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Short stories from *Ábrete sésamo*

by Clara Eugenia Ronderos

translated by
Mary G. Berg

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Introduction

Clara Eugenia Ronderos is a Colombian American poet, critic, and short story writer with a Ph.D. in Hispanic Literature from University of Massachusetts Amherst. She is a retired Professor of Spanish and Literature from Lesley University in Cambridge MA. Her publications include: *Raíz del silencio* (Bogotá, 2012); *The Poetry of Clara Eugenia Ronderos: Seasons of Exile*, a translation by Mary. G. Berg of her collection *Estaciones en Exilio* (2010), which was awarded the Carmen Conde Prize; her short story collections *Ábrete sésamo* (Madrid, 2016) and *Agua que no has de Beber* (Córdoba, Argentina, 2019); and two volumes of poetry: *De Reyes y Fuegos* and *Después de la Fábula* (Madrid, 2018). Her poetry collection in English, *Unfoldings,* a volume which is also in great part collaboration between Ronderos and Berg, appeared with Nixes Mate in Boston in 2022.

Ronderos's poems and short stories frequently talk about exile, otherness, women, and death. The four stories translated here –**"Señal de tráfico," "Julieta en el exilio," "Divina enlutada de ojos que no ven," and "¿A la hora que yo quiera te detengo?"**– were originally published in *Ábrete sésam*o [Open Sesame] (Madrid: Editorial Torremozas, 2016), a collection of ten stories that investigate various narrative voices and look for metaphorical ways to explore moments of great change such as death, migration, maternity, divorce, and others. The book is framed by the short story "Open Sesame,[1]" about a young writer who is looking for a way to express "what she doesn't even know is hiding inside her." Each story develops the itinerary of that search. Ronderos has resided in the U.S. for twenty-three years, but she also keeps a home in Colombia where she spends at least three months of the year. Her writing is fed by these two worlds. The four stories are presented here with the English titles "Cross Walk," "Julieta in Exile," "Divine Mourner with Sightless Eyes," and "I will stop you whenever I want?".

[1] Published in Mary G. Berg's translation by *Your Impossible Voice*, 21. Nov 2019.

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About the translator

Mary G. Berg has taught Latin American literature at the University of Colorado Boulder, UCLA, Caltech, and Harvard. She was a Resident Scholar at the Brandeis University Women's Studies Research Center where she wrote about Latin American writers, including Clorinda Matto de Turner, Juana Manuela Gorriti, Soledad Acosta de Samper, and contemporary Cubans. Her translations include three anthologies of recent Cuban fiction (*Open Your Eyes and Soar*, *Cuba on the Edge*, *New Cuban Fiction*). She and Dennis Maloney have translated twentieth-century Spanish poetry, including Antonio Machado's *There Is No Road* (2003), and *The Landscape of Castile* (bilingual, 2005). Other translations of poetry include work by Clara Eugenia Ronderos, and Carlota Caulfield. Among her latest translations are *A Talisman in the Darkness* (with Melanie Nicholson) by Olga Orozco, and *Bésame mucho and Other Stories* by Laidi Fernández de Juan.

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CROSS WALK

Standing there, the two of them had fixed their eyes on the same spot: a sparrow, strutting along in little leaps, miraculously avoiding the heavy traffic along the avenue. From their own separate personal prisons, each one smiled at the unexpected and shameless freedom of that tiny being a thousand times smaller and more fragile than either of them. It reminded Rodrigo of his own childhood, when he'd jump over puddles and dig in the earth searching for a forgotten treasure left by some English pirate. For Teresa, it brought back memories of her mischievous little son, barely walking, sticking buttons in his mouth as if to defy death.

She knew perfectly well that she shouldn't have let him play with that ridiculous button, but it was all so fast and unthinkable: an unwanted pregnancy, followed by hope when she felt the movements of that anonymous being in her belly which almost made her forget her panic; a painful childbirth that rewarded her with that palpitating tiny bundle with eyes, nose and mouth, followed immediately by the interminable, sleepless nights trying to appease his hunger, his thirst, his shivering, perhaps–she felt sometimes– his fear of being on the planet Earth. There were also many nights she would wake up when she didn't hear him cry and she'd worry about his suffocating or sudden death or any of the other evils her mother warned her could happen any moment. Surprised, she watched him flip right over one sunny day when she'd set him down on the grass. Between surprise and desperation, she'd made it through the days of her adult-youth, of reality-as-game, until the boy took his first steps while a torrential rain tore through the garden and then… "Better not to think about it." She was watching the sparrow the very moment when, without making a sound, it smashed against the windshield of an enormous truck.

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Rodrigo didn't want to believe that everything had to end this way: broken and blood-stained like his left leg that day he thought he could fly hanging from an umbrella and ended up on the floor, defeated and incredulous and with a puddle of blood around his knee. Ever after that, he refused to accept that all freedom leads to absolute submission. His flight had imprisoned him in the wheelchair where he spent over a year watching others play soccer and gazing through the railings of the hospital bed during the repeated operations on his fragmented bones: lengthened, soldered together, patched so that he could finally move around slowly with the help of a cane and cross that avenue where yet again he had to confront the truth that he embodied and which he nevertheless persisted in methodically denying, as a mental exercise that enabled him to carry on with his life.

Freedom was destroyed there. The bird, with its broken wings, expelled from the air and condemned to fuse with the earth, like her baby son, Teresa was thinking, with that stupid button stuck in his throat. He had turned purple and finally black like the earth that swallowed him, black like the clothing her mother forced her to wear for a whole long year, like the black blood of that defeated bird on the pavement now.

The sign's green image of a little walking stick figure indicated to them that it was time to cross the street. Rodrigo saw her cross in the opposite direction from him, with her watery eyes and shaking a little as she walked, and he was amazed to see old age imprinted on her young face. Teresa hardly noticed the limping man who, with difficulty and seeming to be absorbed in the image of the dead bird, crossed her path to reach the other side of the avenue.

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JULIETA IN EXILE

When we built Julieta's room, Gustavo and I thought that it would be something temporary. That after a bit, some Dutch scientist with bottle glass spectacles would find a cure for her illness. Like a frightened little caterpillar, Julieta would have to make herself comfortable in her stone crib. "The child has allergies," we'd been told by Dr. González, who came to see her the morning she had an attack, "to light, to heat, to softness, to smoothness." Cotton, wool, and linen should, according to his diagnosis, be eliminated whatever the cost. The very professional Doctor González examined her carefully and without any preamble, condemned her to that dark prison where we've kept her for more than ten years.

Gustavo designed that underground space where the child would be protected from all her phobias, thinking that it would be an exercise of sorts, a way to kill the time that separated Julieta from her quilted crib in the sunniest corner of the house. And it wasn't like Gustavo didn't put a sizable number of hours into designing a space that would allow Julieta to grow, if by any chance the confinement went on longer than expected. Next to the stone crib, he designed a spiral staircase that the child could climb when she got better. Until then, the door that opened onto the top step would remain bolted from the outside, so that from the house we could go in to look at her, but she could not escape.

The truth is, it's hard to make a place without light look inviting, even though Gustavo deployed his best architectural skills in the design of the underground room. Not even when he worked on that building for an important man and was paid a fortune, did I see him so engaged and lucid. But Julieta would need to make the change soon, since

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Dr. González feared that a second attack could have irreversible consequences. And so, Gustavo felt obliged to abbreviate his deliberations, and with the plans barely sketched, construction began.

It seemed extravagant and even unscrupulous to break through the ancient foundations of the house in order to dig a space for the vault. Construction workers were told that they were building a photo lab, but the nervous laughter and the tone of complicity with which they assured Gustavo: "don't worry about it, doctor, we'll do whatever we have to do" made it clear that they thought they could be very well building a secret place to hide illicit dollars or even, because this is how things are like in this country, a private prison.

They also seemed suspicious of the size of the chamber and the quality of its finishing touches. The curves and intricacies designed to guide Julieta's steps in the dark when she eventually learned to walk, as Dr. González assured us, seemed to be part of a strange plan to hide an important person for an indefinite time. We remained silent in the face of the veiled comments and the prying questions because we knew all too well that this version was the most logical for the majority of the people, fed daily by the sordid newspaper's reports and the nightmare images that dominated television news. Anyone could turn out to be a "narco" or a "guerillero," even that seemingly good guy, the architect Escalante. And so, we let them dream about how they were building, with their own hands, the setting for another Dantesque episode of our history, written always with violent blows.

The construction was completed with the speed and silence of a crime. The three trusted laborers finished their work by applying matt stucco with bluish-gray streaks. The house, a bit dusty and disrupted, had weathered their efforts well, and in less than three months, Julieta was installed in her provisional room, while in her original one, in the sunniest corner of the house, begun the process of an irreversible deterioration.

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And I, who am terrified of darkness, could not accompany her down below. But Gustavo could. Against the doctor's advice, he hugged her close in his arms so that she could feel warmth for the last time, and he placed her, naked, on the cold bed. She didn't even complain, or at any rate that's what Gustavo told me, perhaps just to soothe me.

He goes down to see her every day, hoping it will be the last. I, hovering at the top of the stairs, not daring to look, wait for his livid face, his broken voice: "she's grown so much," he tells me, "and she looks at me as if to indicate that she feels well, that she isn't afraid, that she continues to trust us.".

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DIVINE MOURNER WITH SIGHTLESS EYES

Señora la Muerte que estás meditando
en la noche negra, la mano en la sien…
Hace mucho tiempo te estoy esperando
divina enlutada de ojos que no ven.[2]

Guillermo Torres Quintero

Two frightened girls wait behind a half-open door through which they hear recognizable moaning. It sounds like an echo of another rainy afternoon in the ice-cold city of their childhood. It's true that they recognize the moaning, but they don't hear the counterpoint of that other voice: one that in other times provided comfort or good advice, urging the sick person to get better quickly. The sobs and the rain echo now in that house, bigger and more desolate than before. Their father looks out every once in a while, his face transformed into a strange map of wrinkles.

The older sister could not imagine then that the little girl, of whom she'd been so jealous, would become her beloved sister until she died. That same little girl, many years later, after she turned into an old woman, survived her sister only by a few months. Even on the brink of death, she had continued to see her older sister, now dead, by her side. Her ghost urged her on to get up and walk like Lazarus, while the younger sister, feeling herself abandoned again, refused to come back to life.

[2] ["Lady Death, you who are meditating / in the darkest night, with a hand on your temple… / I've been waiting for you for a long time, / divine mourner with sightless eyes."]

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In that morning of their childhood, as the two share their bewilderment, what is happening there has a face they have not seen before. Something is missing. When, in an earlier time, the moans had ceased, a small, loving person had gathered them to talk about heaven and other things they could barely imagine. Now, when their father emerges completely from the room they aren't allowed to enter, his tearless eyes reveal something broken that cannot be fixed. Neither he nor anybody else seems to want to see them, talk to them, to explain to them what is going on. What emerges with him is an absence of light, a darkness that haunts them.

The girls are distracted for a moment. The older girl helps her little sister tie a shoelace that has come undone and threatens to trip her up. The younger one is happy with her sister's operation and then she runs along the hallway and goes on until she comes across a doll, sitting on a table at the back of the bedroom where she and her sister sleep. The older one, six years older than her little sister, cannot get completely distracted. She sees her run and wishes she too could run and run and never stop. She is aware that she has lost something. She knows that at any rate her father will no longer be the same. She hopes her mother, silent now, will come out of that mysterious room to clarify everything.

Stubborn, the others in the house call her. Everyone is bigger than she is, and they are men. She does not let that stop her. She insists when she needs to insist and yells if she must. She does not let her brothers humiliate her when she wants to know the meaning of a difficult word, or decides, two years later, to translate a novel by Jules Verne. She illustrates it abundantly and signs it with great pride–even if the others believe that a girl, only fourteen years old, should barely know the alphabet. She is expected to understand numbers well enough to guide the cook with the right amounts for a recipe–always a double recipe, enough for the seven men in the house, the little one and herself. The two of them barely eat since that day when she had to scream like crazy so that they let her enter the closed-door room, where everything that would define her from now on was happening.

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But they lock the door. No matter how much she yells and kicks they won't let her see what took place inside. Her father wants her to calm down. He sits her on his knees, reads her a story while the little one dresses and undresses her doll, puts her to bed and awakens her to give her a breakfast with a tiny wooden spoon that the doll eats without making a peep.

Her brother, two years older, her playing companion, the one who taught her to climb trees and walk on the high walls in their backyard, doesn't want anything to do with her. He has been told something that has taken away his desire to skip over the tiles, pretending they are an ocean he must cross in his English pirate suit. He's also lost his desire to pull her hair and run away so she can't catch him. He looks like a deflated figure that wanders around without noticing the others and refuses to talk to her about what everyone, except the two little girls, already knows and is barely beginning to process.

When years later, that brother would die with a broken neck in a shadowy car accident she, as a grown woman, had to identify the body of the sibling she loved so much. Another two of the older brothers had died in absurd circumstances; one stabbed by the knife of a jealous lover, the other run over by an anonymous vehicle a few blocks from his house. It was understandable to her, when these deaths occurred, that their torn childhood had a lot to do with the way her brothers' lives ended: those men had never been able to recover from the blow and therefore never fully reached maturity. As if suspended in time they remained feeling and acting like hurt teenagers, terrified by the reality defining them since that fateful day, a reality they could not escape for it no longer depended on them.

After the story, the girl insists on opening the door again, on finding out what they are hiding. Many years later she will tell her grown daughters that she went to sleep that night hugging her little sister and with a strong premonition. Her brother, the poet, had died only a month before, after long nights of moaning with his mother at his side. Then, he had spent two nights in a coffin at the center of the living room surrounded by white candles. Even if they forbade her to look at him, she peeked at the edge to say goodbye to that brother whom, they told her, was going to heaven. She saw then an unrecognizable

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face that reminded her of the poem he had dedicated to Death a few months before. He had called her: "Lady Death, divine mourner with sightless eyes," and she wondered what those enigmatic words could mean. Maybe it had something to do with that purplish and expressionless face. Death had closed her brother's eyes forever. It was Death who would not let him open his eyes to look at his mother, broken with pain in a corner of the living room. Not even her little sister could lessen her mother's torn sobbing and cheer her up, as she usually did.

All of them knew it well. When their mother felt ill or sad, all they had to do was to send the little sister to give her a kiss or recite for her a nursery rhyme in such tangled baby talk that the mother could only understand because she had herself taught it to her. Then the mother would laugh, with that laughter they all adored, and she would tell them a story about the town where she was born or about her eccentric uncle who would bring the horse into the house so it would not get cold. In that moment, even if outside it rained as if the Great Flood was about to start again, they all felt the warmth of this small and fragile creature that was nevertheless the fortress upon which stood their life in their enormous, rumbling house. They all lived there feeling protected, not by economic wealth, since their father, the only son in a family of landowners, had lost everything in bad deals and feuds with cousins who were a lot savvier than he was. So, the wealth in their house was the books they read and talked about when they met at night for dinner. Then there were evening gatherings with theatrical games and songs, when they would make up characters, compose poems or make fun of the current politicians with elaborate pantomimes until they burst out laughing.

And the mother, obliging with all of them, would let her military son carry her on his back like a sack of potatoes and take her in that manner up to her bed when it was time to sleep. But she would get up again to make sure the girls were tightly tucked in. Their bedroom would always get cold at night even if it was the warmest in the house and a coal burning brazier was kept red hot to warm it up before they went to sleep. The older girl already knew that this was her mother's routine, and she would wait for her, fighting against sleep after an active day. Then she would say in a whisper so as not to awaken her

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little sister "Good night mommy." That was the way she had learned to say it from a list of correct forms of greeting that she would later teach her own children: "Good night when it's night, good morning when it's morning, good evening when it's evening." An education always directed towards respect for others, with a linguistic formality that, rather than a mask, was the way to express a solid fondness without embellishments, had been her upbringing. Many years later it became her own "trade-mark" after she not only became responsible for her little sister but also turned into a mother with no other model on which to base her duty, than that scared little girl's memories, which never fully left her.

The girls wake up early next morning and they go directly into the kitchen, where a cup of hot chocolate and freshly baked bread waits for them, like every morning. The older one already goes to school and the little one stays by the door, at the end of the entrance hall, saying goodbye until she sees her turn the corner. But this morning, their father, looking haggard and with a smile that seems to come from the bottom of a bottomless cave, sits with them at the table. He tells the older girl: "Today you are not going to school. We already notified the nuns that this week you cannot go. One of your classmates will stop by in the afternoons to bring any assignments you have." He explains to her that a woman does not need so much learning, that on the contrary she needs to learn to manage the maids that cook and clean the house, and to help them with the most delicate tasks like the impeccable ironing of shirts, pants, and starched tablecloths. These are important things she might not grasp then, but they symbolize honor in a good family without means.

Until the end of her days, the older sister would remember that day in which she had to become the woman of the house. She was then able to understand better her dead brother's poem. Her mother, it was finally clear to her, was the "Divine mourner" with no eyes to see how her house was becoming this dark place where the girl had to walk carefully not to stumble with the past, forever closed as were her mother's eyes. Those eyes had stopped looking at her when "The Lady Death" had taken her mother to heaven, where the poet brother might be waiting for her.

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I WILL STOP YOU WHENEVER I WANT?

Te vas porque yo quiero que te vayas.
A la hora que yo quiera te detengo…[3]

José Alfredo Jiménez

Blue shoes on both pairs of feet did not symbolize an aesthetic affinity or identification with one another. They showed, on the contrary, a desire for closeness. As if blue, the soft blue of the suede, could become a slippery light-blue universe where Juanita's vital energy and Sara's slow shyness could merge. Their history together was only eight days old and yet the elapsed time expanded like a willful chewing gum bubble skillfully blown to its limits. The blue continuity of their steps, chosen at a random "for sale" window display, sought to highlight the hope for a common path: a blue trace resonating in both futures.

Juanita, as well as Sara, knew the journey would be short because the end had already been a part of their beginning: a casual encounter in a Chinese restaurant where crowded tables forced them to share a corner, besieged by the swinging kitchen door. Juanita discovered it first and settled in the most comfortable seat spreading her books on the table in the hope of not being invaded. Sara arrived a few minutes later as if predestined, attracted by one or two words on the yellow cover of one of the books on the table. "Would you mind if I sit down?" she asked with a nearly inaudible voice and such a wretched articulation that Juanita, resigned, nodded at the murmur of the strange lady who clumsily and making a lot of noise settled across from her. They each took the menu and, after studying it, ordered the same thing: mixed rice and spring rolls. This traced their first link, an open smile at the coincidence. The yellow book, with the words: "love" and "cholera" in its title, traced the second connection. This one occurred not just by chance because for both of them loving and being choleric were two sides of the same coin.

[3] ["You are leaving because I want you to leave / I will stop you whenever I want …"]. From the famous Mexican *ranchera* "La media vuelta."

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While Juanita had come to Madrid following her passion for art but also for Diego, which in recent times had become one and the same, Sara had been stumbling around Europe for three months. She was fleeing from an unhealthy relationship and blindly clinging to a bibliographic passion that had haunted her since childhood but seemed to vanish every time she fell in love. Her specific purpose for this trip to the Spanish capital was a search for an old edition of Quevedo's complete works that she had seen reviewed in a French literary journal.

García Márquez, the name under the title of the yellow book, traced between them the third link, the strongest in this sort of web that tangled them together from the first moment. Diego, Juanita's Diego, like Sara, was Colombian. And Juanita, also a foreigner in that land, with her Caribbean accent and maritime grace, felt right at home in the tropical paradise of the land of cholera as described by the Colombian writer.

The two women spent many days in conversations between coffee shops and avenues, as they visited art galleries and old booksellers' shops. The hours passed as a never-ending game of hide and seek, each struggling to see her image in the other and to hide what she did not see reflected there. Diego took part in the game but without joining either team. He seemed rather a silent and acquiescent referee who enjoyed the shifting complicity between the two. These were days of intimacy and confessions, of abrupt distancing and hostilities. There was a permanent mismatch between the closeness and ease of affection, and the fears of the true distance between them. A sister or best friend-like fondness that seemed to connect them forever was pierced at every turn by the strangeness of the restaurant table where they had met in the first place. Certainly, they would write to each other, they would try not to let distance interfere.

But, to tell the truth, Sara knew herself. She had lost relationships that had been especially precious to her for fear of reducing them to a page with some disjointed news every few months or an e-mail answered on the run and unable to say much in its few hurried lines; a message that seemed more like an excuse for not saying what she was thinking at the time and how much she resented the separation. She preferred to keep the intensity of her relationships intact in the distance. If she maintained a long-distance

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relationship, after a few years, she thought, the only thing she would have of the other is a few words on a cracked yellow piece of paper, or worse, in an email box that could be erased at any time due to a virus or the wrong command on the computer. In her memory, she had always told herself, everything would remain intact, like a tiny boat preserved inside a translucent bottle.

Juanita felt something similar for different reasons. Sara's *Bogotano* formality, her mania for constantly apologizing and giving thanks, exasperated the young woman. Juanita knew that it was something that had always bothered her about Diego, but in his case, the reason for her annoyance had not been so obvious. Sara, on the other hand, was like a magnifying glass of the same parsimonious and even pedantic behavior that reminded Juanita of Fernanda del Carpio, the only character of her favorite author that she could not tolerate. Sara radiated something that felt like suffocating gusts of politeness, and Juanita couldn't imagine being in Bogotá, an entire city inhabited by people like her. So for Juanita, exchanging letters might be possible, but seeing each other again, when Diego took her to see his country, seemed intolerable.

A month later, a little out of bounds and without a prologue, the Quevedo edition that put an end to Sara's literary search appeared in a most unlikely attic. Remaining in Madrid would have been like accepting another defeat of sentimentality over intellectual pursuit. Mexico promised, before her return to Colombia, to be a source of perhaps forgotten authors that, with a good nose and a lot of patience, she could unearth from a dusty provincial shelf and launch herself to acclaim with critics who are always eager for something new to write about.

A dinner was organized for the farewell in a small tavern, with lots of wine, all the tapas that Sara had not tried yet, and their intention to avoid a melodramatic scene of tears and belated declarations of friendship. The four blue shoes gleamed on the pavement of the terrace. Their voices broke despite efforts to keep them loud and unconcerned. Shortly after the second bottle of wine, Diego and Sara, forming a chorus, insisted on teaching Juanita a heartfelt Mexican *ranchera* that said, "you're leaving because I want you to leave."

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At the end of the night, the three of them, singing, embraced each other like "castaways on the last piece of a sinking ship," as Sara remembered it on the plane, laughing at herself, at her inevitable taste for melodrama.

Three postcards from Madrid and one from Rome had fueled the hope of a possible return. "See you soon" at the end of each one postponed an illusory meeting in Bogotá, where Diego would take Juanita to meet his parents. Nevertheless, the unanswered emails and the days without any kind of communication already foreshadowed the threat of a definitive silence.

Now that she was far away from them, Sara reconsidered. It seemed to her that writing letters or e-mails and being content with the brevity of the messages with which they responded, or the formulaic distance of letters and postcards was better than losing them. From a distance, that young couple in love had become something of an obsession with her. Those few days, so intense, so overloaded with minute trivialities, weighed on her life story like a feather added to lead to tip the balance definitively. It was true that she had abandoned, almost without a second thought, many perhaps happier relationships. But Juanita and Diego–Juanita, whose reappearance in her life would depend on Diego–had found her at a time in her life when she was no longer so willing to lose. She had spoken with Diego's family several times, learning more news about a delayed return to Colombia. They said little or nothing about Juanita and seemed to want to forget her existence. *Bogotano* prejudices, Sara thought.

Things finally began to clear up: all had ended between Juanita and Diego some time ago. Diego's mother agreed to explain briefly over the phone what had happened when Sara insisted. Juanita had disappeared without a trace and a dejected Diego said he would never return to "his sad city of severed mountains." His mother quoted him in a monotonous voice, solid as the pain that these words now awakened in Sara. She sensed it all: the fights after her departure, the same games that she knew Juanita played, painful for a young man as much in love as Diego; the yelling and recriminations, their dreams shattering as they attempted to salvage them. Sara was beginning to understand that this

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love of theirs, their easy intimacy without tensions that she had envied in the days they had shared, had allowed her to endure her defeated return to the Bogotá routine with a useless pile of old books. Imagining them together, finding happiness in the most mundane things, as she had experienced in those Madrid days, had made her believe that, while some fluke kept her in her isolation, happiness could indeed be part of her life.

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Discarded and in disarray, as if rebelling against their fate, a pair of blue shoes contrasts with the lead gray of the carpet. She had wandered aimlessly along every street, from 1st to 50th; across every sky, from blue to the perforated black of night. But it had been useless; her rage had not been able to wear out the blue shoes until they were destroyed.

Tired, her feet swollen and blistered, Sara sits alone in the precise center of her empty bed. She drops her feet heavily onto the bedspread and curls into a long, stubborn fetal position. The arch of her back is taut and her knees across her chest pull her entire body, like anchors tying her to the world, reminding her that she is alive. She can't cry, but her eyes, glued to a series of postcards poorly pasted on the wall, are filled with a solid moisture that doesn't drip. Her mind fixates on a single instant that returns to her obsessively, like a horse on a merry-go-round. That scene appears again and again: the box wrapped in Manila paper with her name and address on one side, and her fear of opening it as she sensed its contents from the shape. Inside, the blue suede shoes that she and Juanita had bought together, with a note written in block letters without further explanation: "I will never go to the city of bell towers".

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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.

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.

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13. RT/TC 013 (2021). *Song of Being and Nonbeing*. Author: Santiago Alba Rico (Spain); Translator: Carolina Finley Hampson; Genre: Poetry.

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17. RT/TC 017 (2021). *Parallel 35* (three excerpts) and "The Dead Woman". Author: Carmen Laforet (Spain); Translator: Roberta Johnson; Genre: Chronicle/Short Story.

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

19. RT/TC 019 (2021). *Rincón de Traductores / Translators' Corner – Volume 2: Compilation 2020-2021*. Various Authors; Various Translators.

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