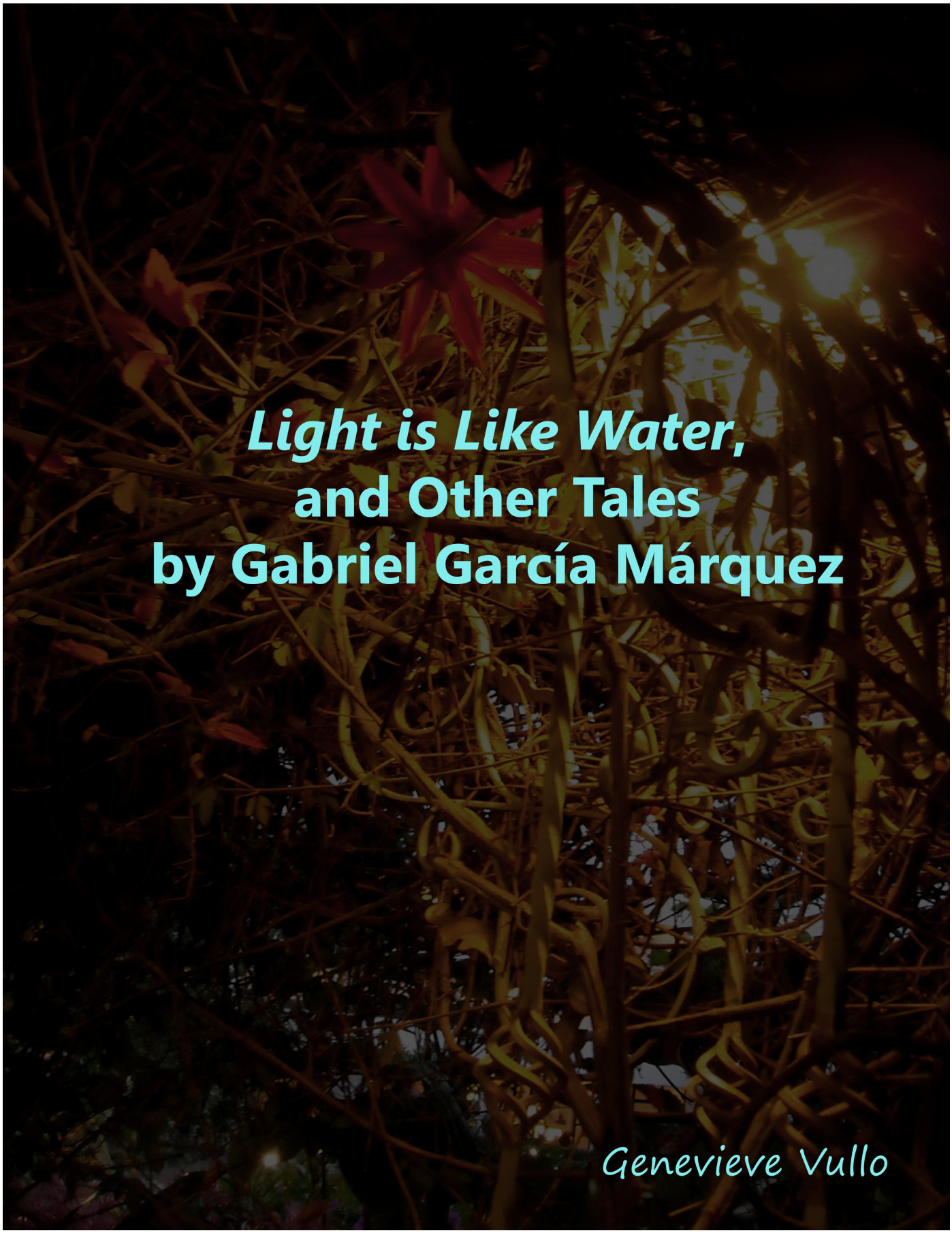

Light is Like Water, and Other Tales by Gabriel García Márquez

Genevieve Vullo

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Foreword

"Where literature exists, translation exists. Joined at the hip, they are absolutely inseparable, and, in the long run, what happens to one happens to the other." - Edith Grossman

Embarking on this project, I was fully aware of the challenge I was about to face. Translation, especially in the realm of creative literature, is a complex, nuanced, and wholly demanding process. The paradox of being faithful to the original text and comprehensible and relatable in the second language creates a thin, treacherous line. Yet translated works are as crucial as the original masterpieces themselves, allowing new and renewed understanding of works previously only available to native speakers.

Ultimately I chose eight short stories by Gabriel García Márquez, a favorite author of mine, to translate for my Senior Honors Capstone. These stories appear in chronological succession from earliest to most recent in the following pages. An additional journal element, which can be found at the end of this project, captures my experience of each tale. In search of the most appropriate and accurate words and phrases, I sifted through online language forums and multiple dictionaries. I also consulted friends and my gracious advisor, Professor Consuelo Hernández. The overall experience was far more engrossing than I could have foreseen.

Awake, I read and reread the stories and my translations, teasing out the meaning of each word, each phrase. Asleep, I dreamt of these tales, finding myself running from stone-curlews through unfamiliar landscapes, through darkness… I was immersed, drowning in the rich waters of fiction and fact.

Allow these eight tales to pull you into the world of 'magical realism,' where the fantastic is not only possible, but probable.

Genevieve Vullo

Someone has Touched These Roses

Since it is Sunday and it has stopped raining, I think I will bring a bouquet of roses to my grave. Red and white roses, the ones she grows to make altars and crowns. The gloomy, eerie weather of the morning had reminded me of the hill where the townspeople abandoned their dead. It is a bare place, without trees, swept clean except for the few fortunate crumbs that return once the wind has passed. Now that it has stopped raining, the midday sun should have dried the path up the hill, making it passable. The sun might now shine on the tomb where my childhood body rests, in the back, now confused, crumbling between snails and roots.

She is kneeling in front of her saints. She has remained completely engrossed in her prayers since I stopped moving in the room, after having failed in my first attempt to reach the altar and grab the most flush and fresh roses. Maybe today I would have been able to do it; but the lantern flickered and she recovered from the trance, raised her head, and looked towards the corner of the room where the chair stood. She must have thought "It's the wind again," because something did rustle next to the altar. The room undulated for a moment, as if the weight of stagnant memories from so long ago had been lifted. I realized then that I must wait for another opportunity to take the roses. She was fully alert, looking at the chair. She would have been able to feel the whisper of my hands next to her face. Now I must wait until, in a moment, she leaves this room and goes to the neighboring bedroom to take the measured and invariable Sunday siesta. It is possible that then I can leave with the roses so I can come back before she returns to this room and stays, watching the chair.

Last Sunday was harder. I had to wait almost two hours until she fell into a trance. She looked restless, worried, as if she were tormented by the certainty that suddenly her loneliness in

the house had become less intense. She paced around the room many times with the bouquet of roses, before abandoning it at the altar. Then she went out to the passageway, looked back inside, and made her way to the neighboring bedroom. I knew that she was looking at the lantern. And after, when she passed by the door once again and I saw her in the brightness of the corridor with her dark sweater and pink stockings, she looked to me as if she were still the same girl who, forty years ago, leaned over my bed in this very same room, and said: "Now that they have propped open your eyelids, your eyes are shiny and hard." She was the same, as if no time had passed since that remote afternoon in August when the women brought her to the room, showed her the body, and told her: "Cry. He was like a brother to you." She leaned against the wall, crying, obeying, still soaked from the rain.

For the past three or four Sundays I have been trying to reach the roses, but she has remained vigilant in front of the altar. She watches over them with an unfamiliar, startling diligence that never before, in her twenty years in this house, has she experienced. Last Sunday, when she went to look for the lantern, I managed to put together a bouquet of the best roses. In no other moment had I been so close to achieving my goal. But, when I was about to return to my chair, I once again heard footsteps in the passageway. I quickly put the roses back in their place on the altar. Then I saw her appear in the doorframe with the lantern raised.

She was wearing her dark sweater and pink stockings, but her face glowed with a revelation. In that moment she did not look like the woman who, for twenty years, grew roses in the orchard. Instead, she looked like the same girl from that August afternoon that was brought to the neighboring bedroom to change her clothes, and now returned with a lantern, fat and old, forty years later.

My shoes still have a hard crust of mud from that afternoon, despite drying for twenty years next to a flameless fireplace. One day I went to look for them. This was after they closed the doors, took down the bread and bouquet of aloe vera from the threshold, and moved out the furniture. All of the furniture, except the corner chair that has been a place for me to rest all this time. I knew my shoes had been put to dry, and that they were simply forgotten when they abandoned the house. So I went to look for them.

She returned many years later. So much time had passed that the musky scent of the room had mixed with the smell of dust and the dry, tiny reek of insects. I was alone in the house, sitting in the corner, waiting. I had learned how to distinguish the murmur of the decomposing wood from the flutter of air turning old in the closed bedrooms. Then she arrived. She had stopped at the door with a suitcase in hand, a green hat and the same cotton sweater that she has not taken off since. She was still a girl. She had not begun to get fat, nor did her ankles bulge beneath her stockings like they did now. I was covered in dust and cobwebs when she opened the door and, somewhere in the room, the cricket that had been singing for twenty years fell silent. But despite this, despite the cobwebs and dust, the sudden silence of the cricket, and the old age of the newcomer, I recognized in her the same girl who, that stormy August afternoon, came with me to knock down nests in the stable. As she stood in the doorway with her suitcase in hand and her green hat, it seemed as if suddenly she were about to yell, to say the same thing that she had when she found me face up on the grass by the stable, still clinging to the rung of the broken ladder. When she opened the door completely, the hinges creaked and the thin dust of the roof slid down in gusts, as if someone had begun to hammer the ridge of the roof. So she wavered in and out of clarity in the doorframe. Then, leaning half of her body into the room, in

the tone of someone calling to a sleeping person she said: "Boy! Boy!" I remained still in the seat, rigid, with my feet stretched out.

I thought that she came only to see the room, but she went on to live in the house. She aired out the room. It was as if she opened her suitcase and from it surged a familiar musk smell. The others brought her furniture and clothing in trunks. She alone had taken the smells of the room with her. Twenty years later she brought them all back, hung them up in their places and rebuilt the little altar; exactly the same as before. Simply her presence was enough to restore what the restless rigor of time had destroyed. Since that day, she eats and sleeps in the adjacent room, but she spends her days in this room, speaking in silence with the saints. In the afternoon she sits in the rocking chair next to the door and mends clothes. She helps those who come to buy flowers. She always rocks as she mends. And when someone comes for a bouquet of roses, she puts the coin in the corner of the handkerchief that she keeps tied at her waist. Without fail she says: "Take the ones on the right, those on the left are for the saints."

For twenty years she has sat in that chair, mending her things, rocking, looking at the other chair. It is as if she no longer takes care of the boy with whom she shared her childhood afternoons. Instead, she cares for the disabled grandson that is here, and has been sitting in the corner since the grandmother was five years old.

It is possible that now, when she once again begins to nod off, I can get closer to the roses. If I mange to do it, I will go to the hill and put them over my tomb. Then I will return to my chair to wait for the day when she no longer comes to this room, and the noises in the neighboring rooms cease.

On this day there will be a transformation. I will have to leave the house once again to tell someone that the woman with the roses, the one that lives alone in the ruined house, needs

four men to bring her to the hill. Then, once and for all, I will be alone in the room. But, in exchange, she will be satisfied. On this day she will learn that it was not an invisible wind that touched the roses on her altar every Sunday.

1952

Night of the Stone-Curlews

The three of us were sitting around a table when someone slid a coin into the jukebox, and the Wurlitzer replayed the record all night long. The rest of us did not have time to think about it. It happened before we were able to remember where we were; before we could regain our bearings. One of us put a hand on top of the counter to search for the others (We couldn't see the hand. We heard it.). It bumped into a glass and remained still afterwards. Now two hands rested on the hard surface. Then the three of us searched for each other in the darkness and met there, on the tabletop, in a pile of thirty fingers. One said:

"Let's go."

And so we stood up as if nothing had happened. We had not had a chance to feel confused.

As we passed through the corridor we heard nearby music weaving around us. We could smell the sorrowful women, sitting and waiting. We sensed the long emptiness of the corridor in front of us as we walked towards the door. We would soon be met by the bitter smell of the woman who sat just outside. We said:

"Let's get out of here."

The woman did not respond in the least. We heard the creaking of a rocker, easing upwards, relieved of her weight when she stood up. We sensed her footsteps on the loose wood. She returned to her chair after we heard hinges creak, and the door closed shut at our backs.

We turned. Right there, behind us, was the harsh, biting air of the invisible dawn and a voice that said:

"Get away from there, I'm trying to get past with this."

We threw ourselves backward. And the voice came back to say:

"You're still against the door."

And only then, when we had moved everywhere possible and we could not escape the voice, we said, "We can't get out of here. The stone-curlews took our eyes."

Then we heard many doors opening. One of us got loose from the others' hands and we heard him drag himself in the darkness, staggering, crashing into the objects that surrounded us. He spoke from somewhere in the darkness:

"Now we must be close," he said. "It smells like there are piles of trunks around here."

Once again we felt the touch of his hands. We leaned against the wall and another voice passed, but in the opposite direction.

"They could be coffins," one of us said.

The one who had dragged himself into the corner spoke again at our side:

"They're trunks. When I was young I learned to recognize the smell of stored clothes."

And so we moved in that direction. The ground was soft and flat, like trampled earth. Someone held out their hand. We made contact with the full, lively skin, but now we did not feel the wall behind us.

"This is a woman," we said.

The other, the one that had known about the trunks, said:

"I think she's sleeping."

The body shook under our touch. It trembled. We felt it slip away, but not as if it had gone beyond our reach. Instead it was as if it had ceased to exist. Nonetheless, after an instant in which we remained still and drew closer together, shoulder to shoulder, we heard her voice.

"Who goes there?" she asked.

“It is us,” we responded without moving.

You could hear creaking in the bed and the shuffling of feet looking for slippers in the darkness. Then we imagined the woman sitting, watching us, not yet fully awake.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

And we answered:

“We don’t know. The stone-curlews took our eyes.”

The voice said that she had heard something about this. The newspapers had said that three men were drinking beer on a patio where there were five or six stone-curlews. Seven stone-curlews. One of the men began to sing like a stone-curlew, imitating them.

“Unfortunately it was at a backward hour,” she said. “And so the birds jumped onto the table and took out their eyes.”

That was what the newspapers said, she explained, but no one had believed them. We said:

“If people went there, they would have seen the stone-curlews.”

And the woman said:

“They went. The patio was full of people the next day, but the woman had already taken the stone-curlews somewhere else.”

When we turned, the woman stopped speaking. There, once again, was the wall. Simply by turning we would always find the wall. A wall was always around us, enclosing us. The same man once again freed himself from our hands. We heard him trace the ground again, sniffing, saying:

“Now I don’t know where the trunks are. I think we’re somewhere else.”

And we said:

“Come here. Someone is here, next to us.”

We heard him come closer. We felt him raise himself to our side and again his warm breath grazed our cheeks.

“Reach your hands over here,” we told him. “There’s someone who’s heard of us.”

He must have put out his hand. He must have moved where we told him to, because an instant later he returned to tell us:

“I think it’s a boy.”

And we told him:

“Okay, ask him if he knows who we are.”

He asked. We heard the uninterested, simple voice of the boy who said:

“Yes, I’ve heard of you. You’re the three men whose eyes were taken out by the stone-curlews.”

Then an adult voice spoke. It was a woman’s voice that seemed to be behind a closed door, saying:

“Now you’re talking to yourself.”

The child’s voice carelessly replied:

“No. It’s the men whose eyes were taken out by the stone-curlews.”

Then there was the noise of hinges creaking, followed by the adult voice, closer than the first time.

“Bring them home,” she said.

And the boy replied:

“I don’t know where they live.”

The adult voice answered:

“Don’t be so disagreeable. Everyone has known where they live since the night the stone-curlews took their eyes.”

Then she went on, speaking in another tone, as if she were talking to us:

“What happened is that no one wanted to believe it. They said that it was a bogus story, made up by the newspapers to increase sales. No one has seen the stone-curlews.”

So we said:

“But no one would believe us if we took them through the streets.”

We didn’t move. We were motionless, leaning against the wall, listening to her. The woman said:

“If he wants to take you it’s different. After all, no one gives a damn what a boy says.”

The childish voice interceded:

“If I go out there with them and I say that they’re the men whose eyes were taken by the stone-curlews, the other kids will throw stones at me. Everyone says that it’s impossible.”

There was a moment of silence. Then the door closed. The boy began to speak once more:

“Anyways, I’m reading Terry and the Pirates.”

Someone whispered in our ear:

“I’ll convince him.”

He inched towards the voice.

“I like that one,” he said. “At least tell us what’s happening to Terry this week.”

He’s trying to gain his trust, we thought. But the boy said:

“I don’t care about that. I only like the colored comic strips.”

“Terry is in a labyrinth,” we said.

“That was Friday. Today is Sunday and I like the colored ones.” He said with a cold, detached, indifferent voice.

When the other man returned to us, we said:

“We’ve been lost for almost three days and we haven’t rested once.”

And one replied: “Okay. We’ll rest for a while, but without letting go of our hands.”

We sat. An invisible warm sun began to heat our shoulders. But not even the presence of the sun interested us. We felt it there, wherever we were, having lost our sense of time, space, and direction. Many voices passed us.

“The stone-curlews took our eyes,” we said.

And one of the voices said:

“These guys are taking the newspapers seriously.”

The voices disappeared. And so we stayed sitting like that, shoulder to shoulder. We waited for a familiar scent or voice to pass in that river of voices and images. The sun continued to warm our heads. Then someone said:

“Let’s go towards the wall again.”

And the others, motionless, with heads raised towards the invisible light, said:

“Not yet. Let’s at least wait until the sun begins to burn our faces.”

1953

The Torment of Three Sleepwalkers

Now we had her there, resigned to one corner of the house. Someone told us, before we moved her things – her fragrant clothing smelling of fresh wood, her weightless shoes for the clay ground – that she could not get accustomed to the slow life, without sweet tastes, without any other charm than the impenetrable, marble solitude always pressing down on her. Someone told us – and much time had passed before we would remember it – that she too had a childhood. Maybe we did not believe it then. But now, seeing her sitting in the corner with eyes like saucers and one finger placed over her lips, maybe we recognized that once she had a childhood. That at one time she could sense the early freshness of rain. Yet her body always bore the silhouette of an unexpected shadow.

All of this – and much more – we learned that afternoon when we realized that, on top of her tremendous internal life, she was completely human. We discover this when suddenly she began to howl as if inside her glass had shattered. She began to call each of us by name, choking out words between sobs until we sat next to her. We began to sing and clap our hands, as if our yelling could weld the scattered glass shards. Only then could we believe that she had a childhood. It was as if her screams were a revelation; as if they were a flourishing tree, fed by a deep river. When she pulled herself together, she leaned forward a little and, still without covering her face with her apron, still without blowing her nose, and still crying, she told us: "I will never smile again."

The three of us went to the patio without speaking. Perhaps we believed we could read each others' minds. Maybe we thought that it would be better not to turn on the house lights.

She wanted to be alone – maybe – sitting in the dark corner, weaving her last braid. It seemed to be the only human thing about her that would survive her transformation into an animal.

Outside on the patio, submerged in the deep mist of insects, we sat and thought about her. We had done this many times before. We could have said that we were doing what we had done every day of our lives.

Nonetheless, that night was different; she had said that she would never smile again. We knew her so well that we were certain that the nightmare had come true. Sitting in a triangle we imagined her inside the house, her mind elsewhere, incapacitated. She could not hear the countless clocks that measured the time, marked and meticulous, in which she was turning to dust. "If only we had the strength to wish for her death," we thought in unison.

But we wanted her like that, ugly and frigid like a selfish contribution to our hidden flaws.

We were adults even before this, many years earlier. She was, nonetheless, the eldest of the house. This same night she could have been there, sitting with us, feeling the warm pulse of the stars, surrounded by healthy sons. She would have been the respectable woman of the house if she had been the wife of a good middle-class bourgeois man or the concubine of a punctual man. But she became accustomed to living in one single dimension, like a straight line, perhaps because her vices or virtues could not align with her profile. For years we had known it. It did not even surprise us when one morning after waking, we found her face down on the patio, biting the ground in a hard, static pose. Then she smiled and turned to look at us; she had fallen from the second-story window onto the hard clay of the patio and had stayed there, stiff and concrete, flat on her face in the damp mud. Later, we found out that the one thing that remained intact was her fear of heights, the natural panic in front of empty space. We stood her up by the shoulders.

She was not as sturdy as she had seemed at first. On the contrary; she had soiled herself, her intestines free from her will, like a warm corpse that had not yet begun to stiffen.

Her eyes were open, her mouth dirty from the earth that must have tasted like the dirt of a tomb. When we turned her to face the sun it was as if we had put her in front of a mirror. As I held her in my arms, she looked at us all with a lifeless, sexless expression, which gave us a sense of her true absence. Someone told us she was dead. Then she was smiling with that cold and calm grin like she did the nights when she wandered, half-awake through the house. She said she did not know how she got to the patio. She said she had felt very hot, and she was hearing a piercing, high-pitched cricket that seemed (as she said) to be trying to knock down the wall of her room. Then she had begun to recite the Sunday prayers, with her cheek pressed to the cement floor.

Nonetheless, we would find out that she had not been able to remember any prayers. Just as we later learned that she had lost all sense of time when she said that she had been sleeping, holding up the wall that the cricket was pushing from the outside. She said that she was completely asleep when someone pulled her by the shoulders, separated her from the wall, and turned her face-up towards the sun.

Sitting on the patio that night we knew she would not smile again. Maybe in that moment her severe expression hurt us, and we felt a hint of the pain we would feel witnessing, over time, her dark and determined, isolated life. It continued to deeply hurt us; just as we were hurt the day when we saw her sitting in that same corner and heard her say that she would never again wander about the house. At first we could not believe her. For entire months we had seen her walking through the rooms at every hour, stubborn and slouched, without stopping, without ever getting tired. At night we heard the steady murmur of her body, heavy, moving between

two darknesses. Most times we would stay awake in our beds, hearing her stealthy walk, using our ears to follow her through the whole house. Once, she told us that she had seen the cricket inside the mirror, sunken, submerged in the solid transparency, and that she had gone through the glass surface to reach it. We did not know, in reality, what it was she wanted to tell us. But we all realized that her clothes were wet, plastered to her body, as if she had just come out of a pond. Without trying to explain the incident we decided to exterminate all the insects of the house; to destroy the objects that obsessed her. We had the walls cleaned, we ordered the bushes on the patio cut, and it was as if we had restored the silence of the night. But then we did not hear her walk nor speak of crickets until the day when, after dinner, she kept looking at us, sat herself on the cement floor still without breaking the stare, and told us: "I will stay here, sitting." We shuddered. We could see that she was beginning to resemble something that was already very much like death.

Much time had passed since this, until we became accustomed to seeing her there, sitting with her braid always half woven, as if she had dissolved in her solitude. As if, although you were looking right at her, she had lost the natural ability to exist. Because of this, we knew that she would not smile again; because she had said it in the same convinced and definitive way in which she once told us that she would not walk again. It was as if we could be certain that later she would tell us: "I will not see again," or maybe "I will not hear again." We would find out what was the most basic form of humanity, as she would go on willingly eliminating her vital functions. Spontaneously she would terminate sense after sense, until the day that we would find her resting against the wall, as if she had fallen asleep for the first time in her life. Maybe there was much time left before this. But us three, sitting on the patio, would have wished for that

night, to hear her sharp and sudden wail like broken glass, to at least create the illusion that a child had been born in the house. To believe that she had been born again.

1949

One of These Days

Monday the sun rose lukewarm and without rain. Aurelio Escovar, a degree-less dentist and dedicated early-riser, opened his office at six. He took out dentures from the display case, still in their plaster mold, and set a fistful of instruments on top of the table. He put them in order from biggest to smallest, like in an exhibit. He wore a collarless striped shirt, closed at the top with a golden button, and pants held up by stretchy suspenders. He was strict and lean, with a gaze that rarely corresponded to the situation, like the blank stare of a blind man.

When he had everything arranged on the table, he rolled the drill towards the spring chair and sat to polish the false teeth. He seemed to not think about what he was doing, but he worked with determination, pedaling the drill to make it whirl even when he was not using it.

After eight he took a break to look at the sky through the window. He saw two brooding vultures drying themselves in the sun on the ridge of a neighboring roof. He went back to work, thinking that before lunch it would rain again. The grating voice of his eleven year old son shook him from his daydream.

"Dad."

"What."

"The mayor says you've got to take his tooth out."

"Tell him I'm not here."

He was polishing a gold tooth. He held it at arms length and examined it with his eyes half closed. From the waiting room his son yelled once again.

"He says you *are* here because he can hear you."

The dentist continued to examine the tooth. Only when he put it on the table with his other finished work he said:

"Great."

He went back to using the drill. From the cardboard box where he kept things to be done, he took out a many-pieced bridge and began to polish the gold.

"Dad."

"What."

He still had not changed his expression.

"He says if you don't take out his tooth he'll shoot you."

Without rushing, with a remarkably calm movement, he stopped pedaling the drill, pulled back the chair and opened the bottom drawer of the table. There sat his revolver.

"Okay," he said. "Tell him to come shoot me."

He turned the chair so that it sat in front of the door, his hand resting on the edge of the drawer. The mayor appeared in the doorway. He had shaved his left cheek, but the other, swollen and aching, had five days worth of facial hair. In his withered eyes the dentist saw evidence of many anguished nights. He closed the drawer with the tip of his finger and said smoothly:

"Take a seat."

"Good day," said the mayor.

"Good day," said the dentist.

While the instruments boiled, the mayor rested his skull in the headrest of the chair and felt better. He sensed the ice cold atmosphere. It was a shabby office: one old wooden chair, a pedal drill, and a display case with china knobs. In front of the chair was a window with a half-

curtains as high as a man's head. When he sensed the dentist nearing, the mayor dug in his heels and opened his mouth.

Aurelio Escovar moved his face towards the light. After looking at the damaged tooth, he adjusted the jaw, cautiously pressing with his fingers.

"I'll have to do it without anesthesia," he said.

"Why?"

"Because you have an abscess."

The mayor looked him in the eyes.

"Okay," he said, and he tried to smile. The dentist did not smile back. He brought the pan with the boiled instruments to the work table and took them out with cold tongs, still not hurrying. Then he rolled the spittoon over with the toe of his shoe and went to wash his hands in the washbasin. He did all of this without looking at the mayor. But the mayor did not take his eyes off the dentist.

It was a lower wisdom tooth. The dentist repositioned himself and clenched the tooth with the dental clamp. The mayor seized the chair's armrests, pushed all his strength into his feet and felt an icy emptiness in his kidneys, but he did not say a word. The dentist only moved the tooth. Without animosity, more so with bitter tenderness, he said:

"Here you will pay us back for our twenty dead, lieutenant."

The mayor felt a crunching of bones in his jaw and his eyes welled with tears. But he did not breathe until he could feel the tooth come out. Then he saw it through his tears. His pain seemed so foreign that he could not understand the torture of the five previous nights. Leaning over the spittoon, sweaty, panting, he unbuttoned his military jacket and felt for his handkerchief in the pocket of his pants. The dentist handed him a clean cloth.

“Dry your tears,” he said.

The mayor did. He was shaking. While the dentist washed his hands, he noticed the suspended ceiling caving in and a dusty web with spiders’ eggs and dead insects. The dentist returned, drying his hands. “Rest,” he said, “and rinse your mouth with salt water.” The mayor stood up, said goodbye with an indifferent military salute, and went towards the door, stretching his legs, without buttoning his military jacket.

“Send me the bill,” he said.

“Send it to you or to the city?”

The mayor did not look at him. He closed the door and said, through the screen:

“It’s the same thing.”

1962

Artificial Roses

Groping her way in the half-light of dawn, Mina put on the sleeveless dress that she had hung next to her bed the night before and rummaged through her trunk for her fake sleeves. Then she searched for them on the nails in the wall and behind the door, trying not to make a sound so as not to wake her blind grandmother who slept in the same room. When her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she realized that her grandmother had gotten up. So she went to the kitchen to ask her about the sleeves.

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

There they were, hanging from a wire held on by two clothespins. They were still damp. Mina returned to the kitchen and laid out the sleeves on the stones of the stove. In front of her the blind woman stirred the coffee, her dead pupils fixed on the ledge of bricks in the corridor where there was a row of medicinal herbs.

"Don't pick up my things again," Mina said. "These days you can't count on the sun."

The blind woman turned her face towards the voice.

"I had forgotten that it was the First Friday of the month," she said.

After inhaling deeply to see if the coffee was done, she took the pot off the burner.

"Put a piece of paper underneath them, because these stones are dirty," she said.

Mina rubbed her index finger against the stones of the stove. There was a crust of soot that would not dirty the sleeves if they did not rub directly against it.

"If they get dirty you're the one to blame," she said.

The blind woman had gotten herself a cup of coffee.

“You’re angry,” she said, rolling a chair towards the corridor. “It’s sacrilegious to receive the holy communion when you’re angry.” She sat to drink her coffee in front of the roses on the patio. When the third stroke for mass tolled, Mina took her sleeves from the stove. They were still damp, but she put them on. Father Ángel would not give her the communion if she had bare shoulders. She did not wash her face. With a towel she wiped off what was left of her blush, grabbed the book of prayers and her silk scarf from her room, and left. A quarter of an hour later she was back.

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

Mina went directly to the outhouse.

“I can’t go to mass,” she said. “My sleeves are wet and none of my clothes are ironed.” She felt herself being followed by a clairvoyant stare.

“It’s First Friday and you aren’t going to mass,” the blind woman remarked.

On her way back from the outhouse, Mina got a cup of coffee and sat against the lime doorjamb near the blind woman. But she could not drink her coffee.

“It’s your fault,” she murmured, with muffled resentment, feeling like she was drowning in tears.

“You’re crying,” the blind woman exclaimed.

She put the watering pot down next to the oregano plants and left the patio, repeating: “You’re crying.”

Mina put her cup on the floor before standing up.

“I’m crying out of anger,” she said. And as she passed her grandmother, she added: “You have to confess your sins, because you made me miss First Friday communion.”

The blind woman stayed still, waiting for Mina to close the door of the bedroom. Then she walked to the end of the corridor. She leaned over, feeling her way, until she found the intact cup on the floor. As she poured the coffee back into the clay pot, she went on to say: "God knows my conscience is clear."

Mina's mother came out of her bedroom.

"Who are you talking to?" she asked.

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

Shut away in her room, Mina unbuttoned her bodice and took out three little keys that she wore held together on a safety pin. With one of the keys she opened the lower drawer of the dresser and took out a miniature wooden chest. She opened it with the next key. Inside was a packet of letters on colored paper, bundled together by an elastic band. She put them beneath her bodice, put the little trunk in its place and once again locked the drawer. Then she went to the outhouse and threw the letters to the bottom of the pit.

"I thought you were in mass," said the mother.

"She couldn't go," the blind woman interjected. "I forgot that it was First Friday and I washed her sleeves yesterday afternoon."

"They're still damp," muttered Mina.

"You've had to work a lot these days," said the blind woman.

"On Easter I have to deliver one hundred and fifty dozen roses," Mina replied.

The sun came out early that day. Before seven Mina set up her artificial rose workshop in her room: a basket full of petals and wire, a crate of elastic paper, two pairs of scissors, a spool of thread and a jar of glue. A moment later Trinidad arrived, with a cardboard box under her arm, to ask her why she had not gone to mass.

“I didn’t have sleeves,” said Mina.

“Anyone would have been able to lend you some,” said Trinidad.

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

“It made me late,” said Mina.

She finished a rose. Afterwards she pulled the basket towards her to curl the loose petals with scissors. Trinidad put her cardboard box on the floor and joined in the work.

Mina noticed the box.

“Did you buy shoes?” she asked.

“They’re dead mice,” said Trinidad.

Because Trinidad was an expert petal-curler, Mina devoted herself to making wire stems covered in green paper. They worked in silence without noticing how the sun moved through the room, decorated with idyllic paintings and familiar photographs. When she finished the stems, Mina turned back to Trinidad with a blank expression, her mind elsewhere. Trinidad curled petals with admirable preciseness, barely moving the tips of her fingers, her legs tightly pressed together. Mina noticed she was wearing men’s shoes. Trinidad avoided the glance and, without lifting her head, ever-so-slightly pulled her legs back and interrupted their work.

“What happened?” she asked.

Mina leaned towards her.

“He’s gone,” she said.

Trinidad dropped the scissors in her lap.

“No.”

“He left,” Mina repeated.

Trinidad looked at her without blinking. A vertical wrinkle marked her furrowed brow.

“And now what?” she asked.

Mina responded, without a tremor in her voice.

“Now nothing.”

Trinidad left before ten.

Free from the weight of her secret, Mina took a moment to throw the dead mice into the outhouse. The blind woman was pruning the rose bed.

“I bet you don’t know what I have in this box,” Mina said to her as she passed.

She shook the box.

The blind woman listened closely.

“Move it again,” she said.

Mina repeated the motion. After listening for a third time with her index finger pressed to her earlobe, the blind woman still could not identify the objects.

“They’re the mice that fell in the church’s trap last night,” said Mina.

Returning, she passed by the blind woman without speaking. But the blind woman followed her. When she got to the room, Mina was alone next to the closed window, finishing the artificial roses.

“Mina,” said the blind woman, “if you want to be happy, don’t count on strangers.”

Mina looked at her without speaking. The blind woman took the seat in front of her and tried to join in the work. But Mina stopped her.

“You’re on edge,” said the blind woman.

“It’s your fault,” said Mina.

“Why didn’t you go to mass?”

“You know better than anyone.”

“If it had been because of the sleeves you wouldn’t have even left the house,” said the blind woman. “On your way there, someone was waiting for you and told you something you did not want to hear.”

Mina passed her hands in front of her grandmother’s eyes, as if she were wiping an invisible glass pane.

“You are a psychic,” she said.

“You have gone to the outhouse twice this morning,” said the blind woman. “You never go more than once.”

Mina continued to make roses.

“Would you be willing to show me what you keep in the dresser drawer?” the blind woman asked.

Without hurrying Mina stuck the rose in the window frame, took the three keys out from beneath her bodice, and put them in the blind woman’s hand. She closed the woman’s fingers around them.

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

Her grandmother examined the little keys with the tips of her fingers.

“My eyes cannot see the bottom of the outhouse.”

Mina lifted her head and had the strange feeling that the blind woman knew that she was watching her.

“Throw yourself to the bottom of the outhouse if my things interest you so much,” she said.

The blind woman ignored the comment.

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

“You yourself turn off the lights,” Mina said.

“And immediately after you turn on the small lantern,” said the blind woman. “By your breathing I can tell what you are writing.”

Mina made an effort not to move.

“Okay,” she said without raising her head. “And suppose that is what happens. What’s so strange about it?”

“Nothing,” responded the blind woman. “Only that it made you miss First Friday communion.”

Mina gathered the spool of thread, the scissors, and a fistful of stems and unfinished roses with both hands. She put everything in the basket and confronted the blind woman.

“So you want me to tell you what I went to do in the outhouse?” she asked. The two remained in suspense, until Mina responded to her own question: “I went to shit.”

Her grandmother threw the three little keys into the basket.

“It would be a good excuse,” she murmured, making her way to the kitchen. “You would have convinced me if this weren’t the first time in your life that I’ve heard you swear.”

Mina’s mother was coming through the corridor in the opposite direction, loaded down with thorny stems.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“I’m crazy,” said the blind woman. “But as far as I can tell they won’t send me to the madhouse until I start to throw stones.”

1962

The Airplane of Sleeping Beauty

She was beautiful, elastic, with tender skin the color of bread and green almond-shaped eyes. Her hair was straight and black and reached her waist, and she had an aura of rich ancestry, the kind that could have been from Indonesia or the Andes. She dressed in fine taste: a linen jacket, a natural silk blouse with pale flowers, rough linen pants, and high heeled shoes the color of bougainvillea flowers. "This is the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen in my life," I thought, when I saw her pass with her stealthy, long, lioness strides while I got in line to board the plane to New York at the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris. She was a supernatural apparition that lasted only an instant, then disappeared into the crowd in the lobby.

It was nine in the morning. It had been snowing since the night before. The traffic was thicker than usual in the city streets and even slower on the highway. There were tractor trailers lined up at the road's edge and overheating automobiles in the snow. In the lobby of the airport, on the other hand, life went on as if it were spring.

I was in the line for the counter behind an elderly Dutchwoman who took nearly an hour arguing about the weight of her eleven suitcases. I was beginning to get bored when I saw the instantaneous apparition that left me breathless. So I never knew how the argument ended. The employee pulled me from the clouds, reprimanding me for daydreaming. As a way of excusing myself, I asked her if she believed in love at first sight. "Of course," she said. "Any other kind of love is impossible." She continued with her eyes fixed on the computer screen, and asked me what kind of seat I wanted: smoking or non-smoking.

"It's the same to me," I told her deliberately, "as long as I'm not next to the woman with eleven suitcases."

She gave me a commercial smile without taking her eyes from the phosphorescent screen.

"Pick a number," she told me. "Three, four, or seven."

"Four."

Her smile had a triumphant sparkle.

"In the fifteen years that I've been here," she said. "You're the first who didn't choose seven."

She marked the seat number on the ticket and handed it to me with the rest of my documents, looking at me for the first time with grape-colored eyes that consoled me as I turned to look for the beauty. Only then did she warn me that the airport was about to close and all the flights were suspended.

"Until when?"

"God only knows," she said with a smile. "They announced this morning that it would be the biggest snowstorm of the year."

They were wrong: it was the biggest of the century. But in the first class waiting room, it was spring. There were live roses in vases and the canned music seemed sublime and tranquilizing, just as its creators intended. Suddenly it occurred to me that this was a suitable refuge for the beauty, and so I looked for her in the other rooms as well, shaken by my own boldness. But the majority of people were real-life men reading English newspapers while their wives thought of other things. The women gazed at the dead airplanes in the snow through the panoramic windows, staring at the ice cold factories and the vast fields of Roissy devastated by the lions. After midday there was no open space, and the heat had become so unbearable that I had to escape the room to breathe.

Outside was a shocking sight. People of all sorts had overflowed from the waiting rooms. They were camped out in the suffocating corridors and even on the stairs, laying on the floors with their animals, children, and their travel bags. Also, communication with the city was interrupted and the transparent plastic palace looked like an immense space capsule stranded in the storm. I could not help but think that the beauty must have been somewhere in the midst of that tame horde. This fantasy filled me with new hope.

By lunchtime we had taken on the mindset of castaways. Lines were endless in front of the seven restaurants, cafes, and crammed bars. In less than three hours they had to close because there was nothing left to eat or drink. The children who, for a moment, seemed to be all of the children in the world, began to cry at the same time, and the scent of a herd began to rise from the crowd. It was a time of instincts. The only thing I was able to snatch up to eat in the midst of it all were the last two ice cream cups from a children's store. I ate them little by little at the counter while the waiters put empty chairs on the tables and watched me in the back mirror, with the last little cardboard cup and spoon, thinking of the beauty.

The flight to New York, scheduled for eleven o'clock in the morning, left at eight at night. When I finally was able to board, the first class passengers were already in their places, and a stewardess showed me to mine. My breath escaped me. In the seat next to me, next to the small window, the beauty was making herself comfortable in her space with the natural ease of an expert traveler. "If I were ever to write about this, no one would believe me," I thought. And I barely attempted, in my broken French, a hesitant greeting that she did not even notice.

She settled down as if she were preparing to live there for many years, putting everything in order in its place until the space was as well arranged as in a perfect house where everything was within one's reach. While she did it, the chief flight attendant brought us the welcoming

champagne. I took a glass to offer to her, but I should not have. She only wanted a glass of water. Next, in incomprehensible French and then in barely better English, she asked the flight attendant not wake her for any reason during the flight. Her voice, solemn and halfhearted, carried an eastern sorrow within it.

When they brought her the water, in her lap she opened a toiletry box with copper corners, like a grandmother's trunk, and took out two golden pills from a case with many other multicolored ones. She did all of this in a methodical and calm fashion, as if from the moment she had been born, everything had been planned for her. At last she pulled down the window curtain, reclined the seat as far as it could go, covered herself with a blanket up to her waist without taking off her shoes, put on her sleeping mask, lied down on her side in the seat with her back to me, and slept without pause, without breath, without shifting, during the eternal eight hours and twelve minutes that remained in the flight to New York.

It was an intense flight. I had always thought that there was nothing more fascinating in all of nature than a beautiful woman. So it was impossible for me to escape even for an instant the spell of this fairy tale creature that slept at my side. The flight attendant had disappeared as soon as we took off, and was replaced by a Cartesian stewardess that tried to wake the beauty to give her the toiletry bag and headphones. I told the stewardess the warning that the beauty had given to the chief flight attendant, but the she insisted on hearing from the beauty herself that she did not want dinner. The woman had to check with the head attendant, and even then she scolded me because the beauty had not hung the little card around her neck that said not to disturb her.

I had dinner in solitude, telling myself in silence what I would have said to her if she had been awake. Her sleep was so steady that in one moment I worried that perhaps the pills she had taken were to kill her, not to put her to sleep. Before each sip, I raised my glass and toasted.

"To your health, beauty."

After dinner they shut off the lights, played a movie that no one watched, and the two of us were left alone in the twilight of the world. The greatest storm of the century had passed, the night above the Atlantic was immense and pure, and the plane seemed motionless between the stars. So I studied her, inch by inch for many hours, and the only sign of life that I could see were reflections of her dreams that passed over her face like clouds over water. Around her neck hung a chain that was so fine it was almost invisible over her golden skin, her ears perfect and un-pierced, pink, healthy nails, and a plain ring on her left hand. Because she didn't look to be more than twenty years old, I consoled myself with the thought that it wasn't a wedding ring but a ring from a short-lived engagement. "To know that you sleep, certain, sure, faithful river of abandonment, pure line, so close to my tied hands," I thought, repeating the brilliant sonnet of Gerardo Diego into the crest of champagne bubbles. Later I reclined my seat to the level of hers, and we lay closer than we would have in a full-size bed. The aura of her breath was the same as her sorrowful voice, and her skin released a faint aroma that could only be the very scent of her beauty. It was incredible to me: the previous spring I had read a lovely novella by Yasunarl Kawabata about the ancient bourgeois of Kyoto who would pay enormous sums to spend the night studying the most beautiful women of the city, naked and drugged, while they, the men, were dying of love in the same bed. They could neither wake them nor touch them. They would not even try because the essence of the pleasure was to watch them sleep. That night, watching

over the dreams of the beauty, I not only understood the senile refinement, but I lived it in plentitude.

"Who would believe it?" I said to myself, my self-esteem exacerbated by the champagne: "I'm an elderly Japanese man at this altitude."

I believe I slept for several hours, conquered by the champagne and the muted flashes of the movie. I awoke with a splitting headache. I went to the bathroom. Two spots behind me laid the elderly woman, the one with eleven suitcases, rudely splayed across the seat. She looked like a forgotten corpse on a battlefield. On the floor in the middle of the aisle sat her reading glasses with a chain of colored beads. For a moment I enjoyed not having to pick them up for her.

After surfacing from the excessive champagne, I surprised myself in the mirror, disgraceful and ugly, and I was astonished at how terrible the ravages of love could be. Suddenly the plane dropped, righted itself as best it could, and continued to fly at a breakneck speed. The light that tells passengers to return to their seats turned on. I bolted out, hoping that God's turbulence would wake the beauty, and she would have to take refuge in my arms, fleeing from terror. In my rush I was about to step on the glasses of the Dutch woman. It would have made me happy. But I retraced my steps, picked them up, and put them in her lap, grateful that she had not chosen seat number four before I did.

The beauty's sleep was invincible. When the plane stabilized, I had to fight the urge to shake her under some pretext, because the only thing I wished for in the last hour of the flight was to see her awake, even if she were enraged, so that I could recover my independence, and perhaps my youth. But I could not do it. "Damn," I thought, with contempt. "Why wasn't I born a Taurus!" She awoke on her own the instant that they put on the landing announcements, and

she was as beautiful and fresh as if she had slept on a bed of roses. Only then did it dawn on me that seatmates in planes, just like in old marriages, do not say good morning upon waking. Neither did she. She took off her sleeping mask, opened her radiant eyes, put her seat in an upright position, threw the blanket to the side, and shook out her hair and so that it fell into place. She once again placed the case on her knees, quickly put on superfluous makeup, taking just long enough so that she did not have to look at me until the plane door opened. And so she put on her silk jacket and slid by almost on top of me with a conventional apology in the pure Spanish of the Americas. She went without saying goodbye, without thanking me in the least for all that I did during our happy night together. She disappeared into the jungle of New York and has been gone ever since.

1982

Ghosts of August

We got to Arezzo a little before midday, and we wasted more than two hours looking for the Renaissance castle that Miguel Otero Silva, a Venezuelan writer, had bought in the idyllic bends of the Tuscan countryside. It was a Sunday in early August, burning and bustling. With the streets filled with tourists, it was almost impossible to find someone who knew their way around. After many fruitless attempts, we returned to the automobile and left the city on a path lined with lifeless cypresses. An old woman watching the geese told us exactly where the castle was. Before leaving she asked if we planned to sleep there. So we answered that we were only going for lunch, as we had planned.

"Thank goodness," she said, "because that house is haunted."

My wife and I did not believe in midday ghosts, so we made fun of her gullibility. But our two sons, nine and seven years old, were thrilled by the idea of meeting a ghost in the flesh.

In addition to being a good writer, Miguel Otero Silva was a splendid host and had a sophisticated palate. He had prepared an unforgettable lunch for us. Because it had gotten quite late, we did not have time to see the inside of the castle before sitting down at the table, but from the outside it looked harmless. Any concern we may have had was erased by the incredible view of the city from the flowered terrace where we ate. It was hard to believe that on that hill of teetering houses, where not even ninety thousand people could fit, so many men of everlasting genius had been born. Nonetheless, Miguel Otero Silva told us, with his Caribbean humor, that none of them was the most distinguished in Arezzo.

"The greatest," he proclaimed, "was Ludovico."

Just like that, without a last name: Ludovico, the greatest man of art and war who had built that castle of misfortune. Miguel spoke of him throughout lunch. He told us of his immense power, his ill-fated love and his horrifying death. He told us how, in an instant of passionate fervor, he had stabbed his lover in the bed where they had just made love. Then he set his ferocious war dogs on himself and was torn to shreds. He assured us, solemnly, that at the stroke of midnight the sprit of Ludovico wandered through the house in darkness, trying to find peace in the purgatory of love.

The castle, in reality, was immense and dark. But in broad daylight with a full stomach and happy heart, Miguel's tale just sounded like one of the many jokes he tells to entertain his guests. The eighty-two rooms we walked through without awe after the siesta had suffered through all kinds of adjustments, owner after owner. Miguel had completely restored the first floor. He had constructed a modern bedroom with marble floors, a sauna, a fitness center, and a terrace, covered in flourishing flowers, where we had eaten. The second floor had been used the most over the course of the centuries and was composed of a series of characterless rooms. The furniture from different time periods was left to its own devices. But the last door opened on an intact room, perfectly preserved, as if time had simply forgotten to pass there. It was Ludovico's room.

It was a magical moment. Right in front of us was the bed with a gold-embroidered canopy and tasseled bedspread still stiff with the dried blood of the sacrificed lover. There was the hearth with solid cinders, the last log turned to stone, the well-polished dresser, and an oil portrait of a pensive nobleman in a gold frame, painted by one of the Florentine masters who did not outlast his time. Nonetheless, what stunned me the most was the scent of fresh strawberries that seemed to be encapsulated within the bedroom without possible explanation.

Summer days are long and slow in Tuscany, and the sun does not set until nine at night. When we finished our tour of the castle it was after five, but Miguel insisted on taking us to see the frescos of Piero della Francesca in the San Francisco church. There we stopped for coffee, chatting in the gazebo in the town square. When we returned to get our bags, dinner had just been served. So we stayed to eat.

As we ate under a mauve sky with one solitary star, the children lit a few torches in the kitchen and went to explore the darkness upstairs. From the table we heard their wandering gallops by the stairs, the groans of the doors, their happy cries calling to Ludovico in the sinister rooms. It was their bad idea to stay the night. Miguel Otero Silva delightedly encouraged them, and we did not have the heart to say no.

Contrary to my fears, we slept very well. My wife and I stayed in a bedroom on the first floor and my sons on the fourth floor in adjoining rooms. Both rooms had been modernized and neither looked at all sinister. As I waited for slumber, I counted the twelve reverberating strokes of the pendulum clock in the room, and I remembered the eerie warning of the old woman who watched the geese. But we were so tired that we fell asleep very quickly, into a dense and uninterrupted slumber. I awoke after seven in the morning with the splendid sun shining between the vines that covered the window. At my side, my wife sailed, sleeping, in the peaceful sea of the innocents. "What foolishness," I thought to myself, "that someone would still believe in ghosts nowadays." Just then the smell of fresh cut strawberries made me tremble. I saw the hearth with solid cinders, the last log turned to stone, and the portrait of the sad nobleman who watched us from three centuries ago from a gold frame. We were not in the first floor bedroom where we had gone to bed the night before. Instead, we were in Ludovico's

bedroom under the intricate molding, dusty curtains, and sheets soaked with the still-warm blood of his cursed bed.

1980

Light is Like Water

For Christmas the children once again asked for a rowboat.

"Sure," said the dad. "We'll buy it when we get back to Cartagena."

Totó, nine years old, and Joel, seven, were more determined than their parents thought.

"No," they said in unison. "We need it right here right now."

"First of all," said the mother, "the only water you could sail in here is what comes out of the shower."

She and her husband were right. At their house in Cartagena de Indias there was a patio with a pier that reached over the bay and enough space for two big yachts. On the other hand, here in Madrid they lived squeezed into the fifth floor of number 47 Castellana Ave. But in the end, neither he nor she could refuse their pleas, because they had promised the children a rowboat with a sextant and compass if they won the third grade laurel award in school, and they had. And so the dad bought it all without saying anything to his wife, who was more reluctant to pay the debts of gambles. It was a beautiful aluminum boat with a golden border at the waterline.

"The boat is in the garage," the dad divulged at lunch. "The problem is that there's no way to bring it up through the elevator, nor the stairs, and there's no more open space in the garage."

Nonetheless, the following Saturday afternoon the children invited their classmates to bring the boat up through the stairs, and they managed to get it to the bathroom.

"Congratulations," the father said. "Now what?"

“Now nothing,” said the children. “All we wanted was to have the boat in the room, and now it’s there.”

Wednesday night, like all other Wednesdays, the parents went to the movie theatre. The children, now the men and owners of the house, closed the doors and windows and broke the shining light bulb from the lamp in the room. A stream of golden, fresh light, like water, began to flow from the broken light bulb. They let it run until it was four palms high. Then they cut the current, pushed off in the boat, and sailed between the islands of the house as they pleased.

This fantastic adventure was the result of my thoughtlessness during a seminar about the poetry of household objects. Totó asked me how it was that with the simple push of a button, lights turned on. I did not think twice about it.

“Light is like water,” I answered him. “You turn the knob and it comes out.”

So they continued to sail on Wednesday nights, learning how to use the sextant and compass, until their parents came back from the theatre and found them sleeping like angels. Months later, eager to go further, they asked for scuba diving equipment. All of it: masks, flippers, tanks, and air-powered spear guns.

“It’s bad enough that you have a useless rowboat in your bathroom,” said the father. “But it’s worse that you want scuba equipment as well.”

“And if we win the gold gardenia award first semester?” said Joel.

“No,” said the mother, worried. “Now nothing more.”

The father criticized her stubbornness.

“It’s just that these kids don’t deserve as much as a penny for doing their duties,” she said. “But on a whim they are able to win even the teacher’s chair.”

In the end the parents did not say yes or no. But Totó and Joel, who had been at the bottom of their classes the two previous years, won the two gold gardenia awards and public recognition from the principal in July. That same afternoon, without having asked again, they found two sets of scuba equipment in their original packages in their room. So the following Wednesday, while their parents watched *The Last Tango of Paris*, they filled the apartment up to their shoulders and they dove like domesticated sharks under the furniture and beds. From the bottom of the light they rescued things that, over the years, had gotten lost in the darkness.

In the final award ceremony the brothers were praised as an example for the school, and they received excellence awards. This time they did not have to ask for anything. Their parents asked them what they wanted. The children were very reasonable; they only wanted a party in their house to celebrate with their classmates.

The father, alone with his wife, was glowing.

"It's a testament to their maturity," he said.

"God willing," said the mother.

The following Wednesday, while the parents saw *The Battle of Algiers*, the people who passed by Castellana Ave saw a cascade of light falling from an old building hidden between the trees. It flooded from the balconies and spilled in torrents from the front, channeled by the large avenue into a golden flood that illuminated the city up to Guadarrama.

Called to the scene, firefighters broke down the door of the fifth floor and found the home brimming with light up to the ceiling. The leopard skin sofas and armchairs floated in the room at different levels, between the bottles from the bar, the grand piano, and a shawl that fluttered mid-water like a gold manta ray. Household objects, at the peak of their poetry, flew with their own wings past the kitchen ceiling. The marching band instruments, that the kids

played to dance to, floated every which way between the colorful fish liberated from the mom's fish tank. They were the only ones that floated lively and happily in the vast illuminated swamp. In the bathroom the toothbrushes, dad's condoms, the small containers of creams, and mom's false teeth were floating. The master bedroom's television floated sideways, still playing the last installment of the midnight movie forbidden for children.

At the end of the corridor floating suspended below the surface, Totó was sitting at the stern of the boat clinging to the oars with his scuba mask on, looking for the lighthouse, when his tank ran out of air. Joel floated at the bow still searching for the height of the North Star with the sextant. Their thirty-seven classmates floated through the whole house, eternalized in the rebellious moment of peeing in the geranium flowerpot, of singing the school anthem with different lyrics as a joke on the principal, of secretly drinking a glass of dad's brandy. They had opened so many lights at the same time that the house had overflowed. The entire fourth year at the San Julián el Hospitalario school had drowned in the fifth floor of number 47 Castellana Ave in Madrid, Spain, a city far from stifling summers and icy winds, without sea nor river, whose indigenous of terra firma were never masters of the science of light sailing.

1978

Journal

Someone has Touched these Roses

Someone has Touched these Roses is a complex story, steeped in the concept of time, spirits, and haunting. Many years before the tale takes place a young boy dies, falling from a broken ladder. His ghost remains behind in the house after his heartbroken family moves away. Years later a young woman, the boy's childhood friend present at the moment of his death, moves into the house. She creates an altar where she places fresh roses every Sunday, and sits in the room, speaking to the saints in whispers. The boy's spirit sits in an empty corner chair, constantly waiting for a chance to take roses to bring to his tomb. Beings both alive and dead are trapped in this strange purgatory. Eerie, suspenseful, the complex weaving of past and present events made this tale especially challenging to translate.

After reading and rereading each page to grasp the sequence of events, I consulted a number of sources to most accurately and faithfully translate the story. WordReference, an online Spanish-and-English dictionary and forum, was an excellent place to begin. When a word or phrase was still unclear, I would turn to *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (or the Dictionary of the Spanish Language of the Royal Spanish Academy) in its online version. Next I would sift thorough *El Diccionario del Uso Español* (The Dictionary of Spanish Use) by María Moliner. Finally I would consult my capstone advisor, Professor Consuelo Hernández. The title, *Alguien desordena estas rosas,* was quite difficult to translate. Literally translated in English the verb would be too powerful: *Someone Messes up these Roses* simply does not have the proper tone. Finally I settled on *Someone has Touched these Roses*, a softer, more mysterious and ambivalent title.

Night of the Stone-Curlews

While translating *Night of the Stone-Curlews,* the greatest challenge was preserving the confusion of the narrators without making the English version impossible to understand. The true heart of the tale *is* this bewilderment and panic: these recently-blinded men do not know where they are or what surrounds them. They are forever enclosed within a wall, stranded in a town where no one believes their plight nor cares to help. When encountering unfamiliar words and phrases I once again used WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, *El Diccionario del Uso Español,* and spoke with my gracious advisor, Professor Hernández.

Yet another difficulty was translating the word "alcaraván." Technically this is a very specific species of bird which was difficult to track down through online encyclopedias and Google image searches. Would native Spanish speakers recognize "alcaraván"? Would it sound the same as "stone-curlew," the equivalent, did to English speakers? I began to feel as though this may be region-based knowledge. As I spoke with my capstone advisor, she explained that "alcaraván" *would* be known by certain individuals in some areas of Latin America, while it would *not* be recognized by others. Therefore I choose to use "stone-curlew," knowing that in English-speaking nations, just like in Spanish-speaking nations, some of the population would know what "stone-curlews" were, and others would not.

The Torment of Three Sleepwalkers

This is the dense, twisted account of a woman who, after falling from a second story window as a child, is unable to function normally. Narrated by three men who may be the brothers of this woman, the story winds through her progressive decomposition. It is almost as if she chooses to exterminate each of her functions, one by one.

The Torment of Three Sleepwalkers was a very difficult story to understand upon first glance, and was one of the most complex to translate. Yet again I searched through WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, *El Diccionario del Uso Español*, and spend quite a bit of time discussing this story with Professor Hernández. In addition to the twisting and turning plotline, there were a handful of similes and metaphors utilized that would not translate clearly into English. For example, the following sentence refers to the wailing of the woman, which is fully apparent to others, yet surges from a deep, dark place within her: "Fue como si sus gritos se parecieran en algo a una revelación; como si tuvieran mucho de árbol recordado y río profundo." Ultimately I chose to say: "It was as if her screams were a revelation; as if they were a flourishing tree, fed by a deep river."

One of These Days

One of These Days is the sickening tale of a dentist and a town mayor with a terrible toothache. It is unclear exactly what happened in the past that made the dentist want to seek revenge. Before ripping the tooth from the mayor's mouth without anesthesia or Novocain, the dentist says: "Here you will pay us back for our twenty dead, lieutenant." How did those twenty people die? Were they casualties of war? Or did something even more sinister take place? It is unclear. Yet the reader can viscerally feel the pain of the mayor, the crunching of the tooth being yanked from his skull.

The translation process was relatively straight-forward. I looked through WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, and *El Diccionario del Uso Español* for help with some unfamiliar words. It was difficult to translate the names of the dentist tools into English, but after speaking with friends I determined the best possible terms.

Artificial Roses

Artificial Roses is set in a somewhat distant past, although the core of the story is easily understood: a young woman, after being left by her lover, is utterly distraught. Yet she hides her misery and believes no one can tell what has transpired. Only her grandmother, though blind, notices her odd behavior.

The vocabulary and terms within this tale are somewhat dated and may not be recognized by modern Spanish or English speakers. I consulted my usual sources, WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, and *El Diccionario del Uso Español.* I also had a discussion with Professor Hernández. "Fake sleeves" sounds as strange in Spanish as it does in English, and is foreign to the modern reader. Many years ago the Catholic Church would not allow women with sleeveless dresses to enter the church for mass. So women would attach 'fake sleeves' to their sleeveless dresses before going to church. Also, "First Friday" is a tradition of the Catholic Church that is not as common today. It encourages individuals to go to Friday mass to receive communion on the first Friday of each month for nine consecutive months. Ultimately after establishing the religious references that had been unclear, I found the essence of the tale quite relatable to the modern reader.

Sleeping Beauty's Airplane

Sleeping Beauty's Airplane was one of my favorites in this selection of stories. It is a much lighter and more humorous tale taken from Gabriel García Márquez's own life experience. In the midst of a crowded airport he finds the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Flights are cancelled because of a historic snowstorm, and chaos ensues within the airport. "It was a time of instincts," García Márquez comments. He finds himself fortuitously sitting next to "the

beauty" on the plane, but she takes sleeping pills and falls fast asleep for the rest of the ride. Capturing the humor in translation was especially enjoyable. I consulted the same list of resources as I had for all other stories (WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, and *El Diccionario del Uso Español)*, yet did not have much difficulty during the translation process.

Ghosts of August

This eerie, short tale was not quite as challenging as some of the others to translate. Steeped in rich imagery, this story was relatively easy to understand once I looked up the questionable words and phrases in WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, and *El Diccionario del Uso Español*. A family vacationing in Tuscany visits Miguel Otero Silva who in fact was, in real life, a famous Venezuelan author. Although they are warned not to stay over, they spend the night. The father wakes up to a disorienting, gruesome scene.

Light is Like Water

Light is Like Water, the final story in this series, is my ultimate favorite. In many ways light *is* like water, from the flowing of electric currents to the way light can fill a room. García Márquez takes the notion one step further in this tale of two brothers who flood their home with light when their parents are out. They sail and scuba dive through the depths of their created ocean, and later invite their classmates to join as well. The flowing imagery of the final scene is fascinating, yet awful.

Confusing phrases and unclear words I looked up in WordReference, *El Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, and *El Diccionario del Uso Español.* In order to accurately

translate the scuba equipment terms, I searched in Spanish for images of the items online, then asked an English-speaking friend who often scuba dives what he would call the equipment in the images. This technique worked quite well for terms such as "air-powered spear guns" for example.

Finally, I chose *Light is Like Water, and Other Tales by Gabriel García Márquez* as the title of my capstone. To me this story embodies the blend of the fantastic and ordinary for which Gabriel García Márquez is so famous. The tale is odd yet very relatable – what children do not secretly defy their parents? It leaves the reader with the impression that this just may, in fact, *be* a true story.

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It has been an honor to recapture these stories in the English language.