

En el viaje de novios

Mi mujer se había sentido indispuesta y habíamos regresado apresuradamente a la habitación del hotel, donde ella se había acostado con escalofríos y un poco de náusea y un poco de fiebre.¹ No quisimos llamar en seguida a un médico por ver si² se le pasaba y porque estábamos en nuestro viaje de novios, y en ese viaje no se quiere la intromisión de un extraño, aunque sea para un reconocimiento. Debía de ser un ligero mareo, un cólico, cualquier cosa.³ Estábamos en Sevilla, en un hotel que quedaba resguardado del tráfico por una explanada que lo separaba de la calle. Mientras mi mujer se dormía (pareció dormirse en cuanto la acosté y la arropé), decidí mantenerme en silencio, y la mejor manera de lograrlo y no verme tentado a hacer ruido o hablarle por aburrimiento era asomarme al balcón y ver pasar a la gente, a los sevillanos, cómo caminaban y cómo vestían, cómo hablaban, aunque, por la relativa distancia de la calle y el tráfico, no oía más que un murmullo. Miré sin ver, como mira quien llega a una fiesta en la que sabe que la única persona que le interesa no estará allí porque se quedó en casa con su marido. Esa persona única estaba conmigo, a mis espaldas, velada por su marido. Yo miraba hacia el exterior y pensaba en el interior, pero de pronto individualicé a una persona, y la individualicé porque a diferencia de las demás, que pasaban un momento y desaparecían, esa persona permanecía inmóvil en su sitio. Era una mujer de unos treinta años de lejos, vestida con una blusa azul sin apenas mangas y una falda blanca y zapatos de tacón también blancos. Estaba esperando, su actitud era de espera inequívoca, porque de vez en cuando daba dos o tres pasos a derecha o izquierda, y en el último paso arrastraba un poco el tacón afilado de un pie o del otro, un gesto de contenida impaciencia. Colgado del brazo llevaba un gran bolso,

On the Honeymoon

My wife had felt unwell and we had quickly returned to the hotel room, where she had gone to bed shivering and with slight nausea and a slight fever. We did not want to ring a doctor immediately in case it passed and because we were on our honeymoon, and that is a journey on which you do not want the intrusion of a stranger, even for a medical examination. It had to be a touch of sickness, colic, something minor like that. We were in Seville, in a hotel which was protected from the traffic by a terrace which separated it from the street. While my wife went to sleep (she seemed to go to sleep as soon as I put her to bed and tucked her in), I decided to keep quiet, and the best means of achieving this and not be tempted to make a noise or speak to her because I was bored was to go to the balcony and look out and see the people go past, the Sevillians, how they walked and how they dressed, how they spoke, although, given the relative distance of the street and the traffic, I heard no more than a murmur. I looked without seeing, like someone who arrives at a party at which he knows that the only person who interests him will not be present because she stayed at home with her husband. That only person was with me, behind me, with her husband near her bedside. I was looking outside and thinking about the inside, but suddenly I picked a person out, and I picked her out because unlike the others, who walked past for a moment then disappeared, this person remained motionless where she was. She was a woman around thirty seen from a distance, wearing an almost sleeveless blue blouse and a white skirt and high-heeled shoes that were also white. She was waiting, her stance was one of unmistakable waiting, because from time to time she walked one or two steps to the right or left, and with her last step dragged the sharp heel of one foot or the other, a movement of restrained impatience. Hanging from her arm she carried a large bag, like the ones that when I was a child were

como los que en mi infancia llevaban las madres, mi madre, un gran bolso negro colgado del brazo anticuadamente, no echado al hombro como se llevan ahora. Tenía unas piernas robustas, que se clavaban sólidamente en el suelo cada vez que se volvían a detenerse en el punto elegido para su espera tras el mínimo desplazamiento de dos o tres pasos y el tacón arrastrado del último paso. Eran tan robustas que anulaban o asimilaban esos tacones, eran ellas las que se hincaban sobre el pavimento, como navaja en madera mojada. A veces flexionaba una para mirarse detrás y alisarse la falda, como si temiera algún pliegue que le afeara el culo, o quizá se ajustaba las bragas rebeldes a través de la tela que las cubría.

Estaba anocheciendo, y la pérdida gradual de la luz me hizo verla cada vez más solitaria, más aislada y más condenada a esperar en vano. Su cita no llegaría. Se mantenía en medio de la calle, no se apoyaba en la pared como suelen hacer los que aguardan para no entorpecer el paso de los que no esperan y pasan, y por eso tenía problemas para esquivar a los transeúntes, alguno le dijo algo, ella le contestó con ira y le amagó con el bolso enorme.

De repente alzó la vista, hacia el tercer piso en que yo me encontraba, y me pareció que fijaba los ojos en mí por vez primera. Escrutó, como si fuera miope o llevara lentillas sucias, guiñaba un poco los ojos para ver mejor, me pareció que era a mí a quien miraba. Pero yo no conocía a nadie en Sevilla, es más, era la primera vez que estaba en Sevilla, en mi viaje de novios con mi mujer tan reciente, a mi espalda enferma, ojalá no fuera nada. Oí un murmullo procedente de la cama, pero no volví la cabeza porque era un quejido que venía del sueño, uno aprende a distinguir en seguida el sonido dormido de aquel⁴ con quien duerme. La mujer había dado unos pasos, ahora en mi dirección, estaba cruzando la calle, sorteando los coches sin buscar un semáforo, como si quisiera aproximarse rápido para comprobar, para verme mejor a mi balcón asomado. Sin embargo caminaba con dificultad y lentitud, como si los tacones le fueran desacostumbrados o sus piernas tan llamativas no estuvieran hechas para ellos, o la desequilibrara el bolso o estuviera

carried by mothers, my mother, a large black bag hanging old-fashionedly from her arm, not slung from the shoulder as they are carried now. She had stout legs, which were firmly planted on the ground each time they stopped again at the point chosen for her waiting after the minimum displacement of two or three steps and the heel dragging with the last step. They were so stout that they eliminated or included the heels, it was the legs that were fixed to the paving, like a knife in wet wood. Sometimes she flexed one of them in order to look behind her and smooth down her skirt, as if she was afraid of some crease that would make her backside look ugly, or perhaps she was straightening her rebellious panties through the material that was covering them.

It was getting dark, and the gradual loss of light made her look more and more lonely, more isolated and more condemned to wait in vain. Her date would not turn up. She remained in the middle of the street, she did not lean against the wall as people who are waiting usually do so as not to get in the way of those who are not waiting and who walk by, and so she had problems avoiding passers-by, someone said something to her, she answered him angrily and threatened him with her enormous bag.

She suddenly looked up, towards the third floor where I was, and it seemed to me that she was noticing me for the first time. She peered, as if she was short-sighted or had dirty contact lenses, she blinked her eyes a little so as to see better, it seemed to me that it was me she was looking at. But I did not know anyone in Seville, what is more, it was the first time I had been in Seville, on my honeymoon with my so newly-wedded wife, behind me ill, I hoped it was not serious. I heard a murmur coming from the bed, but I did not look round because it was a moan from someone sleeping, one learns to make out straight away the sounds made in her sleep by the person that one sleeps with. The woman had taken a few steps, in my direction now, she was crossing the street, dodging the cars without looking for pedestrian lights, as if she wanted to come quickly close to check, to see me better at my balcony where I stood. However, she walked uneasily and slowly, as if she was unused to the high heels or as if those striking legs of hers were not made for them, or she was thrown off balance by her bag or was

mareada. Andaba como había andado mi mujer al sentirse indispuesta, al entrar en la habitación, yo la había ayudado a desvestirse y a meterse en la cama, la había arropado. La mujer de la calle acabó de cruzar, ahora estaba más cerca pero todavía a distancia, separada del hotel por la amplia explanada que lo alejaba del tráfico. Seguía con la vista alzada, mirando hacia mí o a mi altura, la altura del edificio a la que yo me hallaba. Y entonces hizo un gesto con el brazo, un gesto que no era de saludo ni de acercamiento,⁵ quiero decir de acercamiento a un extraño, sino de apropiación y reconocimiento, como si fuera yo la persona a quien había aguardado y su cita fuera conmigo. Era como si con aquel gesto del brazo, coronado por un remolino veloz de los dedos, quisiera asirme y dijera: 'Tú ven acá', o 'Eres mío'.⁶ Al mismo tiempo gritó algo que no pude oír, y por el movimiento de los labios sólo comprendí la primera palabra, que era '¡Eh!', dicha con indignación, como el resto de la frase que no me alcanzaba. Siguió avanzando, ahora se tocó la falda por detrás con más motivo, porque parecía que quien debía juzgar su figura ya estaba ante ella, el esperado podía apreciar ahora la caída de aquella falda. Y entonces ya pude oír lo que estaba diciendo: '¡Eh! ¿Pero qué haces ahí?' El grito era muy audible ahora, y vi a la mujer mejor. Quizá tenía más de treinta años, los ojos aún guiñados me parecieron claros, grises o color ciruela, los labios gruesos, la nariz algo ancha, las aletas vehementes por el enfado, debía de llevar mucho tiempo esperando, mucho más tiempo del transcurrido desde que yo la había individualizado. Caminaba trastabillada y tropezó y cayó al suelo de la explanada, manchándose en seguida la falda blanca y perdiendo uno de los zapatos. Se incorporó con esfuerzo, sin querer pisar el pavimento con el pie descalzo, como si temiera ensuciarse también la planta ahora que su cita había llegado, ahora que debía tener los pies limpios por si se los veía el hombre con quien había quedado. Logró calzarse el zapato sin apoyar el pie en el suelo, se sacudió la falda y gritó: '¡Pero qué haces ahí! ¿Por qué no me has dicho que ya habías subido? ¿No ves que llevo una hora esperándote?' (lo dijo con acento sevillano llano, con seseo⁷).

feeling dizzy. She walked like my wife had walked when she felt unwell, as she entered the room, I had helped her get undressed and get into bed, I had tucked her up. The woman in the street had just crossed over, now she was closer but still at a distance, separated from the hotel by the broad terrace that distanced it from the traffic. She still had her eyes raised, looking towards me or my floor, the floor of the building where I was standing. And then she made a gesture with her arm, a gesture which was neither of greeting or of beckoning, I mean beckoning towards a stranger, but of appropriating and recognizing, as if I was the person she had been waiting for and her date was with me. It was as if with that gesture of the arm, with its final rapid fluttering of the fingers, she was trying to grab hold of me and was saying, 'Come here, you,' or 'Got you.' At the same time she shouted something that I was unable to hear, and from the movement of her lips I only understood the first word, which was 'Hey!', spoken with indignation, like the rest of the sentence that did not reach me. She kept coming nearer, now she touched the back of her skirt with greater cause, because it seemed that the person who was to judge her figure was now in front of her, the man she had been waiting for could now appreciate the fall of her skirt. It was then that I was finally able to hear what she was saying: 'Hey! Look, what do you think you are doing there?' The shout was now very audible, and I saw the woman better. Perhaps she was over thirty, her still peering eyes seemed pale to me, grey or plum-coloured, her lips thick, her nose rather broad, her nostrils flared in anger, she must have been waiting a long time, much longer than the time that had passed since I had singled her out. She walked clumsily and stumbled and fell to the ground on the terrace, immediately dirtying her white skirt and losing one of her shoes. She got up with difficulty, not wanting to step on the paving with her bare foot, as if she was afraid to dirty the sole of it too, now that she had to have clean feet in case they were seen by the man with whom she had made her date. She managed to put her shoe on without resting her foot on the ground, she brushed the dirt off her skirt and shouted: 'What do you think you are doing there? Why didn't you tell me you'd already gone up? Can't you see I've been waiting for you for the past hour?' (She said this with an ordinary Sevillian accent.) And

Y al tiempo que decía esto, volvió a hacer el gesto del asimiento, un golpe seco del brazo desnudo en el aire y el revoloteo de los dedos rápidos que lo acompañaba. Era como si me dijera 'Eres mío' o 'Yo te mato', y con su movimiento pudiera cogerme y luego arrastrarme, una zarpa.⁸ Esta vez gritó tanto y ya estaba tan cerca que temí que pudiera despertar a mi mujer en la cama.

— ¿Qué pasa? — dijo mi mujer débilmente.

Me volví, estaba incorporada en la cama, con ojos de susto, como los de una enferma que se despierta y aún no ve nada ni sabe dónde está ni por qué se siente tan confusa. La luz estaba apagada. En aquellos momentos era una enferma.

— Nada, vuelve a dormirte — contesté yo.

Pero no me acerqué a acariciarle el pelo o tranquilizarla, como habría hecho en cualquier otra circunstancia, porque no podía apartarme del balcón, y apenas apartar la vista de aquella mujer que estaba convencida de haber quedado conmigo. Ahora me veía bien, y era indudable que yo era la persona con la que había convenido una cita importante, la persona que la había hecho sufrir en la espera y la había ofendido con mi prolongada ausencia. '¿No me has visto que te estaba esperando ahí desde hace una hora? ¡Por qué no me has dicho nada!', chillaba furiosa ahora, parada ante mi hotel y bajo mi balcón. '¡Tú me vas a oír!⁹ ¡Yo te mato!', gritó. Y de nuevo hizo el gesto con el brazo y los dedos, el gesto que me agarraba.

— ¿Pero qué pasa? — volvió a preguntar mi mujer, aturdida desde la cama.

En ese momento me eché hacia atrás y entorné las puertas del balcón, pero antes de hacerlo pude ver que la mujer de la calle, con su enorme bolso anticuado y sus zapatos de tacón de aguja y sus piernas robustas y sus andares tambaleantes, desaparecía de mi campo visual porque entraba ya en el hotel, dispuesta a subir en mi busca y a que tuviera lugar la cita. Sentí un vacío¹⁰ al pensar en lo que podría decirle a mi mujer enferma para explicar la intromisión que estaba a punto de producirse. Estábamos en nuestro viaje de novios, y en ese viaje no se quiere la intromisión de un extraño,

while she was saying this, she once more made the grasping gesture, a sudden movement of her naked arm and the flutter of fast-moving fingers that went with it. It was as if she said to me, 'Got you,' or 'I'll kill you,' and might grab me and then drag me along in the same movement, a paw. This time she shouted so loudly and was already so close that I feared she might wake my wife in bed.

'What's going on?' said my wife in a weak voice.

I turned round, she was sitting up in bed, with fright in her eyes, like those of a sick person who wakes up and still cannot see anything and does not know where she is or why she feels so confused. The light was off. She was a sick woman while this lasted.

'It's nothing, go back to sleep,' I replied.

But I did not approach to stroke her hair or reassure her, as I would have done under any other circumstances, because I could not leave the balcony, and scarcely look away from that woman who was convinced she had a date with me. Now she could see me clearly, and I was without a doubt the person with whom she had arranged an important rendezvous, the person who had made her suffer while she waited and who had offended her by my prolonged absence. 'Didn't you see me waiting over there? It's been a whole hour. Why didn't you tell me?' she was now shrieking furiously, having come to a halt in front of my hotel and beneath my balcony. 'Just you wait, I'll kill you,' she shouted. And she once more made the gesture with her arms and fingers, the gesture that was grabbing hold of me.

'What's going on?' my wife asked again, bewildered from the bed.

At that point I stepped back and pulled the balcony doors to, but before I did so I saw that the woman in the street, with her enormous old-fashioned bag and her stiletto heels and her sturdy legs and her tottering gait, was disappearing from my field of vision because she was already entering the hotel, ready to come up and look for me and ready for the rendezvous to take place. My mind went blank when I thought of what I could say to my sick wife to explain the intrusion that was about to happen. We were on our honeymoon, and that is a journey on which nobody wants the intrusion of a stranger,

aunque yo no fuera un extraño, creo, para quien ya subía por las escaleras. Sentí un vacío y cerré el balcón. Me preparé para abrir la puerta.

even if I was not a stranger, I think, to the person already coming up the stairs. My mind went blank and I shut the window. I got ready to open the door.