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JEAN THE AMOROUS

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Jean the Amorous

The were laughing on the *Te Amo Juanita* tourbout, an ex-schooner studded with wooden seats for the tourists in summer. Álvaro had worked on this boat for a few months when he first moved to Valparaíso and the owner, an old man with whom he'd struck up a friendship, still let Álvaro take it out at night if he wanted. Really they were just floating next to the harbor. Álvaro had asked about where the cadena had gone and Jean had heard or absorbed cadera and suggestively moved her hips in response, which is why they were all laughing. A plastic glass rolled between the pews. It was dark but not late, maybe eleven. They drank the wine Maru had brought and listened to the night open up on shore: the punks shouting tender-hearted in line for a show, the elsewhere blare of cumbia brass. Jean positioned herself on the ground between Maru's legs. Maru, who had a daughter, twisted Jean's hair back and asked if she was sure. Jean said Yes, and Maru took the scissors and said, I've always wanted to do this. Cut a sailor's hair? said Jean, tripping on the reflexive. The boat rose and fell, and the light reached them or was obscured in that rhythm. A lamp hung from one of the poles but Álvaro couldn't figure out how to light it, tienes fuego, he asked Maru, but she no longer smoked. Ya fue, she said. I don't need it. She twisted Jean's hair into a single, tight cord and with her right hand tested the scissors not far from Jean's ear, the blade rasping against each other. Their sound like a shimmer, like a hue cut from deep rock. Then all Jean could hear was the music and the bay water against the docks.

A few days later Paulina, Jean's neighbor, took the razor and shaved the neckline for her, so she could pull her new short hair back and look like all the other girls, with that harsh plane underneath, though she was blonde, and so would never look like the other girls, nor would they ever look like her. That was clear enough from walking by the Mercado Cardenal or even just down the hill. Men seemed confused and delighted to see her: they would stare up from the bottom of a staircase, or stop halfway, leaning back against the handrail as she clopped down. He blondeness performed a kind of erasure, for she was if tall not pretty. Her mother's

last name was Dutch and this created a logic for Jean's proportions: *rubia y alta, pero ruda.* She said this over merienda to Carmín, winking and making that pistol-grip tsk out of the side of her mouth in syncopated time with the joke: ruddy, *ruda.* Carmín laughed and said, it's true. Much of talking with people was a performance like that, in continuous reference to herself, in reference to Chile or to contrasting countries. It was difficult to talk about anything else.

Jean had arrived in this new city under circumstances that struck her—both at the time and then strongly, again, much later—as resembling some mixed-up portent, a warning shot fired into a flock of augury birds, its logic anachronistic and pulled from a Greek tragedy read in college. The new city was in fact an old city, or at least, it was a city that looked old; at the time this was a difference difficult for Jean to parse, being from California. And though she had flown, as one must, into Santiago, she had taken the two-hour bus ride directly to Valparaíso from the airport. So for a long time the old port city would be the only part of Chile Jean knew.

But something—to bring us back into the scene with her—is wrong. Jean senses this as she steps down from the bus into the terminal. But what? The terminal feels crowded, too crowded, above all what Jean will remember is chaos, and yet the unease is collective, as if everyone together had been witness to some violence. It is already night. She cannot tell what is wrong, and clutches her two suitcases stupidly. Nor will she know how long she remains standing amidst the crowd, unsure if she cannot move because of the unnamed quality of disaster or her bags or both, she is aware suddenly of how possessing things makes one frightened.

From the street outside she can hear the blaring of sirens and a distorted crackling voice, a recording that sounds more bureaucratic than omniscient, as if projected not down from the opaque sky but rather straight up into it. ATENCION, says the voice, ATENCION, but the rest of the announcement collapses inside her ear canal, Jean cannot make any of it out. She pushes toward a woman who has just finished making inquiries at a ticket window, leaning onto the ledge and tilting her head down to hear the response. In the future Jean will come to know this station better, the various temperatures held inside its yellow walls—in the future she can interpose on this moment faces and hats and people wearing backpacks, or sitting on their luggage eating cellophane-wrapped triangle sandwiches—but tonight she absorbs nothing but her own fear and her own suitcases and this woman, who is Carmín. But Jean does not even know that yet.

Excuse me, Jean says, tearful. Disculpe, excuse me, do you know where to catch the bus?

The electricity in the light hanging directly above them is zipping and raw, the bulb having recently, it seemed, exploded.

Carmín and Jean seem to realize this both at the same time, that they are standing in glass.

Jean could not think how to ask *why the glass, the exploded lights, the announcement,* though that was her real question, or one half of it, anyway. And not even Carmín, who had listened to the woman behind the ticket window the same way one might listen to a child—patiently, watching for the real grievance behind the grievance, but careful always to demonstrate that she is listening, to show the small injured party not her gaze but her ear—not even Carmín would think to explain that there had been an earthquake. Because who hadn't felt the earthquake?

But Carmín does hear the other half of Jean's question, the other part that is hidden, and says, kindly and by way of response, If you wait a minute I can help. But I need to make sure my friend got on the bus first.

This should be enough for Jean but it isn't, because right as Jean nods, the announcement—which has, in repeated endless waves, washed over their conversation, forcing them at points to shout their questions and reassurances and finally their names at each other—clicks in her mind like a Rubik's cube toward a sudden garish coherence, *tsunAmi, tsunAmi, eva-CUARR, eva-CUARR,* the rs tumbling over themselves. *Evacuarr a una zona de seguridad!* The comprehension, still only partial, must have shown in the panic on Jean's face or in the grasping at her luggage, or maybe Jean in fact says, now almost hysterical, *pero no tenemos que subir?* because Carmín laughs and warms this strange girl's fear with that laugh, replying, as she pats Jean on the shoulder, Oh, I think it's probably alright.

But it would be a long time before Jean saw Carmín again. Carmín had headed South soon after, to see friends for a few months, putting Jean in a taxi near the station and writing down her cellphone number. So they hadn't become friends until later. Jean sometimes wondered whether her life in Valparaíso would have been different, whether everything that happened, to her and to others, could have been avoided, if she had only been friends with Carmín from the beginning. But counterfactuals are only so useful. The taxi had wound up into the hills to avoid the chaos, and Jean had settled into herself there in the backseat, blood still pumping in her ear canals. The driver switched on the radio, the sound unspooling into the contained dark, and only then did Jean hear the broadcaster say *terremoto* and *ocho punto seis* and really grasp what had happened, and how lucky she had been, and wonder, in what would be the first of many times, whether her luck and her looks were related. This conviction, that being blonde

here made her *lucky,* made it difficult to see certain things, like the way, when the taxi had stopped near the top of Cerro Alegre, at a large house with a garden, the man who had opened the gate had first looked at her through it with something like intention.

What is accomplished here is only the beginning. And in the end only Jean will be able to say who were the real, active characters, and who were off in the wings, with her wondering whether to call. Perhaps future eras will have established etiquette for the internet age, where the present tense slipped toward present-perfect, where the past always lugged itself after you. What she accomplished simply in finding her way, dragging her life of suitcases with her. It was only the beginning, because through the latticework of the gate she misread the man's face as pleasantness or the pleasure of welcome or curiosity or genuine surprise. For Jean did not know that she was replacing the previous blonde foreign woman in the house, as an updated edition from the same catalogue. She did not know that there could only be one girl at a time, and that each had her expiration date, the moment when her family became anxious for her to come home, to finish school or start real life. Eight months to maximum two years, a range depending somewhat on the age of the girl, who was never older than exactly twenty-nine, and sometimes as young as high school. If this sounds grim, it is. But a las gringas les gusta ser gringa también, as Álvaro would later point out. Not that he ever knew the full story, knew what happened in that house full of men.

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To begin, the man who was pleasant worked in the tourist industry. He was tidier than the rest of them, perhaps due to his training, and he'd stoop to plug in the stereo before picking up beer bottles from the living room. But he did not live in the house, if we are speaking in technicalities. And in this case it is worth paying attention to things like good manners and laws and service manuals. Rather he was dating the girl who was quickly expiring. In her defense this girl had delayed her ticket back to Germany four times. This struck Jean as an extremely expensive choice but Jean said nothing, as the girl who was quickly expiring had in the recent months been working very hard for very little money at a cafe, and she liked to speak about this fact to all the men in the house. The rent of the room—which Jean knew because her terms were precisely that, to rent the room—was practically the cost of Chile's minimum wage, though the man who was pleasant claimed that his girlfriend was in fact paying much less and that the landlord, who was one of the other men, had in the turnover nearly doubled the cost. So someone was fibbing and Jean didn't

know who but either way she wasn't sure the finances added up. But the truth was that this man who was pleasant was so pleasant that he kept his eyes on Jean, in case she needed anything, and with all that looking at her she began to think that, considering how conscientious he was, there were in fact certain things that she needed.

We should explain that there had been some kind of misunderstanding. It takes sometimes months for packages to arrive, and sometimes they do not arrive at all. So with that kind of customer service standard these sorts of mix-ups are par for the course, *par for the course* being an American idiomatic expression. Jean and the other girl were not supposed to overlap, but the other girl had put up a kind of fight, to her parents, to the uniqueness of the existential terms upon which her life was lived here. That she had the right to stay. That her boyfriend, who was so pleasant, was not simply waiting for the next edition to arrive. This meant in practical terms that Jean had to sleep on the couch for two weeks while the girl who was quickly expiring fought heroically against her fate, Jean treaded with increasing caution and sympathy as it dawned on her that she *was* the girl's fate, or that the girl's fate was hers, even as Jean's need for certain things also increased, certain things, she told herself, like sheets and towels and toothbrushes and a thermos and a romantic interest, things that one either received in a hospitable situation or that one should acquire if possibly staying forever or at least for a year.

When the girl who was quickly expiring finally gave up the ghost they threw her a party. All in that house wanted to celebrate her reasonability in the face of life's inevitable forces. It began in the late afternoon, a warmish day for winter, and went until three or four or five in the morning. Her accommodating boyfriend cooked shellfish on the terrace barbecue, and everyone ate multiple servings, showing up with bottles of wine in plastic bags as contribution. In the garden once it was dark a third man in the house, Gustavo, put his arms around Jean from behind and kissed her on the neck. She turned around and saw first and foremost a bleariness in his eyes. She tried to say, I don't know if you should do that, but she probably said instead, I don't know, that which what you do, you know? And he shot back, annoyed, I did nothing. And Jean could have no response to nothing besides climbing out of the garden and back onto the terrace, back where the girl's boyfriend who did not even live in the house could keep his friendly eyes on her. She drank wine and smoked pot with the landlord plus several of his invited poet friends and they all laughed about tipping off their seats on the edge of the balcony and dying smashed on the concrete below.

At a certain point Jean said she was tired and the landlord offered to let her sleep in his bed, since many partygoers were traipsing back and forth through the living room. She was tired enough that she agreed and was sincerely grateful. Now this might have in fact implied a different set of conditions than explicitly stated, except for the fact that upon laying her head down the most violent need to throw up took over, and this need did not cease for the next fifteen or twenty hours, prompting her to repeatedly use the landlord's private bathroom as well as his bed, forcing him by politeness or repulsion to sleep on the couch when he did finally come inside. The next day he made her rice to eat and called her, playfully, a very difficult and temperamental person.

When Jean said "thank you" over and over again to the girl who was quickly expiring, the girl was not wrong to hear in the repetition a serving up of her own powerlessness. To be extremely kind to someone is to confront them with the truth of their position. And just when Jean thought she couldn't take another night on that couch the girl did expire—like a carton of milk, like a worn-out but modest heroine—leaving bagfuls of clothes and bodily miscellany for Jean to sort through. Jean took useful and symbolic items like a houndstooth coat and coconut lotion, as the thoroughness of the humid cold had caught her unprepared. And for months afterwards Jean had the pleasure of German tampax. The rest went to the woman who cleaned the house, an older woman who every other week slipped in at eleven wearing a colored cardigan and shuffled about the lounging bodies of the male tenants for a few hours, changing little, and who could blame her? For the house was filthy. Slugs crawled out of the shower drains at night and went a cold squelch under Jean's feet. The woman did not think to say her name to Jean and Jean did not think to say her name to the woman, as this seemed superfluous, both of them having adopted legible roles for the household already. Gustavo had started calling Jean *Blancanieves* since there were nine of them and one of her, and because she sometimes did break down and try to scrub the horrors out of the bathroom or the grit out of the kitchen tiles or solve the unresolvable equation of ten people to a fridge. She did so in order to keep the bile down and because the woman who was paid to clean and whose name she did not know had clearly received instructions to save her energies for the landlord's own bedroom and bathroom, infusing those superior facilities with a shine and sparkle that Jean had reveled in even through her nausea and her throat's marring of that very work.

Cleanliness—a clean bathroom to share, a nice bedroom with two windows—was the landlord's silent offer.

The man who is pleasant whose girlfriend has now expired works in a hostel three blocks from the house. Jean runs into him sometimes as he takes his lunch breaks, sitting on the steps eating an empanada, or walking through the neighborhood eating the same empanada. Jean quickly learns to expect only so much variety from Chilean cuisine. She is expanding her knowledge of the city very slowly, advancing block by block. Jean gets dizzy from all the vibrant colors of the murals and the tilt of the roads if she wanders too far. So she advances slowly and runs into him often. The house is not unlike a holding container, and increasingly she feels the need for fresh air, showing up again and again at the hostel's door. We shouldn't be doing this, he says, and maybe he means it. His moralism being part of the appeal, part of his offer. How refreshing, this equivocation, in contrast to all the others, who make their intentions so clear. He is leaving for Germany in a few days. The expired girl purchased him a ticket. Perhaps anyone can be bought.

He takes her up onto the hostel roof, from which she gets an eyeful of the roofs of the whole rest of the city. He smokes hash with a friend who has appeared along with a couple of guests from Brazil. Everyone is excellent company. The man and his friend, who met while studying philosophy, are debating Guattari across the terrace potted plants but she cannot participate, only smokes and goes dull, the joint quitting her of language.

(Because of all the men who circled in that house, he was the one who shouldn't have watched Jean. But he did watch her, more than the landlord, more than Gustavo, more even than Nico, the horny nineteen-year-old, who Jean flirted with and infantilized simultaneously, whose serves she returned like some expert cosmic tennis player, veering his pockmarked astroids of desire back toward the planetary jumble. He had watched Jean longer and harder than any of them, and the poor expiring girl had watched him watch. So Jean took his interest and his morals seriously, took his seeming helplessness to *not* look at her as a sign of something closer to love.)

He takes her into one of the private rooms. The window, which is wide and opens toward the bed, bears the same view of the port city as the terrace but lower, from a thrusted, more human angle. From here the boats teeming in the water stand out to Jean, the muted palette and rooftops the color of warmed rust and the sense of guided perspective not unlike a Dutch painting. This comparison occurs not to the narrator but to Jean but even so she keeps it to herself. Not everything translates. He tells her to read

The Open Veins of Latin America. He tells her there is no legal abortion here, which Jean already knows. He tells her Chile is the asshole of the world, and that the U.S. fucked Chile in the asshole. He tells her this gently, seductively. He spreads her out on the bed.

The light leaves the room before they do, and the dark is a grainy image. In the future what Jean will remember most from that afternoon is the feeling of being desperate to be caught, almost as if in taking off her underwear he had said, like playing hide-and-go-seek, *What have we here,* just like when she was a child, when she would hide and her father would try to find her and she would want to be found, even though the whole time he was wearing a mask and pretending to be a terrifying animal.

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What did Jean do, in the weeks that followed?

He left and she was still there, lying twisted down on the bed with her crotch open-feeling, somehow behind her, between her buttocks. She is humiliated by his leaving, though he had warned her. She reaches through her legs and covers herself, her hand cupped like a little hat.

Back in her own room, which was the girl's room, she pushes the furniture to different corners, hangs the mirror on another wall. The violence of a frame can be reassuring. In this new position the mirror clips light from the window, cuts her neck from her shoulders. Ha-ha, goes the light. In bed she entertains morbid thoughts.

Is having sex, as a woman, with a man, anything other than being turned on by one's own abjection? Gripping her by the waist, sitting on the edge of the bed, he pushes up uncomfortably fast and hard into you, holding her up. Disappearing (you) as something else comes into sight over a slicked horizon. "Banging"—it was like that, like he was literally banging into her. Jean comes to intensely desire this, once the man who is pleasant has sex with her in this way. Her memory of it is not an image but a very short

film, depicting that feeling, of being banged into and gripped; a flash of his face, seen from above. Then words cover up the film, stain it, blot it out.

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Only now does Jean begin to really see the other men. She acts out her tragedy in private—in her room, along her walks—sharing nothing, convinced that they had all guessed already, her face red upon encountering them, the nine of them judiciously shaking their heads. Either that or they hadn't noticed at all; those were the only options. For they had all known and loved the previous girl, and Jean had broken some sort of rule, though the situation provided to her seemed designed to test that very question, of what, under such circumstances, might or might not be broken.

All this is still early in Jean's life in Valparaíso, the first act of a longer play. (Or perhaps the man's leaving, which so marked Jean, in fact marks the end of Act I.) Jean would pull herself out of this house, meet her real friends (Carmín, Álvaro), meet Gato. A seemingly more complex set of relationships and events would thus begin, which Jean knew and was waiting for, because even within this moment Jean felt that she was play-acting. So it is tempting to glaze over what upon first glance seems extraneous to the larger arc. But everything leads to everything else, doesn't it, and it's hard to tell when we stop playing at our lives and when the reality of life begins. And besides, this story is less something thrown (an arc) than something dropped: the glint of a coin followed as it disappears down a well.

These men who among the nine of them taught her that particular habit of naming, identifying someone according to profession or country, but since most people in Valparaíso didn't have professions it was mostly according to country. To call someone *el mexicano, la franseca, el italiano.* Three Lithuanian men lived in the house and became *los lituanos*, their habits taxidermied according to the imagined logics of homeland and culture, though no one else knew anything about Lithuania at all. The pitter pitter pitter patter of the three men's conversations something truly foreign to rest of them, full-mouthed and delicate, in some dimension between Catalán and Russian, a language for singing lullabies. Gustavo often played ping-pong with them in the afternoon, doubles, the plastic ball ricocheting off the beams over their heads or the dull concrete floor.

She disliked them before, didn't want to speak English with them, wanted only to practice her Spanish and be with enough practice practically Chilean, in practice, Chilean, but now she suddenly takes comfort in it, that they are foreign like her.

(For completeness, we will briefly sketch the others: *el marinero,* who being in the navy only showed up once a month; the set designer in his late forties who was very publicly on the wagon; the French film studies postdoc doing research at the university, who for some reason no one ever called *el francés.* One afternoon before he left, the man who was pleasant had taken Jean to the cliffside overlooking the navy harbor, and had whispered in her ear that the navy was the most fascist part of the whole military, that the coup had begun here, in the navy in Valparaíso, and that Jorge was a fucking marinero fascist. The suits he wore blindingly white, a strange color for an unkempt city. Then he said, still in her ear, *El pueblo unido jamás será vencido,* and while she was a bit embarrassed for him, for relying on platitudes like that, she nevertheless as an American took it as a sign of his forgiveness and his love.)

The Lithuanians themselves had little money and complained with great frequency about Chile—about the weight of the cheese they had just purchased (too light), about the curds of the cheese they had just purchased (too sour), about the rind of the cheese they had just purchased (too thick, considering the weight). That in Lithuania you could drive out into the country and purchase huge cheeses, whole smoked legs of ham. Did we tell you, one would say, turning to Jean, about the castle in the middle of a lake? It's beautiful, Lithuania is a beautiful country.

They are disturbed when she throws away potato peels, cry out at the realization that they've left an eel head in the fridge too long, and that it's gone rotten, the eyes rolling back gelatinous into a fish's jaw filled with teeth. In humans teeth can be used to identify a corpse. They meant to make eel head soup but forgot. What a waste, the three of them say, shaking their heads in dramatic unison. For a while Jean can't figure them out, how such snobbery about cheese and anxiety about waste could co-exist. How they were willing to spread those rinds they so hated over bread, drink the last drops of a bad bottle of wine. At some point she begins to piece things together, how they were all of them born just after the wall fell, raised in the EU by parents who had known only USSR rations. She realizes this when they make her watch a video of a Lithuanian singer from the eighties, who sings an invented

children's camp song about how wonderful it is to go to the potato farms (they are leaning over her, laughing and eagerly translating as she gazes at the screen). Because no child actually wanted to go in the summers—get it? They'd force these children to work on the farms and it was really terrible but they pretended it was a summer camp, our moms all had to do it, so the song is making fun of that. Really funny, right?

(*Reirse* meaning, to laugh, reir meaning the same thing without the reflexive, rier being an inversion of reir, ries being the second-person present of that nonexistent word. The final meaning being curiously transparent. Something like U LAFF rather than YOU LAUGH. A question sounded within the word somehow. You laugh, u laff, ries, ¿te reís de mí? As she began to venture out, the phrase and its variations haunted her across town, spread over bus shelters and buildings, along Avenida Alemania, the main street which crossed through the plaza above them and ribboned endless over the hills, providing a perpetual view and separating the lower-middle class of the city from the poor, who lived at the top. You laugh, you laugh. Once, on one of the many days when Jean offered to make Nico-the-nineteen-year-old lunch out of pity, for he mostly cooked himself eggs—she'd watch him stand slouched over the stove and mix the yellow liquid in circles with a tiny wooden spoon—she asked him what he thought his tag meant. It's good, isn't it, he said, grinning at her from the couch, where he was lying with his laptop on his stomach. It's really good.)

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When Jean was a child, her father would point out moments of reflected light: tremulous green, patches of iridescence reaching otherwise dark corners of the house. Questions not of art but physics. He'd make her show him where the light was coming from. She liked the premise, which knitted the world together, but was bad at the game, and even as a child she disliked being bad at things. She would grow tired, wanting the answer, but he made her look until she found the object responsible for twisting the beam: his fisheye lens resting on the table, or the bright underbelly of a CD, or a painting framed in glass.

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Jean begins to walk farther. The city opens itself to her, house by house. She tries to memorize each one, though the task is impossible. Chile has produced few good painters but many good architects. She steps her way beneath clotheslines strung between balconies, the blocked reds and blues and greens of shirts and pants like the bright houses strung out in miniature. Everything adds up, the hills generous and unyielding. Ries, *Ries*, ries, RIES. If only she can be attentive enough, a kind of ethics, claustrophobia will not overwhelm her.

Still, a risk emerges, tender and dangerous, which never fully disappears: the risk of her hating this city, of feeling herself the victim. But she reminds herself not to cast judgement. And if her pride surges outward on these walks, if there are moments when she cries out, *does he know who I am* (because perhaps he did not realize that she will someday be a significant person, that she is secretly preparing herself for significance), she tries her best to unthink these thoughts, puts her nose inside the neckline of her shirt and breathes in moldy, gaseous shame to counteract her indignation, which feels, if she is not very careful, like something violent, that there is a hand extending from her chest, wielding a knife.

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In 1974, the Pinochet regime arrests a theater troupe and drives several of its members to the Ritoque concentration camp, an hour north of Valparaíso. The barracks and mess hall, built along the beach, were converted from a vacation camp for low-income families, finished shortly before the coup. The actors put on shows in which their characters, at some point, must pretend to be in prison. Oh what a terrible prank! Oh what a terrible dream! their characters say in the final scene, waking up to reality.

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Jean is becoming less inhibited. This might translate as, she sleeps with more men, or, she talks to more people, or, she walks farther. All of this is true. She sleeps with a shy university student whose name she does not remember. She talks to the old woman next to her on the bus, careful not to say *mijita* back. She sleeps with one of the landlord's friends, visiting from Santiago, with whom she flirts and does feel a certain fondness, perhaps in part because the roundness of his chest reminds her of the man who

was pleasant, but she says no to him, no, no, not this time, at dinner she smiles taking his hand off her thigh, she leaves the 80s disco they've all ended up in early to make this clear, she is trying to be clearer about these things, when she arrives back at the house the Lithuanians are throwing a party, she goes to bed regardless, a man from the party knocks on her door, then opens it (the door does not lock) saying Can I sleep with you, she says no and he closes the door, which does not lock, a few minutes later he again opens the door (which does not lock) saying, more forcefully this time, Can I sleep here I need to sleep!, from her bed she says again No, now she is awake for a while but he seems to have left and she is drifting paranoid back regardless toward slumber when the unlockable door opens BANG Can I sleep here! Jean hears the slip-scratching on the floor in the darkness, a dog, she realizes frantically, he's brought a dog from the street, the dog innocent huge lunges onto the bed, Get out! she shouts, Get this person out of my room! The Lithuanians come running and throw him and the dog out. Then the friend from Santiago and the landlord stumble in at three in the morning and the friend knocks on her door (which does not lock) saying that the landlord brought someone home from the disco and so now he couldn't sleep in the landlord's room and so couldn't he sleep with her? And so she acquieses, at this point she feels safer with him in her room. They have sex, and halfway through sex she realizes he took off the condom. This will be the person who, of everyone she slept with, minus the university student, and minus Álvaro, she feels like was by far the kindest to her, or at least, the most in love. And in the morning he feels bad about the condom, explains he that he only took it off to give her more pleasure, like when he was hitting his penis against her, remember how she had liked that.

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Drop a coin down a well. It leaves the hand too quickly, doesn't it? Drops like *ding,* drops like *plop,* already only sound.

On the nights that Jean would have to go to bed early, her mother would step just inside Jean's room, leaving the door ajar, her figure unreadable against the light of the hallway. Sound, in these moments, as Jean's only knowledge: the edges of bracelets clinking brightly, the dry clatter of ice in a glass. Standing there, at a distance, her mother would tell her the following story:

> *It was a dark and stormy night, just outside the gates of Paris. I, being the challenged, chose weapons. I chose my rusty, trusty pistol. I aimed; I fired. He fell into the arms of his companions. I walked the streets of the city, seeking*

a place for prayer and contemplation. Soon I met a tall, distinguished looking gentleman. Your name, said he. My name! said I. Your name, said he. Zanzibar, said I. Zanzibar! said he. Zanzibar, said I. …You have killed my brother! We must duel!

Jean did not think about why her mother took such pleasure in telling her the story, just pulled up the covers and took her own pleasure, saying, to the shape that was her mother, again, and would lie back into the circular surface tension, wondering whether it was the same night or whether they had waited until the following thunderstorm, whether a man could really have so many brothers, and whether someone could really kill like that, with an almost bored precision.

(Sometimes her mother would crawl into Jean's bed rather than her own at the end of the night, smelling almost like sweat. Jean would move to the very edge of the bed and sleep clutching the rails, though if her feet were cold she'd scootch back and tuck them, toes first, between her mother's thighs.)

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The flash across the walls, then the ceiling. She trains her eyes on its bright movement while. Her wrists holding her together and to him, pressing into his back. She forgot to take off her watch.

In the end there is Gato, who has not even come on stage yet, writing her *no alcancé a darte un abrazo.* In the end there is Carmín, saying, *Por favor, que no vuelvas a exponerte. Jean—* . In the end there is Álvaro, drawing a line between them. *Lo que pasó pasó,* he says, to begin and to finish. Whatever happened has now happened. Or maybe a better translation would be, what's done is done.

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A week after the troupe returned from their whirlwind tour of Europe and Cuba, the actors woke, each separately, each in their respective childhood bedroom in their parents' houses, to the tanks rolling down la Alameda, to the machine gun fire they could hear but not see on the television, to Allende giving a speech like some surrealist political tragedy. They were all still theater students at the university. That night the army came on the television and announced the take-over, on the off-chance that someone hadn't noticed. The troupe didn't touch the rehearsal room for several weeks. They thought the army was surely coming to get them too. Two friends from Sociology were not picking up the phone, their parents were picking up the phone but only sometimes, saying Who is it in a very closed way, and when Oscar said Oscar they would burst into tears. A man's body was found nearby, a worker, maybe part of a union, and Oscar was ashamed to find himself thinking this but it seemed almost quaint, to find one body, the poor man's body there either from laziness or to purposefully instill terror, as already there were likely so many more people dead, and his friends detained, to use up all one's energy being shocked by the swollen limbs of a stranger was exactly what the army wanted. So Oscar closed the curtains and simply kept calling around until Amanda's brother from the public engineering union picked up the line while Oscar was speaking to Amanda and interrupted them, saying, Jesus, stop calling, you think these conversations are so private? And so Oscar stopped.

But the army never arrived at any of the actors' doors, didn't check a single passport for the incriminating entry and exit stamps from Cuba, and so in October Oscar ventured back to the university and into the room. The place was wrecked: the tape recorders and microphones gone, wires cut, a stereo system smashed on the ground for dramatic effect. It was enough to scare anyone, Oscar thought. He was the director, and if he knew anything it was that he didn't need scared actors. And maybe even he himself was scared. He walked all the way home, slowly, over several hours, a stupid thing to do, pushing curfew like that. But by the time his mother hugged him inside the door he had sorted through the risks of various possibilities in his mind and said to his mother—his chin still over her shoulder, so he was thinking aloud right into her ear—Doesn't my uncle still have that old house?

And so in November, as the leaves in the Parque Forestal grew into green despite themselves, the poplar trees embarrassed or even surprised to have gone on with their own processes amidst the atrocities, the troupe began to make up a play.

—

We might venture that Jean is becoming reckless.

Thursday nights at the Liberty Bar sound like plates colliding against each other in time. Jean shows up beneath the rows of strung-up hats as decor. Does she show up by herself? I don't think so; she's been warned too many times by the men in the house against going to Plaza Echaurran alone at night. So she shows up with someone, but who? (The blankness of this role is similar to the blankness of her memories of Gato early on. She does not know how he first slipped through the door, followed her down the hall. She remembers glimpsing his face one day, and thinking he looked just like the man who was pleasant, even wondering vaguely if they were cousins. Her next memory of him, several months later, is him cajoling her into bed. Nothing in between.) The musicians having formed a wailing, thrumming circle in the corner. Tiki-tiki-tin: the pattern pattered out with feet, plates, clicking tongues and tambourines. Let us imagine that Gato is standing among them, clapping beneath the warm electric light, stepping in for his turn to sing when he knows the verse. Senses someone behind him, staring. Is it Jean, helpless to do anything other than? He turns around and catches sight of her, then smiles. She is the kind of stranger he recognizes. Still looking, now even openly appreciative, he reaches up with his left hand and touches his mustache.

In this scene at the bar we are forming together, Gato asks Jean if she would like to dance. The dance, cueca, has three sections, and is easy if you know the pattern but almost impossible to hazard if you don't. Opening turn (complete). Media lunas (not the pastry) going back and forth, switch places (half turn), scratch the floor with your feet (escabilla'o), switch places again, zapateo, switch places but kind of slowwllly or you'll end too soon and…there! Link arms or kiss or some kind of capitulation on the woman's part right on that final beat! And the whole time do not drop the gaze of your partner, even and especially when you are turning past each other. That is rule number one. Twirl your handkerchief in his face, beneath your eyes, along the edge of your shoulders, and look, look at him, look straight at him.

The cueca is an acting out of seduction, seduction being, by definition, an overcoming of will. There is no other way to finish. So in truth the woman has said *yes* as soon as she agrees to step out onto the floor, as soon as she says *no* but in the right kind of way. The pleasure must then lie in the variation, in the getting to that final moment, which should be delayed by both parties as long as

possible. Why do you think the last turn happens so slowly? Because we desire—again, by definition—what we do not have, and the most exquisite feeling of all is that not *yet,* the having and not having at once.

Each song lasts between two and three-and-a-half minutes, and, properly, a pair should dance three rounds of cueca: that is, three songs, each with three turns, and each song builds to that moment. But the good dancers construct a larger arc: though the story is performed to completion each time, the *real* seduction occurs over the course of the three, each round being an act in the larger show. For do we desire that which labels itself as ours from the beginning, or do we just feel a kind of enormous pity?

—

Álvaro hadn't been interested in Jean, that first night they met at the bar. He was sitting at one end of the long shared table at El Canario. A couple French girls were there too, slim and light-colored, studying abroad from Avignon, and were asking Carmín about the dictatorship. They were asking her whether many people had died, what she herself remembered, and whether the ex-carcel up the hill had anything to do with it, that muy bonito park where, they explained, they had eaten a petite picnic the previous Saturday. Jean could not tell whether their curiosity sprung from empathy or perversion or both. Their limited Spanish forced Carmín to speak slowly, and she stressed individual syllables as she mimed a word's meaning: she drew the shape of a house in the air, ducked down slightly and pretended to shiver, there inside the stuffy bar and wearing her red leather jacket. Jean and Álvaro watched the conversation unfold together, still strangers, but in that shared silence Jean perhaps imagined some further understanding between them. At some point the two girls and Carmín all began to speak at the same time, and Álvaro, impatient with the whole scene, slapped his palm down loudly on the tabletop.

The dictatorship! he said. Alright alright, let's talk about the dictatorship. I was really hoping to talk about something—anything!—else. Do you like movies? We could talk about movies instead, he offered, looking toward Jean in the low yellow light. The walls of the bar, which was only a single room, were covered in posters of Che, Violeta, el aborto legal, los 43. His offer, Jean realized, was insincere, but she took him up on it anyway and said, Well, what about Guzmán, *La Batalla de Chile.* Since you wanted to talk about movies. He shifted forward onto his elbows and said You've seen it? Yeah, she said. He reached for his breast pocket and fingered the lonesome cigarette it held. She could tell he was attracted, or maybe just impressed, in the way that one is

impressed with a precocious child. Fumas, he asked. No. Good, I only have one. I'll be right back. He was gone a long time, and Jean found herself imagining him leaning against the railing that separated the improvised patio from Cumming street, observing groups of friends purchase wine through the plastic window of the botellería a few hundred feet up the hill, some walking a bit further to drink in the Plaza de Descanso, others turning back toward the flats. She watched him step inside and journey toward her; he seemed to know half the bar. When he sat down she said, her words too rushed to seem nonchalant, And Carmín tells me you're a painter. Un pintor. Álvaro looked down at the table brimming with initials. Pucha, he said, forcing his thumbnail into the grooves. No secrets from you.

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How is Jean in such a position to know these things? Something like: she has studied them, but only a little bit. More than the French girls, apparently, or the well-educated, young American couple with whom she once fell into conversation on the street. They had said, *It's nice to go on vacation in a country where the US hasn't been so horrible.* Jean had taken a radical Latin American cinema class her last semester in college, where they had all met in a basement classroom at seven in the evening with coffee and pastries and watched five hours of difficult footage. The format had reminded her of the literature classes she had taken a few summers earlier, in Buenos Aires, at the humanities building of la UBA, on the far side of Rivadavia street. All the toilet seats ripped off in the bathroom, the soap dispensers missing, bookstores and people selling more books on tablecloths laid out on the street, the styrofoam cups of espresso at the unheated student cafe, microwaved medialunas the cheese and ham slices melting hot on her fingers. The sense of that seminar triggering similar sensations, that of it being extraordinarily difficult to arrive, the whole city and the whole day to cross, but gaining in part because of the difficulty a freedom within that space, drinking coffee at seven to talk until ten at least. The professor had in fact been Argentine, a sharp, thin, kind woman who wore long thin scarves and who asked them why they weren't already putting their boots on the ground, so to speak. It was a good question, even if Jean disliked the metaphor. But it is difficult to make metaphors without weapons. *La Batalla de Chile: Un Pueblo Sin Armas* was the full title of the six-hour documentary by Patricio Guzmán. Was Chile then without metaphor?

But that is perhaps a bad question, and Jean wouldn't have been able to answer regardless, because, in fact, she had lied to Álvaro that night at the bar—even that conversation was a lie!—-because she hadn't, in fact, seen the film at all. She had missed class the day they watched *La Batalla de Chile,* had caught only the discussion afterward, when the group replayed the final scene at the end of part one, when the soldier had climbed down from a tank and shot the cameraman, and how the frame had tumbled into the concrete before cutting to black. How that was effective metaphorically but also was just what had happened, no one was acting, the cameraman was dead dead dead.

Not that I'm sure that Jean knew it was a lie. She'd been so struck by the footage that increasingly—once she learned she would be going to Chile, once she was *in* Chile—she convinced herself that she had in fact seen the rest of the film. How could she not have? And so much of what she knew about Chile was like that—books she convinced herself she had read rather than flipped through. Something that did, eventually, add up to a kind of knowledge, but a knowledge held together like a fine tissue, something thin and translucent and prone to tearing.

—

…Gato así nomás, like a cat? she asks, when the song is over.
Yes, he replies, grinning. Then adds, in an English so slow she has to be careful not to laugh, *I…am…a…cat.* She looks at him, scanning his rough and open features. The skin around his hairline and beard mottled by bright sun. A six-foot colorín, redhead. Tabbycat.
He switches back to Spanish. —Sometimes they call me Patafísica.
Pata like las patas, like paws?
His grin widens.

—

It is worth asking ourselves what we gain from knowing about atrocities that occur to others. Whether we can really recreate inside ourselves someone else's pain. And if not, what are we doing exactly, throwing statistics of pain at each other, what are white American women doing going down to Chile to remember and witness American pain, while simultaneously seeking the largess of an *abroad* experience, a place other than "here"? And it is worth asking whether the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships hold some special, easy feature for being particularly white atrocities (for being atrocities in countries where the 19th century was so thoroughly atrocious so as to have almost erased all other people, if this did not itself set the standard, subconsciously, for the kind of thoroughness of erasure that swept through the doors and windows and bodies of every person in Chile in the first years of dictatorship, for a good many people this meant the doors and windows of their bodies: thumbs and orifices, any part that could be sliced or hooked to an electric wire, penetrating, breaking into any part of you that didn't open itself, and even then—). In Valparaíso, Jean was often impatient with people when they lectured her about the dictatorship, saying hurriedly, Yes, yes, I know. As if secretly offended by that, by the implication that she didn't *know*. As if her own body of knowledge was why they were telling her.

Jean is in Chile because she is translating a book. She reminds herself of this often. A novel about the dictatorship, or just after. Jean is "on fellowship" to do this. When she had heard, while still enrolled in that class, that she had received the money to go, she told her professor and her professor had replied, *But Chile? Don't you have better things to do, Jean?* This being, even accounting for the prejudice, not an entirely unfair thing to ask. So why is Jean there, really? It is a question she will perhaps never be able to answer fully, or it is a question sublimated into other questions, Jean is carrying them all whether she realizes it or not, like a girl in some old-fashioned schoolyard race, clutching at her skirts while she runs as fast as she can, her elbow wobbling as with her other hand she holds out a spoon with an egg on it, all the questions are contained in the egg, which she cannot she absolutely cannot drop.

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Drop a coin down a well. After pausing to listen for the hit, you can shout *hello* and the well might shout *hello* back, always too quickly, like someone who agrees before they even hear the question. Whether that counts as having company. And Jean, being an

only child, would respond, echoing herself, Yes, yes it does. For the story is not strictly a tragedy; rather, it is Jean's projection of a tragedy. The fact that the projection becomes real, that the story contorts itself into tragedy, *that* is the tragic, inevitable piece. But then again, isn't all tragedy like that—you can't tell if it was inevitable, or if everything could have been otherwise, that it was only a matter of shifting the frame.

—

She remembers taking that photo of Álvaro and Carmín outside the bar, Carmín's face in profile, Álvaro looking sidelong at the camera over a cigarette. The hour is late. The photograph looks like a painting. They'd all run into each other, in barrio puerto, that night. Really it is a series of photographs, with Carmín laughing in one, then smoking in a blur, then gulping the translucent contents of a green beer bottle; Álvaro meanwhile is looking at Carmín, and then down, and then finally at the lens. Both talking to each other but shifting under Jean's distanced gaze. It is raining, the light and the water give the images a painterly effect. All of them wondering whether to go to the same show, as there was only ever one good show to go to, and whether the rain was considerable enough to just go home. Carmín is mostly smiling, maybe asking Álvaro a question. To see her like this is to assume that she is always cheerful. But she often hides herself away, and can abandon in a sudden rush large pieces of her life. The three of them, in fact, have this in common, as the city disproportionately allows for and even rewards a certain propensity to let go of all prior terms, that particular combination of casualness and anger.

Gato is rubbing at their ankles, around their feet. Jean notices, she always notices, since she is the one, out of the four of them, that Gato is seeking. Álvaro will begin to notice too, at some point, to notice that Jean notices. Maru, the only one not in the photograph, will be too occupied with her child, will keep her distance, as she always does with Jean. It is difficult for Jean to be friends with the women. She is friends with Carmín, perhaps due to Carmín's own desire, and Jean's openness, even in a small way, to that desire, though a kind of false openness that would end up hurting all of them. Jean will wonder, for the rest of her life, whether she really did not desire Carmín back in the same way, or whether this strange dance she found herself helpless to sit out of closed her off to some wider possibility of loving. Not being friends with women is part of the dance, and Maru's genuine efforts to be kind to Jean—the seeming immensity of the effort—revealed Maru to be just like the rest, wary, which is another way of saying, motivated by distrust.

But Jean is not immune to that feeling, either: she feels it growing within her, strong, like some sort of miraculous vine in a children's story, springing up and around her organs overnight. For while women seemed to funnel their mistrust into her, weren't the men the real root of mistrust? So shouldn't Jean be wary, too? But somehow the wariness and distrust growing rapidly in Jean further separate her from other women. (She remembers what the man who was pleasant had said to her, that fateful afternoon, while still on the bed: *You're quite the temptress. Otherwise I wouldn't have done this.* She was hurt, lying there naked, she tried to redeem herself and maybe him—*But do you like me?*—and yet he insisted, still also naked, on making his cruel point, gazing at her with his head reclined on his hand, as if he found it curious and possibly even delightful that she had contested the point, their conversation alluding, in its subject of love and in his posture, to classical times. But really there was no argument. *I think you are very tempting,* he said again. *And a very good flirt.*)

Maru, Álvaro, Carmín. Álvaro stoops to pick something up, the cat or the child, Jean isn't sure, would prefer to be kept in the dark.

Close your eyes, Jean. Think instead about the two rabbits from primary school, though as a girl you paid them little attention. What Jean took away, more than anything, from those rabbits, were lessons about the phenomenon of captivity. But what were the lessons, exactly? The rabbits made no secret of their unhappiness; or at least, it seemed to all the children that they were dreadfully unhappy, there in their tiny, two-tiered cage, unable to do little other than ascend and descend the horrible metal ramp. So they built an enclosure outside, in one of the old vegetable beds. When they first moved the rabbits, aghast, to their new home, the children imagined the bunnies' lot to be not so different from their own, as they too were limited to fenced-off grass and concrete; the younger children would sometimes pretend to be the bunnies, hopping incessantly around the schoolyard, arguing over who was which. But a year or so later, everyone had to admit that the bunnies seemed unhappy there as well, and so the enclosure was expanded to include a second bed, complete with a pink plastic tube that connected the two spaces. The first bed was more thoughtfully built, with a roof and hutch, but the second was just a wooden box filled with dirt, fenced off by loop wire. Perhaps the children resented, unconsciously, that their generosity was found wanting. Or perhaps they were just less careful the second time around, as humans often are. Because a few weeks later the rabbits disappeared. A large bird swooped down, or maybe dogs burrowed in, joyous amongst all that expansive, uncovered sadness.

Years later, when the photographs are only photographs, someone will ask her: Jean, why are you so obedient?

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Let's take a plunge. Jean hears *plunge* and thinks: dream*,* because sometimes she dreams that very feeling, of plunging down immersed, into the ocean, and then how, in that momentary sense of rising, she looks up and glimpses a large dark shape, the oval smoothness of a whale. This is Jean's favorite dream. She tells Álvaro about the dream and her tells her about womb sensation, how we all want to go back to that cosmic stomach where we are one with the universe. But isn't that just Freud, Jean says. Álvaro sips his wine and shrugs maybe, before asking Jean why she came back. And if she says she wanted that immersion feeling, which only this trashed technicolor city can provide, what would he say? His love, which concealed but not with the intent to hurt. After that horrible party, in which Álvaro had stopped talking to her, where the silence between them had clicked into place, where she had crouched, her hands over her ears, by the wall of windowpanes, and looked through a triangle of sharp glass into the outside world, which was the only world they had, all of them together. Sirens and a distant flicker of fire and smoke on one of the hills. Carmín had pulled her into the blue-tiled bathroom and said, "People have the right to say no." But did they really, after all that? The statement was so plainly true and so deeply unfair that Jean wanted to scream.

And hadn't she been signaling nothing but *no* to Carmín, who loved her like a friend or maybe more than a friend, who later kissed her cheek, a quick shy bright kiss, in the garden. If Carmín perhaps knows *no* better than anyone. But why did she say no to Carmín while still being tricked into yes by all the others, so many men making her say yes and the only one who didn't saying no, didn't Álvaro realize she never got to say no, didn't he realize how cruel that was, or rather that she was supposed to say no to say yes and also no to say no, and so even she couldn't tell any longer what she meant, and so when she really meant no they fucked her anyway, maybe because she said "no thank you," or maybe because she said no and laughed at the same time, or because she said no as she opened the door to her house, and so maybe, she'd think to herself as Gato pressed her against the bed, she didn't really mean no after all. So couldn't Álvaro just say yes and let her make her demands of him.

—

But isn't Jean forgetting about Ruth? Jean has questions about how many people this story can hold before the surface breaks.

And yet: Ruth stands before Jean, in that first room. A floor lamp fills the space with dim light.

They had picked up Ruth and her sister at Las Docas; Jean, Gustavo, Nico, and the Lithuanians had driven down to the secret beach. Nico found the girls, of course; Jean had been busy changing into her swimsuit in the car and testing the water. The ocean made Jean nervous, and so she thought she should take advantage of the rare afternoon heat to brave that particular fear. And once she climbed out of the backseat, the boys jeered and encouraged her in. So it was that, too: half show, half dare. Jean had wanted them to see her in a bathing suit, wanted to say *look at this body I have,* but as she leaned forward, tying the bikini top awkwardly in the backseat, she felt a flash of panic. The total incongruity of her bookishness with that level of exposure. Her elegance, if she could call it that, depended on a species of concealment. She put her shorts back on before she got out of the car.

The water pulled her under with more force and was colder even than the part of the Pacific that ran into California, Gustavo and Nico preferring to stay on the beach, recording videos of her shouting with delight or disbelief as the freezing water crashed into her, which they found quite funny. Then a wave enveloped Jean, pulling at her from beneath, like hands grabbing at her ankles. Inside that rushed unbounded ocean for some moments Jean lost all sense of where her body began and ended, and she scrambled frantically against the draw to right herself. She gasped her way toward the shallows and stood up shivering out of the water, turning her back to the waves to find the boys, who were no longer filming her but instead talking to two girls Jean had never seen before, both attractive and clearly foreign. They were sisters, somos hermanas, they managed in Spanish, when Jean approached to introduce herself. From Berlin. One of them—Ruth, who said she was younger—was living for the year in Santiago, and they'd come to Valparaíso for an electronic music festival, had stayed up the whole night and ended up here on the Sunday afternoon, since everything else was closed.

How old are you, Jean asks.
Eighteen.

Jean is frightened by how much she wants to touch the girl. I thought you were older, she says.

Most people think I'm older, Ruth replies, almost as an apology.

The silence between them is warm, heavy. Ruth wants something from Jean, lifting her arms away from her body to straighten her back, displaying herself while she waits for the first hint of what the answer will be, not really knowing what she has asked.

Jean is afraid she would be insisting.

Ruth talks about her group of friends in Santiago, mostly girls, mostly gay, some of them still in high school, all of them want to sleep with her, and how frustrating it is, to feel oneself on the other side of instrumental desire. She just wants friends, she says.

Jean feels lecherous and old.

Ruth says, *Es muy probable que perdí el bus.*

Usually Jean doesn't like to speak Spanish with other foreigners, but she like speaking with this German girl, slightly shorter than her, who rushes into things, who speaks quickly and fluidly, though her language spills error after error, like pouring a gallon of water into a cup. With Ruth, Jean accesses some more proper and prosperous space within her own Spanish, as if desiring to guide Ruth over grammatical terrain: *watch that rock, don't waste so much water.*

The light in the room too dim to even throw shadows. Jean recognizes that double-belted machine inside the girl now facing her, the wanting and the not-wanting churning at at the same shuddering rate, generating images that cannot cohere. Jean wants to see the shadows of this machine on the wall, its mechanisms and latches. She wants the dignity of shadow to hide her face in. The silence between them is warm. Perhaps her fear is only cowardice. But not like this, Jean tells herself, not with Ruth, who in standing beside Jean's dresser stands on one side of something Jean cannot name, while Jean stands on the other.

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In March there is the container festival, meaning that a few containers from the port are used for artistic interventions and events, and Carmín and Carmín's new girlfriend and Jean all buy a certain number of tickets and on the designated day walk to the plaza near Neruda's house, where they are holding one of the theater shows, the organizers having somehow dragged the container up

there. The evening sky settles into itself as they enter the rectangular box along with the rest of the audience. The stage is like a catwalk or a shooting range, straight down the middle, and so the audience is seated, as a group, on either side, lengthwise single file. The show portrays the life and times of everyone's favorite patron saint and local turn-of-the-century serial killer, Emile Dubois, and Jean spends a good part of the two hours worrying about her own death, due to the hundred or so very real lit candles that deck the far end of the container, this being a budget-friendly lighting option and an authentic touch. (People, especially men, like to tell her proudly about Dubois, almost like how some people go around telling others that tomatoes are really a fruit not a vegetable. Whoever is telling this loose happy fact of science is inevitably convinced that, one, the listener hasn't heard this fact before, while the listener almost inevitably has, and two, that this fact reveals something transcendental, rather than simply the hubristic and arbitrary nature of our insistence, as human beings, on classifying the whole world.) Halfway or two-thirds of the way through the show, a girl in a whorehouse dances for him. The actress pauses dramatically, then begins to shimmy back and forth, so violently that Jean cringes in embarrassment, almost feels or hears the sequins on the woman's dress scraping against each other in their noisy imitation of seduction. After the show ends—Dubois is killed by a firing squad—they file, to Jean's relief, out the door and into the open air of night, and Jean discovers that her sense of the dance number was all wrong, though everyone agreed it was funny for some reason or another. Jean thought the dance was a parody—bad on purpose, maybe not to the character's mind, but that the audience and the actress were in on the joke together. But Carmín, who bursts into laughter just remembering the girl's movements, leaning into her new girlfriend's shoulder to stay upright but also as a flirtatious gesture, Carmín says, No, no, you don't get it. We weren't supposed to be in on any kind of joke, it was a bad show, Jean, the actress was just bad.

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The theater troupe puts on *Antigone*. There aren't scripts, of course, but Oscar helps the actors loosen up, occupy their characters to the point that it becomes less important, though he reminds them to lean on certain formalities like "thee" and "thou" and "thine" and "good sir," as these words lend consistency and help cover up the politics. Oscar always wants them as far away from the barracks and the soccer field as possible, in order to not ruin the show for anyone, so they rehearse in the sand, yanking off their shoes and socks. Even without scripts, each character still has a number of memorable lines—they are, at least, the lines that

Oscar can remember. There are only men in the camp. This too contributes to the sense of a classical production. Oscars finds a seventeen-year-old boy to play the title role, whose soft features contort so easily into emotion, who is feeling all of this, Oscar realizes, so much, that the boy had no previous rehearsals, no life dramas in which he might have practiced difficult emotions before entering the totality that is the camp, all of them shitting together and sleeping ten to a room and seeing their loved ones three hours a week. He puts a skirt on the boy and says, Just talk in your regular voice, okay?

—

Jean is losing the ability to judge. It is like a dive into senselessness or possibility, or seeing suddenly all sides at once. Maybe empathy and paranoia are two sides of the same coin. Maybe she falls down after it. She is getting worse, for example, at knowing when a joke is a joke and when is it not. Or when she's supposed to think something is funny even though it's not initially a joke. Or even just when she is supposed to get the joke and when she is not, because there are times when she is not supposed to get it but still somehow recognize it, as a joke, that is, be able to stand outside of the joke and know that it is still a joke, even if she cannot see in. And what is the relationship between a joke and a tragedy, anyway. Don't tragedies often have humor? And don't people get hurt in slapstick, isn't that actually the whole point of slapstick, that people get hurt, or is the pleasure located somewhere else too, in the unfolding unlikely inevitable chain of cause and effect, which sounds an awful lot like tragedy?

Jean's friends began to wonder why she didn't quit all these terrible men, and her acquaintances began to wonder whether she wasn't a bit of a slut. Álvaro has his issues, said Carmín. They were in Carmín's tiny kitchen, barely room for the two of them to stand. Carmín was mashing up an avocado and heating bread on the stove behind her. The ovals of marraqueta, encouraged open by her thumbs, lay face-down on that contraption que se usa harto en Chile, that shallow sheet of metal with grates and a handle. But this other guy, she was saying. Forget him. Why do you go over to his house if you don't want to do anything? Why do you let him in your door the next week? Just drop it. Jean had no answer, really, and thought she could hear in Carmín's voice the approaching end of her being charmed by the perpetual mishaps of a girl straight from California. Carmín filled her ceramic electric kettle, chipped at the spout, with water, and, closing the lid, turned to place the kettle carefully back on its base, which

lived on top of the fridge. Bueno, I mean, she said, backing up, you're young. Es decir, we're all stupid sometimes. Eres pava nomás.

Jean asks Álvaro bitterly one day whether Maru's baby is his. Álvaro stops speaking to her.

In her free time—which is, if she is honest, all of her time—she acts out "no," acts out "American." Method acting being a taking of part for whole, a cassock for a priest, the symbolic as the real, a kilo of ripe tomatoes as the full pleasure of life. "I can't," she says, practicing. *No puedo.* But Jean still hears "I love you!" slip from her mouth, slip out toward the doors and windows along Avenida Alemania, where she takes longer and longer walks in the afternoons. She does not know who or what she is addressing—the terrace plants or the concrete or Álvaro or the stray cats or the stray dogs. The dogs are the most likely, she thinks, and these days she steps lightly around their piles of shit in the street. The dogs follow her home at night, keep her safe as she rounds the various corners up the hill. Whistling the strays alongside, who lolling their tongues keep up with her with the sideways eagerness of a slow-moving vehicle.

Gato slips through the door, follows her down the hall.

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(The crowd cheers as the curtain goes up again. That was a gorgeous intermission, full of candied pretzels and thoughtfully filtered light. Of course now the actors can hear a certain amount of unwrapping, the crinkling of a long thin bag of peanuts opened in halting fragments of motorized silence, driven by shame. How easily we are driven by shame! *Antigone*, by the way, was a hit. Even the guards loved it, slapping their knees at the skirt and crying at the bit where she gets stuck in a cave and has to fend off the lions. The following week the director overheard them bragging to the Red Cross inspectors: they were housing, they claimed, a group of particularly talented prisoners.)

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The long blinds in Carmín's apartment murmur plastic against each other, covering, whether angled open or closed, the sliding glass of the far wall.

Carmín has cooked her a stew, with garbanzos and chorizo. They each eat their portions awkwardly, focusing on digestion, on bringing the spoons to their mouths. Dinner is somehow always worse than a coffee, un cafecito, lighthearted, dinner is rich and heavy, the weight of evening upon them. Carmín loved her like a friend or maybe more than a friend. Jean knows that Carmín wants something but that Carmín will never ask, not so directly. Jean feels, as her spoon scrapes against the heavy terracotta of the bowl, that the whole world has slowed down to this terrible moment, time has funneled them both into something terribly still.

Jean knows what Carmín wants—she thinks, anyway, that she knows—but cannot tell if she, Jean, wants it back. But she feels that in this moment she is being a coward, like with Ruth, though Carmín wants something in a way that is clear, Jean is the one hesitating. At moments Jean wonders whether her capacity for restraint is infinite. Would she have hesitated with Ruth, if Ruth were clear like this, like water, like putting her hand into a cold, rushing stream?

What is the moment in which something breaks. She leans and touches Carmín on the shoulder. Their bowls are empty, her touch not exactly empty but not full of an identifiable feeling, either. Jean pushes questions of particularity and attraction to the back of her mind. Is this only a favor to a friend, a way of saying *thank you for being my friend*. With her touch, together with the clatter of a spoon to the floor, Carmín puts her hand softly on Jean's knee, to encourage this feeling, a closing in. Jean leans forward and it is Carmín who says *thank you* into or against Jean's mouth.

Carmín's lips are soft in a way that strikes Jean as strange, even unerotic, and what happened was over too soon, almost before Jean could even see it, a single gesture. But for a moment or a few minutes Jean was almost too enthusiastic, so achingly relieved to simply have crossed or broken or melted that Carmín had laughed that same laugh at what Jean had so briefly offered, don't you want that, Jean had asked, looking up at her, and Carmín said yes but it's alright, no rush. But Carmín hadn't realized what she was refusing, if what she was doing was in fact refusal, because it wasn't like a glacier that had melted after all, just a piece that fell off crashing briefly into the ocean and then you'd never know

Jean got up from the bed and said she had to go, there was a goodbye party she had to go to.

But you're coming back, said Carmín.

Yes, said Jean. But she didn't.

—

Let me tell you something about singing. Permítame, permit me. C is telling Jean as they walk through the Bellas Artes district in Santiago, into Centro, she hasn't done laundry so is buying underwear at a basement shop, you have to be careful, she says, serious, sorting through the onslaught of lavender and mint green, about the men you permit. C tells Jean this as a part of C's own journey; for once she is not judging her American friend. The point being as much for herself. But *permetir,* the underlying feeling is all wrong! Jean cries out, loving her friend and wanting to shake her, out of frustration and solidarity both. A fire truck yodels through the streets as they emerge up the stairs and into the sun, drowning Jean out right as she says: Enthusiasm, what about enthusiasm, what about desire not compromised by insistence?

But this moment with C comes years later, when Jean visits Chile again and rings her old friend up, now living in the capital city. When Jean can finally say: that was assault, what happened to me. And that other time, too. And that other time. C says, Qué bueno que rompiste tu patrón. *Patrón* meaning pattern, but also master, boss, patron saint. Jean explains, It helped to remember the first time, that everything else twisted into focus as mere effect. This is, Jean thinks, to not state certain things, but the narrative has to start somewhere. Or doesn't it? But C is now replying, and she speaks as if lit not by the sun glaring off the windshields but by a single quiet spotlight: I don't really know mine, she says. I just remember a man on top of me, an adult. But sometimes I think I just made it up.

—

Did you put the pieces together yet? Jean is back in Chile after a long absence and asked Álvaro over for dinner. He agreed. Álvaro is looking her in the face, saying, I hate pero odio este hombre. Jean is not sure he has all the pieces, or rather she is sure he does not have all the pieces, like how she slept with Carmín too, how Carmín had said *thank you* into her mouth. Remember, nothing is like anything else, every piece unique. Like a puzzle. Álvaro says, the girl I was dating then, she also had a bad experience with

him, this Gato, and Jean asks sharply, she is holding a knife, that is why she is asking like that, did he rape her, and Álvaro says she didn't like that word, said it all happened so fast there wasn't time…he makes a whooshing noise and tumbles his hands together.

—

It mostly comes from the throat, singing. Or did she have it backward and it mostly comes from the stomach. Jean often had her memories backward, too, the order of events. With Gato for a long time she remembered that they had gone to the funeral together first. Afterward, she thought, he must have come to her house. There was perhaps more dignity in that version. But the truth was that he had walked her up to her house the evening prior, because otherwise she wouldn't have gone with him to the funeral at all: he was slippery like a cat, you had to catch him and keep him. Once he'd left her sight she wouldn't know for days or weeks where he was. And she had wanted to go to the funeral so badly, to see the famous cemetery, to hear the singing. Flaco Moreno had died, his nickname original for being two unoriginal nicknames put together. He'd accompanied half the singers in Valpo; certainly, said Gato, all of the older ones. So she had wanted to go, and Gato was her ticket in, because the cueca musicians didn't like outsiders, especially Americans, especially at their wakes.

So the night prior they had arranged to go to a concert and then a party, a closing event. At the concert, which is really just some hostel's patio, the band plays that tired old Chico Trujillo song, brassy as ever, *loca loca, te volviste loca y disparaste en frente a mí.* There is a bathtub installed outdoors, to charm visitors and for washing things, Gato smiles and places the empty bottle of wine he had been drinking from—his favorite kind, the bottle oblong, its shape reminiscent of harder liquor—on the cement, tucked behind the tub's brassy foot. People always know I've been here when they find those, he hum-murmur-laughs into her ear. His accordionist fingers play along her waist to the song. *Cara de vulgaridad,* sings the singer. Afterwards they go to the closing event, in a different part of town, it is a good party. She runs into Álvaro there, outside the door, and is so happy to see him. He says he is well, he is dating someone he likes, another American, his face bashful at the admission, or maybe Jean just imagines that. She is happy for him, her pride is saved by being with this other man, she promises Álvaro to see him soon, but he is like some apparition, a warning, or a reminder, turning on a question inside her, making her ask, again, *why is she here,* not in Chile but with

Gato, at this stupid party, rather than with her real friends, why did she call him rather than anyone else. They have slept together before and yet there is always something terrifying about it, though she can never quite say why, maybe it is her own fault, her own relationship to sex. But he drinks that bottle of wine and something changes, warms in him, something slippery, like oil. Something slippery, like oil: she turns away from Álvaro and toward the door, she wants to keep talking to him but it's almost strange to do so, they are both a little too happy to see each other, she does not want Gato to see them and feel uncertain, even if she now does. The evening itself warm. But the question remains and as Gato finding her on the improvised dance floor takes her face with both his hands and hum-murmur-laughs as he kisses her, his wet tongue twisting wetly, red wine in his red mouth, she cannot quite escape the question, and something inside her hardens with undesire, even as he is saying to her—his voice softly slurred, but maybe like something nice, like velvet—Wonderful, this is so wonderful. After three or four songs she tells him she is going home, and he says, Pero te acompaño, which of course can mean many things, but she was far enough from home that she needed that, someone to walk her through the port and Plaza Echaurran at least. So she nodded and after another song or two he puts on his jacket, which they'd been guarding on some cafe table beside them (remember that this is a closing event, that the cafe-bar is closing because the neighborhood is changing quickly, the landlord wants to sell, the set rotates ninety degrees and the table disappears and reappears elsewhere as a different table in a different life). Álvaro waves at her at she leaves, he leaning up with someone, a girl, against the far wall of the stairwell; Jean does not know whether to approach them and so just waves backs.

By the time the arrive at the Plaza Anibal Pinto she is wearing his jacket, he has offered it to her. Some good manners are free. He does not let her take it off. She imagines her feet glued to the ground and says, Sabes que, no quiero. But let me walk you up. Something catches in his voice. Earlier they passed his music studio, where she knows he has been sleeping lately, he is between houses, and she had said, Perhaps you should stay here. But he'd insisted on walking her to the Plaza and now here they were. So she says again, Sabes qué, no quiero. Which didn't refer to the walk up but to sex. He looks stricken, his hands cradle her face again. Déjate sentir, Jean. A girl she recognizes from the street approaches them, strung out, and grabs her by the shoulders, her propositioning simultaneously affectionate and aggressive, even erotic, whispering hotly into Jean's ear, hamburguesas veganas weed cocaine I have it!, she lets go and not even really waiting for a response laughing slips up a nearby stairwell, Gato straightens the jacket, which had shifted with the girl's grip, holding the lapels he pulls her toward him, Alright, Jean says. But as they begin to climb she says again, stopping again, Sabes qué, no quiero. And he says, pointing to another stairwell behind her, Pero no nos

paramos acá, acá asaltan. And he says—a block later, when she stops again, repeats again, no quiero, no quiero, she has been practicing—pero lo hacemos con mucho amor y condón. Which could arguably be translated as love and protection. His voice each time stickier. And she remembers that she does want to see the funeral, and that he has nowhere to sleep. He pulls playfully at her hand, she wishes they had gone up the other way, where she goes up when she is alone, where there are always more people, here the streets are just as angled but empty, they make her afraid to go up by herself but they are already halfway, it is senseless to go all the way down to go back up again. They arrive at the house and she pauses once again before the door. She feels something heavy in her, the whole way up the hill dragging this heaviness, she says yet again, No quiero. He puts his hand on her shoulder. Durmámos no más, he says, to reassure her.

Inside they are already up the stairs in the bedroom, she does not know how, as it is difficult afterwards to remember how you got there, that is the most difficult part to remember, he pushes her down playfully onto the bed and pulls down her leggings, she reaches both her hands down and pulls them back up again, durmámos no más, no quiero, he pulls them back down, she pulls them back up, it is almost a farce, a parody, who is joking and who is not joking, he pulls them back down, daaaalleee, he says, hooking her panties to one side and shoving his tongue in her crotch, when exactly does she capitulate, when she slides off the bed and he scoops her back up, or when he is sucking on her breasts, this will all be easier if she decides that she really wanted to in the first place, because hadn't she almost really wanted to, she must either relax or face some consequence that she can't see or can't bear to look at and so she lets go and he is on top of her—

In the morning she finds a peach pit on the washing machine. She does not know how it got there until she is in the kitchen, trying to make herself a hungover tea, and sees that one of the two peaches she'd purchased is gone. Now she remembers: he had taken the peaches off the fridge in order to light the gas in order to take a shower. Did he taste like peaches in the night. She was trying not to taste, not to think. A memory of having tasted her fridge in his mouth before. Her capitulation all too familiar. Was he really that hungry, she wondered.

And later when he wakes up it happens again. This time, because she is more sober or simply because it is the second time, it is humiliating. Fool me twice, she thinks, cresting. Jean spends a while just laying there afterward, now he is the one with energy, he

cooks her breakfast. Makes a paste out of half an onion and an old rotting carrot and spices, digs up an avocado from the fridge, toasts bread, he is a good cook, it is delicious. At breakfast he is careful to eat only as much as Jean eats, and she eats little, perhaps on purpose. But now she can get her side of the deal. Shouldn't we be going to the funeral, she asks.

—

Across the table, a drenched space. The man is asking him a question. The best torturers are empathetic, as they can imagine the secret parts of you.

In the Ritoque concentration camp they found the Town of Ritoque. Oscar, who began the game, names himself mayor. He welcomes the new prisoners as they file in from the trucks each morning, explaining that, in fact, they've arrived to the only free town in Chile. The prisoners give the alleyways between barracks street names, designate a postman. There's even a fire department. Everyone is the audience and everyone is a member of the cast. The guards play the policemen, and the prisoners approach them with imaginary complaints. That señora stole my best watermelons again. Some rascal keeps me up screaming each night.

But the man across the table is no longer playing. Answer the question, he says.

—

But all these women you say slept with Gato, says Jean, to Álvaro. She is angry again. How do you know? You know because you slept with them too, don't you?

Yes, okay okay, I like foreign girls.

Jean says, German, French, American, starts laughing, almost hysterical.

Álvaro stiffens. But so what? I don't trick anyone into having sex with me, Jean. I don't call anyone *genia,* like he does.

Jean keeps laughing and laughing in order not to cry, to avoid admitting that Gato had called her that too, just like the other girls, that it had all happened too fast, just like the other girls, that it had happened over and over and over again, that that very afternoon she had pulled a condom from her vagina, four or five days old. The loose watery latex smelling foul with use.

Maybe there are things that I will never understand, says Jean, suddenly calm.

Yes, says Álvaro, sensing something beneath, something that could tear and contaminate and wound him, a rusty nail felt with the soft underside of his foot. Puede ser.

Álvaro will ask, What do you think I am thinking, Jean? And Jean will have no response. He watches her in her blue dress. She moves and he frames her movement. He needs not wine but a cigarette, something to get him out of here for a few minutes, at least a few minutes. She is watching him too; they are both restless and careful of each other. Like animals circling uncertain, a possible violence. They are speaking of a darkness that looks just like them, that is indistinguishable from their own vectors of desire. Men who only sleep with foreign women, foreign women who only sleep with these men. A cigarette, he hears himself saying out loud. Is he being a coward or is he just steadying himself. I'm going to buy a cigarette, if you need anything. Jean says she needs nothing—lemon, wait, a lemon.

(Álvaro walks to the top of the hill. It is his turn to be on edge. From the corner store he can still make out the port, and so smokes the two cigarettes a block down, against the lookout's railing. He gazes down at the rows and rows of shipping containers, oranges and yellows and blues desaturated by the gray of night. What is Jean thinking and what is he doing here, ruining his lungs with paint and cigarettes, holding a fist-sized lemon in his palm. He is beginning to realize that he meant much more to Jean than she ever meant to him, those two weeks they spent together, a fling he had folded beneath others. Something happened to her, Jean keeps saying. And now—? And if he is that kind of man she described. He is not Gato. He knows that. But his thoughts slip out from under him, and he is at her door again.)

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How do we come to know anything? Mostly by comparing things. Pain and pleasure being immediate, being knowledge in themselves. Nothing is like anything else, but surely some things are *more* unlike than others. Torture is not like anything else. "The pain was what it was."

—

The rest of the night with Álvaro: marea. She asks, over and over again, are you sure, are you sure. She's stiff, unrelaxed, hiding just how close Gato really is, how he's under the bed, between the sheets, how only now she is realizing she will have to leave forever to escape him, how she is that kind of person, who can leave forever, how another blonde foreign girl is going to take her place soon enough. And Álvaro says, yes, I want to. Touching the inside of her thigh. Afterward they eat yogurt and cereal in bed and he says, You know, I used to not understand graffitti. It was annoying that I couldn't read whatever the word was. Now I walk by and think, Que bueno. Que bueno que no se lee las letras. It's the only abstraction in this whole fucking city.

—

Venganza. This is Carmín's response, flat, to Jean's question about why men—not Álvaro, she hurries to clarify, but other men—might do such things to her, treat her badly on purpose. Carmín's eyes lack the usual sympathetic glint. Jean ventures that these men, born around the time the dictatorship collapsed, or just after, that they perhaps have trouble figuring out how to narrate the coup in terms of their own lives. And Carmín says, No, they don't. They know. They know exactly why they wish to hurt, Jean. There are plenty of reasons. The two of them are learning on the balcony. Many conversations in Chile happen on balconies. There seems to be something specifically Chilean in valuing a view, the ocean and the mountains running down the ribs of the country. Carmín taps her cigarette on the railing and turns her gaze turns back to the darkening roofs and the lurid sky. She points out the bridge ten meters below, how the house is built so you come in on the second floor and through the back, over the bridge, so that the front of the house faces the water but cannot be seen from the street nor from where the two of them are standing. She says, what I've noticed about my generation—people who are now maybe between thirty-two and thirty-eight or forty, is an immense bitterness about what wasn't. That something really amazing was happening in Chile, to create a more just society. Not only

Allende; the two presidents before him were also beginning to make these changes. It's not only about the people who disappeared, but about a very specific kind of opportunity that the coup shattered. We could have been born into that, but instead we get a Chile where no one can afford to pay the gas or break their arm or send their children to school. We are less educated for it, poorer for it, sicker for it. And none of it was inevitable.

It is once again Jean's last night there. Carmín says, Eres la chica más despedida del mundo.

They stay up until the morning. At some point Jean begins to think that the sun has already risen, the sky is so light. But across the hills comes a surge of brightness, is the shape to call it round even, do we just sense "round" behind that brightness, a surge that in this second no tiene nada que ver con completion or circularity, is more like a surprise out of nowhere, horrible, suddenly there's also pink, suddenly two clouds are reaching across the bay wanting in on the action, the pink beneath them. The container ships heavy and indifferent. The cloud bodies are purple, divide pink (below) from yellow (the immediate) and blue (the rest). Here comes the sun, looking straight at her from the balcony, the birds loop across trying to get out of the way, almost like dodging a camera shutter. The sun comes and blots out the world—

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Not everyone in the theater troupe was imprisoned. Or some were detained for shorter periods of time and released. The ones who were never released back into Chile, like Oscar, attained refugee status in some European country or another when Amnesty International forced the dictatorship to close the camps, if not the torture sites, which were mostly within the city. Oscar went to Paris, his sister Claudia still in Santiago. They'd initially been detained together, though they were held in different parts of the building. She had been married to Renán, one of the actors in the troupe, and he had come to see them in that first month, along with their mother, during Sunday visiting hours. But visiting hours were also traps, if they thought your family could make you talk. So when Oscar was taken from his cell into another room he was bracing himself for another "merienda" as the guards were calling it and found worse his brother-in-law across the table. The guards asked Oscar a question, and told him that if he didn't talk his brother was going to "have to go away." And Oscar and Renán just looked at each other across the table. Claudia, they released

Claudia around Christmas and she hadn't known any of it, so when she arrived home she spent a few days waiting for Renán before she realized that he was gone, and that their mother, who had never so much as read a pamphlet, was also gone, neither listed even in the detention registry for visiting. So Claudia just visited Oscar, who by then had been moved to Tres Alamos, and later to Ritoque, and tried not to collapse over her steaming tea each morning, tried instead to trace with her eyes the outline of trees and cordillera on the long bus ride from Santiago to the coast. Oscar said, You can't live your whole life in mourning. He couldn't say much else, in front of the guards, and told her also that he was putting on shows inside, with the other men, most of whom had never acted. But they're naturals. Something about this stuck with Claudia, even after Oscar left Chile. Maybe that was how she began teaching acting workshops, mostly in high schools, but she'd go wherever they wanted to hire her. And one morning—years later, really toward the end of the dictatorship, when everyone was holding their breath—a nun called her up, asking if she might be willing to do a workshop for some women and girls living at the convent. The nun explained that some of the women were unwed mothers; others were simply disturbed, and that the workshop might do all of them some good. Claudia, after a moment, had agreed. That she was asked over the phone and not in person helped her hide the gaping hole of fright that had opened in her. It is almost certainly not a trap, she tells herself over and over again, and she goes the next week to the nunnery, in Valparaíso, taking the same bus as before. The woman who rang her opens the thick wood door and lets her in. There is a remarkable amount of light, the second and third floors with the same openness of structure as other houses in the port. She is led into a room with a group of women and she immediately understood to whom the nun had been referring, as a woman approached her, out of the blue, talking, talking, she couldn't stop talking, looking only a few years younger than Claudia, though Claudia couldn't really tell with the woman wearing an apron over her dress like a schoolgirl, the nuns must make everyone wear that, Claudia thought, in pity, she tried to call the group to attention but the woman kept approaching her, combing her hair behind both ears at the same time, asking Claudia if she had seen her dog, if she had seen someone named Mateo, if she had seen how beautiful the curtains looked this morning, if she had purchased the packets of tea like she or someone else had promised, and finally the anxiety and frustration building in Claudia won out and she said to the woman all in a rush, Pretend you're a statue! And for a second the woman froze, as she was, her arms still tucked into her body. Then silent or as if all the talking was now inside her she began to pull off her apron, and once she had pulled off her apron she pulled off her shoes and then her socks and without any hesitation began shimmying out of her dress, tugging her arms and torso out of the sleeves until the whole top of the dress was bunched around her waist and she was trying to tug it down further, get the dress over her hips, and when she fails she thrusts out

her two arms in front of her and freezes like that, naked at the top with these enormous baroque folds of a skirt, when someone throws open the door from the verandah—have they been watching us, Claudia wonders, almost dizzy, the whole time?—and one of the nuns, a young one, comes running up to the girl with her own habit and full of her own pity and her own shame close to tears and throws it over the woman, covering the woman as she comforts her, stroking her neck and shoulders as the woman begins to shudder, her heaving shape modest once again modest beneath the heavy obliterating white of the cloth.

APPENDIX I: A REHEARSAL

What was determined?

I always avoid writing this scene.

Something caused the dynamic. Jean would throw herself into these relationships and watch herself flail, watch her body be unsafe. Why did she do this, over and over again? (Is that the question I'm asking, or are my questions about something else, or framed a different way?)

That college film class. What Jean remembered first, when she began to put her memories in order, was not what had happened to her, but watching a film after the fact: Memorias de subdesarollo. Cuban movie from the 1960s. The professor responding that she herself wouldn't consider it an assault scene. Jean begins to wonder why that movie maimed her before she even arrived in Valparaíso, before she met Gato or Álvaro or the man who was pleasant. At some point Jean remembers something she hasn't thought about for a long time, something that happened in Buenos Aires, years before, that first time she travelled. The two men in San Telmo, everything lit in bloody red light. She was 19. Now Jean is perhaps even objectively a beautiful woman. The number of wounds that occurred in between, the number of undignified moments to impose something like dignity on you.

The first night she goes to a bar in Buenos Aires is almost the first night she's ever gone to a bar. She goes with a bearded American man, who sleeps in the same room at the hostel. She dislikes him—there is something depreciatory in his stance toward the world, which she finds strange—but then again he does not give her a bad feeling either, unlike the other man in their room, also American, also white, who sleeps above her. The bar is not far; they can walk, the man says. He tells her about his girlfriend, who will be joining him at some future point. He talks about her in a plaintive way, almost sadly. The bar, the woman at the hostel desk explained to them in English, pretends to be a secret place, so they are careful to walk along the same street as the bar, and, after they pass the correct intersection, to look for an unmarked door. The door is in fact not so hidden; Jean turns the handle, opening to the noise of a room she still cannot picture, and a set of stairs. She wants to forget that this sullen man has come along,

so she walks in first and remains slightly ahead of him as they climb the stairs. When she emerges, on the second floor, to the blare of music and warm light, Jean sees the counter to the left, red couches to the right. The walls are red brick and there are many high windows. The setting pulls her out of girlhood, for the bar was not a living room with furniture pushed aside for dancing, nor a cleared cafeteria hall. She was never comfortable in those makeshift spaces: never knew where to stand, her tall, rounded body not unlike the rooms themselves, clumsy and unsexed. But here time starts again. She has been—has always been—a woman for two minutes, two minutes that become three and four. She unzips her coat, giddy with the sensation of being watched: as she walks toward the bar, men turn to look, or so it seems to her. As a test, she chooses a spot at the bar by the man who, of everyone she can see, strikes her as the most attractive. The bartender approaches from the other end; she asks him for a house drink. He is amused and complies. (An early lesson: to charm amidst the fumble.) She can approach any man in the room. She leans her weight on the counter. It is the first time she has ever felt this way. And perhaps this man whom she sat beside—now turning to introduce himself —is living with that same freedom, and has freely chosen to speak to her.

They move, at some point, to the couches, in order to join his friend, who is much larger than him. She assumes they are both somewhere in their twenties. The second man a tango musician. She learns the word for bass: el bajo. Intuitive enough. She already knew that tocar meant both to play and to touch. The bassist offers to get her another drink. She says, just beer, please. She likes that she can stay on this couch, sitting across from the first man, though in the future she will remember almost nothing about him. Or perhaps he told her almost nothing. She will remember what he looked like, thrown into relief against the red leather, and she will recall certain sensations from this hour at the bar, of attraction, of amazement with herself. But much of her memory of this evening will occur in a mode beyond language, and for many years she will not remember at all.

They offer to show her their apartment nearby; they could stop on the way to another bar. She agrees, almost too quickly. She likes having been invited somewhere, and looks around the room for the American man and spots him at the bar. By now he's struck up a conversation with other foreigners. She had in fact forgotten him. He nods, tensely, not quite looking at her, when she tells him she is leaving the bar. The streetlights reflect off the cobblestones and the metal barriers that cover the shop windows; everything is locked and closed by now. The walk is less lively than she expects, they do not talk much, she can hear the click of her shoes on the ground. Once inside the apartment, the slimmer man encourages her to sit down on the couch, make herself comfortable. The wall behind the couch is thick, the top half made up of embedded squares of glass, in such a way that light, but not information, passes through. A hallway leads back towards further rooms. The bassist goes to the kitchen, and Jean gets up to

follow him, leaning on the doorframe, which has no door. He is rolling a joint on the counter, and asks if she would like some; she demurs. He tells her this is an artist's neighborhood, then is quiet for a minute before asking, again, if she really doesn't want to smoke. She says no and so they walk back to the living room, and she returns, somewhat reluctantly, to her spot on the couch by the first man, who shares the joint with the bassist, him sitting beside her while the other stands in various corners the room, approaching to hand over the joint or take it back, stooping a bit to do so while, to make conversation, he mentions some friend of theirs who is traveling. Then, surprising Jean, he disappears down the hall.

The man beside her murmurs something, then puts his left hand on the back of her neck and pulls her head toward him. He starts opening and closing his lips and she does it back, does what she imagines kissing to be, and though she has never practiced much, she senses what almost seems like indifference in him, something that sits back on its heels. He shifts and she glances down to see him unbutton and unzip his pants with his right hand, pull out his penis. His left hand still holding her by the back of her neck. Jean supposes that she wants to be doing this, and reaches out her own left hand as she continues to try to kiss him, touching the penis very lightly, not sure whether to hold it, move her hand up and down, or just rub her fingers along its pink skein. She tries to be very gentle, as this way she can pretend it is something else, a small frightened animal, like the pet rabbits back in grade school, which would sit quivering in her elbow as she cupped her free hand over their head and length of ears, trying to calm them. She's not doing very well, he can tell she doesn't know what she's doing, Jean can tell this because after a few minutes he places a palm on either side of her temple, coaxing her head forward, all ten fingers pulling her down from the back of her skull, down to his penis so she can put her mouth on it. She is still sitting beside him on the couch, as she puts her mouth on it she is overwhelmed by the sense of being a beginner, she puts her mouth down to swallow the rabbit, watching herself lean over his lap in the most terrible way, she knows none of this. Whatever she has unearthed is just beginning. Her whole upper body near parallel with the sofa seat as she begins to try to move in relation to his penis somehow, overwhelmed by its presence in her mouth, she cannot move up her whole torso up and down like she thinks he probably wants her to, like bobbing for apples, what she imagines bobbing for apples to be like. Without taking her mouth off, she slides, half falling, from the couch to the floorboards. There's something humiliating in her old familiar clumsiness; in being forced, in this moment, to be clumsy. She gets up onto her knees and continues—now it's easier—she hates it, she realizes, but her hatred is somehow separate from accomplishing the task.

What she senses next. As if a large bird had passed over her. She freezes, stilling herself within its shadow. A cold hand slides down her backside, beneath her underwear, the fingers curling up around insistent darting horrible. His body twice the size

of hers, he envelops her completely. Like a shadow. The other man. She did not notice him come up behind her, crouch down. Not until she felt his hand, those terrible cold fingers attached to his enormous body. There is nothing sexy about crouching, she thinks, dizzy, he's not trying to present himself to her, he doesn't need her to see him, and what are they doing in the living room anyhow, she can feel how frightened she is, trapped between them both, the first man leaning back in pleasure—he is high, she remembers suddenly, they are both high. She tells herself, Get up, Jean, using the voice her father would use, sharp, a warning held inside it, him standing just inside the doorframe at six or six thirty or seven o'clock in the morning. Her mother inevitably still in bed. That if she didn't get up she would be kicked, kicks in the behind in her underwear his shoe sharp like his voice. That she could be many things but not like her mother, who is asleep.

She jerks up to her feet, surprising them. She will feel in that moment and in the future that she rescued herself in Spanish, that in that moment she spoke perfect if simple Spanish. The first time she ever felt this way. Tengo que volver, she says. Tengo algo muy importante mañana. They say what, now? She says, Yes. She points to the larger man, the tango musician. He's the kinder of the two, or just the more cowardly. Either way the safer choice. She says, You are going to walk me home.

The next day she opened her guidebook and found a cafe, well-touristed but classic, in a different neighborhood, far but not too far away. She could walk. When she arrived she chose a seat outside, beneath the cafe's famous rubber tree, ordered coffee and three small pastries. She was not sure what to do, other than write down, as best she could, what happened. She was determined to practice her Spanish, and so wrote, that day, in Spanish, not stopping until she had filled the entire notebook. That unspoken rule —of having to fill the whole book—must have forced her to go into considerable detail. Her handwriting looks different now, has evolved; back then, when she had just turned nineteen, it looked closer to that of a child's, the vowels warmer and rounder. Whether her sentences, limited and surely bad, really got at the heart of things remains an open question. They say it is difficult to process trauma in a language other than the one in which the trauma is experienced. But did it happen in English or Spanish? She didn't have a word for it in either language. After all, she had agreed to go with them.

The cafe provides two tiny chocolates along with the coffee, rectangular and wrapped in gold foil. She eats them ravenously, as much as one can eat small things ravenously. The waiter, a man with combed gray hair, with a napkin draped in earnest over his forearm, watches her from his sentry spot by the door to the cafe. His shirt, vest, and matching apron are also in earnest. He has worked here for decades. He approaches a table near her, to clear the two cups and saucers, the bill, from the pair

recently departed, the man dressed in a blue suit and the woman, older, wrapped in fur. The day is gray but not cold. He moves toward Jean. He pauses, and, after rearranging the cup and saucer on her table, his movement fulfilling for the both of them the roles the world has set out for each, he reaches into his apron pocket and deposits a handful of chocolates beside her.

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A long time from now, when she is a real adult, the notebook would be lost in the mail. So there will be no way to know what she wrote down, or what really happened. Once, months after filling the book, or maybe it was even her second time there, walking through San Telmo again, she passed by the bass player, whose body so suited his instrument, and he stopped on the cobblestones and greeted her, surprised she was back, and offered to take her to a tango concert at a bar one evening. If she thinks about it for too long she begins to wonder whether he's played alongside Gato, who being a tango musician when he wasn't playing cueca and half-Argentine frequently dragged his knapsack back and forth across the Andes on the discount sleeper bus. That perhaps he did this, consciously or not, to avoid anyone putting the pieces together. Was it possible her own tour had been so thorough?

Her hands tremble the whole subway ride home, to a rented apartment on the other end of the city.

The third time Jean finds herself in Buenos Aires, which is the third time Jean finds herself in South America, or is it the fourth time, after she's left Valparaíso but before she returns, her aunt tells her that the city's like some bad boyfriend, as Jean can't help going back, yet is always unhappy there. Her aunt has had many bad boyfriends, and in the moment, holding the phone to her ear, Jean is amused by the comparison.

1 de Abril, 2019 4:55 pm

Querida Gwen:

Al fin tengo un tiempo de tranquilidad para poder escribirte concentrada, por aquí todo sigue igual, pero si han pasado muchas cosas, después de nuestra última conversación me quedé muy atenta a mis emociones y sobre todo a la temática del abuso, durante ese período estuve trabajando mucho, de hecho aún estoy en un torbellino intenso con respecto al trabajo en Sanaclown, estamos tratando de que el proyecto brille más y que podamos conseguir fondos para seguir adelante, pero no me ha sido posible separarme de mis procesos personales, es por eso que decidí retomar una de mis terapias para poder trabajar el ámbito de mis relaciones afectivas con los hombres, y bueno descubrí que fui abusada de niña, desde muy pequeña, vi con muchos detalles esta situación y fui capaz de descubrir como esto estaba generando un estado de adicción al abandono y la indiferencia, que a veces si bien no era de parte de los hombres, yo inconscientemente generaba estas situaciones o escogía a hombres que representaban este perfil, ha sido muy doloroso para mi descubrir esto, y también ver como este trauma fue el responsable de todos mis fracasos amorosos, de todas maneras y como ya había hablado contigo y también había acompañado a una amiga en todo su proceso de sanación, es que pude comprender mucho más rápido la oportunidad que se esconde detrás de aceptar y observar un patrón de comportamiento que estaba siendo tan tóxico y dañino para mi, me tocó vivir todo este proceso en un viaje a las Torres del Paine, por lo que el contacto con la naturaleza en su estado más primitivo y salvaje me ayudó de sobremanera a canalizar mis emociones.

No está siendo nada fácil, tengo mucho miedo de hablar sobre mis emociones o de tomar la iniciativa en cuanto a mis relaciones, por ahora pienso tomar mi tiempo y atravesar esta prueba con valentía, tal como lo has llevado tú, Sigo tu gran ejemplo y quiero recordarte que estamos juntas en esto y en todo, seguro vamos a lograr sacar mucha luz y belleza de estas situaciones, en mi caso estoy viendo la nueva posibilidad que se abre para mi, si no hubiese visto esto quizás me habría condenado a estar en relaciones con hombres abusadores por toda mi vida, creo que ahora si podría estar más atenta a que quien me acompañe lo haga desde el amor y el respeto.

Puedes contarme también como has estado tú, como te has sentido y que tal va todo tu trabajo y estudios.

Te quiero mucho siempre
Te envío un gran abrazo
C

APPENDIX III: A DOOR