



TRANSLATORS' RINCON de TRADUCTORES CORNER



“Claudia and the Cats”

by Ivanna Chapeta

translated by
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Introduction

Born in 1988 in Guatemala City, **Ivanna Chapeta** has her undergraduate degree in Language and Literature Education from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala. Some of her stories have won university and interuniversity competitions, and in 2016 she was the winner of the Editorial Zopilotes II Short Story Competition El Palabrerista. To date, Chapeta has published four books: two collections of short stories, *Historias Incompletas* [Incomplete Stories] (Extracto, 2017) and *Casa de silencios* [House of Silences] (Los Zopilotes, 2018); and two novels, *El año en que Lucía dejó de soñar* [The Year Lucía Stopped Dreaming] (Santillana, 2017) and *¿Volverás a soñar, Lucía?* [Will You Dream Again, Lucía?] (Santillana, 2019). Her short stories have appeared in print in the *Revista USAC* and *Saliva-Zine* and have also been published digitally in several Latin American digital publications. She maintained a blog, *Mierdiario* (Shitdiary), from 2012 to 2018, and since 2016 has been part of the multidisciplinary artists collective La Retaguardia, organized by the author Eduardo Juárez.

Claudia and the Cats is a concise portrait of femicide, of a specific strain of violence which seeks to corral and control women, while simultaneously, blindly, denying these habits. In recent years, across the globe, femicide (the murder of women and girls because of their gender) has been given more light in the press and in certain activist circles. However, the narratives of femicide in the popular press in Guatemala, and in many Latin American nations, are often obscenely superficial, pornographic, and victimizing.



The author deftly attempts to palpate the logic of the violator, even as she demonstrates its relentless senselessness. The stark prose and almost blasé narration emphasize the gory, horrific, and ludicrous -yet mundane- dynamics of power and control which allow for immense impunity, both socially and legally. Capturing the cold, repetitive, egotistical narrative of the original text, which at once is straightforward and elusive, foreshadows and requires negation, was essential to draw attention to the ways in which gendered violence permeates tangible and imagined realms.

It is almost needless to say that Central American women's voices, like that of this young Guatemalan author, historically have been, and continue to be, sorely underrepresented in literature, and even more so in translation. In addition, *Claudia and the Cats* was originally published in its distinctive Guatemalan Spanish by a small, independent publishing house, the Proyecto Editorial Los Zopilotes. This distinguishes the story as part of a growing movement in Latin America that actively seeks autonomy in the face of globalization and increased demands within colonial and imperialist spheres. Thus, the value of the *Claudia and the Cats* is not merely literary, but highly political as well.

About the translator

A translator and editor with an MA in Latin American Studies from Tulane University, Lindsay Romanoff Bartlett (Boston, 1987) lives in Mexico City and New Orleans. Working in Spanish, Portuguese, and English, her most recent collaborations include translations of the Ecuadorian poet Pedro Gil and of the Mexican author Francesca Gargallo Celentani. She is currently translating Ivanna Chapeta's book of short stories, *Casa de silencios* (House of Silences, Editorial Zopilotes, 2018) and is compiling a polylingual anthology of contemporary short stories from the Americas.

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CLAUDIA AND THE CATS

Today Claudia is finally leaving. With her cats, like she wanted. I touch her hand, which still feels frozen, and try in vain to entwine her fingers with mine. I approach the window. The afternoon is threatening to turn to night. The cats climb up the rooftops, thirsty for the last drops of warmth. There are hardly any rays of sun left.

With her hand in mine, I go out on the balcony that was so hers. I remember how, one Sunday afternoon just like today, a couple months after we started dating, she slept over at my small apartment (that I hardly fit in), and she didn't ever go back to her house again, except to get her things the following week.

As soon as we could, we looked for a bigger place to live together. We were hoping to find a house where she could watch how the roofs swallowed up the afternoons and that had a garden where I could spend time by myself watching the plants grow. Nothing that we found had both, so I decided not to have the garden, and in exchange, she filled our home with my flowers and her laughter.

The first days were phenomenal. Love found us everywhere and we even made it when we brushed our teeth. Then we would go to work and I would spend the day wanting to see her at night. The problem is that our afternoons were soon blurred by routine. I used to go out to the parks to walk, to see the flowers, or to sit for a while and read. I also liked to go to the supermarkets to pass the time, walking up and down the aisles without buying anything in the end. I tried to do the same with her, but she found it all very tedious. So much so that she decided to stay at home while I went to do the shopping on the weekends.



One day when I got home from work, I found her sitting on the balcony, trying to reach for something I couldn't see. I asked her what she was trying to do, and bringing her finger to her lips so I would lower my voice, she responded, "There are cats." I moved closer to see them and saw a pair of yellow cats lying down, stealing the sun from my neighbor's roof. Claudia was happy in a way that I hadn't seen her in a long time. The sight was repugnant to me so I quickly got out of there, telling her I would put away the things I had bought that afternoon.

After a while, she closed the door to the balcony and excitedly came to tell me what she had seen her feline friends do. She even suggested that we adopt one for ourselves. I didn't let her finish, reminding her that I didn't like pets. When I was a kid, my mama tried to have some little birds. When she changed their water and food in the afternoons, she would sing to them, and I would wait for her, full of a tickling envy in my chest. One day when she left me alone, I decided to open the door to their cage, and in a few minutes, two of them left our lives. The other one didn't go, so I had to take it out myself. When I did, it pecked me. I had no choice but to tear it apart with my fingers and throw it up on our roof. Mama was really sad. I tried to make her happy by singing to her like she would sing to her birds and I suppose it worked because never again did we have pets at home.

After my cutting no, Claudia didn't insist on the issue and we went back to our routine of eating dinner in front of the television. Nevertheless, the scene with the cats became frequent. Instead of waiting for me at the table or in the dining room like she did before, now she waited on the balcony. She often wanted me to join her, but I was more and more uncomfortable with the animals being so close to us. Moreover, I was jealous. I stopped going to the park so that Claudia wouldn't spend more time than she already did with the cats, and sometimes I even dragged her to the supermarket with me to do our shopping.



I felt uneasy all the time. I started to dream about cats. Cats that slept in our bedroom and whose weight would fall on my feet before they would come up to my pillow, purring, to take my place in bed. I would wake up annoyed and would fight with Claudia for no reason; each time she was farther from me and closer to them. I felt like I was losing her. That they were taking her away from me.

One day when I sat down in one of the armchairs, the one closest to the balcony, I thought it smelled different. I asked her if she was letting cats come into the house and she blushed, responding that she wasn't. I didn't want to insist, but I was sneezing until we went to bed. Claudia said that one of these days she would dust.

When I went to work the next day, I was more uncomfortable than ever. I asked to leave early (a little later than when Claudia gets out) and I hurried home as soon as they let me go.

I thought about cats the whole way there. Cats in my living room. On my furniture. On my bed. On Claudia. I was disgusted to think that she might have touched one of those animals. Upon opening the door, I found Claudia and a yellow cat sitting in my favorite armchair. They both looked at me surprised, and the cat quickly fled. I insulted Claudia (which I really regret) calling her a traitorous bitch. She acted like it was funny and asked me to calm down, trying to get close to hug me. She said that there wasn't anything wrong with cats and that there was something wrong with me. She was defending the damn animals. I yelled many things at her. So many that she got fed up and called me many names too, telling me that I was a jerk and that she preferred to leave than put up with my insecurities. She started to cry but I was furious. She was calling me a jerk in my own home because of some stupid animals. She tried to go to my bedroom, but I grabbed her by the arm. She asked me to let her go, telling me not to be an "ANIMAL." So, I hit her. I hit her to get the idea out of her head that I might be one of her vile cats. I wasn't an animal. I was a man who had given up his damn garden so that she could watch the sunset, and she had paid me back by spending her afternoons with cats. I beat her until I got tired, repeating (yelling) that I wasn't an animal. Our floor filled with blood from her pretty mouth. From her nose. From her head.



When I calmed down, she had stopped moving. I tried to revive her, but all that happened was that blood kept flowing from her lips that weren't so pretty anymore. The damn cats had taken her from me, just as I had feared, and now I didn't know what to do.

Trying to wake her up, I touched her body again, but everything in the house felt like it was going. I started to cry, begging her not to abandon me, to not let the cats in again and for us to be okay again. I hugged her, dampening my clothes and body with her blood and leaving her face wet with my kisses. I said goodbye to her, but her body refused to go. I started to think that I didn't have a garden where I could hide her. I stayed with her, touching her hair, her hands, her mouth, until I fell asleep. I woke up hugging her cold and rigid body. Her hair had become glued to my shirt and the dried blood had formed horrible scabs on my skin. I kissed her mouth for the last time and hugged her, trying not to hurt her. We didn't have a car yet, so I couldn't simply put her in it and leave her just anywhere. All I had was this house and her. Distracted, I went out on the balcony and saw the cats eating something on my neighbor's rooftop. I decided that they would take her. I went to the kitchen to get something to cut her up with, but I didn't find anything. I had to take a bath and go out to get an axe. I'd never even bought a knife before and didn't know how to ask for it. Luckily, the people at the store helped me, and I went back to the house with an enormous axe and trash bags. I called into work to say that I was sick and unhooked the phone so that they wouldn't interrupt me.

I began to break off parts of her body, putting them in small bags in the freezer. In the afternoon, wanting to see if my experiment worked, I threw a small piece of Claudia onto the roof. The cats immediately closed in and devoured her within minutes. At daybreak, I was still trying to cut up Claudia, my Claudia. In total, I think it took a week of feeding the cats and other animals in the area with parts of her body. On my way to work, I take small pieces of Claudia with me and distribute them throughout the city. The animals must smell the blood because they quickly eat her up. When I get home, I take more bags out of the refrigerator and continue the task. I had to break up her stomach and intestines in the food processor. Having to handle that and throw it to the cats disgusted me. The thorax was also difficult because she was very thin, and I had to throw it all in



clandestine trash bins that I found. The skull wasn't hard, but it hurt me to have to break apart my Claudia's face and burn her hair, because nothing would eat that. Each time I dispose of a part of her, I say goodbye and remind her that I love her.

The cats have started to come closer to the balcony to get the food that I give them. These days, one (maybe the one I found with Claudia) has kept very close. It wants to come up on the balcony, but it doesn't dare. I saw its clear eyes looking at me expectantly, and I felt a twinge of tenderness. Maybe Claudia was right, maybe I should have considered getting one.

When I went to the fridge today, there were only a few bags left. One held part of her leg, and the other, her whole right hand. I cut the leg into pieces and gave it to the cats. They ate quickly. I kept her hand, which, before going out on the balcony I tried, unsuccessfully, to entwine with mine. I suppose she's ready to go.

Her palm is rigid and purple. The fingers, stiff, have curved, making her hand into a strange claw. I try to make it caress my face, but take it away when I feel the cold of her skin. I think that, at some point, someone will come looking for me, asking for her. I'll tell them that she abandoned me and will wait to see what happens. I look at her fingers, her nails. I caress them and give her a quick kiss before letting her go. The cats are already waiting. I go back to my living room, leaving the door to the balcony open. Maybe the cat wants to come in and keep me company, even though it makes me sneeze a little. Maybe it won't leave, like she did.



Rincón de Traductores/Translators' Corner

Disponibles en/available at: <http://cervantesobservatorio.fas.harvard.edu/en/translation-corner>

1. RT/TC 001 (2019). "A Letter of Federico García Lorca to his Parents, 1935". Author: Federico García Lorca (Spain); Translator: Christopher Maurer; Genre: Letter.
2. RT/TC 002 (2019). "Like a Night with Legs Wide Open". Author: José Alcántara Almánzar (Dominican Republic); Translator: Luis Guzmán Valerio; Genre: Short Story.
3. RT/TC 003 (2019). "In the Parks, at Dusk" and "I Only Think of You". Author: Marina Mayoral (Spain); Translator: María Socorro Suárez Lafuente; Genre: Short Story.
4. RT/TC 004 (2020). "The Guide through Death" and "The Fat Lady". Author: Guadalupe Dueñas (Mexico); Translator: Josie Hough; Genre: Short Story.
5. RT/TC 005 (2020). "The Case of the Unfaithful Translator". Author: José María Merino (Spain); Translator: Erin Goodman; Genre: Short Story.
6. RT/TC 006 (2020). "The Guerrilla Fighter" and "May as Well Call it Quits". Author: Albalucía Ángel Marulanda (Colombia); Translator: Daniel Steele Rodríguez; Genre: Short Story.
7. RT/TC 007 (2020). "Miguel Hernández' Speech to His Companions in the Ocaña Jail". Author: Miguel Hernández (Spain); Translator: Constance Marina; Genre: Speech.
8. RT/TC 008 (2020). "On the Road to Houmt Souk". Author: Soledad Puértolas (Spain); Translator: Francisca González Arias; Genre: Short Story.
9. RT/TC 009 (2020). *Rincón de Traductores / Translators' Corner – Volume 1: Compilation 2019-2020*. Various Authors; Various Translators.
10. RT/TC 010 (2020). *Waiting for the Revolution: Cuba, the Unfinished Journey* (excerpt). Author: Gustavo Gac-Artigas (Chile); Translator: Andrea G. Labinger; Genre: Chronicle.
11. RT/TC 011 (2020). "A Bad Girl". Author: Montserrat Ordóñez (Colombia); Translator: Clara Eugenia Ronderos; Genre: Short Story.