the mermaid. He said it was a woman, resting on the water and singing a lonely song. She was half woman and half fish— He said the song made him want to wade out to the middle of the lake to help her, but his fear had made him run. He told everyone the story, but no one believed him. He ended up getting drunk in town and swearing he would prove his story by going back to the lakes and bringing back the mer-woman. He never returned. A week later the flock was found near the lake. He had vanished—”

“Do you think the mermaid took him?” I asked.

“I don’t know, Tony,” Cico said and knit his brow, “there’s a lot of things I don’t know. But never go to the Hidden Lakes alone, Tony, never. It’s not safe.”

I nodded that I would honor his warning. “It is so strange,” I said, “the things that happen. The things that I have seen, or heard about.”

“Yes,” he agreed.

“These things of the water, the mermaid, the golden carp. They are



strange. There is so much water around the town, the river, the creek, the lakes—”

Cico leaned back and stared into the bright sky. “This whole land was once covered by a sea, a long time ago—”

“My name means sea,” I pondered aloud.

“Hey, that’s right,” he said, “Márez means sea, it means you came from the ocean, Tony Márez arisen from the sea—”

“My father says our blood is restless, like the sea.”

“That is very beautiful,” he said. He laughed. “You know, this land belonged to the fish before it belonged to us. I have no doubt about the prophecy of the golden carp. He will come to rule again!”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“What do I mean?” Cico asked quizzically, “I mean that the golden carp will come to rule again. Didn’t Samuel tell you?”

“No,” I shook my head.

“Well he told you about the people who killed the carp of the river and were punished by being turned into fish themselves. After that happened, many years later, a new people came to live in this valley. And they were no better than the first inhabitants, in fact they were worse. They sinned a lot, they sinned against each other, and they sinned against the legends they knew. And so the golden carp sent them a prophecy. He said that the sins of the people would weigh so heavy upon the land that in the end the whole town would collapse and be swallowed by water—”

I must have whistled in exclamation and sighed.

“Tony,” Cico said, “this whole town is sitting over a deep, underground lake! Everybody knows that. Look.” He drew on the sand with a stick. “Here’s the river. The creek flows up here and curves into the river. The Hidden Lakes complete the other border. See?”

I nodded. The town was surrounded by water. It was frightening to know that! “The whole town!” I whispered in amazement.

“Yup,” Cico said, “the whole town. The golden carp has warned us that the land cannot take the weight of the sins—the land will finally sink!”

“But you live in town!” I exclaimed.

He smiled and stood up. “The golden carp is my god, Tony. He will rule the new waters. I will be happy to be with my god—”

It was unbelievable, and yet it made sense! All the pieces fitted!

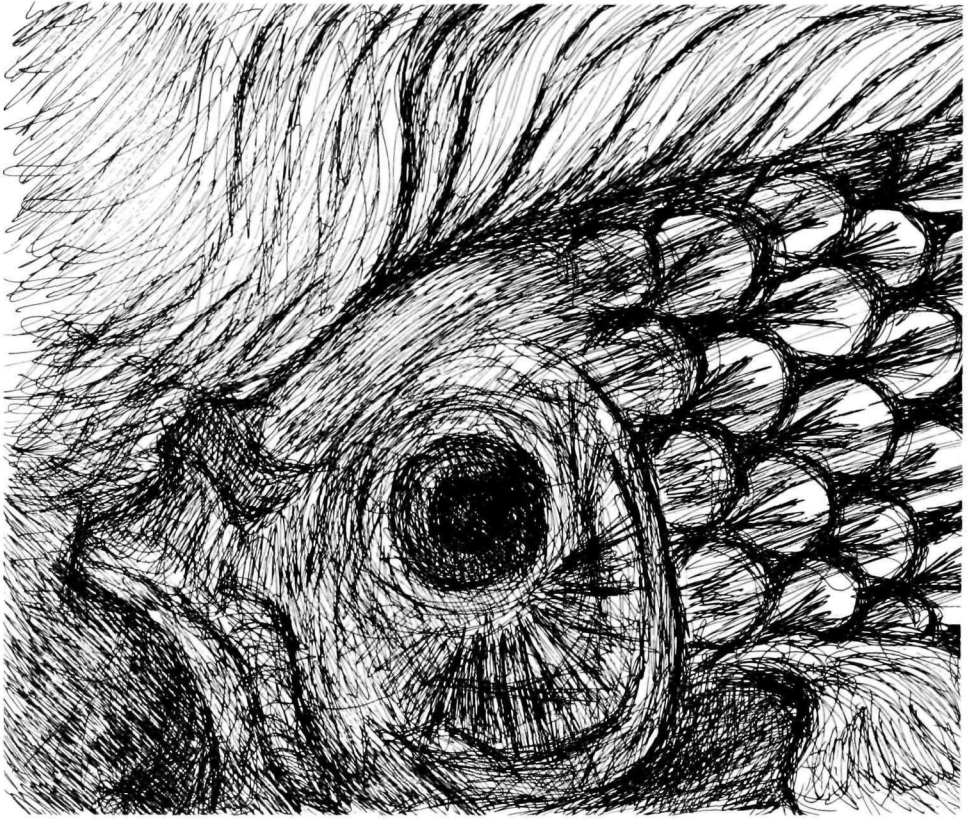
“Do the people of the town know?” I asked anxiously.

“They know,” he nodded, “and they keep on sinning.”

“But it’s not fair to those who don’t sin!” I countered.

“Tony,” Cico said softly, “all men sin.”

I had no answer to that. My own mother had said that losing your



innocence and becoming a man was learning to sin. I felt weak and powerless in the knowledge of the impending doom.

“When will it happen?” I asked.

“No one knows,” Cico answered. “It could be today, tomorrow, a week, a hundred years—but it will happen.”

“What can we do?” I asked. I heard my voice tremble.

“Sin against no one,” Cico answered.

I walked away from that haven which held the pond and the swimming waters of the golden carp feeling a great weight in my heart. I was saddened by what I had learned. I had seen beauty, but the beautiful had burdened me with responsibility. Cico wanted to fish at the dam,

but I was not in the mood for it. I thanked him for letting me see the golden carp, crossed the river, and trudged up the hill homeward.

I thought about telling everyone in town to stop their sinning or drown and die. But they would not believe me. How could I preach to the whole town, I was only a boy. They would not listen. They would say I was crazy, or bewitched by Ultima's magic.

I went home and thought about what I had seen and the story Cico told. I went to Ultima and told her the story. She said nothing. She only smiled. It was as if she knew the story and found nothing fantastic or impending in it. "I would have told you the story myself," she nodded wisely, "but it is better that you hear the legend from someone your own age . . ."

"Am I to believe the story?" I asked. I was worried.

"Antonio," she said calmly and placed her hand on my shoulder, "I cannot tell you what to believe. Your father and your mother can tell you, because you are their blood, but I cannot. As you grow into manhood you must find your own truths—" [ . . . ]

\* \* \* \* \*

[ . . . ] The school house was quiet, like a tomb frozen over by winter. The buses didn't come in because of the blizzard, and even most of the town kids stayed home. But Horse and Bones and the rest of the gang from Los Jaros were there. They were the dumbest kids in school, but they never missed a single day. Hell could freeze over but they would still come marching across the tracks, wrestling, kicking at each other, stomping into the classrooms where they fidgeted nervously all day and made things miserable for their teachers.

"Where are the girls?" Bones sniffed the wind wildly and plunked into a frozen desk.

"They didn't come," I answered.

"Why?" "¡Chingada!" "What about the play?"

"I don't know," I said and pointed to the hall where Miss Violet conferred with the other teachers who had come to school. They all wore their sweaters and shivered. Downstairs the furnace groaned and made the steam radiators ping, but it was still cold.

"No play, shit!" Abel moaned.

Miss Violet came in. "What did you say, Abel?"

"No play, shucks," Abel said.

"We can still have a play," Miss Violet sat down and we gathered around her, "if the boys play the parts—"

We all looked at each other. The girls had set up all the stuff in the auditorium; and they had, with Miss Violet's help, composed the story about the three wise men. Originally we just stood around and acted like shepherds, but now we would have to do everything because the girls stayed home.

"Yeahhhhhh!" Horse breathed on Miss Violet.

"The other teachers don't have much to do, with so many kids absent," she turned away from the inquisitive Horse, "and they would like to come to our play—"

"Aghhhh Nooooo," Bones growled.

"We have to read all the parts," Lloyd said. He was carefully picking at his nose.

"We could practice all morning," Miss Violet said. She looked at me.

"I think it's a great idea," Red nodded his head vigorously. He always tried to help the teacher.

"¡A la veca!"

"What does that mean?" Miss Violet asked.

"It means okay!"

So the rest of the morning we sat around reading the parts for the play. It was hard because the kids from Los Jaros couldn't read. After lunch we went to the auditorium for one quick practice before the other teachers came in with their classes. Being on stage scared us and some of the boys began to back down. Bones climbed up a stage rope and perched on a beam near the ceiling. He refused to come down and be in the play.

"Boooooooo-enz!" Miss Violet called, "come down!"

Bones snapped down at her like a cornered dog. "The play is for sissies!" he shouted.

Horse threw a chunk of a two-by-four at him and almost clobbered him. The board fell and hit the Kid and knocked him out cold. It was funny because although he turned white and was out, his legs kept going, like he was racing someone across the bridge. Miss Violet worked frantically to revive him. She was very worried.

"Here." Red had gone for water which he splashed on the Kid's face. The Kid groaned and opened his eyes.

"¡Cabrón Caballo!" he cursed.

The rest of us were either putting on the silly robes and towels to make us look like shepherds, or wandering around the stage. Someone tipped the Christ child over and it lost its head.

"There ain't no such thing as virgin birth," Florence said looking down at the decapitated doll. He looked like a madman, his long legs sticking beneath the short robe and his head wound in a turban.

"You're all a bunch of sissies!" Bones shouted from above. Horse aimed the two-by-four again but Miss Violet stopped him in time.

"Go put the head on the doll," she said.

"I gotta go to the bathroom," Abel said. He held the front of his pants.

Miss Violet nodded her head slowly, closed her eyes and said, "no."

"You could be sued for not letting him go," Lloyd said in his girlish

voice. He was chewing on a Tootsie Roll. Chocolate dripped down the sides of his mouth and made him look evil.

"I could also be tried for murder!" Miss Violet reached for Lloyd, but he ducked and disappeared behind one of the cardboard cows by the manger.

"Come on, you guys, let's cooperate!" Red shouted. He had been busy trying to get everyone to stand in their places. We had decided to make everyone stand in one place during the play. It would be easier that way. Only the kings would step forth to the manger and offer their gifts.

"Places! Places!" Miss Violet shouted. "Joseph?" she called and I stepped forward. "Mary? Who is Mary?"

"Horse!" Red answered.

"No! No! No!" Horse cried. We chased him down on the stage and knocked down a lot of the props, but we finally got the beautiful blue robe on him.

"Horse is a virgin!" Bones called.

"¡Aghhhhh! ¡Cabrón!" Horse started up the rope but we pulled him down.

"Horse! Horse!" Miss Violet tried to subdue him, "it's only for a little while. And no one will know. Here." She put a heavy veil on his head and tied it around his face so that it covered all except his eyes.

"Naggggggh!" Horse screamed. It was awful to hear him cry, like he was in pain.

"I'll give you an A," Miss Violet said in exasperation. That made Horse think. He had never gotten an A in anything in his life.

"An A," he muttered, his large horse jaws working as he weighed the disgrace of his role for the grade. "Okay," he said finally, "okay. But remember, you said an A!"

"I'll be your witness," Lloyd said from behind the cow.

"Horse is a virgin!" Bones sang, and Horse quit the job and we had to persuade him all over again.

"Bones is just jealous," Red convinced him.

"Come down!" Miss Violet yelled at Bones.

"Gimme an A," Bones growled.

"All right," she agreed.

He thought awhile then yelled, "no, gimme two A's!"

"Go to—" she stopped herself and said, "stay up there. But if you fall and break your neck it's not my fault!"

"You could be sued by his family for saying that," Lloyd said. He wiped his mouth and the chocolate spread all over his face.

"I got to pee—" Abel groaned.

"Horse, kneel here." Horse was to kneel by the manger and I stood at his side, with one hand on his shoulder. When I put my arm around

his shoulder Horse's lips sputtered and I thought he would bolt. His big horse-eyes looked up at me nervously. One of the cardboard donkeys kept tipping over and hitting Horse, this only served to make him more nervous. Some of the kids were stationed behind the cardboard animals to keep them up, and they giggled and kept looking around the edges at each other. They started a spit-wad game and that really made Miss Violet angry.

"Please behave!" she shouted, "pleeeeeeee-z!" The Vitamin Kid had recovered and was running around the stage. She collared him and made him stand in one spot. "Kings here," she said. I guess someone had put the robe on the Kid when he was knocked out, because otherwise no one could have held him long enough to slip the robe on.

"Does everybody have copies of the play?" Red shouted. "If you have to look at the lines, keep the script hidden so the audience doesn't see—"

"I can seeeeee—" It was Bones. He leaned to look down at Florence's copy of the play and almost fell off the rafter. We all gasped, but he recovered. Then he bragged, "Tarzuuuuuun, king of the jungle!" And he started calling elephants like Tarzan does in the movie, "Aghhh-uhhhh-uhhhh-uhhhhhhhhh—"

"¡Cabrón!" "¡Chingada!" Everyone was laughing.

"Bones," Miss Violet pleaded. I thought she was going to cry. "Please come down."

"I ain't no sissy!" he snarled.

"You know, I'm going to have to report you to the principal—"

Bones laughed. He had been spanked so many times by the principal that it didn't mean anything anymore. They had become almost like friends, or like enemies that respected each other. Now when Bones was sent in for misbehaving he said the principal just made him sit. Then, Bones said, the principal very slowly lit a cigarette and smoked it, blowing rings of smoke in Bones' face all the while. Bones liked it. I guess they both got a satisfaction out of it. When the cigarette was gone and its light crushed in the ashtray Bones was excused. Then Bones went back to the room and told the teacher he had really gotten it this time and he promised to be a good boy and not break any rules. But five minutes later he broke a rule, and of course he couldn't help it because they said his brother who worked in the meat market had brought Bones up on raw meat.

"I ain't got page five," Abel cried. His face was red and he looked sick.

"You don't need page five, your lines are on page two," Red told him. He was very good about helping Miss Violet; I only wished I could help more. But the kids wouldn't listen to me because I wasn't big like Red, and besides there I was stuck with my arm around Horse.

"Florence by the light—" Tall angelic Florence moved under the lightbulb that was the star of the east. When the rest of the lights were turned off the lightbulb behind Florence would be the only light. "Watch your head—"

"Everybody ready?" The three wise men were ready, Samuel, Florence, and the Kid. Horse and I were ready. The fellows holding up the cardboard animals were ready, and Red was ready.

"Here they come," Miss Violet whispered. She stepped into the wing.

I glanced up and saw a screaming horde of first graders rushing down the aisle to sit in the first rows. The fourth and fifth graders sat behind them. Their teachers looked at the stage, shook their heads and left, closing the doors behind them. The audience was all ours.

"I got to pee," Abel whispered.

"Shhhhhh," Miss Violet coaxed, "everybody quiet." She hit the light switch and the auditorium darkened. Only the star of the east shone on stage. Miss Violet whispered for Red to begin. He stepped to the center of the stage and began his narration.

"The First Christmas!" he announced loudly. He was a good reader.

"Hey, it's Red!" someone in the audience shouted, and everybody giggled. I'm sure Red blushed, but he went on, he wasn't ashamed of stuff like that.

"I got to—" Abel moaned.

Lloyd began to unwrap another Tootsie Roll and the cow he was holding teetered. "The cow's moving," someone in the first row whispered. Horse glanced nervously behind me. I was afraid he would run. He was trembling.

"—And they were led by the star of the east—" and here Red pointed to the light bulb. The kids went wild with laughter. "—So they journeyed that cold night until they came to the town of Bethlehem—"

"Abel peed!" Bones called from above. We turned and saw the light of the east reflecting off a golden pool at Abel's feet. Abel looked relieved.

"¡Ah la veca!" "¡Puto!"

"How nasty," Lloyd scoffed. He turned and spit a mouthful of chewed-up Tootsie Roll. It landed on Maxie, who was holding up a cardboard donkey behind us.

Maxie got up cleaning himself. The donkey toppled over. "¡Jodido!" He cursed Lloyd and shoved him. Lloyd fell over his cow.

"You could be sued for that," he threatened from the floor.

"Boys! Boys!" Miss Violet called excitedly from the dark.

I felt Horse's head tossing at the excitement. I clamped my arm down to hold him, and he bit my hand.

"¡Ay!"

“And there in a manger, they found the babe—” Red turned and nodded for me to speak.

“I am Joseph!” I said as loud as I could, trying to ignore the sting of the horse bite, “and this is the baby’s mother—”

“Damn you!” Horse cursed when I said that. He jumped up and let me have a hard fist in the face.

“It’s Horse!” the audience squealed. He had dropped his veil, and he stood there trembling, like a trapped animal.

“Horse the virgin!” Bones called.

“Boys, bowoooo-oizz!” Miss Violet pleaded.

“—AndthethreeringsbroughtgiftstotheChristchild—” Red was reading very fast to try to get through the play, because everything was really falling apart on stage.

The audience wasn’t helping either, because they kept shouting, “Is that you, Horse?” or “Is that you, Tony?”

The Kid stepped up with the first gift. “I bring, I bring—” He looked at his script but he couldn’t read.

“Incense,” I whispered.

“¿Qué?”

“Incense,” I repeated. Miss Violet had rearranged Horse’s robe and pushed him back to kneel by me. My eyes were watering from his blow.

“In-sense,” the Kid said and he threw the crayon box we were using for incense right into the manger and busted the doll’s head again. The round head just rolled out into the center of the stage near where Red stood and he looked down at it with a puzzled expression on his face.

Then the Kid stepped back and slipped on Abel’s pee. He tried to get up and run, but that only made it worse. He kept slipping and getting up, and slipping and getting up, and all the while the audience had gone wild with laughter and hysteria.

“Andthesecondwisemanbroughtmyrrh!” Red shouted above the din.

“¡Meerrrr, merrrrda, mierda!” Bones cried like a monkey.

“I bring myra,” Samuel said.

“Myra!” someone in the audience shouted, and all the fifth graders turned to look at a girl named Myra. All the boys said she sat on her wall at home after school and showed her panties to those that wanted to see.

“Hey, Horse!”

“¡Chingada!” the Horse said, working his teeth nervously. He stood up and I pushed and he knelt again.

The Kid was holding on to Abel, trying to regain his footing, and Abel just stood very straight and said, “I had to.”

“And the third wise man brought gold!” Red shouted triumphantly. We were nearing the end.



Florence stepped forward, bowed low and handed an empty cigar box to Horse. "For the virgin," he grinned.

"¡Cabrón!" The Horse jumped up and shoved Florence across the stage, and at the same time a blood-curdling scream filled the air and Bones came sailing through the air and landed on Horse.

"For the verrrrrr-gin!" Bones cried.

"—And that's how it was on the first Christmas!" I heard brave Red call out above the confusion and free-for-all on stage and the howling of the audience. And the bell rang and everybody ran out shouting, "Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" "¡Chingada!"

In a very few moments the auditorium was quiet. Only Red and I and the exhausted Miss Violet remained on the stage. My ears kept ringing, like when I stood under the railroad bridge while a train went by overhead, but it was quiet. For the first time since we came in it was quiet in the auditorium. Overhead the wind began to blow. The blizzard had not died out. [ . . . ]



## EVA Y DANIEL

Tomás Rivera

Todavía recuerda la gente a Eva y a Daniel. Eran muy bien parecidos los dos y la mera verdad daba gusto el verlos juntos. Pero la gente no los recuerda por eso. Estaban muy jóvenes cuando se casaron, mejor decir cuando se salieron. A los padres de ella casi ni les dio coraje o si les dio les duró muy poco y era que casi todos los que conocían a Daniel lo querían muy bien y por muchas razones. Fue en el norte cuando se fueron durante la feria del condado que hacían cada año en Bird Island.

Los dos familias vivían en el mismo rancho. Trabajaban juntas y en las mismas labores, iban al pueblo en la misma troca y casi comían juntas. Por eso no extrañó nada que se hicieran novios. Y aunque todos sabían, aparentaban no saber y hasta ellos en lugar de hablarse se mandaban cartas a veces. El sábado que se fueron recuerdo muy bien que iban muy contentos a la feria en la troca. El viento les llevaba todos despeinados pero cuando llegaron a la feria ni se acordaron de peinarse. Se subieron en todos los juegos, se separaron del resto del grupo y ya no los vieron hasta en dos días.

—No tengas miedo. Nos podemos ir en un taxi al rancho. Hazte para acá, arrímate, déjame tocarte. ¿O es que no me quieres?

—Sí, sí.

—No tengas miedo. Nos casamos. A mí no me importa nada. Nomás tú. Si nos deja la troca nos vamos en un taxi.

—Pero me van a regañar.

—No te apures. Si te regañan yo mismo te defiendo. Además quiero casarme contigo. Le pido el pase ya a tu papá si quieres. ¿Qué dices? ¿Nos casamos?

A la media noche se cerraron todos los juegos y se apagaron las luces del carnaval y ya no se oyeron los tronidos de los cohetes pero nada que aparecían Eva y Daniel. Entonces les empezó a dar cuidado a los padres pero no avisaron a la ley. Ya para la una y media de la mañana la demás gente empezó a impacientarse. Se bajaban y subían de la troca cada rato y por fin el padre de Eva le dijo al chofer que se fueran. Pero iban con cuidado las dos familias. Ya les daba por las patas que se habían huído y estaban seguros de que se casarían pero comoquiera les daba cuidado. Y estarían con cuidado hasta que no los volvieran a ver. Lo que no

sabían era que Daniel y Eva ya estaban en el rancho. Pero estaban escondidos en la bodega, en lo más alto donde guardaba el viejo la paja para el invierno. Por eso, aunque los anduvieron buscando en los pueblos cercanos, no los encontraron hasta dos días después cuando bajaron de la bodega bien hambriados.

Hubo algunas discusiones bastante calurosas pero por fin consintieron los padres de Eva que se casarían. Al día siguiente les llevaron a que se sacaran la sangre, luego a la semana los llevaron con el juez civil y tuvieron que firmar los padres porque estaban muy jóvenes.

—Ya ves como todo salió bien.

—Sí, pero me dio miedo cuando se enojó papá todo. Hasta creí que te iba a pegar cuando nos vio de primero.

—A mí también. Ya estamos casados. Ya podemos tener hijos.

—Sí.

—Qué crezcan bien grandotes y que se parezcan a ti y a mí.  
¿Cómo irán a ser?

—Qué se parezcan a mí y a ti.

—Si es mujer qué se parezca a ti; si es hombre qué se parezca a mí.

—¿Y si no tenemos?

—¿Cómo que no? Mi familia y tu familia son muy familiares.

—Eso sí.

—¿Entonces?

—Pos, yo nomás decía.

Realmente después de casarse las cosas empezaron a cambiar. Primeramente porque ya para el mes de casados Eva andaba de vasca cada rato y luego también le cayó una carta del gobierno a Daniel diciéndole que estuviera en tal pueblo para que tomara los exámenes físicos para el ejército. Al ver la carta sintió mucho miedo, no tanto por sí mismo, sino que sintió inmediatamente la separación que vendría para siempre.

—Ves, m'ijo, si no hubieras ido a la escuela no hubieras pasado el examen.

—A qué mamá. Pero es que no porque pasa uno el examen se lo llevan. Además ya estoy casado así que a lo mejor no me llevan por eso. Y también Eva ya está esperando.

—Ya no hallo que hacer, m'ijo, estoy rezando todas las noches porque no te llevan. Eva también. Les hubieras mentido. Te hubieras hecho tonto para no pasar.

—A qué mamá.

Para noviembre en lugar de regresarse a Texas con su familia se quedó Daniel en el norte y en unos cuantos días ya estaba en el ejército. Los días le parecían no tener razón—ni para qué hubiera noche, ni

mañana, ni día. No le importaba nada de nada a veces. Varias veces pensó en huirse y regresar a su pueblo para estar con Eva. Cuando pensaba era en lo que pensaba—Eva. Yo creo que hasta se puso enfermo alguna vez o varias veces serían al pensar tanto en ella. La primera carta del gobierno le había traído la separación y ahora la separación se ensanchaba más y más.

—¿Por qué será que no puedo pensar en otra cosa más que en Eva? Si no la hubiera conocido ¿en qué pensaría? Y creo que en mí mismo, pero ahora . . .

Pero así como son las cosas, nada se detuvo. El entrenamiento de Daniel siguió al compaz del embarazo de Eva. Luego mandaron a Daniel para California pero antes tuvo la oportunidad de estar con Eva en Texas. La primera noche durmieron besándose. Estuvieron felices otra vez por un par de semanas pero luego llegó la separación de nuevo. Le daban ganas de quedarse a Daniel pero luego decidió seguir su camino a California. Le preparaban más y más para mandarlo a Corea. Luego empezó a enfermarse Eva. El niño le daba complicaciones. Entre más cerca el alumbramiento más complicaciones.

—Si vieras, viejo, que este niño va mal.

—¿Por qué crees?

—Esta tiene algo. Por las noches se le vienen unas fiebres pero fiebres. Ojalá y salga todo bien pero hasta el doctor se ve bastante preocupado. ¿No te has fijado?

—No.

—Ayer me dijo que teníamos que tener mucho cuidado con Eva. Nos dio un montón de instrucciones pero con eso de que uno no entiende. ¿Te imaginas? Como quisiera que estuviera Daniel aquí. Te apuesto que hasta se aliviaba Eva. Ya le mandé decir que está muy enferma para que venga a verla pero no le creerán sus superiores y no lo dejarán venir.

—Pues escríbele otra vez. Quien quite pueda hacer algo si habla.

—Ya, ya le he escrito muchas cartas mandándole decir lo mismo. Fíjate que ya ni me preocupa tanto él. Ahora es Eva. Tan jovencitos los dos.

—Sí, verdad.

Eva empeoró y cuando recibió una carta de su madre donde le suplicaba que viniera a ver a su esposa, Daniel no supo explicar o no le creyeron sus superiores. No lo dejaron venir. Pero él se huyó ya en vísperas de que lo mandaran a Corea. Duró tres días para llegar a Texas en el autobús. Pero ya no la alcanzó.

Yo recuerdo muy bien que lo trajo un carro de sitio a la casa. Cuando se abajó y oyó el llanto dentro de la casa entró corriendo.

Luego se volvió como loco y echó a todos para fuera de la casa y allí estuvo él solo encerrado casi todo un día. Salía nada más para ir al escusado pero aún allí dentro se le oía soyozar.

Ya no volvió al ejército ni nadie vino a buscarlo alguna vez. Yo lo vi muchas veces llorar de repente. Yo creo que se acordaba. Luego perdió todo interés en sí mismo. Casi ni hablaba.

Se empeñó una vez en comprar cohetes para vender durante la navidad. Le costó bastante el paquete de cohetes que mandó traer por medio de una dirección de una revista. Pero cuando los recibió en lugar de venderlos, no descansó hasta que no los había tronado todos él mismo. Y desde entonces es todo lo que hace con lo poquito que gana para mantenerse. Casi todas las noches truena cohetes. Yo creo que por eso, por estos rumbos del mundo, la gente todavía recuerda a Eva y a Daniel. No sé.

## EVA AND DANIEL

Tomás Rivera

People still remember Eva and Daniel. They were both very good looking, and in all honesty it was a pleasure to see them together. But that's not the reason people remember them. They were very young when they got married, or rather, when they eloped. Her parents hardly got angry at all, and if they did, it was for a very short time and that was because everyone who know Daniel liked him very much and had many good reasons to like him. They eloped up north during the County Fair that was held every year in Bird Island.

Both families lived in the same ranch. They worked together in the same fields, they went to town in the same truck and they just about had their meals together, they were so close. That's why no one was surprised when they started going together. And even though everyone knew about it, no one let on, and even Eva and Daniel, instead of talking with one another, would write letters to each other once in a while. I remember very clearly that that Saturday when they eloped they were going happily to the fair in the truck. Their hair was all messed up by the wind, but when they got to the fair they didn't even remember to comb it.

They got on every ride, then they separated from the group and no one saw them again until two days later.

"Don't be afraid. We can take a taxi to the ranch. Move over this way, come closer, let me touch you. Don't you love me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Don't be afraid. We'll get married. I don't care about anything else. Just you. If the truck leaves us behind we'll go back in a taxi."

"But they're going to get after me."

"Don't worry. If they do, I'll protect you myself. Anyway, I want to marry you. I'll ask your father for permission to court you if you want me to. What do you say? Shall we get married?"

At midnight all the games were closed and the lights of the fair were turned off and the explosions of the fireworks were no longer heard, but Eva and Daniel still didn't show up. Their parents started to worry

then, but they didn't notify the police. By one-thirty in the morning the other people became impatient. They got on and off the truck every few minutes and finally Eva's father told the driver to drive off. Both families were worried. They had a feeling that they had eloped and they were sure that they would get married, but they were worried anyway. And they would keep on worrying until they saw them again. What they didn't know was that Daniel and Eva were already at the ranch. They were hiding in the barn, up in the loft where the boss stored hay for the winter. That's why, even though they looked for them in the nearby towns, they didn't find them until two days later when they came down from the loft very hungry.

The following day they took them to get their blood test, then a week later they took them before the judge and the parents had to sign because they were too young.

"You see how everything turned out alright."

"Yes, but I was afraid when father got all angry. I even thought he was going to hit you when he saw us for the first time."

"I was afraid too. We're married now. We can have children."

"Yes."

"I hope that they grow real tall and that they look like you and me. I wonder how they will be?"

"Just let them be like you and me."

"If it's a girl I hope she looks like you; if it's a boy I hope he looks like me."

"What if we don't have any?"

"Why not? My family and your family are very large."

"I'll say."

"Well, then?"

"I was just talking."

Things really began to change after they were married. First of all because by the end of the first month of their marriage Eva was vomiting often, and then also Daniel received a letter from the government which told him to be in such and such town so that he could take his physical for the army. He was afraid when he saw the letter, not so much for himself, but he immediately sensed the separation that would come forever.

"You see, son, if you hadn't gone to school you wouldn't have passed the examination."

"Oh, mamá. But they won't take me just because I passed the examination. Anyway I'm already married so they probably won't take me. Also, Eva is expecting already."

“I don’t know what to do, son, every night I pray so they won’t take you. So does Eva. You should have lied to them. You should have played dumb so you wouldn’t pass.”

“Oh, come on, mamá.”

By November instead of returning to Texas with his family, Daniel stayed up north and in a few days he was in the army. The days didn’t seem to have any meaning for him—why should there be night, morning or day. Sometimes he didn’t care anything about anything. Many times he thought about escaping and returning to his town so that he could be with Eva. When he thought at all, that was what he thought about—Eva. I think he even became sick, one or maybe it was several times, thinking so much about her. The first letter from the government had meant their separation, and now the separation became longer and longer.

“I wonder why I can’t think of anything else other than Eva? If I hadn’t known her, I wonder what I would think about. Probably about myself.”

Things being what they were, everything marched on. Daniel’s training continued at the same pace as Eva’s pregnancy. They transferred Daniel to California, but before going he had the chance to be with Eva in Texas. The first night they went to sleep kissing. They were happy once again for a couple of weeks but then right away they were separated again. Daniel wanted to stay but then he decided to continue on his way to California. He was being trained to go to Korea. Later Eva started getting sick. The baby was bringing complications. The closer she came to the day of delivery the greater the complications.

“You know, viejo, something is wrong with that baby.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Something is wrong with her. She gets very high fevers at night. I hope everything turns out all right, but even the doctor looks quite worried. Have you noticed?”

“No.”

“Yesterday he told me that we had to be very careful with Eva. He gave us a whole bunch of instructions, but it’s difficult when you can’t understand him. Can you imagine? How I wish Daniel were here. I’ll bet you Eva would even get well. I already wrote to him saying that she is very sick hoping that he’ll come to see her but maybe his superior officers don’t believe him and don’t let him come.”

“Well, write to him again. Maybe he can arrange something, if he speaks out.”

“Maybe, but I’ve already written him a number of letters



saying the same thing. You know, I'm not too worried about him anymore. Now I worry about Eva. They're both so young."

"Yes they are, aren't they."

Eva's condition became worse and when he received a letter from his mother in which she begged him to go see his wife, either Daniel didn't make himself understood or his superiors didn't believe him. They didn't let him go. He went AWOL just before he was to be sent to Korea. It took him three days to get to Texas on the bus. But he was too late.

I remember very well that he came home in a taxi. When he got down and heard the cries coming from inside the house he rushed in. He went into a rage and threw everyone out of the house and locked himself in for almost the rest of the day. He only went out when he had to go to the toilet, but even in there he could be heard sobbing.

He didn't go back to the army and no one ever bothered to come looking for him. Many times I saw him burst into tears. I think he was remembering. Then he lost all interest in himself. He hardly spoke.

One time he became interested in buying fireworks to sell during Christmastime. The package of fireworks which he sent for through an address he found in a magazine cost him plenty. When he got them, instead of selling them he didn't stop until he had set them all off himself. Since that time that's all he does with what little money he earns to support himself. He sets off fireworks just about every night. I think that's why around this part of the country people still remember Eva and Daniel. Maybe that's it.



## POR ESAS COSAS QUE PASAN

Por  
R. R. Hinojosa-S.

Extracto del *Klail City Enterprise-News* (March 15, 1970)

Klail City. (Special) Baldemar Cordero, 30, of 169 South Hidalgo Street, is in the city jail following a row in a bar in the city's Southside. Cordero is alleged to have fatally stabbed Arnesto Tamez, also 30, over the affections of one of the "hostesses" who works there. No bail had been set at press time.

### Por esas cosas que pasan\*

No hay que darle vueltas. Yo maté al Ernesto Tamez en la cantina *Aquí me quedo*. No me pida detalles porque ni yo mismo sé como fue. Pero no tiene vuelta de hoja el tal Ernesto; lo dejé tieso.

Lo que son las cosas, ¿eh? Ayer mismo estaba yo pisteando con mi cuñado, Beto Castañeda, el que se casó con mi hermana Marta, y estábamos zonzeando y riéndonos de una ocurrencia sobre no sé qué cuando entró Tamez echando madres a manga tendida. A mí me la rayó así, a boca de jarro, pero se la dejé pasar aunque ni nos llevábamos él y yo.

Usted conoció a Tamez, ¿verdad? Una vez en que Félix Champión alguien le atizó semejante botellazo en la nuca después que Tamez rompió el espejo aquel, ¿recuerda? Bueno, a mí no se me ha olvidado y por eso cuando veía a Tamez, pues, si no le sacaba la vuelta, por lo menos tampoco lo perdía de vista.

Así, como le dije, estábamos Beto y yo frotándonos unas cervezas hasta que, como casi siempre sucedía, se nos acababa el conqué o nos poníamos cuetes pero sin molestar a nadie pidiendo cerveza de gorra, ni nada.

Yo a Tamez y a toda su ralea los conocía desde la escuela y cuando vivían en el Rebaje: Joaquín, el mayor, se casó con Jovita de Anda que aunque antes era más puta que las gallinas, parece que se arregló cuando se casó con Joaquín. Emilio, el chueco, quedó así cuando se resbaló de un tren de carga en la plataforma de Chico Fernández. La tal Bertita se casó con uno de los Leal que salió muy jalador y se fue, dicen, a Muleshoe. También dicen que está muy rico y ojalá que así sea porque taloneaba como pocos y merecido se lo tiene. La Bertita no era lo que se dice una ganga pero tampoco era una mujer mala. El Ernesto era otra cosa. Todavía no puedo comprender cómo se salvó de tantas paradas que me hizo hasta que lo calé yo en el *Aquí me quedo*. En fin . . .

Aquí no se le miente a nadie. Usted me conoce, Hinojosa, igual que conoció a mis padres. Empezamos el pedo Beto y yo en el *San Diego*, lo seguimos en el *Diamond* y, todavía a pie, nos llegamos al *Blue Bar* hasta que llegaron los Reyna. De éstos, ni hablar, porque hasta las piedras saben que cuando andan motos se zambullen una cerveza para que la chota crea que andan pistos y no con la Juana encima. Al llegar los Reyna nos fuimos nosotros para que no hubiera mitote. Anselmo Reyna, desde que le dí aquella chinga de perro bailarín en el *Diamond*,

\*Nota del editor: La grabación en cinta magnetofónica que hizo Balde Cordero fue enmendada sólo en lo que va de ortografía. Ciertamente, lo que importa aquí es el contenido no la forma. Marzo 16, 1970. Klail City Workhouse.

me trata con mucha consideración. Pero, al verlos motos y para no alborotar, decidimos irnos al *Aquí me quedo*.

Curioso ¿eh? que si los Reyna no hubieran ido al *Blue Bar* no hubiera pasado nada. Puro pedo. Cuando algo va a suceder, sucede; ¿para qué irse contra viento y marea? Al Ernesto ya le tocaba anoche y yo tenía que ser el que lo iba a despachar. Algo así como despacha una orden de mercancía el Luisito Monciváis, ese joto que lleva los libros en que los Torres. A veces me da miedo pensar que maté a un cristiano. ¡Qué cosas! ¿Verdad?

Fíjese, Hinojosa, . . . me acuerdo del por qué pero no del cuándo. Que a mí me la mienten en general qué más da . . . pero que se le enfrenten a uno, así, de sopetón, luego, agréguele usted que andaba yo medio jalao y que Ernesto era un hinchapelotas que me debía unas cuantas paradas de esas y, para acabarla, que era un bato furrís que me caía peseta por lo fanfarrón . . . pues, ¿qué quiere? Nos agarramos.

Beto me dijo después que a él le chisporroteó sangre en el brazo y en la cara. Beto también dijo que yo ni pestañé ni nada. De mi parte le diré que no oí nada: ni los gritos de las viejas, ni el remolino de los mirones que se acercaron. Nada.

Me acuerdo que salí a la banqueta y que vi una casa donde estaba una familia viendo televisión. Tan inocentes de lo que acababa de suceder como yo lo había estado hacía unos cinco minutos. Dejando de chingaderas, eso de la vida y la muerte infunde cierto miedo porque uno, verdaderamente, no sabe nada de nada.

¿No le dije que una vez el Ernesto, en frente de todos, me quitó una vieja en *El farol*? Sí, como lo oye. En otra ocasión le dije a otra que yo tenía una purgación. Me hizo tantas otras chingaderas parecidas pero por esas cosas que pasan, no le hice nada. Mejor le hubiera cortado el pedo allí . . . pero ¡vaya usted a saber! A lo mejor, no, ¿verdad?

Bueno, anoche no sólo me la rayó en la cara sino que también se rió de mí y me dijo que me faltaban huevos y pelos en el pecho. Eso a mí no me lo dice nadie a no ser que me lleve con él, como usted sabe. Yo no le dije nada, nomás me le quedé viendo y el pendejo tal vez se creyó que le tenía miedo. Siguió jodiendo y se trajo a una de las viejas que bailan en el *Aquí me quedo* y me echó en cara que me había rajado otras veces. Creo que la vieja estaba entre asustada y avergonzada pero, no pendeja, ni chistó. Recuerdo, casi, que me empezaron a zumbar los oídos como si en vez de sombrero llevara encima un panal de avispas. Seguía el zumbido, oía la voz cargante de aquel menso, veía la sonrisa idiotizada de la vieja, y, de repente, oí un grito desgarrador y vi que Ernesto se deslizaba de los brazos de la vieja.

Sí recuerdo que respiré hondamente y que salí del lugar a la banqueta donde devisé una familia reunida en la sala viendo la televisión.

Más tarde me di cuenta que en la mano zurda llevaba la navaja de cachas blancas que me había regalado papá Albino.

Entré de nuevo a la cantina y de nuevo salí. Ni traté de correr. ¿Para qué? Y, ¿a dónde me iba si todos me conocían? Cuando entré otra vez vi que habían echado agua al piso de cemento y que habían barrido la sangre como si tal cosa. Al Ernesto se lo llevaron a la bodega donde tienen la cerveza y la carne seca para la botana. Cuando llegó don Manuel yo mismo le entregué la navaja y me fui con él en su carro cuando acabó lo que tenía que hacer. Después, al bote, ya ve.

Muy de mañana me trajo café uno de los hijos de don Manuel y se esperó hasta que me lo tomara. Fíjese que he tratado de acordarme del momento preciso cuando sepulté la navaja en el pecho de aquel baboso y nada. En blanco. También puede ser que no quiera acordarme . . .

Beto se acaba de ir diciendo que tiene que ir al district attorney para una declaración. Más tarde quién dirá, pero por ahora me siento mal por lo que hice anoche . . . Eso de que a lo hecho, pecho, son puras ganas de hablar. Créame, me molesta que haya tenido que matar al Ernesto Tamez. A veces pienso que eso de quitarle la vida al prójimo está de la patada.

Hice mal, lo reconozco, pero a veces también pienso que si Ernesto me insultara de nuevo, pues de nuevo lo mataría. La verdad, uno nunca aprende.

No le canso más que veo que me repito por ser ésto lo único que me interesa. Gracias por la venida y ya sabe que se agradecen los cigarros. Tal vez algún día yo mismo sepa verdaderamente por qué lo maté—pero ¡qué quiere! él se iba a morir un día de estos y ya estaría que yo le adelantara la fecha. Fíjese, ya estoy de nuevo.

Ah; antes de que se vaya: dígame a Mr. Royce que mañana no estaré en el jale. Ni modo. Mire, también dígame que me debe una semana de raya . . .

Hasta luego, Hinojosa . . . y gracias, ¿eh?

### Marta cuenta lo suyo\*

. . . no, pos, sabe que cuando murió papá Albino como resultado de aquel accidente en Saginaw, Balde decidió que nos quedáramos allí hasta que se resolviera el asunto. De primero, el contratista que nos trajo desde el Valle, se portó muy mal y Balde tuvo que amenazarlo para que hiciera algo. Con lo poco que le sacamos, Balde contrató a un abogado para la demanda a la Dailey Pickle. El abogado ése era jovencito pero ladino porque hizo que la mentada compañía pepinera nos pagara algo que llaman indemnización. Cuando se resolvió lo de papá,

\*Gravado el 17 de marzo de 1970.

pagamos lo que debíamos de una vez y hasta nos sobró lo suficiente para pasar el tiempo de frío mientras nos enganchábamos con otro contratista o hallábamos trabajo. (Para este tiempo, Beto ya andaba haciéndome la ronda pero por lo del luto, usted comprenderá, no tenía entrada en la casa.)

Usted conoce a Balde desde niño y, como decía papá, qué quiere que le diga. Mamá lleva muchos años de estar tullida y así con sus achaques y todo no ha dejado de hacer los viajes con nosotros. Bien, allí estábamos varias familias mexicanas en Saginaw, aguardando el frío y con el intento de trabajar en lo que saliera. El primero que consiguió trabajo fue Balde como watchimán en el puerto; poco después, le consiguió un puesto allí a Beto, así es que los dos se hicieron más amigos y luego, como usted ya sabe, se hicieron cuñados cuando Beto y yo nos casamos. En ese entonces Balde tenía 27 años y muchas oportunidades de casarse pero, parte por lo de mamá y parte por la necesidad en casa, pues nunca se casó. Cuando volvimos al Valle hace dos años, siguió en las mismas. Balde es noble y trabajador, es más, cuando salía de casa a cervecar, se apartaba de pleitos lo más que podía para no faltar en casa. (Le han sucedido casos en que ha tragado mucha hiel pero se ve que piensa en nosotras y por eso trata de evitar zafarranchos y alborotes.) Yo casi lo único que sé de esto es por lo que Beto me cuenta, pero son contadas las veces que habla de sus asuntos. Una vez, por casualidad, oí que Balde le había dado una santa golpiza a uno de los Reyna pero de eso no se habló en casa.

Mire que es difícil de contarle a usted lo que pensé o lo que dije cuando ocurrió lo de Neto Tamez. De primero no podía o no quería creerlo, tal vez no podía imaginármelo, sabe, porque no me cabía en la cabeza que mi hermano Balde matara a alguien. No crea que lo digo porque Balde sea un santo, no, pero seguramente debió ser algo grueso que Balde no pudo remediar. Le diré que le había costado mucho trabajo dominarse a sí mismo y puede ser que esa noche el tal Ernesto se sobrepasó: Beto me había contado de ciertas paradas hechas por el Neto Tamez pero como Beto habla tan poco no siempre logro entender todo lo que dice. Por parte de Balde, nada, o punto menos porque lo único que de la calle traía a casa era una sonrisa en la boca. Eso sí, de vez en cuando lo veía más serio que en velorio pero, quite usted, qué le iba a preguntar yo nada. Pues, ya ve, con esos dos hombres, la casa, la comida y la lavada, y con mamá como está, bastante tengo yo pa andar en chismes.

No me hago la inocente, no, sólo que quiero decirle que mucho de lo que sé lo oí de Beto, o de las amigas que venían a vernos o, en las raras veces que Balde y Beto discutían. Lo que me suponía también se lo estoy diciendo, pero ya le advertí que una no sabe todo, ni mucho menos. Todo mundo sabe que Neto Tamez siempre andaba de

picabuches con mi hermano Balde y que mi hermano se las dejaba pasar. Yo le digo a usted que si Balde no le paró bola a Neto antes fue porque pensaba en nosotras. Esa es la verdad. Lo que no sabe la gente es por qué Neto se portaba así con mi hermano.

Le voy a contar: desde la escuela el tal Neto me mandaba cartas, me seguía a la casa y usaba a los que le tenían miedo como mensajeros. Yo nunca le pusa cuidado ni le di esperanzas tampoco. Las muchachas me contaban que no dejaba que otros muchachos se me acercaran como si él fuera el que mandaba en mí o tal cosa. De esto hace años, y no le dije nada a Balde, pero la primera vez que oí que Neto le hacía la vida pesada yo sabía o creía saber por qué lo hacía. No sé si Balde sabía o no pero, como dice Beto, todo puede ser.

Una vez mis amigas me contaron que en esos lugares como *La golondrina* y *El farolito*, Neto Tamez insultó a Balde varias veces y de varias maneras; ya le quitaba la bailadora, o hablaba mal de Balde o hacía cualquier otra perrería, pero siempre con el mismo propósito: el de hacerle la vida pesada, ¿no ve? No digo que Tamez lo seguía no, pero le estoy diciendo que tampoco perdía la oportunidad de estarlo machacando hasta que Balde se iba del lugar. Conste que vivir en el mismo pueblo, casi en el mismo barrio, y soportarle tantas barrabasadas es cosa de mucha paciencia. Balde no hacía corajes en casa y cuando volvía tomado o sano, era el mismo: un beso a mamá, platicaba un rato con nosotras y después se sentaba a fumar en el corredor. Comparado a Balde, Beto, que no habla mucho, parece una chachalaca.

Los Tamez son bastante raros. Cuando vivían en el Rebaje, parece que esa gente andaba de pleitos con los vecinos y con medio mundo. Me acuerdo que cuando al Joaquín, por esas cosas que pasan, se tuvo que casar con Jovita de Anda, don Servando Tamez no permitió que ninguno de los de Anda fuera al casamiento. Cuentan que el pobre de don Marcial de Anda, un hombrecito que no servía para nada, lloró como un niño. Me acuerdo ver al Emilio con su pata corta paseándose en frente de la casa como si fuera polecía. Menos mal que la pobre doña Tula Tamez ya había muerto para ese tiempo. Posiblemente lo único bueno que haya salido de esa casa fue Bertita, la que quiso ser novia de Balde. Por fin se huyó con Ramiro Leal, el de la tortillería . . .

Bueno, de todas maneras, ayer, así que usted fue a ver a Balde a la cárcel, llegó don Manuel Guzmán. Dijo que vino a saludar a mamá pero de veras vino a decirle que no se preocupara ella por los gastos de la casa. (¡Quién lo diría! A ese hombre yo le he visto derramar trompadas, cañonazos, patadas y maldiciones a más de cien borrachos y marihuanos para luego llevarles café a la cárcel el día siguiente. Eso sí, desde que don Manuel está de polecía, una mujer puede andar sola y de noche por esas calles, y ni quién la moleste.) Al salir, don Manuel me dijo que podíamos sacar la provisión en que los Torres.

Mamá y yo estamos solas sin Balde pero gracias a Dios que todavía tengo a Beto. Ojalá que los Tamez no vengan a buscarle bulla a él porque entonces sí nos hundimos mamá y yo sin un hombre en casa. Beto horita anda en la oficina del district attorney donde está haciendo una declaración como testigo.

Ay, Sr. Hinojosa, no sé dónde vaya a parar lo nuestro . . . En fin, Dios dirá.



ROMEO HINOJOSA

Attorney at Law

420 South Cerralvo

Tel. 843-1640

Lo que sigue es la declaración en inglés que hizo Beto Castañeda, hoy, el 17 de marzo de 1970, en el despacho del señor Robert A. Chapman, asistente del procurador por el condado de Belken.

El susodicho oficial de la corte me concedió la declaración como parte del testimonio en el juicio *The State vs. Cordero*, que se asignó para el 23 de agosto del mismo año en la corte del juez Harrison Phelps que preside sobre la corte del distrito estatal número 139.

  
Romeo Hinojosa

## A DEPOSITION FREELY GIVEN

on this seventeenth day of March, 1970, by Mr. Gilberto Castañeda in room 218 of the Belken County Court House was duly taken, witnessed, and signed by Miss Helen Chacón, a legal interpreter and acting assistant deputy recorder for said County, as part of a criminal investigation assigned to Robert A. Chapman, assistant district attorney for the same County.

It is understood that Mr. Castañeda is acting solely as a deponent and is not a party to any civil or criminal investigation, proceeding, or violation which may be alluded to in this deposition.

“Well, my name is Gilberto Castañeda and I live at 169 South Hidalgo Street here in Klail. It is not my house; it belong to my mother-in-law, but I have live there since I marry Marta (Marta Cordero Castañeda, 28, 169 South Hidalgo Street, Klail City) about three years ago.

I am working at the Royce-Fedders tomato packing shed as a grader. My brother-in-law, Balde Cordero, work there too. He pack tomatoes and don't get pay for the hour, he get pay for what he pack and since I am a grader I make sure he get the same class tomato and that way he pack faster; he just get a tomato with the right hand and he wrap it with the left. He pack a lug of tomatoes so fast you don't see it and he does it fast because I am a good grader.

Balde is a good man. His father, don Albino, my father-in-law who die up in Saginaw, Michigan when Marta and I, you know, go together . . . well, Balde is like don Albino, you understand? A good man. A right man. Me, I stay an orphan and when the Mejías take me when my father and my mother die in that train wreck—near Flora, don Albino tell the Mejías I must go to the school. I go to First Ward Elementary where Mr. Gold is principal. In First Ward I am a friend of Balde and there I meet Marta too. Later, when I grow up I don't visit the house too much because of Marta, you know what I mean? Anyway, Balde is my friend and I have know him very well . . . maybe more than nobody else. He's a good man.

Well, last night Balde and I took a few beers in some of the places near where we live. We drink a couple here and a couple there, you know, and we save the *Aquí me quedo* on South Missouri for last. It is there that I tell Balde a joke about the drunk guy who is going to his house and he hear the clock in the corner make two sounds. You know that one? Well, this

drunk guy he hear the clock go bong-bong and he say that the clock is wrong for it give one o'clock two time. Well, Balde think that is funny . . . Anyway, when I tell the joke in Spanish it's better. Well, there we are drinking a beer when Ernesto Tamez comes. Ernesto Tamez is like a woman, you know? Everytime he get in trouble he call his family to help him . . . that is the way it is with him. Well, that night he bother Balde again. More than one time Balde has stop me when Tamez begin to insult. That Balde is a man of patience. This time Ernesto bring a *vieja* (woman) and Balde don't say nothing, nothing, nothing. What happen is that things get spooky, you know. Ernesto talking and burlándose de él (ridiculing him) and at the same time he have the poor woman by the arm. And then something happen. I don't know what happen, but *something* happen and fast.

I don't know. I really don't know. It all happen so fast — the knife, the blood squirt all over my face and arms, the woman try to get away, a loud really loud scream, not a *grito* (local Mexican yell) but more a woman screaming, you know what I mean? and then Ernesto fall on the cement.

Right there I look at Balde and his face is like a mask in asleep, you understand? No angry, no surprise, nothing. In his left hand he have the knife and he shake his head like he say "yes" and then he take a deep breath before he walk to the door. Look, it happen so fast no one move for a while. Then Balde come in and go out of the place and when don Manuel (constable for precinct No. 21) come in, Balde just hand over the knife. Lucas Barrón, you know, el Chorreao (a nickname), well, he wash the blood and sweep the floor before don Manuel get there. Don Manuel just shake his head and tell Balde to go to the car and wait. Don Manuel he walk to the back to see Ernesto and on the way out one of the women, I think it is *la güera Balín* (Amelia Cortez, 23, no known address, this city), try to make a joke but don Manuel he say "no estés chingando" (shut the hell up, or words to that effect) and after that don Manuel go about his own business. Me, I go to the door but all I see is Balde looking at a house across the street and he don't even know I come to say good-bye. Anyway, this morning a little boy of don Manuel say for me to come here and here I am."

Further deponent sayeth not.

Sworn to before me, this

17th day of March, 1970

/s/ Helen Chacón /s/ Gilberto Castañeda

Helen Chacón

Gilberto Castañeda

Acting Asst. Deputy Recorder

Belken County

Extracto de *The Klail City Enterprise-News* (August 24, 1970)

Klail City. (Special). Baldemar Cordero, 30, of 169 South Hidalgo Street, drew a 15 year sentence Harrison Phelps' 139th District Court, for the to the Huntsville State Prison in Judge murder of Ernesto Tamez last Spring. PICK UP.

Cordero is alleged to have fatally stabbed Ernesto Tanez, also 30, over the affections of one of the "hostesses" who works there. PICK UP.

No appeal had been made at press time.

**THE CHOSEN ONE  
EL ARCO IRIS  
THE MISSIONARY  
JUAN  
EL MESTIZO  
Y EL CONSEJO**



a short story by OCTAVIO I. ROMANO-V.

She was a medical doctor, out of New Hampshire by way of Boston, like a square-rigger. And, like a square-rigger, she had never married.

In the days of her young childhood, her parents had schooled her in the belief that a vocation for adults was something quite special, yet normal. She had also learned that a vocation was a calling, a calling from God, and given by God to those in Grace. All of her people were in Grace. They had always been in Grace. She had asked her mother. The knowledge that this was the normal earthly condition of her people placed a considerable burden on the child's mind, a burden which she did not manage to lighten until years later when, at the proper and sanctioned time, she willingly surrendered herself to the calling of God. She entered the vocation of medicine.

During a brief and not too successful period of private practice, she slowly became convinced that God appeared to have changed His mind, for now there were *so* many doctors. And *so* many others were being called in steadily increasing numbers to the other vocations. It was disquieting. So many doctors. It seemed that God was calling everyone. This realization was accompanied by the more discomforting suspicion that the lofty peace she had so longingly and lovingly anticipated as an especially chosen servant of God was not forthcoming. Following the death of her mother, her disquietude became even more persistent until, one day, she severed herself from her New Hampshire land and by way of Boston sailed out over the sea and traveled across land until, "like a lost sailing ship," she had quipped, she arrived and settled in Santa Fé, New México. There, in the land of the Indians and Mexicans, she proceeded especially to seek out those few others who, like herself, had previously sailed from Vermont, from Massachusetts, and from her own New Hampshire. These expatriates became her companions. They, too, felt they had been called. By the Sangre de Cristo mountains, once again, she was of the few among the many. And now, just as she had felt in her New Hampshire childhood, once again Elizabeth Victoria Shotwell Smith felt chosen, and the voice of her mother was heard in the land.

El niño se iba fijando en la extraña gente, y ya le daban ganas de ser grande también. Apenas hacía unos cuantos días que había cumplido sus ocho años. De vez en cuando, en momentos inesperados, se sentía como si él mismo fuera el padre de sus tres hermanitos. En otras ocasiones, igualmente inesperadas, le daba un sentimiento de tristeza, sin saber porqué.

Precisamente por eso, quería ya ser grande porque seguramente de grande sabría claramente la razón primordial de su tristeza. Ya una vez sabiendo esa razón, él se figuraba que podría volver a ese lugar donde las tristezas tienen su origen.

- I want to keep your books—said the missionary.
- ¿What does that mean?—I asked.
- It means that you won't ever have to worry about keeping your own books—said the missionary.
- ¡I don't worry about keeping my own books!—I replied.
- Someone *has* to worry about keeping your books. That's what I'm for—said the missionary.
- But I don't have any books—I said.
- But everyone has books. I'll make a set for you—said the missionary.
- Then I'll have to worry about where to keep them—I said.
- I will keep them—said the missionary.
- ¡If you keep them, then they're not mine!—I said.

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- I want to keep your books—I said.
- ¿What does that mean?—asked the missionary.
- It means you won't have to worry about keeping your own books—I said.
- ¡But I don't worry about *my* books!—said the missionary.
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- Everyone has books. I'll make a set for you—I said.
- Then I'll have to worry about where to keep my own books—said the missionary.
- I will keep them for you—I said.
- ¡But if *you* keep them, then they're not mine!—said the missionary.

El niño Juan se levantó. Se levantó del suelo. Se había acostado para descansar un rato. El polvo de la tierra se le quedó pegado a la ropa, como si la tierra no lo quisiera soltar. Se sacudió y la tierra lo soltó.

Libre, Juan se fue caminando por una vereda en el bosque donde se encontraba entre los árboles, las ojas caídas, los venados y las arañas. El sol del medio día le mandaba mensajes cristalinos por los espacios entre las ojas de los árboles, y el espectro solar se iba transformando al color café de su piel por medio de leyes antiguas de la naturaleza.

De pronto, un venado saltó ligeramente y cruzó la vereda por donde Juan iba caminando. Al terminar su salto, el venado inadvertidamente pisoteó y aplastó una araña que estaba allí entre las ojas caídas y secas. Ni se dio cuenta el venado. Ni se dio cuenta Juan. Ni se dio cuenta la araña.

I was in bed with her. I had made points—she had made points. All of the preliminaries had been somewhat standard, with hellos and what's your names, and things like that. Now—in bed with her—every time I made a point I moved toward her. But, now—in bed with her—every time I made a point and moved in bed toward her, she would switch languages on me. It was the damnest dance I'd ever danced. Always, before, I'd had women in one language at a time. It's not that I was caught totally unprepared, and, to be honest, at first I found it rather invigorating when we went from English to Spanish to Navajo, Quechua, Aymara, Huichol (she seemed to have a preference for Indian tongues), and then we went from Hebrew to Yiddish to Chicano over to Japanese and some Eskimo talk. Oh yes, it had been invigorating, and I was enjoying it—until she came at me in Cantonese.

It was that damned Cantonese that threw me. ¡Damn her mouth! I can handle Mandarin pretty well, but not Cantonese. It shook me so much when she came on in Cantonese that I even forgot the few words I had picked up along the way. Her mouth just kept moving, but her words kept changing—while her mouth was moving her words were changing—as her mouth would move, so, too, would her words change—like a psychedelic in which the colors keep changing, only with her it was the words as her mouth moved. ¡Damn her mouth!

She was beautiful, except, now that I remember, except for her mouth, but the rest of her was beautiful, except for her mouth.

Funny. I can't even remember what her mouth looked like. But the rest of her was beautiful, including her two children.

Her two children, ages two and four, a boy and a girl, a brunette and a blonde, a black and a white, were asleep across the room. It was not a large room and I can hear them breathing. Yes, I *can* hear them breathing. I remember now that I can hear them breathing—like little birds being born, or, rather, like birds borning themselves. I look at the two kids and wonder if they would like to have some tortillas and rice and shrimp and bamboo shoots and chile and chicken soup and Peking duck and suppa Inglesa and plum pudding and tacos. Then I wonder if they

speaking Cantonese and I wonder if they mind boring themselves. It was that damned Cantonese that threw me.

I wanted her to speak more Cantonese. ¿Was it her? ¿Was it the language itself? ¿Is there such a thing as a language that is beautiful no matter who speaks it? I never thought so until I heard Navajo. ¿When did she learn Cantonese? ¿How? ¿Why? Perhaps it came with her, like her hair that was made from a paint spray can of wrought iron black, or like the inverted bowls of her eyes (two masterpieces by the Pueblo Indian potter María) done in escaping black. Funny, I don't remember what her mouth looked like. Two children not far away were busy learning. And I wanted her to speak more Cantonese.

Just then a sports car roared into the bedroom and the driver said he was looking for the Golden Gate. I said, "You are in the wrong house," and he drove away after driving around her hair. I thought to myself, the sonofabitch is making hairpin turns. "¿What are you laughing about?" she asked me. "Boring birds," I answered.

She mumbled something in Cantonese and the two children stirred in their sleep, and I can't even remember what her mouth looked like, and I moved toward her again, and now she began to speak in Arabic. ¡Then it dawned on me! I was remembering what was happening at that moment. I wondered, "¿How can a person remember what is just then happening to him, at the same time that it is happening?" I turned toward her and started to remember us in bed again as she lay there next to me. "I must remember to get a sports car," I remembered to myself. ¡Now I was remembering in the future! ¿I wonder if other people are like me and remember only in the present and the future? ¿When were you born?" she inquired. "Tonight," I answered.

"¿Do you remember in the subjunctive?" I asked her. She never did catch on to my little joke. I looked around her bedroom and remembered her white silk screen on which no design had been made. She had put it on the window to keep out sports cars, but it didn't work because I could still hear motors in the distance.

"¿Can I watch?" The little girl had awakened and she had come over to the side of the bed. "Yes," her mother answered. I asked the child, "¿Can you see through bird shells?" "My mother will show me how," replied the youngster. "¿And who will show your brother?" Right away I was sorry because the child looked confused and as if she was about to cry. Right away I sang, "Birds fly over the rainbow, whythenohwhy can't you," and the child was no longer confused, just bored.

"I just want to watch," repeated the youngster quietly. "O.K." I answered. And that is how I made the child ask my permission.

El águila siendo animal, se retrató en el dinero  
El águila siendo animal, se retrató en el dinero,



Para subir al nopal  
Para subir al nopal  
Para subir al nopal

Pidió permiso primero.

I was singing again, for the first time in a long time, and the sports car was roaring and the children were borning and the spray can was spraying and the Indian woman was making some fresh pottery and there was Arabic and Hebrew and Spanish and Quechua and Yaqui and Náhuatl sounds and the words were changing and the mouth was moving and I was oiling her skin with fine Mexican oil and there was shrimp and tortillas and bamboo shoots and chile and chicken soup and rice and tacos and cheese and nopalitos and there was the sound of bird shells cracking all around.

And when it was all over I looked across the room and the silk screen on the window now had a picture on it—three children sitting under a sun . . .

newborn, two, and four  
a boy, a boy, and a girl  
a brown hair, a black hair, and a blonde  
a brown skin, a black skin, and a light skin  
and I could hear all three of the children breathing,  
right there on the silk screen

Hijo. Tengo memoria. Tengo memoria en la cabeza—de cosas particulares y personales. Y también tengo memoria en la espalda de las labores y el peso del pan de cada día. Y tengo memoria en los pies, de andar, buscar, y bailar. Dicen que hay personas que tienen memoria en otras partes de sus respectivos cuerpos, pero yo no. Solo tengo memoria en mi cabeza, mi espalda y mis pies.

En mis pies recuerdo caminos y veredas, y árboles que gritaban cuando se bailaba por encima de ellos. En mi espalda, recuerdo a mi hermano agachado en la pisca del betabel, y gatos que luchaban por la noche. Y en mi cabeza recuerdo cosas muy personales, como el día en que me desocuparon de mi trabajo en la canería.

Los nopales cantan, hijo. Mucha gente no oye su canción, porque para terminar con una sola nota duran miles de años.

Las piedras andan. Se visitan una a otra, y guardan la fé entre ellas y las estrellas. Un día llegué al pie de un humilde nopal, el cual, en ese preciso momento, estaba comenzando a cantar su primera nota. Allí, más o menos por mil años, me quedé a escuchar el canto del nopal.



## THE APPLE TREES

Estela Portillo

The dead valley. Tombstones sprouted on a hill, scattered like old pennons along the valley, clustered in the shadows of a deserted house, and on the stamp of bank along a dead stream next to the hill. Dispirited, the wind moaned its own "Amen." Clusters of dry weeds hugged against the moan while rootless tumbleweeds found a path free-styled following the wind. Unpredictable, these jumbled skeletons of brush found refuge against tree stumps, doorways, and tombstones. There was no desperate plea for life in this deadness, but it was far from a nothingness. A nothingness . . . can the mind and heart conceive of such a thing? Even dead valleys cling to traces of something. This something is new because it is now in the instance of process. The process, in this case, was a part of eager lives until . . . human error? nature's error? No one ever thinks in terms of nothingness or *is* in terms with nothingness. All is part of the change in process, errant and eternal. The reality now is different from the reality then . . . a life emerged, then, a desolation in the duration we call time. . . . Time . . . it is without creation. But things and people of the earth are creation and self-created by complexities beyond comprehension. That is why blame and condemnations of people should not exist, for they are but creations of a process, self created with ingredients from creations outside themselves. This valley thrived once; so did its people, following patterns known and unknown.

Close scrutiny will show that all the tombstones bear the same name . . . Ayala. They are sad finalities to the ways of men. All these tombstones came to be with a suddenness. No! wait . . . only some of them; the others cling like aftermaths, the consequence of greater things. But those that came with a suddenness bear the name and the claim, "son of Teófilo Ayala." Teófilo Ayala must have been the centrifical force if one goes by tombstones. The wind, eager and demanding, well agrees.

If nothingness existed, it would exist after nothingness. But this came to be an end to many lives. Thus the mystery and the wonder of man's short existence upon the earth. The suffering and ephemeral condition of human life leaves all this . . . but never a nothingness! Out of something with a pulse came the dead tree stumps,

the cracked, pained earth, and the moan. At one time the people were and people did. Here the trees once grew, the stream drank full, and the houses held life. Here, at one time no scattered tombstones existed. The dead were taken to a prescribed cemetery so as not to confuse the living.

What had come upon the day in this town of Quinteco? Wasn't that a famous name? Of course, the Quinteco apples, the famous apple orchards that produced the most unusual apples in the world. Here is where the orchards had once thrived and flourished to give men riches . . . el terreno de manzanas that made the town of Cetna famous all over Mexico. In this semi-tropical climate where the rain found protection in mountains that like a fortress surrounded the town, the famous apple was the opportune fruit of many natural wonders.

It had been a small apple, thin-skinned. Its softness had the quality of mangos in ripeness, and its green sweetness surprised at intervals with streaks of gentle, bitter strains that calmed the fullness of the sugar . . . a bittersweet goodness of surprise. There was no other apple like this one. Long before the planting, long before the harvest, the apples in great demand, were sold to canning industries, fine hotels, and exclusive markets. It was a prosperous valley for apples and people.

Don Teófilo Ayala was sole owner of six hundred fertile acres. He had four sons who worked in love and harmony with him from dawn to dusk to help with the creation of life's fruit. The simple laws amongst them were not vain, or seeking profit for self. It was a wholesome venture of unity, where trust and giving came first. The profit in money was but an aftermath, never the due course or the ultimate incentive. The apple trees came first; they represented a task of God and for God, and in this belief the brothers worked.

It is said that experience is not merely physical, biological or even just human. There is a quality in experience that is very much like the Quinteco apple. It is the quality of creation, of innovation, of that something new. The newness itself, nevertheless, be it creation or destruction, finds its way of changing people, apples, ways. Experience finds expansion in this newness, in this unknown. Even if it becomes the remnants of a dead paradise, it leaves another richness and creation for other men. It becomes a growth into understanding. The story of the Quinteco apple left that to men.

When did the newness come? When did the safety and security of the Ayala family feel the impact of something novel and new? Something exciting and desirous, merely because it was not too well understood? It came with Nina . . . in that long ago. The desolation, then, can be relived, proving the non-existence of a nothingness . . . . .

. . . . .

Nina married Ismael, the youngest son of Teófilo Ayala, without family approval. The family, with its elementary tie to the earth, had established a working patriarchal order. The father and sons lived for a fraternal cause, the apple orchards. Their women followed in silent steps, fulfilled in their women ways. If ambition or a sense of power touched the feminine heart, it was a silent touch. The lives were well patterned like the rows of apple trees and the trenches that fed them. Men and women had a separate given image until Nina came.

A confident city girl, she showed disdain for submissiveness and the tried patterns. The conversation of the women bored her. Inevitably, she found her way to the men of the family. The men themselves were troubled over the "easy ways" of Ismael's wife. There was too much turbulence under the blush of cheek and coquettish smile. She had ambition and thrilled to the sense of power in interacting. She flaunted; they frowned. She felt herself lucky to have married well into a good family. She had no substantial background in tradition or security. This the family considered as tragic. Ismael did not care. He knew his wife to be intelligent and beautiful. He knew her to be free. What neither Ismael or the family saw was the fear in Nina, a fear that was a sore storm.

A life of alienation and poverty, loneliness and rejection had nurtured this great fear. It was this fear that made her arrogant in self-esteem. She looked down on these high-born, comfortable women who were now her family. There had been few ripples in their lives; their lives of imitated rituals were a dumb-show to Nina. She felt her fire to be unique. She felt a power within herself that well disguised the fear. The sultry power in the half-promise of open lips, a special smile, things unsaid except with eyes became manipulative with the husband and the men of the family. The fear became faint. There would be no more exile.

She was an Eve in a Garden of Eden; her sin was not innocence reaching for "the knowing." No . . . her sin was a violence grown out of the fear of inadequacy. At any cost, she must have power to disguise the knowing of inhumanities and cruelties from the past. She played the game well; chance was on her side for she dared more, knew no qualms, and felt no guilt. In her shining youth and beauty, she was also the snake.

When Teófilo Ayala died, chance was in full force. The apple orchards were willed to the sons who would choose among themselves to jointly own them, or divide them according to their place in the old laws of inheritance. The oldest son received half of the property. The next three sons received an inheritance in proportion to their rank in birth. Ismael, under these conditions would receive the least. Nina felt an anger in the pit of her stomach.

"It's not fair, Ismael. The land should be equally divided."

"It doesn't really matter . . . we may just own it jointly. We may decide that."

But joint ownership was not the decision made. Teófilo Ayala had been the self-sufficiency. Somehow in the patriarchal pattern, he had become the source of existence. Unwittingly, he had willed the lives of his sons who obediently followed his direction. A dependency was left behind with the death of the father. Someone needed to take strong reins. None of the brothers dared. The oldest, Rafael, lacked his father's business sense. His life had been one of Lothario among the village maids. Feminine conquest was his own private proof of masculinity. It was enough for Rafael. Under the will of his father, he had laboured out of duty, not out of ambition. Marcos and Santos, more naturally industrious, could not replace the sagacity of the patriarch now dead. Ismael, as the youngest, was not expected to do so. It seemed much simpler to divide. The younger brothers did not seem to mind. Within themselves, they knew that the pattern of their lives would serve as the cohesion among them. They would labour in harmony and share in harmony as before. Nina condemned, "I don't believe your brothers. They want their larger share. Rafael probably wants it all. You are an Ayala too!"

"Nina, my love . . . don't say things like that. I trust my brothers. You don't understand the closeness."

Nina left the room slamming the door after her. She went to her bedroom and threw herself on the bed. She thought of the other brothers' wives. How they would lord it over her! The insipid, ugly old things! She didn't have to stand for that. She . . . with all she had to offer. Ismael was a coward. She was an Ayala now . . . the name was hers. Suddenly, she remembered the first time when she met Ismael. He had asked, "What is your name?"

"My name isn't important."

"But I want to know who you are . . ."

"I mean my name isn't important like yours . . ."

But now, she was an Ayala. What was fair was fair. She deserved more than those stupid women and their little ways. She heard Ismael's footsteps coming towards the bedroom door. Quickly, she rose, ran to the door and turned the lock. Ismael tried the door and called her name. After the third time, he left. As Nina heard his steps retreating, she observed. "He's so ineffectual . . . he gives in without a fight. But I know how to fight. . . ."

Nina waited from a distance until everyone had left the market office. Rafael would be alone now. He was sitting at his desk drinking his favorite brandy.

"You must be tired." She stood in the doorway, an angel dressed in a mist of blue.

"What?" Rafael turned and caught the full impact of her striking beauty. "Nina . . . what on earth are you doing here?"

"I came to town to see my dressmaker. I thought you might drive me home . . . if it's not out of your way." She glided to his side and placed her hand on his shoulder gently. Rafael took another drink. He looked at her searchingly, "I . . . I should have offered you some. . . ."

"I love your brand . . . may I?" She helped herself from the same glass and looked at him over the brim of the glass. "Are you sure you won't mind driving me home?"

"How often do I get the pleasure of your lovely company, my dear sister-in-law?"

She laughed. Rafael swiftly tidied his desk and turned off the lights. He walked towards the door. Nina seemed to remain in the semi-darkness as if waiting for something.

"Is anything the matter, Nina?"

"No . . . no . . . I just felt a current . . ."

"Are you cold. . . ."

"It was a different kind of current." The insinuation was made. Rafael walked back to where she stood. "I always thought you were some kind of witch!" He circled her waist. Nina leaned towards him and laughed again, "I am!" She threw back her head and opened her lips. The kiss was passionate. Rafael's muscles tightened. For a moment, he seemed to hesitate. Nina suggested softly, "Let's go out to the apple orchard. Did you see the full moon against the trees last night? Let's go wait for the moon."

They left the office and drove out to the apple orchards. Nina led the way to a cloistered area under trees in full blossom. She sat on the grass and put out her arms to him. Rafael was a combination of confusion, pain, and desire. Nina was like the Quinteca apple . . . soft, with that special sweetness . . . with that sensuality that spells life . . . she was so special . . . so exciting. Nina was the Quinteca apple in the moonlight.

Afterwards, Rafael felt a remorse. The fabric of brothers' trust had been violated. He dared not think of what had happened. He dared not even look at Nina. Nina was amused by his total suffering. She felt him to be a hypocrite. Just like a man! He took without reserve . . . then, he would justify for conscience's sake. All of them were Pontius Pilates. Rafael talked to her in the darkness.

"Forgive me, Nina . . . Ismael must never know. . . . I don't know what I would do if he ever found out."

Nina's voice was now cold and deliberate. "I am going to tell him."

Rafael's confusion was pitious. "But . . . why?"

"I want Ismael to know that he can not trust you. Why should you be trusted with half of the inheritance?"

"The inheritance. . . I can't believe you planned all this just to . . . just to. . ."

"To show you up, my dear, righteous brother-in-law!"

She now stood in front of him . . . a defiant creature. An avenging angel come to the Garden of Eden. Rafael put out his hand in supplication. She violently thrust it aside and ran down the path leading to the main road. She looked back once, to see the dark outline of Rafael still standing where she had left him. She ran and ran down the road that led to the Ayala property. All the brothers' houses were built within walking distance. The orchards were a few miles out. If she were lucky, someone would be driving up the road. As she ran, she began to tear at her clothes. She ripped off a sleeve. With effort, she ripped the front of her bodice, then she stopped and scooped some dirt from the road. She rubbed it on her face and hair. She continued running until she heard a car coming up the road. She stopped and waited breathlessly. She was surprised at her own luck. It was Ismael. It couldn't be better!

Ismael stopped the car and ran towards her with horror on his face. Nina ran to him in tears. He caught her in his arms and she rested there sobbing hysterically.

"What happened? Tell me, are you hurt? What happened?"

She sobbed and shook her head. Ismael looked down the road and saw no one. He quickly led her to the car. She was in need of a doctor. On the way home Nina kept crying softly, but would not speak. When they got home he quickly, helped her off with the torn clothes and got her into bed. She lay there inert. Only a heavy sigh would emerge from her every so often.

"Nina . . . can you tell me what happened?"

Nina began to sob hysterically again. She hid her face on her pillow and her body shook with the crying. Ismael felt helpless. He decided to call the doctor. Then, he went back to the bedside and held Nina's trembling body with great love. His eyes were full of anguish and of questions. Nina still said nothing.

Half an hour later, the doctor had examined her and had deduced what had happened. He spoke to Ismael with kindness. "Apparently she is in shock. That is the reason why she does not speak. I don't know how to tell you this . . . but there are signs of having been ravished. . . All the evidence. She must have gone through a horrible experience."

Ismael stood there broken. In a world of family pride and honor, this was the worse thing that could have happened. There was now only one course beyond all others. . . even beyond the cause of apple trees. . . .

The doctor looked anxiously at Ismael. "What you need is a drink. Here . . . let's go into the study. I'll fix you a drink." Ismael followed the doctor into the study for another reason. He went quickly to the gun case and took out a rifle. The doctor, with concern, tried to reason with him. "No . . . Ismael. You don't know who did it. You must wait."

"She was running up the road from the apple orchards . . . he may still be there."

He loaded the rifle quickly and walked out of the study. He got into his car and drove off towards the orchards. Suddenly, he noticed the torn piece of her sleeve on the road. He stopped the car and got out with the rifle in his hand. He looked towards the orchard where silent trees only spoke of peace and magic moonlight. Ismael did not see or hear. He ran towards the orchard and lost himself among the trees. His actions were fruitless. He knew it. He looked in all direction and the memory of his wife overwhelmed him. Suddenly, he shouted in the darkness, "For Christ sake! Where are you. . . let me see you so I can kill you!" There was only silence. In a burst of new anger, he fired the rifle again, and again. The rifle shots resounded through the apple orchards. In a few minutes, lights from the different houses were turned on. The brothers joined together to see what had happened. With the farm helpers, they began to search the orchards. It was here they found Ismael, kneeling on the ground, covering his face.

Nina stood watching the raindrops hit hard against the window pane. She had stayed in her room for several weeks, mostly to find peace within herself. She looked at the raindrops in fascination. She went back in time when she had looked at hard raindrops against a window pane before. She had been six years old. Her dead mother's sister had taken her to live with her father.

"Here, you take her. I can't afford another mouth to feed. Girls are too much trouble. Especially the pretty ones like this one . . . men are all over them before you know it."

The stepmother with thin lips looked at the aunt with hate and suspicion. "She's Juan's brat . . . not mine!"

The aunt was adamant. "You have to take her." With that finality, she walked out. It was raining hard and Nina had stared out into the rain out of fear and bewilderment. Where did she belong? She looked hard at the raindrops trying hard to keep back the tears. The stepmother, as if to get back at life, walked up to Nina and began to hit her . . . again and again. Blows without reason and the rain. There was a knock at the door. Nina shook herself free from the memory and listened.

"Nina . . . are you going to open the door? Nina . . . for God's



sake . . . please let me in.” Ismael’s voice sounded tired and exhausted. Nina remained silent.

“Nina. . . you must tell me who did it. For my sanity, Nina.” Ismael’s voice rose to a desperate shout. “Nina!” There was no response. She knew that he would go away. She began to pace the floor. There were other plans to be made. She knew that her silence was a scream of accusation. Rafael would break soon . . . soon . . . but when?

Every night, she would open the door of her room and walk to the end of the stairway. There she would listen for any conversation from the study that kept her up with the happenings of the day. The evening before she had listened to what had now grown into another plan. The brothers were gathered in Ismael’s study.

“For heaven’s sake, Rafael . . . you have to stop drinking. We’re late on our commitments. The bookkeeper has been having troubles. There were four complaints about shipment schedules from Mexico City. What do you think you’re doing?” Marcos’s voice was angry.

Rafael’s voice sounded bitter. “My little brothers now blame me for the whole mess . . . how convenient. Where’s Santos? Why doesn’t he help? and you Marcos? what about you?”

“You know that Santos’s ulcer was acting up. He took the family to San Luis. He might have to stay in the hospital. I have to supervise the workers in the fields. You know darn well that’s my job, and Ismael . . . well, what do you expect him to do after what’s happened?”

Rafael’s voice suddenly sounded desperate. “Oh, damn the whole business!”

Nina had tiptoed back to her room. She had heard enough. So Santos was away with the family. The idea came during the night. What if Santos’s barn and house were to catch fire? What if no one knew who had done it? Yes . . . things were moving too slowly. That would bring things to . . . to . . . well, anything, but this waiting . . . waiting.

Nina watched the blaze from a distance. There was a strange excitement in her. The feeling of power was almost orgiastic. She closed her eyes and felt the cool wind against her face. The wind will help the fire spread, she thought. Out of the darkness came a series of screams. . . . The blaze had taken hold. The nightmare began. Out of Santos’s house now in full blaze, came two children. “It can’t be,” Nina felt the panic rise in her. “They went with Santos to San Luis . . . no, no, it couldn’t be true!” But it was. She heard Santos’s voice screaming for help with the fire. He had started some hose and some men came running to help. He, then, set up a ladder facing the upstairs window. The bedroom! His wife, Irene, was still in there. Nina watched Santos go up the ladder. Suddenly, with a lurch, he fell heavily to the ground. The fire blazed relentlessly now. Men gathered around the prostrate body of Santos.

Nina could hear voices. "Give him air! Don't move him! Call an ambulance!" She ran back to her house and found her way back to the bedroom. No one had missed her. She opened her bedroom door and then closed it quickly behind her. She was safe . . . safe . . . for a little while?

She went to the window and watched the lights cast by the fire against the shape of furniture in the room. There were many sounds now. She tried to drown them out. She remembered a vulgar, tavern song . . . out of the past. Why had she remembered the obscenity? How many years had past since the tune cut anguish in her heart? She covered her ears trying to forget it. It came again and again. She screamed. No . . . she refused to remember. She tightened her body and dug her fingers in her arms. With arms folded, she tried to hold back another scream. The memories came, they came like spurts of blood. There was the stepmother with the cruel mouth. She stood there with some money in her hands. Nina remembered the four drunk men that held her. They had bought her from the stepmother. The room over the tavern . . . the many voices that drowned out her screams. The disgust . . . the long, long vomiting . . . the dark alley . . . the fatigue and numbness of the damned . . . the church door.

She became the scullery maid for the blind old priest. The kind old priest never understood how she came to stay with him, but he needed someone to help. He was so aware of God . . . vainly with blind eyes he reached out for people. There were so many things she remembered after that. The church services, the clean, angelic singing, the bells, all, all were a reinforcement of a worth in life. She learned to sleep again; she learned to awaken happy with the day. Four years, she had scrubbed floors and listened and watched. She said nothing then. She was as voiceless as the priest was blind, except when she felt the loneliness overpower her. She would go into the church when it was empty and try to find God. "Are you there? God! Are you there?" There was a silence. She became bitter. "I don't believe anything, do you hear? I don't believe anything!" She felt better after getting back at God's silence. Now the dirty little song had come back to tear at her. She screamed again and then in a whisper asked the question of long ago, "Are you there?" No one heard. The sounds of tragedy were too many outside the house. Now, she had more reason for never leaving the haven of her bedroom. But where were the churchbells, the burning tapers? the singing voices? She ran to the bed and hid her head under her pillow.

The town now spoke of the growing curse. Trees were dying; workers were leaving the Ayala orchards. The assailant of Ismael's wife had not been found. Santos had died of a heart attack trying to save his

wife who had died in the fire. Nina was said to be going insane. Rafael was a broken drunk. Ismael was obsessed with the idea of revenge. Marcos was trying hopelessly to save the vestiges of family. Hubris, catastrophic pride . . . avenging furies on the heads of the town's nobility . . . fruit . . . all melting into a great velocity of madness.

In the haze of alcohol, Rafael knew he had to stop it. He must scotch the snake. He must go to Nina and make her confess. That was the only way to stop the madness. She was to blame for everything. He went to the house knowing he must get her out of that bedroom. She must speak. She wasn't mad. She was a spreading Evil that must be destroyed. When he knocked at her door, Nina knew it was not her husband's knock. This knock frightened her. Then she heard Rafael's voice outside the door.

"You bitch, you filthy bitch, open this door this instance. You tell the truth or I'll kill you. Do you hear? Open the door!"

Nina obeyed. She opened the door to the half-crazed man. She looked at him as if she bore no guilt. She, however, observed his drunkenness. He lunged at her and caught her by the shoulders and shook her again and again. There was no response from her. He let her go. She calmly left the room and walked down the stairs. He followed her shouting. "Come back here and tell the truth!" She looked back once as if confused. "How much did you pay her!" Rafael did not understand. He thought he saw through her. "You are very clever . . . pretending to be mad, you bitch . . . you worthless slut!" She repeated the question, "How much did you pay my stepmother!"

"What? What are you saying?"

She walked out of the front door and Rafael came after her. Outside of the door, he caught up with her and slapped her face as if trying to bring her to her senses. At this time Ismael arrived. He was running towards the house as Nina brushed past him walking towards the opened path. Rafael's face, distorted with hate and fear, made things very plain for Ismael. Rafael was not totally aware of Ismael. His eyes were focused on the running figure of Nina. Ismael knew what his brother had done. The mind, nevertheless, can not register well when the heart objects. He stood transfixed as Rafael rushed out after Nina.

Instead of taking the path that led to the orchards, she began to climb a side hill that overlooked the estate. It was steep and rocky, but she made her way steadily upward. She kept climbing without stopping. Rafael followed her, but could not continue. He sat exhausted on a boulder, his breath coming heavy and hard. Marcos, arriving at Ismael's house, caught sight of Rafael sitting on the side of the hill. He also saw a woman's figure slowly climbing up the steep hill. He walked towards his brother to ask what was the matter.

. . . . .

Ismael unfroze. Rage consumed him. He turned to see the fleeing figure of Nina climb the hill; he saw Rafael running after her. His brother! his brother! His brother had dishonored his wife. Why? Where was the love of so many years? Where was the oneness? His anger rose again. He ran up the steps into the house and made his way to the study. From the gun case he took out the same rifle that he had shot in the orchards. He loaded it again. Again, he set out towards the hill. From a distance he called out to Nina who did not seem to hear. She never turned as she climbed. Rafael looked up and saw Marcos coming towards him. Not far behind him stood Ismael with the rifle in his hands looking up at the still climbing figure of Nina.

"Nina! Nina! Come back . . . come back! I won't let him harm you!" Ismael's voice was full of love. Marcos looked from Rafael towards Ismael, then he, too, looked up at the climbing figure not sure what to make of it all until he saw Ismael raise his rifle and aim it at Rafael. Rafael just sat there, with tortured eyes, waiting for the inevitable. He did not move. Marcos, moved instinctively between his two brothers to try and stop Ismael. It was too late. Ismael fired his gun hitting Marcos through the heart. His body fell without ceremony at the foot of the hill. With another kind of instinct, Rafael seemed to come to life. He scrambled fearfully to the side of the hill that blocked Ismael's aim if he were to shoot again. When he thought himself safe, Rafael began to run across the open field at the other side of the hill.

Ismael did not fire again. The horror of what he had done grew in him. He ran to the dead body of his brother and lifted the body in his arms. "I'm sorry . . . Marcos . . . I did not mean to shoot you. Why did you get in the way! Marcos . . . my brother . . . Marcos!" The body was limp in his arms. Ismael knew he was dead. Ismael's body became one pulsation of despair. Why? Why? He put the body of Marcos back gently on the ground. Slowly, he looked up to the top of the hill. Nina stood poised on the edge.

"How beautiful it is up here!" thought Nina. She looked to the apple orchards. "It will be a good harvest in Paradise." She looked down at Cain standing over the body of Abel. She turned and saw a frightened human being running towards the protection of his home. All this was part of the moving picture of the mind. Again, she looked down at the apple trees. Such a freedom, she thought. Above the world there is peace and an acceptance. After the dark, screaming battles of the spirit, there had been the sweetness. She remembered the hat store where she was an apprentice after she left the blind priest. She had worked hard with her hands and imagination until Ismael came. . . . Ismael came. . . .

He had loved her with a gentle touch. But how could she love? She

did not know how. . . . Sooner or later death comes. He had said many things she did not understand because she had never known light and freedom. Sooner or later death comes. All the beautiful things I am . . . the confidence, the power . . . one large frightened sob? Sooner or later death comes. Nina called out, "God, are you there?"

She leaned over simply to be caught by wind and the openness of things. A shower of rocks followed the path of her falling body in full symphony. It sang the praises of a something new in erosive change. Not a nothingness, but a coming desolation. When her body hit the bottom of the hill, the praises still followed like the lingering fullness of one note until her body was covered with debris. She was now part of all . . . sooner or later.

Ismael saw her fall, but his body machine was overcome by folly. It could take no more than bleared, joyless observation, without acceptance, without rejection. What is more compassionate than the numbness after pain? Life-fruitage fallen unsavoured to the ground. He had known its warmth and richness for a little while. Now he watched, with sad separation, the falling body as it gathered momentum and took with it part of the hill to the bottom. After the rocks stopped falling, there was a silence.

The darkness of the spirit kept him away from her body. Death and the darkness did not give her to him. Grass grew above the ledge. The stream spoke in ripples and far off came the distant cry of birds. The land was bright and warm and rain was still a hope. The darkness still kept him away.

Destiny had found a seal. Ismael picked up his rifle and walked towards Rafael's house.

Rafael was waiting for Ismael. He too had felt and accepted the seal of falling things. There could be no words now. Too much had happened. Extinction had set in. The hands felt the cold metal of the gun. That was the only surety, and the tiredness . . . that consuming, creeping tiredness. Neither could gladly yield to love because violence had confused that. The only thing possible was the automatic, the next step in inevitable violence that made the seal permanent. It was as if they told each other, "Let's get it over with and die."

They did. The tombstones were now complete.

But still . . . doesn't the universe exist with all it contains to evolve? Is it not true of experience? To find God without question . . . to give to man without question . . . is that not the evolution? If only this wholeness could piece the Ninas and the Ayalas of the world.

Life was gone now. The orchards followed. The townspeople blamed it on the curse. The curse? Is not all violence . . . silent and

corrosive, insidious in its every day ways . . . is that not the curse? More practically minded men blamed the dying of the orchards to a change in climate, to an overworked soil, to a lessening rainfall. Whatever the reasons may be, the Garden of Eden became a desolation. The Eden was only orchard, for its people had brought the confused ways of the world into it. They also brought their basic humanness that was the Quinteca apple in rarity and joy. The tombstones bear the name "Ayala," but where is Nina's grave? Someone forgot.

Perhaps she was never important enough.

*A don Pepe le gusta mucho leer. Una de sus comedias favoritas es una obra de un autor español que se llamaba Calderón de la Barca. Cachito aprendió la frase que don Pepe sacó de esa comedia sobre los sueños. Está al fin del cuento.*



## **DORMIR ES VIVIR**

José A. Torres

Cachito, según he leído, dicen algunos filósofos que dormir es el estado natural de vivir, y que el hombre sólo despierta por necesidad. Según esto, el sueño es más importante que el comer. Muchos animales pueden vivir varias semanas dormidos y sin alimento, pero no pueden pasar muchos días sin dormir.

Lo mismo pasa con la gente. Ha habido casos donde una persona se ve obligada, por gusto o necesidad, a no comer. Pero nadie ha llegado a pasar más de una semana sin dormir. Si no duerme, se muere la persona. Al contrario, es muy posible que pase más de un mes sin comer y conservar la salud.

El niño recién nacido duerme dos terceras partes del tiempo o sea unas quince horas al día. El adulto duerme siete u ocho horas al día. Esto quiere decir que una persona de treinta años ha pasado más de diez dormida. Naturalmente, no todas las personas tienen la costumbre de dormir las ocho horas. Cada quien duerme según las diferentes necesidades de cada uno. Para unas personas, la necesidad de ganar el pan de cada día u otras obligaciones no le permiten dormir mucho. Para ellos el sueño es un mal necesario.

Unas personas, Cachito, usan medidas propias a su peculiaridad para poder dormir. Unas repiten versos, y otras leen un libro o se toman un vaso de algo caliente. Lo que tiene buen resultado para una persona, muchas veces no le sirve a otra.

Cachito, dicen que el sueño es vida cuando se sueña de ella. La mayor parte de nosotros soñamos en blanco y negro, y hay muy pocas personas que sueñan en vivos colores naturales. Como todo el mundo lo sabe, hay veces que los sueños toman proporciones fantásticas que parece que todo es la verdadera realidad.

¡Qué gusto da despertar y encontrar que esa pesadilla horrorosa no era más que un sueño! También es triste despertar y darse cuenta que ese paraíso no era más que un sueño. Unos duermen sabiendo que sólo

se puede vivir una dulce evasiva vida soñando, como lo hace la mitad del mundo todos los días, noche por noche.

Recuerdo una vez que soñé que me estaba muriendo, y estaba asustadísimo pidiendo con el alma que despertara si era una pesadilla. Pero de repente abrí los ojos y vi un paraíso tan hermoso que no podía abrir los ojos completamente de tan encantado que estaba. Lo primero que se me vino a la mente fue una plegaria, “Señor, gracias te doy que no era éste solamente un sueño y que ya estoy contigo en este mundo tan hermosísimo.”

Ahora se me ocurre, Cachito, que la muerte es como un sueño encantador. Si así es, entonces dormir es vivir y dormir es morir también. Como dijo un gran escritor español, “La vida es un sueño . . . y los sueños, sueños son” . . .





## MAMA

Rudy Espinosa

It was a clear night, and there was a moon, and from time to time Rosalia put her brown lovely body, clean and bronze against the face of the moon. It was not only her body, but her dark eyes that reflected alma and somewhere on the green carpet of earth, a stringless guitar strummed una canción that warmed blood and throughout the Mountain, whose peak like an obsidian chisel and valley, like a golden crown lifted the heads of the Mountain Lake Folk toward the heavens.

Little Eagle took Rosalia by the hand and said, "Mamá has gone away and our hearts cry together. No llores, hija. Come along and let's go back to our casita." As Little Eagle and Rosalia walked along the rippled waters of the Mountain Lake, the lapping water between the rocks made noise. Brother and sister had squeaky huaraches on and walked slowly. Rosalia began to shake and her brother grasped her brown hand firmly.

"Sister, we are in good fortune to live on the Mountain Lake and perhaps our journey across the great desert may at times seem hopeless. But, hija, don't worry, in the bright of sun, high in the light blue sky, the circling of an eagle makes my heart as light as if I am flying up there. I feel I have wings. We were born within the warmth of adobe bricks. Our souls are clean. Pure as the rock faces are mi gente de la Raza. Mamá held us beneath the hearts of stars and spears of Eagle knights tightened with feathered ornaments, and sitting down before a ray of light. She took me on her lap and flowered my thoughts with kisses, and pointing to the sun, began to say, 'look on the warmth of sun, there he lives.' Even the weed has its purpose on Earth. He gives light and heat away to all earth children. And the red plateaus, yellow slopes, and wild flowers, and wild birds and animals and warriors and dancers receive comfort in the morning and joy in the noon day. And we are put on Earth a little child, that we may learn to bear the flowers of love and that our bronzed faces are but a coloring of volcanic ash. And when the whips of greed will vanish, hija, we shall see the glittering arrow and hear its song, like the wild bird that sings, 'Ven aquí, ven aquí, te quiero con todo mi corazón.' And around the Mountain Lake mi Raza will dance, and again Mamá will have kissed us."



## EL BAUTISMO DE DOÑA PORFIRIA

Juan Antonio García

Toda persona que haya viajado por la parte norte del estado de Nuevo Méjico habrá notado la paz, simplicidad y devoción de sus habitantes que, en fervor de religión, hasta han llegado a ser explotadas por personas tibias en la teología.

El cuento que voy a contar, toma lugar entre esas almas justas a quienes la naturaleza les ha prevenido las disoluciones y, por cierto, los malos sabores de la sociedad moderna. El pueblecillo lleva el nombre de Petaca y está ubicado en el condado de Río Arriba.

El pueblo, en medio de la madreSelva, se compone de antiguos colonos que gracias a su aislamiento retienen sus modismos y también las costumbres de sus robustos antepasados quienes se desprendieron de las colonias españolas y que, por necesidad de subsistir por esos montes, hasta se unieron matrimonialmente con los nativos indígenas de la región. El producto de la dicha unión fue una bendición, pues produjo un tipo de gente que abrazó ambas culturas que, en cambio, afectó hasta su modo de vivir. Sus vidas radean con un espíritu de independencia y simplicidad que, se puede decir, ha sido la envidia del siglo veinte.

Esta gente formó una civilización distinta que ha sido indiferente al beso abominable del modernismo. Aunque siguen usando el español arcaico traspuesto por la inquisición española y lo han enriquecido con una lengua evolucionada por sus modos humildes de vivir, que también ha sido influída tanto por sus contratiempos y tribulaciones como por sus reacciones morales y sociológicas. Pues es una bendición tanto para el escritor como para el sociólogo que tenga la feliz suerte de chocar con la vibrante comunidad.

Está ahí una nación dentro de una nación, pues poco se preocupan sus habitantes por lo que pasa afuera de su mundo inmediato y menos por las abstracciones de la vida siendo que sus necesidades son cumplidas allí. Es una población de campesinos agrícolas que, aunque no han logrado saciarse de las riquezas materiales de la vida, han tenido éxito en forjar una comunidad llena de alegría, compañerismo y paz en su tarea de cultivar sus terrenos. Suplementan sus necesidades con un sistema, disuelto de los quiebros de corazón, experimentando por el

comercio moderno. Observan cambiar una comodidad por otra sin necesidad de dinero, el cual se considera como lujo y también el eje de la perdición.

Sus costumbres sociales también, son producto de una utopía ideal. Su paraíso primordial les protege del influjo maligno de los miserables conocidos como educados y cosmopolitas. Esos complejos de la vida son para otros que se preocupan por la avaricia y, simplemente, no saben vivir como ellos en esa aldea de paz y tranquilidad segunda nomás a la que fue saboreada por nuestros antecesores en al jardín de Edén.

Uno de esos caracteres contentos, que es nuestro principal ingrediente, pondrá el sabor en nuestro cuento. Doña Porfiria Valdez es una de esas viejecillas septenarias que por todas las reglas de la naturaleza, debido a sus angustias personales, debería ya de ser una memoria en la tumba del olvido, pero en compensación de su rica vida, Dios le ha otorgado una vida rica de salud. Pues la pobre, además de haber quedado viuda a causa de la influencia post-guerral que le quitó a su marido, la dejó con ocho niños de edades escolares y un tío paterno senil, Don Santiago, el cual no le servía ni para consuelo. El santo viejo no era ni digno de ser ejemplo para sus sobrinos, pues parecía estar peleado con el agua y el jabón puesto que aun en sus giras románticas no se sacudía ni el polvo.

Las amonestaciones de Doña Porfiria eran siempre encontradas por excusas de los males que le agobiaban acompañados de una toz inagotable. La pobre vieja, buena cristiana que era, se resignaba con su mala suerte y seguía la tarea doble de servirles de padre a sus hijos y la de procurar de hacer la vida para ellos y el viejo obispón que había heredado de su esposo junto con los veinte acres de terreno.

Doña Porfiria ponía todos sus talentos para desprender su vivir de su terreno submarginal. Con el pedregal que ya había desprendido de su terreno bajo cultivo, se podría haber hecho pirámides en miniatura a los de Egipto de los cuales leía ella en su Buen Libro. La manera como hacía su vivir era de maravilla hasta para los buenos cristianos de profesión. Solamente ese carácter de mármol pudiera haber atentado forjar su vivir de esa clase de terreno, pero Dios la favorecía.

Su cosecha consistía de trigo, maíz, frijol, habas, chícharo y calabazas, los cuales constituían la mayor parte de sus alimentos. Si tenía buen año, le sobraría para cambiarle a su compadre, María Vargas, en el comercio por sal, café y azúcar. De todos modos había que tener fe en Dios y seguía la pobre vieja amolando las uñas como un hombre y ya hasta había adquirido proporciones masculinas. Sus zapatos de hombre, siendo que no podía hallar zapatos de mujer que le quedaran.

Hacía ya varios años que había dejado Don Braulio de pedirle su mano en el canino del matrimonio. Tanto había ya trascendido la vereda del trabajo.

Debido a su tarea de servirle de ancla al arado, había ya cultivado un modo de andar que hasta cuando iba por el camino real parecía llevar un pie en la Besana. Su cara también amenasaba con una mirada bovina que parecía desafiar al mundo entero, y a los inmundicios en particular. Pero la señora tenía sus buenos aspectos también. Uno era el de haber vivido al pie de la letra moral y el otro el de estar lista a combatir a Lucifer a toda hora. Aunque sabía poco leer, tenía además una memoria fenomenal cuando se trataba de las Sagradas Escrituras y de los propios himnos para cualquier ocasión.

Repasaba versículo sobre versículo de la biblia y también condenaba al infierno a toda persona que no tuviera, tan siquiera, una alucinación al menos de Nuevo Testamento. En su apetito teológico era capaz de prender su tiro de caballos al vagón y viajar hasta cuarenta millas a una reunión religiosa acompañada de su tío Santiago y su multitud de hijos, los cuales se portaban como cabos militares, pues tan recta era la disciplina de Doña Porfiria.

Después de estas reuniones evangélicas, se volvía la señora una bola de ambición para convertir al mundo entero y no cesaba de infestar a la comunidad con sus campañas feroces de evangelista. El pueblo amaba a la vieja y aun le toleraban su pelea mortal con el diablo con tal de después escuchar su plática que era tan sabroza. Sus sermones, con su psicología compestre, eran de tanta elocuencia que hasta oía voces celestiales y al momento la cogía “el espíritu” que la asotaba por el suelo. Hacía murmulos a tal grado que quedaba hasta sin voz y tenían que revivirla con una copa de café; y si la invitaban a tomar la cena nunca se conoció de haber rehusado. A pesar de todos sus servicios benéficos para su pueblo, tenía una falta que era la de ser convertida a cuanta denominación llegaba por su pueblo. Ella había sido mormona, miembro de la asamblea de Dios, testigo de jehová, presbiteriana y, al fin bautista. Había habido una campaña de avivamiento bautista fuerte por un ministro lírico que vio sus primeras letras eclesiásticas como diácono de la Asamblea de Dios en los campos de pizar papas en el famoso valle de San Luis en Colorado. El reverendo Raúl Martínez, aunque parecía siete mesino, tenía una voz que retumbaba por el monte y ya había sacado los demonios hasta de los niños, pues tan grande era su dominio del diablo que sus “aleluyas” parecían los primeros truenos de mayo.

Aunque el hermano Martínez era de estatura muy chica y su educación académica había llegado hasta el segundo grado de la escuela primaria de San Acasio en el estado de Colorado, su mente tenía una dádiva sobrenatural que registraba cuanto versículo leía en su biblia. Con su elocuencia gigantézca que contrastaba con su tamaño y su psicología campestre, logró conquistar a la mayor parte de los habitantes y entre ellos iba la señora Porfiria, perenne miembro en las cosas celesti-

ales. Sabía el ministro Martínez que en su combate mortal con el diablo podía él contar con Doña Porfiria que hería demonios con sus demostraciones de pasión. Simultáneamente rezaba, rodaba por el suelo y alababa al Ser Supremo acompañada por los aullidos de un perro enorme que parecía saciarse tanto como su ama.

El canino mostraba ya como unos doce años y aunque se conocía como ladrón extraordinario en el robo de huevos, en cuanto entraba a un servicio parecía que tenía inteligencia humana, y, naturalmente, acompañaba a Doña Porfiria en el canto. Aunque parecía que esa reunión iba a ser su última gira cristiana, el perro parecía rejuvenecerse nomás veía a Doña Porfiria coger su tápalo negro y su montera evangelística.

Aunque el perro espasmódico apenas despedía una pata de la otra, siempre parecía preceder a Doña Porfiria a una distancia de cien pies. La leyenda de los dos era ya universal siendo que cuando veían al raquítico, poco después de cierto, vendría la vieja con su pie en la Besana imaginaria. El perro llevaba el nombre de Olivero, el origen del cual se nos escapa, pero es preciso comentar sobre él ya que, como su ama, tenía una personalidad distinta.

El perro, de casta poco obscura, vino a la casa de Doña Porfiria como regalo de un pastor de ovejas de nombre Quirino Vargas. Mostraba aspectos gigantescos y medía unas seis cuartas del lomo a la uña de la mano derecha. A toda apariencia, tenía sangre de perro liebrero y también de rastrero, lo cual le daba un carácter que hasta podía cuajar la leche en el ubre de las vacas de Don Moisés Lucero. Las orejas inmensas con arrugas de acordeón eran suficiente para hacer al más valiente perro de la vecindad retroceder a tiempo doble. Pues los pobres perros locales apenas le daban hasta la rodilla. Sus patas durante la noche eran tan ásperas como su genio durante el día. Su talento en robar los gallineros era insuperable y hasta se decía que el diablo perro sabía abrir los gallineros, apasiguar las gallinas y luego dejar las puertas como las había hallado. La santa señora había recibido ya queja sobre queja de las giras huevísticas de su canino huesudo pero no lo creía y lo defendía con elocuencia. El "Repelones," como le llamaba Don Santiago, parecía entender que Doña Porfiria era capaz de defenderlo a todo costo y con su mirada angélica se saciaba en oír a la vieja exponer sus virtudes cuando atacaban su honor como ladrón de gallineros. Se rasca con sus patotas que parecía querer quitarse su cuero costrudo. En cambio de sus jornadas nefarias a los gallineros, había sido bendecido con una plaga de curuco con un apetito elefante, como el de él para los huevos. El resultado era que "El Repelones" mostraba repelones desde la cabeza hasta la punta de la cola dándole un aspecto horrible que era capaz de cegar a una pulga. Pero para doña Porfiria era la real personificación de belleza e inteligencia perruna que pudiera haber dado a luz una perra de sangre fina.

Tanto había el perro acompañado a doña Porfiria que aún, literalmente cojeaban del mismo pie y los dos eran capaces de cambiar cojeo voluntariamente. Donde estuviera el huesudo, allí estaría ella también. Si alguna persona extraña se aproximaba a doña Porfiria, el perro la gruñía, pero no había ninguna evidencia de que hubiera mordido a alguien en su juventud y mucho menos ahora que ya estaba hasta sin dientes. Pero presentaba un semblante feroz aunque la señora hasta tenía que mascarle la comida.

Por bien portado que era el menso, siempre les daba bastante broma a los diáconos en la iglesia pues insistía en estar a los pies de su ama en las congregaciones evangelistas y por seguro hecharía el cuajo hasta al bautismo de doña Porfiria.

Se llegó el día en que la señora tenía que ser bautisada por sumersión como era prescrito por la iglesia bautista. La información se había destendido rápidamente de que iba a haber bautismos por sumersión para los mayores, y entre ellos iba doña Porfiria, lo cual bastaba para atraer el pueblo desde Las Tusas, Vallecitos, La Madera, Ojo Caliente y hasta La Servilleta.

El bautismo tenía que, por necesidad, tomar lugar en el riachuelo cerca de la casa de doña Porfiria. Siendo que era tan poco el agua que corría por el río, doña Porfiria con sus propias manos hizo un hoyo como de doce pies de largo por seis pies de ancho y seis pies de hondura, pues ella no iba a permitir que ninguna escapara la sumersión completa. Cuando acabó de hacer el pozo, la señora le descolgó el río y así era que en este ilustre domingo tenían un estanque de sumersión. Por supuesto que el agua ya estaba un poco turbia debido a que los puercos de Don Gabino Alire usaban el riachuelo como baño particular para ellos también.

No obstante, la congregación que se había reunido era de tamaño pontifical para un pueblo tan chico, pero la ocasión era tan ilustre que aun los católicos y la Cofradía de nuestro Padre Jesús de Nazareno, había desobedecido al Padre León De la Valle para asistir a esta junta. El día era uno de júbilo pues iba a haber bautismo por sumersión y entre la multitud estaría doña Porfiria.

Empezó un sermón favorito el ministro lírico y amonestaba a la congregación que los modos mundiales no les convenían; el fin del mundo se aproximaba pues toda profesía ya se había cumplido y hasta habían ya llegado a Agamemnón. Imploraba vocíferamente que se bautizaran por sumersión, que era el único modo aceptable para entrar a la gloria.

Los niños, siendo que el día en ese domingo estaba bastante caliente, fueron los primeros voluntarios. Después seguirían jugando en el río. Luego seguían las jovencitas, la mayor parte de ellas en sus trajes almidonados y muy blancos que habían sido hechos de los costales de

harina de la marca "Pansy." En algunos casos se veía la flor claramente estampada en los vestidos pero las jovencitas estaban benditas por una inocencia fenomenal.

Después iban los adultos, y para este punto el hermano Martínez se daba ya tono de experto y no tenía broma en sumergir toda especie de humanidad y en algunos casos era su fervor tan grande que hasta por poco los ahogaba pues estaba tan hondo el hoyo. Venían después los ansianos y el ministro oraba e interponía sus declaraciones de los pasajes de la biblia y también relataba el bautismo de Nuestro Señor por San Juan en el río Jordán. Los viejos aclamaban a Dios en voz alta y a doña Porfiria por ser la mejor en esa clase de zumbido astral, parecía que la había dejado para el último. El pozo de agua estaba ya de un color gris, pues habían ya largado sus pecados allí más de cincuenta personas. La congregación se acercaba al pozo, pues doña Porfiria de seguro seguiría. Al ver doña Porfiria a la multitud que se aproximaba, revivió su espíritu elocuente. Al mismo tiempo que el Pastor Martínez que empezaba una oración que parecía no tener fin; pero después de haber degradado al diablo veinte grados, terminó. Para este tiempo doña Porfiria estaba ya arrodillada cerca del inmenso pozo con sus rezos indesifrables que, decía ella, le venían del cielo y también cantaba himnos con su voz masculina que hasta retumbaban por las laderas de la mesa. El Olivero también aullaba de ver a su ama con tanto fervor y parecía hasta darle segunda a sus cantos. Al fin dejó a doña Porfiria sus declamaciones y se puso de pie, acto preparatorio a que la echasen al pozo. Le dijo al Reverendo Martínez, "Estoy lista para unirme con mis hermanos en bautismo que han aceptado a mi Redentor como su único Salvador." El hermano Martínez responde; "Hermana Porfiria, la aceptamos como persona grata del perdón y la misericordia de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, aleluya, y Gloria a Dios, Aleluya, prosigamos, Aleluya, a bautisarla en el Nombre del Padre, aleluya, el hijo, aleluya, y el espíritu Santo, aleluya. Tomó a doña Porfiria con la mano izquierda por el cráneo y la mano derecha por el pecho para volcar a la viejecilla al pozo de agua.

El famoso Olivero al ver al ministro poner mano sobre su ama, brincó y se metió a combatir al asaltante, pero era muy tarde, pues los tres cayeron a lo más hondo del pozo y por un minuto ni uno se dejó ver y la congregación se puso nerviosa, entre su riza, de ver los acontecimientos. Al fin rompió el agua doña Porfiria y gritó, "mi perro, auxilio, se ahoga mi perro. Compadre Gabino, salve a mi perro." Con esto se vuelve a sambullir la pobre vieja. En este instante salieron arriba el Ministro Martínez y el Olivero todavía abrazados en combate mortal pero se volvieron a perder de vista. Llenos de aprensión, se echaron al agua Elizar Martínez y el joven Alejandrino y salvan a la pobre vieja y después a los gladiadores cristianos. Doña Porfiria decía, "Gloria" Dios

Todo poderoso, mi perro también es salvo y cristiano. El pobre perro compensaba con lamer la mano de doña Porfiria y luego se dio un sacudón que bautizó al resto de la congregación.

Se dice, y esto no lo pudimos verificar, que el perro hasta su muerte al siguiente año no probó ni un solo huevo, gracias al bautismo de Doña Porfiria.





## THE GRAPEVINE

Thelma T. Reyna

The old man lay in bed breathing heavily, the nail of his outstretched index finger lodged between his front teeth. He couldn't move because of the net and straps binding him to the bed, so he sighed slowly, shifting his gaze from the ceiling to his visitors. His wife was there, a withering woman with a tiny face and gray hair that looked like wire and stretched in all directions. His daughter, still majestic though her hair was whitening above and around her forehead, and—was that her husband? Yes, and the boy; he didn't recognize the boy.

As he stared at the youth, a faint picture of a grapevine floated into the old man's mind then vanished. The old man closed his eyes, attempting to clear his brain of pictures he did not quite understand, and tried again to recognize the youth.

"Joseph?" he asked incoherently as the face of the boy danced before his eyes. Like a reflection in a pool of water, the face wavered to and fro. The old man made an effort and asked again, "Joseph?" this time clearly, brassily like a bell.

The daughter came forward to hold the old man's paralyzed hand. "No, not Joseph, Father. It's Samuel."

"Samuel," he echoed. He blinked his thick eyelids at the boy then turned to stare at the ceiling, the nail lodged once more between his teeth. Samuel. Then it was he, not Joseph, who had been coming every week to see him. He remembered the face now; but he had thought always that it was Joseph. Where was Joseph? With a pang of remembrance, the old man closed his eyes and removed his finger from his mouth. Joseph was dead. For more than fifty years, it must be, Joseph his brother had been dead. It was painful to remember, and the old man was glad that his moments of extreme lucidity were not more frequent. They came, rather, at unexpected and distant intervals, interruptions in the old man's daily fuzzy existence. But he thought clearly now, the past coming to him as if it had been the present only yesterday; he recalled how Joseph had died. He was only twenty. The old man was twenty-five then, seventy-seven now. He remembered a vine, yellow-green, clinging to a rough, crooked lattice; but slowly the lucidity was slipping. Must not strain myself, he thought, and turned again to his family.

He tried to raise his arm, but the rope restrained him. The old man looked puzzledly at the faces before him. He heard vaguely the voice of his daughter explaining that he must not move or the ropes would burn his flesh; he had been tied that night for his own safety. She continued cheerily but with an undertone of reproach and recounted to him how he had tried the previous night to jump from his window.

Wounded, he felt his eyes fill and heard his voice murmur, "Home. I wanted to go home." The old man remembered briefly the joy he had felt the night before when he had been able, shoes in hand, to raise himself from his bed and stagger to the window. The cool air had brushed against his senseless body and he had not cared that the ground had seemed far, far away. He had wanted only to go home.

His spirit was different today. The man lay motionless beneath the ropes and listened to the voices beside him, now and then letting his mind float between the lifeless present and the dead past. He thought of his children, grown-up and scattered in different parts of the country. He saw them only occasionally, usually at Christmas, when they came from all parts to partake once more of the one-big-family game, only to go away again and leave him empty. The old man remembered uneasily the past Christmas and saw before him the drawn faces of his sons and grandchildren as they had filed into his little hospital room. One year? No, it was more than a year since his illness had begun.

"Grandfather."

The old man turned and gazed at the youth beside him on the bed. He felt his good hand clasped warmly in Samuel's. The old man's vision blurred.

"Grandfather, you musn't worry about Grandmother. I've been staying with her since your attack. You should see your home, Grandfather. We've been taking extra special care of it for you."

A small white house with red trim and an incongruous green roof came into the old man's mind. A modest home, it had begun as a two-room shack, poorly ventilated, and had grown as his family had grown, witnessing—if it had life—the birth of each child, countless illnesses tended, and the departure and farewells of his eldest son, daughter, and down to the dearest son, the youngest in the family. Now it stood whitewashed and alone, with only Samuel and the old woman within, standing with its years upon it as a monarch resigned to his throne.

The old man saw it, and as lucidity spread within him once more, he remembered the lawn, the chrysanthemums he had planted just before his illness, the geraniums, lilies, calendulas, and oleanders. His mind was clear now and alive with detailed pictures. Suddenly, a small wave of joy swept through him, and it was so visible in his face, that his wife, daughter, and son-in-law sat forward expectantly and smiled at him.

His voice came strong. "The grapevine," he chimed. "How is my grapevine?"

The replies burst forth, and the man's spirits lifted as he listened to the descriptions of his grapevine. Tall, they said, green as fuzzy caterpillars, still tumbling over the lattice you built. No more worms, they continued happily—only ripe, fresh leaves and grapes that would be good soon.

The old man smiled at the news and slowly let his head turn toward the wall. His grapevine, then, still thrived. Drowsiness overcame him, but he fell asleep content that his home, his family—that his grapevine—were still full of life.

Between visits, the days dragged unbearably for the old man. Nurses, doctors, orderlies that floated in and out of his room merged into one white figure that soon lost its identity for him. He was wheeled to the barber shop, to the arts and crafts room where he strove to make little molded pictures and remembrances for his daughter and her children. He was wheeled into the washroom, down the long, white corridor, and into the dining room, where he sat amongst other old men as lifeless as he and ate and drank to keep his vegetable body alive. The ropes were finally taken from his bed one day after he promised by nodding his head that he would not attempt to jump out the window again. When he lay in his bed unbound and free, he inhaled slowly and thought once more of going home. He never noticed that bars had been placed outside his window.

It was two months after the old man learned of his grapevine that the visits from his family became less frequent. His wife, daughter, and son-in-law came always, but Samuel was sometimes replaced by his sister, a brother, or an uncle. The old man's days were spent waiting to see his family's faces before him. When his visitors came, he lay peacefully and gazed at them, speaking less, and staring at the wall and ceiling no more. As if aware that the visits were growing too far apart, he looked from face to face and etched with great detail upon his mind the features and expressions of the faces, the words and descriptions they fed his starved soul.

"The grapevine?" he asked always, sometimes so incoherently that he repeated it three and four times, each time cringing inside because the faces before him looked puzzled and glanced at each other anxiously, begging for an interpretation of the old man's unclear question.

"The grapevine," he would persist; until, at last, as if God placed within his throat a final burst of strength, the question would break forth clearly.

"Ah, the grapevine," they would exclaim and proceed to describe its beauty to him. During one visit, when Samuel had come after a month of absence, the answer came happily to the old man's ears: the grapes

were ripe. The grapevine stood laden with grapes. Samuel and the old wife had been tending it carefully since they had discovered the significance it held for the old man.

That day the old man learned also that his eldest grandson and his young wife had had their first child the night before. A great-grandfather now, the old man looked at his silent wife, at Samuel, and somehow sensed a connection between the news of the day: God, oh God, life was bursting forth around him. Life, life that he lacked, life that he missed in the old, sick men he saw daily, life that he loved, was manifesting itself in his world outside the pale hospital walls. Without warning, the old man's face became twisted; his mouth quivered noticeably, and a sob, then another and another, escaped from deep within him. He made no other sounds, but only his shoulders and body revealed that he was weeping, that passion he had long imprisoned within him was tearing loose. He upset his family, and they crowded around him, comforting him; until, at last, he placed his nail between his front teeth and struggled to control himself.

The days afterward were an uninterrupted series of pain and numbness, of abject depression and quiet joy, of loss of memory and an overly-stimulated mind that bore forth pictures of a life long, long past. The old man remembered days of his childhood, the destitute first years of his marriage, frustrations, and long, hot days spent in fields under a broiling sun. He thought of his thin wife almost dead after she had borne their fourth child. He remembered the day Joseph died, the day the war ended; and he saw within his hospital room the figures and faces of his long-dead sisters, his mother, and favorite uncle. The white figure that visited him daily, giving him medicine he refused and speaking softly to him, multiplied, till at last the white figures replaced the dead family that he had seen visiting him from the past.

The last time his real family came to him, the old man was virtually unable to speak. He learned that Samuel had been taken into military service, that he had been gone nearly three months but would be home soon. The old man stretched his neck to ask the question that had become his only vocabulary now; but his throat felt stifled, and not even air crept forth. His wife, daughter, and son-in-law looked at him tensely as he struggled to speak. The old man extended his neck until it hurt him, and he opened his mouth to ask the question; but he felt a great weight descending slowly upon his chest. He felt as if he were being carried away to sea on a giant, surging wave; and heard, far off, near shore, his wife asking finally:

"Oh, the grapevine? You want to know about your grapevine?" She answered, but by this time he was too far afloat to have heard his wife describe how the grapevine had gradually begun to lose its beauty. She

watered it daily, sprayed it, and loved it as her son, but it had begun to wither.

Two days later Samuel arrived unexpectedly at the old wife's home. Crossing through the backyard, he saw the flowers in bloom, the grass green, the earth damp and soft. Only the lattice which had supported the grapevine stood stark. Strewn upon the wet ground beneath were the withered, brittle remnants of the vine. Samuel knew before he saw his mourning grandmother at the door that his grandfather was dead.



## ILEANA

Alfredo de la Torre

Yo sólo tenía diez y nueve años cuando conocí a Ileana y ella ya tenía sus veinte y tantos. Trabajábamos juntos en un aeropuerto de Estados Unidos y a veces en ciertas ocasiones cuando la gente se apretaba, nuestros cuerpos se rozaban inocentemente. Nos hablábamos poco y yo la adoraba en silencio, al fin y al cabo yo era un chiquillo y a ella le sobraban hombres interesantes. Era muy bonita. Sonreía mucho y sus ojos negros siempre brillaban alegres. Varios envidiosos interpretaban su manera de ser en otra forma. A mí me daba rabia, pero no lo demostraba, cuando oía a alguien decir que sólo se paseaba con ricos pero que era mujer fácil. Yo no podía defenderla abiertamente porque entonces existiría la posibilidad de que descubrieran mi secreto. Todos la trataban bien y hablaban a sus espaldas sin que ella se diera cuenta. Ese era mi gran coraje. Un coraje que se volvió celo porque a mí casi ni me miraba. Yo que de veras la admiraba y tantas veces la soñaba. Yo que fabricaba aquel coraje para hacerme creer a mí mismo que ella me estaba dañando a propósito y así sentirme parte de sus hechos. Pero no importaba, verdaderamente yo era feliz con verla feliz.

Una tarde que subimos los dos en una escalera eléctrica llena de gente, yo había marcado mis pasos a propósito para quedar detrás de ella. Esa vez ya no pude detenerme más, repecué mi cuerpo a sus caderas suaves y apreté con cuidado. Estaba dispuesto a todo; a perder mi empleo, a una bofetada, a lo que viniera . . . sólo existía aquel instante. Ileana no se movió y repecó su cuerpo con fuerza al mío. Yo no lo podía creer pero era cierto. Le gustó.

Desde aquella tarde todo cambió. Ileana mostró más atención en mí. Jugaba conmigo, le gustaba hacerme hablar, y en la palabra la perdí. Es cierto que el mundo es chico, y más cuando por experiencia le suceden a uno las cosas. Los dos resultamos ser nativos de un pequeño pueblo en México. Su familia había emigrado a Estados Unidos primero que la mía, y resultó tener un hermano de la misma edad que yo y que había ido a la escuela conmigo. De allí en adelante se volvió puras pláticas de familia, y más y más me trataba como a un hermano. Mi corazón se congeló y decidí evitarla; para que diablos quería yo una amiga. Poco a poco nos fuimos hablando menos y luego sólo nos saludábamos. Y así, por hombre o tonto, me tragué muchas palabras que había practicado

para ella. No duré mucho tiempo más en ese empleo, pues no soy de personalidad estable. Como quiera, no me quejo, trabajo cuando me da la gana y me divierto a mi manera.

Ahora tengo veinte y tantos años y de lejos la veo que se acerca. Estoy cansado de la vida. A veces le echo la culpa a Estados Unidos y a veces creo que nací para sufrir. En este pueblo de México cada año se celebra una fiesta de disfraces. La gente se pone máscaras de payasos, calaveras, o antifaces negros, y los que no quieren esconder su rostro usan sombreros grandes o ropas viejas, pues es muy fácil ensuciarse de manteca comiendo taquitos. Se permite beber alcohol o cerveza a ojos vistos; se truenan cohetes y se prenden fuegos artificiales. Tiene su historia el pueblo. Creo que todo esto empezó cuando el indio Juárez se andaba levantando en armas. En este pueblo, que en su tiempo era muy afrancesado, se acostumbraba una fiesta de disfraces en el palacio presidencial a la que sólo la alta sociedad asistía. Los Juaristas se aprovecharon de esta oportunidad y mandaron a unos campesinos a pedir permiso al presidente para que los dejara también a ellos tener su fiesta de disfraces afuera del palacio. El gran señor que quería estar en bien con esta gente les concedió la petición. La noche de la fiesta, los Juaristas disfrazados llegaron al pueblo y con ayuda de varias mujeres emborracharon a los soldados que montaban guardia y en menos que canta un gallo con machete en mano tomaron el pueblo.

Desde entonces año tras año la fiesta se lleva a cabo en todo el pueblo. Yo desde chico no venía a este lugar; y ahora se me ocurrió venir. Me siento ridículo parado en medio de la plaza y toda esta gente que se aprovecha de las máscaras para sentirse libres. La veo que se acerca con la misma sonrisa de siempre; no le han hecho nada los años. Está igual de bella. Unas viejas gordas le están hablando y le dicen algo de su suéter y sus pantalones de pana. Así son aquí; les encanta la ropa americana. Se deshace de las viejas y sigue acercándose a mí; claro que me reconoce. Yo tampoco traigo antifaz. Le doy un trago a mi cerveza y bajo los brazos. Aquí está ya y me besa en la boca y en la cara. Su aliento es limpio, no ha bebido. Me vuelve a besar en la boca, ahora con los ojos cerrados. Yo dejo caer la cerveza al suelo y me entrego todo. Me abraza fuerte y yo también. Despega su rostro del mío y sólo sonrío. Las viejas la rodean y una de ellas empieza a rezongar.

—Ileana, pero qué haces, qué costumbres. ¿Quién es este muchacho?

—Es mi novio tía.

Contesta ella aún sonriendo y sin dejar de abrazarme: Un joven de esos apretados, muy bien vestido y con bigotes brillosos, que parecía acompañarla se muestra molesto pero cuando Ileana le dice, —Le presento a mi novio—muy atento me da la mano y me dice su nombre con dos

apellidos largos que no quiero recordar. Me presenta también a las dos tías que me miran sospechosas. Ahora la otra vieja que no había dicho nada empieza a hablar.

—¿Por qué no nos habías dicho que iba a venir tu novio?

—Era una sorpresa tía.

—¿Usted también vive en los Estados Unidos, joven?

—Sí.

Contesto yo sin ganas de decirle que yo también nací aquí en este pueblo.

—Ahora nos vamos a escapar—dice Ileana.

—Y no se preocupen; él me lleva a casa.

—Ay . . . tengan cuidado. Hay muchos borrachos—dice una de las viejas.

—No se preocupen señoras, tenemos muy buenas piernas para correr.

Digo yo en tono de broma que no parece agraderle al jovenazo que ahora abraza a una de las viejas. Nos despedimos rápidamente y agarrados de la mano corremos por una calle oscura hasta detenernos en un lugar donde la luna ilumina la cara de Ileana y sus labios murmuran deseosos.

—Bésame.

Yo obedezco sin ninguna resistencia, nos abrazamos y siento su oído pegado al mío cuando dice triste y contenta al mismo tiempo.

—Tantos años sin verte y pensado en tí. ¿Me crees?

—Sí. Yo tampoco nunca te olvidé.

Tomo su cara entre mis manos y le doy un beso suave. Un beso limpio y puro. Nos agarramos de la mano, reímos y volvemos a correr. Así pasamos horas, viendo los fuegos artificiales, comiendo tacos, tirando con carabinas de postas, y probando todos los juegos de suerte que se ofrecen en la plaza.

Nos volvemos a alejar de la plaza por una calle oscura, y al dar vuelta en una esquina encontramos una cantina de adobe donde unos músicos tocan unas guitarras. Afuera de la cantina donde la tierra es dura, dos viejitos juegan con unas reatas. Unos niños corren y los viejitos los lazan. Ileana reconoce a unas amigas que le gritan y corre a saludarlas. Yo me quedo parado viendo a los viejitos y guiado por un impulso empiezo a correr junto con los niños, y hasta que me lazan me detengo. Con las dos reatas alrededor de mis brazos veo a los dos viejitos que enrollan la otra punta de las reatas y se acercan a mí como charros a una vaca. Sonríen y los reconozco. Son mis abuelos. El abuelo



por parte de mi madre y el abuelo por parte de mi padre. Qué felicidad. Me quito las reatas, los saludo de mano y uno de ellos le dice al otro.

—Te dije que vendría.

Yo ya no soporto más esta alegría y los abrazo a los dos del cuello. Siento sus canas suaves en mis mejillas y empiezo a llorar. Ellos también quieren llorar pero no pueden, sólo moquean. Luego los suelto al ver que Ileana se acerca a nosotros y veo que también ella se limpia unas lágrimas de su rostro y me estira de la mano sin poner atención a mis abuelos. Ella camina rápido y yo la sigo. Volteo a ver a mis abuelos y veo que me dicen adiós con la mano y después gritan casi en coro.

—Vayan con Dios.

Ileana sigue caminando y yo la detengo.

—Son mis abuelos.

Ella no voltea a verlos y me dice enojada.

—No seas chistoso. Esos dos hombres te salvaron la vida y tú te burlas.

—¿De que hablas Ileana?

—Del pleito ese con pistolas que se hizo afuera de la cantina. Y que no te diste cuenta que al mismo tiempo que empezaron a disparar hacia donde estabas tú parado, esos dos señores se pusieron enfrente de ti y cayeron muertos a balazos. Tú les dabas la espalda y parecía que hablabas solo.

—Un momento. Ven conmigo.

Ella se negaba a acercarse de nuevo a aquel lugar pero mi brazo la tomó por la cintura y no le quedó más remedio que ceder a mi fuerza masculina. Llegamos a la cantina al mismo tiempo que la ambulancia y alcancé a ver a los muertos tirados en el suelo antes de que se los llevaran. Estos no eran mis abuelos. Ileana no quiso ver y escondió su rostro en mi cuello. Mis ojos ansiosos buscaban a mis abuelos alrededor de aquella gente pero ya no estaban allí. Le dimos la espalda a la cantina y nos alejamos.

Mi mente daba vueltas confundida a medida que caminábamos muy despacio. La noche se estaba poniendo fresca e Ileana se apretó más a mí y me dio un beso en el cuello. Volví a sentirme enormemente feliz y ahora estaba seguro que ya nunca más la dejaría alejarse de mi vida. Fue entonces cuando recordé que mis abuelos habían muerto hacía mucho tiempo.



## UN AGUINALDO

Francisco Jiménez

Ocurrió hace doce años. Lo recuerdo vivamente como si hubiera sucedido ayer. Vivíamos en un campo algodonero en Corcoran. Era el veinticuatro de diciembre y yo, como todos los niños del mundo, esperaba impacientemente que llegara el día de la Navidad; pero el tiempo pasaba lentamente; los minutos me parecían horas y las horas días.

Desde hacía años yo deseaba una pelota pero mi deseo nunca se había realizado. “Pero ahora” pensaba yo, “ya no tendré que esperar más; este año mi papá y mamá me regalarán una pelotita.” Ese día larguísimo lo pasé soñando cómo me divertiría con mi juguete.

Por fin anocheció y todos nos acostamos temprano. Yo no podía dormir; sólo pensaba en mi pelotita y lo único que interrumpía mis pensamientos era el aire helado que golpeaba contra la carpa donde vivíamos toda la familia de ocho. Al sentir que mi madre se levantaba, fingí estar dormido. Por un agujerito de la cobija vigilaba a mi madre, tratando de ver los regalos que iba a envolver. Pero ella se sentó detrás de un cajón de madera que nos servía de mesa, el cual me tapó la vista. A través de la luz que daba la lámpara de petróleo, sólo podía ver su cara arrugada y alegre mientras empaquetaba los regalos. De repente noté que al coger algo en sus manos se entristeció. Sus ojos se llenaron de lágrimas sin saber yo por qué.

Al amanecer mis hermanos y yo nos levantamos rápidamente para desenvolver nuestros regalos que estaban al pie de los zapatos. Cojí el mío y ansiosamente rompí la cajita de cartón y al ver que era un talega de dulces lo que estaba allí, quedé pasmado. Alcé la cabeza y me di cuenta de que mi madre me había estado observando. Me fijé en sus tristes ojos—lloraban.



## CHRISTMAS GIFT

Francisco Jiménez

It happened twelve years ago. I remember it vividly as if it had occurred yesterday. We lived in a cotton labor camp in Corcoran. It was December 24, and I, like all children, waited impatiently for Christmas Day. Time passed slowly; minutes seemed to me hours and hours, days.

For many years I dreamed of having a ball of my own, but my wish had never come true. "But now," I thought, "I only have one more day to wait. This year my mamá and papá will give me a little ball." That long day I spent dreaming of how I would enjoy playing with my new toy.

Finally it got dark. All of us went to bed early. I could not sleep, thinking about my ball. The only thing that interrupted my thoughts was the cold winter wind that slapped against the sides of the tent where all eight of us lived. When I heard mamá get up, I pretended to be asleep. Through a small hole in the blanket I watched her, trying to see what gifts she was going to wrap. But she sat behind a wooden crate that served as the table and blocked my view. By the light of the kerosene lamp, I could see only her wrinkled and happy face as she wrapped the gifts. I then noticed her face sadden as she picked something up in her hands. Her eyes filled with tears and I could not understand why.

At dawn, my brothers and sisters and I got up hurriedly to unwrap our presents that were next to our shoes. I picked up mine and anxiously tore the wrapper. When I saw it was a small bag of candy, I was dumbfounded. I looked up at my mamá and noticed she had been watching me. Her sad eyes cried.



## MUERTE FRIA

Francisco Jiménez

Terminando de cenar, el hombre ligeramente encorvado, dirigió su mirada hacia sus dos hijitos que comían con hambre al otro lado de la mesa. Se fijó en el reloj que marcaba las siete y súbitamente se puso de pie diciéndole cariñosamente a su mujer:

- Andale, viejita. Deja el quehacer a los muchachos; que ellos recojan la mesa luego que acaben de comer. Tenemos que irnos. Ya sabes que no me gusta llegar tarde al trabajo.
- Ya voy —contestó con pena su mujer— no más quiero dejar todo preparado por si acaso el Trampita despierta durante la noche.

El Trampita tenía seis meses. Su nombre de bautismo era Juan pero sus padres pobres le llamaron Trampita porque lo vestían de ropita vieja que conseguían en el basurero público de la ciudad.

Ya lista para salir, la mujer se dirigió al hijo mayor y le dijo con voz firme:

- Roberto, no descuides a Panchito y al niño. Si llora el Trampita, dale la botella de leche. ¿Me entiendes?
- Sí, mamá —contestó Roberto tímidamente.

Panchito, con un taco en la mano, preguntó:

- ¿Me trae manzanas de la fábrica de conservas, mamá?
- Sí, hijo; sí . . . pero tienes que portarte bien porque si no, me despiden del trabajo y no podré traer más.

La señora acostó al niño en un colchón ancho que estaba en el suelo. Allí dormía junta toda la familia. Ello servía de calefacción durante el invierno, cuando el aire helado penetraba por la carpa.

El hombre volvió a insistir fastidiosamente:

- Andale mujer que se está haciendo tarde.
- Vámonos pues —contestó ella.

Los dos salieron, dejando a los niños solos. Después de lavar los platos, Roberto y Panchito se sentaron a la orilla del colchón. Pasaron

un rato contando cuentos hasta que los rindió el sueño. Sólo el aire helado del invierno perturbaba su sueño, haciéndolos temblar de frío.

Al amanecer, los padres regresaron del trabajo y encontraron a Roberto y a Panchito durmiendo. Estaban acurrucados y tapados hasta la cabeza con unas garras que servían de cobija.

—¿Y el Trampita? ¿Dónde está? —gritó la madre, aterrorizada al darse cuenta de que el Trampita no estaba allí. Roberto despertó aturdido y asustado por los gritos.

—No sé, mamá —dijo Roberto, tartamudeando y temblando de frío.

El padre se fijó en una abertura al pie de la carpa y sin decir palabra salió corriendo. A los pocos minutos regresó, cabizbajo, con el Trampita en los brazos, tratando de ocultar sus lágrimas que caían como lluvia sobre el cuerpecito pálido y tieso del niño.



## COLD DEATH

Francisco Jiménez

After supper, the slightly stooped man looked at his two sons as they ate hungrily at the other side of the table. He then glanced at the clock that marked seven and quickly got up saying to his wife:

“Come on, dear. Let the boys clean up; have them clear the table after they finish eating. We have to go. You know I don’t like to be late for work.”

“I am coming,” she answered wearily, “I just want to leave everything ready in case Trampita wakes up during the night.”

Trampita was six months old. His given name was Juan but his impoverished parents called him “Trampita” because they dressed him with clothes they found in the city dump.

Ready to leave, the woman turned to the oldest son and said firmly:

“Roberto, don’t let Panchito and the baby out of your sight. If Trampita wakes up, give him the milk bottle. You understand?”

“Yes, mamá,” answered Roberto timidly.

Panchito, with a taco in his hand, asked:

“Will you bring me apples from the cannery, mamá?”

“Yes son, yes . . . but you have to behave because if you don’t, I will be fired from work and then I won’t be able to bring you anything.”

The woman lay the baby on a wide mattress that was on the dirt floor. The whole family slept there. In this way they protected themselves from the winter wind that penetrated the tent.

The man, annoyed, insisted again:

“Come on, it’s getting late.”

“I am ready,” she answered.

They departed, leaving the children alone. After washing dishes, Roberto and Panchito sat on the side of the mattress. They exchanged stories for a while until sleep overcame them. Only the cold winter wind which made them tremble disturbed them.

At dawn, the parents returned from work and found Roberto and Panchito asleep. They were huddled together with rags that served as blankets pulled over their heads.

“Where is Trampita? Where is he?” the woman repeated, screaming

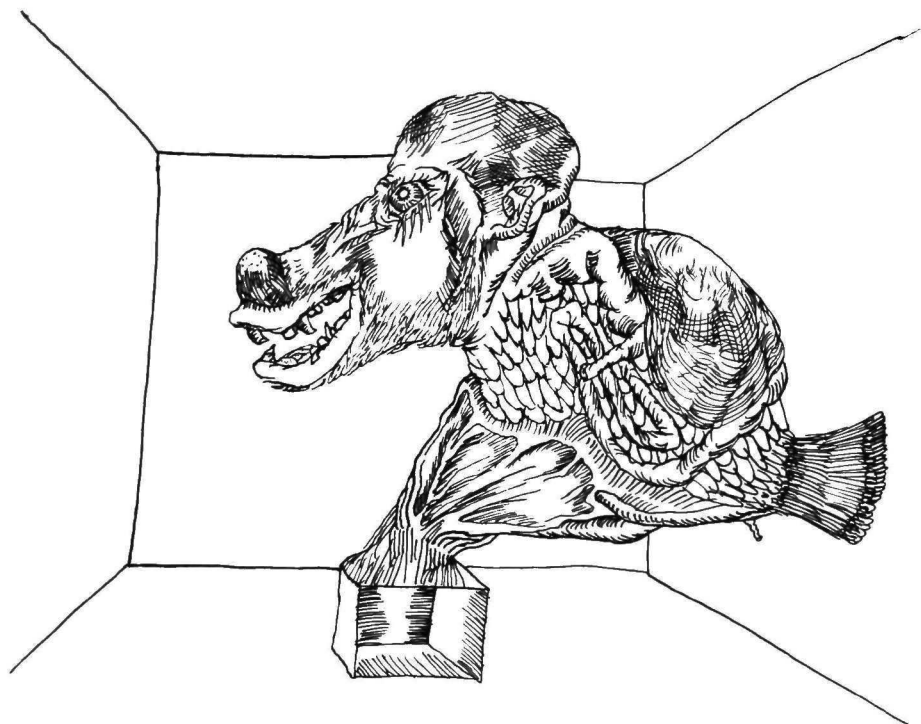
with terror upon discovering that Trampita was not there. Roberto awoke frightened by the screams.

“I don’t know, mamá,” he stuttered and trembled from the cold.

The man noticed an opening at the foot of the tent near the mattress and without saying a word, he rushed out. Seconds later, he returned with Trampita in his arms. Head down the man tried to hide his tears that fell like rain on the stiff and pale body of the child.



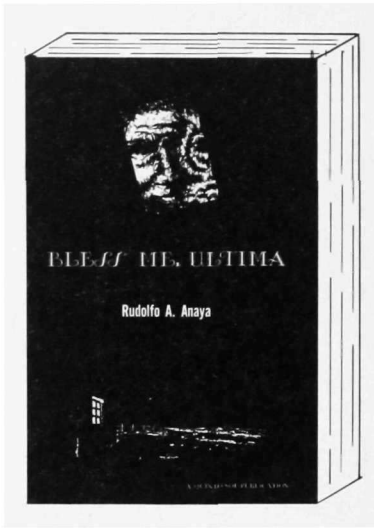








BUT WHOSOEVER SPEAKETH  
AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST, IT  
SHALL NOT BE FORGIVEN HIM  
NEITHER IN THIS WORLD OR THE  
WORLD TO COME.



Rudolfo A. Anaya is the winner of the \$1,000 Second Annual PREMIO QUINTO SOL national Chicano literary award. Mr. Anaya was born in New Mexico. He attended public schools in Santa Rosa, New Mexico, and was graduated from the University of New Mexico.

About writing his novel, Mr. Anaya has said: "I have been writing for the past ten years. I have written volumes of poems, stories, novels, burned some, saved a few. Out of a suitcase full I have, it seemed that ULTIMA distilled into something worthwhile. Writing is not easy. It is a lonely, and oftentimes unappreciated endeavor. But I had to keep creating, I had to keep trying to organize all the beautiful, chaotic things into some pattern. Writing is never quite learned. I have to rewrite and rewrite each manuscript before I'm satisfied. By the way, my writing is completely self-taught. I have never taken a writing course. It's easy. You just have to sit down and write, write, write, and write... hasta que te lleva la madre, y las almorranas."

*From the introduction by Herminio Ríos and Octavio I. Romano-V: BLESS ME, ULTIMA by Rudolfo A. Anaya*

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“...y no  
se lo tragó  
la tierra”

TOMAS RIVERA

“...and  
the earth  
did not part”



*“... y no se lo tragó la tierra”* es una colección bilingüe (español-inglés) de catorce cuentos. Fue la obra premiada en el Primer Concurso Literario Quinto Sol correspondiente al año 1970. El premio consta de mil dólares. Esta obra indiscutiblemente coloca a Tomás Rivera a la vanguardia de los escritores chicanos contemporáneos. En la introducción a la obra del profesor Rivera, Herminio Ríos indica que, “La obra de Tomás Rivera es simultáneamente una continuación del pasado, una cumbre en la época actual, y un punto de partida hacia el futuro de nuestra tradición literaria.” En esta colección, Rivera artísticamente recrea el habla del campesino méxicoamericano. En este sentido nos recuerda mucho de Juan Rufo y su manera sumamente artística de reflejar la sintaxis del campesino mexicano. Pero el mérito de la obra de Rivera no radica solamente en la forma, sino que se ve también especialmente en el contenido.

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