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Carabanchel Blues

by Lorenzo Silva

translated by
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Introduction

Lorenzo Silva (Madrid, 1966) is a bestselling, multi-award-winning Spanish author. His works include fiction and non-fiction, as well as young-adult and children's stories. He is best known for his crime and historical fiction novels, most famously those featuring Guardia Civil agents Sergeant Bevilacqua and Corporal Chamorro. He was a finalist for the 1997 Premio Nadal for *La flaqueza del bolchevique* (published in English as *The Faint-hearted Bolshevik*, translated by Nick Caistor and Isabelle Kaufeller), a recipient of the 1998 Premio Ojo Crítico for *El lejano país de los estanques* [The Distant Land of Lakes], and the 2012 Premio Planeta for *La marca del meridiano* [Meridian Line], all three of which form the famous Bevilacqua and Chamorro series. He also received the 2004 Premio Primavera de Novela for *Carta blanca* [Carte Blanche]. As children's and YA author, he received the 2002-03 Premio Destino Infantil Apé·les Mestres for *Laura y el corazón de las cosas* [Laura and the Heart of Things], and the 2013 Premio La Brújula for the novel *Suad* (co-written with Noemí Trujillo). As an essayist, he received the 2012 Premio Algaba for *Sereno en el peligro. La Aventura histórica de la Guardia Civil* [Sereno in Danger: A Guardia Civil's Historic Adventure]. His work has been translated into fourteen languages.

“Carabanchel Blues” is taken from *Madrid negro* ([Madrid Noir] Siruela, 2016), an anthology in which several of Spain's most renowned authors of crime fiction share stories set across Madrid. The story takes its name from the largely working-class Carabanchel District of Madrid, a site of intense fighting during the Spanish Civil War and one of the city's most diverse areas. In it, Silva introduces the character Manuela Mauri, a police investigator who is the protagonist of the novels *Si esto es una mujer* [If This Is a Woman] (2019) and *La forja de una rebelde* [The Forging of a Rebel] (2022), both co-written with Noemí Trujillo.



About the translator

Kevin Gerry Dunn is a ghostwriter and Spanish/English translator whose notable projects include the translations *Countersexual Manifesto* (2016) by Paul B. Preciado; *Easy Reading* (2022) by Cristina Morales, for which he received an English PEN Award and a PEN/Heim Grant; *North to Paradise: A Memoir* (2022) by Ousman Umar, which spent several weeks among Amazon's top ten bestsellers; and works by Daniela Tarazona, María Bastarós, and Cristian Perfumo. His short literary translations have appeared in *Granta*, *Financial Times*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Latin American Literature Today*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *Asymptote*, and he has translated critical art texts for exhibitions at the U.S. National Gallery of Art, the Prado Museum, the Vatican Museums, the Vienna Kunsthalle, the Phillips Collection, and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. He holds an M.A. in Hispanic Language and Literature and a B.A. in English Literature, both from Boston University, and he teaches translation part-time at Lake Forest College and the University of Massachusetts Boston. He also heads the FTrMP Project, an effort to make Spanish translations of vital migration paperwork available for free online.

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CARABANCHEL BLUES

Sooner or later we always end up back home, only to find that our whole experience on the outside was nothing more than an excursion, a way to kill time and forget that we are what we are, no matter what we believe or how we disguise ourselves or what people say about everything we did or stopped doing. The shitty part is realizing you never actually got away from where you started, when your place no longer exists, or if it does it's different, and in its new form it can no longer receive you, or recognize you, or softly whisper: *Welcome back, darling*.

Tough shit, Manuela.

You say that to yourself so often these days that it's becoming your catch phrase. That slogan is the only thing that's been there for you lately (the way no person ever has, especially not the ones you trusted to be there for you), you repeat it every time they unceremoniously drag you out of bed for one of these things, with crud sticking to your bleary eyes like a baby chimp clinging to her mother and an ache in your soul that will never be relieved by fitful sleep, and certainly not by chemically induced slumber cut short by a phone call beckoning you back to the same old shit, a protocol that offers little relief and no solution, and that only gives certain people a reason to regret ever knowing you.

This time is different, though. And by different, you mean worse. When your colleague told you the address so you could plug it into the GPS—what, you think you could get there on your own?—you had to ask him to repeat it. Paseo de Muñoz Grandes, what number? He says it again with an apathy that, in the moment, after you've both settled into the unmarked car, is equal to if not greater than your own, and he assumes you're just half asleep or doopey from your pills, but he says the number again and you think, fuck, you heard him right the first time, it's the same goddamn block where you lived twenty years ago, there's nobody there for you now, your siblings bounced as quick



as you did because your dad died and your mother followed suit, thereby vacating the apartment that had been their crown jewel, their life savings, and your inheritance, which you and your siblings promptly sold off as soon as Mom croaked at the worst possible moment, right after the bubble burst, and you barely made enough to settle her estate and buy yourselves a car apiece, not even nice cars, like you for instance, who got a Renault sedan that five years later is already showing its true colors as the glorified station wagon it is. It'll last a decade if you're lucky.

Four numbers away from my own fucking front door, you say to yourself, shifting into first gear, driving the company car that, for what it's worth, isn't in much better shape than your own, in fact it's way worse because lots of different hands grip that steering wheel and none of them treat it with the tender loving care that machines need as much as humans do, if not more so, because there are humans who'll let you treat them like horseshit for years and years, a lifetime even, but you could never do that to a machine, and definitely not to the prissy expensive ones that are everywhere these days, demanding that we pamper and coddle them twenty-four seven, as if we, their owners, had no higher purpose in life. Confused and astonished and exasperated, you drive through the tunnels on the M-30, speeding out of sheer spite (the chief inspector or commissioner will take care of the ticket if you get one, it'll give them something to do when they're not plotting their next promotion), and you're struck by a barrage of images from back then, from your years in the barrio, sepia memories of a world with no digital screens except Space Invaders, which you barely ever saw because girls never went to the arcade, or at least not girls like you, a girl who wasn't particularly eager to attach herself to some thug, to one of the countless do-nothings who could very well have been do-somethings, could have been productive with their lives because back then we had public education worthy of the name (not the smug assembly line of illiterates that passes for school today, or no, you can't even call school school anymore, now it's CEIP or IES or whatever other acronym some bureaucrat pulled out of his ass), and you had no interest in latching onto some adolescent jerkoff who had opportunities his parents never could have imagined but who nevertheless chose to turn his brains to mush with copious volumes of pot and cheap beer, who whines



years later that life's not fair, capitalism is bullshit, and in an effort to fully embody the deadbeat archetype, takes it out by wailing on his dumb bitch of a wife who, before he grew up into a greasy washed up nobody, used to watch in infatuated ecstasy as he competed to be the king of Space Invaders or pinball.

You'd seen better things on your own horizon, and you studiously avoided any and all of the deadweight dipshits doomed to bring everyone in their life down with them, but they were still part of your landscape and that's why at one point, as you speed down the M-30 feeling like the siren is ten times louder than it's supposed to be and your head is about to explode, you think how those boys were almost endearing, and you almost let yourself wonder what came of them, almost let yourself hope that one or two of them (and one or two of the girls fated to go down with the ship) got away from the deplorable fate which you, being a clearheaded and sensible girl, managed to evade by finishing high school with good grades, scoring high enough on the university entrance exam to study law, keeping up a respectable GPA, and finally passing the public service exam to receive your diploma when you were barely halfway through your third decade. That hard-won redemption helped you meet people whose prospects, you thought at the time, weren't quite so grim, like the wonderful man who knocked you up twice, saddling you with two kids that shared your nose and last name, a man whose calls you don't accept unless it's absolutely unavoidable, which you confirm by waiting for him to attempt to reach you at least half a dozen times before you consider picking up.

And so you wonder, for the thousand and first time, how you could be such a dumbfuck that you always ended up back with him, Javier, the mistake who hasn't shared your bed in three-plus years, nor, for that matter, has he shared the nervous tremors as you try to fall asleep or the night terrors when the pill fails to fully stomp out your consciousness. As you entertain this lovely train of thought, you begin craving the adrenaline and filth that awaits, you want to get there as soon as possible and come to blows with the human misery they pay you to deal, and which was already waiting for you there, on the same sidewalk you used to take to school, the same sidewalk you were standing on the first time some idiot, or maybe not such an idiot, grabbed your ass, and



you were outraged, or maybe not so outraged; the same sidewalk where you vaguely remember good things and bad things happening, the sidewalk you strolled along with worry and fear and hope and more fear, always fear, because only when you're in possession of a decent supply of the best drug there is—happiness or the illusion of it, which for all intents and purposes are the same thing—is it possible to forget how everything that exists one day won't, how everything you possess you don't, how everybody's fucked way before they send themselves and their lives down the tubes, they're always already poor, always already beggars, always already orphans, and what matters is learning to walk with empty pockets; it's like it says in the Extremoduro's song "A fuego," if you wear your heart on your sleeve, they'll take it from you. Jesus fucking Christ, Manuela, take a deep breath, you tell yourself, thinking about the piece in your shoulder holster, understanding and empathizing with all the right-wing psychos in the US who keep panic and the emptiness in their hearts and their heads at bay just by cleaning their Smith & Wesson or Glock or AK at the dining room table.

And there's adrenaline, yes, finally, when you see the police-tape perimeter, the blue lights on the squad cars and the orange lights on the ambulance, the wet street, the sprawled body covered head to toe with a thermal blanket, nothing to be done here. Another poor soul dispatched from one hell to another, no pitstops in Eden or ticket to Valhalla, unless, against all odds, he was some kind of saint, an innocent passerby. Or unless he thought paradise was about guts, or about indulging in the manifold goodies that digitized consumer society placed at his fingertips before he shuffled off his mortal coil, from the Nintendo DS they gave him when he was a kid to the smartphone he was using tonight to play his life's soundtrack, rap or reggaeton, pausing every once in a while to guffaw at the latest vapid bullshit flowing from the mouth of the YouTuber of the moment, some guru who struck upon the substance and form of the only message this new generation is capable of deciphering. Based on what they told you, if you're not misremembering and you didn't dream it because you were still asleep and trying to understand why your phone was ringing and who the fuck was calling, the kid was from Colombia, seventeen, lived in the neighborhood now that it was going through its new



multinational, mostly Caribbean phase, a place that in its former iteration had been the promised land for economic migrants from Andalusia and Extremadura and La Mancha, people who, as the neighborhood grew, sought refuge there from the hovels of downtown Madrid and the shanty-towns on the outskirts, laying claim to modern apartments and getting a foothold in the proletarian dream of developmentalism, the working man's reward for doing his duty after so much cold and hunger.

The street patrol was quick to identify the body; it wasn't hard: as soon as word spread they were met by a sister and a mother, who are now by the ambulance being treated for their respective nervous breakdowns. They're his only family, according to the briefing you got over the radio, since the father has been out of the picture for a while and lives in Colombia. The mother temps at a café at Barajas airport, the sister is unemployed, and the dead kid had still been pondering his prospects for the future. Like so much fucking cannon fodder, you think, and almost instantly you correct yourself and, in a fit of masochism, give yourself a talking to: what the fuck do you know, Manuela? Just because you've gotten fucked over a few times you think you're entitled to become some bitter, dipshit bitch? You're starting to sound like a real fucking fascist, you know that? You of all people, don't you remember how back in school you wore a solidarity keffiyeh and went through hell convincing yourself to join the pigs—even though it was the nineties already—wasn't a betrayal of your values so much as something seductive you couldn't find anywhere else, a vague promise of adventure and the chance to defend the defenseless.

That's it, Manuela, the defenseless, don't you remember, and as you get out of the car you force yourself to look at the covered body they can't remove until the judge shows up. It makes no difference if you succeed in conjuring that idealistic young woman enrolling in the police academy or if all you can conjure is the jaded witch who has crept into your skin over the past few years, the point is that your task right now, even if it annoys you or you'd rather be assigned a more glamorous mission, is to do right by him, by Yusnavi González Pereira, the name you read under the dim streetlights from the legal pad where your colleague wrote the name in his ugly, uneven handwriting, which



somehow becomes even uglier when he tries to write in block letters. With permission from the forensics team, you let that same colleague be the one to scurry up and down the sidewalk looking for remains, lifting the thermal blanket to inspect the victim's hairless, childlike face with an oddly peaceful expression. His features are intact, either there wasn't time for a fight or he managed to avoid blows to the head. Blood is pooling at his side: you've seen way bloodier cases than this one, the damage from the stab wounds must have been internal rather than external, but you're in no mood to crouch down and inspect them one by one. At the end of the day, whatever you see is irrelevant, what matters is the autopsy report. That's what they'll use in court and that's what the prosecutor and lawyers will cite, nobody gives a shit about your opinion and nobody's going to ask for it, no matter how many of these cases you've seen. You're a cop, i.e., a potentially prejudiced, unreliable witness, less trustworthy than any random pedestrian who thinks he saw something and shows up in court to say his piece without a badge casting doubt on his testimony.

So instead of playing medical examiner, you and your colleague exchange impressions with the CSI guys who say there doesn't seem to be a lot to go on: they haven't found a murder weapon and everything seems to suggest there was minimal contact between the victim and his killers. The half-dozen stab wounds are mostly in his back, except for one in the thorax that may well have been the one that took him down. Then you speak to the first officers on the scene, who share the fairly confusing narrative they've managed to piece together from their interactions with folks in the neighborhood. They say the murder took place during a gang altercation, but you conclude it must have been a very brief confrontation because it's not the kind of place you'd choose to face off if you could avoid it, and you don't see any of the damage that usually results from that sort of showdown. In fact, the only thing out of place in the whole scene is the body lying on the road, the sole evidence of tragedy.

There are still two witnesses there, the first responders asked them to stay so you could speak with them. One is a middle-aged man whose wrinkled clothes and crass language don't exactly inspire confidence. For reasons that aren't clear to you, he feels



compelled to ham up his indignation about the murder, as if he were some sort of spokesman appointed by the community aggrieved by this crime. You ask him to please stop heaping insults on the perpetrators and futilely attempt to explain you're not particularly interested in trash talking whoever committed the murder, but rather in identifying and subsequently delivering them to the judicial authorities so that the latter, in accordance with the law, can hand down a sentence for the corresponding prison time. At this he snorts and lifts his chin, as if he knew more than you, and says don't count on it. This is nothing new, everyone in this country thinks they're a fucking criminologist, but something about the look on his face sparks your curiosity. You ask why he says that, and he clarifies condescendingly: he could be mistaken, because he only saw them when they were all stampeding out of there, but as far as he could tell, not a single one was over eighteen. Following protocol, you ask how many people he saw, what they looked like, how they were dressed. All Latinos, he wheezes, sputtering the word like it was a breed of livestock, and he estimates there were maybe half a dozen including the girls. At least he didn't say females, you think silently as you attempt, without trying very hard, to determine where in Spain he's from based on his accent; you don't succeed. In reference to their clothes, he says they were dressed *like Latinos*, and when you ask what that means, hoping to extract something a bit more specific, he says they were wearing baggy pants *sagging off their asses*, wifebeaters, baseball caps, bright t-shirts. It's at this point that you fear, as you have thousands of times in your professional life, that someone is telling you what they imagine or wish they'd seen, rather than what they actually witnessed, which could have been far less. You also don't make much of it, you know they don't do it on purpose, it's just their innate compulsion to be helpful, or to insert themselves into the drama, one or the other.

Since they have already taken down his information, you tell the man he can go and that he'll eventually be summoned to make a statement under oath. Before leaving, he doesn't pass up the chance to share a few pointers on how you and the rest of the police corps could keep better tabs on those *urban types*, beginning with their parents, who are the real culprits here, they're the ones who should be responsible for making sure their kids



don't turn into *hood rats*. Just what the night needed, you think, a healthy dose of dog whistles. But you showed up in the neighborhood with your own share of prejudices too, you acknowledge with embarrassment, and you remind yourself that you'll have to arm yourself with patience and compartmentalize when witnesses talk this way. Even kind and reasonable people, when they've just had a fright and there's a corpse lying in the street, tend to forget their high-mindedness and let their true colors shine through.

The second witness is a taxi driver who was heading home, and you see that his cab is still parked across the street with the flashers on. He's more circumspect than the first man, more coherent and less frazzled, but both witnesses' accounts largely align. When he arrived, the victim was already motionless on the ground, and all he saw was a group of very young kids—who, yes, looked Latino—running towards one of the side streets, and they were out of sight before he knew it. They were yelling, and one was walking a bit behind the others, like he was shielding two or three of the girls who couldn't run as fast, despite their flailing arms. One of the girls seemed especially young, he says, fourteen at most. And he asks, in his sole moment of editorializing, if you think it's a good idea for young girls to be out like that at midnight with that kind of company, and what the hell is wrong with these parents who don't keep them home at that time of night. Fielding this sort of question isn't in your job description, but you think of your kids, who are sleeping as we speak, and your sister, who's watching them yet again in your absence, and you say no, it doesn't strike you as a good idea for them to be out at that time of night.

Something is off in these accounts from the purported witnesses, but the details they provide, however imprecise, are enough for you to trust they're not just reporting rumors. If it really was a clash between rivals, someone would've seen someone from the opposing gang, to which the victim would presumably have belonged. It would make sense if, after one of their own got injured, they took off in pursuit of the attackers. You ask the taxi driver about this and he says no, he only saw the one group, they seemed to all be on the same side and no one was chasing after them. You ask how old they seemed and he says they ranged from the fourteen-year-old girl up to sixteen or maybe seventeen, or actually, he hesitates, they were short, they might've looked younger than they really were.



This makes you think: it's hard to tell with him lying on the pavement, but Yusnavi González doesn't look like a little kid. He's at least five-foot-seven. How did he end up dead after encountering a group of teenagers?

Since he doesn't have anything more to say and you have his contact information, you finally let him go home; then you return to the street patrol officers and ask your counterpart to please knock on doors to look for more witnesses, in case anyone saw something through a window. He asks if you realize what time it is, to which you respond that no shit you know what time it is, you had planned to spend this time placidly snoring the night away instead of fighting a losing battle against your sleeping pill. That's not enough for him and he suggests leaving the door-knocking for the morning to avoid disturbing people's sleep. At that point you lift your head and point to the housing block in front of you, where six or seven neighbors are looking on from their windows. You ask him to try to at least speak with the insomniacs, he can maybe leave the homes where they don't answer after one ring of the bell for tomorrow. He grudgingly instructs his men to go from door to door in pairs, though not without first warning you that he'll refer complaints to you, and you nod, hoping this is enough to lift the weight from his conscience.

You approach the ambulance and ask about the victim's mother and sister, and if there's any chance of talking to them. At first the doctor who seems to be calling the shots gives you a look that says *I wouldn't try if I were you*, but then she goes into the ambulance where they're attending the mother, and five minutes later she emerges to say the mother seems to have calmed down some, it might not be so bad for her to speak with someone from the investigation, so she can see that they're on it, and if she feels supported it might help her process the shock a little better. You know what's expected of you at that point, you've been cast as a representative of the social distress stemming from the loss of her son, and perhaps also as the righteous defender of justice who will right this criminal wrong. You're fully aware that you're neither of those things, but it's not the first time in forty-five years that you've lied through your teeth, so you take a deep breath and get to it.



Yusnavi's mother, whose name you're told is Angélica, is one of those women who seems to have suffered the ravages of time in the most literal sense possible. She can't be older than you, and in fact you confirm on her ID that she's actually two years younger, but her sloping shoulders and furrowed face make her look like your mother. Her expression is sad, not from today's loss, but chronically, as if from some life-defining setback she experienced very early on, as if when others were just beginning to understand their innermost hopes and dreams, Angélica was already being forced to banish hers forever, replace them with a heavy workload of tedious domestic tasks and responsibilities borne by her alone. When you introduce yourself, she takes your hands and two teardrops slide down her wrinkled cheeks, racing to bury themselves in the weave of her sweater as quickly as possible. She closes her eyes and says Yusnavi was a good boy, they killed him for no reason except he was so good, what they say about gangs ain't true, he's not into that stuff, maybe it was a gang that killed him but he didn't mess with that kinda trouble, he was in school, he was studying AV communication, he was a whiz with the computer and he'd promised he was going to earn so much cash that she wouldn't have to work, and now look, my boy, look what they did to my baby boy, why does he have to die and those thugs who did this to him get to live.

You can't deny it even if you want to; what this traumatized woman is saying affects you, brings you back to your childhood on these same streets, where you admittedly never saw a stabbing, but there was still a crowd to avoid, kids on the wrong path who were migrants or children of migrants not from Latin America but from Spain's most impoverished backwaters, who weren't as alone and neglected as these kids out killing each other, but they weren't exactly smothered in love and attention either. It never occurred to you back then that maybe they didn't have a mother as warm as yours waiting at home, or a father who might be removed and uncommunicative but who was ultimately still present and attentive like yours, and you always thought of yourself as better than them, even tonight when you were driving back to the barrio you committed the same classic human sin, spared yourself a difficult task that pays few dividends: putting yourself in someone else's skin so you can understand their shortcomings, their vices, even the sick



things they do. Empathy isn't your job, but it's not not your job, and as you watch this woman grieving her dead son, you think how you'd like to believe her, how even though it makes no difference at this point, you hope her son was what she says he was, rather than what you and everyone else suspect, that he'd been just another delinquent deceiving the mother who had given up everything for him, a woman who had been stripped of everything and given nothing, left with nothing, only the hope that one day her son, at least, might make it out and have a good life, in a country that barely tolerated her, barely let her scrape by, but which might accept him as one of its own, a citizen like any other, with all the rights guaranteed by the passport in his pocket.

You hate yourself when you get sentimental almost as much as you hate yourself when you get bitter, so you resolve to get back to practical matters and ask the woman where she and her family live. It turns out their home is barely two blocks away, which was how the cops managed to find her and bring her over so quickly. This fact prompts you to consider if the killers went looking for Yusravi, or if they followed him from somewhere, or if they simply ran into him here as he was walking back home. You ask the woman if it was normal for her son to be out at that time of night, and she says yes, sometimes he'd go study with a classmate who had a better computer than theirs, an old PC that was all she could afford. As you weigh whether this is one of many deceits the poor woman may have been served by her late progeny, an agent approaches to say that the judge has arrived.

At that point it's business as usual: the judge and medical examiner show up in about the same mood as you and go through the checklist with a general eagerness to get this over with. The secretary makes the necessary notes and the judge confirms they've taken the necessary photos before authorizing the removal of the body. The medical examiner says little: he'll have his chance to opine in his report, at his leisure and after conducting his own investigation on the autopsy table.

You're just seeing them off when your counterpart from the street patrol returns. They've done what you asked and, as it turns out, more than one of the local residents instructed them to get fucked, just so you know, but they did talk to someone who saw something. And not exactly through a window. The sentence unsettles you and you give



him a questioning look. Better if you come hear it for yourself, detective, it's just that door over there, third on the right, he says, pointing, with a mysterious expression that stirs your curiosity and prompts you to begin walking, hoping this will lead to something better than the largely useless and dubiously factual statements you've managed to collect after ninety minutes on the ground.

What you see surprises you, for a change. Sitting on a chair is a woman, very pale, possibly in her eighties, breathing hard while another agent holds her hand and tries to comfort her, promising there is nothing to worry about. When they introduce you as the detective handling the case, the old woman sits up in fright and, with imploring eyes, asks you to forgive her. You exchange a confused look with the officer, who is gently shaking her head and speaking tenderly to the woman, whom she calls Doña Matilde, and insisting she doesn't have to hurry, she can just tell the detective, you, the story she's just shared. Then the woman sits back against the chair, looks you straight in the eye, and explains that she had been too frightened to go downstairs, she was planning on calling tomorrow, or better yet, she was going to call her son, who lives in Segovia, she hadn't wanted to wake him up in the middle of the night like that to go with her to the police station. You repeat your colleague's request that she calm down, she has nothing to worry about, she can just tell you what she saw.

"I didn't see it, I wish I had only seen it, but what happened to me and that poor boy was my fault," she says. And then, from the place where you last expected to find it, that old woman's lips, you hear the end of the story you've been chasing all night. Before going to bed, poor Matilde realized she had forgotten to take out the trash and, since it was nice out, she decided to take it to the dumpster herself. She didn't cross anyone on her way to the alley, but as she walked back, two girls cut her off, they couldn't have been more than thirteen or fourteen, one was South American, the other she couldn't tell. They told her to hand over her watch and gold necklace, with very poor manners. Doña Matilde scanned the street for help, but there was no one. But the girls were so young, she looked straight at them and said they ought to be ashamed, accosting an elderly woman like that, they should go back home where they belonged. And then, the South American girl gave



her a shove that almost knocked her to the ground, cursed her out and, grabbing her by the wrist, began taking off the watch. Matilde was so shocked by the attack that she could barely speak.

Then, out of nowhere came this boy, also South American. Instead of joining the girls in the attack, as she was afraid he would, he pulled them off and pushed them against a wall. He stood between her and Doña Matilde and told them to get the hell out of there, they had no business on that street and they better rethink things fast if they didn't want to throw their lives away. Doña Matilde was impressed with how serious and determined the boy was, he didn't even flinch when they girls started calling him the most horrible insults she had heard in her life. He was also unfazed when two boys a little younger than him showed up and, seeing what was happening with the girls, approached him with clenched fists. The boy told Doña Matilde to go to her door and he protected her from the others as she took refuge inside the building. She ran to the elevator and she could hear them fighting, but the boy seemed to have the situation under control. He was a few inches taller than the others. It was when she got up to her apartment and went out on the balcony that she saw it happen. As the two boys had him distracted, another, a bit older, crept up from behind and furiously jabbed at him with a knife. At that point, Doña Matilde couldn't take it anymore, she didn't want to watch. She barely managed to reach her armchair before passing out. When she came to, she could already hear sirens and the neighbors shouting. Since that point she had been contemplating going downstairs, but she hadn't managed to muster the strength, and that's what I was doing, Detective, when these officers knocked on my door.

Inevitably, you hear Angélica's words ringing in your ears, and instead of sounding like bullshit, it sounds like an unexpected version of the truth. Doña Matilde has neither the cunning, nor the need, nor the stamina to lie, especially to a detective who represents authority, an authority that she, in her day, some three-quarters of a century ago, unlike those rogue children, learned to respect.



It's Doña Matilde who gives you the key to solving the case a week later. She's old, but her memory is fine, and despite the scare, she noticed details. You ask her question after question until she gives you the clue you need: something the two boys who came to help the two girls said to Yusnavi. Their apparent leader told him you don't mess with Los Trece, everyone who did lived to regret it.

What followed was a routine investigation, in collaboration with the gang-violence department. Los Trece are a gang that terrorizes Villaverde and Carabanchel, it consists of thirteen very young kids, both Latin American and Spanish, who attack other kids as well as the elderly. One of their rites of initiation, which the two girls were completing that night, involved assaulting a senior citizen and taking anything of value they had on them. The undercover police worked fast; with wire taps, it was the members of Los Trece themselves who indiscreetly gave away the murderer's identity: one Ernesto C.D., born in Madrid, Spanish, son of a Spanish woman, father unknown, seventeen years old, with multiple priors and several stints in juvie.

Life's trajectory leads you to stare the darling little boy in the face at the exit of the building where he lives, in a dilapidated housing block that has been standing for more decades than decorum would allow, far more than it was designed to withstand. You go with your colleague and a couple uniformed agents, but you run ahead and, after identifying yourself, tell him to put his hands against the wall. Ignoring the order, he makes a fist and threatens you. That's when you draw your Beretta and jab it into his kidneys. With all the rancor you know how to encode in a look, you tell him that if he puts his hands up, he'll remain a minor whom the law will look upon indulgently, but if he touches you, he won't be any more than a rabid dog with a bullet in its belly. Swallowing his pride, he places his arms behind his back and the uniformed agents cuff him. You did something you shouldn't have, according to the law, but at the same time, it was something you had no choice but to do, because it was what your gut demanded.

Someone has to start teaching the bastard that bad luck isn't an excuse for being a selfish motherfucker, and more importantly, it doesn't give you permission to fuck over someone who's just trying to play the poor hand they were dealt with dignity instead of becoming yet another machine spreading pain in the world.





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.
12. RT/TC 012 (2020). “Claudia and the Cats”. Author: Ivanna Chapeta (Guatemala); Translator: Lindsay Romanoff Bartlett; Genre: Short Story.
13. RT/TC 013 (2021). *Song of Being and Nonbeing*. Author: Santiago Alba Rico (Spain); Translator: Carolina Finley Hampson; Genre: Poetry.
14. RT/TC 014 (2021). “Christmas Eve in the Hills of Jaruco”. Author: Robert F. Lima Rovira and Robert Lima (Cuba/USA); Translator: Robert lima; Genre: Chronicle.
15. RT/TC 015 (2021). *Three Poems*. Author: José Luis García Martín (Spain); Translator: Claudia Quevedo-Webb; Genre: Poetry.
16. RT/TC 016 (2021). *A Manifesto for reading* (excerpt). Author: Irene Vallejo (Spain); Translator: Erin Goodman; Genre: Essay.
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.
20. RT/TC 020 (2021). *Three Poems*. Author: Julia Barella (Spain); Translator: Sarah Glenski; Genre: Poetry.
21. RT/TC 021 (2021). *Five Galician Songs*. Author: Emilio Cao (Spain); Translator: Robert Lima; Genre: Poetry.
22. RT/TC 022 (2022). *The KIO Towers*. Author: José Luis Castillo Puche (Spain); Translator: Douglas Edward LaPrade; Genre: Poetry.
23. RT/TC 023 (2022). “One Hundred Cornfields of Solitude”. Author: Melanie Márquez Adams (Ecuador); Translator: Emily Hunsberger; Genre: Chronicle.



24. RT/TC 024 (2022). *Eight Poems*. Author: Luis Alberto de Cuenca (Spain); Translator: Gustavo Pérez Firmat; Genre: Poetry.
25. RT/TC 025 (2022). *Pilgrimage to Santiago (1610)*. Author: Diego de Guzmán (Spain); Translator: George D. Greenia; Genre: Chronicle.
26. RT/TC 026 (2022). *Short stories from Ábrete sésamo*. Author: Clara Eugenia Ronderos (Colombia); Translator: Mary G. Berg; Genre: Short Story.
27. RT/TC 027 (2022). *Rincón de Traductores / Translators' Corner – Volume 3: Compilation 2021-2022*. Various Authors; Various Translators.