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de la lengua española y las culturas hispánicas en los Estados Unidos

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TRANSLATORS' CORNER
RINCÓN de TRADUCTORES

One Hundred Cornfields of Solitude

by Melanie Márquez Adams

translated by
Emily Hunsberger

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Introduction

Melanie Márquez Adams is an Ecuadorian American writer who has made her home near Nashville, Tennessee. She holds an MFA in Spanish Creative Writing from the University of Iowa where she was an Iowa Arts Fellow. While she does occasionally write in English, she chooses to write principally in Spanish as a way of resisting not just discrimination against Spanish speakers and immigrants in general but also the pressure on authors to shirk 'bilingual' or 'Spanish-language author' as an identity—since they are pushed to write only in English by the relative lack of opportunities (publications, presses, conferences, readings, media exposure) for literature in Spanish in the US. Márquez Adams is the author of *Querencia: crónicas de una latinoamericana en USA* (Katakana, 2020), *El país de las maravillas: crónicas de mi sueño americano* (César Chávez Institute, 2021), and *Mariposas negras: cuentos* (Eskeletra, 2017). Her most recent fiction and nonfiction can be found in journals such as *Puerto del Sol*, *Laurel Review, Spanglish Voces, Huellas Magazine*, among others. She served as editor of *Imaginar Países: Entrevistas a escritoras latinoamericanas en Estados Unidos* (Hypermedia, 2021), *Ellas cuentan: Crime Fiction por latinoamericanas en EE. UU.* (Sudaquia, 2019), and *Del sur al norte: Narrativa y poesía de autores andinos* (winner of a 2018 International Latino Book Award). Márquez Adams is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *Anfibias Literarias,* as well as the Spanish Content Editor at *Latino Book Review*. She teaches creative writing at Hugo House, Seattle Escribe, and The Porch, and is a tireless advocate of Spanish-language writers in the US.

"El maíz de la soledad," the text presented here in English translation as **"One Hundred Cornfields of Solitude,"** is from *Querencia: crónicas de una latinoamericana en USA*, a collection of Spanish-language essays drawn from her life as an immigrant, a Latina, and a writer living in the South. The *crónica* is a nonfiction form with a long tradition in Latin America, a blend of travel writing, journalism, and personal essay. Márquez Adams' take on *crónicas* is laced with dark humor, social commentary, rebellion, and optimism. In this piece, she addresses the fear and isolation that seem to follow women around the world, no matter where they go. Written in the second person, it invites the reader to step into the shoes of a

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woman—who is already facing the dynamics and discrimination of being an immigrant in the US—that arrives full of optimism to a small town in the Midwest. There her illusions of comfort, safety, and support are swiftly crushed.

About the translator

Emily Hunsberger is a bilingual writer, translator, and podcast producer. She has published original poetry, reporting, criticism, and research in English and Spanish in *Bello Collective, Spanglish Voces*, *Latino Book Review*, and *Estudios del Observatorio/Observatorio Studies*. She translates fiction, nonfiction, and poetry into English, with work featured in *Latin American Literature Today, The Southern Review, Spanglish Voces*, *Anfibias Literarias*, *Orden de Traslado*, *Translators Aloud,* and forthcoming in *PRISM*. Since 2017, Hunsberger has produced *Tertulia*, an independent podcast *en español* that tells stories about how Spanish is used by real people in the US to build community, transmit culture, reclaim identity, and exercise rights. She has also worked in the fields of community-based economic development, international sustainable development, education, and immigrant rights. By choosing to translate Márquez Adams' work into English, Hunsberger attempts to offer a pathway for English-language readers to hear the author's voice without forcing her to write in English or to self-translate. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for the translator to declare, together with the author, that the United States is a Spanish-speaking country with its own Spanish-language literature.

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ONE HUNDRED CORNFIELDS OF SOLITUDE

When you're from one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America, your safety mode gets activated every time you go back to visit. As if you could keep danger away simply by staying alert: a sort of personal defense state of zen.

Back in your little mountain town in Tennessee—even though a tiny voice inside you reminds you that danger is always lurking for a woman, no matter where she is—you allow yourself to let down your guard a little.

You relax.

You feel safe again.

Then the universe offers you a new zip code. The opportunity of a lifetime: an MFA in creative writing at a famous university in a small town in the Midwest, among the cornfields.

You let your guard down even more. The City of Literature. A mecca for anyone with literary ambitions in this country. A paradise filled with writers.

Nothing bad could happen in a place like that.

Right?

But shortly after arriving, you encounter a world ruled by slumlords that no one warned you about. A place where the façades parade as houses—complete with porches and flowerbeds—but behind their doors they conceal small, sad apartments owned by corporations headquartered in some metropolis far beyond the cornfields.

You discover that your life and your safety are of no concern to these corporate entities, who subcontract maintenance services to other companies who then, in turn, subcontract the work to men who answer to no one. This absolves all parties of responsibility. No one is accountable. Are you given any assurances about the men that have access to where you live? Absolutely not.

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A few weeks after classes begin, you ask the corporate entity to replace the broken toilet in the studio apartment that they've leased to you. They send a stalker to your door: a man who accuses you of stealing the money that, according to him, he accidentally dropped in your postage stamp-sized bathroom.

A stalker who pounded on your door several times throughout the day.

A stalker that you find later that evening... circling the parking lot... waiting for you.

A stalker that makes you feel trapped in your own car and prompts you to call the police for the first time in your life.

A stalker who completely obliterates your safety mode.

But the story doesn't end here.

You discover that your life is of no concern to the police, either. The officer that they send 25 minutes after you call 9-1-1 files your case under the one that he finds more pressing: the stalker's lost property report. You wait in vain for some sign that the danger has passed, but all the officer gives you is his business card. In case you find the stalker's money.

And, no, it doesn't end here with this other man, the officer.

Having taken shelter at a hotel a few hours after the incident with the stalker and the police officer, the first person that you contact is the director of your program. The hours crawl by at a snail's pace as you wait for her to respond to your email recounting everything you've just experienced. You tell her you don't know what to do. That you're afraid. You just arrived, and you don't know anyone else here.

You imagine comforting words, compassion, support. Maybe even empathy. You cling to this hope, a glimmer of light in the middle of one of your darkest days.

But instead of light, the program director offers you links. *She* is out of the country and won't return until the end of the semester. She copies the department chair and washes her hands of the situation. She also suggests that you reach out to other women in your program. She never contacts you again after that.

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The department chair immediately sends you more links and phone numbers. You won't hear from *her* again until several weeks later, after you've moved to a new apartment on the other side of town. Her unhurried and half-hearted attempt at appearing supportive is like salt in the wound.

You meet with one of the women in your program at a pub. Before you can finish telling her what happened to you, *she* interrupts you to tell you that something else must be going on here. That some repressed memory from your past is making you feel this way.

No one raped you.

No one touched you.

What happened to you wasn't all that serious.

Then she takes a last sip of her IPA, gets up from the barstool, and leaves.

The only thing that anyone you contact at the university does is flood your inbox with more links and phone numbers. Every time you ask someone for help, links. At the end of every appointment, phone numbers. No one offers you a way out of this giant corn maze of numbers and links, and for a time you feel trapped in a cruel web designed solely to follow protocols and avoid liabilities for the university.

As if those links could replace comforting words and actual support. As if those numbers could protect you and offer you the one thing you desperately need: a place to feel safe.

After surviving a series of dismissive responses and finding your own way out of that godforsaken corn maze, you make a promise to yourself.

You will never be dismissive when a woman tells you that she is afraid.

You'll demand action by her side and on her behalf, over and over again, until it's impossible for them to go on ignoring your voices. Until the day comes when every woman reaches her hand out to another woman in danger. Until all women learn to take care of one another. Until no woman feels alone—whether she finds herself surrounded by cornfields or in one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

Dare to imagine it: no woman alone, ever again.

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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.

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5. RT/TC 005 (2020). "The Case of the Unfaithful Translator". Author: José María Merino (Spain); Translator: Erin Goodman; Genre: Short Story.

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18. RT/TC 018 (2021). "Torn Lace" and "Native Plant". Author: Emilia Pardo Bazán (Spain); Translator: Francisca González Arias; Genre: Short Story.

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