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Beyond the moons of August

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University of Wollongong

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BEYOND THE MOONS OF AUGUST

A thesis (novel) submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

2003
CERTIFICATION

I, Beatriz Copello, declare that this thesis (novel), submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Beatriz Copello

30 June 2003
BEYOND THE MOONS OF AUGUST

BEATRIZ COPELLO
Stigmata of a departed God.

* * *

Gabriela lifted the sheet to find the corpse of her dead father. The steering wheel of his car was marked on his chest as if it had been branded onto him with fire. Gabriela wanted to warm his frozen hands. She covered his face with kisses. She knelt on the side of the bed. Crying, she made promises to him. He had been waiting for her. He needed to talk to her and ask for forgiveness. He had not been a good father. Love had not been enough. Gabriela had wanted much more. She longed for her father to be a regular person, an everyday father with a nine-to-five job. Instead he had been a playboy, a philanderer. His life had revolved around elegant clothes, fast, expensive cars, and his many rich, powerful and beautiful women. Gabriela had wished for him to help her with her homework, to stay at home, to tell her stories as he did when she was a child. Now he was leaving. A departure that not only marked a beginning but also led Gabriela to another path, another world, and another life.

* * *
Like into a Dante's scene
where fire and heat
consume all passions
a man had entered
a place for lost souls
where the dead rest
waiting for judgement day

Como en una escena de Dante
donde el fuego y el calor
consumen las pasiones
un hombre ha entrado
un lugar para almas perdidas
donde los muertos
esperan el juicio final.

* * *

Gabriela admired her father's clothing. Blue jacket, golden buttons. White trousers. Pale blue shirt. A wide red tie, small dark blue polka dots. He lit up a cigarette. Gabriela wanted to ask for one, but she wasn't allowed to smoke in front of him.

"I leave with many regrets."

"But why are you leaving?"

"It's my time."

"I prayed for you to be alive."

"I'm sorry I've hurt you. Look after your sister. Please water the roses."
"Your pine tree has died. This morning Jose cut it down. Its roots looked like outstretched arms on the rusted wheelbarrow."

"It was planted with love, watered with hope."

"I wanted to be an actress! I'll never be one now. I promise you. I'll be a virgin until I marry. Pure and chaste . . ."

He smiled and kissed her forehead. He ascended, enveloped in the smoke of his Chesterfield cigarette. Slowly, very slowly his feet rose. His head disappeared first through the ornate white ceiling. Then his body, and finally his feet. When he passed above her head Gabriela noted how clean the soles of his shoes were. Some of the ash from his cigarette dropped on the bed, and the smell of tobacco and cologne lingered in the room.

* * *

I had for many years shared my body and soul with a being, a being which later I discovered was just my image reflected on the mirror.

* * *
That night, I sat for a long time in one of the cold hospital toilets, where my father had died. My mind was a tabula rasa. I was a piece of cardboard cut into the shape of a young woman. My face: the work of a child who had drawn me with charcoal. I was dry like my father's pine. A puppet with diarrhoea. I wanted to shit my life away. The night before father had left for his final trip, he was very angry. I had pestered him to let me join an amateur theatre group. Furious, he had barked his parting words: "If I have to die to stop you from becoming an actress, I wish that, tonight, I die on the road!"

***

In life, events are like a stack of dominoes, as one falls, the others follow.

***

At the end of the long corridor there they stood: the Vaccaro men talking to a doctor. They stood like the marbled statues in their well-kept garden. Gabriela's grandfather, her Uncle Lito and her Uncle Raul. They all
stood with their hands behind their backs. They seemed to be staring into space. She saw them as if in a dream, behind a curtain of gauze, a veil. She approached the group and tried to kiss her grandfather. With mortal coldness he pushed her away. Lito pressed her against him. The doctor's words sounded hollow and empty. "Tragic accident. We tried our best. Nothing could be done. His spinal cord was severed. Tell Mrs Vaccaro that he died in God's grace. He was able to confess and receive the final rites."

Gabriela believed the doctor was mistaken. Her father was still alive. Even if he had disappeared through the ceiling. She had spoken to him only moments ago. He was sleeping peacefully. She ran back into the room where her father lay. She would pray with faith for him to wake up ... to be alive. And she prayed until the night was no longer night. Gabriela prayed until a thin ray of light entered the room. A ray which danced and made doodles on the white walls.

* * *

9
Prayers To A Forgotten God.

"Please God if Dad lives I will forget that I want to be an actress."

"Please God if Dad lives I will do everything that my parents want me to do!"

"Please God if Dad lives I won't wear make up, and I won't dye my hair anymore."

"Please God if Dad lives I won't paint my nails, or pad my bras with socks."

"Please God if Dad lives I will be a virgin until I marry."

"Please God if Dad lives I won't swear any more."

"Please God if Dad lives I will study, study, study until I need glasses to see."

"Please God if Dad lives I won't have dirty thoughts."

"Please God if Dad lives I won't masturbate any more."

***
"Come on, Gabriela. We must return to Rosario. The Vaccaros will arrange the funeral. They want it to be at their place. I know why. They said it's because their place is bigger. But I know. It's because they want his lovers to pay their last respects."

"But Mum ... Dad is alive. I spoke with him last night."

"Gabriela, he's dead!"

"He's not! Please believe me. He's only resting, he'll be fine soon. He's just tired. He'll be better, and then he'll come home. Everything will be different."

"Stop it! You're making things worse for yourself."

"Please, Mum, please. Come! Come into the room! I'll show you. Please come."

* * *

Truth covered Verdad cubierta
by a white linen sheet. por un lino blanco.
Truth of the stigmata Verdad de la estigma
on a man put to rest. en un hombre que descansa.
Undeniable truth, Verdad sin duda,
of a now silent sinner. de un callado pecador.
Truth about the price, Verdad sobre el precio,
paid for the life he wore, que pagó por la vida que llevó,
like a silk handkerchief, como un pañuelo
in the right pocket en el bolsillo derecho
of his tailored suit. de su elegante traje sastre.

* * *

★

Gabriela and her mother Elisa walked into the room where her father had died as a true Christian. Elisa lifted the sheet that covered him, and shook her dead husband.

"See! No response. He's dead! So stop that nonsense right now. Don't be crazy."

"I swear I spoke to him ... look ... look mother. Ash on the floor, and on the bed. They're from his cigarette."

"Gabriela, please, no acting! No drama! No lies!"

"But ... Mum..."

"Shut up! Get your sister. She's in the garden. The bus leaves in half an hour."

* * *
The Witch in the big cauldron boils

a pinch of pain, two tears

and the shadow of a man.

She stirs with a big spoon

the liquid that holds,

\textit{sus penas de amor,}

her love's grieves,

\textit{su amor,}

her love.

Love.

\* \* \*

\* \*

In the big pot, over the gas stove, Elisa stirred the black liquid. Tears slid on her still young and beautiful face. She believed all her tears had dried up until now. But she wasn't crying for him. She was crying for her daughters and herself. She wondered what would become of them. Who would support them? How would she meet the payments on the mortgage Edgar had taken out to buy the fleet of trucks from one of his lovers: Lidia, the widow? Her
thoughts flew between the past and the present. He was now dead! She stirred with a wooden spoon. "Now you'll be mine for ever." The liquid bubbled. "I'll have you with me, in my memories. Memories of happy times." The liquid spilled over the edge of the pot. She asked herself whether or not to cause a scene at the funeral. Slap Lidia, the widow! Slap Luisa, Edgar's ex-secretary! Slap Adelle, the rich bitch who dared to criticise Gabriela. The black water spilled beyond the edge of the pot and flooded the top of the stove. "I bet Adelle is buying herself designer label black clothes. The liquid cascaded from the stove onto the tiled floor. "No money! No pension! No job! What will we do? The Vaccaros will have to help us." A pool of black water formed at Elisa's feet.

"Mum, why are you boiling our clothes? Is there a plague? Sis told me that during the Black Death in Europe some people boiled their clothes and didn't get sick."

"I'm dyeing our clothes black."

"Why?"

"Because, when someone dies, we must dress in black."

"Gabriela said that father is not dead. She said that he has paid to have a dummy made to look like him. He escaped overseas because we all drove him mad. We won't bury Daddy. A dummy is in the coffin. Poor Daddy! I
didn't want to drive him mad!" Stella cried. Tears balanced on the edge of her long lashes. She frowned and dimples formed on her cheeks.

"Don't cry, darling. You didn't drive him mad. No one did. He's dead. He died in an accident. You saw him. You saw the mark of the steering wheel on his chest. Don't take any notice of your sister."

"I'm happy because I'm not going to school any more."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, who's going to pay for the school fees? And I'm not going to a public school."

"I don't know where you get those funny ideas. You'll keep going to school. Go and play outside."

* * *

And the flesh was alive. And blood kept it alive. And it ran through the body. 

* * *

* *

In the long vigil, sleep escaped the mourners. "A cup of tea, querida?" "A glass of port, señor?" Flowers and heat. Coronas de flores that adorned the Vaccaro's grand reception room. A body that rotted as the

Quickly, the old ladies, friends of the family, stuff his nose with cotton balls.

"My father asked me to put a hammer in his coffin. He wanted to wear shoes!" Everyone ignored me. Smell. Flowers wilting. Rotten flesh. The nostrils ached. Tears. Laments from family and friends.

"Such a good man."

"So handsome."

"So clever."

"Not so good to his wife and kids."

"I've heard that all his lovers are coming as soon as the wife retires to rest."

"Such a young life. A real crime."

Suddenly father's mouth opened. "See, he's alive!" I screamed again. The old ladies tied a scarf around his head. "It's the heat. Always so hot in January."

Stella was sleeping. They dragged mother and me away to rest for a while. I didn't want to. But I lay down and fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.
Do the dead feel cold? ¿Tienen los muertos frío?
Do they grieve? ¿Tienen los muertos penas?
Does hunger rumble in their bellies? ¿Tienen los muertos hambre?
Do the dead want to live? ¿Tienen los muertos ansias de vivir?

A black horse. A black carriage. Inside the coffin covered in flowers the dead departed. Calle Colón. All the neighbours were out. Women wiped their tears with the ends of their aprons. Men touched or lifted their hats. The wooden wheels rolled slowly over the cobblestones. Calle Colón. His last trip. On the way to the cemetery, Gabriela planned their suicide. The three of them had to die. In death they would be together. And the wheels rolled on the cobblestones. Gabriela was told that the lovers had been to the wake while they slept. How much hate can a young heart hold? They had stolen her father’s love.

"I'd rather him dead than married to Adelle," Gabriela told someone, who later telephoned Adelle to tell her what Gabriela had said. The procession slowly advanced over Avenida Pellegrini. Passers-by made the sign of the cross as the funeral procession interrupted the mid-day traffic.
Gabriela imagined her own funeral. Her friends crying. Only roses on her expensive coffin. No lovers. "She was a virgin." "She died a virgin as she had promised her father."

***

... And may his soul rest in peace. *Muerto el perro se acabó la rabia.* When the dog dies, the rabies dies too.

***

🌟

"Mum, I've thought about it. We should kill ourselves. No more problems. No more worries about money. We'll be with Dad forever."

"Darling, don't be silly."

"Mum, all we have to do is turn the gas on. After a few minutes we'll faint and we won't feel a thing."

"Somehow we'll manage."

"Please ... I don't want to live. Let's kill ourselves."

"Gabriela ... Life is precious. All your life is ahead of you. Today you're sad. Your Dad is dead. But tomorrow ... tomorrow you'll change your mind. Think of all those things you want to do, all your plans."

"My plans are as dead as my Dad!"
"Calm down! Don't scream. What plans are dead? You can still go to university and study mathematics."

"I'm talking about being an actress. You know what he said before he went on the trip."

"Forget what he said. Concentrate on enrolling at university."

"Look, mum, how are we going to pay for university? And who's going to pay the mortgage? And how are we going to buy food?"

"I know. I know. He didn't leave us in a very good situation. Something will happen. The Vaccaros won't leave us in the street. He had insurance for the truck. That'll pay for something."

"I want to be dead!"

"Don't cry any more. You'll ruin your beautiful eyes. We've cried enough over the last few days."

* * *

Tango. The radio played *Gira Gira*. Tango. "*Cuando se prueben las pilchas que vas a dejar*". Tango y vida. Tango and life. When they try out the clothes that you're going to leave. Tango and life. I knew life was a tango.

* * *
Only a few days after the funeral Gabriela began to forget her father's face. She kept looking at his photo. All she wanted was to hold it, to stamp his features on her mind. Elisa's voice brought her back to reality. "Gabriela, let's go to your father's apartment." Yes, she wanted to be in his apartment. There she could feel his presence in all that was his. There she could touch his furniture, his clothes, his papers. Even smell his perfume. Gabriela was eager to search through his papers. Look for secrets, for money that was already needed. They had the key, it was handed to her mother with his gold watch and his wallet after the accident. "There was no money in the wallet," the police had said.

It was early in the morning.

Three lost souls walked to the tram stop. Innocents who searched for a way out of a dilemma. They believed the solution to their problems was hidden in a drawer. A child. An adolescent. A woman. A mother and her two daughters. A key in an empty purse.

"If we don't find anything we'll kill ourselves."

"Gabriela, shut up or I'll hit you in front of everyone on the street!"

"You haven't told me, what do you expect to find?"
"Perhaps a life insurance policy. A bank deposit book. I don't know. Do you remember that your father had thirty-six gold coins? Well, perhaps we'll find them."

"I don't want to die, mummy. Gabriela said that we'll kill ourselves."


* * *

And the princesses arrived at Ali Baba's Cave. Some events are still fresh in my mind as if they had been stamped with fire.

* * *

As I go back in time I remember mother's trembling hand as she opened Dad's apartment. His *bulin*. His love nest. His business address. Office+Bedroom. Waiting room+Bathroom. Kitchen+Internal patio. Plants. Papers. Music. Whisky and cigarettes. Dad once said: "If I die, you three go and live in the apartment, rent the house and live off the rent." The lights were on. The front patio was cold and a shiver ran down my spine. Were we trespassing? Were we breaking a taboo by entering a temple? Were we breaking sacred rules? "I have the right to be here," mother said in reply to
my concerns. The office had papers all over the floor. Drawers had been left open. "Someone must've been here before us," said mother. Dad's clothes were on the floor. Someone had taken the furniture and the art pieces that he loved. Mum wondered whether Uncle Lito knew something about this. She telephoned him.

Father had been so careful with his clothes, so meticulous. Who would have thrown his beautiful clothes all over the floor? There was no longer a wardrobe to hang them in. No dressing table. No bed for love making. I hugged one of his jackets and my tears wet the lapel. His three hundred ties formed a colourful mountain in a corner of the room.

Mother could not believe what Uncle Lito had told her. *Probreccita mama!* Poor Mum! Adelle, the rich, nasty witch, had taken the furniture and the art. They were hers!

"... And she wants you to return the fur coat she gave you. It was a loan and not a present."

"Bloody woman. She can stuff her fur coat up her arse!" I shouted.

"SHHHH! Don't be crude, Gabriela." Mother begged me, wringing her hands. No tears in her eyes. Not any more ... just trembling lips.

I sat with a drawer on my lap looking for the papers that would secure our future. Mother said that one of father's friends had told her he had taken
out a life insurance policy in Adelle's name, and mine. But if Adelle had been there to collect her things, she could have taken the policy. Nothing. Business papers. Bills. Doodles. Newspaper articles. No policies. Adelle had enough influential friends to leave me out of any policy. Perhaps it was in the safety deposit box together with the thirty-six Mexican gold coins. We didn't have the key to the safety deposit box, but Uncle Lito was the manager of the bank. He could easily open it and give us the contents. Innocence. Naivety of three souls who clutched at thin blades of grass. Sweet smelling freshly cut grass.

We never found the policy, or the gold coins. "There were only cobwebs in the safe," said Uncle Lito.

Right at the end of a drawer I found a neat parcel tied with a rubber band. They were Adelle's letters to father. It was obvious from the letters that she hated me. She was jealous of me! Not of my mother or the other lovers, she was jealous of me! "Would Gabriela wait for you as I wait for you?" she
asked in one of her letters. How much hate our hearts hosted, hearts that loved the same man ...

***
Cancer, a curse. An illness of the soul. An illness to be kept secret. An illness without a cure. Cancer, a death sentence. (A belief of the times.)

***

🌟

It wasn't autumn yet, but Elisa believed that autumn had arrived. Everything appeared to be tinted by a deep grey and yellow. People's faces seemed sombre and sad. The streets looked less vibrant. The garden flowers had lost their lustre. As she showered, she pondered. Perhaps Gabriela was right. Kill themselves and end it all. Absolute peace, as Edgar had finally found.

A small pleasure - Elisa enjoyed the warm water running on her body. As she lathered her breast, she noted something unusual. A lump. She dropped the soap and pressed her right breast to touch that elusive, round mass again. Yes, it was there. There was no doubt she had a lump on her breast.
"Bad things always come in threes." She wondered if they had had their three.

The specialist's surgery was packed. Weren't those women waiting for their death sentence worried at all? Why did everyone look so engrossed in the tattered magazines? Did the specialist deal with matters other than lumps on the breast? Why was her sister Francis talking about going on holidays after the operation? Elisa's mind was a whirlwind. Flashbacks from the past weeks intermingled with her fresh thoughts.

"We'll need to operate immediately. As a precautionary measure. I'll extirpate the uterus as well. We won't know if it's cancer until I operate. So don't you worry your pretty head about it. I have operated on many cases where the growth has been benign."

"Doctor ... the uterus ... why? Is it necessary?"

"You don't need to worry about anything! I know what I'm doing."

"But ... what about if..."

"Look, I'm a very busy man. You just go and arrange with the secretary to book you into the Alma Mater Hospital next Tuesday. As I said, everything is under control."

"But..."
"It's not the end of the world, you know. Go along, dear, I have many people waiting."

The sisters walked out of the hospital with their arms linked and their thoughts in a brighter future.

"Elisa, don't worry. He obviously knows what he's talking about. He's a well known specialist."

"But, Francis, why take out my uterus? What does that have to do with a lump on my breast?"

"I don't know!"

"... And what if it's not cancer? Is he going to take it out anyway?"

"Probably not!"

"He didn't tell me whether he'll just cut the lump out, or if he'll remove the whole breast."

"Elisa, I'm sure you don't have cancer. You look too healthy for that. As soon as you recover, we'll go and spend two or three weeks by the sea, so you can get better quickly."

"Oh yes, with what money?"

"Don't you have any money?"

"Only a few thousand pesos. It has to last us for while."
"Don't ever worry about money. God will provide! We'll have fun. We'll go to the beach during the day. At night we can play roulette in the Mar del Plata Casino."

"You're like mother. Do you want to lose your money like she did?"

"She was a gambler. I'm not."

"You've been going every month to the casino in the last year. A fourteen-hour trip. You want to be careful and not turn into a gambler yourself."

"Silly, I'm no gambler. I want you to go ... good idea? ... And Gabriela too. You all need to have a good time."

* * *

**elemental** a. & n. 2. N. Entity or force thought to be physically manifested by occult means. [f. med. L elementalis (as prec.; see - Al)] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary.*

* * *
Gabriela searched the cardboard suitcase, which contained her Grandmother Pepita's belongings. After losing her fortune at the roulette table, her Grandmother had not much left. Francis didn't want anything from the suitcase, so her mother had kept it after Pepita had died. Gabriela had seen the old book before. She knew what it contained. Power. Power to make things happen. She wondered why her Grandmother had not made use of the book. The old pages were yellow. Mould and moths had eaten the end of some of the pages. She kissed the book and thanked Grandmother for having it. She was going to put it to work!

Gabriela made a list of everything she needed:

IV. An assistant (Stella)
IV. A live animal for the offering (Stella's turtle)
IV. A safety circle (Chalk to draw the circle)
IV. A sword (A big kitchen knife)
IV. Appropriate robes (Dad's bathrobe)
IV. A gold or silver container with pure earth (Easy! A cup of dirt from the garden)
IV. A gold or silver container filled with water
IV. A ruby stone (Mum's ruby ring)

IV. Four candles

IV. An owl feather (A pigeon feather)

Gabriela fetched her sister and told her that she was going to be her assistant in something very important. Stella demanded to know what Gabriela was planning to do. "I want money and power!" she explained. Stella agreed to be her assistant as long as she could share both: power and money. She wasn't too sure what she could do with power, but if her sister was having it, she'd have her share. Gabriela gave her the list and ordered her to bring the first four items to the attic.

Dust and darkness. Musty smell. Cracking old wood. Remains of the past imprisoned in suitcases. Boxes and trunks. Gabriela drew aside the faded curtains and opened the window. Four pigeons, which were resting on the window ledge, fluttered their wings frantically and flew away. She never liked the place, it gave her the creeps. When Stella arrived with the needed items, Gabriela dressed in her father's bathrobe. Her sister looked at her with admiration. "Money and power will soon be ours," she said.
Gabriela drew a circle with chalk. She positioned the four candles at each side of the compass. On the north side she also placed the cup with the soil and, on the south, she rested the cup with the water.

"Assistant, once we're in the circle, I'll give you the necessary orders. It's very important that neither of us goes out of the circle. The circle will protect us. Place the turtle and the feather, the knife and the ring in the centre of the circle. Now, Assistant, light the candles. Let's get into the circle and, remember, no matter what, don't get out of the circle or the Elementals will take you with them."

"Who are the Elementals?"

"No time for questions, Assistant. Let's get into the circle. Pass me the ring." Gabriela ceremoniously placed her mother's ring on the middle finger of her right hand.

"Assistant, pass me the sword."

"What sword?"

"The kitchen knife, stupid."

"OK, don't get moody. I know you've got your period."

"Shut up or I'll push you out of the circle. Assistant, the feather, and hold the turtle high in the air with your left hand."
Gabriela held the feather with her left hand and, with her right, she held the knife. In a very deep voice, she asked the magic circle to protect them from all evils and then, with her knife, she followed the circle that she had drawn with the chalk.

"Oh, Elementals, we offer you this sacred turtle."

"Are you giving away my turtle?"

"Yes. Don't interrupt."

"But I love my turtle."

"We'll have lots and lots of money in exchange for the turtle."

"Ah, OK. Do I hold the turtle high or low?"

"High. Oh, Elementals listen to my prayers:

Οκυμ οκυμ λατινυσ προσπερυσ μεακυμ
Κυμκ κυμ τενιδ λαυδαυς
Ρεπτυυσ αμαρυυσ περιλυυρ
Δινερυμ ρυμ αμαρυς τυλδυ
Οκυμ οκυμ οκυρομυμ

"Assistant, repeat the prayers with me."

"What shit are you saying?"

"Don't swear."

"But you swear!"
"Yes, but I always swore. Just hum and pretend you're saying the same thing. They may not realise it."

"Όκυμ օկւմ լատինոս պրոոփերուս մեկակուμ"

"Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm"  

"Կյուկ կյուկ տենիդ լանդասո"  

"Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm"  

"Քեռիլուս կամիրիլուս պերիլուս"  

"Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm"  

"երեմ րյում կամարուս տողես"  

"Hummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm"  

"Օկում օկում օկուրում"  

"Hummmmmmmmmmmmmm"  

"Don't move! Don't say a word! There is one!

"Where? Where?"

"There, there on top of the old dressing table."

"I can't see anything."

"Just because you can't see him it doesn't mean that he's not there. Let me do all the talking. Thank you for coming, Elemental."

........................................

"My name is Gabriela and I seek your assistance."
"We're in financial trouble and need money."
"...lots of it."
"Shut up Stella! We offer you these gifts: the earth, the water and the turtle."

"No you can't have my sister."
"Please don't give me away."
"No, I won't. Don't say another word. Elemental the turtle, the water and the earth or nothing."

"Your name is not Elemental, so what's your name."

"Shit! Ok, so we have a deal?"

"Can I call you any time?"

"Thank you so much. Say thank you, Stella, and don't leave the circle because he likes you. He wants you!"

"Thank you."
"Goodbye to you, too. He's gone. Now let's blow the candles out. Pass them to me."

Out of the circle now, they collected everything, closed the window and went back down. Stella wanted to know why the turtle was still there. Why hadn't the Elementals taken the offerings? Gabriela explained that he will come back later to collect his gifts, or 'something' that he liked better. "Mierda! I hope it's not me" said Stella and she went to finish her homework.

** **

White flowers. A beach. Candles. And the Madonna blesses the innocent.

** **

I should have realised that the Vaccaros were angry when I went to tell them that Mum was going to be operated on the next day. They were cold and distant. They hardly said a word to me. Auntie Titina promised to come and wait with me, until Mum was out of the theatre, and we knew whether she had cancer or not. The big mansion, where I had spent so many beautiful hours, was like a mausoleum. Ice seemed to pour out of its walls. In the
reception room I could still see Dad's coffin. "Come and pray with us. For the souls of your parents," said Grandmother as she dragged me to the corner of the reception room where they had set up an altar. There, my father's photo occupied a place of honour, beside a statue of the Madonna. White flowers and candles burning. I wondered whether the Elementals had greater powers than the Virgin Mary.

I knelt, next to Grandmother and Auntie Titina, and as I repeated the Ora Pro Nobis of the Rosary, I left my body. I went to a place where the sun shone with a blinding force. A place of sandy beaches, and blond people. I saw people swimming in a blue sea. The sails of 100 boats flared in the summer's breeze. I took my shoes off to feel this place with my body. The soles of my feet burned through my stockings, as I walked on the beach. The smell of the sea, mixed with suntan oil, replaced the overpowering scent of the white flowers. White flowers for the dead. Calla lilies. I approached a group of young people. They looked at me as if they had seen a ghost. I realised that my black stockings and black dress must have looked out of place. "Where is this place?" I asked. "Bondi Beach, mate," said a muscular man wearing a funny hat. All the others laughed and laughed.

After the prayer session I went to speak with Teresa, one of Grandmother's maids. She knew the Vaccaros well. She had been with them
since she was young. Teresa was always up-to-date with what was happening. When she saw me, she hugged me and buried my face in her big bosom.

"You poor child! You poor child!" she kept repeating.

"Teresa … what's wrong with them?" I whispered.

"Missy, sad. Very sad. They think your father killed himself, because your mother made his life a misery," she said, as she dried a flood of tears with her apron.

"Rubbish! Are they mad? Where did they get such a stupid idea?" I asked raising my voice.

"Shhhhh! They'll hear us. Apparently, young Mr Edgar had asked your mother for a divorce, but she refused. Adelle had given him an ultimatum: 'Marry me or leave me,' she told him. Apparently, the night before he killed himself, he had a terrible fight with your mother. He was furious! He was so angry! He wanted to finish it all!" Teresa explained, barely moving her lips.

"What a lot of shit. Mother wasn't even at home when he left. And if he was angry with someone at all, it was with me. I'll give them a piece of my mind. My poor mother!"
"Please, please, Miss Gabriela, you'll get me into trouble. Promise you won't say anything. Promise, dear!" Teresa begged, wringing her old and calloused hands.

"OK. I won't say anything now. But I'll find a way to clear my Mum's name."

* * *

Sorrow of the heart  \hspace{1cm} Penas del corazon
Disease of the flesh  \hspace{1cm} Enfermedad de la carne
Pain of the soul  \hspace{1cm} Dolor del alma
Loneliness of the mind. \hspace{1cm} Soledad de la mente.

* * *

★

Another hospital. Another long corridor. Another series of doors mirroring each other ... And the same pain. The same pain in the gut. The same knot in the throat. The mouth drying. Hands shaking. Heart pumping blood at a frightening speed. Gabriela paced up and down the corridor. Not a word had been said between Titina and Gabriela, except for an early greeting. Gabriela searched in her handbag and took out a packet of cigarettes and
quickly lit one. She took a deep puff, and let it out ever so slowly. Smoke ringlets rose, leaving a grey trail as they ascended. No one can stop her smoking now. No one will ever tell her again what to do. "How can you smoke at a time like this?" Titina's voice resonated with an echo in the silent and empty corridor. Gabriela ignored her comments. Yes, smoking was a pleasure, but also a friend.

"Miss Vaccaro."

"Yes. That's me."

"Your mother will be fine. We didn't have to extirpate her breast. It was only a cyst. We just finished analysing it. The pathologist will do more extensive tests, but we are pretty sure. Your Mum is one lucky lady!"

"Doctor, how long does she have to be in the hospital?"

"If there are no complications, you'll have your mother at home by next week. She'll need to have her dressing changed daily. She'll need a nurse to drain the suture points."

Gabriela's mother smiled as she was taken to her room.

* * *
A place in the sun
beaches and sea.
Golden wheat
adorn the hair
of the tall gods.

* * *

"Stella, get dressed. We're going to Daminatto."
"Where? Not to visit more Elementals? Ha! Ha!"
"No stupid. Daminatto, the travel agent."
"Why do you want to go there?"
"I need to find out where Bondi Beach is and how to get there."
"What?"
"Bondi Beach. I checked in the dictionary, but it's not there."
"Why do you need to know?"
"I'll tell you when I find out."
"I know, with the money the Elementals give us, we'll go on holidays."
"Shut up and get dressed! I don't want to go on my own."

It didn’t take them long to arrive at Daminatto. Daminatto was an old, well-established travel company. Photos from all over the world decorated the walls. There were no other clients in the shop. Gabriela approached the counter, introduced herself and asked in which part of the world she could find Bondi Beach.

"Just a minute, Miss Vaccaro. I'll ask my partner. He's been all around the world and he's very good with geography. Che, do you know where Bondi Beach is?"

"Yes. It's a famous beach in Sidni, Australia."

"Come and talk to this young lady. She wants to know."

"Yes. Bondi Beach is in Sidni. I was there after the war. Beautiful place! On the wild side though."

"What do you mean wild?"

"Well, it's a very rough place. Colonial. Imagine, they don't sell spirits or wine on Sundays. Women cannot drink in public places. Talking about women, not many there. Seven men for each woman."

"I know it's a very beautiful place this Bondi Beach. How can I get there?"
"Don't make me laugh. What would a young girl like you want to do in Bondi."

"Sorry, sir, but it's my business. You just give me the information."

"There's a ship that goes to Sidni every six months. It's a cargo ship. But I can get you in. But let me assure you, it's a wild, wild place. Not for a lady like you."

"Yes, you said so already. Can you let me know how much would three tickets cost? What papers do we need to get there?"

"I'll find out for you. Come back next week. I'll have all the information you need."

Once out in the street, Gabriela felt better. Men were always trying to tell her what to do. Her father had been the worst. A pang of guilt hit her. Somehow her father's death had brought her what she always craved. Freedom.

"We'll sell everything and we'll go to Bondi Beach."

"We'll live on a beach? But, Gabriela, you know mother doesn't like the sun. She's funny. She doesn't want to be dark, but we all want to get a suntan."

"We'll get a great suntan at Bondi Beach."

"So, how would we live on the beach?"
"Stella, don't be silly. We'll find a house near the beach, in Sidni."

"That's where they have canguros?"

"Yes."

They had so much to plan for their trip. So much to find out. So much to do. For Gabriela's mother, coming to Australia was going to be a better option than killing themselves. Gabriela thought that her teaching certificate would be handy to find a job. She spoke some English, she was going to teach her Mum and Stella. Bondi. Such a magical place! Gods and Goddesses walked on the beach!

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Gabriela! Gabriela! Come quickly."

"What? What's happening now?"

"The turtle is dead! The turtle is dead! The Elementals killed it."

"Don't cry Stella."

"You're horrible. You're nasty. You ... you ... You gave my turtle away. Those Elementals are as horrible as you are."

"Stella, dear, the turtle may have died because she was very old."

"Rubbish! Daddy told me it was a very, very young turtle."

"If the Elementals took it, then they must give us money in return. We'll have lots of it. Just wait and see. I'll buy you 100 turtles."

"Poor little turtle!"
"I know. Poor little turtle."

"Why are you crying now? Gabriela, it wasn't your turtle."

* * *

The cards were dealt. Gabriela had the losing hand.

* * *

★

Gabriela entered the hospital room where her mother had been recovering for a few days. Elisa looked good that morning. Her hair was brushed back, her black and intense eyes sparkled like night stars. She was wearing a light blue nightie which made her skin look whiter. They hugged with difficulty. Gabriela sat on the edge of the bed and held her mother's hand. Lovingly, she asked her if she was in pain and about the food at the hospital, about the doctors and ...

"Talking about the doctors, there is this one intern, so handsome. Truly dark, tall and handsome."

"So?"

"Do you want to meet him?"

"... Hum ... I ... I love Cacho."
"Cacho! Cacho! What about Cacho? Is he going to marry you? You're too much for him. He won't be able to cope with you. His family is like the Vaccaros, mass in the morning, mass in the afternoon, mass at night! And if he loves you so much, why did he come to see you only once since you father died?"

"You'll be pleased to know that he loves me. He hasn't come to see me lately, because he had to go to Buenos Aires. The army interviewed him. The poor thing has to do military service."

"Poor thing ... don't make me laugh. Listen, come tomorrow at three, he'll be here and ..."

"Please, Mum!"

"Don't interrupt. Come at three. You won't be sorry."

"All right, all right, tomorrow I'll come at three."

"By the way Gabriela, there's something I meant to tell you, even before your father died."

"What?"

"Well, I know you're going to get upset, but I'm worried."

"What? What?"

"I read your journal."

"Mum! How dare you!"
A secret between
the pages of a book
like a Brazilian butterfly
is kept to dry after her death.
Secrets flattened, pressed, muted.

* * *

My Diary

Winter, May

I have a secret that I have kept for many years. Something I cannot discuss with anyone. How can I share this feeling with anyone? I'm surprised I haven't told Mum or Dad, because this has been with me all my life. I was so tempted to discuss it with my Social Studies teacher. She knows so much psychology! But what could I have told her? "Miss Vargas, I have this feeling that I had since I was a child. It's like I'm two people at the same time." I'm sure she'd send for Mum or
Dad immediately. "Your daughter is suffering some sort of paranoia."
"Yes your daughter is a psycho." I can hear her saying this.

Now I ask myself. If I was mad, how come I don't show it? Don't mad people tell their crazy stories all the time? I have kept the secret. Sometimes I believe that we are two people sharing this body. Other times I imagine that a lost soul has sought refuge in my body. If someone asks me, why I have this feeling, I will not know how to answer.

Sometimes the feeling is strong, and it turns into a voice. A voice which I recognise as mine. A voice which is old and knowledgeable. A voice from the universe. A voice which reaches me from the stars, from somewhere far. Am I going mad? Am I imagining this? Mum always says that I'm a dreamer, that I live in another world, that I'm here but I'm not here. Why am I so complicated? I've never heard of anyone with this problem.

* * *

* * *
There was a knock at the door. Stella and Gabriela stopped reading and looked at each other. Who could that be? It was quite late. Gabriela wondered whether she should go into her father's studio and grab a gun. "You open," said Gabriela. "No, you open," said Stella. Their mother was still in the hospital and they hated being alone. The knocks became more insistent. "Who is it?" asked Gabriela, making her voice sound deep and grown up. "Cacho," came the reply. "Tell him to go home. Mum will be angry if she knows he was here so late."

"Shut up. And don't say a word." Gabriela opened the door and gave him a welcoming smile. Cacho kissed her on the cheek. The three of them sat in the kitchen and chatted. Cacho told them about his trip to Buenos Aires and how in a few weeks he had to leave Rosario for his military service.

"Stella, go to bed."

"I'll go to bed when you come to bed."

"Don't be stupid. Go to bed."

"Mum won't be happy if she knows that I left you alone with Cacho."

"We want to talk about a secret that Cacho doesn't want anyone to hear."

"So, how come he's going to tell you?"
"Gabriela is my confidante," said Cacho wanting to sound important.

"I'll go to bed if tomorrow you let me wear your green dress, and your white sandals, and your matching handbag."

"It's my best dress! You're ... you're ... a stronso."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Cacho, she called me turd in Italian. She swore in Italian," Stella chanted.

"Yes, you're a shit! OK, OK wear my bloody clothes!"

Gabriela suggested that they sit in the sunroom, to be more comfortable and to see the stars. The sunroom was a large covered patio, with Mexican tiles on the floor and a glass roof. Elegant cane lounge suites and wing chairs gave a casual atmosphere to the room. Pots with luscious plants created a tropical atmosphere.

As soon as they sat down Cacho embraced her. Gabriela resisted his embrace but forcefully he brought her closer and kissed her passionately. Fire. Heat. A trembling of the hands. Legs which felt like jelly. A tingling in the belly button.

"I love you Gabriela," he whispered in her ear with a mellifluous voice. Gabriela sighed, enjoying the painful and sweet feeling that rose from between her legs, and travelled through her spine.

"Don't! I don't want you to touch me like that."
"Humm... why not? ... Yes ... Yes ..."

"Because I say so."

"Touch me ... please ... hummm ... Please ..."

"I won't."

"Why?"

"I'm a lady. Get your hands off me!"

Cacho's hands were difficult to control. Suddenly, he got hold of one of Gabriela's hands and held it to his penis. She felt the hard flesh and wondered what her Dad would have said if he knew she was doing this.

"That's how I wanted to catch you!" said Stella as she turned the light on.

"What? We're not doing anything," protested Gabriela.

"I... I... better go. It's late," murmured Cacho, obviously embarrassed.

"What do you have there?" asked Stella pointing to Cacho's crotch. What are you hiding from me? Cacho jumped to his feet and headed for the door. Gabriela followed him, but, as she was leaving the room, she kicked Stella.

* * *
Life is sometimes a tragedy, at other times, a comedy. We are actors in the theatre of life. Who said this? I think I've heard it before.

***

★

THE DOCTOR AND THE TRAITOR

A PLAY IN VARIOUS ACTS

CHARACTERS

The mother

Elisa

The young woman

Gabriela

The youngest daughter

Stella

The doctor

Ernesto

ACT ONE

In a hospital room. Elisa is sitting in bed. Ernesto is by her side when the two daughters enter.

Gabriela: Hi, Mum. *(Bends over Elisa and kisses her. Stella does the same.)*
Elisa: Doctor, these are my daughters. Gabriela the eldest, and Stella the youngest.

Ernesto: Pleased to meet you.

Gabriela: Hi! Yes ... Mum told me about you. She said you've been very supportive.

Ernesto: She's a lovely lady and I can see that she has lovely daughters, too. (Gabriela and Stella giggle.)

Elisa: Doctor, Gabriela has a pain on her rib, on the right side. She refuses to see a Doctor. You're so nice. Would you check if you can feel anything.

Ernesto: It'll be a pleasure, Elisa. Where is the pain, Gabriela?

Gabriela: (Looking furious at her mother) Mum! The Doctor may be very busy.

Ernesto: Oh, it only takes a few minutes from my run. (He gets close to Gabriela. She points to her right rib and Ernesto checks the spot.)

Elisa: (Whispering to Stella) Why are you dressed in Gabriela's best clothes?

Stella: It's a long story. I'll tell you one day.
Elisa: Sounds very suspicious to me. Gabriela never lends you her clothes. You look ridiculous!

Ernesto: I cannot feel anything wrong. Maybe you've strained yourself.

Stella: You can say so, particularly last night.


Gabriela: Nothing, Mum! Shut up Stella! Anyhow, Doctor, Mum will need a nurse to clean her wound every day. Can you recommend one? We don't know anyone.

Ernesto: I'll be happy to drop in everyday and do it.

Elisa: Oh, Doctor! You're so nice. We don't want to bother you.

Ernesto: It'll be a pleasure. I can come after my evening rounds. I must go now. It's been a pleasure. Ladies ... see you soon.

Elisa,

Gabriela and Stella: Bye-bye Doctor. Thank you.

Gabriela: Mum, you embarrassed me to death. Shit! Don't do ...

Elisa: Isn't he handsome?

Gabriela: Don't change the conversation.

Stella: He's gorgeous, not like that stupid guy. Potato nose!

Gabriela: Cacho is very good looking. And don't you call him names.
Stella: But he has a nose like a potato.

Gabriela: You shit! Shut up.

Stella: Mum, she's been swearing every day.

Elisa: Please, girls, behave. How do you think I feel? You're fighting over stupid things. Promise me you won't fight.

Gabriela: Well, tell her to keep out of my life.

Stella: Daddy always asked me to check on you.

Gabriela: See! See! She's always interfering. My friend Nuria came to visit me yesterday and she wouldn't leave us alone. She wanted to hear everything we said. She's always eavesdropping.

Stella (Smiling) I left you alone last night. Didn't I?

Elisa What? What happened last night?

Gabriela Nothing happened.

Elisa I don't know. Stop fighting. Please, girls, do it for me. I'll be home soon. Perhaps, in two or three days.

Gabriela Sorry, Mum. I promise (kisses her mother) we won't fight.

Promise, Stella.

Stella I promise.

Elisa You'd better go now. I want to sleep a bit before dinner.
Gabriela  *(Kisses her mother again)*  Bye Mum.

Stella  *(Kisses the mother)*  Bye, Mummy. Get better soon. I miss you.

*(Curtain)*

***
Nights
long nights
seen through
a curtain of tears
memories of the departed
telling stories of past events
remembering days gone by
anecdotes and some laughs
they hang on to a memory
the dead is kept alive
nights

Noches
noches largas
vistas a través
de una cortina de lágrimas
memorias del que se fue
contando historias del pasado
recordando días que se fueron
anécdotas y algunas risas
se cuelgan de memorias
para el muerto viva
noches

* * *

Friends visited Gabriela’s family. Cacho and Nuria drop in nearly every day. The Vaccaros never turned up. When visitors came they sat around the big oak table in the dining-room and talked about Edgar. They discussed what he would do in this or that situation. They recalled his army adventures told to them many times by a proud Edgar. They showed his
photos to the visitors, and related stories about when they were taken. The accident was brought up many times. For Gabriela Edgar had been a God, after his death he had become a 'God of Gods'. So noble of him! Meeting his death because he swerved to avoid the drunken man who caused the accident, and some children playing on the road. Gabriela believed that her father's death had been somehow mystical, magical. It had a meaning. A meaning yet to be revealed to her.

Doctor Ernesto also turned up. As he had promised, he came daily to drain Elisa's wound. Gabriela offered to pay him, but he didn't want the money. After finishing the medical procedure Gabriela made coffee for them. After the coffee, her mother excused herself and left, taking with her the always protesting Stella.

They smoked, they talked, and listened to music on the radio. Ernesto was in his final year of medicine, he only had one subject to complete. He had a girlfriend of many years. "I have a moral obligation to get married to her," he confided.

Ernesto was indeed handsome and intelligent as her mother had described him. He was also interesting to talk to, and she loved the idea of marrying a doctor. Perhaps her mother was right. Ernesto was a better
candidate than Cacho. She promised herself to use all her womanpower to attract him.

"Mum, she likes Ernesto." "Mum, she's wearing her good clothes to have coffee in the kitchen." "Mum, she stares at him!" "Mum, she loves Ernesto!" Gabriela vehemently denied her sister's accusations. A few days later, on the way out of the house, Ernesto kissed Gabriela with intense passion. In her bed that night Gabriela planned her wedding.

* * *

A wolf dressed in lamb's clothing opened his big mouth and attempted to devour Miss Innocence.

* * *

Mother was obviously disturbed by something. I wanted to know what was wrong I insisted. The mortgage payment was due. She had received a reminder from the lawyer, Dr Menendez who had the mortgaged deeds. We didn't have enough money to pay for it, so I suggested I speak to him before asking the Vaccaros. Dr Menendez was the father of one of my schoolmates. A well known lawyer and family man. I believed he would understand, and
would wait until our financial situation was sorted out. Mum thought it was a good idea and agreed that I talk to him the next day.

Dressed in my best clothes, and wearing high-heeled shoes, I went to solve the family's problems. Dr Menendez's large office was impressive. The waiting room was furnished with leather chairs and the walls were covered in expensive wooden panels. His many degrees hung on one of the walls. I didn't have to wait long. He seemed such a gentleman! Of course, he was going to help. Of course, he could wait. Of course, he would do anything to help us.

When I stood up to leave Dr Menendez came very close and whispered "I'll help you, but you must help me, too," trying to raise my skirt. I struggled to escape his embrace, but he was a strong man. He kissed me on the neck. I kept pushing him but unable to free myself I kicked him with all my might. Obviously in pain he released me from his embrace. "Your daughter and your wife would love to hear about this," I said walking towards the door, which I slammed as I left.

I caught the tramway number eleven to Calle Colón. still feeling his kiss on my neck. The Vaccaros would not appreciate Dr Menendez's behaviour. As I entered the big mansion, I broke down. Aunt Titina and Teresa, the maid, comforted me. I cried tears of anger and resentment,
towards Dr Menendez and towards my father who had left us in such a situation. When I calmed down, I told them what had happened. Titina was outraged at the behaviour of Dr Menendez and said "I promise you that Dad will do something about this. Our good name is at risk. Dad won't be very happy when he finds out that Edgar had debts. But, you don't worry any more, the mortgage will be paid."

I walked back home. It was still summer and the weather was steamy and hot. The streets were deserted. Siesta time. The few people who were around looked stressed by the heat. I walked under the trees that adorned Avenida Pellegrini and pondered about the future and about Aunt Francis's suggestion to take a trip to Mar del Plata to rest and make plans.

* * *

And Gabriela bathed in the cold waters of the Atlantic.

* * *

strolling on La Costanera, the beach side walk. Cerveza and tapas. A cool breeze which brings relief from the heat. February is the best month to go to Mar del Plata. Aunt Francis knew everything about this city which brought ruin to my grandmother. How excited I was to go to the place where glamorous people spend their pesos with great delight. There we were. Aunt Francis, Mum, Stella and me. We had decided not to wear black. We wanted to forget all the tragedies that had been packed into the first weeks of that fateful year.

We spent the first day walking around the centre of Mar Del Plata and at the La Costanera, admiring the beautiful people, drinking vermouth and eating tapas, and wanting the clothes that we could no longer afford. Aunt Francis was eager to get to the casino to play roulette. Mum did not want to go. "I'll go with her," I suggested. "You're a minor. You won't be allowed in," Mum said. But I was prepared. I knew about the age requirements, and had altered my age in my identity card. With bleach, I had wiped my birth date, and after the page had dried, I had written 21, the legal age to enter the casino. Mum was furious, she accused me of being a crook. "You give a bad example to your sister, you're a bad girl." You're this ... and the other and so on. Aunt Francis laughed. She thought I was very resourceful. "You'll go places," she said with admiration. "Yes, to jail," responded Mum, still angry.
Stella wanted to buy bleach to change her age as well. Mum and Francis laughed. "Silly, you're only twelve. You're tall but you still look like a child. No one will believe you." Stella sulked for a long time. She was jealous because Mum allowed me to go to the casino with Aunt Francis. Later Mum caught Stella, on the telephone, she was about to report me to the Mar Del Plata police.

Aunt Francis was a different woman in the casino. Excitement poured out of her body and her blue eyes shone with a passion that I never saw before. At the roulette table she forgot about everything else in the world, including me. I just stood next to her and observed everyone. Aunt Francis's hands placed chips here, there, and everywhere. As the wheel turned she would wring her hand or straighten her many diamond rings. A handsome, middle-aged gentleman tried to talk to her but she ignored him. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" She said suddenly. "I got it! I got it! Nineteen!" Mountains of chips were handed to her. She opened her handbag, took out a chip worth a thousand pesos, and gave it to me. "Go and have a good time," she said.

Only on a few occasions had I owned that amount of money. Watching her I had now a good idea how to play roulette. I approached a table and changed the chip for a pile of smaller value. Within a few minutes I
turned into Aunt Francis! And lost everything. And so did she. We returned to the hotel in silence, tired and deflated.

The next day Mum, Stella and I went to the beach. Mum was wearing a long sleeved blouse, trousers, a hat and sunglasses. "No way I'm going to suntan. White ladies are white ladies," she pontificated. I argued that her ideas were old fashioned. Suntan indicated health and beauty. She thought I was mad. Stella and I lay on the beach soaking up the sun. "I'd love to go into the water, but I'm frightened," I said. We hadn't swum in the sea so were terrified to enter the ever moving cold water of the Atlantic. "Don't worry, I'll solve this," Mum said and walked away under her umbrella. She looked so funny dressed the way she was. A few minutes later she returned accompanied by a tall, good looking and muscular young man. My mouth dropped. She smiled under the shade of her hat and her umbrella.

"Gabriela, this nice young man would be very happy to take you both for a swim. Your name is ..."

"Eduardo, señora."

"What a lovely name. A lovely name for a lovely young man. These are my young girls. Gabriela and Stella. Go and have fun."

I was speechless. Eduardo took Stella's hand and then mine and running, dragged us into the water. My anger didn't last long. Eduardo was
fun. He taught us to jump waves and to swim under the water. After a while, he asked me whether I would go with him for a drink. Before I had time to reply, Stella told him I would be allowed to go only if she came as well. I wanted to throttle her. "What did your mother say your name was? Poisonette wasn't it?" he asked. "No, Stella is my name," my sister screamed as a wave hit her face and pushed her down. Eduardo pulled her out by her hair. We laughed at her. She turned around and walked towards Mum as she shouted "I'll tell everything to Mum!"

* * *

At the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong clothes, and without our father.

* * *

★

Summer was at its peak. An intense heat rose from the colourful sidewalk at La Costanera. Stella entertained herself by jumping to avoid stepping on the tiles she didn't like. The breeze brought with it smells characteristic of the sea. A mixture of seaweed, fish, sand and salt. At that time of the afternoon the sea aromas blended with expensive perfumes. The rich women, who paraded their beautiful bodies and clothes, wore Chanel No. 5, Madame Rochas, Diorissimo, Miss Dior, and other designer perfumes.
Elisa, Gabriela, Stella and Francis sauntered leisurely, as if the world was at their feet, as if they hadn't a worry in the world. Mar del Plata has that power. People forget the mundane, and become entangled in the magic of the place, in the fantasy of the rich and famous.

Gabriela saw her first, and her legs felt like jelly. Señora Eugenia Del Monte-Salabert, her father's foster sister, saw them too. Not long ago, Eugenia had been close to death, but doctors had saved her. Mar del Plata was her husband's present to her for having recovered.

"Where is Edgar?" was the first thing Eugenia asked. Elisa, white as the few clouds that adorned the intense blue sky, could not utter a word. Her lips had a near imperceptible tremor. Aunt held Eugenia's hands, but no words came out of her mouth. Francis's perfect lips became a thin line on her porcelain face. Gabriela took a deep breath and said "Dad is dead!" Eugenia's husband had to support his wife, because she had lost her balance. Eugenia's eyes widened, and her hands rose to her chest as if to mitigate some internal and intense pain. "You're joking! A bad taste joke, Gabriela you shouldn't try to be funny with something so serious." "I'm afraid it's true," said Mr Del Monte. He explained to Eugenia that he had kept it secret because of her fragile health. She wanted to know when, and how it had happened. Eugenia
had been very close to Edgar and was obviously hurt. The accident was explained quickly and demurely.

"What are you doing here? Having fun when Edgar has just died?" Eugenia asked in a brusque manner trying to contain her tears. They did not have the chance to answer because Mr Del Monte said goodbye and practically dragged Eugenia away.

"This is our third bad event!" said Elisa closing her eyes.

Head down, the four of them walked back to the hotel. Even Stella had been affected by this chance meeting. The magic had washed away from Mar del Plata. It was as if an invisible gigantic wave had stolen the colour, the vivacity, and the lustre from the seaside city. As if to match the unfortunate chance encounter, suddenly black clouds hid the sun. A furious wind replaced the gentle sea breeze. A heavy downpour of rain sent the holiday makers running for cover into restaurants, while the waiters brought inside the many tables and umbrellas.

* * *

Feed the wolf roses and it will vomit thorns. Ten years later I found out how the wolf pricked me.
ACT 2

(Gabriela and Ernesto sitting on a trunk, at the edge of the river Parana. A small sailboat is anchored nearby.)

Ernesto: It is great that Joaquin and Betty are getting on so well! He's very pleased you introduced Betty to him.

Gabriela: Yes. She told me he has been hinting at marriage.

Ernesto: He's ready for it!

Gabriela: Are you?
Ernesto: No. I have to finish my final exams, find a hospital which
would employ me. It'll take me a while to think of marriage.
You know I have a moral obligation?

Gabriela: Yes, you told me.

Ernesto: I don't know if I'll be able to honour it.

Gabriela: I'm sure you will. You're a great person.

Ernesto: Perhaps. Who knows? Time will tell. In the meantime, I'm so
thrilled that your mother let you come.

Gabriela: It wasn't easy. If Dad was alive, I wouldn't be here for sure.

(Laughter from behind some bushes.)

Ernesto: How's your mother?

Gabriela: She has recovered well. Thanks to your professional care, no
doubt.

Ernesto: I did what any nurse could have done. I offered to take care of
your mum because I wanted to see you again.

Gabriela: Hum.

Ernesto: I swear.

Gabriela: That's flattering!

Ernesto: Your beauty mesmerised me.
Gabriela: Dear! Do you want something from me? If you expect ... well ... you know what ... well ... no chance!

Ernesto: I'm happy just to admire you ... to hold your hands. (*Holds her hands and kisses them.*)

Gabriela: What about your moral obligation? Isn't she pretty?

Ernesto: Let's not talk about it. (*Gets up and paces.*)

Gabriela: Come back. Why don't you want to talk about her?

Ernesto: She's a part of my life that I resent.

Gabriela: I wish I could help you. But if you don't want to talk ...

Ernesto: (*Returns to the tree trunk and kisses Gabriela passionately.*) Gabriela ... if I ... if I ...

Gabriela: What? What?

Ernesto: Well it's like this ... (*Joaquin and Betty, laughing and holding hands, appear from the behind the bushes.*)

Joaquin: Che, Ernesto, a storm is coming. We'd better prepare the boat.

Ernesto: Yes, we must get ready and get to the coast before it gets dark. Otherwise Gabriela's mother will be waiting for us at the beach and with a priest. (*All laugh. Ernesto and Joaquin walk towards the boat and prepare the boat. Betty sits next to Gabriela.*)
Betty: I'm so happy! He asked me to marry him.

Gabriela: *(Hugging her.)* Congratulations! You must be delighted. He's not only handsome, he's also such a nice guy.

Betty: Yes. He is and I've fallen in love with him. But I'm desperate. I have a terrible problem. I don't know what to do?

Gabriela: What? What's the matter?

Betty: I cannot tell anyone. My happiness is only momentary. I cannot marry Joaquin.

Gabriela: Come on speak. We're friends. We had no secrets until now.

Betty: Yes, I've a secret. I've never been able to talk about it.

Gabriela: What? Please tell me?

Betty: Swear you won't tell a soul.

Gabriela: Of course I won't tell anyone.

Betty: No swear, swear!

Gabriela: OK, I swear.

Betty: Joaquin has said, on a few occasions, that he expects his future wife to be a virgin. If she's not, he would ask for the legal annulment of the marriage.

Gabriela: And so?

Betty: That's my problem.
Gabriela: Don't tell me!
Betty: Yes.
Gabriela: Who? When?
Betty: Never mind. It happened a long time ago. Someone inconsequential. I'm sorry I did it. I was drunk at the time.

(Cries.)

Gabriela: Shhhh! They'll hear you. Maybe he just said it, but in reality, once he's married he won't care.
Betty: You don't know Joaquin. He's very set in his beliefs. I'm sure he'll do it. You have to help me!
Gabriela: How?
Betty: Have you heard about women being, let's say ... repaired?
Gabriela: Yes, I've heard, but I thought it was old wives' tales.
Betty: No, it's true. It can be done. For a fee. A large fee.
Gabriela: God. That's incredible.
Betty: You've got to help me.
Gabriela: You haven't told me how.
Betty: Lend me the money.
Gabriela: You must be joking. I haven't got a cent.
Betty: Your family is very rich.
Gabriela: Yes, my grandparents and uncles, but not us. Now that Dad is dead we haven't got a cent.

Betty: I cannot ask anyone else. My parents would kill me if they knew. Besides, they don't have that kind of money. I don't trust anyone else. You're the only one. You're my only hope. (Cries again.)

Gabriela: Stop it. Stop it. I'll think of something. I know. Here take this and sell it. (Gabriela takes off the gold chain she is wearing.) This chain is very heavy. I'm sure you'll get enough money for it. I'll tell my mother that I lost it today.

Betty: Oh Gabriela you're a real friend. I'll never forget what you've done for me. I'll call my first daughter Gabriela. I don't know how to repay you.

Gabriela: Just be happy. Perhaps one day Ernesto will ask me to marry him, perhaps Cacho.

Betty: Do you love Ernesto?

Gabriela: I think so.

Betty: But don't you love Cacho?

Gabriela: I think so.

Betty: You can't love two guys at the same time.
Gabriela: Why not?

Ernesto: *(From the boat.)* Come on girls it's getting very dark.

Betty: We're coming. *(Gabriela and Betty get up and walk towards the boat.)* Thanks. Thanks from the bottom of my heart.

END OF ACT TWO

* * *

Autumn                              Otoño
perhaps the season                  tal vez la estación
of aging souls                      de espíritus envejecidos
Perhaps the season                  tal vez la estación
of sleeping passions                de pasiones dormidas

**

Gabriela resented returning to Rosario. Life needed to be confronted head on. Life meant money to pay for food, fees, uniforms, and books. The
insurance company had advised them that it would take months before they
would pay the accident insurance. The life insurance policy was never found.

Enrolling at the university had given Gabriela something to look
forward to. Cacho had left for the army, and Ernesto had stopped visiting her.
Betty had disappeared and didn't return her calls. Her friend Nuria was going
steady with Carlos, a famous painter. She spent all her spare time with this
man. Gabriela felt abandoned by everyone. University would give her new
friends and opportunities.

Elisa wanted to move to Edgar's city apartment, but the Vaccaros
strongly advised against it. They believed this to be a crazy idea. According
to them, a 'good family' needed a 'good home'. Edgar's apartment was fine as
an office, but not good enough for a family of their standing. Aunt Francis
came up with the idea of renting two of the guest rooms in their house to
young ladies, señoritas from the country, who came to Rosario to study at
university. It proved not to be difficult to get boarders, and within a week,
Alexandra and Liana moved in. Alexandra was studying architecture and
Liana, medicine. Gabriela hated having these girls at home, taking her
mother's attention, and using her house as their own, but their parents paid
well.
It was early autumn when Gabriela attended her first lectures. She remembered her first days at primary school, when the world seemed a bubble filled with smoke. She wondered why she had chosen to study statistics. She had undoubtedly excellent skills in mathematics, but the statistics she was learning was boring. Gabriela decided to give this course a few months, and if it wasn't what she expected, she would change her enrolment. Law sounded more interesting. That same day she came out of university with a long reading list of books. On the way home she sat on the tramway pondering if the boarders had paid enough money for her to buy these books.

"Sorry darling. All the money the boarders paid was spent on food and your sister's school fees."

"What am I going to do?"

"Well, ask your grandfather. I'm sure he'll help."

"I hate asking him for money."

"You must. We have no other choice."

"What about Aunt Francis. Can't we ask her?"

"She never has any spare money. She has already lent me a few hundred. And she keeps track of every cent. She's a bit mean sometimes. Perhaps it's because her husband doesn't pay much alimony."
"Tomorrow I'll go and ask the Vaccaros. I hope the old man is in a good mood. Since Dad died they all have gone a bit funny."

***

Lend me, youth, your beauty and passion, your strength and fire, that I'll give you resignation, peace and knowledge.

***

* *

MY DIARY

Autumn, March

I wish those two were not living with us. The other day I was looking for my tennis shoes and Mum said that Alexandra had borrowed them! I was complaining to her saying that Alexandra had feet like a "grape pulper" and she would stretch them, when she walked in. With an arrogance that made me sick, she accused me of wearing her undies, her undies! And she added that I had an arse bigger than hers, so I've stretched all her undies. I gave her a dirty look and told her that a Vaccaro doesn't borrow anything from anyone, especially not from a country bumpkin like her. Mother was angry, for a minute
I thought she was going to slap me. Before she said or did anything, I turned around and left the room. Mum asked me where was I going. I didn't answer and walked out. What gives me the shits is that Alexandra brings her boyfriend (another student in the Faculty of Architecture) to have meals with us, then they lock themselves in her room, and laugh and giggle. I know what they're up to. When I complained to Mum, she said "They're studying."

After I left home, I went for a walk around the banks of the river Paraná. It was a beautiful early afternoon. Many people were out walking. I sat on a park bench and lit a cigarette. I had taken only two puffs, when a policeman approached me. He wanted to know why was I smoking. I told him I liked it. He then gave me a lecture on how children pass from cigarettes to light drugs, and then to heavy drugs. "It's none of your bloody business if I smoke or not!" I told him. He wanted me to go to the police station, he was going to charge me! I remembered that according to my documents I was 21. I opened my handbag and produced my documents. He was embarrassed and apologised. What a day! When I got home I found a message from Adelle, she wants to see me this evening.
Midnight

I really never found out why she wanted to see me. It only took fifteen minutes for us to have a big argument. As soon as we finished ordering our drinks she launched her attack. "You're a spoiled brat. Your father sacrificed all his life for you. And you ... you ... horrible child ... how did you repay him?" she said between her teeth and for my ears only. I stood up to leave, but with force, she pushed me down again. I wanted to cry but I wasn't going to give her the satisfaction. She had found out that I had said I would rather have my father dead than married to her! I got up again and this time I succeeded. I ran out of the coffee shop and into the street. Without looking I crossed the street.

Suddenly, someone pushed me to one side. A car, at full speed, was coming towards me. If it hadn't been for the stranger who pushed me out of the car's way, I would have been killed. My death wish would have become a reality! For some reason I was happy that I didn't end up under the wheels of a car.

I hugged the stranger and without a word I cried. He patted my back and made soothing noises. His lapel was soon soaking wet. Through the wet fabric I could smell the same perfume that my father used.

When I stopped crying I had a good look at his face. He was a young man. He looked so familiar! I tried to recognise him but without
success. "You'll be alright, Gabriela," he said. I didn't have time to ask him who he was or how he knew my name. As he spoke his last word he vanished. I looked around but no one was there. The street was silent and empty of passers-by. Only the memory of my saviour and I remained in the corner of Mitre and San Juan. As I slowly walked home, I remembered where I had seen the stranger before.

I said hello to everyone (including Miss Big-foot) and went search for the old family album.

Of course I knew the young man! I had his photo, wearing the same clothes, the same haircut ... The young man was my father when he was an adolescent like me.

* * *

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* * *
The house had been invaded. Everything had changed. A cloud of misery hung over Gabriela's existence. Alexandra acted as if she owned the place. Liana, the other boarder, tried to be her friend but she was such an uninteresting girl. She was just another place at the table. Stella mocked them both. She had names for them, and hid their things. She used to dress with Alexandra's clothes and imitate her, but Gabriela didn't laugh. For a fleeting moment her interest in the boarders surfaced. Stella told Gabriela that Liana had a 'secret lover' and a 'secret life'. She had read it in Liana's diary. Gabriela offered Stella all sorts of things in exchange for the information. She wasn't as daring as her sister and wasn't going to take the risk of being caught reading the diary. Stella was adamant that she was not going to sell the secrets. Gabriela's mood and interest faded as quickly as the black clothes that Elisa had dyed. Dried of tears like Elisa. Bored. Since their return from Mar del Plata, Gabriela spent most of the time reading. She devoured *Rebecca, The Blue Glasses, Nausea, Don Quixote*, and *A Certain Smile*.

Time couldn't be wasted any more. Gabriela needed to read her university books. She decided to make the ultimate sacrifice and ask her grandfather for money. 'Money, always money. Life revolves around money,' she thought. She had promised herself that she was going in the afternoon. But she kept reading. One page more. And another ... and another ...
"It's a shame. You're reading novels, instead of studying. When are you going to the Vaccaros?"

"If you want me to study, you get me the bloody money!"

"How rude! Don't speak to me like that. Studying is for your own good not mine. I've had my life. I wish I'd had the chance to study."

"I'll find some rich bastard and marry him. I'm planning something else."

"What?"

"We're going to Sidni."

"Where?"

"Sidni."

"Stop fantasising! Study! Study! That's your responsibility."

"It's all Dad's fault. He ruined my career."

"What career?"

"My acting career."

"You had no career. Don't be silly. You just wanted to be an actress, you weren't one! All you had were dreams. You can dream again. Another dream. Better dreams."

"OK! Just stop lecturing me. I'll go soon."

"Come on, get up and get dressed."

"No! I'll do it when I'm ready."
"You can't spend your life in bed reading."

"No one loves me. Ernesto doesn't come any more or ring me. Cacho left for the army and hasn't written yet. Nuria is too busy with her new boyfriend and Betty ... the bitch! She took my chain ..."

"What? You didn't lose your chain? You gave it away! Come back! I tell you come back and explain! You little shit. Don't slam the door."

"Mum, I heard you swear," exclaimed Stella as she entered the room.

"Shut up Stella, or you'll be grounded."

"It's not fair. I haven't done anything and I get into trouble."

Rosario was in full autumn. An insistent and cool breeze made whirlwinds amongst the yellow leaves that carpeted Calle Montevideo. Gabriela ambled to the Vaccaros as if she was heading for the guillotine. Somehow she sensed trouble. She kicked the yellow leaves as she unhurriedly covered the distance between her house and that of her grandparents. With a sweaty hand she rang the bell. A new maid opened the door.

"What happened to ... ?" Without waiting for Gabriela to finish her question the maid interrupted.

"I'm Cholita. I started work yesterday. Two of the old maids left. My sister Juana also started yesterday."
"Where is Mr Vaccaro?"

"He's in the dining-room, Miss. He's very upset because the soup was very hot. He burned himself. He threw the plate. Soup went everywhere. The plate broke. We were very scared. Mrs Vaccaro she's very nice. She calmed him down ... and ..."

"I know the way Cholita. Thanks for the info."

Gabriela entered the dining room, where a few minutes before, the mini-drama had taken place. The old man was still at the remains of his soup. She said hello as she entered the pompous setting. Titina, always affectionate, got up to hug her. Mrs Vaccaro remained seated as Gabriela kissed her. Gabriela tried to kiss her grandfather but he turned his face away. She kissed the air. Gabriela sighed. She sat next to Titina on the old French chair. Her grandmother asked her if she wanted lunch. The question was uttered, just as a matter of courtesy and good manners, and not as a loving invitation to eat. Gabriela replied she had already eaten and in silence waited for Mr Vaccaro to finish his lunch. Gabriela felt sorry for the new maids, who, with terrified faces, ran from the kitchen to the dining room, back and forth, carrying Limoges plates, Sheffield silver trays, and Baccarat crystal glasses. Titina made idle talk and asked her questions. Neither of her grandparents spoke. An obtrusive tension, dressed up as politeness, floated in
the room. As soon as her grandfather finished his coffee, Gabriela made her request.

"Grandad, I've started university. I need to buy a few books. Would it be possible to borrow some money to buy the books?"

"Well, well, well. I thought you had plenty of money."

"No. We don't."

"Aha! So how come that you were puteando in Mar del Plata? No respect for the dead. The corpse of your father was still warm, and the three of you, with your Aunt, the other puta, went to enjoy yourselves."

"But, Grandad ... you called us prostitutes!"

"Shut up! Don't interrupt me! You won't get another cent from me. You should be thankful that I paid the mortgage. I did it, not because of you and your mother. I did it, because I don't want people to say that a Vaccaro had debts. Now, if you had money to go on holidaying and gambling, forgetting your obligation to wear black clothes showing respect to the dead, you must have money to buy books. You ignored your luto!"

"But Grandfather, let me explain ... "

"I don't want to hear a word from you."

Mr Vaccaro stood up, thumped the table with his closed fist, and walked out of the room, followed by his wife and daughter. Gabriela was left
by herself with the remains from lunch. A few bread crumbs and the silver
salt shaker, reminded her that she had not imagined the conversation she had
with her Grandfather.

"OK. You won't hear a word from me, because you'll never see me
again!" Gabriela muttered as she slammed the heavy front door.

* * *

Fantasy.

* * *

Trembling and with a knot in my throat, I left the Vaccaro's place.
Grandfather called us putas. If that was what he thought of us, I was going to
do something to really make him think that I was a cheap woman. No, I was
not going to prostitute myself, I was going to find a job that embarrassed
them, something like a strip-teaser, a night club dancer, or perhaps something
milder like a model. My grandfather's outburst was still burning in my mind!
I bought *La Capital* where jobs of all sorts were advertised. With the newspaper under my arm, I went to Parque Alem. I sat on a bench amongst the roses, and read the advertisements. The first few ads left me cold, but on the third column, one jumped out of the page:

**MODELS NEEDED BY MODAS LTD**

Young models needed to travel interstate. Good wages and conditions. Experience preferred but not essential. Interviews after 3 p.m. Ask for Leon. Mitre 223

This was exactly what I wanted! The well-to-do Vaccaros were going to die of shame when they found out that I was not only a model, but probably travelling interstate this man: Leon. Running back home, I planned to make one of my better black dresses a size smaller, to show my figure. Lots of make up, my hair parted to the right and covering my right eye à la
Veronica Lake, and very high heeled shoes, were going to give me the sophisticated look that I needed to get the job. 'Leon, Leon, I'm coming.' I told him in my mind.

"What are you doing?"

"Stella, piss off. I'm busy."

"Little seamstress, little seamstress, be careful, big bad wolves are everywhere."

"I'll thump you one. Let me sew. You know how much I love sewing and with this shit machine."

"Where are you going? What are you doing to your dress? If you don't tell me I'll tell mum what you're doing."

"OK shit face, I'm going for a job."

"A job ... how boring ... I thought you said we'll be rich. The Elementals are supposed to give us lots of money. They took my turtle, so I expect money."

"We'll get money, Stella. Just be patient. Don't say anything to Mum, and when I start working I'll buy you something."

"How horrible. Work, yuk."

"Not for long, money is on its way ..."
Leon, Salomon, Rebekah, Ruth, David, Abraham, Saul, Sarah, Isaac, Milcah, Esau, Rachel, Leah, Reuben, Bilhah, Moses, Joshua, Aaron ... and the Old Testament opened its pages ...

* * *

Modas was a fashion shop in Calles Mitre and Santa Fe. The tramway left me on the same corner. I only had to walk a few metres to get to it. The windows were adorned with warm jumpers and dresses, a reminder that winter was only one step behind us. Tap, tap, tap, tap, my very high heels resonated on the old wooden floor. As I was reaching the back counter I noticed him. One of the brothers who lived across the road from us was standing there. I had named them, 'the perverts from across the road', because many women came in and out of their place. The brothers had a mansion, with a swimming pool, maids, chauffeurs, and a lot of money. Everyone in the street always made comments about their parties, and their lifestyle. As I saw him I froze. What was I doing in the 'perverts' shop? I turned around and tap-tap-tap-tapped my way out. But it was too late. Leon had seen me. He came running after me, asking me to stop. I came to a halt and turned around.
He smiled and we shook hands. "You're from the Vaccaro's across the road, aren't you?" he asked in a friendly manner. Red to the roots of my hair I told him that, yes I was from across the road. Very politely he invited me into his private office. Leon offered me coffee, which I rejected, and a Chesterfield which I accepted. Smoking made me feel secure in front of a man whom I considered dangerous.

"We're very sorry about your father. What a terrible accident. Such a young man. So handsome. My sisters always admired him. But what can I do for you? You were coming to see me? Weren't you?"

"Humm ... ahh ... yes. Yes!"

"How can I help you?"

"Well ... I saw this ad in La Capital. I'm interested in being a model."

"Oh, the ad. Oh no! I think you'll make a beautiful model, but I don't think this is a job for you."

"Why?"

"I know of your family, and I'm sure they wouldn't approve of this type of work. Also there is a lot of travel involved."

"I am the one who wants the job, not my family."

"I'm sure your father wouldn't have liked you doing this sort of work."

"I need to work. I must buy my books for university."
"In that case I can offer you another ... let's say ... a more suitable position."

"What sort of a job?"

"We own various shops around the city. We always need reliable and responsible people to work in them."

"I don't know anything about business."

"That won't be a problem. We can train you here, at Modas, and then place you in charge of one of our boutiques."

"That sounds interesting. I very much would like to take up your offer, but I better discuss this with my mother."

"Think about it. If your mother is happy for you to work for our company, ask her to come and see me tomorrow. She doesn't have to come to Modas. Ask her to come to my place after lunch. After all we're neighbours. We can chat over coffee and come to an agreement regarding your salary, hours, and so on."

Tap, tap, tap, tap, I left Modas reflecting. Was I angry because I had been treated like a child? Was I furious that the Vaccaro's name and influence had marked me for all my life? Was I happy that I had found work? How were the Vaccaros going to feel when they discovered that one of their own was working in a clothes shop belonging to some rich Jewish men? In a way
it was a revenge that had fallen into my lap. But what was my mother going to say? Would she approve of such a job? Would she consider the brothers' fame as womanisers a threat to her daughter? I was so involved in my thoughts that I nearly missed seeing Betty who was about to catch the tramway. I shouted at her, but she turned her face away and ignored me. I cursed her: "I hope that on your wedding night he can't tear your newly acquired virginity."

The university was close by. Without much thought I walked into the enrolment office. I withdrew from Statistics and enrolled in Law. At the Law first year office I collected the evening timetable, and a long list of books to buy. In about two hours I had found a job, changed not only my area of studies but also the course of my life.

* * *

**Habeas Corpus**

I'm your owner  
*Soy tú dueño*

I'm your driver  
*Soy tú conductor*

I'm your master  
*Soy tu amo*

You're my slave.  
*Eres mi esclava.*

* * *
It was late in the afternoon when Gabriela changed from the clothes she had altered for the job interview. She took off her make-up, tied her hair back and waited for her mother's return. The garden looked inviting. She sat on one of the stone benches and watched the birds chirping and selecting a spot on the trees to spend the night. Amongst the pigeons and sparrows there was one bird unusually coloured which looked like a parrot from the Brazilian jungle. It sat amongst the local birds as if it were the owner of the tree. It pecked at all the birds until it was the only one left on the branch. Gabriela felt sorry for the other birds. Angrily she shouted at it: "Do you own the bloody tree?" The colourful bird cocked its head, and with a disdainful look in those little eyes replied: "What is it to you?" Gabriela, jumped to her feet. Very slowly she approached the tree. With disbelief she asked. "Did you speak?" The funny bird gave Gabriela another disdainful look. "This stupid human doesn't know anything. Of course I speak. Since I've just spoken to you," the bird muttered. "Since when do birds speak? She asked again. The bird laughed and spat to one side.

"Well, not all birds speak, but we Sppkkkrrtt's, we can speak."

"What did you call yourself?"

"Sppkkkrrtt."
"That's a weird name, I never heard of a bird called … whatever you called yourself."

"Are you going to keep annoying me with your questions?"

"No. But you've been very mean to the other birds in my garden."

"Ha."

"Ha, what?"

"Just ha, like ha, ha ha. Gabriela, go inside. I have to get ready for bed. Beddy-byes."

"How come you know my name?"

"I can hear everyone talking about you. Gabriela did this, Gabriela did that, Gabriela is this, Gabriela is that."

"Parrot, what have you heard? Tell me!"

"I am not a parrot! I'm a Sppkkkrrtt."

"Mr Bird …"

"Mrs … A widow in fact. Happy to be one."

"Mrs Bird. Please tell me what have you heard?"

"I won't tell you a thing. I was taught not to gossip."

"Only humans gossip. Birds tell stories."

"I'm not stupid, Gabriela. I'm ready for bed now."

"Please tell me."
"I'll tell you one thing, and only one. In life you are presented with choices. If you pick one something happens, if you pick the other something else happens. You must be very careful which option you pick."

"What do you mean?"

"That's all I'm saying. I cannot say more. Go away or I'll go."

Gabriela's conversation with the unusual bird came to an end when her mother called her in. "I heard you speaking to someone in the garden. Were you talking to yourself?" Gabriela's mother asked. Gabriela promptly explained that she was reciting a poem. Once inside the two of them sat in the warm kitchen. Elisa had started cooking and a chicken stew was bubbling on the stove. "Un pajarito told me you've been for a job?" said Elisa half jokingly. "I bet it was no little bird," Gabriela retorted. Stella had told her mother about the job. Elisa started to fire questions about where she had been that afternoon. She wanted to know everything! Gabriela took her time in responding and finally related to her mother the afternoon's events.

"You named these neighbours the perverted across the road. Now you want to work for them?"

"A job is a job. I know how to look after myself. The exact minute that one of them makes a pass at me, I leave. I resign. I quit. Se fini. Fin. Gran finale."
"Ye! Ye! You're so theatrical. I know it's only rumours about them. But what if these rumours are true? What would your grandparents say?"

"Exactly. This is what I want. I want them to pay. Look Mum, tomorrow you speak to Leon, see what you think, if the money is OK. You accept the job. I promise I'll look after myself, and of course my virginity."

"You know that many men return their wives because they're not pure."

"Mierda! I know. But also I know how you can trick them."

"What...? What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Tomorrow will you go?"

"Yes. I'll see him tomorrow."

***

Gabriela writes the monologue of life. Melodrama at its best!

***
MONOLOGUE

(A young woman sits on a garden bench. In the background there are trees without leaves. Mounds of yellow dry leaves are scattered on the ground. The young woman's head is down. Her black hair contrasts with her white dress. The singing of birds can be heard. When she speaks, the birds stop singing.)

Life is full of tragedies, and death brings about the peace and calm denied to those who live. Mysteries, that never will be revealed. Why has life dealt me such a hand? Father you left us when we needed you most. You were my hero. Who am I going to admire? Who? Shall I be naïve and believe that you're with God? But which God? Jesus, Mohammed, Allah, or Adonai?

God! God! God! Do you really exist? Do you care about us insignificant beings? Have you traced my destiny? If so how could you have been so cruel as to leave us without a father? (Pause. The birds sing in chorus. They stop when the woman speaks.)

Money, everything revolves around money, and sex ... and we women are just prey in this society's oppressive web. (Walks around, with her head down. Steps can be heard.)
Shadow, Shadow, Shadow. Lift the curtain that obscures my painful existence. Lift my soul to another life. But you're not God. You're like me, a lost soul in the garden of life. Just go. Take your memories and walk to the light. Let me be me, without you trailing behind. Without you being me. (*The birds sing again.*)

THE END

***

DEFINITION OF A WRITER:

Someone to whom success comes after his/her death.

Someone who is likely to suffer from depression.

Someone who spends a lot of time alone.

Someone who never has any money.

Someone who spends a lot of time thinking.

Someone of whom the rest of the world thinks 'she/he is doing nothing.'

***
"Mum, I wrote this monologue. Read it. Tell me if you like it."

"Why do you waste your time? Why aren't you reading for University?"

"Have you forgotten? I've no money for books."

"You must have something to read. Don't they give you notes or something?"

"I told you I've changed my enrolment. I'm doing law now. I haven't got anything to read yet. I thought you'd be impressed with what I've written."

"You know I don't like the rubbishy-stuff you write. Don't give me poetry either. All that romantic stuff is mierda."

"This is not romantic stuff. This is about life. Since I cannot be an actress I'll be a writer."

"You must concentrate on your studies, otherwise you'll be a nothing."

"Why do I have to study? Why can't I be a writer?"

"Because writers starve to death. They get tuberculosis. They commit suicide, and no one takes them seriously."
"Give it back to me. I'll get my friend Aurelia to read it."

"Who's Aurelia?"

"You may not remember her but she was in my course last year. She has enrolled in law as well. We're going to study together."

* * *

Grandmother, tell me a story, a story of money and legal matters. A story in which the princess makes the right choices.

* * *

Mum thought Leon's approach was very professional. In the end she agreed it was a good idea I work for them. Conditions, and salary were arranged. I was to start work the following Monday. At Modas, the brothers, three of them, were going to train me in all aspects of running a business. The first step was to teach me how to operate the till. A cashier! It sounded so unlike me.

Very nervous and embarrassed, I turned up to work wearing my mourning clothes. All the other girls at the shop looked at me like if I was from another world. Leon introduced me to his brothers, Isaac and Saul. He also taught me how to operate the cash register, and was very impressed by how fast I learned. At mid morning Isaac expressed concern about me standing up for so long. He left and returned about an hour later with a brand
new stool. "So your beautiful legs won't get tired," he said with a mysterious
look in his eyes. At three o'clock he brought me chocolates. Saul ignored me.

Every night Leon and I counted the money and wrote up the corresponding
balance sheets. After working eight hours non-stop I went three nights to
university, on the other nights I went to Aurelia's place to study.

Law? Why the hell had I chosen law? I nearly fell asleep during the
lecture. Aurelia elbowed me a few times. I had no escape. I was trapped in a
course that did not interest me. I was tempted to throw the books into the
Paraná River. And perhaps throw myself in as well. My magic had failed me.
Money had not appeared. I was stuck in a silly job and doing a stupid course.

One night I nearly burnt my bedroom down. I lit about twenty candles
in an offering to the Elementals. I wanted to remind them of the money they
had to materialise. A gust of wind came in through the open window and
some of the candles, which I had spread on the dressing table, ended up on
my bed. My frilly bedspread caught fire. Stella and I succeeded in stopping the
flames from spreading. She swore she was not going to tell Mum. Of course!
Liana, the boring boarder, was there too. Stella had charged her two pesos to
see me doing witchcraft. Liana wanted me to put a spell on her boyfriend. He
was seeing her and someone else at the same time. "Why don't you leave
him?" I asked her. "Oh, I love him" she replied. "How can you love someone who makes you eat shit?" I arrogantly said.

* * *

SILLY SONG

By Stella

Ha! Ha! Ha! A dog with a fleshy tail,
A dog with a tail between the legs.
A dog with no hair and tattered clothes,
Ha! Ha! Ha! A dog who doesn't know
What to do with his tail. Ha! Ha! Ha!

* * *

Gabriela admired Leon although he treated her like a very young girl. One night there was a staff cocktail party to celebrate the company's high returns. A figure of ten million was mentioned. Gabriela caught the amount as if with a net. It was obvious that the brothers were rich, very rich! Leon and Isaac had girlfriends, Saul didn't. She liked Leon because he looked like Prince Rainier of Monaco. With girlfriend or without, she was going to make an impression on him. When one of the staff finished singing she offered to
recite a poem. All the hours that Gabriela had spent in front of mirror, studying every gesture every movement now paid off. Words flowed from her mouth, and her hands moved according to the words. Her body emanated security, confidence, presence. Total silence accompanied her recital and when she concluded everyone clapped. People's faces indicated to Gabriela that the audience was fascinated by her. Shortly after, Saul brought her a champagne glass and offered to drive her home. On the way home he convinced her that wearing black clothes as a sign of mourning was stupid. "You keep the dead in your heart," he said. The next day Leon stopped doing the cash register balance with Gabriela and Saul took over.

"Gabriela, would you like to come to theatre with me? asked Saul one evening while they were counting the money. She smiled and asked what play he wanted to see. "A Streetcar Named Desire," Saul said as he took two tickets from his pocket. "Thank you very much but I saw it last week," she quickly replied, closing the cash register drawer with a thump. She picked up her handbag and walked out of the store. Aurelia was waiting for her.

"I think the old man fancies me."

"How old is he?"

"I heard he's 36."

"He's an old man!"
"Yep! I have to be careful. I like one of his brothers. Handsome! Handsome! He looks a lot younger too. He's got a girlfriend though.

"With your powers you can get him to like you ... and by the way, you promised you'd do a gualichu for me. I want to have every guy in town crazy for me."

"OK come this Saturday. Around three. I work Saturday mornings."

"What a drag."

"I agree. But I have no choice. Let's go for coffee and miss the lecture."

"Do you know? I was thinking the same. Bloody law."

When Gabriela arrived home Cacho was waiting. He looked funny with no hair and the tattered uniform. Gabriela's heart skipped a beat when she saw him. Stella was telling him about the fire. "What are you laughing at?" she asked him. He grabbed her by the hand and dragged her into the garden. He pressed her against him and kissed her passionately on the mouth. He had waited for this moment for a very long time. "I missed you," he mumbled. Gabriela pushed him away and complained about the long weeks of silence. Army duty didn't leave him much time for anything. "You go to sleep tired and in pain. They feed you scraps. And some ignorant bastard, because he's a sergeant, treats you like shit." Gabriela kissed him gently on
his eyes, stroking his shaved head, losing herself in his embrace. She had missed him too.

She was in his arms, a mermaid wanting to sing to her lover to lure him into her world. She was sand and wanted him to be coast. Gabriela floated in velvet clouds, white clouds in a pale blue sky like an Argentinian flag. She swam in a shimmering sea right at the time when the sun commences his departure. A cool sea which rocked her like her mother must have rocked her when she was an infant. But what was that hot feverish feeling on her legs?

"Stop! Put that away." She turned her face away not wanting to look at the "thing" which so suddenly had appeared through the fly of his old uniform pants.

"Why?"

"Because I say so."

"But why not? We love each other. Don't we?"

"This is the first time I hear the word love. You never told me that you love me."

"I thought you knew."

"Love is not enough for you to take liberties and bring out that ... that thing."
"You're so cruel. Just let me press it against you. Let me do it between your legs."

"If you don't stop I'll call Stella. I'm surprised she's not pestering us anyway."

"I paid her to leave us alone."

"No! You didn't?"

"Come to me. We don't have much time. I only had enough money to pay her for half an hour."

"The little shit! You can kiss me and that's it!"

"I'm in pain. Please let me."

"That's it. Stella. Stella!"

And Stella, who was hiding behind the curtains of one of the windows, came out as soon as she was called. Gabriela made her return the money. Protesting, she did as she was told. Cacho left. Gabriela and Stella watched him go, head down, walking slowly, as if defeated. "He looks like a dog with a tail between his legs. Well not necessarily a proper tail, a sort of a tail," said Stella smiling. Gabriela could not help herself, and she laughed and laughed. When their mother returned home Stella had made up a song about a dog not knowing what to do with its tail. Elisa, suspecting that there was
something behind the silly song, kept asking what had happened during her absence. Neither Stella, nor Gabriela, said anything.

***

**INCANTATION TO ATTRACT MALES**

* A bunch of rue
* A twig of rosemary stolen from the garden of a virgin
* Two feathers from a male pigeon
* Pubic hairs from the woman who wants to attract males
* Two frogs' legs

Boil everything and repeat the following incantation:

_Uka prala ternio percurio mata trata_ as you stir with a wand made from a branch of a cherry tree.

Always stir anti-clockwise. When the potion is boiling place it in the magic circle and get the woman to stand over it, with her legs open and no underwear.

As the steam goes up between the woman's legs, repeat the incantation.
"Aurelia, you must promise not to tell anyone about the incantation."

"Of course. I solemnly promise on my law books."

"Oh, you're so bloody funny. You don't give a shit about your law books. Or law."

"They're expensive."

"Promise."

"I promise."

"This a very powerful incantation. Once it's done it's difficult to reverse."

"I'm prepared for it. I want every guy in Rosario to fall in love with me."

"I just want one. A very rich one."

"You mean ... Leon?"

"Hum ... I could consider him."

"I'm ready."

"Me too. It took me a while to collect everything. Where is my assistant. Stella! Stella!"
Aurelia, Stella and I went to the attic where I still had the magic circle drawn on the floor. We carried a small heater to boil the potion. Stella passed me the elements one by one. When it was time to throw in the third ingredient she realised what the short bundle of hairs were and became irate. She threw them back in the box and refused to touch them. I couldn't convince her that the witch couldn't touch anything. It was the duty of the assistant to toss everything in the cauldron. Aurelia begged her. No, she was not going to touch that filthy pubic hair. Aurelia slapped her. "How dare you say that my pubic hair is filthy!" Stella retaliated by pulling Aurelia's long hair. I screamed for them to stop. I ended up adding the pubic hairs with the rest of the stuff. Then I pushed Stella out of the room. Minutes later she came back and apologised to Aurelia. Aurelia apologised to her. Idiots!

One evening very late, Aurelia turned up at home. Her black and vivacious eyes looked as if they had sunken in her face and she had lost weight. We had coffee with mother and then went into my room. As soon as I closed the door she broke down. She cried for a while and stopped to ask me for a glass of water. Walking back into the room I noticed movement behind the curtain. I thought it must be the wind, but the window was shut. I looking down I saw the tip of a black shoe. I screamed. The glass of water fell to the floor. Aurelia stopped crying and also screamed. The intruder also screamed.
Mother came rushing in to find me pulling Stella from behind the curtain by her hair.

"Mum she is hitting me."

"For Christ's sake. I can't even have a private conversation."

"Don't take God's name in vain."

"Since when do you worry about God?"

"Gabriela, don't be rude. I'll tell Aurelia to go home."

"Mum, I'm not a child any more. I work. I earn money. I go to uni. Don't you think I deserve a bit of privacy?"

"Fine. Come Stella, leave your sister to talk to Aurelia in peace."

I closed the door behind them and Aurelia started to cry again. This time I didn't offer to bring her water. She wanted me to reverse the incantation. I had told her that it was very difficult but she didn't believe me. I wanted to know why was she so upset.

"I'm embarrassed to tell you."

"We're friends aren't we?"

"Yes. But what happened is terrible."

"Please tell me."

"I went to that party you didn't want to go to and a few guys were after me."
"Good! Wasn't that what you wanted?"

"I didn't realise I was going to get into trouble."

"How?"

"One of the guys took me to the balcony. We kissed. He was very very handsome. I never had anyone so handsome after me. We kissed for a while, then he insisted that I drink whisky. I told him it made me sick. He laughed and called me a wimp. I didn't want to lose him, so I drank a whole glass."

"Oh, you fool."

"He then took me to his room to show me his trophies. Then it happened."

"What? What happened?"

"You know?"

"No. I don't."

"He raped me."

"Aurelia, my poor friend. Did he force himself onto you?"

"No."

"Did he hit you?"

"No."

"Did you fight him?"
"Not really."

"You let him do it, then?"

"I think so."

"What do you mean you think so?"

"To tell you the truth, I can't remember. I think I was under him. He was kissing me and I was enjoying it. Then I felt this pain. What am I going to do? Please, please, take the incantation away."

"If I take the incantation away it won't bring your virginity back ... and I hope you won't get pregnant."

"He had one of those."

"What?"

"You know, one of those."

"What?"

"A condom."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him put it on."

"So Aurelia, it wasn't that he forced himself on you?"

"It was the fault of the incantation. I never felt like that before. I couldn't control myself. What am I going to do."
"Aurelia, it's OK. What can you do? You liked it. You enjoyed it. So be it. Just don't get pregnant."

"You don't think I'm a bad woman?"

"Why should you be a bad woman. Is he a bad guy?"

"But you're still a virgin."

"So?"

"Don't you want to do it?"

"I'm terrified of doing it."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But also I promised my father on his death bed that I would remain a virgin until I marry."

Aurelia left feeling better. I felt sorry for her. So many nights I had gone to sleep with fire between my legs. A fire which nothing could ameliorate. A fire that Cacho had lit with his kisses and his body pressed against mine. She had let her barriers down. I hoped she had enjoyed it at least. But then I felt guilty. Did I really have such power? And if I did have power, why wasn't I given the money I had asked for?

* * *
**Olivine** (or -en) n. Magnesium, iron, silicate mineral, usu. olive green [f. L. OLIVE+ -INE].

* * *

Leon had been the one doing the cash register with Gabriela for a few days. He was very business-like and ignored her sighs, the flutter of her lashes, the staring into his eyes. Leon was a real man, not Cacho. Cacho was just a kid doing conscription. Why wasn't he responding to her signs? That night Leon informed her that Saul was coming back from Brazil, this would be the last time he'd be doing the till with her. Leon also explained that they had decided to put her in charge of one of their other shops, "Chica", with a staff of three, a boutique that sold high quality clothes. All she had to do was to make sure that no one stole anything, that the staff did their work, and that they kept to their working times.

Aurelia was waiting for Gabriela when Leon and she walked out of the shop. Gabriela was disappointed. She would have liked to get a lift with her handsome boss. Her friend had ruined her last opportunity to be alone with him. "I'm moving to Buenos Aires. There I'll study law. Gabriela, you should come with me. Let's go and withdraw from law," Aurelia blurted.
"Gosh, Aurelia! Any other news?"

"Yes, I've been feeling better about my indiscretion!"

"I couldn't leave my mother and my sister without my support. They need me in more than one way."

"You could always send them money from Buenos Aires."

"You don't understand. It's not just money. It's me they need. Besides, Buenos Aires has no appeal for me. I want to go to Sidni."

"Sidni? You're mad!"

Waiting for dinner to be served, Gabriela lay on her bed and closed her eyes. First she felt the heat of sand on her toes, then cold water on her legs, and the sea breeze entangling her long hair. She opened her eyes and recognised the place. The place that was calling her. The place that had found a residency in a corner of her heart. Australia! Sidni! Bondi! She had never seen so many seagulls and sailboats. She walked towards two flags flapping wildly. There, a group of bathers were looking at something on the sand. Luckily this time she was not wearing black stockings or black clothes. Not since Saul had convinced her to abandon the old fashioned custom of luto.

Once near the group she saw two of the bathers, those wearing the silly hats, trying to resuscitate a young man. "That's me down there," said someone next
to her. Gabriela looked up and recognised him. Yes, indeed he was the man whom the lifesavers were frantically trying to bring back to life.

"How come that you're here and there?" Gabriela asked pointing at the body on the sand.

"Well, that's my body. I'm my soul."

"You're dead!"

"Yeah! I've drowned."

"How sad. Can't you go back into your body."

"Too late. I'm going somewhere else. But before I go, would you swim with me?"

"Love to. But I haven't got a costume."

"Just like that. It'll be fun."

He took Gabriela by the hand and floated towards the water. Cold, cold water. In vain she tried to swim, but the waves pushed her down again and again. Her laughter seemed to echo the sound of the rolling waves. She thought she must have made a funny spectacle with seaweed stuck to her hair, with her inflated clothes, and with her pitiful attempts at standing and swimming. That was it. She was going back to the water's edge. "I'm going back!" she screamed. But he was no longer there. Not far away an ambulance was taking his corpse.
"Gabriela! Gabriela! Wake up! Wake up! You're crying in your sleep."

"Oh. So sad."

"What's sad?"

"The boy who drowned at Bondi."

"What are you talking about? Where?"

"At Bondi, in Sidni."

"How do you know?"

"Nothing. Nothing. I was dreaming, Mum."

"Gosh! Even your dreams are full of fantasy."

"That's why I'll be a writer."

"Dinner is ready. They're all waiting. But, what's that on your hair? Looks like seaweed!"

Gabriela thumped the numbers on the calculator. A few more dockets and she was going to be on her way to university. Free from the slavery of a boring job. Saul had returned from his trip and was patiently counting the money, ignoring Gabriela's treatment of the calculator. She closed the cash register drawer with such strength that the whole counter trembled. "Have I offended you?" asked Saul. Gabriela didn't answer and continued with the task at hand. "Perhaps this will cheer you up," he said and produced a small
velvety jewellery container and handed it to her. Gabriela opened the red case and saw the most beautiful pair of earrings. Two olivines encased in gold and surrounded by diamonds sparkled under the fluorescent lights. "Gorgeous," said Gabriela handing back the box. "For you," said Saul handing them back. "Mr Saul, I cannot accept this present. If you think you will get anything from me by giving me presents you're wrong. I'm a decent girl," Gabriela uttered abruptly as she pushed past him. Saul grabbed her hand and very softly murmured "I know. I know, that's why I want you to marry me."

"Oh My God! I've never seen such beautiful earrings. Gabriela they're beautiful."

"He wants to marry me."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course."

"So sudden! Did you expect something like that?"

"I was expecting something. But I never imagined "it" would come via marriage."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing ... I'm being silly."

"Do you know what, Aurelia? This is the last time I'm coming to lectures."
"We should've withdrawn last week. Let's do it now."

"Going back to the earrings, I don't know how I'll tell my mother."

"Why are you so late?"

"I had a coffee with Aurelia after lectures."

"You know I don't like you to be home so late."

"I know Mum. Look"

"What's this?"

"My boss gave it to me."

"What have you done! What have you done! I'll kill him."

"Don't be so dramatic Mum. I haven't done anything."

"Why would he give you such an expensive present?"

"He wants to marry me."

"Don't be a silly girl. They all say that. It's an old trick to get you to bed."
"Don't scream Mum. I'm not stupid. I won't go to bed with him. He was serious."

"I'll give him a piece of my mind tomorrow."

"Please don't. He was a gentleman. Wait and see."

"You're still a minor. If you misbehave I'll intern you in the Good Shepherd Home."

"Jesus! Mum! How ridiculous. Look I'm trembling in fright!"

"You're so funny. Tomorrow I'll go and return those ear-rings."

* * *
PART TWO
I dreamt a dream that lasted nearly a lifetime.

* * *

I opened my eyes and realised that I had been sleeping. Figures floated around me, words perforated my ears, images danced in front of my eyes, perfumes titillated my nostrils, and yet I was dead. A peaceful death in which I had lost contact with my body, my soul, my feelings. Day after day had passed, and I had not noticed the changing of the seasons or the wind making whirlwinds with the leaves of the street trees, I missed the flowering of wisteria. I was oblivious to life. Mum was living with us. Stella gone. Who was living in my family house? What were my friends doing? Had Betty married? Maids and chauffeurs came and went. A nanny brought from one of the poor provinces. Fashion had changed.

I locked myself in the toilet and looked at myself in the mirror. Who was that fat young woman staring back at me? I slapped myself. There was no doubt, that horrible mound of fat was me. What had happened to my hair? Why was it looking like straw? Why couldn't I remember what had happened to me? And who were those screaming kids knocking at the door and calling me mummy. "Mummy is busy!" I screamed. I took my clothes off and observed my body. My breasts had grown. Fine white lines crisscrossed my belly. A big scar bulged from my belly button to the beginning of my pubic
"Are you alright?" I heard my mother ask. My mother. Yes, she had been around. She had been part of my dream. I the sleepwalker. "Of course I'm alright," I replied. I weighed myself. Eighty-two kilos. I punched the wall with my two fists when I saw the reading.

I came out of the bathroom ready to face my reality, a reality which had existed while I was sleeping. The little girls were happy to see me. They wanted to play. I told them I was busy. I had to work. They were surprised and complained. "You always play with us Mum." Not that day. I had to do so many things! I made a list of what I needed and gave it to the chauffeur to take to Saul so he could arrange for someone to do my shopping. I wanted everything for that evening.
LIST OF ITEMS TO BUY FOR GABRIELA

- A typewriter
- Two or three reams of paper
- Pens and pencils
- Painting oils, many colours
- A few canvasses
- Brushes
- An easel
- Turpentine
- A palette

I opened my wardrobe and screamed when I saw five fur coats hanging: a full length silver mink, an ocelot short coat, a black astrakhan, a brown otter and a silver fox long coat. I touched them. I felt the animals palpitate under my skin. Their pain ached in my belly, in the same place where I had seen the scar. Tears wetted the sleeve of the mink. Had I as a sleepwalker bought all those furs? Had I gone to the shops and selected
them? Had I worn them with pride? I dressed. Later, I was going to decide the fate of the coats. I was in a hurry to get to town.

"I want my hair dyed jet black, with blue hues," I told the hairdresser.

"That would be a very radical change Miss," said the young woman.

"You do what I've asked you to do. I know what I want."

For the first time in a long, long time I knew what I wanted. To be different! To do different things! "The real me please step forward," I said to myself. As they dyed my hair I smiled. I had the whole world at my feet. I was ready to embark on a great adventure. Life. Life at its fullest. Life essential, like oxygen for my lungs. Life essential, like water to plants, like meat to the lions and like grass to the cows. Life, loving my babies. Life awoken. Life not like in a dream. Life with all my senses functioning. Living life second by second, minute by minute. Life!

The young woman had done a good job, I liked my long hair black. I walked down Calle Cordoba, it seemed that everyone in Rosario was there. The smell of freshly-brewed coffee compelled me to sit at a café and order a short black. Even coffee had a different aroma. My taste buds rejoiced. I was about to light a cigarette when a familiar voice behind me said "Please, let me." Aurelia! What had happened to her? Had I seen her during all these years? We kissed and hugged.
"Can you believe it? I'm a midwife."

"Where have you been?"

"I told you. Don't you remember I went to live in B.A. for a while?"

"Yes, of course. Sorry, I'm a bit vague these days."

"I wrote to you many times but you never answered me."

"I was in Sidni."

"What!"

"Just joking."

"You haven't lost your sense of humour."

"So, are you working?"

'I'm so glad I met you. I was going to call you. I'm involved in something marvellous."

"What?"

"A group which will liberate the poor. We'll free everyone from the claws of capitalism. You must meet Julian."

"Why me? I'm married to a capitalist."

"But you think. You've always been different. You're deep."

"Aurelia, are you sure you're not confusing me with someone else?"
"Shit! Have marriage and motherhood softened your brain. Do you remember in our law days how we planned to leave our mark on the world. How we wanted to do something valuable?"

"I suppose. The truth is I haven't thought about anything for so long."

"You've been sick?"

"Not really. Perhaps dormant."

"Do you still do witchcraft?"

"Not since Stella disappeared."

"That was tragic. I sent you a letter. Did you get it?"

"Yes. Thank you."

"So ... what do you think happened to her?"

"I don't know. She just vanished. No one knows. Not a trace, a clue. Gone. Gone for ever."

"How's your mother?"

"Keeps busy with my daughters. My auntie died too. But let's change the subject. That Julian sounds interesting. What does he actually do?"

"I can't tell you until you speak with him. He'll instruct you. But swear you won't tell anyone about this."

"Why not?"
"Gabriela, where have you been? For Christ's sake keep your mouth shut or we'll all end up dead. I trust you."

"Fine. I'll meet him but ... obligation free."

"Would you? Great! I'll arrange a meeting. Give me your telephone number. Expect a call soon. We need people for our cause."

* * *

Rainbow, lend me your colours I want to paint
I want my hand to capture a garden on the canvas.
A stroke here in gold, another there in beige,
Oh that yellow it's autumn! My hand moves
with a planned destination. Who are you who
guide my art? A splash of green, a dash of blue.

* * *

★

The next day everything that Gabriela had requested arrived. She needed a place to work where she wouldn't be interrupted. Not in Saul's study, definitely no. Perhaps the storeroom at the back of the garden, or perhaps the attic, or one of the empty rooms in the servants' quarters. After some thought she decided the storeroom was the perfect space — situated at
the back of the garden, amidst trees and bushes, away from the house noises. She organised some of the servants to clear the clutter and accumulated rubbish. The good stuff was taken by a secondhand store. The rest was sent to the tip. The gardener agreed to paint the room for her. A week later the big easel stood by one of the windows, a small table next to it accommodated all the oils, turps and brushes. Under the other window Gabriela set her desk, an old antique dining room table, with the typewriter, to one side her father's desk lamp, a basket with typing paper, and a flower vase from Florence with pens and pencils. A bookshelf with dictionaries stood between the two windows. A sofa-bed stacked with cushions and two wing chairs gave the room a very friendly atmosphere.

After giving orders to the servants not to let anyone come near her, Gabriela set the canvas on the easel and painted. Her hands seemed to know what they were doing. Colours were squeezed in small mounds on the palette, brushes were softened with linseed oil, then carefully selected before each stroke. How could her hands know what to do? She had never painted before, this was the first time she had held a brush, yet the canvas was being filled with colours! Gabriela was not Gabriela, she was an expert artist who patiently cleaned the brushes with turps, who kept the right distance from the canvas, who knew about light, balance and proportions. Space and time.

... And she painted for hours and hours. Meals were brought to her and left by the door. She did not see anyone for days. "Who are you who guides my hand?" she kept asking. Although she did not get an answer she knew it was someone else who was painting. She felt the presence in her studio. Sometimes she saw a glimpse of a shadow, or the hem of a woman's dress. She smelt perfume. Gabriela guessed a smile on the other woman's face. She named her Berthe.

"How long are you going to be locked in that room?" It was her mother. Her children were also at the door. She hadn't realised she had spent such a long time locked up. She opened the door and hugged her daughters. "Look everyone," she said as she showed them her paintings. "Gabriela, they are marvellous. I'm no expert but they're so professional, so beautiful! Since when have you been able to paint like that?" asked her mother. "Mummy is a painter." "Mummy is a painter!" "Mummy is a painter!" chorused Roma and Amadea, her daughters. "Let's go for a walk sweeties," said Gabriela.

It was siesta time. A winter's early afternoon. All the deciduous trees had lost their leaves. The park was deserted at that time of the day. Gabriela and the girls took turns on the swings. They kicked mountains of yellow dry
leaves. They chased pigeons, and each other. "Let's go to the magical land of Sidni. All we have to do is close our eyes very tightly and we'll be there."

They closed their eyes and when they opened them they were in front a big giant face, with a smile painted on it, welcoming them into this enchanting place. Once inside they didn't have to pay for the rides because no one realised they were there. Laughter and screams followed them all the way down in the Big Dipper. Coney Island offered a myriad of surprises and fun. In one of the distorting mirrors they saw themselves tall and skinny, others reflected fat and short figures. They held each other with fright in the Ghost Train and felt sick on the Rotor. When it was time to come back the girls cried. Gabriela promised them that one day they would live in this land.

Before leaving the fun park she pointed to the enormous bridge at the side of the park. "That's the Harbour Bridge," she told her daughters.

It was after nine when they walked in the house. Saul had been worried about them. Why had she been locked in that room for so many days? What had she been doing? Where had she been all this time? Ignoring his questions Gabriela dragged him into her study. Saul's eyes did not recognise the old storeroom. When he saw the pictures, he smiled. "You never told me you were such a good painter! I'll speak to a friend of mine
who has an art gallery. I'm sure he'll be interested in your paintings," he added.

* * *

THE DOCTOR AND THE TRAITOR

CHARACTERS

The woman Gabriela
The shop owner Elsa

ACT 3 - (Final Act)

An art shop. Shelves stocked with oils, brushes, and canvasses can be seen.

Gabriela enters and searches for a particular oil colour.

Elsa: Are you Gabriela?

Gabriela: Yes.

Elsa: You do look a bit different, though.

Gabriela: You mean fat.

Elsa: Oh no! Your hair. That's what it is. You were a blonde last time I saw you.

Gabriela: Where was that?

Elsa: At your Aunt Francis's funeral.
Gabriela: Did you know my Aunt?

Elsa: I know her ex-husband. He's a member of the Retail Association and so am I. I used to see your Aunt walking around Calle Cordoba. She was very beautiful. Pity she died so young.

Gabriela: Yes.

Elsa: I know a lot about you. Someone I know used to talk a lot about you.

Gabriela: Who?

Elsa: He's someone I'm related to.

Gabriela: I couldn't begin to imagine who he is. *(Obviously annoyed by the conversation and looking at the oils.*) Cerulean blue. That's what I'm after.

Elsa: Ernesto!

Gabriela: Who?

Elsa: Ernesto Perez, the doctor.

Gabriela: Gosh! He's someone from the past!

Elsa: I always wanted to talk to you but I was in two minds about doing it.

Gabriela: About what? Talk to me about what?
Elsa: He loved you, you know. Very, very much.

Gabriela: Did he?

Elsa: Oh yes. I was his confidante. He used to tell me everything. Now we hardly see each other. That woman, his wife, she has split the family.

Gabriela: So he married?

Elsa: Yes. Not long after he stopped seeing you. He really wanted to marry you.

Gabriela: Fancy that! I never knew.

Elsa: He was very upset when he read that you got married.

Gabriela: Interesting.

Elsa: Your friend, it was all your friend's fault.

Gabriela: What friend? Who?

Elsa: Your friend ... the one who married Ernesto's friend.


Elsa: I'd love to, but I can't leave the shop.

Gabriela: That's a pity.
Elsa: Just a minute. That woman seems to need me. *(She walks away to serve a woman. The woman asks a question and leaves.)* She wanted to find out about drawing lessons.

Gabriela: Tell me please, I'm intrigued. What did Betty have to do with Ernesto and me?

Elsa: Obviously she didn't like you. She spoke about you to Ernesto.

Gabriela: What? What could she have said about me?

Elsa: Dear, do you know the saying small town, gigantic hell. What is not true is invented.

Gabriela: But what sort of things did she say?

Elsa: She said that you loved money. That you had no feelings. That you laughed about him behind his back and that you went out with other men. She convinced him that you were no good for him.

Gabriela: And I thought she was a friend.

Elsa: Some sort of friend! I met her a few times. She seemed to delight in putting you down. She absolutely discredited you in the eyes of Ernesto and his friend. I would say she had some subconscious and profound hate for you.
Gabriela: I suspect she wanted me away from her life. I knew something about her. I guess she wanted me out of the way in case I revealed her secret. It's always the same ... the actions of one person affects many others. By the way, how is Ernesto?

Elsa: Very unhappy. He married the wrong woman.

Gabriela: Oh well, we all make mistakes. Give him my regards when you see him. Thanks for your confidences. You have clarified some events from the past. I must go now. By the way do you have cerulean blue?

END OF THE PLAY

* * *
to him who led his people through the wilderness,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

to him who smote great kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

(The Bible, The Psalms,
Book 1, Psalm 136)

* * *

Aurelia had called me. We arranged to meet with Julian that afternoon at the Independence Park, next to the artificial lake, on the bench in front of the statue of Venus Aphrodite. Dressed in old clothes, not to appear too bourgeois, I made my way to the park. It was a glorious afternoon, ideal for walking. The exercise was good for my 'losing weight' program. I had lost a whole stone mainly by drinking coffee and eating water crackers. My confidence was returning. Long strides. Back arched. Arms swinging with strength. Avenida Pellegrini beneath my feet. Would Sidni have beautiful avenues like this one? Cars sped along each side of the central gardens. Roses in full bloom. Winter roses. Their aroma permeated the air. I wondered why Rosarinos liked so much to use the horn. I craved silence. Impossible. Coffee shops with tables on pavements, vendors, beggars, passers-by, coffee.
drinkers, maids, rich women, professionals, speaking, shouting, demanding. Noise and more noise.

The park was deserted. Neither of them had arrived. I sat on the bench and waited. Moments later, in the distance I saw a figure approach. It looked like a man. He crossed the Moorish garden and walked towards the lake. I thought he would then take a right turn, and coast the lake towards me. No he didn’t. He continued walking on the waters of the lake. His figure was enveloped in a white light. He seemed to float above the lake. How was it possible? Was I hallucinating? When he was in front of me the first thing I did was to look at his shoes. They were dry. He smiled. His intense blue eyes glowed. He shook my hand and I felt the goodness of Julian.

Questions and more questions. He wanted to know me. What sort of a person was I? Did I trust myself? Did I believe in myself? Had I noticed the beggars, the poor, the differences in classes? Was I aware of the injustices? Of the exploitation of the workers? Had I read Marx? The world was changing, did I want to be part of that big change? Did I want to change our society so we all had the same opportunities? Words and more words flowed from his mouth. From time to time he would pause and stroke his long blond hair, or brush away the curls that stubbornly kept falling over his eyes. His voice hypnotised me. I became a slave of his words. I became a prisoner of

Julian opened his bag and handed me a few tattered books. "Read them, my dream is in them. You have three weeks to do so," he said, not letting my hands go. We arranged to meet at the same place and at the same time. As we were about to depart I remembered Aurelia. I asked if he knew why she hadn't turned up. Julian shrugged his shoulders. I suspected that she wanted me to be alone with Julian, her hero.

He hugged me, a bear hug that moved me. "I trust you, compañera." He had called me comrade. He had his trust in me. I felt important, wanted, depended on.

Walking back I mulled over in my head all that Julian had said. The interesting thing was that in the back of my mind I had nurtured similar ideas. Ideas which had been anaesthetised by my lifestyle, by my upbringing, by my family values. I pressed Julian's books against my breast and felt them palpitate in unison with my heart.

It didn't take me long to complete the task that Julian had given me. I read and re-read each concept, each proposal, each solution. Finally I fully understood what Ernesto "Che" Guevara had tried to do. What was it that Julian had in mind for me? I telephoned him to bring our meeting forward
but he was in the capital. Perhaps Aurelia knew of Julian's plans. I took a cab and went to her place.

"I'm curious. What does he want from me? What shall I be doing?"

"The main thing about all this is to keep it secret. No one, absolutely no one, must know about Julian, you, the others or me."

"Are there others."

"Yes. Many. But we never get to see them. Unless the operation requires more than one person."

"Operation?"

"Yes. Sometimes we take group action. But mostly we work on our own. You'll be given a code name and a telephone number. Once you're working for our cell you must report every day. You'll ring, you'll say your code name and wait for orders, or inform them that you have accomplished your mission."

"Will I work with Julian or you? Who will give me orders?"

"It depends. Orders and money come from other sources."

"What sources."

"China, Cuba and Russia, of course. Julian has been to all these places."

"Is he your lover?"
"Oh no. He's above all that! I wish he was. I love him and his ideals. He has given me so much."

"He is an interesting character."

"He's much more than that. He's a superior being. He has powers."

"What sort of powers?"

"The power to lead people. To see their inner beings. To be them and him at the same time."


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Dreams that become reality

Reality that becomes dreams

Dreams and reality.

Reality and Dreams.

Reality.

Dreams.

* * *

★

Julian had given Gabriela a code name once he was convinced that she understood their philosophy, their mission and the rules of the cell. On a piece of paper he wrote Natalia and the number which she had to call to receive her instructions and to report that everything was all right. Her first assignment was to distribute pamphlets to the workers in a factory owned by a foreign capital. Although it was a mindless task, Gabriela was looking forward to it. Unaccustomed to rising early in the morning she set three alarm clocks. Saul was intrigued by his wife's unusual interest in getting up at dawn but did not ask for an explanation. In the event of an interrogation Gabriela had already made up a believable story: 'a friend of Aurelia's, a divorced mother, was in hospital and all her friends were taking turns looking after her
children.' Plausible. Gabriela's mother, who was up when Gabriela was leaving, asked awkward questions. "Doesn't she have any relatives?" "Why don't you bring the children here?" "So early! Why?" "What are you up to?"

Gabriela cursed to herself, it was difficult to lie to her mother.

A cold wind hit Gabriela's face as she walked out. She shivered. "No fur coats, no jewellery, no tiaras," Julian had said. Driving to the outskirts of Rosario where the factory was, Gabriela remembered the last time she had seen him; the day he had given her a code name and had made her memorise the telephone number. Then he had asked her to tear up the page in her address book where she had written his details. Going back over the events of that afternoon gave Gabriela a warm feeling. At a certain moment he had buried his face in her shoulder. She felt his long soft hair on her cheek. He said something, which sounded like a prayer. Gabriela was expecting him to kiss her. But Julian was praying. Praying? What was he saying?

Seven fifteen. Gabriela had only fifteen minutes to get to the factory. At full speed she drove through Calle San Martín until she arrived at *El Saladillo*. So many times she had driven by, but she never had imagined that one day she would be there at the factory handing out information about their cause. She parked the car some distance away to avoid it being identified, and ran to meet the workers.
In the freezing cold morning she handed out the 'red' leaflets. Most workers took them, others screwed them into a ball and threw them at her feet. Others confronted Gabriela and called her *comunista de mierda.* Gabriela could not understand why there was so much hate in the faces of those who referred to her as a 'shit communist'. Was she doing something wrong? Didn't they realise that she was spreading 'the word', Julian's word, Che Guevara's word. The Word! Perhaps they threw the pamphlets away because they didn't know how to read. Julian had already told her that many of the workers were illiterate. "If one, only one of them understands our cause, we should be happy, because that one will tell another, and another, and so on," Julian had said.

By eight the whole exercise was over. She discarded the remaining leaflets in a rubbish bin across the road. Checking to see that she was not being followed she went a few times around the block. When she was sure that no one was behind her she entered a public phone booth and dialled the cell number. "This is Natalia and everything is fine." That was it. No how are you? No well thank you. Nothing. No pleasantries. No formalities.

Once at home Gabriela locked herself in her study, this time to write. At first the white page rolled into the typewriter frightened her. Yet words were piling up in her mind. A queue of words was forming. Words that
wanted to come out. Words that tripped over each other. Words that had a will ... Gabriela's fingers commenced to type, lines, and more lines. Neatly the words were positioned one next to the other, on one line, on another, on another. A poem. Another poem. More poems. She read them aloud imagining that Julian was listening.

Tired, Gabriela rested on the leather sofa. She closed her eyes and felt Julian caressing her forehead. It didn't take her long to fall sleep.

THE DREAM

Gabriela looks at the sky where black clouds are forming. She enters her study to close the windows, but it's too late, the storm is over her. The wind is strong and prevents her from closing the window. The shutters hit the window again and again. Suddenly Stella is next to her, helping her to close the windows. "Where were you?" She asks her sister. But Stella makes a sign to indicate that she cannot talk. "Gabriela begs her to say something, but the thunder, the wind, and the rain
drown her voice. She shouts, but words don't come out. Stella laughs at her, then she turns around and points to the typewriter. Gabriela walks to it and reads the word typed on the blank paper: Elementals. "Did they take you? Did they take you?"

She screams, but Stella is no longer there.

Gabriela woke up screaming "Did they take you? Did they take you?"

She was wet with perspiration, and her nails had left quarter - moon marks on her palms. She got up and walked to the typewriter. As in the dream she saw the word 'Elementals' typed on the blank piece of paper in the typewriter. She pulled the paper out and cried as she read and re-read the word. Her tears smudged the letters one by one. The wet paper disintegrated and fell onto the floor like ashes.

The phone was ringing, but it sounded as if it were in another part of the house. She answered. It was Julian. Butterflies. Spring butterflies. Summer butterflies. She could even smell spring. She held onto her desk, her legs were shaking. "I rang to tell you that I love your poetry," Julian said. Gabriela wanted to know how he knew she had been writing poetry, but he was speaking so fast that she couldn't interrupt. A group action had been
planned for next month. He was going to be the leader of the mission, they
had to meet to discuss it.

That night Saul walked into Gabriela's studio with a big smile on his
face. She was painting with the girls. The three of them were sprawled on the
floor covering butcher's paper with hand paint. She jumped to her feet and
kissed him, the girls abandoned their painting to welcome their father. "I
have good news," he said happily.

"Do you know my friend, Romualdo Pavessi, the owner of the art
gallery?"

"He came to our wedding. Yes. I remember him."

"I showed him some photos of your paintings. He was impressed.
He'd be very happy if you would agree to have an exhibition."

"Saul! You're mad. When did you take the photos? I'm no good. I do
it for pleasure. How embarrassing."

"He loved the paintings. He wanted to know with whom you studied.
I made a story about being taught by a famous artist who left the country. We
don't want to mention his name."

"Did he say anything about when he wants the exhibition?"
"He wants you to go and discuss details with him. You'd be silly to miss an opportunity like this. People continually knock at his door for him to consider their paintings."

"I suppose I'll talk to him and see what he has to say. But I still think you're both mad."

"I already told you, he loved your paintings. He said he hasn't seen in Rosario a talent such as yours for a long time."

* * *

A STORY TO BE TOLD UNDER A TREE

In a very far away place there was a She-Dreamer. When she did not dream she was out of danger. The She-Dreamer knew that evil forces desired the treasures she dreamed. One day, very tired after working in her garden of poppies, she leaned against a willow tree and fell asleep. Not long after, and without realising what she was doing, she started to dream. A nasty Elemental, who had been watching her for a long time, sneaked into her dream.
to steal her treasures. A lyrebird, who was a friend of the She-Dreamer, woke her up in time, and the evil Elemental could not do anything. When she realised how close she had been to losing her dreams, she screamed, and screamed, until her friend calmed her down. Then her friend, the lyrebird advised her to hide her treasured dreams, and not let anyone near them. The She-Dreamer agreed and went to a carpenter to ask if he would make her a box. Once the box was made she kept in it: her passion, her *sexo dormido*, her hunger, and lust, and all the dreams she had knitted with two golden needles. Later she visited an old woman who was an expert on making locks and keys. She bought the strongest lock and placed it on the box. The gold key that opened the lock she hung around her neck. The She-Dreamer stopped being frightened because she believed she no longer could
dream. Happy, and convinced that no one could reach her dreams, and exhausted from all her errands, the She-Dreamer laid her red cape on the ground and fell sleep. While she slept she had a nightmare in which all her dreams were stolen. With terror the She-Dreamer woke up to realise that indeed someone had taken the box with all her dreams.

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Julian called me before he said he would. He wanted to meet at the park that very afternoon. My whole being became expectant. Sensations that I had long forgotten arose between my legs. I ached for him. Julian ... Julian ... Rather early I drove to the Independence Park. I was at least 45 minutes ahead of the arranged time. The cemetery where father was buried was close by. I parked the car and walked there and bought flowers from a woman with a basket full of flowers, real and plastic. The sight of the Vaccaro's mausoleum hit me hard in my newly acquired awareness of poverty and
ignorance. It was one of the most elaborate and expensive ones in the cemetery. And they say "you can't take your money to the grave" - most of the graves were an indication that one could! *Familia Vaccaro* was written on top of the granite façade. White marble statues of suffering angels were sprawled on the front steps. I had to push hard to open the intricate bronzed door.

Inside it was dark and musty, a mouldy smell hit my nostrils. I couldn't be bothered to place the flowers in a vase, so I just laid them on top of father's coffin. I sat on one of the marble benches and lit a cigarette. "Dad, I don't know what I want out of life," I said, not expecting an answer. Yet, clearly I heard him reply. "Neither did I." I jumped to my feet and ran out, falling on the gravel path. I hurt my knees and burned my hand with my cigarette. I cried all the way to meet Julian. He immediately realised that something was wrong and hugged me, gently kissing my forehead. That was enough to make me feel better.

I told him what had happened. He wasn't surprised or shocked, neither did he think me mad. My knees were bleeding and my fingers were red and aching. Julian placed his hands on my knees and the bleeding stopped. There was no sign of any injury, nor even a mark on them!
We sat by the rose garden. The perfume, the imitation of the Greek statues, the mid-afternoon sun, all reminded me of my adolescence. In particular that day when Gustavo, my first and innocent love, kissed me. "I would have kissed you too," Julian said interrupting my thoughts. I felt the blue of his eyes on my skin, cool and soothing as the waters of Bondi, Sidni. "Why don't you kiss me now," I said plunging into his soul. And he did. It wasn't passion that emerged between us. Passion seems a carnal and low feeling in comparison. How can I describe those sensations? It was as if we had vibrated in unison and floated into another dimension. It was like listening to Mozart. It was a perfect and total communion of mind, body and soul. After kissing, he seemed sad.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I shouldn't have done that. It's not right."

"Why? Why?"

He didn't answer, and walked away. Only he hadn't walked away, he just vanished. One minute he was there with me, and the next he was gone. When I arrived home I realised I had left the car near the cemetery. Walking had allowed me to mull over the events of that afternoon.

"Mum let's play."

"OK, let's play witches."
"How do we do that?"

"We get brooms, and ride them around."

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Let's play witches."

"I have some black dresses. We'll wear them and pretend they're witches' robes."

"We need witches' hats too."

"Yes, you're right. We need some black, pointed, and frightening hats. I have some cardboard in my study. Three witches' hats coming up."

When Saul arrived he wasn't very happy to see us dressed the way we were, and mounting brooms around the garden. The little one started telling him that we really had been flying. He couldn't convince her that it wasn't true.

"Perhaps, we did fly, " I said.

"You should act a bit more mature. Especially in front of your children and the servants." Until that day I had never answered him back, but that day my words escaped out of control.

"The truth is that I'm not immature. What happens is that you're a bore, and don't know how to enjoy yourself." I walked into my study, slamming the door behind me.
I telephoned Aurelia. I needed to share with her my experience at the mausoleum, Julian's healing my knees, his kiss and my anger with Saul. She answered very cheerfully and excited. She didn't even attempt to hear what I had to say. I listened patiently as she told me how she had visited Julian's mother, Maria. The mother had said that Julian always talked about Aurelia, and that she thought that he loved her.

"Perhaps I have some hope," my friend said between sighs. "And as we were engrossed in this conversation, Julian's father, Joseph, arrived. He's so friendly! He offered to make me a treasure chest in his carpentry shop." And she went on and on and on . . .

"Yes, perhaps he loves you," I mumbled and pretended that someone was at the door and hung up.

I didn't hear from Julian for a whole month. In the meantime I continued distributing pamphlets at different factories, and reporting by phone to my cell leader. One of those times when I called I built up enough courage to ask about Julian, and the group action he had told me about. I was told it had been postponed. Someone had tipped off the police and they were waiting for us to make a move. During that month, a few times I woke up to find Julian sitting at my bedside. I must have been dreaming because when I
tried to talk to him, or touch him his figure disintegrated as if he had been just a projected image.

Julian ... Julian ... how much I ached for you!

Mr Romualdo Pavessi was a charming man. He really liked my paintings and he seemed honest about saying so. My suspicions that Saul had paid for him to arrange the exhibition were unfounded. He not only liked the paintings, he also liked me as well. During our interview I frequently had to move away from him as his hands somehow always ended up on my body. A few times he commented on how lucky Saul was to be married to such a young and attractive woman. "Bloody old man!" I thought. He showed me the gallery and we set the date for the exhibition at the beginning of spring.

Finally, I saw Julian. He was standing next to my car in the car park on the corner. He looked happy to see me. As he had done before, he hugged me, against my protestations that someone might see us and tell Saul.

"You shouldn't care about what anyone says. You own yourself. You've got the right to do what you want with your body, and your mind."

His words went straight into my heart, it was as if they were branded in my mind and from then on they became my motto, my vision, my light in my darker and most confusing times.
Julian kissed me as we leaned against the parked car. I felt his desire against my legs. His hands discovered my body. Between kisses he told me stories of freedom, equality, education and love. His words entered me, not only through my ears, but through my skin. He penetrated me with his ideals. His force shook me. As I came in his arms I felt transported to another place and another time: Sidni. I knew there and then that my place, my life was not in Rosario but in that glorious city, where the sun is always warm, and the sea embraces the city as Julian was embracing me. "You belong there," he said and added: "and I, I'll return to where I belong."

"Where Julian? Where do you belong? Please tell me." He didn't answer. He handed me a neatly folded piece of paper and lost himself in the darkness of the cold and dark parking station. I read the instructions on the paper and after memorising them, I burnt the paper with my lighter.

* * *

154
Mr and Mrs Saul Bennin

You are cordially invited to attend the gala ball in honour of General Juan Jose Viola who will be visiting our city.

The event will take place on Saturday, 19 July, at 20.00 Hrs, at the Country Club, Rosario.
Gabriela didn't want to go to the ball, a ball in honour of the enemies of the people! But how could she avoid it? Saul had already sent her to Buenos Aires to select a designer outfit, and anything else she wanted for the occasion.

"Buy a silver mink stole. And you should think of selecting a light coloured gown. It will contrast with your black hair. I want you to look your best! I know General Viola. He and his family used to live across the road from my parents' house. He always thought he was better than anyone else," he had said over lunch. When Gabriela complained about not wanting to go to the ball, he hit the table with his closed fist. Everyone at the table was startled by his uncharacteristic demonstration of anger. "You're my wife and you'll do as you're told," he said, getting up from the table without finishing his meal. Gabriela knew she didn't have the courage to defy him.

"Mummy why are you crying," asked her daughter Roma, the eldest.

When Gabriela arrived in Buenos Aires her legs were still shaking. Saul's chauffeur was mad, he thought of himself as Fangio, and drove at high speeds with very little skill. During the trip she talked to him about the exploitation of the working class by the rich. He didn't need a revolution. He was happy. Saul was a good boss and he was paid a lot of money. No use,
didn't understand. "What a fool," Gabriela thought and sank into a depressive mood.

Buenos Aires looked gloomy and grey in the rain. Gabriela was surprised to see so many people up so early in the morning. She had left Rosario at 4 am, it was now eight o'clock. She had to wait for at least two hours for Madame Rosanne to open. She let the chauffeur go, and sat in a café to wait, reading the morning paper and savouring a coffee. Gabriela was so engrossed in the paper that she didn't realise that someone had sat next to her.

"Julian! What are you doing here?"

"What about you?"

"You don't want to know. It would make you sick."

"Try me. I've been told that I'm understanding."

"I have to go a gala ball, in honour of General Viola. On top of that I have to dress like Saul wants."

"I see. You do have a problem there. But let's don't talk about it now. Come with me."

Julian took some money from his pocket and left it on the table. Once outside in the street he kissed Gabriela on the mouth and took her by the hand to a hotel across the road.
"I'm staying here," he said, as they entered the lift. Was this coincidence? A hotel right across from where she was having coffee? How did he know she was going to be in Buenos Aires? Everything about Julian was mysterious. Gabriela tried to find some answers, but Julian cleverly avoided any question by joking or changing the conversation.

The hotel was a modest one, and the room had no luxuries, nothing like the five star hotels chosen by Saul. Gabriela felt shy and uncomfortable alone with Julian in a hotel room. She couldn't finish looking around because Julian picked her up and carried her to the bed.

"I know this is not right, but I'm human too," he said. Very tenderly he removed her clothes. Gabriela was self-conscious about the stretch marks on her belly and her breasts, and tried to cover herself with the sheet. "You're beautiful," he said as he uncovered her. Gabriela could hear Mozart but there was no radio in the room. Julian quickly undressed himself and with tender kisses and warm words he relaxed her. "Love me." "Love me." He kept saying. And Gabriela finally said "I love you."

Julian's hands knew how to touch, how to caress, how to stroke and where to stroke. His mouth was also expert at giving pleasure. His tongue found sensitive corners she didn't know she had. When Julian entered her she shivered at the thought that she was cheating on her husband. But was she
cheating really? Didn't her body belong to her? Weren't all humans free?
Who had set the rules of marriage and fidelity? The church, the capital, men?
With joy Gabriela realised that she was not feeling guilty. In that moment she
let free her contained passion. A passion that had lain dormant for years. Her
hands became explorers, her mouth was thirsty for Julian's body and her
insides craved for him to go on and on making love to her. And he did. Again
and again he brought her to orgasm. Finally, exhausted, they fell sleep.

When Gabriela woke up, her first thought was about the chauffeur,
she had said to pick her up at Madame Rosanne in two hours. They had slept
for about four. She was about to jump out of bed but Julian said "Don't
worry about him, he's been taken care of. Get dressed and I'll walk you to
your appointment." How could he have arranged all this? Before they left he
made her promise not to tell anyone about their relationship. Not only could
it be dangerous, but many people could get hurt. "Like Aurelia?" Gabriela
asked. "Yes, like Aurelia," he answered. "She's a friend, a comrade, that's
all," he added.

Gabriela slept all the way back to Rosario. With delight she had
selected a rather plain long black dress with a dramatic red rose on one
shoulder and a long black coat made of the same material as the dress. The
chauffeur made no comment about her disappearance. She wanted to ask him
about Julian but realised that it was better to pretend that nothing had happened. Perhaps she had imagined everything. Perhaps nothing had happened at all. Perhaps ...

* * *

Power

power of a few,

pain,

pain of the many,

who under their boots,

live in fear and crave freedom and peace.

Uniforms which hide beasts with no feelings.

Inside the rich dance and eat,

outside the poor sit and wait.

* * *

Poder

dolor de unos pocos,

dolor,

dolor de los muchos,

quienes bajo las botas,

viven con miedo y desean libertad y paz.

Uniformes que ocultan bestias sin sentimientos.

Adentro los ricos bailan comen,

afuera los pobres esperan sentados.

* * *
When Saul saw me dressed in black he didn't say anything. Eyes wide open, he stared at me for a long time. Finally he smiled and we left for the ball. In the car he complimented me and told me that until then he hadn't noticed that I was half the size I had been. In a way I was disappointed, I didn't want to gain his admiration I wanted to defy him.

When we arrived everyone was excited at the idea of sharing a meal and making small talk with the president and his cronies. We sat at a table with some of Saul's associates. It was embarrassing to receive so many compliments about my looks, about my hair, and about how much weight I had lost. When one of the women said "You look so much better now. You should've gone on a diet before," I replied with disdain "To tell you the truth, weight for me is irrelevant. I value the inside of people and not the outside!" There was a prolonged silence. Saul shot me a look of disgust and made some comments about my art exhibition. It was then me who gave him a look of loathing. I didn't want all those empty vessels at my exhibition. With not much enthusiasm I answered their ridiculous and fatuous questions about my paintings.

The generals entered the ball-room with all the pomp and ceremony they required. Their boots, their epaulets, their medals, and their ornamental paraphernalia, all shone under the lights of the elegant Country Club.
Murmurs like a wave undulated across the room. They, the generals, smiled and shook hands. Everyone wanted to talk to them, to be near them, to ask them questions. I only wanted answers!

During dinner the dishes kept coming. Nothing but the best for the generals: pheasant, lobster, partridge, \textit{palmitos}, caviar, and all sorts of expensive foods. In another place and time I would have eaten until I had to undo my belt, but the presence of the generals brought an uneasy discomfort to the pit of my stomach.

After dinner the president and his coterie circulated amongst the guests shaking hands and asking inane questions. When I was introduced to them, I looked at the president and asked: "Mr president, is it true that people who express different ideas and opinions to those of your government are being persecuted?" For the second time that night I was surrounded by absolute silence. Saul as usual was quick to diffuse the tension. Without giving the president the chance to say anything, he positioned himself in front of me, patted him on the back and congratulated him for some foreign economic decision he had just taken. The president thanked Saul and kept moving, whispering something to one of his minders.

Saul grabbed me by the arm and led me to the street, without collecting our coats from the cloakroom. Once outside, we caught a taxi
home. "Have you got any idea of the danger of what you have just done?" He was not expecting an answer. Perhaps I didn't know what consequences my words could bring me, on the other hand perhaps I did. Worry was stamped on Saul's face and I felt scared. That night I couldn't sleep, how impulsive and stupid I had been!

As soon as the sun came up I showered and dressed and went to carry on with my new mission: teaching illiterate factory workers how to read. Luckily mother and Saul had thought it was a good and charitable action, and never asked too many questions. I met the workers in the factory dining room, one hour before their starting time. It was a small group of five middle-aged men, all very keen to learn. I had been told by my cell leader that I must not only teach them how to read, but also about their rights and about Socialism. With a gut-wrenching feeling due to my stupidity the previous night, I dragged my feet from my car to the factory entrance. I raised my eyes and saw him. I ran and threw myself into his arms crying.

"Go back to your car and wait for me. I'll tell the workers you're not well," he said as he dried my tears with his hands.

Julian was very sympathetic but agreed with Saul. I had put myself, my family and anyone who knew me in a dangerous position. If I was lucky they would forget me, if not I would soon hear from them. He had to discuss
my situation with his leader and mine. Perhaps I would have to leave the cell because I had endangered the whole operation. "Tomorrow's operation might be your last," he said sadly. He gave me instructions for the next day and told me to go home and relax. They needed me to be strong and calm.

While everyone slept at home, I sneaked out, dressed in black and wearing runners and a scarf around my head. I met my other contacts not far from home, Julian was picking us up. We didn't have to wait very long as Julian appeared soon afterwards, driving the bread van he had stolen.

'Nothing smells so sweet and appetising as freshly baked bread', I thought as I sat in the van. Hearts palpitating, dry throat, palms sweating, we drove to the shantytown closest to Rosario. When we arrived the people were waiting for us. Other compañeros in the cell had gone ahead, to tell the villa miseria dwellers of the bread distribution.

A mighty uproar rose when they saw us. "It's not just for the bread, it's for the meaning of our action that people are cheering," said Julian with tears in his eyes. "We won't have enough bread for everyone," I shouted "Trust me, we will," Julian shouted back as he handed out the first loaves. People continued to cheer and to sing and chant words against the government, while peacefully and orderly they collected their bread. There were hundreds of them stretching out their hands. As Julian distributed the
bread more and more bread appeared. And He, Julian, blessed the people: 

*Que Dios los bendiga compañeros*

For nearly a month I didn't hear from Julian. His image amongst the people, His face and the poor people's faces kept appearing in front of my eyes. I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't write or paint. That scene kept repeating itself in my mind. Even the smells of that moment were fresh in my memory. The rotten smell of the *villa*, Julian's aftershave and the smell of the bread, together with the memory of the event had become an obsession.

One night I had just gone to sleep when an insistent bell ringing and a thumping at the front door awoke me. The maids were all sleeping and we didn't expect them to get up. With slow movements Saul put his robe on and went to open the door. The bell had not stopped ringing! I pricked up my ears but all I could hear was someone sobbing.

"Your friend, the weird one wants to see you. She's in a terrible state," he said as he walked into the bedroom. I grabbed my dressing gown and walked to the entrance hall. It was Aurelia. When she saw me she hugged me, screaming: "He's gone. He's gone!" I couldn't understand what she was saying. Her sobs and screams were jumbled up sentences. Saul, brought her a glass of water. I could not make out whether he was angry or concerned.

"Calm down, Aurelia. Calm down." I kept repeating.
"Can I do something?" asked Saul.

"No. you better go back to bed."

"If you need me call me," he offered as he left the room.

"Let's go into my study," I suggested. Aurelia could hardly walk. Her whole body was shaking. The glass of water ended half on her dress and half on the floor. I put my arms around her and steered her into my study. I served her a whisky which she drank in one big gulp.

"Another?" I asked. She nodded without stopping her crying. "Now, take hold of yourself. Stop. What has happened? Have you been caught?"

The police know about us? About me? What? What? For God's sake Aurelia stop crying and speak to me."

'He's gone! He's gone. My darling is gone!'

"What do you mean? Do you mean Julian? Where has he gone?"

"He's gone forever." she kept repeating as she rocked herself back and forth. I shook her and screamed at her.

"What do you mean? Tell me! Please!"

"He's dead. He's dead. Julian has been killed."

I tried to speak but the words wouldn't come. I started to tremble too. I poured myself a whisky. I had to hold the glass with both hands. I drank what tasted like poison.
"Are you sure?" I asked and my words sounded shallow, empty, silly.

"Yes. Yes. He's dead. He has been killed with three other compañeros. He'll never be mine now. The revolution will fail. We lost a great hero. My hero, my God!"

"Julian was everyone's hero. He didn't belong to anyone. He belonged to his people."

"You knew I loved him. He loved me too. I knew he loved me. And now he's gone. What am I going to do?"

"Aurelia, what can we do? Anything. We cannot do anything!"

When Aurelia left, I cried for him, for her, for me, and for the people who had lost such a leader. My hands, driven by passion, love and emotion painted Che Guevara and Julian holding the Argentinian flag. When Saul saw the painting he forbade me to hang it at the forthcoming exhibition!

* * *

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Days passed and time went by, memories like knives cut windows in the mind. How everything was, how everything is, Pain. But pain heals hope draws curtains, the past becomes a thin piece of material which thread by thread becomes frayed and the last bit hangs embellished, cherished as a rich tapestry. Memories coloured by fantasy.

* * *

Los días pasaron y el tiempo pasó. memorias que como cuchillos, tallan ventanas en la mente como todo era. como todo es. Dolor Dolor que pasa la esperanza cierra las cortinas y el pasado se convierte en un tapiz rico que hebra a hebra se fue deshilachando, y queda una última hebra cuelga embellecida, de una tela gastada, Memórias coloridas por fantasias.

* * *
Julian's death brought about a renaissance in Gabriela. Like a Phoenix she rose, not from her ashes, but from her pain. A pain which she could not express, a pain which she had to keep hidden from everyone. Only with Aurelia was she able to talk about him, and only about his friendship and politics, never about their love. A month after his death Aurelia returned to Buenos Aires never to be heard of again. Perhaps she, like many other comrades, is with Julian. Her departure closed a stage in Gabriela's life. She wrote on a piece of paper, using her blood as ink, a resolution. Then she burned the paper and threw the ashes in the Paraná river.

I Gabriela swear, on Julian's memory, never to fall in love again.
During the lonely days when Gabriela mourned Julian she wrote a novella and finished enough paintings for the exhibition. Amidst all these activities she made sure that she dedicated time to her daughters. She had been absent from her body for so many years, living without being conscious. Living now made her feel guilty. A guilt which rose from the idea that she hadn't been a good mother. She had cared for her children, played with them, and loved them. Perhaps she had nothing to worry about, but a niggly feeling about this was always present.

The day of the exhibition arrived. Everyone at home was excited, even the maids and the chauffeur asked her questions about it. Saul and her mother were more anxious than she was. Señor Pavessi had arranged for the exhibition to be widely publicised. *La Capital*, the most important newspaper in the city, had dedicated half a page to the exhibition. Other smaller daily papers had only mentioned it, but some of them had included photographs in their articles. The press had been invited to a preview. Gabriela and her works had been admired, and also photographed. When Señor Pavessi heard that Gabriela wrote poetry he asked her to send him some pieces for publicity. He was very keen to include a poetry reading as was fashionable at the time. Gabriela sent him romantic and gentle poetry, but she had other poems in mind to read on the day.
By eight o'clock the gallery was packed. School friends, relatives, even the Vaccaros with whom she had made peace when Roma was born, were there. Señor Pavessi opened the exhibition with a bombastic tone and exaggerated compliments. Gabriela had arranged with Señor Pavessi's assistant to swap one of the paintings with the one of Che Guevara and Julian. Later, when Señor Pavessi saw it hanging on the back wall, he went white and his hands trembled uncontrollably. She felt sorry for the man and assured him that it was her problem not his, and that no one would dare to say anything to her as she was from a well known and respectable family. "Rather bourgeois," she added. When the time came to read her poems she recited her most subversive, controversial, and political works. Many people cheered as Gabriela poured out words which were a slap in the face to the government.

Gabriela's years of practising to become an actor had paid off. With a confident manner and presence, she read one poem after the other. Everything was going according to plan, when suddenly she quivered, all her blood seemed to go to her head, and a cold shiver ran down her spine. In a corner of the grand salon, her eyes met another pair of eyes that reflected hate. Standing there, in civilian clothes, was one of General Viola's minders, the one that Viola had whispered to. Gabriela scanned the room for Saul to
judge his feelings, but he wasn't there. Perhaps anxious, he had gone outside to have a cigarette. Instead of Saul, her eyes discovered Cacho, standing alone. He smiled. Gabriela's heart's missed a beat.

After her recital a lot of people left in a hurry, afraid to be associated with someone who was defying the unwritten code of silence. Some came and congratulated her on the paintings and poems. In a moment when Gabriela was alone, Cacho approached and handed her a letter in an envelope. "Ring me. My number is there," he said. Gabriela folded the letter and hid it in her bra. Señor Pavessi, who had been lamenting: "What am I going to do? I'll be ruined!", every time he passed Gabriela had cheered up when many of the paintings were sold. Discreetly, he had removed the Che Guevara and Julian painting, as Gabriela was reading. By the end of the night he was again cheerful and seemed to have forgotten Gabriela's defiance. Saul was silent throughout the evening. At the end of the night he helped her to carry some of the flowers to the car. Gabriela also pretended that nothing unusual had happened.

The next day in the peace of her study, Gabriela read the many business cards that people had placed in her hand, then she opened Cacho's envelope. His letter was short and poignant.
Dear Gabriela,

Have you got any idea how much you've hurt me? There I was, miles away from Rosario, doing military service, living in appalling conditions, experiencing hunger, cold, and humiliations. You were my light, you were the reason I was able to continue, to struggle to survive that inhumane situation. And what did I find on my return? You preparing to get married. I still suffer, but slowly I'm getting over it.

Let's get together and have coffee. In a discreet place, because as you know I'm married now. Ring me 403001, but don't say it's you, say you're my lawyer's secretary. I look forward to seeing you.
Cacho

P.S.

Do you remember those summer nights when you loved me?

Gabriela screwed the letter in a ball and threw it in the waste paper bin. She made a distasteful face and frowned. Cacho. She had nearly forgotten about him. Later she changed her mind got up and copied his telephone number in her address book. "Maybe one day I'll ring him,' she thought. Cacho waited twenty years for Gabriela's telephone call. But that is another story!

She was surprised to realise how many people had given her their business cards. What did they expect from her? Did all those people want money from Saul? One of the cards was markedly different from the others and puzzled her. In neat and tiny handwriting, on a card from an art institute, someone had written Congratulations comrade! We will welcome you in our group. Next Saturday, 3pm, Montevideo 204. Bring your poems. If you
wonder who are we, well just think geniuses! Just joking! Two names were in the card: Andres Fuentes and Irma Martinez Ferre. "I'll be there," said Gabriela smiling to herself.

Three days after the exhibition, Saul asked Gabriela to go for a walk with him, something so unusual that alarm bells rang in her mind. In silence they walked towards the river Paraná. The jacarandas which adorned that end of Avenida Pellegrini were all in full bloom. Fallen flowers had made a blue carpet on the pavement, and those still remaining on the branches seemed to blend in with the sky making a brilliant vault. Such a beautiful afternoon yet Gabriela couldn't enjoy it because she knew that Saul was either angry or had bad news.

"I've had a call from Jaime, my contact in the police department."

"So?"

"Someone has asked for your file."

"Traffic infringement, perhaps?"

"Please! Don't play the innocent, Gabriela. This is a very serious matter."

"Feel the spring Saul. Feel it! Isn't it a glorious afternoon?"

"Indeed. It is. But Gabriela you won't distract me from talking to you."
"I'll race you."

"Stop it."

"You're hurting me. Let me go!"

"I also got a call from Pavessi. He's very worried, for us and for him. He told me what you did. Do you have any idea of what this can cost us?"

"I'm prepared to die for my ideals."

"You may have two daughters, but you're an immature child."

"I know what I'm doing."

"Yes, risking your life, your family's and Pavessi's. Very mature."

"Well if things get very bad we can all go and live in Sidni."

"What are you talking about? Are you out of your mind? Everything is so easy for you."

"You can stay if you like. I'll take the girls."

"I am ignoring all that rubbish. I'm calm. I'm very calm …"

"You're hurting my arm again."

"Let's go back. But I want you to promise me that you won't make any political statement in public."

"I can't."

"Yes you can. Do it for your daughters!"

"I want my daughters to grow up in a democratic country."
"The problems that Argentina is experiencing at the moment are temporary. We'll get ahead. Everything will be alright. Soon we'll have a democratic government."

"You believe all that crap because you only read right wing papers."

"Enough is enough. You're being silly. What do you know about politics? You came out of a nun's school straight into marriage. Is all this interest in politics an attempt at creating an artist's image for yourself?"

"You don't know anything about me. We only share a bed. Nothing else. We're two strangers. I don't even know why you married me."

"Come back Gabriela. Stop! I'm telling you to stop! Wait ... !

Gabriela ran all the way to a public phone and contacted her cell leader. He advised her not to return to the factory, to destroy all the pamphlets she had, and not to ring him for a while. Gabriela slammed the telephone down. She didn't want to return home, she couldn't face Saul. She had no one to turn to. No one whom she could trust. No one who could say 'everything will be fine'. She walked back towards the river's edge but as she approached the end of Avenida Pelligrini she noticed that everything was different. The street sign read Bondi Road.

She continued going down Bondi Road because she realised it ended at Bondi Beach. On her descent she noticed how short the women's skirts
were. She was surprised at the funny footwear that the young men and women were wearing. These were a weird type of sandals, looking very much like *ojotas*, but made of rubber. "Those must be the hippies, she thought when she saw a rowdy bunch of teenagers with bandannas on their head and wearing Indian clothes. As usual the sea was alive with surfers and sailboats. Sun-tanned topless girls, bronzed men, seagulls, surfers, lifesavers, all shared the fun of Bondi Beach. Everyone seemed happy, they smiled, they laughed, joy was painted on their faces. In Argentina everyone was worried about the repression, the inflation, the unemployment, the gagging of the press, the devalued peso, the international debt, and all the other evils that affected the country and its economy. "Excuse me! Excuse me! Do you have a coin. I'm hungry. I haven't eaten for three days." Gabriela, startled by the beggar, jumped to her feet to find that she had been sitting on a bench in Rosario's Costanera. She handed a few pesos to the beggar and gave a last look at the Paraná River, its waters brown and polluted, the sky lifeless and sad.

* * *

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MY DIARY

Dear God,

I know, sometimes I forget you. Do you know why?

Because I doubt your existence.

God, do you really exist? Please God, if you exist, make sure:

• that the generals forget me,
• that I forget Julian
• that Saul forgets what I did. So be it!

* * *

I tried to lead a normal life, but I was no longer the same person; I had changed and I was ready for a new life. When Saturday afternoon arrived, I went to Saul and informed him, as opposed to asking his permission, that I was going to meet some of the people who attended the exhibition. I prepared some poems and took the novella that I had written after Julian's death. Saul didn't get angry but offered to drive me there. I thanked him and said I preferred to drive myself.
With my papers under my arm, feeling my hands clammy and my mouth dry I knocked at the door. The maid who appeared told me that they were all up in 'the sky'. Curious, I asked her where 'the sky' was. "I'll take you there. All his friends are here already." She took me to the second floor of the house and to a very sombre studio where a small spiral staircase led to what appeared to be an attic. "Up there. Go up. They're all there," she instructed. As I appeared in the attic everyone stopped talking and came to greet me.

"Welcome to 'the sky'. I'm Fabio your host. And these are the other geniuses. But come and take a seat. Whisky? I hope you brought your work to read."

"You're overwhelming her. Shut up Fabio. I'm Andres."

"Pleased to meet you all. Yes. I remember you and your friend from the exhibition."

"That's me. That's me. I'm Irma. And we are not friends, we're lovers. We live in sin."

"Don't scare Gabriela so soon, please! My friends call me Zarathustra," said Daniel Carusso shaking my hand.

"I don't think anything will scare her. I'm Juan Fontanarosa. I was at your exhibition and I listened to your poetry. Very brave, indeed."

"I'm Krishna."
"He shits from trees."

"Shut up, Daniel. I'm a naturalist and a Krishnamurtian."

"Leave him alone, he is good poet," said the older man in the group, Juan Fontanarosa.

"Tell her. Tell her of the many toilets you had to pay to replace, because you insisted on shitting standing up."

They all laughed, as Fontanarosa tried to control them. I laughed, as I had not laughed in such a long time. The jokes continued throughout the afternoon as everyone made fun of each other. They were all artists of one kind or another and defined themselves as humanists and geniuses. When they came across someone who they thought was worth becoming part of the group they were invited to join. They lived for their art and they helped each other. They called themselves Grupo de Arte y Literatura Hermandad, Group of Art and Literature Brotherhood. It sounded all embracing and caring. A group that fought with words and not bombs. A group that taught people about their rights through arts. It was my kind of group.

That afternoon we sat in a circle and I read my novella to them. I stopped after a few pages but they insisted that I continue. They wanted to hear more and more and I ended up reading the whole work. As everyone complimented me I wondered if they were making fun of me. "You are one
of us. You're a genius," Daniel and Fabio, the obvious leaders of the group, kept repeating. I wanted to escape, to run away, until Irma held my hand and assured me they were serious. "You're one of us. That's if you want to be. Do you?" she asked. Crazy Krishna came next to me, went onto his knees and begged: "Please be one of us." Again they all laughed hysterically.

When I returned home, around eight o'clock, Saul merely asked if I had enjoyed myself. I ignored his question and went to play with the girls. They wanted to hear a story about the magical land of Sidni. So I told them about the youngsters who wore bandannas on their heads, and the rubber footwear, and the golden sand, and the gods and goddesses that walk on the beach and swim in the shimmering waters of the Pacific. I told them about the seagulls which tell stories to the bathers, and the boards the gods use to fly above the sea and amidst the waves. They listened, eyes wide and when I ended my story they begged me to take them there. I promised that one day I would. After dinner Saul went to have a coffee with his brothers. I locked myself in my study.

***
GROUP OF ART AND LITERATURE—"BROTHERHOOD"

This group is made up of youngsters, mainly middle class professionals from well-known families. They appear to be in their twenties and thirties. These people profess to be humanitarian, and want to change the status quo through their art. Their opinions are radical and subversive. They promote equality and freedom. Their leanings are obviously towards the left. A connection with The Montoneros has been established through one of the newest members. On many occasions they have been heard to criticise the government.

Their art seems to fit into what is called avant garde. They meet in different houses and work together to organise public functions which they
call "happenings" — a mixture of art exhibitions, drama, ballet, music, and a mélange of other actions to bring attention to themselves and their work — actions which mainly disorient and startle the spectators, and only make sense to themselves. The following are some examples of their senseless and unconventional acts:

• At an exhibition/poetry reading/dance/musical event they pretended an argument had erupted amongst a couple (both members of the group). The woman suddenly took a pistol out and started shooting (the police found out later it was a starting pistol).

• The group danced semi-naked around a fountain in Independence Park, and threw paint in the fountain. When the police arrived they had all gone.
• At another of these events one of the members attended the exhibition completely naked, acting as if nothing was wrong. When an informant advised the police the offender had left.

• At one of their functions they appeared dressed in black, covered from top to bottom, with only two small holes for their eyes - a manner of dress favoured by terrorist groups.

• At another event they encouraged participants to destroy some of the paintings. Similar audience participation is promoted at all times.

Some of their most outrageous acts have been:

• To set up a toilet in the middle of an art exhibition and invite participants to urinate in it.

   (I) To induce participants to kiss a stranger passionately.

   (II) To pretend to copulate during a dance.
• To shout obscenities at each other, and invite
  the public to do the same in order to 'liberate'
  their instincts. They call this 'primal art-
  therapy'.

Usually, when these immoral acts take place the
majority of visitors leave the event.

The following group members appear to be the most
influential. There are others who take part from
time to time.

No action has been taken against any of these
people so far, as they are all well-connected and
influential. Their actions need to be monitored to
stop any future subversion. Our contacts will keep
us informed. I have attached copies of the profiles
of those who appear to be group leaders.

Sargento Luciano Rosas
NAME: FABIO NUNEZ
AGE: 21
IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.841 624 123 14 - Rosario
OCCUPATION: Law student, part-time administrative officer at the Rosario Law Court.
MOTHER: Housewife
FATHER: Judge Agustin Nunez (Supreme Court)
MARITAL STATUS: Married
WIFE: Leonor Spossito (Does not participate in any activity)
MAIN ART FORM: Painter and writer

NAME: DANIEL CARUSSO
AGE: 28
IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.282 618 441 15 - Rosario
OCCUPATION: Door to door salesman
MOTHER: Deceased
FATHER: Deceased
MARITAL STATUS: Single
MAIN ART FORM: Writer

NAME: ANDRES FUENTES
AGE: 24
IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.318 573 111 89 - Rosario
OCCUPATION: Ballet dancer
MOTHER: Lucia Perez (Housewife)
FATHER: Joaquin Fuentes
(Parlamentarian)
MARITAL STATUS: Single
WIFE: Lives in a de-facto relationship with another member of the group, Irma Fuentes
MAIN ART FORM: Modern dancer and painter

NAME: IRMA Fuentes
AGE: 30
IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.278 333 238 15 - Santa Fe
OCCUPATION: Music teacher
MOTHER: Carmen Altamirano (Housewife)
FATHER: Deceased
MARITAL STATUS: Married and separated from husband. Has no contact with husband.
HUSBAND: Cesar Altona
MAIN ART FORM: Pianist and violinist

NAME: JUAN FONTANAROSA
AGE: 39
IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.141 622 526 77 - Buenos Aires
OCCUPATION: Journalist (Employed by La Capital)

MOTHER: Deceased

FATHER: Jose Escartin (Secretary of the Radical Party of Rosario)

MARITAL STATUS: Married

WIFE Rosa Largoso (Does not participate in group activities)

MAIN ART FORM: Writing

NAME: ALBERTO SALAZAR A.K.A. KRISHNA

AGE: 27

IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.123 238 277 88 - Rosario

OCCUPATION: Philosophy student

MOTHER: Housewife

FATHER: General Carlos Zamorano
MARITAL STATUS: Single

MAIN ART FORM: Writing

PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS:
Arrested for defecating in public places. Arrested during various student demonstrations. Arrested for refusing to pay for breakages to public toilets. (Fines paid by his father)

NAME: GABRIELA VACCARO

AGE: 24

IDENTITY DOCUMENT: C.D.I.999 999 111 99 - Rosario

OCCUPATION: Housewife

MOTHER: Elisa Gonzalez (Housewife)

FATHER: Deceased

MARITAL STATUS: Married
HUSBAND: Saul Bennin (Currently under investigation/file with General Lopez)

MAIN ART FORM: Writer/Painter

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Gabriela felt so free amongst her new friends and wanted that freedom to envelop her whole life. She wanted that feeling for every minute of her days and nights. She wanted to get drunk with freedom. She wanted to be independent and not have to give an explanation of her acts to anyone. During siesta time she would sit under the shade of the big ombú, a tree which nearly covered the whole backyard. There she would write poetry and dream of a life without marriage commitments, without ties, without anyone telling her what to do or wear. Gabriela imagined her life without Saul. Would she miss him? What would her daughters say if their parents separated? Would they miss their father? Would they suffer? Would her mother approve of a separation? Invariably, an uncontrollable feeling of guilt would arise. It seemed to start in the pit of her stomach and travel through her heart and throat to rest in her mind. There it tortured her so that she hated
herself for wanting to do such an abominable act. She cried, she thumped the
ground with her closed fists, she tore pages from her exercise book and
ripped them into a thousand pieces wishing that each piece was a part of her.
One day to punish herself she stabbed her palm with her fountain pen. Her
blood mixed with the ink and flowed on the page, making exotic blots. When
the pain became unbearable she ran to the toilet and washed her hands again
and again.

"Mother ... what would you say if I separated from Saul?"

"Are you crazy?"

"Of course I'm not. I'm serious."

"I knew it! I knew it. All those fancy friends you have now, they have
been filling your head with rubbish."

"For God's sake Mum, I'm an adult. I know what I want. No one has
to tell me what to do."

"Too liberated, that's what they are. See that one, the blond one, the
violinist. She lives in sin with someone. Do you want to do the same? Is that
it? Do you want to go and putear? Jump in bed with one, then another,
and ..."

"... And another. The more the merrier."
"Insolent. Be rude and I'll slap you. I'm still your mother. I'm a realist, not a dreamer like you. You're like your father. You never know what you want."

"You're wrong. I definitely know what I want."

"Tell me one thing. How are you going to support your children? Where are you going to live?"

"I can work. We can go back and live in our house."

"Yes, what are you going to work as?"

"Perhaps Saul can pay for the children's upkeep."

"And what gives you the idea that he will let you take the children?"

Her mother was right, but she had to try! Life couldn't be that difficult. She could work as a teacher, in an office, in a bank, or in a factory. She had seen a few women when she was teaching reading to the workers. Perhaps she could ... there wasn't much that she could do. The reality of how difficult her situation was would plunge her into a depressed state for a few days, then she would cheer up, and jump fully into her role of mother and artist. "I never would abandon my children," she said to herself. But the thought of being free crept into her mind again and again. One day she confronted Saul.

"I want to separate."
"Pardon?"

"You heard me. I want to separate. I want to go with the girls and my mother to live somewhere else.

"Are you saying that you don't want to live with me any more?"

"Yes."

"You don't love me."

"I have a lot of affection for you. You well knew I didn't love you when I married you."

"I thought that maybe one day you would."

"I don't hate you. You're a great man. You've been kind and generous with us and I'll be forever thankful. It has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with me. I want to be free."

"You don't have to separate to be free. You can have your freedom."

"It's not the same."

"I won't stop you doing anything. I don't want the girls to grow up without a mother."

"I'll take the girls."

"No you won't. If you walk out you'll walk out on your own. If your mother wants to stay she's welcome. But my daughters stay here with me where they belong."
"Children belong with their mother."

"And decent mothers stay with their families."

"Are you saying I'm indecent? How dare you!"

"Don't raise your voice, the servants will hear you."

"I don't care who hears me."

"This is an idiotic conversation. I'm leaving."

"Saul! Saul! You bastard!"

Gabriela's car sped through Rosario's streets. With her hands firmly gripping the steering wheel she narrowly avoided cars, bicycles, trucks, and people in her way. She drove without respecting the few rules which prevailed in Rosario's chaotic traffic. She could hardly see where she was going, her tears formed a veil which transformed everything into bleary shapes. She ignored the insults, the traffic lights and the stop signs.

Oh, how she wanted to escape.

When Irma opened the door, Gabriela fell into her arms. Without asking anything her friend embraced her and let her cry on her shoulder.

When Gabriela stopped crying, Irma led her by the hand into her music room. She poured two glasses of whisky, handed one to Gabriela and made her sit on a pile of cushions. She took her violin out and commenced to play.

Gabriela had listened to Irma play on only a few occasions but never like she
was playing that day. The music entranced the suffering young woman, each note entering her body through each of her pores and then, in quantum leaps, invading her mind. The notes soothed her spirit. She closed her aching eyes and saw that each note had a colour, and together they formed the most beautiful patterns. Then from one moment to the next she could only see various shades of greens.

She rubbed her eyes with her closed fists and when she opened them she realised she was in a forest. Gabriela had seen many forests but this one was different. She took a deep breath. Eucalyptus essence refreshed her nostrils. A fine vapour rose from the ground and a blue mist floated among the gum trees. Unusual creepers strangled some of the trees, making ornate canopies over them. Ferns, grasses, and dead leaves covered the ground. Some of the trees had enormous parasitic plants attached to them, which reminded her of stag-horns. Others were losing their bark, and appeared naked in their whiteness. Flaming, elongated red flowers festooned from some bushes. Where was this enchanted forest? Where was she? She took a few steps and the sound of the pieces of bark and dry leaves under her feet intermingled with Irma's music. She looked to the left and saw mountains of the most intense blue, she looked to the right and noticed a narrow path and a
sign pointing to *The Three Sisters*. Gabriela was about to take that path when she heard Irma calling her.

"Did I put you to sleep?"

"Oh Irma! Your music. It transported me to the most enchanted place. A blue forest, and blue mountains. I've never seen anything like it before. Thank you. Thank you Irma."

"You looked so peaceful."

"I was. Your music calmed me. Your music is magic."

"I knew it would help you."

Irma rested her violin and bow on the floor and knelt in front of Gabriela. She embraced Gabriela's legs and rested her head on her lap. Gabriela was surprised by her friend's demonstration of affection, but welcomed it. Irma raised her green eyes and rested them on Gabriela's.

"What's the matter darling?" she asked, pressing hard against Gabriela. "I want to separate from Saul. But I don't think I can," replied the young woman. Irma jumped to her feet next to Gabriela. She took Gabriela's hands into hers and kissed them. "We love you. Andres and I, we love you very much. If he was here he would tell you so himself. We always talk about you. The three of us, we're made from the same earth. We're kindred spirits. We
must've been related in our past lives," said Irma as she stroked Gabriela's face with the back of her hand.

That evening during dinner Saul acted as if nothing had happened and Gabriela did the same. Saul was suggesting that they all go for a drive when one of the maids announced to Gabriela that a Mr Fabio Nunez was on the phone. Saul gave his wife an inquisitive look, before she explained that he was one of the poets.

"I need to talk to you."

"Is this about our next 'happening'?"

"No! There is something important I've got to tell you."

"Tell me now."

"Gabriela I can't over the telephone. There are 'Moors on the coast'."

"Your wife is around?"

"Yes."

"Do you keep secrets from her?"

"Not until now. But I'll explain. When can I see you?"

"Perhaps, tomorrow afternoon. I'll be in town around five."

"I'll meet you at Augustus."

"OK. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night."
Love can take many forms. Love can be expressed in many ways. Love can be felt, sensed, perceived, imagined. Love goes hand in hand with deception. Love can die. Love can grow like a plant. One can die of love. One can live to love.

* * *

Intrigued to the marrow of my bones, I dressed and went into town to meet Fabio. I sat drinking a Red Label and smoking my imported cigarettes, observing the people that came in and out of Augustus. I was about to order another whisky when he walked in. It was the first time I'd seen him wearing a suit, and it made him look taller and older. Very slowly he sat down, kissed me hello, and ordered a drink. He was nervous. I could see his hands trembling as he lit a cigarette. He had just finished work, and explained that wearing a suit was a must in the tribunals. I asked about his wife. He shrugged his shoulders with a disdainful expression on his face. I thought for a moment that he was going to cry. He kept rubbing his eyes continuously. He had fallen out of love. He was only 19 when he and Leonor had married. She was pregnant, but she lost the baby. Immature and ignorant, the daughter
of very rich parents, she did nothing all day and complained about everything.

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"You're different."

"We're all different."

"You're like me."

"What do you mean?"

"A poet, intelligent, we're the three geniuses in the group."

"... And conceited too."

"It's the truth. You have a lot to give me."

"Oh yes? What? And let go of my hand, someone may see us."

"I don't care any more."

"I do. You very well know I'm married."

"Gabriela please be mine."

"I only belong to myself."

"Stop laughing. I'm serious."

"How serious?"

"Very serious. I love you."

"How ridiculous. How can you love me. You don't know anything about me."
"I know enough. I want you. I want to make you mine."

"Do you want to marry me and take care of my mother, my daughters and me?"

"No, that's not what I mean."

"I get it. You just want us to fuck?"

"It sounds so crude."

"But is it the truth or not?"

"Oh, how much I want you. I ache for you. My uncle has an apartment. I can borrow it for a few hours. Please say yes. You'll come. I'll make you happy."

"I'll think about it."

"When I ring I'll tell you that 'I've got the folders', which means that I'll have the keys. You'll hear from me soon. I have to go now. Leonor gets upset if I'm too late for dinner."

Creep! I knew exactly what he was after. My father had probably told the same story to all his lovers. The misunderstood male. The worthless wife. The big marriage mistake. I knew the 'tango', the sad story of the lonely man. But deep inside myself I was happy he wanted me. I had spent many years believing that I was fat, ugly, unwanted, his attention did make me feel appreciated. And I wanted sex, I desperately wanted to have sex. SEX. SEX.
SEX. I wanted to feel like I had felt for Julian. That night I couldn't sleep thinking about a possible encounter with Fabio. I didn't know if I was going to accept his proposal or not. If I had sex with him was I going to feel guilty afterwards? With Julian everything had been different. At times I even doubted that he had existed. Yet I wanted to find Julian in Fabio. But Fabio was not Julian!

One lunchtime a few days after our meeting in Augustus the telephone call arrived. "I've got the folders. Will you come to collect them?" He asked. At four that afternoon, dressed in a revealing and skimpy black dress, carrying books and folders under my arm I walked out of the house explaining that I was meeting my artist friends. I was aching with desire. I wanted him. He was young, handsome, intelligent ... and an arsehole. Wet from my lustful thoughts I pressed the bell to his love nest, or rather his uncle's love nest.

I was in his arms the moment he opened the door. We kissed with fury, we grabbed each other's body with youthful and unrestrained desire. We didn't make it to the bedroom, fucking there and then, on the floor of the entrance hall. Thrust. Thrust. Thrust. That was it! "Wasn't that great!" he murmured. Shy. I was shy in bed. I couldn't tell him that I needed more and more. Disappointing young bull! To make matters worse he asked: "Did you
"come?" And I replied: "Of course!" 'Perhaps he'll improve with practice,' I thought and sadness overcame me as I remembered Leonor, his wife.

One day a few weeks later, I was told that one of my poet friends was at the door. "A funny man, Miss Gabriela. He's got a long beard and very long, long hair," she explained. I knew who he was, Daniel or Zarathustra as we called him in the group. I asked the maid to show him into my study. His broad and friendly smile made me happy inside. We were pleased to see each other. He was the best poet in the group and had always made positive comments and suggestions about my poetry. Every time we met, whether for a coffee, or for a group meeting, we had fun. We philosophised for hours and talked about the intricacies of love and life.

We sat on the floor and sipped cold tea as he read the manuscript that he was about to publish. "And this one is for you. I even dedicate it to you, name and all." It was a passionate poem charged with sexual undertones. My face said it all. He realised that I was surprised, closed the manuscript and looked into my eyes. Zarathustra's sad blue eyes made me want to caress his head as I did to the girls when they were upset or hurt themselves.

"Didn't you know?"

"What?"
"That I love you. I find out that you're having an affair with Fabio. I can't stand it. He knew I loved you. I confessed to him only a few weeks after we met. I could kill him, but he's my best friend."

"Some sort of friend! And a big mouth too."

"The three of us are tied together by strong feelings. You love me too. Tell me you love me."

"Zarathustra! Stop it! Stop it!"

"Please don't push me away. I love you! Let me kiss you!"

"My husband is at home. Are you mad? All you two want is to fuck me."

"I swear it's not true. I really love you."

"Just because you write a poem about me and dedicate it to me in your book doesn't mean that you love me."

"I'll marry you."

"Yes and my mother, my daughters and I go and live in your room, at the boarding home."

"You reject me because I'm poor?"

"My dear friend. I don't reject or accept you. You're a good friend and I love you as such."
"Why Fabio and not me?"

"I don't know."

"He's done this before. He's just fucks women and then leaves them. I know him very well."

"That is sad."

"Do you love him."

"Perhaps. I love you both as friends."

"But you won't be mine."

"I hate that. I belong to myself. I'd rather you say fuck, or have sex, or make love. Stop! Zarathustra, get off me or I'll call for help."

"OK. OK."

"Another thing. That dedication you say you'll include in your book will get me into trouble with my husband."

"He's man enough. He can take it."

"It may give him the wrong impression."

"I don't care. It's my way of telling the world that I love you. Promise you'll consider being my lover. If you want you can keep seeing Fabio as well as long as you don't leave me aside. We're a perfect triangle, aren't we?"

"To be a perfect triangle, you need to go to bed with Fabio."

"You're insulting me. I'm a man!"
"I thought you were a liberated man. By going to bed with Fabio you won't stop being a man. Don't you think, sweetie?"

"You don't take me seriously. I'll look for a proper job and make money to take you away with me."

"Zarathustra, don't be a child. It's not like that. I want to be your friend for ever. If we go to bed we'll ruin our friendship."

He left. Head and shoulders down carrying my rejection in his soul. I couldn't love him other than as a friend, and I didn't know why. That night the group went to Irma and Andres to read poetry, to listen to music, to drink and discuss art. Fabio was all over me and Zarathustra spent the time ridiculing anything that Fabio said. At a certain moment after a big argument they got up and left. Shortly afterwards the others went and I was left alone with Irma and Andres. We continued chatting until it was nearly midnight. I telephoned home to speak to Mum and to check what Saul had said or if he was angry. Mum put me at ease and said that he had gone to sleep very early and had said nothing. When I was leaving, Irma held me by the shoulders and asked me if I was having an affair with Fabio. I said, yes, I was. Irma shook her head from side to side and saying: "We don't want you to be hurt. Be careful. We love you very much. We're like three pods. Together we spell creativity and power. Andres' paintings and his dance, my music and your
poetry." She kissed me on the lips. When Andres walked in the room he asked: "Have you told her?"

"Not yet," Irma replied.

When I got home, I found my sister Stella sitting on the marble stairs that led to the upstairs rooms. She had been waiting for me. "How dare you come home so late? I know you've been screwing around. Aren't you embarrassed to look your daughters in the eye? You're disgusting! You're a tart! You make me sick." She looked so old, so mature. I ignored her tirade of insults and walked towards her. I was so happy to see her again that what she said didn't hurt me. I wanted to hug her, to welcome her back. I ran towards her but as I was about to touch her, laughing she disintegrated in a thousand molecules of thin air. Mum came down the stairs and asked who was I talking to. "No one," I said.

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Triangle. 1. a geometrical plane, figure formed by three (usually) straight lines which meet two by two in three points, thus forming three angles, 2. any three-cornered or three sided figure, object, or piece: a triangle of land. 3. Music an instrument of percussion, made of a steel rod bent into the form of a triangle open at one of the corners, and sounded by being struck with a small,
Last night again I dreamt of triangles, triangles and more triangles. Doors, pianos, beds, all made in the shape of triangles, even the clouds had congregated and taken that shape. No wonder I have such dreams! Zarathustra and Fabio refer to the three of us as 'the triangle of geniuses' and Irma and Andres call us 'the triangle of creativity and spirituality.'

Yesterday, Krishna confessed his love. He started the conversation by saying that he doesn't believe in triangles. He wants to form a duality with me. It sounded nice. He explained at length his naturalistic beliefs and told me about his dislike for Fabio and Zarathustra who make fun of him.
because he's a naturalist. "It's true I shit from the top of trees, because that's the way we humans are supposed to do it," he said. I tried to imagine him, with his bear-like figure hanging from a branch. I couldn't contain myself and started giggling. It took me a long time to convince him that I found the action funny, and not his beliefs. Sometimes he shits squatting on loos, resulting in many broken toilets. This time we both laughed.

His gentleness and sincerity impressed me. He was matter of fact, and didn't give me the rubbish that the others had given me to get me into bed.

"Friends," I said, and he accepted that.

At the last Runa meeting it was decided it was my turn for a group action towards presenting my new work. I have written a play about Julian and his ideals. We will perform this piece at the Sociedad Rosarina de Cultura Inglesa. They have a theatre of considerable size and they are not afraid of political repercussions. We are joining with a group of actors
who want to work with us. They call themselves 'Anarchos' and often perform naked, in undercover performances, and in secret venues. Irma will write the music. Fabio wanted to be Julian, luckily the first actor of the Anarchos has taken this part. I was so happy to see him being rejected. Do I have a cruel vein?

Andres will dance representing time, he says he has some great ideas. Zarathustra will do an introduction.

Saul has been very supportive, he never asks where I have been, or what I have done. I wonder what he'll say when he sees "The Meeting and my Essence."

Roma has been saying that she is a poet too. She composes little poems. She is adorable. Amadea copies every thing that Roma does. I'll never be separated from them. They come first in my life and that will be so until the end of my days. I'll do anything for them. Sometimes I feel guilty about leaving them at night when I go to the group,
but I make sure that every day I spend time with them. And we have fun!

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Three bears held hands, three bears looked at the stars, three bears got drunk, three bears went to bed.

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Irma asked Gabriela to bring the manuscript and read it to her while she wrote the music for the presentation. Her friend not only played the violin, but also the piano and the flute. She had collected an array of objects from various materials to create different sounds for the music she was going to write. She wanted to compose a modern piece, something dramatic and strong.

At around five o'clock Gabriela left for Andres and Irma's house. A furious storm was raging. Lightning, thunder and rain. Gabriela hated driving on the wet road and proceeded cautiously. She arrived a bit shaken because, at a busy intersection, her car had spun around. Irma comforted her by bringing a double whisky with ice, and a towel. With quick movements she dried Gabriela's hair. When she finished she lifted Gabriela's hair behind her neck and kissed her. Gabriela, although surprised, did not react or make any
comment. Encouraged by her friend's silence, Irma continued kissing her.

Gabriela surprised, changed position, but the new angle gave Irma a better position to display her affection. The violinist's long fingers massaged Gabriela's shoulders and slowly found their way to her breasts. At that moment Andres walked into the room. Irma didn't stop. Gabriela, with a nearly audible voice said "Hi." "Please don't stop," said Andres. He kneeled next to Gabriela and rested his beautiful head on her lap and embraced her legs with his muscular arms. "Darling ... we need to solidify our love. We must give ourselves to each other. Do you love us Gabriela?"

What was happening to her? Had she lost her will? Shouldn't she feel offended? Outraged? Angry perhaps? She was petrified and glued to the sofa. She wanted to go but oddly enough she also wanted to know what was going to happen next. Why didn't she feel disgusted? Andres had removed her undies and was caressing the inside of her legs. With his tongue he drew figures of eight on her knee. Without exerting any force and without Gabriela offering any resistance, Andres lead her into the bedroom.

Irma and Andres undressed Gabriela and themselves without interrupting their sexual attentions. The storm outside had reached a climax. A steady and monotonous rain was beating against the windows. It wasn't yet dark and a ray of light filtered through the half-drawn curtains. In the dim
Gabriela noticed that Irma's belly was in disproportion with the rest of her body. She placed her hand on the warm flesh underneath her friend's belly button and felt something move inside. "Oh my God!" she screamed. Andres murmured "She's pregnant."

By now Andres and Irma were in a state of steamy excitement. Gabriela observed what was happening as though she were a by-stander. With passion the couple tongue kissed her in turns. Tenderly caressing her body, they told her how much they desired her. She felt Andres enter her and her hips commenced to move instinctively. She stopped abruptly at the thought that Irma might be jealous. She searched her friend's hand to squeeze it to indicate that she wasn't left out, but she couldn't find Irma's hand. She was busy masturbating herself.

"We're now one," exclaimed Andres as he came.

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What lies around the corner? Qué se encuentra al doblar la esquina?
A secret in the God's hands, Un secreto en las manos de los dioses,
and spirits play hopscotch y los espíritus juegan a la rayuela
while humans suffer. mientras los humanos sufren

What lies around the corner? Qué se encuentra al doblar la esquina?
It was very late when I returned home. I wasn't worried, Saul was on a trip. He'd been travelling very often in previous months. He was hardly at home. All the lights had been turned off, my mother's way of telling me she disapproved my late return home. Tip-toeing through the house I went to the study. When I switched the light on I saw Aurelia sitting on the leather sofa.

"Oh my God! You gave me fright!"

"I've haven't got much time. I came to say good-bye."

"Again? Where are you going?"

"Listen, be careful. They're after us."

Mother suddenly opened the study door. I forgot Aurelia and grabbed mother by the arm. "What's wrong Mum?" She was pale and her hands were trembling. "Aurelia's body has been found in a ditch. Her mother rang a few hours ago. "But Aurelia is here," I murmured turning around, but she wasn't there. Mum ignored what I had said and continued.

"She had been practically cut in two by a machine gun. The police found her body soon after it happened. You'd better go and support her
mother as soon as ... you get up. But I can see that you haven't been to bed yet." I begged mother to leave me alone and to stop her recriminations.

As soon as my mother had left I called out to Aurelia, screaming her name, but she didn't come back. She had said "Be careful!" How could I be careful? I wanted to cry but I couldn't. I threw myself upon the cushions that were scattered on the floor, hitting them again and again. Tired and devastated by the news I fell asleep.

Hours later the phone woke me up. It was my cell contact. "Don't go to her place or the funeral," he said and hung up. My stomach turned. I had to rush to the toilet to vomit, and vomited not only my pain but also my terror. Things must have been really bad because cell leaders never called members at home.

I left very early in the morning pretending to go to Aurelia's place. Instead I went to the local court to meet Fabio for a coffee. Irma had said he was having an affair with Violeta, the new writer in the group. Andres had even told me that this 'bimbo' screamed like a 'pig at the slaughter' when she came. I had suspected that Fabio had someone else when for a whole month he hadn't contacted me for a rendezvous at his uncle's place. I telephoned him from a coffee shop in the corner of the court. In a painful and suffering voice
he agreed to meet. He walked into the coffee shop head down, shoulders sunk into his body. 'Poor thing!'

"Fabio dear. What's the matter? You look as if you're suffering."

"I am. I'm suffering a lot."

"Oh, yes ... and why are you suffering?"

"I can't see you any more."

"Is that all?"

"Darling, I love you. But we must stop seeing each other. We'll always be very close friends. Zarathustra, you and I will always be the 'three geniuses of the group.' But our love affair can't continue. If we were married I'd say let's save our marriage. But what have we to save?"

"True. Just a few hopeless fucks during siesta time."

"You're angry."

"Nope. Just stating a fact."

"Is that all I meant to you? How can you say that?"

"You silly boy. You didn't think I was madly in love with you? Did you? You're such an innocent. And on top of everything you're a lousy fuck."

"Gabriela. Why didn't you say so when we were fucking?"

"Did I ever scream 'like a pig to the slaughter' when we fucked? No, I didn't. So there you are."
"Andres has been at you. The bastard!"

"So it's true, you're having an affair with the 'bimbo' who writes about little pink flowers."

"Well, not everyone can write poetry like us."

"You haven't answered me."

"What? What I haven't answered?"

"About Violeta."

"I swear she wanted me. I didn't want to. She pestered me until I gave in."

"That's fine. That's all I wanted to know."

"Do you hate me?"

"Do you really care about what other people think or feel?"

"Of course I do."

"If you really care about other people's feeling you would not cheat on Leonor."

"Leave her out of this."

"Listen Fabio, dear. I have to go. Chau."

"Wait, don't go. We haven't finished talking."

With a knot in my throat, and my heart broken in a thousand pieces, I walked to Santa Rosa's Church. I walked into the dark ornate building hoping
to find there some solace. I knelt on the hard wooden bench, and held my head with my hands. I cried. I cried for Julian and for Irma. I cried for me, for that emptiness that was invading my soul. What a fool! Just for a moment, a fleeting moment, I had imagined that Fabio had loved me.

My mother never once asked me about Aurelia's mother or the funeral.

* * *

"My dear Don Quixote, you that believe that 'diligence is the mother of good luck,' please teach me how to win this war. Teach me how to beat my enemies — the giant that has learnt through spies that we intend to destroy them."

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After long days of planning, publicising, rehearsing, and arguing between the 'Anarchos theatre group, and the Art and Literature Brotherhood, Gabriela's epic-poem-play, was ready for the public. The major newspapers had ignored the press releases, but all the university papers had dedicated whole pages to what one of them described as "the marriage of various art forms by two of the most avant-garde groups in the country." This type of
publicity had brought many students, mainly from the university of art, and from philosophy and letters, to see the performance. Excitement and expectation was written all over their faces. Everyone in the theatre knew this was going to be a unique experience. Not only had the groups advertised nudity but also a psychedelic event of gigantic proportions. The 'forbidden' had enticed many youngsters to defy their parents and attend. If 'the generals' had spies in the theatre "The Meeting and my Essence" would be closed after opening night.

Irma's music reverberated in the theatre, and sounds exploded in colours. Gabriela's words filled the minds and hearts of the audience. Andres naked and the women from Anarcho, some also naked and some dressed in tattered black tunics to represent the poor, danced in such a way that made them seem to be floating above the stage. The stage designer had made slides with Gabriela's, Fabio's and Andres' paintings which were projected, intermingled with photos taken in the shantytown.

Gabriela's superstition had made her more anxious than usual. The night before the opening she had had a dream in which Stella had said to her "All you write is shit. Your life is shit. And you're nothing but a piece of shit!" As the actors and dancers began to move and speak she settled in her seat holding Roma's hand. When the last word was uttered, the audience
remained mute. Gabriela's heart palpitated. She interpreted the silence as failure. After a few seconds the clapping started, followed by cheers and voices of approval. Again and again the curtain fell. The audience kept clapping. The director called Gabriela to the stage. Terrified of tripping she climbed the steps and gave an imperceptible bow. At that moment Roma and Amadea entered the stage carrying a basket full of flowers. Smiling they distributed a bunch to everyone. And then the curtain fell for the last time. The Anarchos had been warned that the generals had ordered everyone's arrest if there was another performance.

Late that evening they all went to celebrate at Andres and Irma's place. Cheap red wine filled the glasses which were clinked together again and again in celebratory toasts. The drinking continued until the sun hit the windows. "I want you to be my child's godmother," Irma said to Gabriela. "I don't believe in God," came the answer. "I don't either. What I mean is that if something ever happens to me I want you to care for my child," the musician clarified. "I will," promised Gabriela.

When Saul returned from taking Roma and Amadea home, Zarathustra was showing Gabriela his just-released book of poetry and the poem he had dedicated to her. Her eyes quickly ran through the poem, it was a love poem, and her name was printed at the top of the page.
"Why have you done this? Saul will be hurt." Zarathustra closed the book and with a smile on his face pontificated "Saul has enough balls to accept that someone else can love his wife." As he was saying this he noticed Saul getting himself a drink. "Hey, Saul! Come and see my new book of poetry, and read what I've written about your wife!" he shouted. Gabriela kicked him and called him an arsehole. When Saul was close enough, Zarathustra read the poem aloud. When people realised he was reading a poem they congregated around him. "I start again. And by the way everyone, this poem is dedicated to Gabriela, the beautiful poet," he said. He read, enunciating every word, taking his time when describing his feelings, sighing in between lines, looking at Gabriela with adoration. Saul listened, and observed the scene without any particular expression on his face. When Zarathustra finished, Saul approached him and shook his hand saying "Great poem, my friend."

On the way home Gabriela asked her husband if he was angry.

"Why would I be angry?"

"Well, jealous."

"Why jealous? You're mine. I can't stop other men falling in love with you."
"First of all I belong only to myself, not to you, not to anyone. Secondly, you're being very exclusive saying that only men fall in love with me. Women can also fall in love with me."

"I see. Which woman is in love with you?"

"No one. I've just been hypothesising. Anyhow, thanks for the flowers. I really appreciated them."

"You deserve them, and the others too."

"Were you shocked by the performance?"

"I didn't expect anything else from you. You've changed."

"I have indeed."

"I want the old Gabriela!"

"She's no longer here, Saul. I'm so sorry. Things will never be as they were. I love you very much, but as friend, as a brother, as the father I've lost."

"I know."

* * *

Behold the storm of the Generals! Beware of their wrath —a tempest encapsulated in bullets, it will burst upon the head of those who dare to think.

* * *
Life seemed to be going fine but suddenly, like a castle made of cards, it tumbled. I was slowly recovering from my pain and anger. Pain — for losing Julian, Aurelia, and Fabio — who in reality never had been mine. Anger — because the newspapers had reported that Aurelia was a drug dealer who was well known to the police. Of course they were not going to say that she was killed, by order of the Generals, for her political ideas. I still had in my heart the pleasure of the success of "The Meeting and My Essence." The flattery and attention I was receiving from Zarathustra, Andres, Irma, Krishna and Victor, the main actor of the Anarchos, brought excitement and fantasy into my everyday existence. Writing and painting had become part of my self. I was a painter and a writer. Andres used to joke, saying, "Yes, you're a writer, a painter, an actress and an astronaut. You're very dramatic and you're always in outer space dreaming." Then the raid took place.

I was away from home at one of the group meetings when it happened. At around seven o'clock that evening five men wearing balaclavas and holding machine guns raided our house. According to my mother they rang the bell, and when Teresa, one of the maids, opened the door they pushed past her, and terrorised everyone in the house. They wanted to speak to Saul. They searched the house looking for him. When Roma and Amadea saw the hooded men they started to cry. Amadea wet herself, something that
she had not done for a long time. "Tell that child to shut up!" they ordered Blanca, the nanny. When they couldn't find Saul they became angrier and angrier. Mother followed them trying to stop them stealing or breaking things. They went into my study and slashed some of my paintings. When mother protested they hit her with the butt of a machine gun. She fell with the impact and was unable to get up. One of them kicked her and called her "rich bitch." The maids later told mother that the men then went into Saul's study. They spent a long time searching through his papers. Finally they left taking a big box of papers with them. "Tell the Bennins we'll come back for them," they told Teresa.

When I returned home, and saw Mum's face I screamed wanting to know what had happened. Mum, was holding a towel with ice against her face. She was in a lot of pain. Teresa and the other maids had resigned and left, she said. They were afraid to remain in the house. Saul arrived home around ten. He looked desperate, old, sad and angry. "We must leave now. Pack some clothes for the girls and for you if you want to come with us. Bring all the money and jewellery you have. We must leave within the hour."

I couldn't understand what was happening. Why were the general's cronies after Saul, when it was me who had been involved in subversive activities? What were Saul's plans? Where were we going?
"Saul, dear. I'm so sorry I caused all this trouble."

"Stop crying, and pack your bags and mine."

"But I feel guilty. What have I done. Oh my God!"

"Please. Please let's go. Friends in high places have given us an hour to pack and leave."

"I'll go to jail. Why should you have to suffer for me? Call them. Tell them I'll confess. It's not your fault. I'm prepared to give myself in."

"Gabriela, please. Please ...What have I done?" He moaned.

"What? What? Why are you crying? Don't cry dear. Don't cry. Here, take my handkerchief. Speak to me. I beg you. Please, speak!"

"They're after me, not you," he gushed.

"What do you mean?"

"Yes. It's me they want, not you."

"What have you done?"

"I've been buying arms overseas. For the Montoneros."

"How? When? Why you didn't tell me?"

"It was too risky. I had to keep it secret. Only a few people know."

"How did they found out?"

"I don't know. There are informers everywhere. What have I done?"

What have I done? I've risked all our lives. I used to see you fighting through
your art and there I was, pussy-footing, attending useless meetings on how to
overthrow the government. So, I volunteered to do the arms deal. All those
trips overseas were to buy arms. I also went to Cuba and the USSR. So my
dear, you see it's not your fault. It's mine. We've only got a few minutes. We
must leave before they return."

"How long are we going to be away?"

"I don't know."

"I'd better take my typewriter with me and I'll take some of my
paintings."

We locked up the house, packed the car and took off for the uncertain
future that was confronting us.

That afternoon, after Saul had been told about the raid by a friend in
the police, he went to a lawyer and signed all his rights for the business to
one of his brothers. Then he went to his office, destroyed compromising
documents and found a place to hide.

"Where are we going?"

"To Mar del Plata."

"Mar del Plata?"

"Yes, an understanding associate is letting us stay in his chalet."

"Won't they find us there?"
"By the time they find us, we'll be away."

"Away? Where?"

"I don't know. I've got to think about it. We can't go to Chile, or Uruguay, they'll find us there. Perhaps, Spain or France."

"I know. We can go to Australia, to Sidni."

"This is no time to be funny Gabriela."

"I'm serious, let's go to Sidni."

"Sidni?"

"Yes, Sidni."

Through a curtain of tears I took a last look at our house. As we sped away I saw for the last time many familiar landmarks: my grandparents' house, the nuns' college, Avenida Pelligrini with the old mansions, the cemetery, the Independence Park. A strange mixture of feelings overwhelmed me. Was it excitement because finally I was going to set foot in the ancient land where I believed I belonged? Was it terror because I knew what could happen to us if the general's cronies found us? Was it sadness because I realised that by the time I could finally return to Rosario many of my friends would be dead? Was it abandonment because there was no one who could save us? Was it panic because Saul was driving well above the speed limit, and taking risks that he never did?
"Do you want to kill us?" I shouted.

"We must pass the province's checkpoint before they receive details of our documents and issue the capture order."

... And we sped out of Rosario with our stomachs in knots, our hearts thumping in their cages, dry mouths, wet eyes, aching bodies, minds in turmoil.

So many memories were carried with us, another baggage, another suitcase. Thoughts interrupted by the girls' crying. They wanted their toys, they wanted to sleep in their bed, they wanted to know who the nasty men were. They kept asking why were mummy and daddy crying, why did those men hit grandma. Mother's face had swollen and she had a black eye but she did not complain.

"Mum I'm sorry about all this. You can always catch a train back. They won't bother you."

"Don't be silly child. You're my family and I go where you go."

"Thanks Mum."

Three suitcases between us. Not much to start a new life!

What were people going to think? For sure stories would be invented, like when Stella disappeared. Jumbled thoughts. In my mind I saw people I knew: Zarathustra, Fabio, Julian, Aurelia, Irma, Krishna, Nuria, Cacho,
Ernesto, Betty and so many others. Friends, relatives, left behind — some
dead, some alive. From then on they all became memories, memories that I
hid until now, thirty years after that day in which I said goodbye to my past
and hello to a new life. A life in a place for so long dreamt of: Sidni.

* * *

I said goodbye

to my past,

to my city,

to my friends,

to the dead.

I wrapped

in silk paper

my memories,

my hopes,

and illusions.

* * *

Les dije adios

a mi pasado,

a mi ciudad

a mis amigos

a los muertos.

Envolvi

en papel de seda

mis memorias

mis esperanzas

e ilusiones.

* * *
PART THREE
Beyond the moons of August

* * *

* We arrived in Mar del Plata very late at night. No one had stopped us at the state crossing and we made it safely to our destination. When Saul opened the chalet door a mouldy smell hit our noses. The electricity had been disconnected. With the flimsy light thrown by a small torch we made our way into the house. In one of the cupboards we found candles and a few tins of food. Roma and Amadea were still sleeping in the car. Walking with the insecurity that darkness and the unfamiliarity of a place gives, we dragged our feet around, groping for door handles. It was evident that the house had not been used for a long time. It seemed abandoned. The house was big and very old, perhaps one of the first mansions built in this city. I reached the first floor and opened the door of one of the bedrooms. An offensive smell confronted me. It repulsed me. Squeaky noises came from the big double bed. Covering my mouth and nose, I moved the candle so I could see what was making such a racket. Feeling faint and sick I wanted to scream but laughter came out of my mouth. I laughed and laughed, not only loud but hysterically. Mother, who was trying to prepare supper and Saul who was bringing our luggage in, came to check the source of my amusement. They didn't think what they saw was funny. Hundreds of mice had created a city on
the mattress. Mother gave a shrilling cry. Saul was shocked and disgusted.

We decided to spend the night in the car until we could clean the house.

I was sleeping, leaning against one of the car windows, when I was wakened by a gentle tapping on the glass. A woman, dressed in colourful and unfashionable clothes, signalled for me to get out of the car. She placed her index finger across her lips to indicate "keep quiet". We were in a strange place, escaping from the police, in a house which sat at the edge of a forest. And what did I do? I opened the door and went to her. It surprised me when I noticed that she had a painter's pallet in one hand and her hair was held up with a brush.

"Je sui Berthe. I followed you all the way here."

"Berthe who?"

"Don't you know who I am?"

"No!"

"You're ungrateful ma chérie."

"What are you talking about? I've never seen you in all my life."

"Je sui, l'artiste Berthe."

"Sorry. I don't speak French."

"Merde! Merde! Merde!"

"That, I understand!"
"I taught you to paint. *Ma petite exilée.*"

"Then it was you! You held my hand while I painted."

*Oui mademoiselle. Je suis Berthe Morisot.*

"Why me? Why did you select me? Please answer me. Come back. Stop dancing. Tell me."

"I came to tell you that I'll have to go back. My mission is finished. Another day, another life awaits me. You don't need me any more, *ma protégée! Alea jacta est.*"

"Berthe, I told you, I don't speak French."

"No, no, no, no, no. It's not French, it's Latin."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"It means something like 'the luck of the draw,' 'your fate has been decided,' 'the cards have been dealt,' 'Your future has been decided.' Any further explanations?"

"I see."

*Ma phosphorite, adieu.*

"Wait, wait, don't go yet. Why did you call me "a match?"

*Oui mon amour, because everything you touch turns to fire. You really left a big fire in that funny place you lived. Rosarno?"

"Do you mean, Rosario."
"Oui, I should've known. Catholics! Puagh! To call a place Rosary!

"What were you saying about fire?"

"Oh oui. Feu. Fire. You burnt a few hearts and ... well something else. And then ...is the other fire, the political one. But I really came to say adieu. You're on the way to freedom and to that place you've always dreamed about!"

"Sidni?"

"Oui. Just be careful, mon enfant. Exciting times in front of you. But please be careful. Don't burn yourself again."

"Oh Berthe, please be more precise. What do you mean?"

"Don't fall in love. Evites l'amour!"

"Why? Why? Please tell me."

"Pardonnez-moi, je dois partir."

"Berthe! Berthe!"

As Berthe disappeared in the direction of the forest, the brush that was holding her hair fell to the ground. I felt a sadness when she lost herself in the darkness surrounding the house. The last I saw of her was her blonde curly hair and long colourful skirt flying in the cold air as she floated towards eternity.
I woke up very cold. I gently opened the door and got out of the car. Everyone was still sleeping. I smiled at the thought of my vivid dream. Mother always said I had an incredible imagination.

Walking towards the house to make breakfast a cracking noise attracted my attention. I looked down and saw a painter's brush. A brush which had split in half with the weight of my body. With the two pieces in my hands I entered la casona to face the accumulated dirt of a hundred years.

Everyone helped with the cleaning. Saul hauled the mattress swarming with mice to the garden and set it alight. The cute and yet revolting rodents scuttled into the forest. We laid all the other mattresses in the sun to get rid of the musty, mouldy smell.

Food and other essentials were needed. Saul was worried about the forces of repression recognising him. He needed to change his appearance. "Shave your beard and change your hair colour. I brought hair dye with me." mother suggested. It was a good idea. The girls laughed and laughed at their father having his hair coloured jet black. Looking like a different man he drove into town to buy everything we needed. When he returned he asked me:

"Where is it that you want to go?"
"Sidni," I replied. That night we sat at the front of *la casona* and talked about the future and about our lives.

***

"Australia, often described as the world's largest island, is the sixth largest country in the world. It is also the only country to encompass a continent. Australia's unique fauna derives from its geographical isolation over thousand of years, and the few ancestral types from which the fauna has evolved. Australia is home to most of the world's marsupials. The government is a parliamentary-democratic monarchy; independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The official language is English." From: *Great Aussie Facts, Everything you ever wanted to know about Australia.*

***

🌟

"I found this book about Australia in a second hand bookshop. I've been reading it. A very democratic country indeed. It seems that there are a lot of opportunities there."

"I know. Opportunities for everyone."

"Perhaps you're right, the farther we go the better. I have one concern only. I don't speak English."

"You can learn."
"I'm not sure if we'll be able to get passports renewed. Visas may be easier. I'll just have to explain what happened to us. We need to move quickly. I'll go to the Australian Embassy in Buenos Aires. I have names of people in the federal police who may help us to get passports."

"I'm sure we'll get there. I'm so happy. Thank you. Thank you!"

"Don't you resent me because you have to leave your country, your friends, your recently acquired fame ...?"

"Not really. Perhaps later. At the moment all I want to do is get out of here. I don't want the same fate as Aurelia and Julian."

"Who's Julian? One of your lovers?"

"He's dead!"

"I'm sorry. Was he your lover?"

"Why are you asking stupid questions?"

"I want to know. Have you stopped loving me?"

"I've already told you I love you as a father, as a brother, as a friend."

"Are you ever going to return to my bed?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"It's been so long since we've been together. As husband and wife, I mean."

"Do you mean fucking?"
"What language! The influence of your crazy friends, the artists, no doubt?"

"Why get entangled with so many words when one would suffice? And my answer is no! I won't sleep with you any more. We'll go together wherever you want to go. We'll go as a family. But one day I'll leave you."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind. I hope ..."

"Don't. Please don't make me feel guilty. Let's talk about Australia. We must live in Sidni."

"Do you know someone there."

"Of course not!"

"Why are you so keen to go to Sidni? Why not another city?"

"Sidni is my city. My future is there."

"How do you know?"

"Don't worry about it. When are you going to Buenos Aires?"

"Tomorrow."

"I'll go with you."

"No you stay here. You can't leave your mother and the children alone. You keep the car, you may need it. I'll go by bus. I'll take some of your gold jewellery to sell in case I have to pay bribes."
A week later Saul returned with passports, visas and tickets to Sidni. Gabriela's anxiety turned to excitement, a contagious excitement that infected everyone. Plans were made for life in the new country. Roma and Amadea imagined how real 'kanguros' would look like, and talked incessantly about having one as a pet. They wanted to know if Santa would find them in such a far away place. Elisa wondered how she would be able to shop, to speak with the neighbours, or go to the doctor. Gabriela tried to answer all their questions and scattered hope and fantasy onto everyone's life.

The Australian consulate had granted the visas! The officials perfectly understood the situation they were in, and kindly offered to pay all their fares. Saul found out that accommodation was provided on arrival, and English classes were available for everyone. A small amount of money would be paid to them until they could find work. Gabriela kissed the plane tickets which were now smudged by her tears.

They closed the house and drove to Buenos Aires under the summer stars. Saul's family had been advised of their departure and all his brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews were coming to say good-bye. "Why are you going so far?" Everyone asked. "When are you coming back?" Gabriela knew deep in her heart that they would never return to live in Argentina. "Happy New Year!" "Happy New Year" "Happy New Year!" "Please write." "Don't
"forget us!" The departure hour arrived and Gabriela and her family walked onto the plane. The relatives, waved their wet handkerchiefs through the glass windows of the departure lounge.

Champagne and blueberries for the adults. Miniature airplanes and colouring books for children. Roma and Amadea nursed their dolls and played with their new toys. Tired, they fell sleep, one at each side of their grandmother. The grandmother fingered her Rosary. The plane moved too much. What if the pilot lost control? God alone could prevent an accident. Prayers and more prayers. Elisa's lips moved fast. She prayed for the safe landing of the monster plane, but also for Gabriela's marriage, for Stella, for Roma and Amadea. She said no prayers for herself. She had no interest in life any longer. Too old to find another husband. Too old to risk another failure. Too old to go back to study like Gabriela wanted to do. She was happy just being a mother and a grandmother. She prayed for her family.

Turbulence. Turbulence inside and outside. Turbulence inside the migrants' minds. Turbulence outside in the grey and black clouds which from time to time appeared to come alive under the dazzling lightning.

* * *
My dear, dear Irma and Andres

Thank God we made it! We're free! Do you remember how we used to joke about being persecuted by the forces of repression? Well it has been no joke for me, for us. We had to leave Rosario to save our lives. Strange ... well not really. Suffice to say that it was not only me who got into trouble. Saul was in deeper shit than I was. Can you believe it? How wrong we were to think of him as a 'capitalist', 'a bourgeois', 'a man of business'. All of that was a front! I cannot tell you what he was involved in, but it was something really big.

Oh! I haven't told you yet where we are going ... you'll never believe me ... Australia! (Via Los Angeles)
Don't ask me why Australia, it's such a long story.
Don't try to look for books about Australia in Rosario because you won't find any.

First of all, and for your own protection, please destroy this letter after reading it. When I send you my address in Sidni, memorise it, and don't give it to anyone. Please don't tell absolutely anyone where we are going. Perhaps tell Zarathustra and Krisna but don't tell Fabio. I've decided I hate him. You were right, he's a conceited bastard.

A few hours ago there was a frightening storm that made the plane shake like a fragile piece of paper. Mum still has a terrified look on her face!

We have been flying above the Andes for a long time. From the top, the Andes look insignificant, yet there is strength, a persisting force, an endurance which is reflected from the hundreds of peaks that portray a myriad of colours. The Andean peaks remind me of the mountains that I used
to construct with mother's velvet cape, when at Christmas, I made a Nativity. A little Jesus born amidst the mountains!

I already miss you both. I know I'll suffer but my destiny, my future, my life is in Sidni. Perhaps one day you'll be able to come and visit me.

I have many plans ... I'll keep you informed and I promise I'll write often.

They have turned all the lights off. They expect us to sleep I suppose. In fact I'm a bit sleepy. I am not only tired and emotionally drained but I've also been drinking champagne. Free! Because it's New Year's Eve, they served us a feast (all in tiny trays) and glasses and glasses of the bubbly wine.

I'll always keep you both in a special place in my heart.

With all my love.

Gabriela
I folded the letter and kept it in my handbag. Saul wanted to know who I was writing to. "To all my lovers," I replied. He apologised for asking.

In Los Angeles all we did was to sleep and eat. 24 hours passed quickly. Soon we were back in the air for more reading, more of Mum's prayers, more boredom and more sleep.

I woke up with Amadea's crying. She'd been sick and mother was trying to keep her quiet. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. My body tingled. My back ached. My nose was dry. Such a long trip. I counted the hours, the minutes, the seconds, and finally the announcement came: we were very close to Sidni.

Oh the sea! Oh my Sidni! Oh! Those houses with red roofs that sprawled for miles and miles! Oh that blue sky so bright and sharp, so clear!

The order came to remain in our seats. Disinfection time. Two men in white coats entered the plane and walked down the aisles spraying everything. Dumbfounded we stared at such weird ritual. "Here, here spray us!" shouted Roma. Finally we disembarked.

I was tempted to kiss the ground, instead I lit a cigarette.

* * *
eucalyptus, n. Austral. etc, evergreen tree of genus Eucaliptus; eucaliptus (oil), essential oil from leaves of this used as antiseptic etc. [mod, L, f. EU-+Gk kaluptos covered (kalupto cover), unopened flower being protected by a cap]

* * *

The immigration officer took the passports that Saul handed him. He looked at them and ceremoniously stamped them. He raised his head and asked Saul something. "Lo siento. No comprendo," Saul explained. The official kept talking, moving his head, and gesticulating. He was obviously asking questions. Saul turned to his wife and asked:

"What is he saying?"

"I don't know. I don't think he's speaking English," Gabriela muttered.

A woman with a Spanish flag in her hand approached the counter. She explained to Saul that the official was welcoming the family and wishing them good luck in Australia. She was a Welfare Officer from the Department of Immigration and was going to accompany them onto the bus that was going to take them to Villawood Hostel.

"What language was the official speaking?" Saul asked the Welfare Officer. She laughed at the question and assured them that yes, the official
was speaking English. Everyone spoke English in Australia — a colourful version. English with a different accent and with rich colloquialisms, but English for sure!

Gabriela had arrived home! She knew the blond tall people, she knew they spoke English, she knew how they dressed, she knew how they loved the sea as much as she did.

"Is Villawood close to Bondi?" Gabriela asked as they walked to the bus that was going to take them to the Migrant Hostel.

"Oh no! It's in the opposite direction. In the West."

"Isn't there a Hostel near Bondi?"

"You've been allocated to Villawood. You must go there."

The bus had been waiting for them; it was full of migrant families from many countries, speaking and shouting in many different languages. They were the last to arrive.

"G'day! G'day! We've got Buckley's of making it for lunch. But I'm sure you can have a cuppa on your arrival. Welcome! Welcome!" said the bus-driver.

Tempe, Redfern, Ashfield, Burwood, Canley Vale, Bankstown, Fairfield ... strange names for strange places. The streets were deserted.
Some of the suburbs looked unkempt and poor, others looked nice boasting houses with tiled roofs and front gardens.

"Today, is a public holiday. That's why there are not many people in the streets. In Australia on public holidays people go to the beach, to barbies, and on picnics," explained the bus-driver over the loud speaker system.

Gabriela took out her notebook out and wrote: backley's and barbies. Later she was going to check the meaning of these words in her Oxford dictionary. She couldn't believe it, all those years learning English at *La Asociación Rosarina de Cultura Inglesa* and she could hardly understand a word. She promised herself that one day she would speak and write in English as well as she did in Spanish.

The Villawood Migrant Hostel, a collection of run down sheds and yellow brick, three storey apartments, was surrounded by eucalyptus trees and grevilleas with flowers that looked like brushes. A weird laughing broke the silence of the siesta time. "That's a kookaburra," explained the Welfare Officer. Gabriela didn't care about the smell that came from the bodies of some of the other migrants, she didn't care about the long walk from the street where the bus unloaded them to the hostel, she didn't care that she had to drag her suitcase, she didn't care about the constant and loud chatter of all the other new arrivals, she didn't care about Saul's silence, or the girls
complaining that they were hungry, she didn't care because finally she was in
her beloved Sidni, which she realised was Sydney and not Sidni.

"Why does everyone speak funny?" asked Roma as she drank her first
Australian cup of milk. The big dining-room was buzzing with activity.
Afternoon tea was being served to the new arrivals. A large group of cooks
were busy preparing for the evening meal.

"Dinner at 6.30 p.m.? You don't understand English at all, Gabriela.
We can't have dinner at such a ridiculous time. Ask again, please," moaned
Saul. But yes, it was 6.30 p.m.

The apartment they had been allocated was spartan but clean. It had
two bedrooms, one with three beds and one with a double bed, a bathroom
but no bidet, and a sitting room with a television. While Elisa was convincing
the girls to have a sleep and let her rest before dinner and while Saul was
trying to find a news program on the television, Gabriela grabbed her
notebook and went for a walk around the hostel.

A reddish sand tickled her toes. Small and sticky flies accompanied
her all the way to a garden across from the office building. She sat on a bench
to collect her thoughts. The strong smell of eucalyptus trees mixed with the
odours from the kitchen reflected her new reality. She wrote:
MY FIRST DAY IN SYDNEY

• Impressed by the generosity of the Australian Government.
• Impressed by the organisation and efficient services.
• Impressed by the FREE services.
• I love the people's friendliness.
• I love the kookaburras.
• I love the blue sky.
• I love the flora.
• Where are the kangaroos?
• Will I be able to speak like an Australian?
• Will we find work?
• I hate not having my own bed.
• What will my future be?
For the first time in her life Gabriela woke at dawn. The bright Australian sun invited her to life. A choir of chirping birds and the laughing kookaburras made her quickly realise that she was in another part of the world. It was hot and humid. She had a quick shower, dressed and went for a walk. At the front door of the administration office Gabriela saw a group of women speaking Spanish. She approached them and introduced herself. Soon she was captivated by the conversation and the advice received.

"Don't expect to get contraceptive pills. They want to populate Australia. Doctors refuse to prescribe them," said a Chilean woman.

"Are you sure?" doubted Gabriela.

"Oh yes! I'm one hundred percent sure. A friend of mine - she left the hostel already - was refused a prescription."

"I find it hard to believe," said the woman next to her.

"Well that's nothing. You can't choose the work you want. They'll send you to work in a factory," said a woman with a Peruvian accent.

"But, I'm a teacher. I'm an artist! They can't send me to work in a factory!" exclaimed Gabriela.

"The husband of an Uruguayan woman, in the apartments next to ours, is already working in a factory, and he's a doctor," retorted the Chilean woman.
"And you better shave down there," said the Peruvian woman.

"What do you mean? Down where?" Gabriela wanted to know.

"Your pubic hair. I heard that some of the women from backward countries have brought pubic lice to the hostel!"

"Yes, yes!" choired all the women.

Gabriela smiled, excused herself, and went back to her 'flat' to see if everyone was ready for breakfast. "We won't stay here for long," she told Saul.

"Are you crazy. We just arrived in Australia and you already want to go?"

"No, silly. I mean the hostel. I've heard horrendous things. We better buy a car and go exploring and see where we can live. I know there are beautiful places by the sea."

"We haven't got a lot of money Gabriela. Have you forgotten?"

"I'll work and learn English. I'll find a good job. You'll see. Until you find a job we can get help from the government."

"No. We won't ask for anything. It's enough what they're giving us."

"Everyone gets it. I read it in a pamphlet. It's called 'Unemployment Benefit'. After breakfast we'll go to the administration office and asked them to explain everything to us."
Breakfast was a colourful and somewhat novel experience. The migrants and the food were certainly different. Roma wanted to know why everyone spoke 'funny'. Elisa explained that the people did not speak 'funny' they spoke other languages. Gabriela searched the whole length of the food display counter looking for croissants. Amadea refused to eat what were called "corn flakes". Saul drank only black coffee; and left the dining-room, he couldn't stand the smell of grilled lamb.

"You're right. We must leave this place as soon as we can," he said frowning and added, "Find out where we can buy a car."

Filling in papers, asking questions, repeating the questions, people shouting at them when they didn't understand, wondering, doubting, judging, asking more questions, and more and more ... Life in Australia had begun!

* * *

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From Gabriela's Note Book:

**Arvo:** afternoon

**Barbie:** meat cooked on the fire - *asado*

**Bloke:** a man


**Chips:** French fries

**G'day:** a greeting

**Knock-off:** (?) knock to hit someone ?????????????????

**Mate:** not the Argentinian drinking tea! This mate is pronounced *maaaayt*, it means friend, comrade.

**No worries:** without a problem

**Pub:** a place where men drink

* * *

* It didn't take long to get from Villawood to Ashfield by train, but the return trip in our 'second hand' Holden car, took even less. Buying the car wasn't easy. Saul wanted to know all the technical details but I didn't have the
language to ask all the questions he wanted answers for. He was frustrated, the salesman was frustrated, I was frustrated, the girls were bored and mum was trying to clarify things by repeating in Spanish everything that Saul said. At a certain point I stood up and exploded: "Buy the damned car once and for all!" and walked out of the office. That did it. They shook hands, Saul paid and the salesman handed us the keys. "Good deal mate," he shouted as Saul tentatively drove onto Parramatta Rd.

Driving on the opposite side of the road was a trial. A few times we all screamed as cars came towards us when because we were in the wrong lane. I insisted that we drive to Bondi. We stopped at a service station and asked for directions. The attendant very patiently drew a map for us and sold us the Sydney Morning Herald. "Great paper for jobs. Saturdays are your best bet. 'Cause you're looking for a job, aren't you?" Parramatta Rd. became George St., we turned into William, we passed 'Kings Bloody Cross', as the man in the service station had instructed us but then we got lost. Finally, after asking other people for more directions we arrived at Bondi.

I took my shoes off, ran onto the beach, the girls followed me. The sea smell entered my soul, the blue-green waters recognised me and caressed my legs telling me they had been waiting for my arrival. The seagulls nodded 'hello' and the drowned young man, who had swum with me, waved from the
distance. There was practically no free space on the beach, bronzed bodies lay one next to the other. Surfers and swimmers competed for the waves. And the never tiring waters turned to froth as they kissed the golden sand. Saul and Mum watched us from under a parapet. They looked weird. Saul in his black suit, and Mum always hating the sun, her head covered with the cardigan she carried everywhere. They both were flapping their arms for us to return. We ignored them and kicking sand and water, jumped the fading little waves that cooled our feet.

That night with the help of my English dictionary I went over the jobs offered. One caught my eye:

**HOME FOR CHILDREN**

**NEEDS CARERS**

**30 Wellington St - BONDI**

Women with qualifications in childcare and/or experience with children are required to look after children. Infants to schoolies. First Aid Certificate desirable. Shift work. References essential. For an interview telephone: Mr Andrew Dobb, Administrator, on 886754
Bondi!!! The place in my heart. Immediately I made a list of the requirements and of the words I didn't know.

NOTES

Looking after children: mother

Qualifications: primary school teacher


Oh yes, children always come first, of course!

Shift: To change, to move. Moving work? No. It can't be.

Time for which they work." *Si!* horario de trabajo.

Next day, with the newspaper, my note book and my Spanish-English dictionary at hand I telephoned Mr Dobb.

"Mr Dobb?"
"Yes ..."

"I ring for the work."

"Oh yes ..."

"I qualified teacher for little children. I have two children. I am good mother. I think children come first also, because the First Aid, you say in the paper. Mr Dobb, I am very intelligent and I work shift very hard. In Argentina I write poetry and paint. I help children paint."

"Where do you live?"

"In Australia. I become Australian citizen in two years."

"No, where do you live now?"

"Before Argentina, now Australia."

"Your house. Where is your house?"

"Ah!! House. No house. Hostel."

"Hostel!!! Which one?"

"Hostel which one? Humm ... Villawood."

"Villawood! That's too far. How are you going to come to work?"

"I buy house in Bondi, soon."

"Are you moving to Bondi."

"Yes! Yes! Moving to Bondi."

"OK. Would you like an appointment?"
"Appoint - ment? What?"

"An appointment."

"Appoint -ment?"

"Yes! Would you like to come and see me to discuss the position?"

"Ah ... you want to see me?"

"Yes! At ten o'clock on Wednesday. Is that OK?"

"Bueno ... Yes ... Yes ... Wednesday. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Ah ... si Miércoles! Wednesday we drive to Bondi. Children Home near the beach?"

"On Wednesday I'll show you around. See you on Wednesday. Bring any references that you may have."

"Good-by Mr Dobb. Thank you. I good worker!"

Mr Dobb wanted to see me! Skipping and jumping, avoiding the shadows that the gum trees cast on the ochre ground, I left the phone booth and walked in the direction of our flat. I had brought with me every piece of paper that I thought might be useful, including the Teaching Certificate and all the clippings from my exhibition and the performance of "El Encuentro y mi Esencia." I believed that Mr Dobb was going to be impressed with my background. Saul and mother were very excited about the prospect of me
getting the job. Roma and Amadea were jealous. I had to assure them that I was not going to love the abandoned children more than them.

That night unable to sleep, I went for a walk around the hostel. It was dark and there was no one around. I sat on a swing in a small park where all the migrant children fought and played. I was looking for the moon which was hidden by clouds when from behind someone pushed me back and pulled me to the ground. Startled I screamed. I tried to get up but he was strong. The stranger covered my mouth with one of his hands and dragged me into the dark. With the force of his body he pinned me down and attempted to rip my undies. I fought furiously. With mighty effort I freed one of my hands and dug my nails into his face. He pulled my hair. I groped between his legs and finally found what I was looking for. I squeezed as hard as I could. This time he screamed. Taking advantage of his momentary distraction I freed my other hand and without hesitation went for his eyes. He tried to hold my hands but I screamed and screamed. In a second he fled.

I composed myself the best I could, and went straight to the shower in the flat. I had no marks on my face or body. "Are you alright?" asked my mother.

"A dog bit me," I replied.
"Thank God there isn't rabies in Australia," I heard Saul tell my mother.

When I came out of the bathroom, I insisted that the next day we go to the Eastern Suburbs to rent a place. And we did.

***
An old house by the sea
old walls that keep
old secrets ... a past ...
Who has died in my bed?
Who has eaten in my kitchen?
Who has planted the roses
that adorn my living room?
Mornings tinted in blue and
a verandah that saw me dream.
New South Head Road,
a road that took me
to a new and brave destiny.

* * *

The two very old and refined women who lived in their Vaucluse mansion felt sorry for the migrant family and rented them, at a cheap rate, the house that had belonged to their deceased sister. Gabriela convinced them, in her poor English, that although they didn't work now, the three adults would
find jobs very soon, and if they didn't they had gold to sell. To prove that they had gold she opened the case she had been carrying in her handbag since they left Argentina and showed her valuable jewellery. The old women pretended they didn't want to look but furtively they had a glimpse of the brilliant diamonds, pearls, precious stones and gold that made up Gabriela's treasure.

The rented house, although it didn't have the luxury of the one where the owners lived, was large and had good quality furniture. Obviously the sisters had removed any precious items, nevertheless they had left a few pieces of art which were, if not costly, still attractive to look at. Everything needed to live comfortably was there: pots, pans, linen, blankets, plates, even a television and a record player. Gabriela insisted that they wanted to move in that very day. Saul, nodding and smiling, pretending to understand what they were saying, paid the sisters the first month's rent. They all shook hands and the renters drove back to the hostel to pick up their luggage.

Elisa suggested that they have dinner before leaving the hostel but Gabriela demanded that they depart immediately. When they arrived at Vaucluse, after nearly two hours driving, all the shops in the local shopping centre were closed. Elisa, not hiding her anger, complained about Gabriela being so impatient. Roma and Amadea were hungry and Saul was in a very
bad mood. They parked the car and forgetting all their negative feelings walked into the house. There were enough rooms in the house for everyone to have one of their own, except Roma and Amadea.

"I wish we had bought some food on the way. We can't put the girls to bed without having eaten," moaned Elisa.

"You all drown in your own saliva," said Gabriela with disgust in her voice.

"Do you mean: We drown in a glass of water," corrected Saul.

"Yes, but I don't want to use clichés. I like to create my own sayings," replied Gabriela.

"You're so creative! Use your creativity to provide food for the girls."

"Fine, I'll get some food."

Gabriela had noticed that the lights were on in the house next door. She walked to the neighbour's place and knocked at the door.

"Good Evening. We now live next door. My name is Gabriela. I have two children and a mother and a husband. My mother name Elisa, husband name Saul. Children name: Roma and Amadea."

"Welcome to Ray Ave! Come in! Come in! John, come and meet our new neighbour. What did you say your name was?"

"Gabriela."
"Hi. Pleased to meet you. I'm John. The children are all in bed. We have seven children."

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven? Oh mi dios! Siete! Catholic?"

"Yes, we're Catholic," John agreed smiling.

"What can we do for you, Gabriela? Do you need anything?"

"Yes. Thank you and please. In Argentina for good luck and welcome, neighbours give potatoes and carrots to new neighbours. I am very, very traditional and follow Argentinian customs. For good luck please give me some potatoes and carrots. Then another day new neighbours bring you Argentinian food for good luck to you."

"How interesting!" exclaimed the husband and wife at the same time.

"Yes good luck with potatoes, carrots and sometimes pumpkin too, or any other vegetable. They represent 'to grow'. Fortune grow in new place."

"Yes, of course. Sally, get Gabriela some potatoes, carrots and pumpkin if you have any," ordered John.

"Yes, of course. Lucky new neighbours! I have the lot," said Sally.

"The lot?" asked Gabriela.

"Everything," Sally explained as she walked into her kitchen.
Saul and Elisa raised their eyebrows when they saw Gabriela with the precious cargo: an assortment of vegetables!

"Food for the hungry! Food for the hungry! Food for the hungry!" she sing-songed as she dropped the vegetables onto the kitchen table.

"Where did you get that? I hope you didn't ask the neighbours? Did you embarrass yourself begging for food?" asked Saul.

"Don't be silly. I made up a story."

"What story?"

"I invented an Argentinian custom. I told the neighbours that it would bring us good luck if they give us some vegetables. They never doubted me. I promised them an Argentinian meal. I believe they thought it was quaint," explained Gabriela.

"You never cease to amaze me,"

"You're using a cliché, Saul. Please be more creative with your language!" demanded Gabriela.

The next day Saul drove Gabriela to the job interview.

"Come in Gabriela. Take a seat. Pleased to meet you. Did it take you long to get here?"

"Please to meet you Mr Dobb. Now we live in Vaucluse."

"In Vaucluse."
"Yes."

"What work have you done with children."

"I am a teacher. A primary school teacher. I also have two daughters. Here is my certificate."

"How many years experience do you have in teaching."

"Oh ... experience ... teaching ... ? I am very very good with children. I am an artist and a poet. I can teach the children to paint and to write poems. I have lots of ... hummmmm ... eh ... paciencia."

"Do you mean you're very patient."

"Yes, Mr Dobb. Please look at my folder. See this is my certificate. Here, newspaper talking about me. Look photos of art exhibition in Rosario. This with my daughters in the theatre, my book very excellent: *El Encuentro y mi Esencia.*"

"I see ... have you actually worked before."

"Yes Mr Dobb. I work in clothes shop. Then married the owner. Then I was owner of shops. I am intelligent and learn quickly. You never sorry with me. Please if you employ me I work hard, very hard."

"Do you have a First Aid Certificate?"

"Children first? Yes I agree. Children first."
"No. If a child gets injured, hurt, cuts himself. Do you know what to do."

"Ahhh ... Primeros Auxilios ... Yes, I learn when I learn to be a teacher. But I can learn more and more!"

"You're very enthusiastic, Gabriela. I'll give you a go."

"Give me a go? Mr Dobb, I do not understand give me a go."

"I'll employ you."

"Mr Dobb, you employ me. I work here?"

"Yes, Gabriela. You will work here."

"Thank you. Thank you."

"When can you start?"

"Tomorrow start. No problem."

Come I'll show you around and introduce you to the sisters. They'll tell you which shift you'll be working. I'll place you with the 'kindies'. Margaret can do with someone to help her."

"I know shift work but 'kindies? What is the meaning of 'kindies'?"

"Children of kindergarten age. Next door there is a school that teaches English. Bondi Public School. Classes will start soon. You can go to classes after work. You're Spanish are you?"
"No! No! No! I am Argentinian and now I become Australian in two years."

Gabriela left Scarba running. She wanted to shout to the world that she had been employed. That she was going to earn $36 dollars a week. That she was going to help the teacher in the kindergarten. No factory job for her! No government help! A house near the beach ... a job in Bondi ... what else could she ask for? A car, a car for herself, that's what she needed.

* * *

**Historical Notes on Scarba House:**

This impressive late Victorian mansion first appears in the Sands Directory in 1884, and it was first occupied by Malcom Campbell. The mansion has also been the residence of A.M. Loewenthal who was an Alderman of Waverley Council in 1914-15. The property was acquired by the NSW Government around 1913. Later the house became a child welfare facility. (From State Heritage Inventory, Source: Dowd, p.226).

* * *

I entered Scarba House as if I had entered my own house. Everything was familiar. It was as if I had been there before. I had the rare feeling that I had already walked under the verandahs, that I had run up and down the
impressive wooden stairs, that I had sat shivering in front of the marble fireplaces. I knew the old Victorian home very well. The nursing sisters would send me to fetch something in this or that room and I would find the room without asking anyone where it was. One day I had to go to the attic, a place that rarely anyone went into. Without pausing I passed the big old living room which had been turned into the nursery, I passed the Sisters' dining-room, and then the storage room. Next to it there was a door and finally, behind that door the spiral staircase which led to the attic. Sometimes I would touch the walls and felt that they responded to my touch. I didn't have time to think about all of this because I was busy with the children. It is only now that I can reflect on the past and realise that I had a connection with Scarba House.

Days and months passed quickly. Soon I entered into a routine: work, English classes, home and work, English classes, home and work ... Sometimes, when I didn't have English classes the girls and I went to Bondi beach.

Saul kept looking for jobs and found one in the Holden Car Factory. He lasted three days! Luckily someone told him about the sponsored English classes at the university. He received some money for attending classes. With
my salary, and his stipend we survived quite well. Mother was looking for a job caring for children while the girls were at school.

After a month working I sold two gold bracelets and bought a Morris Minor, my chariot from hell. Saul and I went to a car yard on Parramatta Road. It was a business that specialised in small, second hand cars. The money I had wasn't sufficient to pay for the car. I wanted a car, I needed a car so I convinced the car salesman that I could pay the difference with one of my paintings. At the last minute before leaving Rosario, I had packed two unframed works which I later had framed in a shop in Double Bay. I invited him to come to our home to look at the paintings. If he liked them I would keep the car and he could keep the paintings. Before showing him the paintings I produced my folder with the clippings. When I judged him impressed, I led him to where my paintings hung. He liked them! After coffee, cake, and liqueurs, he walked out with them and I kept the car. Saul gave him a lift to his place in Annandale. Not long afterwards I found out that what I had paid for the second hand car would have been enough for a brand new one!

The children I cared for became my children. I loved them. I gave them the affection and care that their parents couldn't give them. Some of the other nurses and some of the sisters thought it was strange mothering the
wards of state. Sometimes on weekends I would take some of them home where they played and enjoyed the day out.

Sometimes, I had to do night shift so the other assistant nurses didn't complain about me only working the day shifts because I had to go to English classes. On one of those nights, I was alone feeding one of the babies, when in front of me leaning against the mantelpiece of the marble fireplace, I saw a woman. She was wearing a long organza yellow dress, and long lace gloves. A moon ray, which stubbornly worked its way in through the drawn curtains, shone on her diamond necklace. She lifted her head and her beautiful mane of blond hair spilled over her white and naked shoulders. Her eyes pierced mine. I didn't actually see her eyes but I felt them. I felt their anger, their resentment, their anguish but also their love. "I've been waiting for you," she said. I dropped the bottle and instinctively brought the baby against my chest, as if danger was lurking in the moonlit nursery. "Why did you leave? Why did you take so long to return home? We've been waiting for you," she said, drying her tears with a handkerchief. I jumped to my feet and ran to Sister Appletree who was preparing more bottles for the babies.

"Sister! Sister! I've seen a ghost."

"Shhhhhhhhh! You'll wake up everyone. Speak softly. Where did you see it? In the nursery?"
"Yes ... yes ... in the nursery. She spoke to me."

"Well don't tell anyone."

"Why? Don't you believe me?"

"Shhhhhh! I've seen her too. But I don't want anyone to get a fright and resign."

"Who is she?"

"I don't exactly know, but I've heard some stories."

"Please tell me. Please tell me about her."

"Go and finish feeding the babies. We don't want all of them screaming at the same time."

"Alright! I feed babies. When go home I write ghost story."

THE SAD STORY OF ELIZABETH ANNE CAMPBELL- SMYTH

Elizabeth Anne Campbell - Smyth grew up and went to a ladies college in England. She always believed she was going to marry her sweetheart, have many children and live happily ever after in the city of her birth: London. Her father Malcolm Campbell, an extremely ambitious man, was a rich and well respected merchant. He wasn't happy with his middle class and comfortable life. He wanted to accumulate wealth. Through his business he had talked with many sea captains who had been to Australia. According to these people the free settlers were making fortunes. No longer was Australia a prison island, now many people were migrating with the
hope of a better life than the one they had in mother England. About the time his daughter Elizabeth turned sixteen he had already decided to try his luck in the colonies. On the exact day of Elizabeth's birthday two things happened: the young man she loved asked for her hand in matrimony, and her father announced their departure for Australia. The young man who wooed her came from a poor family and he only had what little money he earned as a shipping clerk. Elizabeth's father considered the young man unsuitable as a husband for his daughter. "He probably wants my money," he had said to Elizabeth, rejecting the young man's marriage proposal.

Soon came the family's departure for Australia. Secretly, Elizabeth's father had been selling all his assets. Elizabeth was desperate. She didn't want to leave London. All she wanted was to marry the man she loved. She was even prepared to enter into service in order to help him. Her father who had forbade her to speak or to see the young man, ignored all her protestations and forced her to embark with the family for the new territories.

During the long trip to Australia Elizabeth remained in her cabin most of the time. No matter how much her mother or her sister begged her to at least go out for a breath of fresh air. Elizabeth just wanted to be alone with her misery. Her meals were brought into her cabin but she refused to eat and cried herself to sleep. Her sister Emily would tell her about strange birds with three wings, four legs and two beaks that flew above the ship to arouse her curiosity and encourage her to leave the room. She also told her stories about the other passengers, mainly about the young man who sat at their table. But all Elizabeth wanted to do was die.
This young man, who Emily had described in minute detail, was a talented artist who was going to Australia to draw and record the exotic flora and fauna from Terra Australis. His name was Albert, and Albert always managed to cross Emily's path and converse with her alone or when she went for her constitutional with her mother.

"Albert wants to meet you. I've spoken so much about you that he's intrigued. But because you're never around he has said I've invented you. He believes I'm a fibber. Dear sister are you going to let him accuse me of being a liar? Tonight the Captain is offering a dinner and dance in the ladies' honour, please do come my dearest!"

Elizabeth, who had stopped crying in the last few days, propped up in bed and said, "What shall I wear?" Emily was delighted. Finally her sister was ready to have fun again.

That evening Elizabeth dressed in her most beautiful gown, made of lace and velvet, and holding hands with Emily, walked into the dining-room. Their mother smiled and told everyone that this was her other beautiful daughter - "The one who was feeling sick," she added. All the gentlemen at the table stood up and bowed their heads, welcoming them. Their father looked surprised to see Elizabeth but he didn't say anything, just raised one eyebrow as he did in moments of tension. After the lengthy introductions the sisters finally sat down. The conversation, which had stopped with the sisters' arrival, resumed.

Albert, who was sitting right opposite the sisters, fascinated them with tales from his trips around the world. Both of them attentively listened
to his words, asking questions or seeking clarifications. When all the
gentlemen excused themselves to go into the smoking-room, Albert invited
the young ladies to go for a walk on the upper deck. The sisters left the
dining-room, with their mother's blessing, one at each side of Albert.

It didn't take long for Elizabeth to forget her London suitor. Albert
was not only from a good and rich family, but he also had a title, was
handsome, and intelligent. Mrs Campbell had described him as a real
gentleman. Emily had already fallen in love with Albert.

When the family arrived in Sydney they stayed for a few months in
the house of a sea Captain who was a distant relative of a friend of the family
in London. Soon after their arrival Elizabeth's father bought land in the
Alexandria Parish, in the Cumberland County, in an area known as Waverley
and set out to build a villa which he named "Scarba". After a year in the
colonies Mr Campbell's business flourished and his fortune grew beyond his
imagination.

As soon as the mansion was finished the family moved in. One day
Mr Campbell heard word that Albert was back from his trip around Australia
and that he was considering settling in Sydney. The next day, Mr Campbell
who considered him a good candidate, sent one of his clerks with an
invitation for dinner. Mr Campbell told his wife to organise a dinner for
Albert who had returned: "Do not spare anything," he ordered. The sisters
were thrilled and delighted about the return of the young man and each
secretly hoped that he would fall in love with her.
Mrs Campbell was enchanted at the prospect of receiving such a distinguished young man in her house. She agreed with Mr Campbell that Albert would make an excellent husband for one of their daughters.

The night of the dinner Elizabeth and Emily looked radiant in their pastel coloured dresses and the expensive jewellery bought on a trip to Florence. Albert looked older and tired, but he was still the same witty, handsome, and intelligent man. During dinner the three young people exchanged smiles, jokes and furtive looks. After dinner Mrs Campbell encouraged them to go for a walk in the rose garden. Albert led the two beautiful women into the cool of the night and they continued talking about Albert's work and mysterious lands and people he had visited and met.

During the following three months the three of them became inseparable and, chaperoned by Mrs Campbell, attended parties, concerts and afternoon teas at the Governor's House and at the houses of other dignitaries in the colonies. In the meantime the Campbell Family kept guessing whether he would ask Elizabeth or Emily to marry him.

Finally, exactly two years after their arrival in Australia, Albert sought an appointment with Mr Campbell. Mr Campbell, who was never at home during the day, arranged a meeting in his mansion to impress the candidate with his newly acquired Jacobean desk and bookshelves, his African leopard rugs, and other pieces of expensive furniture and art he had purchased from a European merchant. He wanted Albert to realise that if he married one of his daughters he would marry someone from a wealthy family.
Nervously and choosing his words carefully the young man asked for Emily's hand in matrimony - if she was happy to accept him. He had inherited a considerable fortune and also had made a lot of money selling his drawings and writings to a publisher in England. He assured Mr Campbell that Emily would have a comfortable life, not missing out on anything. He was about to buy the house of a gentleman who was returning home, also his future was secure because the publishing company which had contracted him wanted him to continue with his work about Australian nature. Mr Campbell could not hide his joy and shook hands with him, his eyes beaming with happiness. "Of course Emily would accept you!" he said ringing the servant's bell to order afternoon tea.

Emily's heart missed a beat when Mr Campbell told her that she was marrying Albert and jumping to her feet she hugged Mr and Mrs Campbell. Elizabeth, who was embroidering a table cloth for her glory box, didn't bother to stand up, and with a hint of sarcasm in her voice said:

"Congratulations, sister!"

The sisters hardly spoke to each other from that moment on. Elizabeth would get up early every morning and with one of the maids would leave for the markets, returning at midday and then leaving for her charity work immediately after lunch. On her return, in the early evenings, she would eat something light and then no one would see her again until the next morning.

One hot midday, the maid returned to Scarba House as usual carrying the daily shopping, but Elizabeth was not with her. With shaking hands the maid handed a letter to Mrs Campbell.
"Why on Earth is Elizabeth writing me a letter?" asked her surprised mother. "O dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!" Mrs Campbell kept repeating until she fainted. The servants gave Mrs Campbell smelling salts while Emily picked up the letter and read it:

Dear Mother and Father,

Twice my heart has been broken. I cannot continue to see Emily's happiness at the cost of mine. I know I'm selfish but so are you, father. Don't look for me because when you read this letter I'll be on my way to a place far, very far away.

Good-Bye and God bless Emily's matrimony.

Elizabeth Anne Campbell - Smyth

When Mr Campbell arrived, and read the letter, he questioned the maid. The frightened woman confessed that Ms Elizabeth had met a foreign gentleman and, in recent weeks she had been sent to do the shopping on her own,
because Miss Elizabeth had 'business to do with the gentleman.' The maid couldn't tell who he was or where Miss Elizabeth had gone.

As the days passed Mr Campbell's anger changed to sadness. He commissioned a friend in the police services to investigate his daughter's disappearance. After arduous investigations it was found that she had left the colonies with a foreigner who was going back to Europe and then migrating to an exotic country in South America: The Argentines.

Two years after the disappearance of Elizabeth, Mr Campbell received a visit from an Italian sea Captain. Elizabeth's husband had sent a letter. In shock, the prematurely aged Mr Campbell, read the terrible news. Elizabeth Anne Campbell - Smyth had died during childbirth; her daughter, although very small and of fragile health, was being cared for by the Caminitti family, another Italian family, and they were bringing her up as their own daughter. Mr Campbell thanked the captain and when he left called his family in to tell them of Elizabeth's fate.

Sadness enveloped the family, a sadness that sifted through the walls of "Scarba"; a sadness that pervaded the house for many years to come.

* * *

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MARIGUANA  MARIJUANA
POTA     MARIHUANA
WEED     MARYJANE
JOINT   PORRO
INDIAN HEMP POTIGUAYA
HASHISH DOPE
GRASS  CAÑAMAZO

Stars

Freedom had a price. The price was money. If Gabriela was to become independent she needed money. Money to rent a place, to buy furniture, to leave Saul and set herself up in a house in Waverley. She had heard that many of the Scarba Nurses were doing part-time jobs as waitresses. She was going to search for a suitable position in “The Sydney Morning Herald”.

The Friday afternoon that Gabriela decided to find a part-time job was her day off. She had planned to go to the beach with her friends Dierdre and Anne, two young and vibrant nursing sisters.

Gabriela liked the young women because they taught her how to 'speak properly' and not like other 'ethnics' as Dierdre had said. Even the
night before, when Gabriela was complaining about having to collect one of
the sick babies' faecal matter and place it into a receptacle, her friend
corrected her when she said "I don't like to put the 'caca in the thing.' Dierdre
made her repeat various times: "I dislike placing the stool into the container. I
dislike placing the stool into the container. I dislike placing the stool into the
container." With the help of the sisters and Margaret the kindergarten teacher,
as well as the English classes, she was hopeful to be able to learn to 'speak
properly' soon. Money and English - the two thing that Gabriela needed!

A free afternoon! An afternoon without responsibilities. No children -
hers own or Scarba's. The girls were at school. Elisa had found a job looking
after a Minister's children for a few hours a week. There was no one to care
for, or to worry about. There was no one to argue about whether the uniform
was too short, or too tight. No one to tell her that she smoked or drank too
much.

Although it was a working day, Bondi beach was at its best. All the
young and unemployed people in Sydney seemed to be sunbathing at this
popular spot. At Camp Cove Gabriela would take her top off but not at
Bondi. Someone had told her that the police had asked some topless girls to
put their tops back on. She didn't want any problems with the police.
Gabriela got up and went for a walk. She could see at the far end of
the beach the drowned young man. He was looking towards the sea. Gabriela
sensed a certain loneliness. She waved at him but he didn't see her. Instead, a
group of young men, who were about to get into the water with their surf
boards, all waved back at her. She walked to the area between the flags, as
her friend had advised her, and ran into the waves. The cool water calmed her
stormy body and spirit.

She swam vigorously, her thoughts back in the past, when as a child
she had jumped into one of the city fountains and had swum with dolphins
and mermaids.

Reflecting on life she walked to where her friends were. She laid her
towel next to Dierdre's and Anne's and sat to watch the surfers and a group of
life savers who were practising resuscitation. Enunciating each word
Gabriela asked:

"What is the name of that 'bird' over there?"

"Who? The blonde or the one in the black bikini?" enquired Anne.

"No! The grey and white one. The one who can fly," Gabriela added.

"That's a seagull," replied Dierdre laughing hysterically for a while.
Gabriela laughed also when they explained to her that in slang a 'bird' was a
girl.
"Next Saturday, we're having a party. You and your husband are invited. It's BYO," said Anne lighting a cigarette.

"BYO? What is BYO?"

"Everyone brings their own drinks," clarified Anne.

"You little money? I can lend you money for the drinks," offered Gabriela.

"Silly! It's an Aussie custom! What's your drink, Gabriela?"

"I have many favourites: champagne, whisky, beer, wine, brandy, vodka, gin, scotch, cider ..."

"Just bring one. Don't bring your whole bloody bar with you," commanded Anne.

"Please, Anne, don't teach her to swear. I want Gabriela to learn to speak correctly and properly."

"'Bloody' is swear?" asked Gabriela with surprise.

"Sort of. It's not very nice in a lady's mouth," explained Dierdre.

"You're such a puritan!" commented Anne.

"So why they call a place bloody?" asked Gabriela.

"Which place?"

"Kings Bloody Cross."
The nursing sisters laughed again for a long time, when they stopped they explained that the real name was Kings Cross but because it wasn't a very nice place some 'ockers' referred to it that way.

The afternoon sun faded and the three friends packed their belongings and went for a coffee at Anne and Dierdre's place. Anne brought out a cooking book and showed Gabriela the picture of what she was planning to prepare for the party. "It's a new dish. It's called lasagne," she said. While Anne described the party's menu to Gabriela Dierdre made three strong Irish coffees." They sat on the floor listening to Cat Stevens and Roberta Flack records while sipping the delicious beverage."

"Don't get pissed," advised Anne.

"Piss? Like piss in toilet," asked Gabriela.

"No! Pissed ... like in don't get drunk!"

"Anne I told you not to teach her slang!"

"She needs to know. If she stays in Australia she needs to learn everything about being an Aussie."

"Yes! I want to learn to be an Aussie," exclaimed Gabriela.

Tired and tipsy, Gabriela drove home in time for dinner. Roma and Amadea were waiting for her in the front garden. Kisses and hugs. Hugs and kisses. Mother and daughters played hide and seek until it was dinner time.
After dinner they sat together to read books. Roma and Amadea were starting to speak like the children at Scarba. She wondered why they didn't have a Spanish accent like her.

"If I die I want you to know that I love you very much. That you are the most important people in my life," Gabriela uttered with sadness. Roma, hugging her mother, assured her the she was never going to die. While at the beach Gabriela had been thinking about the fragility of life, about that thin line that separates the living and the dead. She kissed the girls good night and went to Saul and said: "Saul, if I die I don't want to be cremated." Saul put down the paper and with a smile on his face replied, "Fine."

It was silly to worry about death at twenty five. She had so many years to live. Even if she died at the age her father died - forty something. She still had a long time to get to that age. The most important thing was to live life to the fullest. Appreciating every minute. Enjoying every breath of air. Feeling with every cell and fibre of the body. Palpitating with nature. Letting every ray of sun and moon penetrate the skin. Loving. Loving with intensity. Loving without any regrets. Loving and giving without expectations. Gabriela had never really fallen in love with anyone. She wondered if it would be like eating chocolate, or being aroused all hours of the day or if it was like floating on a cloud or rolling on grass. Suddenly she
realised she was missing Rosario, she was missing her friends. She was far away from her life as a painter and a writer. Would she ever return?

That week went by quickly. On Saturday morning the whole family went to Paddington markets to buy a dress for Gabriela. She wanted a 'hippy dress', a cotton embroidered Indian dress, and a leather band for her hair. Roma and Amadea wanted dresses the same as their mother's. Saul explained that they didn't have much money, perhaps they would be happy with just buying bands for their hair.

"Use the little papers," advised Roma.

"What little papers?" Saul asked.

"The ones you sign," she explained. Roma meant cheques!

That night with a bottle of red wine in a brown paper bag, Gabriela and Saul drove to the party. Gabriela wore the new purple dress which contrasted with her jet black hair, she didn't wear the headband, but she adorned herself with an assortment of beads. There were no parking spots near the house so they parked the car in a street close to Blair St and walked to the middle garden where canna lilies bloomed lavishly. The warm night and the colourful flowers made Gabriela's heart burn with nostalgia. But what was the use in feeling melancholic for a place when she no longer belonged there? When she was in the land that she wanted to be in, the land that had
called her, the land that had been awaiting her. She brushed aside the silly emotions and rejoiced because she was alive, she was young, she had friends and she was going to a party.

They arrived very late. Anne joked about Spanish time. They had waited for them to have dinner. Everyone seemed interested in trying 'lasagne'. Gabriela pretended she had never eaten this fashionable dish and repeated many times the words she had learned from the children and that she realised meant delicious. "Yummy!" "Yummy!" "Yummy!"

After dinner everyone sat on the floor. Saul preferred to sit on a sofa and talk with another older man, married to one of Dierdre's friends and who also spoke Spanish. The group conversation was very animated. Gabriela missed most of what they were saying. Not to look stupid she laughed when they laughed and looked serious when she saw gestures indicating grimness. She had learnt to say 'of course,' because she realised that this expression could be used to answer nearly everything.

"Do you want more lasagne?"

"Of course!"

"Do you want more wine?"

"Of course!"

"Did you like the movie?"
"Of course!"
"Do you want to come to the beach!"
"Of course!"
"Do you like Australia?"
"Of course!"
"Do you understand what I mean?"
"Of course!"

The wine glasses were filled again and again. "Australian people are very happy," Gabriela thought when everyone started to laugh and laugh about what seemed to be silly things. Suddenly, she realised that the group had engaged in some sort of typical Aussie custom. One person gave a puff to the cigarette, and then passed the cigarette to the next person. Not wanting to be rude she offered her Marlborough butt to the good looking American sitting to her right. The American and the whole group entered into a laughing fit.

"This is pot man!" said the American. Red. Gabriela's face turned red. She felt her blood colour her whole body. She jumped to her feet, collected her handbag and locked herself in the toilet. Pot? Pot? The pages of her dictionary seemed to fly as Gabriela flicked the pages. M, N, O, P. Finally, pot! Straining her eyes, she read: 1. Pot, a rounded ceramic, metal or glass
vessel for holding liquids or solids or for cooking in, 2. flowerpot, teapot, etc.

3. Content of a pot, 4. Pot' hole, pot-luck, pot shot. No mention of a 'smoking pot'. That pot wasn't in the dictionary. On the way to the toilet she had noticed that Anne was in the kitchen. She went there.

"What is pot?"

"Marihuana."

"Oh! Marihuana! Drug Mariguana? You, a sister smoke mariguana?"

"Yeah! No problems, mate. Have you tried?"

"No. No drugs for me. Never!"

"Don't be silly. Try. Here, I'll light this butt. You have to inhale really deeply and don't let the smoke out too soon. Keep it in. Good. Good. Like that. Just wait. You'll feel great in a few minutes."

Gabriela and Anne returned to the group and sat down. They had just lit another marihuana cigarette. When there was a lull in the animated discussion she informed the group:

"In Argentina for luck we pass Marlborough around. So police do not jail people smoking mariguana. For drugs you go to jail in Argentina. I smoke mariguana all the time. Give me pot, please."

Gabriela gave a few puffs to the butt until her fingers burned.
"Chuck?" She asked as Anne had taught her to say when she had to throw something out.

"No daisy, give it to me," the American ordered, producing from one of his pockets a small contraption, something like tweezers, with which he held the remains of the marihuana cigarette.

**BOOM!** Suddenly Gabriela was stuck to the ceiling looking down. Everyone on the floor looked like garden gnomes. "I better come down otherwise they will make fun of me again," she said to herself. The garden gnomes didn't notice her disappearance. As soon as she was back with her feet on the floor she commenced dancing. The American joined her. Slowly they moved to the rhythm of Cat Stevens' music. Gabriela wondered how was it possible that the notes had colours. Each note a different colour. A rainbow made of music. "Don't get into trouble," Dierdre's cat whispered from a corner. Someone changed the record and played "Easy Lovers." As the different music enveloped them the American brought Gabriela closer and closer to him.

She could feel his strong body against her breast. His perspiring hands transmitted a bitter - sweet energy onto her back. A warmth rose from her toes to her insides. She trembled with passion and closed her eyes. When she opened them, instead of the American she was dancing with Julian.
Julian was begging her to go into the bedroom, to follow him, to be his. The American grabbed Gabriela by the hand and took her into one of the bedrooms. He gently closed the door behind him and led her to the unmade bed, which was covered with Dierdre's clothes. She moaned and sighed as he entered her, repeating again and again: "Julian, Julian, Julian." A knock at the door brought her to reality. The American ignored the knocks until he came. He opened the door. It was Dierdre.

"What have you done to her?"

"What do you think?"

"You bastard! She was stoned."

"So? She didn't complain."

"Get out. You men are disgusting. Get out. Her husband is back."

"Where was he?"

"He gave Jenny and her husband a lift. She wasn't feeling well. Don't go near Gabriela again or I'll tell Joanne what you've done. You should be ashamed of yourself. Screwing other women while she's working her guts out, doing night-shifts to save money to marry you. You're a shit!"

"Gabriela. Gabriela. Wake up. Wake up!"

On the way home. Gabriela had a headache that was making her see everything bleary.
"Dierdre told me you've been sick."

"I can't speak. I'm sick ..."

"You've been drinking and smoking marihuana. I saw you. That's disgusting behaviour."

"Shhhhh! Shut up. Don't speak. It hurts."

"Serves you right. Drugs. Now you're into drugs."

"I'm an adult. I can do what I want. If you don't shut up I'll jump out of the car."

"Your mother will be very pleased if she finds out."


And you ... you ..."

* * *

THE JEWEL OF INDIA RESTAURANT

EAT IN OR TAKE AWAY

CURRIES HOT OR MILD
The newspaper advertisement was clear, they wanted an Indian woman to work as a waitress in The Jewel of India Restaurant. The restaurant was in Bondi Junction on the main street, and not very far from home or Scarba. If Peter Sellers could make himself look like an Indian person so could I. All I needed was a red dot on my forehead and one of the hippie dresses that I had bought at Paddington Markets. In my Morris I sped across Old South Head Road in the direction of the restaurant. Parking the car was always a struggle so when I found a space large enough to fit two cars I parked. The restaurant was a few blocks away. I ran all the way to be there at exactly three in the afternoon. The newspaper ad had said to be there after that time. I entered the Jewel of India to buy my freedom. Inside the restaurant it was very dark. An unusual smell titillated my nose, a mixture of incense and what I later discovered was the smell of curry. I could hardly see where I was going. In a corner of the restaurant, there was a man. When he saw me he walked towards me.

"We don't open until six o'clock."

"I come for the job."
"I see ... but you're not Indian."

"Look I have black hair. I think I look Indian."

"But do you have saris? Do you wear saris."

"Saris?"

"Yes, saris."

"What is saris?"

"Saris are the typical Indian dress worn by women."

"Oh ... but I can wear like this dress. Indian too. Sticker say made in India"

"But we want an Indian woman! Anyhow, have you worked in a restaurant before?"

"No! But I went many Restaurants. Very best restaurants: in Paris, in Rome, in Buenos Aires. I know how to be good waitress. Please give me the job. You very happy with me."

"What do you know about curries?"

"What does it mean curries."

Curries are the food we serve here."

"I learn about curries. You see I am very, very intelligent. I am poet and painter and study for teaching in Argentina."

"Why do you want to work here?"
"This work very close to home."

"Where do you live?"

"In Vaucluse."

"In Vaucluse! You must have a lot of money."

"No, not a lot of money. Poor."

"Let me think about it. By the way my name is Peter."

"Think. I wait."

"No. I'll think and then I'll give a call."

"Please think now. I learn curries. I learn menus. I learn everything very fast."

"When can you start?"

"Now, tomorrow. You say, I start."

"I pay $3.50 an hour. Some people leave tips. Would you be happy with that?"

"Yes, Mr Peter! Plenty happy."

"Just Peter, no Mr. I need someone only for three days a week. From six to eleven. And what is your name?"

"You can call me Miss Gabriela."
"OK! Miss Gabriela ... Miss Gabriela I think I'll give you a chance. I'll employ you only for a week. If you're good you can stay. If I'm not happy you'll go. Is that clear?

"I sure very much, I stay long long long long time."

"Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Of course!"

"Fine, I'll see you tomorrow at six, and be prepared to work hard."

Saul threw the paper to the ground, and hit the table with his closed fist. He screamed at me that there was no way that he was going to let me go out to work at night. Mother came into the room when she heard Saul raise his voice. It was something very unusual. He informed my mother that her crazy daughter wanted to work as a waitress. She was shocked too. Her concern was what would people say in Rosario if they knew that I was doing the job of a waitress. What a dishonour for the Vaccaros! "Both of you think about how you are going to stop me, because tomorrow I'll start working at the Jewel of India," I said and locked myself in my room. About an hour later Saul knocked at the door, he wanted to speak to me. I told him that I wasn't going to open the door for him to act as my father. He promised he wasn't so I opened the door. Saul was concerned about me working too much, about
being away from the girls, about doing work that was not suitable. Finally, he
realised I wasn't going to change my mind and left the room.

Peter had given me a menu so I proceeded to memorise the exotic
names of the many curries and accompaniments. The girls and I made a game
of it and together repeated the weird words, changing our voices to funny
Pappadums. Puris. By the time they went to bed the three of us knew all the
names on the menu by heart.

The next day I worked at Scarba from seven in the morning to three
in the afternoon. I drove home, had a shower, changed clothes and went to
my first evening at The Jewel of India. Peter introduced me as Miss Gabriela
as I had insisted. At the time I couldn't understand why everyone was trying
to hide their giggling. After the introductions Peter explained my duties.
Every time that the bell rang in the kitchen I had to pick up a tray full of
dishes and deliver to the right table. Peter taught me how to carry the tray and
how not to burn myself with the hot plates. He also told me how to prepare
side dishes. After work I was given one container full of yellow rice and one
container full of chicken curry. For the first few weeks I refused to take any
food but seeing so many people enjoying their meals I finally decided to try
the curries, and I liked them.
The next time I worked at the restaurant the cook and the other waitresses asked me if it was true that I lived in Vaucluse. From then on when anyone called me they said: "Miss Gabriela from Vaucluse." I didn't mind, I thought it was an Aussie way of referring to people.

The nights I worked in The Jewel of India I was so tired that every bone and muscle in my body ached. I would lie in bed unable to sleep because of the pain. When I was rostered for night shift it was worse, thirteen hours of work between the two jobs. But the pain didn't matter, it was for a worthy cause. Also, I was learning so much about people, life, music, food, and wine ... and sex.

The restaurant attracted all sorts of people, interesting characters, and also bastards! Most people were polite and generous, others were mean and nasty. One day, this middle aged man was leaving the restaurant. Peter asked me if he had paid. He hadn't. The restaurant owner ran after him and asked him to pay the bill. With a stony face, the man assured my boss that he had given me the money. Of course it wasn't true and I said so. Peter believed the client and not me. With an accusing tone he told me that I had to pay for the dinner with my wages. The liar with a satisfied smile thanked Peter. In those moments in which an unjust act such as this was committed, I wondered who to slap first: my boss or the client? I wondered if I should chase the client and
kick his balls? Resign in disgust? I did none of the above. I cursed the client as he was going through the front door. "I hope you buy medicine with my money," I shouted at him, and in an inaudible voice I also cursed Peter.

The fact that I needed the job made me forget the lack of loyalty Peter had towards his staff. He only cared about his money. Still I enjoyed the work, the Indian music, the dimmed red light, and the exotic smells — a mixture of incense and curry. The beautiful sisters who owned the restaurant with Peter made the place much more interesting than Scarba. One night while preparing side dishes in the back workroom Peter came in. Without uttering a word he hugged me from behind, and proceeded to rub himself up against me. Very swiftly I turned around and noticed that his penis was out of his pants. I pushed him away and waving the knife I had in my hands said: "You do that again and I go to tell your wife." He left as silently as he had came in.

Next door to The Jewel of India there was a cocktail bar. On Saturdays it closed at eleven o'clock and all the patrons moved into the restaurant to continue their drinking and dancing. Next to the dining-room there was a bar and space for people to dance. The music would change, Peter would leave the dining room and move behind the bar, and the kitchen staff prepared small plates of curry to serve with the drinks, as was required
by the liquor license. The first time the horde descended on The Jewel of India I had nearly fallen asleep against the cash register. The laughing and loud chatting, and the change in the music suddenly woke me up. From the corner where I was standing I observed the happy customers. Was I hallucinating? Was I imagining things? Was this scene, which looked like out of Sodom and Gomorrah, real? Not until then had I seen anything like it. Men were dancing with men. Women were dancing with women. Some men were dressed as women. Some women looked like boys. And there was a group who looked like women but there was something different about them.

"They're transsexual," explained the other non-Indian waitress. I wanted to know about all of them!

"Michelle, please tell me. Why men dance with men?"

"They're camp?"

"Camp?"

"Yes. Camp."

When I had the chance I went to my handbag and checked my Spanish-English dictionary. Camp: camp tents of army; military quarters; travellers resting place. Back to Michelle.

"Camp means tents together. But why men with men and women with women?
"Camp also means homosexual."

"Homosexual? No? You're joking? You laugh at me?" Why then would they dance together? Aussie custom?"

"No silly. And the women with women are lesbians, and the others, see that little group to the right of the bar? They're transsexuals, sex-change people."

"How can change sex?"

"Eeeeeeesy. They chop the balls and they empty the dick and make a vagina out of it. Before people went to other countries to do the operation, but they've started to do it here now. And guess what? I'm a lesbian and I fancy you."

"You are so pretty. You cannot be a lesbian."

"You're like everyone else. They think we're lesbians because we're ugly or because we can't find a man. When we finish work in a few minutes would you dance with me?"

"Hummm ... ah ... hemm ... OK."

And I danced with Michelle, and it was weird to feel her large breasts against mine. She was obviously enjoying dancing with me, her warm and rapid breathing was tickling my ear. She kissed my neck but I did not protest. When we finished dancing I said: "We can be friends Michelle." I never had
the chance to be her friend. A few days later she drowned at Bronte Beach. She was stoned they told me. That night I cried myself to sleep.

Peter decided to employ a barman. It was too much for him to look after the restaurant and the bar, even with the help of his Indian wife and her sister. The first thing I noticed about the new barman were his long boots. He looked different. I couldn't make up my mind whether I liked his appearance or not. I had the chance of observing him every time he came into the kitchen to fill up the ice bucket. He had long blond hair and wore a colourful scarf. His black trousers were very tight and instead of a shirt or a jacket he wore a vest.

"You must be Miss Gabriela from Vaucluse," he said one evening as I walked into the back work room. He was having a coffee.

"Yes. I am Miss Gabriela. Please to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you too. Say 'pleased' not please."

"You just meet me and you teach me to speak?"

"Why not? My name is Lawrence. Like in Lawrence of Arabia."

"Lawrence, nice name."

"They tell me that you live in Vaucluse."

"Yes. Where you live?"

"Next door. Do you work somewhere else?"
"Yes in Scarba. You work another job?"

"Yeah. I'm a bricklayer."

"Oh! A lawyer!"

"No! A bricklayer."

"A bricklayer?"

"Yeah!"

"What is brick ... brick ... layer?"

"I put bricks one on top of the other. I build walls. See, like this one."

"Ah ... albañil. You no study? Your parents ... poor? Poor family ... you bricklayer?"

"Bricklayers earn a lot of money! I already own three houses around Bondi Junction."

"Oh! Can I be bricklayer?"

"No! You need to be strong. Only men are bricklayers. It's hard work."

From then on Lawrence and I conversed every chance we had. One night he brought me a rose.

* * *

Mothers on a wage Madres pagadas
mothers for eight hours madres por ocho horas
mothers who don't give love
children who wake up crying
because of their nightmares
no one to comfort the pain
brought by the night terrors
children who are forced
to eat their meals when not hungry.
Shared toys
kindly donated clothes,
laughs and shouts
in the playground.

A subtle tristesse invaded Gabriela's mind. It was not only the sadness
that oozed from the walls of Scarba, neither was it the pain of the long past
that had impregnated the mansion, it was the children's melancholy. A
loneliness and unhappiness that Gabriela read in their eyes. Most of the
Sisters and Nurses did their best to keep them well looked after and
entertained, but it wasn't enough, those kids needed love. A love that only a
mother or a father can give. Whether natural or foster parents, those children
deserved to be made special by someone who loved them. They needed to
have their own toys, to have someone who answered their questions, who ran
to their bedside when they had nightmares. They needed someone to take
them places, to read them books, to buy them sweets. Scarba Home gave
them the best food, the cleanest of clothes, toys, and books but that wasn't
enough.

Gabriela had also noticed that the nurses who had been there the
longest, treated the children as objects - they had become part of their
routine. Wake up children, make beds, play time, breakfast, play time, mop
floor, little sleep, make bed, change sheets, afternoon tea, play time. Routine
and more routine. She didn't want the same to happen to her - she hated the
idea that one day she would treat these wards of state as if they were objects.
But it was very difficult to give the love and attention that the poor little souls
needed because there were also many tasks that needed to be completed.
Although the idea frightened her, she decided to look for another job.

What sort of job could she do? After many hours of considering her
strengths and weaknesses Gabriela decided that she could do a job that
involved figures. She was good at maths and was able to do mathematical
operations at a good speed. But what sort of position was she going to look for?

The day that Gabriela finally decided it was time to leave Scarba Home she had been rostered for night shift, Sister Appletree would know what classification she needed to look under.

After working in The Jewel of India, she drove as fast as she could to mark her card in the old bundy clock. The miles went up and up on the speedometer as Gabriela negotiated other cars, drove through amber lights, cut curves and felt the way her father must have felt when he drove his Maseratti. But her car was not a Maseratti, or a Lancia Prila, or a Bugatti, or even a Fiat. It was an unresponsive, unreliable, rusty machine which stopped functioning every time it rained.

The houses on Old South Head road seemed to fly pass. Suddenly an unusual noise attracted Gabriela's attention. She was trailing something along. She stopped the car, brakes screeching as if in pain. She got out of the car and looked behind and under the car. A piece of the exhaust pipe had come loose and was touching the pavement. Holding it with an old rug, she pulled with all her might and the piece became separated from the car. Happy with having solved that problem she rehearsed excuses for her lateness. Since she had been at the restaurant she had been late every time she had night
duty. She was running out of stories to tell Sister Appletree. Perhaps she should confess the real reason for her lateness.

Gabriela marked her card. Ten minutes late. Tiptoeing, she crossed the kitchen, the nurse's dinning-room, and the big stairs where, standing on the first landing, in a flowing yellow dress, was the woman from the past. She called out to Gabriela who excused herself whispering: "Not now. Come and see me later." Sister Appletree was feeding one of the babies.

"Where have you been."

"Sister! Oh Sister ... sorry! I know late late very late! Please sorry so much."

"What's the excuse today?"

"Excuse? Yeeeesss ... pleeeaaase excuse me."

"Why are you late?"

"I know, very late, very very late Sister."

"What's the point! Finish feeding this one. I'll go and make more bottles."

Gabriela was pleased with herself, she had evaded giving an explanation to Sister Appletree. Later during the evening she confessed: she wanted to leave her husband, needed money to do so, had two jobs, two kids to look after, and a house to keep clean. The sister patted Gabriela on the
shoulder and promised not to get too angry as long as she didn't come too late. Considering that the sister was in such an understanding mood, Gabriela consulted her about what sort of work might be suitable for her skills. Accounts clerk, clerical assistant, invoice clerk, shipping clerk were some of the options given by the good woman.

It was still dark when Gabriela left her shift. It was a joy to be alive. The sun was going to be out soon. She was planning to go to Bondi Beach to sleep on the sand after driving the girls to school. Writing a poem in her head she drove as she had driven the night before. Gabriela was so engrossed in her poem that she didn't hear the police siren behind her. She only realised that the police were after her when their car passed her and blocked her way. "Oh my God! Oh my God! What have I done?" she kept repeating.

"Didn't you hear the siren?"

"Siren. Oh no. I work night shift. Too tired."

"Now, is this a car or a war tank?"

"War tank? No, no, officer, this is a Morris car."

"Your exhaust pipe is broken."

"Today, fall exhaust pipe. I pull exhaust."

"You can't drive with the car like that. Your licence please."

"One moment. Here. Here is my licence."
"What's this plastic card?"

"My Argentinian driver's licence. See my photo. Me in the photo. No good picture. Better in person."

"You can't drive with this licence either. You need an Australian licence."

"Officer. No person told me."

"You were also speeding. I can book you for every infraction in the book."

"Which book."

"The infraction book."

"Officer, I am so sorry, Officer. I am poor. I have no money to pay infraction. I have no money to pay for car repair. Please no boleta. No infraction please please please officer."

"OK. This time I let you go. Tomorrow you get yourself a driver's licence and take this heap of rust to be repaired."

"No Heapofrust, it is a Morris Minor officer. Yes, I promise I go and get license, and car repair too."

That night at the restaurant Gabriela told Lawrence about the car and the police. She didn't know where to go for the license or to repair the car.
Lawrence assured her that she didn't need to worry, he was going to take her to get her license and he was going to have a look at her car.

Lawrence invited Gabriela to go for a drive around Bondi Beach after the restaurant closed. It was late but what difference was an extra hour going to make? It was twelve midnight. Everyone at home was sleeping so why not go with the barman for a bit of sea air. Gabriela believed that Lawrence would have a modern expensive car. She kept forgetting that he was a bricklayer and not a lawyer. He had a truck! He moved the tools and rags from the front seat and asked Gabriela to jump in. With difficulty she got into the car. The platform shoes and the tight long sundress made her movements troublesome. In a few minutes they were at Bondi Beach. A cool breeze entered through the wound down windows. The lulling sound of the sea carried words. Words that only Gabriela could hear. "He's not the one." "He's not the one." The waves kept murmuring but Gabriela ignored their message.

Lawrence hadn't said much that night. Gabriela had noticed a change in him. He seemed sad.

"You not happy tonight?"

"It's the anniversary of my twin brother's death."

"Sad. He sick?"

"No, he killed himself."
"Why?"

"He realised that he was camp and didn't like it. So he gassed himself."

"He kill himself for that?"

"Yes. He found it difficult to cope with his sexuality."

"You camp?"

"No."

"I think, we all a bit woman and a bit man."

"You're right. But I like my man part best."

"Man part?"

"I'm joking."

"My sister also go away."

"Where?"

"No se. I don't know. Desaparecida you know."

"Sorry, I don't understand,"

"She disappeared."

"When?"

"A few years ago. We think she dead now."

"Was her body ever found?"

"No. The Elementals took her."
“Who?”

“She dead too. It’s my fault.”

“Please explain to me. Why it’s your fault?”

“I ... I ... asked for money, gave the turtle, they didn’t want it. He liked my sister. I said ... no you cannot take my sister. No! No! But they took her.”

“You’re not making sense.”

“My mother said I stupid to believe spirits took her. The spirits ... the Elementals cannot take people, she said.”

“Your mother is very clever. You tell some interesting and complicated stories.”

"You're laughing again!"

"You make me happy."

Lawrence held Gabriela's shoulders and kissed her with ardour. She responded to his kiss, opening her mouth and letting Lawrence explore her with his tongue. She caressed his hair and sighed as he stroked her breast. He kissed her neck and her ears. Gently he moved the straps of her dress which fell to her waist exposing her young and firm bust and with his mouth he learnt its shape. Why was Gabriela in a boat, in the middle on the ocean,
being rocked back and forth, back and forth? The stars above spelled a name: Julian; but the waves kept repeating: "He's not the one." "He's not the one."

The next, day and the next and the next, Gabriela couldn't forget Lawrence. She wondered why she liked him so much. During a work break she got her journal from her handbag and wrote:

Why do I like Lawrence?

He is young
He is funny
He makes me laugh
He is passionate
He is intelligent
He makes me feel wanted
He tells me nice things
He has blue eyes
He is tall and strong
He is a dreamer
Every night that Lawrence and Gabriela worked together he would bring her something - a rose, a book, a perfume, a pebble, a shell, or simple a leaf to indicate that he thought about her while they were apart. The barman had been asking Gabriela to let him make love to her, but she had refused. Finally that night she agreed to go to his place the next day.

Lawrence's place was a room, with a kitchenette and a bathroom at the back of a shop a few doors down from The Jewel of India. As agreed, at three thirty that afternoon he waited for her in front of the restaurant. When Lawrence opened the door of his house a revolting smell offended Gabriela's nose. Newspaper was scattered all over the floor. The bed was unmade. "Be careful, there is crap all over," Lawrence advised. Gabriela asked what was the meaning of crap. She didn't have to wait for an answer, she immediately realised what he meant. A hysterical miniature dog appeared from the kitchenette. Her happiness when seeing Lawrence was demonstrated by her jumps about a metre in height. The man picked up the dog and assured it that he loved it. When Baby Doll, as the dog was called, realised that Gabriela was there, she growled and wouldn't stop. Lawrence had to lock her in the toilet. He patiently picked up and disposed of the newspapers soiled with dog's urine and excrement. He turned on the radio and straightened the obviously unwashed sheets. Gabriela hadn't moved. Standing in a corner she
was trying to understand herself. What was she doing in such a rat hole? It
didn't take her long to work out why. She wanted Lawrence to fuck her.

Lawrence was fire. He knew how to make love. Not even Julian had
been able to give her the pleasure that the 'barman-bricklayer' was giving her.
Embracing her he galloped like a wild horse. He moved her and turned her
on. He caressed her and kissed her. He tongued her body. He swore that he
loved her. He assured her that she was all he wanted. And Gabriela believed
him.

On the way home her plans changed. No longer did she need to save
money and rent a place to move out. She would marry Lawrence. She would
live with him and the girls and of course her mother too. If he had three
houses he could use one of them to live in. Lawrence would make a good
father for Roma and Amadea.

After that day, Gabriela entered into a life of deceit, lies, anguish, but
also passion. Deceit and lies because every free minute she had, she wanted
to be with Lawrence. To do so she had to find reasons for her long absences,
to invent extra activities at Scarba, to conceive events at Bondi Public School
and at The Jewel of India that never took place. Anguish because being
separated from Lawrence was like being separated from a part of herself.
Passion because overwhelming sexual desire had taken her over. Lawrence
lived in her mind. Everything else in her life except her daughters lost value and became opaque and valueless.

Gabriela requested to be rostered permanently on night duty so she could spend her afternoons with Lawrence. He would finish work at three thirty and by four he would be at his derelict and filthy room. There she would wait for him and spend two hours making love, searching for the satiation of her uncontrollable desires. In those afternoons of sex Gabriela would lose herself in that fire that consumed not only her body but also her soul.

One day, as she opened the door she saw a woman sitting on the bed. It was very dark so it took a few seconds to realise who the woman was. No longer was she an adolescent. She looked older and tired. She smiled and pointed under the bed. At that moment Lawrence opened the door. As he entered the room Stella vanished leaving in the room a beautiful essence and a purple mist where gold sparkles shone. Lawrence asked if she had burned some exotic type of incense. Not wanting to reveal about Stella she agreed. It didn't take long for them to become entangled while undressing each other.

* * *

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"For homework tomorrow I want you all to write a story about an event, or something that happened to you." The English For Migrants Teacher.

***

THIS IS A TRUE STORY

By Gabriela Vaccaro

The other day in my work as waitress in an Indian restaurant called The Jewel of India, early in the evening a man made a pass at me. I ignored him and never went back near the table.

Later that night, near closing time, a customer whom I believe was the one who had 'come on to me'(my friend Anne taught me to say this) entered the restaurant and spoke to me in a very demanding tone said:

"I wait for you ... in my car ... blah blah blah ... ten minutes ...blah blah blah ..."

Indignant by his insistence, and angry because he hadn't realised that his advances were unwelcome I replied:

"Go away. I am married!"
He looked at me in very peculiar way and insisted:

"I wait for ... in my car ... blah blah blah ... ten minutes ... blah blah blah ..."

And I repeated:

"Go away. I am married!"

The same dialogue went on for a few minutes. Although the light was dim I noticed that his face was getting redder and redder and his tone more and more agitated.

Spitting chips (My friend Anne taught me this too!) he said:

"Call the manager."

Surprised by his request I said:

"My boss won't make me change my mind," and I went to call him.

I stayed behind the thin wall that separated the dining-room from the kitchen so I could listen to their conversation. Listening to my boss apologise I suddenly realised that maybe he didn't want me in his car.

Everything became clear when my boss asked me why I had refused to give the customer his curry. He had been waiting for it a long time.

The poor bugger (Anne again) had been saying:
"I have been waiting for my curry for more than ten minutes."

And I thought he was saying: "I am waiting for you in my car in ten minutes!"

I was very embarrassed. I didn't know what to say to my boss.

Luckily he didn't get angry. Next time I will pay more attention to what customers say.

END OF STORY

Dear Gabriela

Congratulations! This is a very good and funny story.

Your English has improved very much in the last few months. Try not to use 'slang' in your writing. Soon you'll be writing poetry in English.

Phillipa Dimarkis

***
Female with a flair for figures to work in our very busy office. General office duties.

Training provided. Good wages and conditions. References essential. For an appointment telephone 2062805.

☆

Mr Ross was so impressed with Gabriela's enthusiasm and motivation that he employed her on the spot. On leaving the building the telephonist told her that she must be good because he had already hired someone. The job was simple. Gabriela had to do the calculations, so many bottles of gin at so much. More dozens less price. Tables of costs were kept in a folder. The salary was so good that Gabriela was not only going to resign from Scarba but also from The Jewel of India. It was time to ask Lawrence when were they going to get married.
That same night Gabriela resigned from Scarba. Her friends Anne and Dierdre were upset, but they themselves were leaving soon to trip around Tibet and India. Sister Appletree congratulated her and said that everyone was going to miss her.

After supper Gabriela slowly walked up to the nurses' resting room. She needed to be alone, to take in what it meant to leave Scarba House, the children, her friends. Again another departure. Another good-bye. She turned the light off and closed her eyes for a few minutes. The soft sound of silk against the wooden floor made her open her eyes. Standing by the door was the woman from the past that she had seen before. She seemed to be looking for something in the drawers of an old desk that Gabriela didn't recall being in the room. The woman turned around and pointing a finger at Gabriela said: "You're leaving again." Gabriela, without realising it, without even being conscious of what she was saying, whispered: "Please forgive me." The woman dried her tears with a lace handkerchief and replied: "I forgive you, sister." Gabriela wanted to ask her who she was and why she cried all the time, but the apparition had turned around and bit by bit lost her form and shape. When the last vestige of the woman was disappearing Gabriela heard her say very clearly: "Look under the bed."
She left the nurses' room and begged Sister Appletree to let her go home because she was feeling sick. Once at home she fell asleep, but frightening dreams kept awakening her. Covered in perspiration she woke up crying and shivering. What was happening to her? Everything was going fine with her life. She had found someone who loved her, she had found an excellent job, her teacher had told her that her English was improving, the girls had settled in school without a problem, Saul was realising that sooner or later she was going to leave him. So why was she feeling this way? All she had to do to feel better was to think about the next day because Lawrence had asked her to meet him at his place.

Peter, her boss, wanted to attract more clients into his bar, so he had employed an attractive young woman who was prepared to work topless. As a result Lawrence was working fewer days in the bar. This had complicated things because Gabriela couldn't see him as often as she wanted to. He was looking for another bar job so he had asked her not to go to his place because he wasn't going to be there.

Gabriela woke up very late after a restless night. It was nearly time to meet Lawrence. She showered and dressed quickly and in twenty minutes was in his room. Like many past afternoons, kissing and tonguing in each
other's arms they rolled on the dirty and stained sheets. Their moans accompanied the soft music that was being played on the radio.

Tired, Gabriela had fallen asleep. Lawrence gently woke her. He was already dressed in his typical attire: tight black pants, black shirt, long scarf and long black leather boots. Gabriela asked him where was he going. "I'm going to meet someone for another part-time job. Get dressed. I'll see you at closing time. Don't be late. Peter gets the shits," he told her.

Gabriela got up and dressed. She was ready to go but couldn't find her shoes. She looked under the bed. And there they were. Neatly. Side-by-side. She pulled the shoes from under the bed and immediately realised that they were not her shoes. She recognised them. The shoes belonged to the topless woman that Peter had recently hired.

On the other side of the bed were her shoes. She put them on and raced next door to The Jewel of India. She had never felt like this before. Her hands, her legs, her whole body was wobbly like a jelly fish. She needed water. Tears turned to anger. There she was. The topless barmaid was in the kitchen filling a bucket with ice.

"Have you slept next door?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Have you slept with Lawrence?"
"Yes, I have indeed. It's not a secret. Everyone here knows."

"Did you know Lawrence and I were formal lovers."

"You poor thing! Don't tell me you took Lawrence seriously."

"Yes, I did. I love him and he loves me. We were going to marry."

"This is the 1970s. You silly girl. When he's not with you he is with me and when he's not with me he's with boys. How do you like that?"

Gabriela left the kitchen and went to the bathroom. She washed her face with cold water, brushed her hair, peed and started to work. Every time the barmaid crossed her path she would give her a condescending grin.

Closing time seemed to never come. At eleven exactly Lawrence walked into The Jewel of India Restaurant. At that particular moment she was carrying an order. She put the dishes down on the table she was serving, and with the tray in her hands she confronted Lawrence.

"Did you have sex with the barmaid?"

"Well ... circumstances ... I had to ..."

"Did you sleep with her."

"Yes. I'm sorry. I did."

"I thought you loved me. I thought you were going to marry me and the girls and I were going to live with you. "
"I could never take on that kind of responsibility. I grew up without a father I couldn't take your daughters away from their father."

"How could you do this to me?"

"I couldn't help it. Miss Gabriela, I'm really sorry."

"You are a bastard. I'll never see you again."

"Didn't we have a good time? Gabriela! Gabriela!"

Gabriela returned to the kitchen and told Peter, in front of the cook, the dishwasher and the other waitress, that he could keep his lousy job. She didn't want to work with someone who didn't trust or respect her. Peter opened his eyes very wide. But he opened them even wider when Lawrence grabbed Gabriela by the arm and Gabriela, with the tray still in her hand, repeatedly hit Lawrence over the head with it. After she stopped she dropped the tray on the floor, and as Anne had taught her, said: "You can all get fucked. I won't be here anymore for all of you to laugh at me behind my back."

The miles clocked up on the speedometer as Gabriela drove home in her Morris. The houses on New South Head Road raced by her, blurry through her teary eyes. She cried and screamed at the same time, and for a flitting moment she felt that she was her father driving towards his death. In her mind a thousand thoughts collided, images and feelings intertwined like a
wisteria on a pergola frame. Her mouth was dry, her heart's thumping reverberated in her head. The car's steering wheel became an eel in her trembling hands.

Gabriela stopped a few blocks before arriving at her house. She sat in the seat and tried to relax using the technique she had learned in her pre-natal classes. Fresh air entered her welcoming lungs. It remained in until a strange calmness descended over her; then she realeased it slowly, very slowly. Again and again she repeated this until a strange calmness descended over her.

All her hopes for a life with Lawrence were dead, he had cheated on her, worst—he had never taken her seriously. Now she realised that at no stage had he said anything about marriage, or even living together. These plans had been created by her. All had been a fantasy.

Like atoms encased in matter, thoughts rushed in Gabriela's mind. Her thoughts became words which she uttered out of control. Wrathful words and stumbling sentences:

"Stupid bitch!"

"You're an idiot and an innocent."

"Bastardo! Bastardo! Hijo de Puta!"

"You fool. Forget men for ever!"
“Slut. You’re a slut!”

Then she became quiet, so quiet that she hardly heard herself breathe.

As she sped down the road she noticed the full moon reflected on the sea.

* * *

Moondust and fairy tales
sleepy silver rays
that kiss a dead dream
confident, tireless waves
caress a broken heart

Polvo de luna y cuentos de hadas
dormilones rayos de luna
que besan un sueño muerto
confidentes e incansables olas
que acarician un corazón quebrado.

* * *

It has been one month since I broke up with Lawrence and for the first three weeks an emptiness took over me. Hollowness. Silence. A void. Numbness. A vacuum. It was as if I had lost my connection to the world of the living. I had retreated into a space of my own. It was a black space - an empty garden where nothing grew. Enduring my emotional pain, I found solace in crying. An intense sadness had overtaken me. The new job distracted me from the pain but from time to time I would lock myself in the
Pilbey’s staff toilet and within its confined space, I cried. I cried bitter tears. Tears of anger. Tears of rage. On the long daily bus ride home, hiding behind my sunglasses, I set free my heart’s waterfall. One evening I cried so much that when I left the bus my skirt was damp with my heart’s waterfall.

The defunct fantasies tormented me as they flashed in my mind’s eye: the house in Bondi, the picnics by the moonlight, Roma and Amadea playing with Lawrence in the garden, swimming at midnight … ridiculous figments that had blinded me during the affair. I believed Lawrence was going to save me from my failed marriage. Assumptions had made me see him as “my prince”, but he was just an ugly crow. A turd in fact!

How could I have been such a fool falling in love when I had promised myself never to love anyone again?

“I love you!” Maybe he did utter those three words. Hollow words that fell discarded under the bed to keep the topless waitress’s shoes company. Hollow words with Lawrence’s dog shit on them. Hollow words that turned to shadows in the underworld. Another disappointment with a man! It seems that they all wanted one thing — to fuck me.

As the days went by I analysed my past relationships and the men I had been involved with. Saul, who married me thinking that I was going to play the role of the ‘nice looking and compliant’ wife. Well he got it all
wrong! He manipulated me for a few years, but then I grew up. Julian, who hid behind his god-like qualities. Yes, he had helped me to trust myself, to be confident, to view the world in a different way. But now that the time has passed I realise that perhaps he never loved me either; he just wanted another recruit to fight his battles. Was he also screwing Aurelia as well? I'll never know now. Fabio who cheated on his wife to be with me ... what a fool I was! He stroked my ego and I opened my legs. Once he had enough of me he dumped me and went to the next one — Filipa they told me, another member of Runa. Even Andres and Irma ... did they really love me or did they just want to experiment with sex? Was I simply the stupid prey who swallowed their bait? I'll never know because I'll never go back to Argentina. In fact I'll never write again to any of them.

One after the other the veils of innocence fell and all that was left of me was as thin as tissue paper. But on that thin frail surface a new Gabriela had been traced.

Then one day the turmoil left me. I became a river that gushed through its bed with radiant energy. I was like like one of those seeds left buried in the pyramids by the ancient Egyptians. I had inside myself power, strength, and the potential to work, to study, to do whatever I wanted to do. I was ready to take my life in my own hands.
After weeks of planning in my head what to say, finally I confronted Saul and said it: “I am leaving you.” That day I needed to be alone. I walked to The Gap taking in the warm but pure summer’s air. The sea was a brilliant blue colour, the sun rays felt like caresses on my skin; passers-by smiled at me. How could I be upset when I was finally in my dream place? I loved Sydney! The people were friendly, honest, straightforward, and with no pretence; so unlike the people I used to mix with. Finally, I have achieved the dreams of so many years ... finally I am in Sydney. I walked ... and walked ...

***

NOTES:

➤ Find out the name of a lawyer

➤ Find out how to rent a place and how much money I need to do it.

➤ Have a chat with Mum and the girls about my separation and eventual divorce

➤ Speak to Roma and Amadea’s teacher to see how they are going

➤ Find out where I can study to become a ... something
For a while I was a piece of dry wood floating in the river of life. Water currents dragged me, shook me, turned me, until one day I was shoved up against a coast. There, roots penetrated the red soil firmly taking hold, sucking nutrients and water. Soon velvety leaves covered the new-grown branches, branches which extended their arms to the heavens. The glory of existing covered me with a veil smelling of fresh cut grass, of seaweed, of gardenias ...

Like an actor on opening night I had entered Pilbeys Gin, heart fluttering, mind focused and ears pricked as instructions on how to prepare invoices were given to me. It didn't take long for my fingers to fly on the old calculator and soon I was hidden by a mountain of paper. Invoices and more invoices were brought to my desk.

"You are excelling," Mr Ross said one morning.

"You ... expelling me?" I asked with a quivering little voice.

"No, silly. You're very good. Very good indeed!"

No longer was Miss Gabriela my name in the world of numbers, invoices, clerks, and managers. I became 'Gab' and ate fairy cakes for morning tea, went for 'smokos', shared Chinese take away, and went to the pub on Fridays. I learnt that when it was my turn to 'shout' I wasn't supposed
to scream but to pay for everyone's drinks, pubs sold 'grog' and Pilbeys sold
'grog' to the pubs. I now knew that to be 'in the shit' was to be in trouble, like
when my 'mates' came back to work late from lunch after drinking at the
corner pub. At home I was always 'in the shit.'

"Where have you been? You're still my wife."

"You've been drinking at work?"

"At what time did you finish work?"

"Who are all these people that ring you?"

"You're going out again?"

Life with Saul had become very difficult. I avoided conflict by hiding
myself between the tattered pages of the Spanish-English dictionary and
those of "The Female Eunuch" by Germaine Greer.

Often, I lost myself between rose petals and fragrant frangipanis, or in
the subtle blue of the plumbago and the tenderness of sweetpeas. In the
garden I was a child again!

Roma and Amadea held my hands as we jumped puddles, the
skipping rope or cracks on the sidewalk.

Painting filled many hours. Hours coloured by cerulean blue, carmine
red, cadmium yellow, and vermillion.
The thought of freedom inebriated me ... it was just around the corner.

* * *

Bells, cymballs and castanets
fans, feathers and hats
a red cape in the toreador's hands
death frightened scapes,
life dresses up in lace
and a girl, finally
becomes a woman!

* * *

It was Friday; Gabriela had been to the pub with her work mates from Pilbeys Gin, something that had become a routine. Over the last few weeks she had been happy, life was going the way she had planned. These days she hardly had a thought about Lawrence. The people at Pilbeys had welcomed her and treated her like a friend more than a work colleague. Saul finally had agreed to a separation. The girls did not fully understand what a separation
and divorce meant, but Gabriela was hopeful that in time she could explain it to them and they would adjust to the new situation.

The night was cool. Gabriela didn't want to go home. She drove to Bondi Beach and ran aimlessly on the wet and cold sand. She felt on top of the world and she cried tears of happiness — little stars, which as they touched the sand, made a brilliant trail behind her footsteps. Upon reaching the rocks, exhausted, she let herself fall. She lay there hearing the sound of the waves which to her ears was a full orchestra playing Mozart for her alone.

Gabriela wanted to sing, to dance, to fly, and to tell everyone that she was happy as she never had been. No longer feeling sorry for herself she shouted her fulfilment towards the four points of the compass. Gabriela needed to ponder her future, to think about what might come to pass in this place that had called her and that she now loved as her own. She wished to see her future. She sat and looked at the sea as if somehow the ever-moving waters had the answers. Instead of answers she was visited by the dead. All of them coming just to see her.

She smiled when she saw Lili, her childhood friend who had died of polio. Aunt Francis pointed with one hand to the palm of the other, where there was an all seeing eye. She closed the palm and floated away on a blue cloud. Her handsome father waved at her as he galloped through the waves.
on a white horse. Julian and Aurelia shook their heads as they disappeared into eternity.

When the dead had departed a film seemed to be projected on the dark skies of that cool night. The heroine in this film always won, always knew how to stand up for herself, she knew how to fight, how to survive, how to live. The heroine, after much struggle, had reached her destination - she had found the place where she belonged - the land of the blonde gods.

"You look good in the film," said the drowned young man as he passed Gabriela.

"Wait! Wait! Don't go! Is that me?" she asked.

"Yes," the young man answered as he sped towards the street.

It was indeed her! She was the winner! She was the heroine!

The last image she saw projected was her face as an old woman. A face crisscrossed with lines, lines that meant a life lived to its fullest. Lines of laughter and pleasure. Lines of strength and power.

... and the old woman, the heroine in the picture, Gabriela, wrote on the sand with her walking stick: Sidni, you are my love!

Back in her 'chariot from hell' Gabriela drove at full speed towards Vaucluse, to the house that soon she would leave to start a new life.
Gabriela tiptoed down the hallway and walked directly into her children's bedroom. She knelt next to Roma and kissed her. She smiled in her sleep. And, as she covered Amadea, she whispered to them:

"Tomorrow we'll spend the day at Bondi."

***

But that is another story …
THE WRITING OF "BEYOND THE MOONS OF AUGUST"

A thesis (annotation) submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

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from

University of Wollongong

by

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2003
CERTIFICATION

I, Beatriz Copello, declare that this thesis (annotation), submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Beatriz Copello

30 June 2003
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CHAPTER ONE

THE IDEA
My past was the seed—“Beyond The Moons Of August” is the tree

“Beyond the Moons of August” was born from my angst about recording and understanding my past. While writing this manuscript, I submerged myself in the depths of my mind, by conjuring the dead and finally putting them to rest, and rescuing from my memory stories, people and events long buried in this invisible cemetery. Through writing this novel I recreated my past, I re-interpreted events long gone, I sought revenge and forgiveness. Catharsis and creativity went hand in hand with the writing of “Beyond the Moons of August”.

This book represents an era of my life which, like a shadow, accompanied me to the present. I pulled memories out and paraded them, distorted and enlarged them. I bathed them in fantasy and hope and I sprinkled them with innocence and humour. Magic transformed my recollections as my fingers hit the keyboard of my computer.

Like a seamstress, I made a suit from the fabric of my past. I threaded word to word until a costume, embroidered with colourful sequins and rhinestones was created. My past was the cloth, my craft was the needle and the thread, and the sequins and rhinestones were my imagination. The suit fits perfectly because it was made to measure.
As humans age, memories lose lustre and escape like water or sand through our fingers. After a while true memories disappear, leaving behind mere feelings, ethereal sensations which evaporate as time goes by. All that remains are residues which seduce us with the transformed product. The smell of a gardenia, a phrase from a Chopin sonata, a light touch, are physical fronts for traumas, dead illusions and pain buried in the subconscious. By writing "Beyond the Moons of August", I wanted to come face to face again with those experiences which I had put away in a deep corner of my mind. I wanted to confront not only my phantoms, my lies, my conundrums, my mistakes, but also my joys, my discoveries and the pleasures and excitement that I encountered in this, my adopted land, Australia.

This process commenced in 1995, when I wrote *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria.*¹ This is a novel based on my memories and the recollections of the stories that I had heard from the mouths of the women in my family about my great-grandmother, her daughters and my mother and her sisters. The novel finishes with Gabriela, the main character, finding out that her father is dead.

¹ Beatriz Copello, *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria*, (Sydney: Abbott Bentley, 1999)
The struggle to survive in Australia, the imperative of learning English as my own language,² the determination to become a professional,³ and the responsibility of bringing up two daughters on my own, covered my past and my career as writer with a thick veil, a veil which lightly rose when I enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Communications at the University of Technology — Sydney, to study creative writing. After satisfactorily completing this course, I enrolled at the University of Sydney and completed a Master of Arts in English with a Major in Creative Writing. During this course, the unveiling of my past commenced when, as a requirement of the course, I had to write a novel. It was then that I wrote Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria.

This early novel tells the story of Gabriela's childhood and adolescence in Argentina. In this book I weaved, with magic and fantasy, Gabriela's story and the stories of three generations of women. “Beyond the Moons of August” commences at the point when Gabriela, her mother and her sister are confronted with the death of her father.

Before feminism, before equal employment opportunity, before the women’s liberation movement, a woman had only a few choices for

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² I was determined that I was going to be able to write in English as I had written in Spanish.
³ I am a registered psychologist; I have completed a BA in Psychology and a Masters in Counselling at Macquarie University.
her life. Being a daughter, a mother or a wife brought with it a script which dictated how women were required to behave.

Despite the rigid mores and rules of conduct prescribed by the times, many women dared to break away from convention and confront society with defiant attitudes and behaviours. "Beyond the Moons of August" takes the reader not only through the exploration of female roles across two cultures, but also into a world in which fantasy and reality are blended.

Gabriela—daughter, wife, mother, artist, political activist and migrant, is the main character. She is an innocent victim of her oppressive society, but her demons and angels take her by the hand to explore not only her artistic talents, but also her values and her beliefs.

After the tragic death of her father, Gabriela, only eighteen years of age, finds herself having to take charge of her family. She needs to obtain work, a difficult task in a small city where unemployment is rampant.

Desperate and not seeing a way out, she proposes to her mother that they kill themselves. Death will bring relief to their sorrow, they will reunite with their father, and all their problems will end. Her mother lovingly dissuades her and suggests taking in boarders as a means of earning some income.
Through a vision Gabriela discovers a magical place called Bondi, where young people, who appear not to have a care in the world, run and play on golden beaches. She learns that Bondi Beach is in Sydney, Australia, and from thereafter her dream is to travel to this beautiful and faraway land. Her dreams are not realised until a few years later.

When money has all but gone, Gabriela finds employment in a fashion shop. The owner, a rich older man, shows a keen interest in her. After a few months of sending her flowers and presents, he proposes marriage. Gabriela knows that if she marries him she will solve their financial problems. Unable to cope with the pressure overtly placed on her by this man and covertly exerted by her mother, she marries to solve their difficult situation.

Time passes. Idleness and inanity envelop Gabriela, who not only grows fat, but also bored and lonely. To cope with her life, she becomes absent from her body, escaping to a world of her own. One day she wakes up. Motivated by unknown forces she loses weight, commences to write, to paint, and to live.
Gabriela is liberated and plunges headlong into two worlds: one bathed in the secrecy of illegal politics, the world of the Montoneros,4 and another, the artistic world where she becomes admired for her talents as a poet. Slowly, she abandons her pointless life and enters these worlds living, in a short period of time, the experiences of one hundred years.

At a moment when Gabriela’s artistic career is on the way up, she and her family are forced to leave the country for political reasons. After a raid on her home, her husband agrees that they are in danger and confesses that he also has been involved in illegal activities. The couple agree that they must leave.

Gabriela knows of a magical place of golden beaches which has been waiting for her—Australia—so she suggests that they migrate there. In Australia Gabriela's adventures continue, but the novel ends with Gabriela's realisation that she belongs to Australia and she will age and die there. Nevertheless, I have stopped the novel at a point at which I can resume when the time comes to write part three of Gabriela's life and fantasy.

I have always been fascinated by the question of why writers write. In the many creative writing courses that I have conducted I always

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4 Montoneros was an Argentinian leftist revolutionary group which operated in a clandestine way at the end of the 1960s and 1970s.
ask the participants why they write. Invariably the answers fall within four categories. Some writers believe that they have something important to share—a message to convey to others. Another group of writers believe that what they write is going to change the world. Then there are those who say that writing makes them feel good and that they write for the pleasure of it. Finally, there are those who want to entertain others. Why do I write? Why did I write "Beyond the Moons of August"? I feel that I wrote it because I considered that I had an interesting and human tale to tell. I wanted people to share with me some of my experiences. I wanted readers to reflect on the many feminist issues which are the novel uncovers. I wanted readers to be entertained and to laugh and enjoy the adventures of Gabriela.
CHAPTER TWO

THE PLAN
I plunged into the past

The first time I plunged into my past in search of interesting material, I wrote *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria*. At that time I wanted to be the god of words and string them one by one into a necklace of stories. I wanted to play with the magic of the imagination as I had done when I was a child. I wished to feel the same joy as when, page by page, I printed the first draft of my first novel. With “Beyond the Moons of August” I once again wanted to hear readers telling me that they had enjoyed reading my work. I wanted to see my novel in print and to feel my heart race as it has done when I held in my hands the first printed copy of *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria*. I needed to write another novel because I had become intoxicated with everything that is associated with being a writer. I had become addicted to paper and ink!

After pondering for a while, I realised that I had a good formula in my first novel. *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria* had been reasonably successful and readers had liked it. Why not write a novel starting where this book had ended? I had now a lot of experience; I had received feedback from many people and I knew what to do to improve my style. So once again I submerged myself in the past; I fished out a few skeletons and wrote a plan for “Beyond the Moons of August”.

Ritualistically, I cleaned up my study, burned a candle and incense and sat on the floor with a large piece of butcher's paper. The whiteness of the paper dragged me into it, and I felt anxious at its emptiness, the edges of the paper seemed to become barriers which imprisoned me. Yet the large black marker in my hand told me that I was in control and not the emptiness of the paper. All I had to do to fill that space was to spill onto it the vast universe held in my mind. It was all there: a fountain of words, images, fantasy, imagination; I with my hundred and one personae; and a particular grammar, a syntax, a vocabulary that I felt to be mine alone.

Once the fear subsided, effortlessly I covered the paper with ideas and possibilities. Arrows travelled joining names, places, dates and ideas. Dates grounded the plot and the sequences of events. Names for characters were listed as their faces and qualities took shape in my mind. By the end of that day I had a clear idea of what I wanted to write. How I was to write it I would decide later.

Like many writers, I found that insecurity knocked at my door. Many nights I spent awake until the early hours of the morning, having conversations with myself about the characters, about the plot, about the ideas. Were my characters too 'Latino'? Would the plot be of any interest to readers of Anglo-Celtic background? What about the publishers?
Would they be interested in an unusual manuscript about a bohemian artist/writer whose life’s dream was to live in Australia? And the humour? I was always able to make people laugh when I gave talks, or told stories, but was I going to be able to conjure that humour in my manuscript? I wondered for days how to judge the value of my ideas. Finally, an opportunity arrived. I saw advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Sydney Writers Festival, ‘Pitch Your Story Competition’. No more agonising! I was going to be able to test my ideas.

I submitted my plan with the idea for “Beyond the Moons of August” and it was selected to be pitched to a judging panel and presented for public appraisal. More anxiety, more wondering and pondering on how best to present the idea to win this competition. I realised that I had to do a different sort of presentation in order to stand out from the other participants. I made two decisions. One, to pitch the story from the main character’s point of view, and two, to write it in the form of a poem.

With trembling legs and shaking hands I walked to the microphone. In a corner of the room a lectern had been set for the competitors to read their work. I stood there for a second looking at the expectant crowd. Was I about to run away with my papers under my arm to hide in my car and cry all the way home? Was I going to stay there and
win that audience? I decided that I was staying and that I would present a confident and professional performance. Three minutes were at my disposal. This is what I read that night.

I AM GABRIELA, A CHARACTER IN A BOOK

I am Gabriela a character in a book.

My life, like an exotic Persian carpet, will unravel throughout the pages of a manuscript yet to be written.

The writer will tell the story of the events that shaped my life and sculpted my being.

The writer's computer will blush as she unleashes the passions that for years were wrapped in the cellophane paper of a patriarchal and rigid culture.

A metamorphosis, unlike Kafka's will take you on a woman's passage from adolescence to adulthood.

Tales of a marriage and children,
of money, power, sex and politics
will be splattered on the pages
of a book, or on the big screen.
The magic of Latin America
runs through my veins
and you the reader,
the movie goer,
will share with me
moments in which fantasy and reality
intertwine with each other.
You will feel in your body
the dirty politics of Latin America,
as I plunge into two worlds:
one bathed in the secrecy
of illegal politics—
the world of the *Montoneros*
and another, the artistic world.
Poetry became my sustenance
and poets my lovers.
With the police biting my heels
I needed to find asylum
for me and my family,

once I had seen at the movies,
in an old and faded newsreel,
a place called Australia
where young people
without a care in the world
ran and played
on golden beaches.

And I Gabriela, a character
in "The August Moons"
escaped with a suitcase,
and a bag of full of dreams,
to this faraway land
where I found freedom,
knowledge and love!

You will laugh with me
as I learn to speak strine,
to smoke pot, and
to drink flagon wine,
in those liberating years
in the Australia of the 70s.
You will see Sydney
through my eyes,
and the 70s will unfold
like a Spanish fan...

The public and the judges laughed throughout my presentation. The more they laughed the more confident I became. With joy and exhilaration I listened as I was told that I had won the First Prize and the opportunity for Random House to read and assess the novel with the possibility of publishing it.

A representative for Penguin who was amongst the public also approached me and gave me her card requesting that I contact her as soon as I had finished the manuscript. Yes, I had a good idea! And that is how the idea and the plan for “Beyond the Moons of August” was born.
CHAPTER THREE

THE NOVEL
Let the magic begin

Have I read an Australian novel similar to "Beyond the Moons of August"? No, I haven’t. There may be similar books to my manuscript, but so far I have not come across or read any that I would consider as having the same style as this novel. Perhaps it could be said that the work has a Latin-American flavour. True, but my novel is somehow different to those of well-known Latin-American writers such as Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Maria de los Angeles Mastreta, Vargas Lloza, or Carlos Cortazar, amongst others. As I have said before, I have lived in Australia for thirty years and I am no longer familiar with contemporary Latin-American literature, except with authors who have been translated into English—those I have just mentioned. There may be some authors who write in a similar style to mine, but if there are, I am not aware of them.

Comparing "Beyond the Moons of August" with works written by the above mentioned authors, the reader may identify 'magic' as one of the common elements. Various reviewers, teachers and readers have compared my writing to that of magic-realist writers. My first novel published in Australia, Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria, was considered a magic-realist novel. Professor Michael Wilding made the following comments: "I first read the book when Beatriz was a student of
mine in the creative writing course. She delivered this most amazing, enchanting and exciting novel as part of the requirements for the MA degree. I thought it was a tremendous read and should be published and now it has been."  

On the back cover of the book Professor Wilding describes my novel as: "The most magical of magic realism. An enchanting account of a young girl's growing up in South America and her relationship with her unforgettable father. Exotic, evocative and absolutely compelling reading."

In a review of the book, Marisa Cano writes: "I loved the language, the tone, the voice used to tell this story. Beatriz Copello's style is simple and accessible, yet—precisely because of this simplicity and accessibility —highly poetic and evocative. The combination of two voices at the beginning of the novel (the child Gabriela and its alter-ego or ancient soul) that progressively shape into a single one is an ingenious literary device used effectively by the author to create that sense of surrealism of all beginnings."  

In another review, Anna Maria Dell’oso comments: "The novel tells the story of Gabriela and her coming of age in the Argentina of the

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50s. This absorbing novel is a garden of beauties and cruelties, and its fractured fairytale of growing up in the middle of machismo, decadence, wealth, poverty, and dependency unfolds with a cinematic power. I saw its images very much as a film and I will not be surprised if one day it attracts the notice of a producer and is made into a film—a magic-realism art film."7

Because of some of the magical elements included in "Beyond the Moons of August" this novel could be classified as a magic-realist novel.

The term magic realism was first utilised by the German critic Franz Roh in 1925 when referring to a group of Post-Expressionist painters who showed the objective world in a different way. Later, in 1955, Angel Flores applied the term to Spanish-American writers. Magic realism has been defined as writing in which the author deals with the fantastic as the normal, without surprises or amazement. The most well known novel commonly described as a magic-realist novel is One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

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In magic realism, reality becomes magical and what is unreal becomes real. Supernatural elements appear as part of the natural world. The magic realist writer deforms reality and in many cases without the constraints of time and space.

Characters in magic realist novels accept the unreal without questioning the unnatural characteristics of events and they never seem bedazzled by these.

Folklore has also been considered an integral part of this genre.

I very much like the definition of magic realism given by S.E. Denney who says:

Magic realism is that literature which crosses the border between two separate literary discourses, the realistic and the magical. In their most polarised forms, "realism" refers to a literary discourse that represents those aspects of the world open to empirical proof, whereas "magic" refers to the literary system that admits the existence of something which can not be empirically proven, the existence of the supernatural. The supernatural, however, takes culturally specific forms, consisting of many different local manifestations with a variety of different laws and characteristics. In joining these contrasting literary systems, magic realism disrupts the traditional meanings of these terms and obscures the hierarchy of
realism over magic which reflects conventional Western epistemologies. In upsetting this hierarchy magic realism allows for and encourages the disruption of further hierarchical binaries.8

Although the genre of magic realism was born in Latin-America it is strongly associated with post-modern literature generally and has been taken up by many post-modern writers from all corners of the world. 


I can summarise the main characteristics of magic realism by saying:

• a magic realist narrator creates the illusion of 'unreality'
• reality becomes magical

• characters, objects and events appear natural
• explanations about unnatural events are not given
• characters appear not surprised by the magic
• the magic is uncontrollable and inexplicable
• it may incorporate folk history specific to the local culture
• it contains social critique in overt or covert ways
• the fragment is a common unit of construction
• narrative boundaries are often blurred
• objectivity and subjectivity are bent and genres crossed.

In “Beyond the Moons of August”, both Gabriela (as narrator) and the omniscient narrator, create an illusion of 'unreality' where 'reality' becomes 'magical'. This happens for example when Gabriela sees Julian walk over water and in the scene when this character distributes bread and Gabriela realises that the bread never finishes. On these occasions, as well as in others, Gabriela accepts this as reality, never questioning these events.
In contrast, at the beginning of the novel, when Gabriela sees her father ascend to the ceiling and beyond, and she tells her mother that she has seen her father, her mother does not believe her, although there is ash on the bed and the floor from the father's cigarette. This is uncharacteristic of magic realism, as characters never question the 'unreality' of events.

In most magic realist novels the magic appears to be associated with most characters. In "Beyond the Moons of August" the magic is only associated with Gabriela. She is the only one who sees the Elementals, who hears a bird prattle, who sees and speaks to spirits. For Gabriela all magical characters appear natural, she doesn't question their existence. Yet she doesn't control this magic.

One of the most salient characteristics of magic realism is the covert and overt social criticism. In "Beyond the Moons of August" the social criticism is both covert and overt. The ways in which police repression, the exploitation of workers, and the repression of women are
represented, as well as the subversive nature of the Runa Arts Group, are all very clear examples of social criticism.

I consider the novel "Beyond the Moons of August" to be a hybrid narrative with some characteristics of magic realism. It is an original and different work not merely because it contains magical elements, because I utilise two narrators to tell the story instead of one, I use different modes and forms within the novel, and I introduce each section with a device. I consider that this novel is not completely a magic realist novel, rather it has magical, realist and surrealist flavours.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE WRITER
The power of words

Writing is power. Since that first moment when I held a pencil in my hand and insecurely scribbled on the paper, the act of transforming my ideas into words, into sentences, paragraphs, and stories provided me with the sense that writing could turn me into a 'god'. Whilst writing I feel in control. I create; I give life to worlds, to people, to circumstances.

From my earliest years I have loved reading and writing; at the age of ten I produced six copies of a small magazine *Martita* which I named after my best friend. With dedication I carefully copied each word and re-drew the same pictures six times. Motivation, determination and love went into those rounded letters which capriciously refused to fit into a perfect line.

Like "Beyond the Moons of August", *Martita* was in a way, a political production as in it I declared my love and loyalty to the charismatic Eva Peron.9 Pouring my admiration and affection into those pieces of paper patiently sewn into minuscule booklets was an act of rebellion. My father detested Peron and called Eva "the dictator's prostitute wife". His family, too was extremely anti-Peronist. Oh how powerful I felt by going against my father's beliefs!

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9 Eva Peron (1919-1952), the wife of Argentina's then-dictator, General Juan Peron.
Reading and writing for me have always come hand in hand.

Reading developed in me a respect and attachment for languages, first Spanish, then Italian and now English. I have to thank my mother for my love of reading. From a very early age she would read to me at mealtimes and at bedtime. With every peso she saved, she bought books for me. When I learned to read, we sat for hours together reading our books — fairy tales, stories about witches, fantasy stories, comics, and other magical types of books which developed in me a taste for the occult, the esoteric and the unusual.

Magic and imagination have always been my allies. My childhood was not a happy one, so to escape from the pain and anguish that I suffered I created the Lions' Kingdom. This was a magical place where I was the Queen, lions were my friends and I had the power to communicate with them. Everyone in my kingdom respected and served me; to control my kingdom I had my magic and my lions. With my magic I made people obey. If there was anyone in my life who I didn't like, in my kingdom I would turn them into animals. The nasty craft teacher who reprimanded me for not finishing the embroidering of a table cloth was turned into a dog; the boy who tugged my plaits I changed into a rabbit; the nun who pulled my ears for swearing was metamorphosed into an old goat. With the help of my magic wand I produced sweets and cakes which
I shared only with my lions. In the lonely afternoons of my childhood, I spent hours under a cement bench believing that I was in my kingdom. Sometimes I wrote stories to read to the lions, other times I designed the beautiful clothes that I was going to wear in my palace. Every night, before going to sleep, I would relate to my younger sister what I had done in the Lions' Kingdom that day. This fantasy disappeared as I grew up, leaving within me an emptiness which I filled with writing.

At eleven years of age I wrote my first poem. Spring had touched me ... the smell of the jasmine, the peach trees in flower, the warm weather after a particularly cold winter, and a new and unusual feeling stirring within me compelled me to write a poem. That pathetic little piece was received by my mother with no enthusiasm at all. "All poets starve to death", she said. My father, on the contrary, was very encouraging and promised to help me have my poetry published, although he never did. Nevertheless, the passion for writing remained.

As an adolescent, I was not allowed to socialise much, so the main source of my entertainment continued to be reading and writing poetry. In the confines of my bedroom I read most of the classic writers from European and North and South American origins. Then, I discovered the existentialist writers! I devoured Sartre, Kafka, Camus, Ionesco, Genet, Moravia, Dostoevsky, Beckett and others. I felt these people gave sense
to my life — an absurd existence controlled by my despotic father. My writings in those days were sad and obscure pieces that reflected my depressed mood: poems that spoke of freedom and rebellion, of self-determination and the breaking of chains, and about power and control.

Reading over "Beyond the Moons of August" for this annotation, I realised that, in a way, the prevailing themes in this novel are about these very same things.
CHAPTER FIVE

VOICE AND METAPHOR
Hear my voice: I have something to tell you

My voice is that of a woman who grew up in a society in which males had supreme power. In “Beyond the Moons of August”, my voice is not a loud or accusing one. My voice is hidden in the stories I tell. It's not a muffled voice, yet opinions are not directly given. My words present the reader with events in which male dominance is obvious. I write for the intelligent reader, for the one who is able to assess different situations and realise what my voice is saying: who I make fun of, who I ridicule, what my values are. I want to encourage my readers to think, to analyse, to judge the different situations and to draw their own conclusions.

My voice is a voice coloured by the exploitation I suffered in my younger years, not only in a male-dominated society, but a society ruled by dictators, demagogues, the army and corrupt politicians. A society which I left in search of freedom: freedom to speak, to write and to think what I wanted without the fear of being imprisoned or punished for it.

My metaphors mostly relate to freedom — freedom which comes with power: the power to be oneself, the power to make decisions, the power to own one's body, the power to ignore the patriarchal and tyrannical commands from church and government.

When Gabriela's father dies, she suggests to her mother that they kill themselves. Dying means they won't have to face their financial
problems. Death is a metaphor for freedom: freedom from the pain of having lost her father, freedom from the sufferings of a life without sufficient economic means.

Gabriela searches for a job which will offend her father's family, the conservative and upper class Vaccaros. She wants to break away from their rigid morality; she wants to be free from their control.

After Gabriela discovers Bondi, she wants to travel to Australia, where the sea is also a metaphor for freedom. 'The blond gods', without a care in the world, bathe and sunbake by the sea. She wants that freedom!

Gabriela is an ingénue; she believes that marriage will set her free. She sells herself into marriage to solve her family's economic problems. Trapped in an unhappy situation, she withdraws into herself. The reader doesn't know what happens during that period. Her self-imposed catatonic state gives her the freedom to avoid her unhappy marriage and boring life. She wakes up one day from her chrysalis state to discover she is emerging as a new woman in search of freedom.

The new Gabriela metamorphoses. She even changes her hair colour.

She wants to transcend and she does so through painting and writing which are also metaphors for freedom. But she doesn't find
freedom in her art. On the contrary, her art places her at risk — the police have created a file on her because she has become a subversive element.

Perhaps a Christ-like person such as Julian, who walks on water, can give Gabriela the gift of freedom with his ideology, but he is killed, and with his death, his ideologies. Communism, another possible source of freedom, doesn't satisfy Gabriela.

In order to avoid persecution, the young woman escapes to the land of her dreams. Poor Gabriela! In Australia, again she falls for a man, believing the romantic myth of the 'prince who will take her away on a white horse'.

The final metaphor of freedom is the last scene in "Beyond the Moons of August", when Gabriela, by the sea, realises that she is where she wants to be and that in Australia she has options. She will age in the land of the blond gods where finally she will find freedom within herself.
CHAPTER SIX
THE STRUCTURE
Grains of sand that made a beach

While planning "Beyond the Moons of August", I decided to split the novel into three parts because I felt that this division was more appropriate to the style of the novel. Part one of the manuscript deals with Gabriela mourning her father's death and the difficulties her family confront because of their financial situation. In this part Gabriela discovers Bondi, "Sidni", Australia, and makes plans to reach this magical place, only to find her plans interrupted by marriage. At this stage Gabriela is still an adolescent whose steps through life are insecure, tentative and inexperienced. Gabriela is an adolescent who in many ways is a grown-up, like when she takes responsibility for her family by marrying Saul, or when she gives her gold chain to her friend to sell in order for her to pay for the restoration of her virginity. She is an adolescent who in many ways is still a child, such as when she practices her grandmother's magic, when she seeks to embarrass her father's family by looking for a job as a strip-tease artist or a model, and when she suggests to her mother that they kill themselves.

The second part of the novel presents the reader with what I consider to be Gabriela's transformation. She has been married for a few years, has two daughters, and realises that she has been 'living without living'. Gabriela undergoes a metamorphosis. After her long hibernation
she wakes up ready to explore not only her artistic talents but also the possibilities of love, sex and politics. In this part Gabriela is almost a woman. She becomes aware of her marital situation and seeks ways to liberate herself. It is as an adult that she finally departs for the land of her dreams. This part ends with Gabriela migrating to Australia.

The third and final part relates to Gabriela's adventures in Australia. In her new country she finally sees clearly that life offers a myriad of possibilities and that freedom lies within herself.

Each of the three parts of this novel has been divided into sections. Each section is introduced by a specific device from the following:

- poetry
- prayers
- swear words and expressions of feeling
- statements about certain issues
- dictionary definitions
- crosswords directions
- Jewish names
- definitions made by me
- an incantation to attract males
- biblical psalm
- invitation to a ball
• police records and
• Personal notes from Gabriela.

I have utilised similar devices in Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria.

The purpose of most of the devices is to slow the narrative, prompting the reader to pause and ponder prior to reading the ensuing text. Also, through these devices I want my novel to bring the reader closer to Gabriela's reality—a fictitious reality in which an invitation, a letter, a note, a police record and so on, provides a more concrete aspect. As opposed to the magic in the manuscript, these devices add a reality to this pretend world of fiction, bringing a balance to the story.

The story of "Beyond the Moons of August" is told in a variety of forms and modes. I have done this mainly because I enjoy the experimentation—like Gabriela I enjoy plunging headlong into different things.

In "Beyond the Moons of August" I utilise poetry for various reasons. One of them is that I believe nowadays poetry is not given the place it deserves in the literary world. I include poetry, then, to promote this form. Another reason is that with poetry the writer can convey a message in a very succinct way utilising vivid imagery. The use of poetry in my manuscript is a means of slowing the narrative, and metaphorically
a way of saying: "Stop, think, meditate, something interesting is coming."

Why poetry in Spanish? In the first section of "Beyond the Moons of August", I include the translation of the poems in Spanish to give the reader the ambience of the novel, to set his or her mind in the Latino culture, inviting the reader to experience another language and, for those who understand Spanish, to enjoy the musicality of this Romantic language. I had not intended to include the Spanish translation in the later part of the novel when Gabriela is in Australia, but after careful consideration I decided to continue translating the poems for consistency and because I believe they add a different dimension to the story.

I wrote the play "The Traitor" to encapsulate a single story with Gabriela and a group of characters who do not reappear in the novel.

The plot of the play is simple but strong thematically. Gabriela financially helps her friend Betty to restore her virginity to ensure that her forthcoming marriage is not annulled. Gabriela's innocence plays her a bad deal. After the deed is done, Betty disappears from Gabriela's life, as does Ernesto, Gabriela's sweetheart. During the third and final act, Gabriela finds out that Betty had discouraged Ernesto from marrying her 'best friend Gabriela'. Gabriela had posed a threat to Betty because she
knew about her friend's repaired virginity. Gabriela had to be kept away because Betty's husband is Ernesto's best friend.

Since I read *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant I have thought, and I still think, that this is one of the best short stories ever written. With this play I had the ambition to emulate de Maupassant by creating a piece which was short, had a moral to the story, was succinct yet well developed, and which at the end, forced the reader to say mentally, or perhaps aloud: ahaaa!

I decided to split the play into three parts, and using these parts at different points in the novel to create suspense and to keep the reader’s attention and memory titillated.

Diary writing, as opposed to journal writing, I believe is a very female genre. I include diary entries in “Beyond the Moons of August” because I want to honour this practice. Also I imagine that Gabriela was the sort of person who would keep a diary. She rarely talks about her feelings or problems, she keeps everything inside, a diary is the perfect way to include some of her reflections, worries and meditations.

As a writer, I always write copious notes about everything relevant to my current or possible future projects. I carry a notebook with me all the time in order not to miss anything that I consider worth recording. For example, in my notebooks I record words that I hear whose
meaning I don’t know; I write descriptions of faces for future reference. I sketch interesting places which later I utilise as scenery in different pieces of writing. In my notebook, I write lists of words I like, lists of goals I want to achieve and lists of personality traits for the development of my characters. I ensure that I write down most of my ideas for new stories, poems, plays or novels. Gabriela is also a writer so I saw fit that she should write notes as well.

Like Gabriela I worked in Scarba House. Many occasions while on night duty I wondered who could have lived in such a beautiful house. At the time, in the early seventies, I made enquiries but no one was able to tell me anything about its origins. While writing “Beyond the Moons of August”, and while surfing the Internet searching for information about Bondi, I came across the Waverly Council site. There I found a mention of Scarba House and its first owner. This fired my imagination and that night I wrote "The Sad Story of Elizabeth Campbell-Smyth" to be included in “Beyond the Moons of August”.

When migrants are uprooted from their birthplace they need to keep in touch with what they have left behind. In the past, letter writing was the bridge that kept many migrants in touch with their homeland. Nowadays e-mail serves that purpose. The letter that Gabriela writes for Irma and Andres is not only a bridge to what she has left behind but also
a good-bye. This letter symbolically seals her past. Gabriela writes the letter on the plane, on the way to Sydney. She tells her friends that she knows her destiny, her future, and that her life is in 'Sidni'. She doesn't say that she expects to return to Argentina. In saying good-bye to her friends, she farewells her past. I couldn't think of anything better than a letter to close a chapter in Gabriela's life.

The story of "Beyond the Moons of August" is told by first and third person narrators, focalised through Gabriela. This is a technique which I also utilise in *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria*.

In *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria*, I introduce the third person narrator when I want to distance Gabriela from the telling of a traumatic or difficult life event.

I continue with this practice in "Beyond the Moons of August" because I feel it breaks the monotony which employing only a first person narrator can produce. I also believe that the use of the third person narrator gives more credibility to Gabriela's story in that this narrator can be more objective.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WRITING PROCESS
My approach to writing

As a writer I am introverted in the sense that I like to work on my own. I rely strongly on my intuition, but also I spend a lot of time thinking what I should write before doing so.

Intuition plays an important part in my writing. I tend to write, write, write and then to judge and edit. I learned to trust my intuition and rarely has my intuition failed me. When writing "Beyond the Moons of August" I utilised my normal writing process. I wrote following a plan, but the actual content came from deep within myself. When I write I hardly stop to think, I hear a voice in my mind which dictates what I have to write. As I write I also see in my mind's eye what I am writing as a movie.

Prior to writing anything, I think a lot about what I am about to write, judging in my mind different ideas and propositions. Some people may believe this is a waste of time; my mother and teachers used to criticise me when I was a child, saying, "You are not paying attention". But they were wrong. I was thinking and judging what I had to do.

Although sometimes I find it difficult to distance myself from my writing, I believe that I am a reasonably good judge of my work. Perhaps I am too self-critical and tend to be a perfectionist. I want to write everything perfectly which is impossible considering that English is not...
my first language. I get very upset when I fail to recognise an error in spelling, or in a verb tense, or make other grammatical mistakes.

As stated before, many of my ideas for writing come from my life experience. These ideas are then modified according to how I feel on the day I am writing, what book I am reading at the time, what writer I have heard speak, or what emotions are controlling my reasoning.

If I evoke a particular experience in which I had a disappointment, when I am writing I explore different courses of action to the one that I may have taken. I may ask myself: "What should I have said?" "What would be the consequences if I had acted differently?"

Another technique I employ is to exaggerate my personal experiences to the point where they become humorous or ironic tales.

Sometimes if I am angry with someone I utilise their personality in the development of a nasty character and then submit this character to humiliating circumstances.

Dreams played a very important part in my writing of "Beyond the Moons of August" and other work. My dreams offer me a rich source of background material for the development of plots and characters. My short story "Hope" which won a prize in the "Peace Through Literature Competition—1996", was entirely based on a dream.
As the result of my fondness for fantasy, magic, mysticism and all that is esoteric, I blend my reality or the reality of my characters with fantastic elements.

When I sat down at my computer to write “Beyond the Moons of August” I knew that I had to write about a particular event or situation but I had no idea what I was going to write.

Sometimes ideas flowed easily. I saw them in my mind's eye with cinematic quality. I believe this to be the case because I love the cinema. I value images in the same way that I value evocative prose.

Writing for me is like a meditative state: I immerse myself in what I'm doing and whatever is happening outside of my mind vanishes from my attention.

I also find writing very cathartic. Writing about the death of Gabriela's father proved to be cleansing. When young, I wanted to be an actress, something of which my father bitterly disapproved. As an adolescent, I had been invited to join an amateur theatre group. The night I received the invitation I begged my father to let me join the group. I argued and insisted until he became very angry and, hitting the table, said: "If with my life I can prevent you becoming an actress I hope that tonight I kill myself on the road."

And he did.
After his death and until recently, I had a recurring dream in which I killed and buried someone. The police have found out and are coming to remove the body and, of course, they will find out that I have killed this person and they will arrest me. Since the death of my father, this nightmare has caused me enormous anxiety, but I had never associated it with my father's death. When I was writing about the death of Gabriela's father, the image of that dream hit me hard and in that moment I realised that the person I had killed and buried was my father. From that moment on I have never had this dream again.

When writing "Beyond the Moons of August" I allowed my writing to flow in order not to stunt my creativity. Once ideas were on the paper I edited. I strongly believe that most writing comes from the subconscious mind. If the writer is too self-critical, the subconscious, as a matter of protection, will block the writer's creativity. I consider that the subconscious does this to protect the writer—preventing him or her from making a fool of themselves.

Many of my characters are different aspects of myself, aspects of my personality, my different personae. Gabriela and Julian, for example, if not exactly me, are what I was, what I would have liked to be; they are my children, they are extensions of my personality.
Most of the characters in this novel are based on real people but changed and adjusted to fit the story. Prior to writing and as part of the planning process, I developed a list of attributes, peculiarities, likes and dislikes for some of the characters. This allowed me to get to know them even before I wrote about them. Other characters I knew intuitively.

In “Beyond the Moons of August” there are two cultural types of character: Latino-Argentinian and Anglo-Celtic Australian. The Latin characters are, on the whole, more dramatic, effusive, unrestrained, impulsive and intense. Perhaps this sounds as though I am describing the stereotype of Latinos and, in a way, I am, because I believe that stereotypes carry some truth in them. The Anglo-Celtic characters in the novel are more matter of fact, direct, honest and straightforward. Rightly or wrongly that is how I perceive Argentinians and Anglo-Celtic Australians!

Gabriela adapts very quickly and learns how to behave like the others. She is no fool; when she does the ‘wrong thing’ she is able to save face by the use of her imagination and powers of persuasion. Not so her creator—me!
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WRITER'S IDENTITY CRISIS
Who the hell am I?

For some unknown reason I never felt that I belonged in Argentina. I always sensed that it was not the place for me. Like Gabriela, since I was an adolescent I wanted to leave the country. In Argentina I felt suffocated, constricted, restricted, and repressed. In Argentina I had no wings, or rather my wings had been clipped.

In Australia I adapted very quickly to the environment and its people. I was convinced that I belonged here. Unfortunately, often people made me feel to the contrary. They would ask questions like "Are you going back home?" and I would cringe because my home was here! Other people would make comments about my accent, reminding me that I was different. Often when people find out that I am a writer they ask: "In what language do you write?" or "Do you write in Spanish?" I used to take offence at these questions but I have now steeled myself to ignore such remarks.

Has migration affected my voice as writer? Yes. As a migrant writer I have to be extremely conscious of the quality of the language I employ. Furthermore, I continuously have to ensure that what I write does
not sound like the words of a 'tango' song.\textsuperscript{10} I have to keep in mind the Australian culture and nature. This has instilled a degree of insecurity which I try to conquer. I don't believe that I have an identity crisis, I know exactly who I am and what I have to offer. I have a dual identity. It is as if I have two personalities. When I am with English-speaking people I behave in one way and when I am amongst Spanish-speaking people I behave in another. Also I write in different ways depending whether I write in Spanish or English.

In 1996, I was invited to present a paper for the American Association for Australian Literary Studies Conference, at Humboldt University, Arcata, California, exploring my identity and my writings. The following is verbatim what I presented at the conference:

At each stage in their life humans need to solve particular crises, jump hurdles or resolve an issue in the particular life stage they are in. For example mothers, when their children grow up and leave home to live independently, face the crisis of separation. Aging in adulthood is another typical crisis. Childhood, adolescence, and adulthood all bring a crisis to resolve, a conundrum that needs an answer. In adolescence the crisis is finding the answer to the question ‘Who am I?’.

\textsuperscript{10} Tango words are often melodramatic, intense and florid.
I am a mature woman, who has passed the adolescence stage, but in the course of my career as a writer I am often asked to define my identity, a task that forces me to ask the question typical of adolescence: 'Who am I?'

I'll start by telling you how other people define me. Not long ago I read my poetry during Feminist Book Fortnight. I was asked to read at this function because they said: "You're a 'feminist writer'!" The Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (S.T.A.R.T.T.S.) invited me to read at their annual soirée because they believed I am a 'political writer'. The Multicultural Arts Alliance asked me to participate in their 'Big Event' because I was a 'multicultural writer'. Last week I received an acceptance to publish my short story "Out of a bird and into a paper bag" from a 'surrealist-existentialist' journal. The editor in the letter of acceptance said: "We surrealist-existentialist writers have little opportunity to publish." I was shocked as the afternoon I wrote that piece I said to myself, "I'll write a nice post-modern story."

Well these are just some examples of what people believe I am. Those who haven't labelled me continue to ask me about my identity and how I define myself, as well as what informs my writing. Good questions, so I search for answers because I am a nice person and I like pleasing people, especially if by defining myself I get to write in my C.V. that I presented a paper at such prestigious conferences as this one.

So back to the question of: How do I judge myself? How do I define myself? What is my culture? What part of me has more relevance than another in defining my identity? Am I different from other Australian writers? But aren't we all different from each other? Didn't George Orwell say: "We are all different but some are more different than others"? Did I get that right? If I am
different what makes me different? Is it my name? Is it the colour of my eyes?
Is it the fact that I was born far away from where I choose to live? Oh! I nearly
forgot! Is it my accent?

Let's say if I am asked to define myself it must be because I am
different but I want to know different from whom? This is very hard but I'll try
again. This time I'll try some labels.

I am:

A poet
A psychologist
White, I mean pinkish
Australian citizen
Woman
Public servant
Environmentalist
Feminist
DINK - Double income no kids
Inner city resident
Mother
Etc, etc.

Do all of these labels define me? Yes, in the same way as they define
other fellow Australian writers. So where does the difference lie?

Let me analyse this from another angle. Perhaps I'm different because I
learned English in my twenties and not when I was three years old. Or perhaps
it might be because I was born on the other side of the world — right opposite
to Australia, in Argentina.
OK! OK! You were born and went to school in Argentina, that must make you different. Let's see ... when I was growing up in Argentina the country was one of the wealthiest in the world and people from all over the world migrated there to become rich. At the time the standard of living and educational levels in Argentina were higher than many European countries. Argentina then wasn't a third world country. So I come from a country very similar to Australia. Even the names have something in common: both start with A and end with A and both names have the same number of letters. In both countries the traditional dishes are pastry filled with meat; in Argentina they call them *empanadas*, in Australia *meat pies*. A lot of coincidences—I bet Shirley Maclaine could make something out of this.

Continuing with Argentina, have you heard the saying: "Argentinians are Italians who speak Spanish, live in French style houses and think they are English"? Well at least my family believed they were, and they all behaved like Anglos.

But back to the crucial question: who am I? Maybe I am Italian? You must take into account that three of my grandparents were Italians. But perhaps I am a Celt. Let me explain why I believe I am a Celt. Last year I went to Scotland, it rained for ninety days and nights, sorry that's in the Bible—I am getting my stories mixed up. Believe me, it seemed like ninety days. Anyhow in Scotland I developed a keen interest in the Celts. While it rained I read books and books about them. Well I never! I found out that the original inhabitants of Chiavari, in Italy, where part of my family came from, were Celts. These Celts were the Ligurians who refused to mix with the
mean Romans and remained racially pure for centuries. Then, if I am descended from the Ligurians, I must be part Celt!

In fact I might be double Celt because of my Spanish ancestors. Three of my grandparents are Italians and one Spanish. My Spanish grandfather came from the north of Spain, from an area which was also originally inhabited by the Celts, this mysterious and brave race. There is no doubt about it—I am a true Celt!

... And I'm not making all this up like some award-winning writer. What was her name DDD Demi ... something?

So what am I? Just plain Beatriz Copello, a poet, a writer, a feminist, etc, etc.

Hang on, if you are not different from other Australian writers then your ... your ... writings must be different ... you ... speak a bit funny ... errr ... and your accent ... so ... I know! I know! Let me guess: you write in Spanish and then you translate into English.

Wroooong! I write in English when I want to write in English and I write in Spanish when I want to write in Spanish. Once my brain subconsciously could manipulate the structures of the English language, the right side of my brain started to send me poems in English! Can you believe it? You, one of those, a wog, a Latina, a multicultural, an ethnic, a NESB? You actually write in English. Unbelievable!

I am fed up with people who, when they find out I am a writer, the first thing they ask is: "Do you write in your own language?" They mean Spanish. The last time someone asked me I said, "NO! I write in Chinese, Russian, and Swahili and when I'm bored I write in English." That shut them up.
So if you are not different from other Australian writers, and if you do write in English, then where do your ideas come from? What about your themes, your plots? Yes! Yes! Yes! It is in your themes, your ideas, and your plots that all your *wogness* appears. Wrong again. I write about similar topics to all other writers: people, relationships, political issues, current topics, nature, love, sex, pollution, more sex, in fact a lot about sex. All you have to do is read my book of poetry *Women Souls and Shadows*.

Let me ask you another question: Would you be writing the same thing if you were living in Argentina? Are you mad? Do you think I would like to be killed? Most definitely not! If I were in Argentina I would write about inflation and the starving masses. I would write tangos not lesbian poetry. Didn't you know that homosexuality doesn't exist in Catholic South America?

Finally, we are getting somewhere. So there is something that informs your writing: your sexuality perhaps? Yes and no. I do not only write about lesbian issues or topics, I also write about the environment, about people, about nature and so on—but let me tell you something about language.

Language, whether written or spoken, is essential for human beings to maintain culture, accumulate knowledge and communication. A very common assumption made is that language is a neutral medium for the transmission of ideas.

Traditional linguists, from the time of ancient Greece, interpreted language as a system of forms to which meanings are attached. This view of language has in recent times been challenged. Many modern linguists, contrary to this view, believe that language is a system of meanings realised through forms.
The structures used in any text are related to social factors. Different social situations in any given culture call for a particular kind of text, whether it is written or oral.

Linguistics uses the term text for the language people produce and react to, whether written, read or listened to. Fiction, poetry, debate are all samples of text. Text has two properties: meaning and choice. Text is realised through words and sentences, and is made of meaning.

Text is choice because it represents a selection made from various options: "What was said" as opposed to "What was not said". Different conditions influence the choices we make. Each text relates to each social situation and all texts are socially formed. Every text is embedded with a political, an ideological or economic discourse. Text also can be public or private. For example in the beginning of this text I utilise private text which is colloquial, and may be light and funny. In the later part of this text, I utilise public text and some academic jargon.

Within each society, each culture and subculture shares social structures, its processes and the language associated with these. The meaning that permeates the language is made by institutions such as the family, educational institutions, political parties, the media, and so on.

For example, if we considered Australian gay and lesbian fiction in the light of this theoretical framework, it can be argued that gay and lesbian Australian writing represents an Australian ideological and political position. Gay and lesbian writers, whether they be a fiction writer, a poet, a journalist or a playwright, provide with their text a position for their readers which reflects the Australian gay and lesbian culture.
I believe that there is in Australia (especially in Sydney) a very definite gay and lesbian culture. Homosexuality is not just sexual behaviour. Homosexuality involves social, psychological, cultural and in many cases spiritual exchanges. Those exchanges are carried out in our particularly Australian way. Similar perhaps to the exchanges in Oslo, Amsterdam or San Francisco, but with our own particular flavour, our very own spoken and written text.

Summarising, I will leave you with some profound and meaningful words. I am what I am! I am an Australian writer who writes Australian writing whether or not you decide I am a Celt or a Latina.

Concluding, I can say with certainty that my voice as a writer has been affected by the migration process. I cannot deny the fact that I am the person I have become, because I was born in Argentina, and because I have lived in Australia for thirty years. If I had stayed in Argentina I would have been a very different writer to what I am today. This dual identity, which I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, has allowed me to compare different worlds and to bring that variety into my identity and writing voice.
CHAPTER NINE

IN CONVERSATION WITH A WRITER FRIEND
Pearlie McNeill asks the questions

I have included in this annotation the following interview with writer Pearlie McNeill,11 believing this writer might bring into the picture a different focus and approach with respect to the various areas of writing.

Pearlie: The first thing I want to ask you is how long has it taken you to work on this book and where did the ideas begin?

Beatriz: I started to write “Beyond the Moons of August” when I enrolled at the University of Wollongong in the Doctor of Creative Arts Degree, which is now three years ago.

Pearlie: Did you start the course with the idea for the book in mind?

Beatriz: Yes I did! At the beginning of the same year I enrolled in the Doctor of Creative Arts Degree, I had entered the idea for “Beyond the Moons of August” in the 'Pitch Your Story Competition' organised by the Sydney Writers Festival. In this competition writers suggest an idea for a novel or a film and, if the idea is selected the writer then has to pitch it to a judging panel. My idea was selected from amongst 150 entries. I was

11 Pearlie McNeill is an award winner and widely published author in Australia and overseas. She has also been a creative writing tutor for the past twenty years.
one of the finalists so I presented the idea and I won the first prize. So yes, I had the idea in mind.

Pearlie: Did that competition help you to shape ideas? Did you start with notes? Did you have a chapter down?

Beatriz: I had the idea for the book. The competition forced me to objectify the idea. I wrote the plan in poetry form, which in a way, is a summary of the book. The only notes I had was a chronology for the book, which then I turned into a poem.

Pearlie: Is that a usual way for you to start a project?

Beatriz: No. Starting with a poem is not my usual way of stating to write a novel. I had already the ideas in my mind for "Beyond the Moons of August" but, when I commenced writing the book, I brainstormed ideas on a piece of butcher's paper. I wrote everything that I wanted to cover. Then I did a rough plan.

Pearlie: Like a spatial image? With lots of detail on it and so forth? But poetry is a very natural way for you, a natural form of expression for you. How important was it, do you think, that it began with a poem?
Beatriz: Poetry is very important for me. I started writing poetry quite young. Poetry has been with me most of my life. Perhaps starting with a poem was a stroke of luck. I may start all my next novels with a poem.

Pearlie: What I was wondering is – given the fact it was unusual for you to begin a project in this way, did it crystallise something for you in putting it in the poem?

Beatriz: Yes, in fact now that I think about it, it gave me a clearer picture of what I was going to write about.

Pearlie: Well, many writers would say that when they’re writing a book. I know when I’m writing a book, it’s almost as if a shadowy figure comes over the hill and it takes a long while for them to become visible. Sue Woolfe says you have to write 300 pages before you know what you're doing. The fact that you wrote a poem—and we know how disciplined a poem is — made me wonder whether it crystallised something for you about the form, the shape, the idea?

Beatriz: It helped me enormously because I knew exactly what I was going to write about. I had a good and concrete plot but the shape and the form came later.
**Pearlie:** That suggests two things to me. One, it suggests discipline and the second thing is that it suggests that you were really thinking already of an original way to talk about it. So did that lead you to think that poetry in the book would be a good idea?

**Beatriz:** Yes. I thought a lot about whether or not to include poetry in the novel. Why do I include poetry in the novel? I think I've done it to allow the reader to stop and reflect on the poem, to get a different feeling, to appreciate a different style. And, of course, to promote poetry!

**Pearlie:** For this reader, it certainly had that response and it also encapsulated something that caused that reflection. I thought that was a very good technique myself. So how much of yourself, Beatriz, your story, your life, is in this book?

**Beatriz:** Quite a lot. In writing the annotation I have said that it is me and it is not me. As Jung would say, it is based on the different personae in me. I think most writers utilise themselves, their friends, or composites of everyone they know, to create characters. Gabriela is me, but also she is not me! I exaggerate, I dramatise, I invent and retell memories. In my novel I do things that I didn’t do in real life because I didn’t have the guts to do it.
**Pearlie:** So it's rather like taking some of yourself and using it as a bit of stuffing or ingredients to begin. So do you feel vulnerable having revealed anything of yourself?

**Beatriz:** Not really. I don't feel vulnerable. In fact, I don't give a shit! I write to entertain and for people to enjoy themselves, even if I do this by 'taking the Mickey out of myself'. Some people tend to put down memoir writing, or the use of your life as the framework for your writing. I think it is most valuable, particularly because it is a very female thing to do. I believe a lot of women write about themselves and their experiences. Women's history for the future.

**Pearlie:** Yes, I would agree with that. I suppose I feel that once you have exposed something, you start to move away from it as a vulnerability anyway. Did you feel like that?

**Beatriz:** Yes. Once it is out there it doesn't belong to you any longer. The worst that could happen already has happened. My sister stopped talking to me for two years after I published *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria,* because I revealed a few family secrets! So I've already faced the worst!
**Pearlie:** I just wonder, too, about that. The idea of being seen. A lot of people don’t like the idea of therapy in writing, but is there a therapeutic value for you in this?

**Beatriz:** Well, writing is cathartic, but I don't write to 'cure myself', I write to entertain. Perhaps help others with my experience, to motivate readers, to make them reflect. What I mean is: I don't write to feel better about any of my possible traumas — I write for others. Yet sometimes one gets the sideline benefits. While writing about the death of Gabriela's father, I came to the realisation that I had felt guilty and responsible for my father's death for some years.

**Pearlie:** That is quite profound, isn’t it? It’s rather an amazing insight too. Would you have thought you would have got there without the process of writing?

**Beatriz:** Probably not.

**Pearlie:** What do you think about the value of therapy in writing? Do you encourage it in other writers? Would you welcome it?

**Beatriz:** Oh yes. I think it is very therapeutic because once you put your thoughts, your pain or your anger on paper, it's no longer inside yourself. You objectify it, you’ve got it out and in front of your eyes. I always
suggest to my writing students that they use their journals to clarify their ideas and feelings.

**Pearlie:** There is something interesting that I notice about your work that you don’t put into your poetry. In your poetry, I sense humour, I sense a succinct expression but, on the other hand in your novel I get a sense that you are feeling your way along a dark tunnel to a burst of light that we could call insight?

**Beatriz:** In poetry I have to be more economical, whereas in other forms I can explore a lot more. But I feel that I use a lot of humour in my novels too! I use a lot of intuition as well. Yes, sometimes it is like going through a dark tunnel to find the light at the end. Oh that light when you finish the last word on the last page!

**Pearlie:** I suppose though, when I see your poetry, I think of Beatriz, the actress. Beatriz-the-person-who-is-taking-the-stage and it’s very much a performance kind of poetry. Perhaps there is something different happening with the novel, would you say?

**Beatriz:** A lot of my poetry is to be read aloud, to be shared with a live public. It is more performance poetry and when I read in public, the actress in me comes alive. I connect with the audience. I also write poetry
for the readers to enjoy in the intimacy of their home. When I read in
public I tend to select entertaining pieces. When I write a novel, I write
for an unknown reader. Also I feel that a different part of me writes
novels. Again a different persona!

**Pearlie:** I was actually going to make the point that it seems to me that
your poetry is for a mass of people, an audience, but your book, by
contrast, seems to me something that you put into the hands of one person
for them to take into their bedroom, their living room, and to privately
have a conversation with you. And perhaps to learn something of their
own life. Do you have any idea of that, or have I got that wrong?

**Beatriz:** No, no, no. That's right. I want people to reflect on it because, in
my novels, I don't make any comments or judgements about events, I
present things for the reader to evaluate. I don't say: "Oh! Isn't this
disgusting or revolting." When Gabriela's mother goes to the specialist
because they suspect she has breast cancer, for example, and she asks
questions about her condition, the specialist doesn't want to answer any
questions and dismisses her as a 'bimbo'. I could have said: "Oh! Isn't he
disgusting", or "Isn't he horrible." But I don't say anything — I just
present the cruel fact that Elisa has been treated like an idiot by the
specialist and let the reader assess the situation and think: "Gee, isn't that
cruel. That's how women were treated in the past. Doctors were like gods and were never questioned."

**Pearlie:** Yes, I think that's a good point. Drusilla Modjeska has just written an essay. You may not have seen it yet. I saw it in Saturday's paper. She was talking about there being a lot more popularity in Australia at the moment for non-fiction and less for the novel. Although she talks about the great value of the novel, too. What do you feel about the line that has been drawn in this country between fiction and non-fiction, given that you have written your book as fiction?

**Beatriz:** I think the situation in Australia for the novelist is quite appalling. A lot more emphasis is put on non-fiction. Maybe I'm silly to be writing novels. I should write self-help books and make money. Just joking! I write for love. Also if I had written "Beyond the Moons of August" as non-fiction, it would have been boring, and who is going to be interested in my memoirs. I'll write those when I'm famous!

**Pearlie:** I wonder, too, whether—and perhaps you need more time to think about this—whether perhaps people aren't recognising that in our novels we are writing non-fiction to a large degree. We choose the novel form, particularly as women writers, because it goes wider than just one person's experience. What do you think about that?
Beatriz: Yes, you are right. I believe that what women write has an immense historical and cultural value because women writers often write 'non-fiction' in their 'fiction'. We are leaving the next generations a record of women's lives.

Pearlie: Well, I suppose I've always thought that autobiography is like holding up a mirror so that the reader can actually see themselves in that mirror, and I think that in the kind of novels that you and I write, there's almost no line between fiction and non-fiction. I know that my own last book—for which I won a non-fiction prize—although I wrote it as a novel, fell between two stools. I think this is a serious issue for us as women writers.

Beatriz: I absolutely agree. There is always something personal in all books.

Pearlie: Yes, I would agree there's something personal—I was thinking of Isabel Allende. I was even thinking of Drusilla Modjeska and Poppy and so forth. I think there's a genre that probably isn't being recognised for exactly what it is.

Beatriz: Absolutely!
Pearlie: So when I ask where do the ideas come from, I want to be specific about what I mean by that. It seems to me that we have a multi-layered book here: we have poetry, we have stories, we have ghosts, we have the idea of seeing Sydney, in particular, and Australia as a country before you ever came here—visions if you like. Were these things that began with the writing of the book already there or were these just waiting to be taken out like balloons that you pull down? I mean how much a part of you were they and how much a part of the writing process were they?

Beatriz: Let’s say that I don’t have visions or hallucinations! But the idea of coming to Australia was with me for many, many years. I was about 12 or 13 years old when I first saw a newsreel about Australia. In the newsreel I saw Bondi beach, where the people looked so carefree and happy. It really made an impression on me. I thought what a marvellous place and I have wanted to come here since then. At 18, like Gabriela, I wanted to come to Australia and the person who was selling the ticket in a shipping company discouraged me. So that idea was there all the time. Look, the basic plot of “Beyond the Moons of August” came from my life. Simply said: my father died, I married, I was unhappy, I got involved in the arts and politics, I exiled myself to Australia, I worked at Scarba and at the Indian restaurant; the rest is all imagination and fantasy. Yes, I
also experimented with sex; you must remember that the sixties and seventies was a time of exploration! In addition to all this my greatgrandmother, grandmother and aunts all delved a little bit into the occult and the esoteric, as well as using herbs and casting spells to cure and help people.

**Pearlie:** All right, well that explains that. So let's think of the other layers. We've got poetry and we've got the ghost stories. You did some research for these stories? Are they based on truth?

**Beatriz:** Not really, I've done a bit of research about a particular street. Nothing about ghosts.

**Pearlie:** Well, I was particularly thinking about the one in Scarba House?

**Beatriz:** The only research I did was to find out who had owned the house and in which year it had been built. Working there, very early one morning, I believe I saw a ghost and it really shocked me. It was a beautiful woman, dressed in an organdie dress standing by a fireplace. She looked as though she was crying. But it was about 5 o’clock in the morning; I hadn't slept all night, I had been feeding babies for hours and, on top of that I was burning the candle at both ends, so I could have imagined that I saw a spirit. At the time I thought what a good idea to
write about the house and the ghost. And thirty years later, I wrote about them.

Pearlie: A lot of people think that Latin-American writers write generously over the top, have you had to fight for that style?

Beatriz: Oh absolutely! Actually, for the annotation I was thinking about that, and what my problems are. One of them is that I have to stop myself from writing 'tangos'. Tangos have very melodramatic and passionate words, so I have to stop myself from over-dramatising and putting too much emotion or too much feeling into what I write.

Pearlie: Do you welcome the restraint? Does that feel like a necessary thing to do?

Beatriz: I write for an Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Celtic as well as for the Australian multicultural readership. I would be writing in a different style if I were writing for a Latin public living in a Latin country.

Pearlie: There's another line here, a line between being authentic and educating the reader to accept your authentic style. Where would you place yourself on that line?
Beatriz: I believe that I am authentic because I own both cultures, the Australian and the Latin-American. I think it’s a matter of being bi-cultural. I write bi-culturally. Sometimes I write things for Spanish people and I write in an absolutely different way. I know both cultures very well. Humour, for example, I know what’s funny for my Anglo readership and what is funny for the Latin people. Let's say that I know what buttons to press. I believe that I am able to move from one culture to the other in an authentic way.

Pearlie: But holding onto, if you like ...

Beatriz: ... Not really, no because I feel very comfortable in both cultures.

Pearlie: That leads me to the next question and it’s one of the things that troubles me greatly as an editor when working with somebody whose mother-tongue isn’t English, particularly Australian English. As you’d be aware, in England there is such a thing as ‘Black English’ and so on. And it concerns me that the line between the authentic voice—if we take something like the ‘Bone People’, you remember, the book where somebody really almost creates a language of working class or very poor people, or Maori people in New Zealand. What I wonder is what happens when you are doing the next draft revision? I sometimes felt that you
were more concerned with putting yourself in the reader’s position than feeling at home in your own narrative?

**Beatriz:** But I do feel at home with my narrative! I could write in "Spanglish" which is the type of jargon that Latin-American people often utilise, but I prefer to write as most Australian writers write or I try to.

**Pearlie:** So does that mean that when you think about the work you think about it in Spanish?

**Beatriz:** No, absolutely not. I think in English, ninety-nine per cent of the time.

**Pearlie:** So you're a blend, you're already in the blend of the two. That makes quite a lot of sense.

**Beatriz:** It's a very mixed mind really.

**Pearlie:** It comes through very well. One of the things that I know about you, is that your sister is alive and in this book Gabriela has a dead sister. And you mentioned earlier that, when you wrote the last book, she didn’t speak to you. Was there a reason why this Gabriela has a dead sister, rather than a live sister like Beatriz has?
Beatriz: I thought that the character, Stella, was irrelevant in the second and third part of the book. At the beginning of the book she was important in order to aid the magic and add fun and conflict to the novel. If I had kept this character it would have complicated the narrative. I would have had too many characters to worry about and to keep track of.

Pearlie: The other thing I thought was generous was the way you deal with Australians. Australians are really used to being put down quite a lot by people who come from Britain or Europe, as if we were a backward country or something. I'm saying that from a lifetime of living in Australia. And I wondered—there are not many people I've read who have really looked forward to coming to Australia in the way that Gabriela does. Is there a generosity around the Australia you come to that is reflected in your book?

Beatriz: I don't know if it is generosity. I love Australia and have done so since I landed in the country. Anglo-Celtic Australians have many qualities that I value. They are honest, straightforward, they dislike pretence, they give you a hand if they can, they respect human life, animals and nature, and I could go on and on. I know there is racism in Australia but I have never encountered it in a blatant form. I have been
discriminated against as a woman but not for being a 'wog'! Also

Australia is a very democratic country, and I value this.

**Pearlie:** There did seem to me something—that maybe there is something in the Argentinian personality that you were almost an Australian before you became an Australian?

**Beatriz:** Maybe. I never, never fitted one hundred per cent into Argentina. Perhaps because I'm more European, more Italian and Spanish than Argentinian. On the other hand, most Argentinians are from European backgrounds. There's something about the Argentinian mentality that doesn't go with me. It's too individualistic in the wrong way. Everyone would steal for their own good without caring for the others. It is a "me, me, me" society. I hate the military governments, the revolutions at the drop of a hat, the torture, and the lack of freedom, especially when I was living there.

**Pearlie:** The other thing I liked in the book is how you depicted Gabriela, her daughters and her mother. They didn't always have an easy time. For example, the situation that occurred in Villawood when Gabriela is attacked and we don't know who the attacker is, although she fights him off quite gamely. It's almost as if those incidents—the buying of a car where she's cheated and so forth—it was almost as if she could throw
those incidents over her shoulder because she kept her eye on a wider
view of Australia. Perhaps a lot of migrant people moving to any country
are affected by the small things that go wrong, as if they were personal
slights. What’s your take on that?

**Beatriz:** Positive. I’m a positive person and therefore my heroine is
positive too! It is said that some people see the glass half empty, and that
other people see it half full. Well I drink the water!

**Pearlie:** A very Beatriz comment. How aware were you of ‘technique’
when writing this book?

**Beatriz:** I studied literature for my HSC. Having completed a masters and
a graduate diploma in creative writing gave me a good background. Also
I’ve written in Spanish a lot, and I’ve been writing since I was very young,
so I have quite extensive experience in the writing craft. Between English
and Spanish there are linguistic and structural differences but there are
not differences in genres. I read at least two or three books a month, and I
have been doing this for a long time. This has given me an insight into
English literature.

**Pearlie:** So if we were to say that a novel could be described as an idea or
a theme to which a whole lot of other ideas come around like a galaxy of
stars, what are the other things that have influenced the writing of this book? Where has the other little galaxy of little pieces that got added on come from? Have you had conversations with people at the University? What have been the sorts of input that have come along the way as you began writing?

**Beatriz:** Most of my ideas come from my imagination, some from the environment, and others from association and inspiration. John Scott has been very supportive and he has advised me and made suggestions when he thought something didn't work.

**Pearlie:** So where would you say that the things that added to the stories came from? I mean as the story opened up did things occur to you just out of the blue.

**Beatriz:** Yes, they did. I see things in my mind like in a movie and I hear a voice in my head with the words I need to write. Everything comes out of my imagination.

**Pearlie:** I have a gut feeling, because I know from the process of writing my book as an M.A. student, that there would have been times that you had to struggle against conflict for the process of this book. Can you think of anything? Does that fit for you?
Beatriz: Yes, you're right. I had a bit of conflict with a previous supervisor. We had two different views of the world. I would call it a cultural clash! She was very supportive but she wanted me to go one way and I wanted to go a different way.

Pearlie: Were there moments when you could have given up? Or you could have abandoned the project?

Beatriz: I don't think so—no! I'm quite a determined person and I rarely give up on a project.

Pearlie: So there must be discipline, determination?

Beatriz: Yes, I'm very disciplined and very determined.

Pearlie: So did you always know, therefore, the path the book would take?

Beatriz: Yes and no. I knew the overall plot but the ins and outs, the intricacies of the different events and characters, I worked on as I went. I didn't have a clue what I was going to write next or how I was going to write it.

Pearlie: Has the writing process just gone from start to finish in a disciplined way?
Beatriz: Yes!

Pearlie: So as Gabriela fought particularly to leave—you, too, have fought and will go on fighting. Perhaps that’s part of a process that will always be there for you, do you think?

Beatriz: Oh yes, definitely. I’m a fighter. I try to fight with my writing. I have the delusion that I can make the world a better place.

Pearlie: I’m interested in the construction of the narrative. What came first? Did you have the middle, the beginning and end? What did you have?

Beatriz: It was very much linear. When I did my planning I thought—this is going to happen first, and this next and so on. Yes, as you say I had a beginning, a middle and an end.

Pearlie: So if we were to suggest that you worked out the plot first and then shaped it along, is that the way you’d describe it?

Beatriz: That’s the way, yes!

Pearlie: So it’s not an organic approach, it’s a very thought-out approach of what should go where.

Beatriz: Yes, yes.
Pearlie: And is that the way you worked on your previous book?

Beatriz: Yes. I'm very spontaneous and intuitive but I set up a framework to start with.

Pearlie: Yes, that's what I was going to suggest. It's a little bit like saying "I will wear this swimsuit even if I hang out of it in bits." I think it says something about the spontaneity of it that the swimsuit is going to hold you, hold the body of the story intact?

Beatriz: Yes.

Pearlie: I think it's a great book, I've loved reading it and there are so many things to comment about it! I can only congratulate you at this point.

Beatriz: Thank you very much, Pearlie.

END OF INTERVIEW
CHAPTER TEN

SOME THOUGHTS AFTER THE INTERVIEW
The visible Differences

I am very thankful to Pearlie McNeill for the time she invested reading the manuscript of “Beyond the Moons of August”, preparing questions and interviewing me. I feel the interview in a certain way crystallised many of the ideas and issues raised in this annotation and that some interesting new points were brought out.

One important point was that starting the idea for “Beyond the Moons of August” with a poem helped me to give form to the novel’s plot. This poem provided me with a blueprint to follow, and with a clear idea of the events to cover. Reviewing the interview made me further reflect on how different it is for me to write poetry as opposed to fiction. When I write poetry I do it intuitively, words seem to emerge in already formed stanzas and little effort is needed to write the first draft of a poem. Writing fiction for me is a different ball game, but I have discussed this extensively in this annotation.

Another interesting point that Pearlie raised during the interview was about being or feeling vulnerable after revealing part of yourself. I strongly believe that, whether it is true or not, readers always assume that

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12 The visible differences refers to accent, skin colour and other racial characteristics.
somehow writers are part of their fiction. I had the opportunity to test this hypothesis in the late seventies and early eighties. Influenced by the many countries that practised systematic political torture, I wrote many short stories and poems on this topic. Invariably after a reading people would come to me and commiserate about my being a ‘torture and trauma survivor’.

The idea that women utilise a lot of their own experiences in their own writings is an interesting point. Perhaps a new genre, named *autobiographical fiction* or *ficto-memoirs* needs to be created in order to classify works that combine memoirs and personal experiences with fiction.

Finally, various cross-cultural issues were raised by Pearlie—issues similar to those that are raised by others. People generally, and writers in particular are always interested in how I write. Often I am asked whether I write in Spanish and then translate into English, or if I write in English. These types of questions always make me feel uncomfortable. Why is it that my ethnicity becomes more significant than any other part of my writing? Pearlie said that she felt that I was more concerned with putting myself in the readers’ position (eg. writing for an Anglo readership) than feeling at home with my own
narrative. Here is another very good example of the assumptions that people make about my writing. After being in this country for 33 years and completing an extensive number of courses at tertiary level, I am perfectly comfortable writing in English and being part of and understanding the Australian culture. I am an Australian, a new Australian indeed but not a foreigner.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION
The end of a long road

As I write this conclusion I feel a sense of completion but also a certain vulnerability. Have I said too much? Have I not said enough? Have I said things that I shouldn’t have said? I realise that the anxiety that today embraces me is born from the fact that my novel and this annotation are going to be judged. But to be a writer involves being exposed to criticism, setting yourself and your work for evaluation, receiving critiques and assessments. In a few words, to be a writer involves moving from the individual’s comfort zone. Nowadays, writers not only expose themselves on the page but also through public readings.

At times my anxiety leaves and my optimism takes over as I tell myself: “You’ll be fine – your work will be OK.” And it is this optimism that has allowed me to progress to where I am today in my career as a writer. As we Australians say in a colloquial way “I had to have guts!” Yes, from the first poem I wrote in English to this annotation, I had to have courage. As a new Australian I have been faced with the insecurity which comes hand in hand with writing in a language which is not my mother tongue, an uncertainty which could have made me a ‘closet writer’. When I have
performed in public I have had to have the strength to read my work, knowing that as soon as I opened my mouth and because of my accent I was going to be judged as 'different' from the other readers. Yet, I have moved from my comfort zone and I have put myself in all kinds of stressful situations because being a 'writer' is what moves me.

With that determination and courage which in the last ten years I have dug from somewhere within me, today I can say to myself “You have done it!” I have completed my submission for the Doctor of Creative Arts Degree. Perhaps my work will be judged excellent, perhaps mediocre, but that does not matter because I know I have done my best.

My heart and soul have been opened to write both “Beyond the Moons of August” and this annotation. The process of writing these works has been enriching and fulfilling. Writing “Beyond the Moons of August” has made me realise that I can write many more novels, and that *Forbidden Steps Under the Wisteria* was not just ‘that novel’ that everyone says they have to write. I know now that I can write novels until the day my hands, my eyes, or my heart give up.
The most valuable knowledge that I have achieved from writing this annotation is self-knowledge. I am now very clear about why I write, how I write and what I want from my writing. The intense questioning that I have submitted myself to has given fruit. This questioning was at times laborious and perhaps painful but as a whole challenging and stimulating.

Throughout the pages of this annotation I have explored my past and the experiences that have led me to be a writer. This act brought with it nostalgia as I reminisced about my childhood and my relationship with my now dead mother. Writing about those childhood moments took me back to the excitement of learning to read and write and to that world of fantasy where I hid to comfort myself from my isolation and loneliness.

I feel that I have been honest and sincere in this annotation. I have opened myself like a book, revealing secrets, concerns, and other intimate parts of my self. Pearlie McNeill asked me if I felt exposed by utilising some of my life experiences for the plot of "Beyond the Moons of
August”, and I have answered “No!”. Neither do I consider myself
‘exposed’ in this annotation. Why should I? I have just spoken the truth.

Exploring the process of writing reminded me of the times when I
was studying to be a psychologist. Every new mental illness I came
across I analysed ‘just in case I was suffering from it’. In the same way I
have plunged into self-questioning mode in order to find out how and
why I did what I did in the process of writing “Beyond the Moons of
August”. Sometimes the answers came easily; other times I had to
struggle. Either way, each discovery was an achievement, and with each
little progress the words on the page grew and grew, leaving me satisfied
and motivated to continue.

The knowledge, experience and awareness that I have gained by
attempting to complete the Doctor of Creative Arts degree will be
invaluable in my future writings and in the teaching of creative writing. I
sincerely hope that whatever I write in the future will reflect all that I
have learnt, enriching and entertaining my readers.


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http://www.inkyfingers.com/samerin/proposal.html


