

La indiferencia de Eva

Eva no era una mujer guapa. Nunca me llegó a gustar, pero en aquel primer momento, mientras atravesaba el umbral de la puerta de mi despacho y se dirigía hacia mí, me horrorizó. Cabello corto y mal cortado, rostro exageradamente pálido, inexpressivo, figura nada esbelta y, lo peor de todo para un hombre para quien las formas lo son todo: pésimo gusto en la ropa. Por si fuera poco, no fue capaz de percibir mi desaprobación. No hizo nada por ganarme. Se sentó al otro lado de la mesa sin dirigirme siquiera una leve sonrisa, sacó unas gafas del bolsillo de su chaqueta y me miró a través de los cristales con una expresión de miopía mucho mayor que antes de ponérselas.

Dos días antes, me había hablado por teléfono. En tono firme y a una respetable velocidad me había puesto al tanto de sus intenciones: pretendía llevarme a la radio, donde dirigía un programa cultural de, al parecer, gran audiencia. Me aturden las personas muy activas y, si son mujeres, me irritan. Si son atractivas, me gustan.

— ¿Bien?¹ — pregunté yo, más agresivo que impaciente.

Eva no se alteró. Suspiró profundamente, como invadida de un profundo desánimo. Dejó lentamente sobre la mesa un cuaderno de notas y me dirigió otra mirada con gran esfuerzo. Tal vez sus gafas no estaban graduadas adecuadamente y no me veía bien. Al fin, habló, pero su voz, tan terminante en el teléfono, se abrió ahora paso tan arduamente como su mirada, rodeada de puntos suspensivos.² No parecía saber con certeza por qué se encontraba allí ni lo que iba a preguntarme.

— Si a usted le parece — dijo al fin, después de una incoherente introducción que nos desorientó a los dos —, puede usted empezar a explicarme cómo surgió la idea de . . . — no pudo terminar la frase.

Eva's Indifference

Eva wasn't a good-looking woman. I didn't ever find her attractive but, at that first moment, as she crossed the threshold into my office and came over towards me, she filled me with horror. With her short, badly cut hair, her blank excessively pale face, her none too slim figure and, what's worse for a man for whom outward appearances are everything, her dreadful taste in clothes. As if this wasn't enough, she was incapable of detecting my disapproval. She did nothing to win me over. She sat down on the other side of my desk without giving me even the faintest of smiles, took some glasses out of her jacket pocket, and looked at me through the lenses in a far more short-sighted way than she had done before putting them on.

Two days before, she had spoken to me on the phone. In a resolute tone and at a brisk pace she had put me in the picture about what she wanted to do. Her intention was to get me on to the radio, where she presented a cultural programme that, by all accounts, had a lot of listeners. Very active people bewilder me and, if they happen to be women, they get on my nerves. If they are good-looking women, I'm attracted to them.

'Well then?' I asked, more aggressive than impatient.

Eva was not at all put out. She sighed heavily, as if overwhelmed by a deep feeling of dejection. She slowly placed her notebook upon my desk and peered at me intently again. Perhaps her glasses weren't strong enough and she couldn't see me properly. She eventually spoke but her voice, which had been so authoritative on the phone, now ventured out as tentatively as her gaze, filled with uncertainty. She didn't seem to know for sure why she was there, nor what questions she was going to ask me.

'If you agree,' she finally said, after an incoherent opening that confused both of us, 'you can start by explaining to me how you got the idea for . . .?' She couldn't finish the sentence.

Me miró para que yo lo hiciera, sin ningún matiz de súplica en sus ojos. Esperaba, sencillamente, que yo le resolviera la papeleta.³

Me sentía tan ajeno y desinteresado como ella, pero hablé. Ella, que miraba de vez en cuando su cuaderno abierto, no tomó ninguna nota. Para terminar con aquella situación, propuse que realizáramos juntos un recorrido por la exposición, idea que, según me pareció apreciar, acogió con cierto alivio. Los visitantes de aquella⁴ mañana eran, en su mayor parte, extranjeros, hecho que comenté a Eva. Ella ni siquiera se tomó la molestia de asentir. Casi me pareció que mi observación le había incomodado. Lo miraba todo sin verlo. Posaba levemente su mirada sobre las vitrinas, los mapas colgados en la pared, algunos cuadros ilustrativos que yo había conseguido de importantes museos y alguna colección particular.

Por primera vez desde la inauguración, la exposición me gustó. Me sentí orgulloso de mi labor y la consideré útil. Mi voz fue adquiriendo un tono de entusiasmo creciente. Y conforme su indiferencia se consolidaba, más crecía mi entusiasmo. Se había establecido una lucha. Me sentía superior a ella y deseaba abrumarla con profusas explicaciones. Estaba decidido a que perdiese su precioso tiempo. El tiempo es siempre precioso para los periodistas. En realidad, así fue. La mañana había concluido y la hora prevista para la entrevista se había pasado. Lo advertí, satisfecho, pero Eva no se inmutó. Nunca se había inmutado. Con sus gafas de miope, a través de las cuales no debía de haberse filtrado ni una mínima parte de la información allí expuesta, me dijo, condescendiente y remota:

— Hoy ya no podremos realizar la entrevista. Será mejor que la dejemos para mañana. ¿Podría usted venir a la radio a la una?

En su tono de voz no se traslucía ningún rencor. Si acaso había algún desánimo, era el mismo con el que se había presentado, casi dos horas antes, en mi despacho. Su bloc de notas, abierto en sus manos, seguía en blanco. Las únicas y escasas preguntas que me había formulado no tenían respuesta. Preguntas que son al mismo

She looked to me to finish it for her, without the slightest trace of pleading in her eyes. She was, quite simply, expecting me to solve her problem for her.

I felt as alienated and detached as she did, but I spoke. Glancing at her open notebook from time to time, she didn't jot down a single thing. In order to put an end to this situation, I suggested that we should go around the exhibition together, an idea that, as far as I could tell, she greeted with a certain amount of relief. This morning's visitors were mainly foreigners, something upon which I commented to Eva. She didn't even take the trouble to acknowledge this. I almost felt that my remark had made her feel uncomfortable. She looked at everything without seeing anything. She glanced superficially over the display cabinets, the maps hanging on the wall and some illustrative paintings that I had obtained from major museums and the odd private collection.

For the first time since its opening, I was pleased with the exhibition. I felt proud of my work and I considered it useful. My voice was becoming increasingly enthusiastic. The more tangible her indifference became, the greater my enthusiasm grew. A struggle was being waged. I felt superior to her and wanted to overwhelm her with very full explanations. I was determined that she should waste her valuable time. Time is always valuable for journalists. This was indeed what I managed to do. The morning had ended and the hour set aside for the interview had elapsed. I pointed this out to Eva with some satisfaction, but she was totally unconcerned. She had never shown any concern. Peering through her glasses, through which there couldn't have filtered even the tiniest part of the information on display there, she said to me, condescendingly and remotely:

'We shan't be able to do the interview today. It'll be better if we leave it for tomorrow. Could you come to the studio at one o'clock?'

There was no sign of ill feeling in her voice. If there was perhaps a little dejection it was the same feeling she had shown on her arrival in my office, almost two hours before. Her notebook, open in her hands, still had nothing written in it. The few, occasional questions that she had put to me had no reply. The sort of questions

tiempo una respuesta, que no esperan del interlocutor más que un desganado asentimiento.

Y, por supuesto, ni una palabra sobre mi faceta de novelista. Acaso ella, una periodista tan eficiente, lo ignoraba. Tal vez, incluso, pensaba que se trataba de una coincidencia. Mi nombre no es muy original y bien pudiera suceder que a ella no se le hubiese ocurrido relacionar mi persona con la del escritor que había publicado dos novelas de relativo éxito.

Cuando Eva desapareció, experimenté cierto alivio. En seguida fui víctima de un ataque de mal humor. Me había propuesto que ella perdiese su tiempo, pero era yo quien lo había perdido. Todavía conservaba parte del orgullo que me había invadido al contemplar de nuevo mi labor, pero ya lo sentía como un orgullo estéril, sin trascendencia. La exposición se desmontaría y mi pequeña gloria se esfumaría. Consideré la posibilidad de no acudir a la radio al día siguiente, pero, desgraciadamente, me cuesta evadir un compromiso.⁵

Incluso llegué con puntualidad. Recorrí los pasillos laberínticos del edificio, pregunté varias veces por Eva y, al fin, di con ella. Por primera vez, sonrió. Su sonrisa no se dirigía a mí, sino a sí misma. No estaba contenta de verme, sino de verme allí. Se levantó de un salto, me tendió una mano que yo no recordaba haber estrechado nunca y me presentó a dos compañeros que me acogieron con la mayor cordialidad, como si Eva les hubiera hablado mucho de mí. Uno de ellos, cuando Eva se dispuso a llevarme a la sala de grabación, me golpeó la espalda y pronunció una frase de ánimo. Yo no me había quejado, pero todo iba a salir bien. Tal vez había en mi rostro señales de estupefacción y desconcierto. Seguí a Eva por un estrecho pasillo en el que nos cruzamos con gentes apresuradas y simpáticas, a las que Eva dedicó frases ingeniosas, y nos introdujimos al fin en la cabina. En la habitación de al lado, que veíamos a través de un panel de cristal, cuatro técnicos, con los auriculares ajustados a la cabeza, estaban concentrados en su tarea. Al fin, todos nos miraron y uno de ellos habló a Eva. Había que probar la voz. Eva, ignorándome, hizo las pruebas y, también ignorándome,⁶ hizo que yo las hiciera. Desde el otro lado del panel, los técnicos

that are at the same time answers, that do not expect from the person addressed more than a half-hearted agreement.

And, of course, there was absolutely no mention of my career as a novelist. Perhaps she was unaware of this, for all her efficiency as a journalist. Perhaps she even thought that it was some kind of coincidence. My name is fairly common, and it might well be that it hadn't occurred to her to make the connection between me and the writer who had published two relatively successful novels.

When Eva left, I experienced a certain relief. I straight away fell victim to an attack of ill temper. I had made up my mind that she should waste her time, but it was me who had wasted mine. I still felt part of the pride that had swept through me on gazing at my work again, but I now felt it as a sterile pride, without significance. The exhibition would be taken down and my tiny bit of glory would vanish. I considered the possibility of not going to the radio studio the next day but, unfortunately, I find it hard to get out of an obligation.

I even arrived exactly on time. I walked along the building's maze of corridors, I asked several times where Eva was and I eventually found her. For the first time, she smiled. Her smile was not for my benefit, so much as for her own. She was not happy to see me, so much as to see me there. She jumped up, held out to me a hand that I could not remember having ever shaken before and introduced me to two colleagues who greeted me most warmly, as if Eva had told them a great deal about me. One of them, when Eva was about to take me to the recording-room, patted me on the back and said some words of encouragement. I hadn't raised any objection, but everything was going to turn out fine. Perhaps there were signs of astonishment and apprehension on my face. I followed Eva along a narrow corridor in which we passed pleasant people hurrying about their business, for each of whom Eva had a witty comment, and we finally went into the booth. In the adjoining room, which we could see through a glass screen, four technicians wearing headsets were intent upon their work. In the end, they all looked at us and one of them spoke to Eva. They had to test for sound. Without paying me any attention, Eva carried out the test and, still ignoring me, got me to test my voice. From the other side of

asintieron. Me sentí tremendamente solo con Eva. Ignoraba cómo se las iba a arreglar.⁷

Repentinamente, empezó a hablar. Su voz sonó fuerte, segura, llena de matices. Invadió la cabina y, lo más sorprendente de todo: hablando de mí. Mencionó la exposición, pero en seguida añadió que era mi labor lo que ella deseaba destacar, aquel trabajo difícil, lento, apasionado. Un trabajo, dijo, que se correspondía con la forma en que yo construía mis novelas. Pues eso era yo, ante todo, un novelista excepcional. Fue tan calurosa, se mostró tan entendida, tan sensible, que mi voz, cuando ella formuló su primera pregunta, había quedado sepultada y me costó trabajo sacarla de su abismo.⁸ Había tenido la absurda esperanza, la seguridad, de que ella seguiría hablando, con su maravillosa voz y sus maravillosas ideas. Torpemente, me expresé y hablé de las dificultades con que me había encontrado al realizar la exposición, las dificultades de escribir una buena novela, las dificultades de compaginar un trabajo con otro. Las dificultades, en fin, de todo. Me encontré lamentándome de mi vida entera, como si hubiera errado en mi camino⁹ y ya fuera tarde para todo y, sin embargo, necesitara pregonarlo.¹⁰ Mientras Eva, feliz, pletórica, me ensalzaba y convertía en un héroe. Abominable. No su tarea, sino mi papel. ¿Cómo se las había arreglado para que yo jugara su juego con tanta precisión? A través de su voz, mis dudas se magnificaban y yo era mucho menos aún de lo que era. Mediocre y quejumbroso. Pero la admiré. Había conocido a otros profesionales de la radio; ninguno como Eva. Hay casos en los que una persona nace con un destino determinado. Eva era uno de esos casos. La envidié. Si yo había nacido para algo, y algunas veces lo creía así, nunca con aquella certeza, esa entrega. Al fin, ella se despidió de sus oyentes, se despidió de mí, hizo una señal de agradecimiento a sus compañeros del otro lado del cristal y salimos fuera.

En aquella ocasión no nos cruzamos con nadie. Eva avanzaba delante de mí, como si me hubiera olvidado, y volvimos a su oficina. Los compañeros que antes me habían obsequiado¹¹ con frases alentadoras se interesaron por el resultado de la entrevista. Eva no se playó. Yo me encogí de hombros, poseído por mi papel de

the glass screen the technicians gave the go-ahead. I felt tremendously alone with Eva. I had no idea how she was going to manage.

She suddenly began to speak. Her voice sounded strong, confident and full of expression. It filled the booth and, what was most surprising of all, it was talking about me. She referred to the exhibition, but at once added that it was my work upon which she wanted to concentrate, that painstaking, slow and deeply felt work. Work that matched the way in which I constructed my novels. For I was, above all, an outstanding novelist. She was so generous in what she said, revealed herself to be so well-informed, so sensitive, that my voice, when she put her first question, had been buried and I had difficulty in rescuing it from deep in its tomb. I had had the absurd hope, the certainty, that she would continue speaking with her wonderful voice and her wonderful ideas. I expressed myself clumsily, speaking of the difficulties that I had encountered in putting on the exhibition, the difficulties of writing a good novel, the difficulties of combining one field of work with the other. In short, how difficult I had found it all. I found myself bemoaning my whole life, as if I had taken the wrong path and it was now too late to do anything about it, and yet I needed to broadcast the fact. All the while Eva, happy and brimming over, was singing my praises and turning me into a hero. It was absolutely dreadful. Not her work, but my role. How had she managed to get me to play her game so exactly? As I listened to her voice my doubts grew greater and I was even less significant than I used to be. Mediocre and winging. Yet I admired her. I had known other people who worked on the radio, but none like Eva. There are cases of people being born with a particular destiny. Eva was one such case. I envied her. If I had been born for some purpose, and I sometimes believed this to be so, it was never with that certainty, that commitment. In the end, she took her leave of her listeners, took her leave of me, gave a wave of thanks to her colleagues on the other side of the glass screen and we went out.

This time we didn't pass anyone. She moved ahead, as if she had forgotten about me, and we went back to her office. Her colleagues, who had previously made encouraging comments to me, wanted to know how the interview had gone. Eva did not speak at length about this. I shrugged my shoulders, completely taken over by my

escritor insatisfecho. Me miraron desconcertados mientras ignoraban a Eva, que se había sentado detrás de su mesa y, con las gafas puestas y un bolígrafo en la mano, revolvía papeles. Inicié un gesto de despedida, aunque esperaba que me sugirieran una visita al bar, como habitualmente sucede después de una entrevista. Yo necesitaba esa copa. Pero nadie me la ofreció, de forma que me despedí tratando de ocultar mi malestar.

Era un día magnífico. La primavera estaba próxima. Pensé que los almendros ya habrían florecido y sentí la nostalgia¹² de un viaje. Avanzar por una carretera respirando aire puro, olvidar el legado del pasado que tan pacientemente yo había reunido y, al fin, permanecía demasiado remoto, dejar de preguntarme si yo ya había escrito cuanto tenía que escribir y si llegaría a escribir algo más. Y, sobre todo, mandar a paseo a Eva. La odiaba. El interés y ardor que mostraba no eran ciertos. Y ni siquiera tenía la seguridad de que fuese perfectamente estúpida o insensible. Era distinta a mí.

Crucé dos calles y recorrí dos manzanas hasta llegar a mi coche. Vi un bar a mi izquierda y decidí tomar la copa que no me habían ofrecido. El alcohol hace milagros en ocasiones así. Repentinamente, el mundo dio la vuelta. Yo era el único capaz de comprenderlo y de mostrarlo nuevamente a los ojos de los otros. Yo tenía las claves que los demás ignoraban. Habitualmente, eran una carga, pero de pronto cobraron esplendor. Yo no era el héroe que Eva, con tanto aplomo, había presentado a sus oyentes, pero la vida tenía, bajo aquel resplandor, un carácter heroico. Yo sería capaz de transmitirlo. Era mi ventaja sobre Eva. Miré la calle a través de la pared de cristal oscuro del bar. Aquellos transeúntes se beneficiarían alguna vez de mi existencia, aunque ahora pasaran de largo, ignorándome. Pagué mi consumición y me dirigí a la puerta.

Eva, abstraída, se acercaba por la calzada.¹³ En unos segundos se habría de cruzar conmigo. Hubiera podido detenerla, pero no lo hice. La miré cuando estuvo a mi altura. No estaba abstraída, estaba triste. Era una tristeza tremenda. La seguí. Ella también se dirigía hacia su coche, que, curiosamente, estaba aparcado a unos metros por delante del mío. Se introdujo en él.

role as an unfulfilled novelist. They looked at me in bewilderment while ignoring Eva, who had sat down behind her desk and, with her glasses on and a ballpoint pen in her hand, was going through papers. I began to take my leave, although I hoped that they would suggest a visit to the bar, as usually happens after an interview. I needed that drink. But nobody offered me one so I left, trying to conceal my discomfort.

It was a beautiful day. Spring had almost arrived. I thought that the almond trees must have already flowered and I felt a longing to go on a trip. To move along a road breathing pure air, to forget the legacy of the past that I had assembled so patiently and which, in the end, remained too remote, to stop wondering if I had already written everything that I had to write and if I would manage to write anything else. And, more than anything, I wanted Eva to go to hell. I hated her. The interest and zeal that she displayed were not genuine. I wasn't even sure that she was completely stupid or insensitive. She was different from me.

I crossed two streets and walked along two blocks before reaching my car. I saw a bar to my left and decided to have the drink that I hadn't been offered. Alcohol works wonders at times like this. Suddenly, the world was transformed. I was the only person capable of understanding it and of revealing it anew to others. I possessed the keys that were unknown to others. Usually they were a burden but all at once they took on a splendour. I was not the hero whom Eva had portrayed to her listeners with such assurance, but my life had, beneath that glow, a heroic quality. I would be capable of passing this on. This was my advantage over Eva. I looked at the street through the bar's tinted glass wall. Those passers-by would gain from my existence some day, even if they went straight past now, unaware of my existence. I paid for my drink and went towards the door.

Eva was walking along the street, lost in her thoughts. In a couple of seconds she would have to pass next to me. I could have stopped her, but I didn't. I looked at her when she was level with me. She wasn't lost in her thoughts, she was sad. It was an immense sadness. I followed her. She was also going towards her car, which, oddly enough, was parked a couple of metres in front of mine. She got into it.

Estaba ya decidido a abordarla, pero ella, nada más sentarse frente al volante, se tapó la cara con las manos y se echó a llorar. Era un llanto destemplado. Tenía que haberle sucedido algo horrible. Tal vez la habían amonestado y, dado el entusiasmo que ponía en su profesión, estaba rabiosa. No podía acercarme mientras ella continuara llorando, pero sentía una extraordinaria curiosidad y esperé. Eva dejó de llorar. Se sonó estrepitosamente la nariz, sacudió su cabeza y puso en marcha el motor del coche. Miró hacia atrás, levantó los ojos, me vio.

Fui hacia ella. Tenía que haberme reconocido,¹⁴ porque ni siquiera había transcurrido una hora desde nuestro paso por la cabina, pero sus ojos permanecieron vacíos unos segundos. Al fin, reaccionó:

– ¿No tiene usted coche? – preguntó, como si ésa fuera la explicación de mi presencia allí.

Negué. Quería prolongar el encuentro.

– Yo puedo acercarle a su casa – se ofreció, en un tono que no era del todo amable.

Pero yo acepté. Pasé por delante de su coche y me acomodé a su lado. Otra vez estábamos muy juntos, como en la cabina. Me preguntó dónde vivía y emprendió la marcha. Como si el asunto le interesara, razonó en alta voz sobre cuál sería el itinerario más conveniente. Tal vez era otra de sus vocaciones. Le hice una sugerencia, que ella desechó.

– ¿Le ha sucedido algo? – irrumpí con malignidad –. Hace un momento estaba usted llorando.

Me lanzó una mirada de odio. Estábamos detenidos frente a un semáforo rojo. Con el freno echado, pisó el acelerador.

– Ha estado usted magnífica – seguí –. Es una entrevistadora excepcional. Parece saberlo todo. Para usted no hay secretos.

La luz roja dio paso a la luz verde y el coche arrancó. Fue una verdadera arrancada, que nos sacudió a los dos. Sin embargo, no me perdí su suspiro, largo y desesperado.

– Trazó usted un panorama tan completo y perfecto que yo no tenía nada que añadir.

I had already made my mind up to approach her but no sooner had she sat down behind the steering-wheel than she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. It was a disconsolate crying. Something dreadful must have happened to her. Perhaps she had been reprimanded and, given the enthusiasm with which she approached her profession, she was furious. I couldn't go up to her for as long as she was crying, but I felt an amazing curiosity and I waited. Eva stopped crying. She blew her nose noisily, shook her head and started up the car. She looked behind her, looked up and saw me.

I went towards her. She was bound to have recognized me because it was barely an hour since we had been in the recording-booth together, but her eyes remained vacant for a few seconds. Eventually, she responded:

'Haven't you got a car?' she asked, as if that were the explanation for my presence there.

I said that I didn't. I wanted to prolong our encounter.

'I can drive you home,' she offered, in a tone of voice that wasn't entirely well disposed.

But I accepted. I walked round in front of her car and sat down in the seat next to her. Once again we were very close to each other, as we had been in the booth. She asked me where I lived and set off. She debated aloud about which would be the most convenient route there, as if this was something that interested her. Perhaps this was another of her vocations. I made a suggestion to her that she rejected.

'Has something happened to you?' I interrupted, with evil intent. 'You were crying a moment ago.'

She glanced at me with loathing. We were stopped at a traffic light. With the brake on, she pressed down on the accelerator.

'You were great,' I went on. 'You're an outstanding interviewer. You seem to know everything. There can be no secrets from you.'

The traffic light turned from red to green and the car moved off. It was a real jolt forward that shook us both. However, her long, despairing sigh did not escape my attention.

'You outlined such a comprehensive and perfect survey of my work that there was nothing for me to add.'

— En ese caso — replicó suavemente, sin irritación y sin interés —, lo hice muy mal. Es el entrevistado quien debe hablar.

Era, pues, más inteligente de lo que parecía. A lo mejor, hasta era más inteligente que yo. Todo era posible. En aquel momento no me importaba. Deseaba otra copa. Cuando el coche enfiló mi calle, se lo propuse. Ella aceptó acompañarme como quien se doblega a un insoslayable deber. Dijo:

— Ustedes, los novelistas, son todos iguales.

La frase no me gustó, pero tuvo la virtud de remitir a Eva al punto de partida. Debía de haber entrevistado a muchos novelistas. Todos ellos bebían, todos le proponían tomar una copa juntos. Si ésa era su conclusión, tampoco me importaba. Cruzamos el umbral¹⁵ del bar y nos acercamos a la barra. Era la hora del almuerzo y estaba despoblado. El camarero me saludó y echó una ojeada a Eva, decepcionado. No era mi tipo, ni seguramente el suyo.

Eva se sentó en el taburete y se llevó a los labios su vaso, que consumió con rapidez, como si deseara concluir aquel compromiso cuanto antes. Pero mi segunda copa me hizo mucho más feliz que la primera y ya tenía un objetivo ante el que no podía detenerme.

— ¿Cómo se enteró usted de todo eso? — pregunté —. Tuve la sensación de que cuando me visitó en la Biblioteca¹⁶ no me escuchaba.

A decir verdad, la locutora brillante e inteligente de hacía una hora me resultaba antipática y no me atraía en absoluto, pero aquella mujer que se había paseado entre los manuscritos que documentaban las empresas heroicas del siglo xvii con la misma atención con que hubiese examinado un campo yermo, me impresionaba.

— Soy una profesional — dijo, en el tono en que deben decirse esas cosas.

— Lo sé — admití —. Dígame, ¿por qué lloraba?

Eva sonrió a su vaso vacío. Volvió a ser la mujer de la Biblioteca.

— A veces lloro — dijo, como si aquello no tuviera ninguna importancia —. Ha sido por algo insignificante. Ya se me ha pasado.

'If that's the case,' she replied quietly, without irritation and without interest, 'I made a bad job of it. It's the person being interviewed who has to speak.'

So, she was cleverer than she seemed. She was probably even cleverer than me. Everything was possible. At this moment, it didn't bother me. I wanted another drink. When the car turned into my street I suggested this to her. She agreed to go with me, like someone who gives way to an unavoidable duty.

'You novelists are all the same.'

I didn't like the expression but it had the virtue of getting Eva back to where we had started. She must have interviewed a lot of novelists. They all drank and they all suggested having a drink together. If that were her conclusion, it didn't bother me either. We went in and walked up to the bar. It was lunchtime and the bar was deserted. The waiter greeted me and had a quick glance at Eva with obvious disappointment. She wasn't my type, and she certainly wasn't his either.

Eva sat down on the bar stool and raised the glass to her lips, drinking quickly as if she wished to get this engagement out of the way as soon as possible. But my second drink made me happier than the first and I now had an aim that called for action.

'How did you find out about all that?' I asked. 'I had the impression that you were not listening when you visited me in the Library.'

The fact is, I found the brilliant and intelligent radio presenter of an hour before unpleasant and, not in the least attractive. But that woman who had strolled among the manuscripts that recorded the heroic deeds of the seventeenth century with as much attention as she would have looked at a barren field did make an impression upon me.

'I'm a professional,' she said, in the tone of voice in which such things are said.

'I know,' I admitted. 'But tell me, why were you crying?'

Eva smiled into her empty glass. Once more she became the woman in the Library.

'I do cry at times,' she said, as if it was of no importance. 'It was because of something trivial. I've got over it now.'

– No parece usted muy contenta – dije, aunque ella empezaba a estarlo.

Se encogió de hombros.

– Tome usted otra copa – sugerí, y llamé al camarero, que, con una seriedad desacostumbrada, me atendió.

Eva tomó su segunda copa más lentamente. Se apoyó en la barra con indolencia y sus ojos miopes se pusieron melancólicos. Me miró, al cabo de una pausa.

– ¿Qué quieres?¹⁷ – dijo.

– ¿No lo sabes? – pregunté.

– Todos los novelistas . . . – empezó, y extendió su mano.

Fue una caricia breve, casi maternal. Era imposible saber si Eva me deseaba. Era imposible saber nada de Eva. Pero cogí la mano que me había acariciado y ella no la apartó. El camarero me dedicó una mirada de censura. Cada vez me entendía¹⁸ menos. Pero Eva seguía siendo un enigma. Durante aquellos minutos – el bar vacío, las copas de nuevo llenas, nuestros cuerpos anhelantes – mi importante papel en el mundo se desvaneció. El resto de la historia fue vulgar.¹⁹

'You don't seem very happy,' I said, although she was beginning to cheer up.

She shrugged.

'Have another drink,' I suggested, and called over the waiter who served me in an unusually solemn manner.

Eva drank her second drink more slowly. She leant on the bar languidly and her short-sighted eyes became melancholy. After a pause, she looked at me.

'What do you want?' she said.

'Don't you know?' I asked.

'You novelists . . . ' she began, and stretched out her hand.

It was a brief, almost maternal caress. It was impossible to know if Eva desired me. It was impossible to know anything about Eva. But I took hold of the hand that had caressed me and she didn't remove it. The waiter treated me to a disapproving look. He understood me less and less. But Eva continued to be an enigma. In the course of those few minutes, with the empty bar, our glasses refilled and our bodies longing for each other, my important role in the world vanished. The rest of the story was like so many other stories.