



**Rosario Lisciandro
María del Mar Palenzuela Pérez
Tim Spratt (Eds.)**

SHORT STORIES TO TELL

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texto:

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Prologue

The origin of this book is a short story competition «Short Stories to Tell» took place on the occasion of the English Language Day, part of programme of activities developed by the Language Centre of the University of Almeria and the Vice-Rectorate for Communication and University Extension. Those responsible for this activity are the lecturers of the Department of Philology Rosario Lisciandro and María del Mar Palenzuela Pérez in collaboration with Tim Spratt, teacher of the Language Centre.

The book is made up of 29 stories in English whose authors are students and lovers of the English language. The stories are original and have been selected by a jury.

The thematic variety of the stories gives the book an interesting, entertaining, heterogeneous and culturally diverse character. Moreover, the cultural and nationality diversity of the authors gives the book a distinctive element.

A Fight for Life

DARIA HANAS

I woke up behind the bars. I didn't know how I got there. The last thing I remembered was the sound of an approaching four-wheeled vehicle and later here I was, all alone in a small cage. I was afraid. I didn't know what to do at first, so I spent my days laying in the corner. Although I had never had any family and I sometimes felt lonely, that place that I found myself in was giving me the chills. Some big creatures, I think they are called humans, gave me one small bowl of food every day. I tried it once and I had a terrible stomachache afterwards so I refused to eat whatever it was and that's how I knew that I shouldn't have done this... One human approached me and started hitting me, I didn't know what he was saying but judging by the tone of his voice he wasn't happy with me. Why was he so aggressive with me? Didn't he know that I felt bad after eating it?

The other day I was given a collar, but this time it was different – it had a lot of spikes on the inside. I was also tied to the metal bars so every time I tried to move, the spikes were really hurting my neck and eventually I started to bleed. That same day a lot of new dogs came to that place, I was so happy I wasn't alone anymore, and I wanted to say hi to everyone. Suddenly someone came to my cage and took me out, I was hoping that they understood me and were taking me to greet the other mates! They took me to a much bigger cage with a lot of other dogs. But wait... Why were there only boys? I would have preferred if there had been girls too... I started to feel very anxious. Those friends turned out to be not as friendly as I thought. But the true hell started when the humans threw a lot of meat in, that was the first time I saw something delicious to eat. As I was starving, I grabbed a piece of meat and started eating it but as soon as I did it, I felt an enormous pain on my neck. One guy wanted my food. I couldn't let him do it to me, so we started fighting. I looked around: a lot of other dogs were fighting too. I won, I needed to win because if I hadn't, I would have starved to death, but as I grabbed my trophy, I saw that my opponent had stopped moving and was bleeding from his stomach. What happened? Did I do it to him? I just wanted to defend my food. He wasn't the only one laying still.

For the next month every day, they brought a lot of male friends to my cage and we were fighting for food. By then, had understood that it was the only way to survive and that every male dog will always be my enemy. I had my ear broken, my neck ripped, and my paws bitten but somehow, I still managed to survive.

Until one special day came when someone approached me and smiled to me. I could tell it was a female human being because she smelled different. That was the first time I saw a smile on somebody's face. She took me to a machine, I was afraid at first because it was the same machine that hit me for the first time but somehow, I trusted her. I knew everything would be better. We drove to a much nicer place with bigger cages where I was alone again but at least no one was biting me anymore. The first day I arrived a lot of humans started coming to see me, they wanted to touch me. I didn't know what to do at first, everything was a little bit overwhelming. I wasn't afraid of humans, I would never hurt them, but I also didn't know if I could trust them, no one had ever taught me that. The days had passed, the humans were visiting me as if I was some kind of tourist attraction. But one day, I was sitting in my cage, and I saw four humans coming in my direction. They weren't alone, with them was also a beautiful girl. When I saw her, I immediately fell in love with her although when she sniffed me for the first time she run away, probably because I had

never had a bath. Those humans were really nice, I don't know why but when I saw them, I started jumping for joy which I had never done before. One of the humans came closer to me, pulled my body towards her, grabbed me and didn't want to let go. I knew she didn't want to suffocate me because she was smiling. She had the same smile as the human that took me from that horrible place. I must admit, it made me incredibly happy. That was a new feeling to me, a feeling that I had never experienced before. I looked at her, licked her on her face and she started smiling even more.

They took me to their place that same day. I didn't want to enter, I was afraid because there were no cages inside, no metal bars. It didn't look familiar. I saw a bowl of food but even that didn't make me enter that place. Finally, my beautiful girlfriend (although I don't think she knew that I was referring to her as my girlfriend) barked at me and I immediately entered. That was my first lesson: never make a woman angry. Four humans started clapping their hands, so I knew I had done a good thing.

Today, I am telling my story from an incredibly comfortable bed right next to the fireplace and my girlfriend. I couldn't be any happier. My name is Rocky, at least that's what they call me, and I think my girlfriend's name is Kora. We have become inseparable. At least three times a day we go for a romantic walk. I have to wear something on my face when I run, I guess it makes me not bite other dogs, I still think that if I meet another male dog, they will want to hurt me and now as I have a girlfriend, I have to be extra protective. But that's okay, I don't have any problem with that. By the way, I am so in love with Kora that I can't even stay at home alone for a second without her. Every time she barks at me, I immediately do whatever she wants. But apart from her, do you want to know what is my favorite thing is? My four humans, who wake me up every morning with a warm hug and lots of kisses.

The Rope

CELIA SILVA DÍAZ

The rope must be finished tonight. I've been trying to finish it for many months. If I look back and reflect on it, maybe even years. But the rope always had to wait when Mother knocked on the door to ask about my day. The rope had to wait when Sister came with a tray of baked cookies. The rope had to wait when the phone rang and it was Grandma calling me pretty.

The rope must be finished tonight, though. I rush through the process like many other nights. Grief visits sometimes, and I welcome her just to feel more human. She has a wrinkled face, two hollowed cheeks. Grief says: *finish the rope*, and the voice of Hope pales.

I was quickest on nights like today. Nights darker than olives, nights with no sound and no dreams. The faces of Mother, Sister, Grandma, they blur. I forget their names, their lovely warmth. Mother's eyes...they were green, like emeralds. I do remember that. Green beautiful eyes I never had. Sometimes I think I was doomed from birth. Sometimes... As a baby, I cried so much. As a baby, a black bird touched my tiny hand and I...I cried so much. I was already disenchanted with reality. Can someone run out of tears? I would cry now if I could. I would cry for every little thing, like the moon, terribly lonely; like the sea, immensely blue.

The rope, the rope, the rope must be finished tonight. It is very important that I finish the rope. But I...I stop. I remember the melody of that one song. Words sweet like honey, music new, then old. The sun comes out tomorrow, the flowers, they bloom. But the rays touch my face and the cold does not fade, it has made a home in me. But the roses grow, and the marigolds, and I...cannot smell a thing.

Oh, my heart. What is wrong with my heart? Why does my heart not bleed? Why does my throat not cry? My fingers keep going and I...I was a child, once. And the world was a carousel with horses that spun. I know the world now; it has nothing to give me but brown and rotten fruit. Where are the Summer cherries? The orange juice?

The rope, you know, must be finished tonight, for I cannot see—cannot bear—another starry sky of despair. The bottle sits on my desk, empty, as if to say: *there's nothing here for you either*. I stand. The rope is finished. Step after step, breath after breath, I get on a stool and I...hang myself.

The Babysitter

ADRIÁN SIMÓN

19/04/1990

A girl in Houston was looking for a job. Sophia had the idea of being a babysitter so she could earn some money to help her parents. A family contacted her the same afternoon that she'd put an ad on the web. Sophia was surprised, but she accepted the job offer.

Sophia arrived at the home and she noticed that the parents of the three children that she had to take care of, weren't there. But she didn't mind. After a while Sophia found a note on the table of the sitting room that apparently was written by the parents. On the note she read a phrase written clearly in red *«Don't go to the basement, we are in the middle of decorating»*. At first, this seemed a little strange to Sophia. It wasn't normal that the parents didn't say anything about what meal to prepare for the kids' dinner and it was quite weird that they wrote a note that forbade her from going to the basement.

After this she went to look for the children to ask them about what they wanted for dinner. She was willing to make any food, because she was a great chef. Sophia went to the boy's bedroom to see if they were in there, because she had been looking all over the house and hadn't found them. Finally, she discovered them in their room playing.

Sophia asked them why they hadn't answered her calls because she had spent about 10 minutes trying to find them. She angrily asked the boys what they wanted for dinner but they responded with total silence. After asking repeatedly, they started murmuring between them in a foreign language. She'd never heard that language before even though she was studying to become a flight attendant and practicing lots of languages. This produced an uneasy sensation in her.

She went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. She opened the fridge door and was shocked to find a goat's head inside! Sophia started to think that the situation was alarming but the boys were very cute so she ignored it.

After preparing some dinner, she went upstairs to the boys room. She knocked on the door. She could hear the boys laughing a lot. As she opened the door she saw that they were wearing masks and playing a board game that had a geometric symbol in the middle. The boys asked Sophia if she wanted to play. She felt something was wrong but she reluctantly accepted. Before they started to play they gave her a drink that looked like a soft drink. She sipped it and after 5 minutes she started to feel dizzy and suddenly fell unconscious.

Sophia woke up in the basement tied to a stone slab. She was petrified. She saw the satanic symbol from the board game that the boys were playing, on the roof right above her. The boys were around her, forming a circle. They were still wearing their masks. She could hear them chanting in a strange language as they moved closer to her. Sophia saw that each boy was holding something in his hand. One carried a wheat sheaf. Another carried an ax. She looked to her left as she felt a sharp metal blade prick her arm. The youngest and cutest boy was giggling manically as he began to work.

A Bad Dream

DIEGO MARTÍNEZ NAVARRO

A little boy named Grey moved into an old neighbourhood. Soon after he arrived he made a friend named Gus, who took the boy home to play. Gus's parents were nice and made them a snack with biscuits. Everything went well.

The afternoon passed quickly, both boys had a lot of fun. After a few hours, Grey started to feel tired and they prepared a place for him to sleep.

When he woke up, everything was very dark. He started looking around the house for someone and calling for Gus, but no one was there. Then he saw a lady. This woman was stout, she was dressed like a maid or something like that. The woman asked him if he remembered her body. Grey did not know what she was talking about. Then the woman explained:

—We women are more self—conscious about our physique and that's why we remember it better.

The lady told him that the first owners of the house were murderers and the history of the house was marked by that. The maid confessed that the owners in her time killed her, as they had done with other people. At that moment Grey looked down at himself and noticed that his face had turned pale. Grey started to run away in terror, reaching the road to get out of the house. From outside he could see that the house was really old, it looked abandoned. It looked like it had been a long time since he had been there. The whole neighbourhood had changed, except for that house, which seemed to have fallen into ruin.

Grey stood looking at the house, it was inside a small area with a square of its own. At that moment a boy arrived, who could not see him, the boy approached the windows to inspect the inside of the house. Grey was curious and bored, so he started making noises and touching the boy on his back to scare him. Grey even spoke to him and told him to leave his money in front of the house. Grey didn't want the money at all, he was just starting to adjust to his new existence, to make sense of not being able to rest.

At that moment, a second boy who was very thin and wearing glasses appeared. The first one did not hesitate to bully him. He seemed to forget the fear he felt and turned all his terror on the innocent boy.

Grey decided to put a stop to the situation. Both children were shocked to see a third child appear there. Grey was able to show himself. The second boy ran away and the first boy began to ask him questions, claiming that Grey looked familiar, he was not scared. Grey stepped back as he kept his eyes on the first boy. Finally, he said:

—I have to see it, that room.

Puzzled, Grey asked if he had ever been inside the house. Then a little girl came smiling into the room. Both children began to laugh sinisterly and confessed: they were the first owners of the house. They would start their life in their home once again.

A Day to Forget

IRENE GIMÉNEZ LAO

A few years ago, Yrene wanted to dance in a pub during her summer holidays. She was introduced by her best friend Lara to a lot of people who dance salsa in a dancing club and since then she has had a group of many good new friends to spend her free time with.

Sometimes at the weekend she used to go to dance to this kind of music because it's very energetic and difficult to follow the steps, when a movement isn't easy for her, it's a real challenge to get it.

That summer was special for her because she met her best male friend. Before she had only had friends who were women and friendship between men and women is possible.

Next year problems started. It was only a small mistake but it changed Yrene's life for ever. Three years ago, her boyfriend Alex was very jealous because of the social life of his girlfriend and for this reason she was very bad-tempered and nervous.

While she went on her holidays that summer she met a handsome boy whose girlfriend was her best friend, Lara. She started a friendship with that boy James until one day he kissed her and told her «I love you» so they became lovers. The lovers even travelled together on a city break for three days when their partners were very busy at work. They visited several monuments and had a good time to forget everything.

When they came back from the trip, one morning James woke up saying Oh, my god! In his dreams, he had had a terrible nightmare. In the nightmare he was being punished on the bed by Lara like characters in a famous book.

Then, James became afraid because of the nightmare, it would be a disaster if the dream became real. Two hours later the phone rang, a strange voice said «Be careful, it's a warning to you, if you go on cheating on your girlfriend, your life will change forever!

After the strange phone call, he received a mysterious e-mail, the text said: «You're a pig!

In the evening, James was going to the gym when he suddenly received a phone message: «Look behind you, a murderer is following you! Fortunately, James could hear no one following him, and realised that he was safe at last.

Meanwhile, Yrene was very confused about her feelings. After that summer was the worst period of her life because they were discovered together in bed by Alex and Lara. Obviously, it produced a break-up with Alex and she lost her friend but the worst thing was waiting for her.

A few weeks later, she discovered that she was pregnant. When she told James the news of her pregnancy, she never saw him again and during her pregnancy she suffered from depression because she was too young to be another.

In the end, once the baby was born she had to say goodbye to Saturday nights with her friends.

A Never Ending Walk

CAMILA LUZ PÉREZ SCOLPATTI

In the middle of the night, a young woman was walking alone back home. She was having fun with her friends at a popular pub in the city when she decided it was too late to stay. Her name was Sofia, and looking at her was pleasing to the eye. A tiny girl, white as snow, with green big eyes and beautiful long black hair. She was the vivid image of Snow- white, as you can imagine.

After half an hour walking down the dark street, feeling alone and scared, Sofia's path crossed with an old man. He looked ancient, as if he had lived a hundred lifetimes. She asked him to keep each other company through the night. The old man, looking slightly over his shoulder, kept staring into the big eyes of Sofia, and answered with a simple «Why not». Sofia tried to have a conversation with him, in an attempt to make the situation more comfortable for both, but the old man had no words to say. Fifteen minutes after, he went home, and as simple as in their earlier encounter, he said «Take care», disappearing behind the door.

No longer than five minutes after, two redhead boys, teenage twins, saw Sofia walking alone, and decided to gift her their company. They were riding a tuned bicycle together, while being the most energized and talkative boys that Sofia had ever seen, so much so that it was kind of exhausting to be with them. She was thankful not for have to walk alone, but there was also a haste to finish the nonsense conversation soon. Luckily, ten minutes later, they glimpse a young man on the horizon, who seemed to be the same age as Sofia. Trying to escape from the teens, she shouted -Adam, it's me, Sofia, nice to see you. Sofia quickly thanked the boys for helping her, and said goodbye with too much enthusiasm.

When she approached the young man, she could see his face better. He was really handsome, tall as a tree, with beautiful big brown eyes. As soon as he started to talk, she was captivated by his voice and his charming personality. It's safe to say that it was love at first sight. After ten minutes of walking and non-stop talking with her new friend, she realized they were not going on the right way. Sofia stopped walking immediately, and apologizing as much as she could, said goodbye to the supposed love of her life. Little did she know that he wouldn't let her go anywhere.

The night, dark as a black hole. The loudly pub, too far away from home. The streets, devoid of humanity no matter where you looked. Sofia recalled everything as well as she could. The quiet old man, the exhausting redhead twins and Adam. That wasn't even his name, but he never told her who he was, and Sofia never asked. Maybe that was her mistake; maybe it could have been safer to stay on her own; maybe it was her destiny to end like that. Sofia disappeared into the night, wishing to be anybody else, but knowing she would never come back.

A New Dawn at the Marcos

JOSÉ LUIS CAPARRÓS MARTÍNEZ

This story is fictitious, but it could have happened at the beginning of the 20th century in some mine village from Filabres Mountains (Almería).

It was at 6 a.m when the old alarm clock rang. Uncle Chato's loud snores made its ringing inaudible to who slept peacefully close to fire.

Manuel, more out of habit than anything else, woke up after he sensed sound. He realized that Isabel wasn't in the bed anymore. She always woke up before to him.

He got up jerkily and looked blindly for a match to light the candle. After, for seconds, he sat on the edge of bed while he listened to the breathing of his children. His concern about small Maria's cough was growing.

A dim light illuminated slightly the Cortijo's main room. It was humble like the rest of the houses in Filabres. Four stone walls without floor tiles, a clay roof with wooden beams, only two small windows on both sides of the door and a big rudimentary fireplace.

It had only three cupboard full of gadgets to cook on the fire, a small cabinet to store clothes, a trunk, a cantarera, a table with five chairs and three beds as furniture. One for grandparents, tío Chato y tía Rosita, another for Isabel y Manuel and another for the two small children, Pedro y María.

The rest of Cortijo's rooms were a stable in the back and a warehouse on the upper floor. In the stable lived the mule «Enriqueta», the family's most precious asset, together with three goats and some chickens and rabbits. On the upper floor, the family kept tools and agricultural products such as olive oil jars or sausages, which were hanging on two reeds attached to the roof.

Like every morning, the first thing that Manuel did after getting up was to go out to smoke the first cigarette of the day. It was the only time of day he had to himself, he loved standing for some minutes in the door frame, tasting the silent and the smell of wet earth which filled that small village.

That day, the landscape looked as if it was from Northern Europe. The first rays of sunshine painted the blankets of fog purple. They stretched from the ravine and partially hid the trees of that small valley.

Manuel didn't realize what someone was approaching him since inside the cortijo. Isabel warmly hugged him, kissed his cheek and sweetly whispered to him:

—What are you thinking?—

Manuel, without turning around, smiled happily, threw away his cigarette butt and slowly lowered his hand to tighten his wife's hands.

—This place is special. Have you seen those willows? Their flowers look like cottonj...— Manuel said.

—This place is not especial. It is poor and hard.....— Isabel answered.

—Don't be an angry woman, our life will be better soon. Manuel smilingly answered.

—Ayyy Manolico...— Isabel sighed. —You should forget your dreams about changing the mines and their bosses. That is dangerous and impossible. I don't want you to go on strike the Menas.—

—Let's not argue Isabel, there is no turning back now.—

Anatomy of a Memory

EDUARDO MORENO POZA

Yesterday was a very special day for me. You may not have the slightest idea what I'm talking about, but I hope you find out when you finish reading this story...

It all started this morning when I found one of your photos on the floor, in a corner I don't usually get to when I remember I'm a mess with housework. You would have loved to see it too, unlike me. That's what I'm for, to define you again to remind you at that very moment when our life froze. Do you want it to start? Remember I'm a bit of an anatomy geek and that I do not intend to objectify you. On the contrary, I only intend to define you as I am reached by the memories that still stay put in my memory.

Let's start with the head. Your hair barely flickers with the breeze that runs through it. I don't know if you still have that beautiful jet hair or if baldness has knocked on the door of your hair's pores. Totally different from those hazel eyes, full of life like that sea we had behind us. I don't know what you thought, but knowing you was nothing innocent. What about your mouth? Those lips prey to a perennial smile leave free teeth whose marks I still keep on my skin. I'm afraid to get to your neck. That personal fragrance that enveloped him like a halo still keeps me up at night...

Your chest is covered by a t-shirt soaked in saltpetre. It's hard to glimpse that big scar you made after meeting me while riding a bike. I appreciate it, it was really horrendous.

Your arms remain alert, holding me like a child afraid of heights. The thick veins that decorate them envelop the boiling blood that pumped your heart when fear prevented you from flying. You didn't want to talk about time, even if it was on our side.

Your abdomen is the perfect connection to the waist, the centre of my universe, where my voice broke at every impulse that led me to madness.

We arrive at your feet, tanned like a ripe tropical fruit and very willing to run to save yourself from the fear that made you grow.

It's been a few years since that photograph. You became somebody that I used to know. I don't know if you are still in this world or if you are planning to stay. I guess loving you was a loser's game after all. Speaking of loving, these are difficult times. The bombs of reality are shattering our dreams and achievements become mere chimeras in the face of oblivion.

I don't want to say goodbye to your memory without first dedicating these words to you. That photo will again be hidden under the passage of time, away from my delusions. I'm really clumsy when it comes to saying goodbye. Don't judge me. I never would.

Bruno's Adventure

ANA MILLÁN CONDE

Every day Bruno gets up from his bed and goes to the kitchen with his whole family. His mother, Carolina, prepares the bowl of milk for him. His sister, María, was super excited because that morning they were going to the zoo. Bruno is sitting watching television and listening to the news like every morning and... Suddenly a noise is heard...

María: —Bruno, Bruno, let's go, we're late and we are going to miss the bus.—

Bruno: —I'm coming, Maria, don't be so annoying, the animals aren't going to leave.—

The two of them go to the door and say goodbye to their dog named Oslo... Bruno says goodbye, and suddenly hears as if Oslo is answering him... Bruno is scared, and runs with Maria because otherwise they will miss the bus. When Bruno gets on the bus, he doesn't pay it the least bit of attention, but he finds himself a bit confused.

When they arrive at the zoo, Maria and Bruno go their separate ways because they go to different classes. Bruno meets his best friend Mike. The visit is going to be done in zone by the zoo, so Bruno and Mike decide to start with the safari. Mike loved to read and his biggest passion was being like Indiana Jones, so suddenly he pulls out a hat from his backpack...

Bruno: —That's not worth it, you should have told me and I would have brought one too.— Mike: —We go in search of intrepid adventures, to fight against crocodiles, and snakes.— Mike starts to run and Bruno goes behind to catch him, suddenly Bruno hears a voice that he doesn't know where it's coming from. He begins to sweat and get very nervous, since no one is around him. Then, a lion appears through the glass and says: —Hi, I'm Lolo, and you?—

Bruno doesn't believe what is happening, he starts to tremble and wants to cry. He hides behind a tree and Bruno tells him: —Can you talk? You understand me?— Lolo nods, and says yes. Bruno realizes that he has a gift, the power to communicate with animals.

Mike comes back and sees Bruno talking to himself and tells him, Bruno, what are you doing? That's when Bruno realizes that only he is able to talk to Lolo. Bruno tries to hide it, and they continue with the trip to the zoo. Bruno begins to write to María on his cell phone telling her everything that has happened to him, and that is when he looks up and sees an elephant with a giant trunk that completely soaks him with water.

Bruno: —AAAAH!!! I'VE GOT WET, I'm fed up!—

Suddenly the elephant looks down and says —I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I'm Elisa.— Bruno still doesn't believe what he's hearing, he thinks it's all a joke or a dream. He starts running and bumps into something, starts crying. It is when a turtle approaches him and says —I know what is happening to you, I'm Teresa.—

Bruno and Teresa have a conversation, and they come to the conclusion that Bruno has special powers because he is the only one who can talk to them. And that's when suddenly... Bruno begins to hear his mother's voice... it had all been a dream.

Dark Stains

MARÍA GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA

I'm dirty with stains that only I see, of your hands running over my body without any type consent, and they don't go away, I don't understand how you could do that. I keep wondering why. Why me, why do these things happen today, why did you have to come in when I didn't even want you to be there.

I was conscious, my body paralyzed and my mind were far from there, with the strength of a newborn and with the fear of spending the first night alone in your childhood home. I wish I could forget everything, have the courage to take your hand away, throw you out of there, react. I don't know if I'm the victim or if I'm to blame for everything.

I remember the smell of drugs, entering every pore of my skin, burning every inch of my throat, without having consumed anything. My eyes struggling to stay awake counting each relief of the stippled walls of that room. Physically there, mentally running away from you.

Fear and blows, locked in a room, not wanting to leave, looking for help and in complete silence, pretending that I don't exist, wishing she would go out the door. Pursued in a small place where I live and there is no escape. I was able to escape, you left but I no longer felt at home.

Every time I close my eyes, I return to that moment, ephemeral that was a nightmare.

What hurts me the most is that I remember everything, but they justify themselves in «I took a liking to you quickly» «nothing happened, don't make a drama», and I only see myself locked up in that bed again being caressed without my consent, moving my hand away and running away.

I know that if they continue to deny what I know happened, I'm going to doubt it, but every time I close my eyes I remember your hand looking for my mouth and the stench of hard drugs in that room.

It is hard to see inequality existing every day, as if it were the worst of routines.

How do we continue to allow them to persecute us, to yell at us at all hours of the day, to make us feel uncomfortable and powerless, to downplay each of our concerns, not knowing what to do, not knowing how to act, letting it go and doing nothing about it.

Believing me, believing all those women who are raped, abused and harassed every day, without proof, with their words, because nobody wants to feel that way, is eternally disgusting.

Today it was me, this is my story, maybe real, maybe a lie, but tomorrow you can easily be the one to experience this situation and you will know how it feels.

Emily in Florence

JESÚS ESCOBAR SEVILLA

At full gallop nothing can stop your frenzy. He comes to visit me; I type on my computer. I tame the mouse that's beneath, the craving creature.

Richard was meant to visit me in the summer holidays, but he was helplessly good-natured. He had booked a last minute flight and slumped in my loft 80 x 190 bed, a mattress of rife and ache, which shrank into mellow idleness. Then, a smirk. A bent neck. A so-called raid on the phone.

—Are we off to the harbour any time soon?— Richard uttered. His face didn't flinch, but you could tell that his thumbs were sweating over the screen.

—Let me finish two more pages of the assignment and then we're getting ready to go for a stroll.— Richard nodded sheltered within the pillows.

—I am not meeting my deadlines and I just need more time.— said Emily.

—And a huge chocolate bar— he cawed mockingly as he leaned forward to stare into her gleaming screen. —Wanna have one of these?—

—You're lucky that it didn't melt on the way to my student halls— chuckled Emily. —You'd have gone viral.

—Yes, I'd better have it now or else.» He laughed and drooled it uninspiringly.

In every sense— she looked back, white marble like. —I can't fool around this term. Remember what happened to me last term? I must strive for excellence.

He pressed the screen as if he was whacking moles and winning coins on a local fair. —Don't worry about it, it's going to be cool— said Richard.

That's how she would always remember him, elusive and oblivious. But people would, say, worship every single one of his gestures as an incontestable act of mercy from a detached deity. She was writing nonetheless an essay on the effects of the bubonic plague in medieval Florence. And Emily sensed that the havoc the plague wreaked was greater for the ones that survived to restore the city, that the root of despair lied in feeble notions over the conspicuous heroism of men at war, their recognizable amendments. That the healing power of time was a necessary discourse for the meek and mild people at the right side of history, which was overlooked. That words of relief were an excess of evil that could not pay off the neglected state of the sewers, the untold weeping, the looming fear of being the next one wallowing as a pitiful scholarship holder or the fear of overworking. They would all end up muffled under a pile of thousands of other swollen merchants, passers-by, and impostor syndrome applicants.

—You can't be any poorer than dead— she muttered as she saved the file. —The rest of the events, like the body, have their own bearings.—

She stood up from her rotating chair, felt the even surface of the white table and heard birds twittering somewhere.

Follow the Symbols

DANIEL FERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ

Anduin and Rylai, brothers of 14 and 12 years old respectively, had just moved to the north of Romania, the war in Ukraine had forced their family to migrate, with the few savings they had their best option was to move to an abandoned house.

The week after they moved in, they discovered that in the attic there was a small room, it was a gloomy and sinister place with symbols engraved on the walls in the shape of a star, symbols that looked quite familiar, Rylai looked through the window and knew, he had seen them before in the family mausoleum, so they set out to check them out.

It was a small stone mausoleum to which time and the rains had given a certain abandonment and a feeling of being forgotten. They left the bicycles leaning against the outer wall and entered the cemetery. It took Anduin almost half an hour to find the symbols at one end of the mausoleum. The building stood in the form of a narrow marble hut with a rusted iron gate and statues of two angels looking up to heaven. Between the rusty bars of the gate still stood a bunch of dried flowers from time immemorial.

Anduin felt that the place had a strange aura about it, it was evident that it had not been visited in a long time, the echoes of pain and tragedy still seemed fresh. The gate was ajar and an intense closed smell drifted out from inside. All around him, the silence was absolute. He took one last look at Rylai and they entered, aware that if they waited one more minute, they would leave the place in a hurry.

But there was something else. Beneath the name, the symbol of the nine-pointed star above the circle presided over the slab that held the remains of a child. Anduin experienced an unpleasant tingling in his back and wondered for the first time why they had come to that place, pulled out his watch and checked the time, thinking that perhaps he had dawdled too long, but the watch had stopped, curiously.

It was then that they noticed that they were not alone inside the mausoleum and that a dark silhouette was moving on the ceiling, advancing stealthily like a reptile.

Anduin felt his watch slip through the cold sweat on his hands and looked up. One of the stone angels he had seen at the entrance was walking upside down on the ceiling. The figure stopped and, gazing at Anduin, flashed a canine smile and extended a sharp accusing finger at him. Slowly, the features of that face transformed into the face of a child. Anduin could read a burning rage and hatred in his gaze. He wanted to run for the door and flee, but his limbs did not respond. After a few moments, the apparition faded into shadow and they both remained paralyzed.

Gratitude or as Usual

PATRICIA ROCAMORA PÉREZ

It was early in the morning, and she was sitting on the bench beside the corridor that led to the classroom, waiting for her teacher, as usual.

And he was late, as usual.

She was glad about his delay, though. Actually, she would have wanted to freeze that moment of waiting, in which she had felt happy for so many days during the previous years. 'Happiness is in the waiting-room of happiness', indeed.

But that one was not just another day. She found it difficult to identify or describe the mixture of feelings she was experiencing: anxiety, melancholy, nostalgia... She wouldn't have been able to explain it properly. But one thing was for sure: she wasn't feeling happy.

The teacher finally turned up. Tall, skinny, hair in a mess, casual beard, very British tea-colour eyes, sporty clothes, inseparable backpack, always striding in a rush... singularly unmistakable. He raised his eyebrows as a greeting gesture when passing by her, while taking off his earphones, heading towards the classroom without stopping, as usual.

She took a deep breath, which was followed by a quiet sigh, stood up and followed him.

When she entered the classroom, the teacher turned from the whiteboard to her.

—You wanted to talk to me, didn't you?—, he asked her.

—Errr... yes,— she answered.

In fact, there were many things she wished to tell him. She was standing in front of him, next to which had been her desk for a few years. She remembered then that already distant hot day of July, when they had met for the first time. It was in a lower-level intensive summer course. The discovery of this 'in-his-own-style' inspiring teacher had helped her not only to bring her English back, but also and more importantly, to bring her confidence back.

She remembered how much she had missed him the following courses (she felt guilty at this point, having met such great teachers, wasn't she being unfair?), and the joy of meeting him again at the highest level course. However, so intimidating a level had made her feel uneasy and embarrassed at the beginning, and the idea of giving up crossed her mind more than once. But one more time, this teacher had proved to know how to make her regain confidence in herself.

She was extremely grateful to him, and not only for her improvement in English. No, it was much more than simply that. She felt in debt to her teacher, and she had conceived the idea that passing the exam would somehow serve as a way to give him back at least a part of all she had learnt and received from him. Then, the exam already over and passed at a good grade, of course, she felt glad about it, but it didn't seem enough 'thanksgiving present' any more.

No, definitely, she wasn't feeling happy at all.

She struggled to get all these thoughts and feelings off her chest, but she got a lump in her throat. She knew she wouldn't be able to say more than a few words before bursting into tears.

—It's... It's funny,— she finally said.

—Funny ha—ha, or funny strange?— he asked, as usual.

—Both— she replied.

—So, what's 'funny both? — he inquired again.

—Well...I...er...I've just passed a C2 level exam, you know, but... I feel unable to... I can't find a way to... I don't know how to...—

She made a small pause. Her eyes got wet.

—I don't know how to say thanks—, she managed to say, in the end.

The teacher looked at her for a few seconds. Then, he smiled, took his markers from his backpack and, turning again towards the whiteboard, he began to write quickly on it, while explaining out loud, as usual:

—Well, there are different ways to express gratitude in English. Of course, you have to consider the register. For instance, in a neutral context, the most common expressions are...—

She stood still for a little while, looking at him in astonishment. A trembling smile lit up her face, in spite of the already irrepressible tears. She wiped them away with a fast hand movement. She sat at her desk at once, took her stationary from her bag, and started to write everything down in her notebook, as usual.

Kara's Melody

RUBÉN CASTILLO FERNANDEZ

What Connor liked the most about Kara was that he was the only person she would play the piano for. She would prepare a hot cup of tea, sit on her black piano stool and start delicately sliding her fingers along the keys. Connor never stared at her, because she hated it. He always sat in the coziest armchair nearby and pretended to read a good book while he looked askance at how she played. It was the specific melody she played that made Connor both happy and nostalgic. However, remembering it after Kara had passed away was truly painful.

Because of that, Connor was completely frightened when he heard the exact same melody in the middle of the night. He woke up, placing his bare feet on the freezing floor. No way had he heard that piano. Connor thought twice before coming down to the living room. Covered by a shabby grey blanket, the grand piano had never been touched ever since Kara's absence. Connor gulped and hesitated, but he ended up removing the blanket. Despite his fears, what he found under the blanket made him smile. A tiny white cat with a black stain around its ear and its eye was snuggled up top of the piano's keys.

—Hey, little buddy —greeted Connor—. What are you doing here?

The window was wide open, so Connor figured out the cat had entered the house and looked for a warm place under the blanket to escape from the cold November night. Connor understood he had never heard Kara's melody. The cat had just accidentally pressed the piano's keys randomly and he'd totally mistaken the sounds. He felt relief, but also quite sad.

Connor took the cat in his arms. The animal rubbed himself against him. It was half asleep, but it looked right into Connor's eyes. Somehow, the cat reminded him of Kara. Connor left the cat in the armchair and got some milk from the fridge. He filled up a plate with the milk, and then, he placed it on the floor close to the animal. The cat jumped off the armchair and it started to slowly lap up the milk. Having heard that melody again gave Connor the chills, but he felt more relaxed watching the cat purring and enjoying the meal.

However, it didn't last. Connor's heart almost stopped. Even the cat stop eating and raised its furry ears directly to the instrument, as shocked as Connor was, while, completely on its own, the grand piano played the Kara's indistinguishable melody all over again on the cold November night.

Lili Caterpillar

RANIA OUAZIZI

Once upon a time, a caterpillar named Lili lived with her family in the Irati Jungle (Navarre). They were very happy in their home and had some magnificent neighbours.

One day Lili decided to play hide-and-seek with her neighbours, but they had already become a butterfly so Lili would have a harder time finding them. Frustrated Lili started crying as she wanted to be like them, but she didn't know how special she was.

When she got home, she asked her parents why she hadn't become a butterfly just like her friends. Her parents replied that she must be patient that she would be the most beautiful in the jungle. Lili hearing that calmed down and went to sleep happily.

She dreamed that she was in the forest with a beautiful river where there were fairies, mermaids and elves. When they saw her, they were shocked and surprised because she was the most beautiful butterfly they had ever seen.

Later, a fairy asked her — What does it feel like to be so beautiful?

She answered: We are all different, unique and beautiful; we just have to accept ourselves as we are.

When she had said the last word, she woke up from sleep. She saw that everything was still normal but the words she said herself in the dream made her change her point of view. So, she went out again to play with her neighbours and they had a great time.

The words Lili surprisingly said in the dream went round, round in her mind until she really understood their meaning, and began to accept herself.

That night she went to sleep happier than usual and when she woke up her dream had become a reality. Lili looked in the mirror and saw a cute butterfly with big wings with the colours of the rainbow. Lili shone brighter than ever.

'And just when the caterpillar thought it was at its end, it transformed into a butterfly'.

Morpheus

JUAN JOSÉ GALLARDO RODRÍGUEZ

I was standing in the middle of a crowd that laughed and shouted. It is curious how alcohol turns an innocent laugh into something odd... or even demonic. In those moments, if you focus on somebody's eyes you could even peep into their soul. As the alcohol vapour exudates from our skin, the devil that we all have inside us shows up. Then, facial expressions change, and young boys and girls look like they were old souls from a dim and distant past. That night, every group of youngsters made up a coven. It seemed to me that all were befitted and lost in their own deliriums. As I pondered such things, I saw her. Pale and beautiful... like a full Moon in a summer night. A young woman of no age. Her long and bright jet-black hair made her face even prettier. Far from being an exuberant beauty, she had a serene grace not very different from a marble sculpture would have had if an ancient God had granted it a whisper of life. Staring at me, I felt that she was there for me. Our looks had not crossed by chance. She had been seeking me and now, I had been found. The look of the hunter who has been given a prey, raised in me all sort of feelings. I had not met her before, not in my dream and not out of it, but she looked so familiar to me. Then I saw it. A narrow and sharp dagger. —How the hell hadn't I seen it before— I shouted to myself not letting the words leave my mouth. I panicked. I run. I lost myself in the streets and I found myself again in the same place, or maybe in another... but still in danger, still surrounded by nameless people. Then I saw her again. Did I run or I just imagined it? I run one more time without knowing, however, if my feet were moving my body somewhere. Every time I stopped, I could feel her eyes on me. I do not remember how many times this scene repeated. After what seemed like ages, I gave up. I was tired of running in that endless hunt. I closed my eyes and accepted my fate, waiting for her. After a while I opened my eyes. She was not there anymore. Confused and agitated I started walking. My steps were heavy and slow, nearly a crawl for I did not really want to go anywhere. I walked for a long painful time. And then, in an unremarkable bend I run into her. She held me tight and whispered some verses that I was not able to understand although I found them captivating and comforting. I was not scared of death, I just only feared the pain. There came the blade in my side. As the dagger entered my body, the fear disappeared. Cold and merely cold, that was what I felt. But not for longer, in a matter of seconds the cold passed into warmth. I looked down and saw my blood covering everything in its path in red. I did not die that night. I probably continued dreaming, I am not sure. If only I could remember how everything was before I went to bed. When I try to think about how I ended up here, a continuous night of oblivion where I wander in despair is all I can recall. Then, I pray for the next hunt to be the last one.

Senseless

JOSÉ LUIS MANZANO PLAZA

The cold feeling of my face touching the floor made me slowly open my eyes. I was in an unknown, squared room, which only contained a sign, a door and a big zero above it. The sign said: «The deeper you go, the more bizarre and primitive it all is. There is no going back, only forward in this vicious loop.». I only knew I wanted to get out of there, so without thinking twice about it, I just went through the door. I couldn't see anything in this room, and when I wanted to go back, the door before me disappeared. The only thing I noticed was a strange, distant whisper, which I followed hoping it'd guide me to the exit. I started to understand what the whispering was saying... and it wasn't pleasant. Describing horrible things, and inciting me to do them. Luckily, I was correct, and managed to escape the first room. In the second room, not much changed, however, the voices continued, as if they had gotten inside my mind. Apart from that, I also noticed a strange scent. At first it was pleasing, but as I went further into the maze, it started to get worse and worse, to the point of stinking like rotten flesh. I finally got out, but as expected, the disgusting smell lingered. Now, apart from these horrendous feelings, I wasn't able to notice anything strange. So, my only option was to follow the walls until I reached the exit. The touch was smooth and cold, but it started to feel softer and more moist. I hated that, which combined with the smell and the voices, made me feel extremely sick. But at last, I got out of the third room, and entered the fourth one. I was finally able to see, and what there was, was just a white corridor. However, the voices and smell stayed there, in the addition to the disgustingly fleshy feel that was now on the floor as well. I run as fast as I could, I really wanted to get out of there, but the further I got from the starting point, the worse it all got. Now everything around me started to look like the insides of a living creature: red flesh-made walls with visible veins and blood. I got to the fifth room and absolutely everything got amplified. I continued running through this room, which much like the one before, was simply a corridor. The voices, the smell, the floor and the walls were now accompanied by a horrible taste. I was surrounded. I desperately looked for the exit, but there was only more corridor. I was feeling so bad, that I passed out, falling for what felt like forever. The cold feeling of my face touching the floor made me slowly open my eyes, as I realized I was inside a small room, with nothing but a sign, a door, and a big zero above it.

The Bed

EMAN MHANNA MHANNA

She slept, like everyone else in her house. Serene, carefree and probably confident. She was right, to tell the truth, because her bed, like her sisters', was synonymous with safety, security and abundance. From her window, far — far away, or so she wanted to think — she could see other beds (I don't know if they were beds or not, honestly, but let's call them that for the sake of understanding) of distant neighbours, far away. Her house was full of windows, but she and her family hardly ever looked out of them. They opened them from time to time to air the house and to let in the sun, the little sun that there is in these lands. The window of her room was the one that was opened the most. When she went to sleep, she warned her sisters that she could see the shadows of those beds in the distance. They looked at her mockingly, they looked at each other and silence abounded. The first few nights, she would jump out of bed, almost blindly approach the coat rack to get her dressing gown, raise the blind a little without turning on the light and contemplate the spectacle for a few minutes. She understood nothing and went back to sleep. As the nights went by, that urge to jump out of bed and open the blind increased. She would look at her sisters and her sisters would look at her after dinner: «Are you going to pull up the blind again?» they would ask her, and she would notice their unease and not say a word back. They appreciated her uneasiness and uncertainty flooded the house for a moment. They slept and she kept opening her blind a few centimetres. The picture was not clear and with the blind so low the interpretation was closer to the fantastic. The looks from her sisters after dinner and at breakfast the next morning were beginning to weigh on her. It was true that something didn't fit, but «It's just too far away», she said to convince herself, and the show was tiring her: She always saw the same thing over and over again. A few days went by without opening the blind a single centimetre. She had dinner, said goodbye to the family and went to bed. She decided to turn off the light and sleep without even looking at the side where the blind was. Even with the blind completely down, the light came in. «The light is coming in», she thought, «It's not possible», and she jumped up, switched on the light in her room and opened the blind all the way. She saw beds that did not seem synonymous with safety, security and abundance. She looked at them again out of the corner of her eye, turned around and quickly closed the blind...

Now she knows she shouldn't have closed it.

The Goat's House

ELENA CASTILLO SOLER

There was only one word that could describe the house. It was huge. It didn't matter that people said it was cursed or that some idiot boys had gotten themselves killed in there. It was big, very big. Nevertheless, Ruth didn't have time to admire it. She was there to prove her courage. Her task was simple, explore the house, take a picture of the room where the boys had found their deaths and get out before she ended up like them.

From the outside, the house was huge. From the inside, it was huge and scary. It smelled awful, too. Ruth was cursing her soon to be friends for sending her to that place, but they were the only ones that had offered her their friendship... a noise startled her and Ruth stopped walking. What was that? She even stopped breathing to hear better, but couldn't find anything amiss. It must have been her imagination.

Ten minutes later she was trembling, absolutely terrified. There was someone with her and Ruth couldn't decide what was the lesser evil, someone alive or someone not so alive. Could the rumours be true? Was the house truly cursed? Well, she didn't want to find out and, of course, wasn't going to test the veracity of the rumours, not even for the friendship of some so called friends. She then realised something. They weren't true friends because they had sent her to her death. There was someone or something with her and it could be a threat to her life, so she did the only thing that could be done, she started running toward the exit. Her life was far too precious to her to waste it on some stupid feat to impress people that sold their friendship. She had only ran about five metres when the floor collapsed and Ruth fell.

Fortunately, she didn't break anything, but a deafening cry pierced the quiet of the house. Ruth could only gape at the macabre sight that was in front of her. It was the rotten body of some type of animal, probably a goat. Hundreds of thoughts invaded her head, each one darker than the last. Was it an accident that had killed the poor beast? Was it a cult? Was she going to share its fate? She didn't know where the strength that got her out of the hole that she had fallen into came from, but the next thing Ruth knew she had left the house with the dead goat and the strange noises.

She was going home, but before that, she had to send a few messages to the group that had dared her to enter that hell. She wasn't nice with them and she didn't wait for an answer. They weren't her friends after that. The only thing she wanted was to return to her home alive after the nightmare she had lived in there. Nothing more and nothing less.

The Kiss of the Night

DOLORES RODRÍGUEZ GARRIDO

Here is the story of Naida, a nymph who lived in a clear lake surrounded by a beautiful dense green forest.

Naida was a truly beautiful nymph; her long, straight hair was as dark as jet. Her large emerald eyes stood out against the pale color of her skin. Under the flow of the wind, the one who observed her, believed to be in the presence of the goddess of beauty that legends narrate, for which her fellow nymphs felt envious of her.

However, her heart was cruel and dishonest. So, one day, when Eros declared his love to Naida, she ruthlessly rejected him, leaving him desolate.

Apolo, who saw everything from behind a tree, came out of his hiding place and angrily cursed the nymph, condemning her to spend the rest of her days in that forest in complete solitude.

The nymph, frightened by the punishment, knelt down, begging him to have mercy.

However, Apolo scolded him, saying:

—If you had the courage to humiliate Eros, now have the courage to face your punishment.

The nymph was left completely alone in that place and, disconsolate, she got into the lake.

Time passed and Naida got used to being alone: she lived by the lake and only went out to eat a few fruits and to observe the starry night sky.

All those who had ever seen the nymph prowling through their villages were either dead or about to go to the gods and, therefore, they told their descendants that a beautiful nymph lived in the forest.

Hundreds of years later, the story became a myth and, according to folklore, a curse.

They said that whoever entered the forest would be cursed by a witch and would become her slaves.

A kind-hearted lumberjack entered the forest.

That night was very dark and the road was only illuminated by the stars.

In the distance, he saw the nymph come out of the lake and was truly captivated by her beauty.

He approached the girl and hesitantly spoke to her.

Both began to talk and eventually, the woodcutter confessed that he had fallen in love with her.

The girl kept looking at him and smiled at him. She too had fallen in love. Minutes later she replied:

—I have been courted by gods and even various companions, and rejected they all. But this is the first time I've fallen in love and on top of it all to a mere mortal.

So, the excited woodcutter told her to come live with him, to which the girl replied with a yes.

They both left the forest together hand in hand, but when crossing the limits of the forest, Naida began to feel sick and the woodcutter stopped.

The nymph understood what was happening to her, she had disobeyed the punishment that Apolo gave her.

The woodcutter did not understand anything. What was happening to his beloved? And why had she begun to cry?

Naida came over and grabbed him by the face and said:

—Thank you for teaching me to love before I left this world. Never forget me.

Moreover, between tears she kissed him. When the woodcutter walked away, he saw that the nymph had vanished, but in his hand, a beautiful blue flower remained.

The woodcutter with tears in his eyes and with the flower in his hand, returned to the town and on the way, he realized that only the night was witness to his love for the nymph.

The Lonely Bird

RUBÉN LÓPEZ PASTOR

Once upon a time in a mountain where there were two little eggs in a nest that was exposed on the top of a pine, but their parents weren't anywhere to protect them. That summer was strangely cold and under the frozen wind days passed away and somehow one of the eggs started to shake and a beak hatched out from inside the shell. An adorable baby bird had been born and with expectation looked for her siblings and parents, but there was nobody except another egg that now was as cold as the wind. The chick went near to her sibling and started to hug it, but it was useless, she couldn't warm up the egg. The sky was dark and the chick had been hungry and instinctively chirped, but the silence was her only reply, so she approached her unborn sibling and fell asleep.

At dawn, the chick woke up with the first lights beams and with a sad face looked to the egg, meanwhile her stomach was rumbling.

I will go to look for food, wait for me here- she said hungrily.

She leaned out of the nest and looked at the ground from the edge of the nest, but she had no feathers and couldn't fly when suddenly a big eagle with majestic feathers showed up.

—You're an eagle, like me — said the eagle looking at her with curiosity.

—Are you my father? — reply the chick.

—No, but, tell me little chick — said the eagle perching in the branch and focusing his eyes on the nest— What did you trying to do? Can't you fly yet?

—This is my sibling but it is cold and I'm hungry... can you help us?— said the chick returning to the egg side.

The eagle approached the egg and rubbed it with his beak, after a few seconds, he separated his beak and watched to that lonely bird with sadness. He took her carefully with his claws before taking flight.

I will take care of you from now— said the eagle.

Finally, the eagle left her with other eagle's chicks on a beautiful nest, then a female eagle as beautiful as the first one perched to his side.

—Where did you find this little one?— said the female eagle.

—She was alone in the abandoned nest and I couldn't abandon her to her fate— said the male eagle.

—But... I wasn't alone, I have a sibling — said the chick, confused for the eagle words.

—I'm sorry — but your sibling will not be born —said the male eagle.

Sorrow fulfilled the heart of the chick and her tears flowed out. The female eagle hugged her with her wings.

—I'm sorry if I had known you two were eagles...— said the female eagle.

Those words couldn't calm her pain, because in her mind thought —What does it matter if we were eagles or not?—

Time passed and the little chick became on a young eagle that flew across the blue sky. One day, on one of their flights she saw an abandoned nest. Three little blue eggs were inside, but these eggs were too different from her sibling's egg, however, she didn't care and landed in the nest and opening her beautiful and warm wings brooded the eggs until one day, three robin's chicks were born and adopted her as their mother.

The Other Side of the Coin

GUIOMAR BERNAL

It all started on October 23rd. Holly had received a message from her best friend Erin, the message said: —Hey! I've returned to Melbourne, would you like to meet?

Holly was very happy to see her again so, she accepted.

The last message between them was sent at 18:30 and it was from Erin. She promised that there would be a car in front of Holly's house to pick her up.

It was a new day. As on any usual day Holly went to work to the Local Hospital, where she is a heart surgeon.

Everything was very normal, waking up, going to work, arriving home, having lunch...but there was something outside Holly's routine, her meeting with Erin.

That, somehow, excited her, because she was burnt out from always doing the same. The time to meet with Erin had arrived, it was 17:55 and our protagonist was ready to get into the car. At first, it was weird that her best friend, the one that used to consider picking up someone with a personal driver a baloney, was going to send a personal driver to her, but then she realised that it was a special time. While she was in the car, Holly was texting her mother, who reacted oddly when she found out who her daughter was meeting with.

According to Holly's mother, Erin was still in Switzerland. Holly's first thought was that Erin was preparing a surprise party for her birthday, which was that day, but it started to feel scary when she suddenly fell asleep.

Holly finally woke up. She was tied to a chair in a dark room surrounded by mirrors, where a strange voice began to sound. That person was repeating the same thing over and over: «You were never alone».

She didn't understand what was going on, she had no enemies and nobody would ever hurt her.

Someone started to grab her feet, but, it was just a way to make fun of her and also scare her.

Some time later, the kidnapper decided to reveal her identity. Her face was very damaged due to some cuts she had on her cheeks but you could perfectly see the similarity between Holly and this girl.

This girl explained everything to Holly. According to her, their parents had neglected their other daughter, who was the kidnapper.

Holly was shocked but even so, she tried to defend her parents saying that maybe they couldn't raise two babies and it was the best decision for her.

Holly couldn't even finish the sentence because this crazy girl started hitting her in the face.

When Holly had already been punched twice in the face, she began to feel dizzy and to hear a strange noise.

The noise was setting louder and louder until Holly woke up in her bed and said:

«Was everything just a dream?»

She calmed down and got her glasses when she saw a note on her nightstand that had written on «You were never alone».

The Perfect Crime

PAULA CANTÓN MARTÍNEZ

I woke up five minutes earlier than usual. The Day was cold and apparently, it had been raining all night, I supposed that was the reason why there was a huge puddle of water under the window.

After mopping it up, I looked through the window. I really loved the smell of the wet floor.

—Oh, what a lovely day.—I said as if somebody were paying attention to me even if I was alone.

After that, I closed the window and went downstairs, straight to the kitchen to prepare a cup of coffee when the phone rang.

—Renata on the phone... ok, I get it. Could you repeat the address, please? Ok. Bye.

Damn. This day was meant to be my rest day.

After parking the car, I hurried out to the crime scene. My co-worker Alan was waiting there for me.

—Why are you always so late, Renata?—He asked me.

—Sorry for the delay. I didn't let him reply to me. As fast as I saw the body, my blood ran cold.

—Her name is Alice...

—Alice Brown— I interrupted the coroner.—She is...she had just turned 34 years old, if I am not mistaken. We were classmates at high-school.

—Oh, God. I'm sorry Renata.— Alan put his hand on my shoulder.— If you want, you can leave this case, go home to rest.

—It's fine. Actually we haven't seen each other for years. We weren't close friends. Crime never stops and neither do I...Let me see...—I took a look at Alice's cold body,— can you see that injury on her head? It has the same shape as the chandeliers in the corridor.

—Head trauma?

—Exactly. But It doesn't seem deep enough to have killed her right away.

—Maybe she died from another stab wound. As soon as I figure it out I'll tell you.

—Fine. I'll go check all the exits from the house. If the murderer had the weapon with him, there must be drops of blood somewhere.— I left the crime scene with Alan following me.

Three hours later, I arrived home. I was exhausted because of the interrogations. According to family members, none were at home during the alleged time of murder and all of them swore eternal love to Alice.

I still remember her mother's desperate crying when she saw us taking photos of her dead daughter's body in the center of the hall. She did not know anything and she did not even have the opportunity to say goodbye to Alice.

I was about to fall asleep when my phone rang again.

—Renata on the phone...possible childhood suspects? Honestly, I would love to help but Alice was a friendless girl... Well, I remember that during the last two years of high-school her boyfriend abused her. I believe he still living in this town but I don't know where. His name was Jack Romanoff... I just remember her going to class with injuries...Ok. I hope we find the one who killed her. See you later.

I hung up the call and sat on the couch.

Despite being a detective, I would never have imagined that hiding a crime would be so difficult.

The Race Day

IRENE CEREZO ALONSO

Hi! I am Marta and my friends are always laughing and picking on me because I drive terribly and I always lose all the races we do. But today, that's going to change. They are going to see who the best driver ever is. Fran is good, but I'm going to prove I'm better. They don't know but I have been practicing on my own and I'm going to impress them. I have everything ready, I have been training to know the circuit perfectly and to be able to do it at full speed. I only need to arrive the first at the bridge, because after that there are sharp bends and they won't be able to speed up and overtake me. Moreover, I have the perfect car: light and with good engine and wheels. I could do the drifts I have rehearsed so much and I will be on the podium and get the gold medal.

The race is about to start, I'm nervous. The marker is counting down: 3, 2 (I step on the gas), 1 NOW. I have started really well, I'm ahead of Estrella and Sergio, although Fran is in front of me, but not for long. I keep stepping on the gas. I'm close to him but he is blocking me and I can't overtake him. Well, I need to keep calm because there is still a long way to the bridge, so I have time to overtake him later. I will keep myself going after him without trying to overtake him to let him relax and believe that I have given up. We are arriving at the city hall, where I think the best place to overtake him is. YES! I did it! I'm first now. I can't believe it and I'm sure that they can't either. They have to be going crazy at me. I stay first and Fran is trying to overtake me, but there is just a short distance to arrive to the bridge and I have done the drifts even better than in the training, and he didn't do them so well so I have some meters of advantage. I think I can see the bridge in the distance. I'm going to win. I speed up a little bit more. The speedometer shows 240km per hour. This is incredible, I feel the adrenaline. I have never enjoyed anything so much. YEAAH, I have entered the bridge first, now it's impossible to overtake me. NOOOO. I'm falling off the cliff! I hit the curve too fast and I messed everything up. I can't believe it, I was doing great and at the end, do everything finish here? GAME OVER for me and Fran is going to win again.

I'm so angry that I turn off the console without letting Fran finish the race, at least he is not getting more points to improve his car. One day, I will win the Videogame Race.

The Ring Notebook

ÁNGELA PALMA ORTIZ

She thought for a long time about picking up her ring notebook. She opened it, staring at the first page. It was perfectly white. For a moment, she wished she was like that piece of paper: a pristine sheet in which she could write, cross out, remove, modify everything she considered to be wrong. That paper represented the freedom she would never have. That was why she was afraid of writing on it. That paper reminded her how empty she was; how full she was of emotions she could not identify or control.

She kept on staring at the sheet, waiting to have enough bravery to let ink stain it. She placed the pen on it but stopped. A tiny spot remained, the page already was dirty. She thought about it as humankind: it reminded her that perfection did not exist, as failure is in our nature. We are all black, white or grey papers, but we all have stains. We live in a society where there are so many stains on the sheets that they all mingle together, and black papers try to stain the white or grey ones.

She looked away with tears in her eyes, thinking about every time she had stained her sheet.

She loved writing. She was aware of the power of letters: they could thrill, destroy, create. They were double-edged swords. People had beaten her up, knocking her down as no one had ever done, without putting a hand on her. So, she learned that words could also kill.

She stared at the page again. She was about to weep. She wanted to put on it all her anger, but she did not know how to start. She started with the beginning. She had always been different. She had a sixth sense: she empathised with everyone. She knew how to give advice but did not apply her advice to herself. She had to rely on people, and fear came back. That was the beginning of her end.

She could write. She knew someday she would win that battle against that stupid piece of paper but was still afraid of someone reading what she wrote. Her way of showing her inner self was writing. It was her Achilles' heel. Her common-sense urged her to lock up the part of her soul in which her sorrow and the things she wished she had never known remained, forgotten.

She did not realise she had been grabbing the notebook so hard her knuckles were white. The rings had left marks on her fragile skin, but she did not feel any pain. The paper was stained and crumpled now. When she started to tear it up, she realised it was the only one left. The ring notebook had no more paper, and she had not written a damn word on it. She would never turn the page. She would always have second thoughts about everything, but she would not be brave enough to face her fears. Nothing hurt her more than her thoughts.

She tried to lie to herself again, but she was surprised to discover that she could not put everything into words. She told herself the best way to say something was to say nothing at all.

The Rocking Chair

NURIA RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍNEZ

After a long day's work at the office, it was usual for Martha to fall asleep on her very comfortable sofa while enjoying an episode of her favourite series. Waking up in the early hours of the morning, having a glass of water and going to bed was almost a ritual for her, but that night an unusual noise startled her earlier than expected. It seemed to come from the flat of Julie, her octogenarian upstairs neighbour, a very nice lady, who had never caused any disturbance before.

Strange, what would Julie be doing up at this hour, and why is her rocking chair making such a creepy noise? Martha asked herself.

The next morning when the alarm clock started its repetitive 7 a.m. tune, Martha could hardly open her eyes. She was knackered. She finally got out of bed, made herself a strong cup of coffee and prepared to start a new day's work.

Martha's tiredness didn't go unnoticed. In fact, her colleague Mark was quick to comment on it. The young woman couldn't help herself and told her colleague that the night before she had been startled awake by a strange noise coming from upstairs and that, although she was able to fall asleep afterwards, she felt as if she had been having a nightmare.

The day at the office was a long one for Martha, but finally came again. The last episode of the third season of *How to get away with murder* was waiting for her, and so was her soft sofa. The episode was really interesting, however, Martha could feel Morpheus slowly taking hold of her. It only took her a couple of minutes to close her eyes, eyes that a couple of hours later she would suddenly open when she heard the same sound as the night before. It was eerie. The rocking chair creaked like something out of a horror movie.

This time Martha couldn't sleep a wink all night. The rocking chair kept rocking and she decided that she was not willing to go through another sleepless night. So, she decided that as soon as she got back from the office she would stop by her elderly neighbour's house and offer her help in repairing the damn rocking chair.

It was done. Martha came home from work, went up to the fourth floor and just as she was about to ring the doorbell, Julie's opposite neighbour, Bernard, came out of his house.

—Hi Martha! What brings you to the fourth floor? — Bernard said.

—Hello, neighbour! Well... I haven't been able to sleep for two nights because of a rather annoying noise coming from Julie's house. — Martha replied.

Suddenly Bernard's face changed. He didn't seem to understand what his neighbour was saying.

—But..., Martha. You must have got confused. Maybe you dreamt it. Our dear Julie died just two days ago. Her son came to visit her and sadly found her lifeless body. It seems she died in her sleep on her old rocking chair...

—But, it can't be true, I hear a noise from her flat.

Suddenly, the door to Julie's flat opens slowly and the nice lady appears. Bernard and Martha are stunned and, out of an excess of fear and surprise, collapse to the floor. Now Julie has company as she continues to rock in her old, noisy chair.

The Secret That His Eyes Hid

NEREA DEL PILAR LÓPEZ CARA

It was a rainy day in Granada. I didn't have an umbrella when I met with my grandparents. My grandmother was wearing a red dress, a shiny necklace and white heels and my grandfather was wearing a black suit and elegant shoes. I was surprised because my grandparents wore very unusual clothes, accessories and shoes.

Firstly, we were speaking about various topics such as: my marks in the exams of college, the health status of my little dog because he had been sick since last week and about the economic situation of my parents, too. After that, they asked me:

—Have you fallen in love?

I didn't expect that question. Of course, I was shocked after the question and I answered no!

Secondly, they invited me to dinner. We went to a restaurant near the beach of «La Rábita». I ordered a portion of seafood. In this portion there were crabs, prawns, lobsters and squid. Nevertheless, my grandparents ordered grilled chicken and fruit salad. The food was really delicious and the restaurant was of quality. This establishment had five Michelin Stars!

Then, my grandparents and I left the restaurant. Afterward, I asked them:

—Why are you wearing those clothes?

Surprisingly, they responded —We are celebrating the golden anniversary. Fifty years ago, we got married so your grandmother and I have organized a trip for the whole family and we are going to go to one of the best places in the world, New York.

Curiously, no one knew anything about this issue. They had kept it secret. I assumed that for that reason they were in this dress! However, I was thinking about why they asked me that question. In this moment I thought —If I ask my grandparents about the reason for that question, they will probably know my secret.

Finally, I had the courage to ask my grandparents about it. My grandmother smiled and she answered —Last month, I saw you in the supermarket around the corner from your house and you were talking with a boy.

What's more, she continued adding —Yesterday, I saw you with the same boy and you were leaving your house. He was wearing a blue shirt, white pants and green shoes and you were wearing a pink sweater and blue jeans. Finally, I told my grandparents that the boy's name was Álvaro and he was my boyfriend.

The Valkyrie

LUCÍA FELICES GARBÍN

Mikael Lindberg was scrutinizing the sky when the sixth squad returned from their expedition. Three terrified half-naked young men burst into his tent. Two of them were carrying a fourth unconscious soldier.

—Leave her on the stretcher. — the doctor ordered as he ran to wash his hands. — What happened?

—We were ambushed in the canyon! — stuttered one of the soldiers. «We were bathing in the river while Nora kept watch. She warned us of the danger and we ran for the guns while Nora covered us. I saw her take down several before she was shot. We could barely get her out of there. How bad is it? Is she going to be okay? Please, doctor, I promised her sister I would take care of her.

The soldier began to cry. The other two, drenched in Nora's blood, trembled.

—I'll do what I can. Now get out of here.

Mikael inspected the unconscious soldier. She had been shot three times in the chest and a fourth in the leg. He could see no exit wounds from any of them, but the amount of blood she was losing did not bode well for the future. The doctor looked up at the sky through the hole he had made in his tent and sighed in relief when he saw only clouds overhead. Maybe he could still do something.

A familiar throat clearing caused him to stop in his tracks. Appearing out of nowhere was a towering woman. Her red hair was pulled back in long braids. She wore a blue robe with metallic details and rune drawings. She carried a small round shield and a spear as tall as she was. However, what stood out most about her was the pair of black wings that sprouted from her back.

—Not this one, Reginleif — Pleaded the doctor. —She's only 19 years old. She has barely begun to live.—

—And yet she has died a glorious death with a weapon in her hand. The Valkyrie pointed to the gun that Nora held in an iron grip.

The Valkyrie touched Mikael's forehead and he froze, unable to move. The medic watched helplessly as Reginleif rested her hand over Nora's eyes. The soldier let out a final gasp and her body seemed to flatten as she relaxed. Then she began to glow and from the corpse emerged a glowing version of Nora Dahl, who sat up stunned. Reginleif grabbed Nora by the waist and stretched her wings across her full wingspan. Before leaving, the Valkyrie exchanged glances with Mikael.

—If it's any consolation, she will live an excellent life as an *einherjar*.

The Valkyrie smiled and took off. Mikael gradually regained control of his body. He closed Nora's eyes and mentally prepared to communicate her death to his companions. As every time that that had happened, Mikael promised himself that he would not let that damned Valkyrie take any other soldier, even if he had to go up to Valhalla to fight Odin himself to do so.

There Are Two Sides to Every Story

LOLA GÓMEZ DELGADO

My grandpa was the first motorcycle owner in his village. He was the doctor's firstborn and not many people in a little town could afford such luxury. Of course, all his friends fancied trying it and he was usually willing to lend his vehicle for a little leisure around the village, unlike longer journeys. Javier had to mumble and whimper and implore for over two weeks to change his mind about it. What he didn't realise was that he would rue that determination.

—Are you ready? Just sit behind me and grab the handles on the sides. Yes, that's it. Just relax and keep your hips loose so I can lean to the side —, my grandpa instructed his nervous friend. It was the first time Javier was on a motorcycle and he sat totally rigidly. We cannot forget the year was 1955. They were heading to the closest city for a big yearly carnival, and they had a long list of errands for all their acquaintances.

Out of the blue, a big oily splash was just in the middle of the road. My grandpa did everything in his power to avoid it, however the back wheel slipped on the slick and shortly they were both rolling on the ground. Grandpa jumped and saved himself without a scratch, but his companion remained clenched to the bike as if it were the only lifeguard and he skidded on the concrete for several meters. When my grandpa approached him, his eyes were wide, and he was trembling and terrified.

They arrived at the fair with difficulty. It had been agreed that they would split up in the city and see each other again on Friday to return together. —That was my last time on that diabolical machine, I'll see you in the village—, Javier spat while he hopped off and got lost in the crowd of the market. In spite of the snap, my grandpa was worried about him. How was he planning on getting back? There was no public transport to the village or anything of the sort.

Against all odds, he saw Javier again that Friday while he had the village already in sight. He was riding his new donkey along the road. Of course, my grandpa stopped the bike to ask him about his health and without pretending to mock him at all, he mentioned the animal. «My dad needed a donkey for the harvest, you know. It was a bargain and I decided at the last minute», Javier defended himself sullenly. He had to leave the city three days earlier than planned to be back on time avoiding the monstrous invention.

The following week everyone heard Javier talking in the tavern about how revolutionary the motorcycle was and how fast the journey. «It is a pity I had to buy a donkey, it would have been thrilling to come back again with Gomez», he said boasting about his huge adventure. —There are always two sides to every story—, my grandpa reminds me every time he tells this one. And, he always ends it with a wink.