

The Two Books of
Saint Andre

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DEDICATION

Melanie and Daniel, my daughter and son.

Rafael, my lovely husband.

María Elena, my dear mother.

Marisela and Andrés

Analy and Eduardo

Odin and Mónica

And my other sisters and brother: Ellen, Sara and Guillermo

And Guillermo, Leonardo, Andrés, Marcos, Ricardo, Daniel and

Vanessa

This book is dedicated to all of them. Thanks for being in my life. Of course, I have a lot of family and friends that I would have to thank but it wouldn't be enough pages in this book to name it all.

Also I would like to thank the readers which will take time to read my story. Thank you all.

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1 - THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT ANDRE

-The magic came by camel – so was my answer to Lato’s question, one of the magicians of the Supreme Court of Sorcery of Eisenbaum, experiencing the vague feeling that things were not going well. The peat of outraged magicians stacked in the tribunes waving their fists in the air and their poles in continuous knocking against the cobbled surface of the room, sent a relentless exasperating pounding to all corners and returning gnawing to my ears.

The expression of the inquisitor’s dislodged face was whipped up with each of my answers. I, mutinous, alone before the scaffold, separate from my sisters that I observed in the distance sitting on a burly dock and squeezed by two guards, reflected on the past events.

Was it there where it all started? Truly, I could not say, I would have to go back to some months ago, prior to my arrival at Saint Andre to live with my step-grandmother Gertrude, when I was not yet an apprentice witch and had no intentions of becoming, when still had not found the ominous ring that would upset every minute of my life, or even further, to the ominous death of my adored grandfather, Gennaro, who passed away from this world as departed the souls without sin, docile and in peace.

I must confess, without a doubt, that these were the last two events that precipitated the series of events that led me to that world tucked away, unnoticed, mysterious of the magic. Of that I heard only speak in whispers, under the security of a closed door and with a handful of candles; to emerge, after long years of study, such as a supernatural world, almighty, omnipotent, able to defy the laws more refined, natural and divine, in the hands of those few to whom its secrets are revealed.

It all started, I for my part, ignoring, looking from afar, indifferent in

the distance, pending more of the vicissitudes of this world of senses, than the other that was insinuated, promising and challenging, such as a lover waiting for the opportunity to get closer and strip his wonders.

I will start my story of the day I traveled to Saint Andre, in the company of my sisters, Beatrice and Mariana, when the only thing that I knew about magic were those cheap tricks of circus illusionists that dressed in black layer suit and scarlet lining, sprayed on bulky hats with a silhouette of fungus a sort of magic dust that made it appear the more rounded rabbits, that by a strange coincidence were always white!

That morning, the bus was hardly climbing the seaway slope. Stones, tree trunks, streams were recurring obstacles we had to overcome to ascend the Monte Glaslo by the sole serpentine road that came close up to the top to descend after, abruptly, almost in free fall-height, until the inhospitable Valley of Saint Andre, and when I said "inhospitable" I did not mean in any way to the quality of the field or to the natural wealth of the people, no, I am referring to the derogatory treatment which their inhabitants were bestowed on us since the first time we walked through the valley.

Our sweaty bodies were tortured by the midday sun and attached to the seats we were struggling to not bounce and crashed into a window of the unit. Radio broadcasts transmitted patchwork of sounds from the city but they were intermittent, without sense, as a tangle of chords impossible to identify. From very early, my aristocratic sister Beatrice had begun to distill her indignity. Thus, every minute, and to the whole world, she played her bit of indignation. She was outraged with the driver for driving so abruptly a bus as shabby and with so little ventilation, was outraged with the obese and picturesque madam that was sitting in the front because she opened the window that ruffled her hair, she was outraged, in addition, with a red-haired young seated behind her because he closed the window that made her heated, but above all, and with even greater relevance, was outraged by the circumstances that made us leave the comforts of our home in the city and transported in a vehicle so dishonorable up to the desolate village spread of farmers and cows, and who knows what other creeping creatures.

The driver seemed scared and desperate to get to the destination, not only by the filthiness of my sister who would exasperate until the most gentle of the monks, but by the ghostly figure that had addressed the vehicle at the terminal. His hunched over body, ashy skin, dark eyes within a sickly face peppered with warts was known by all the inhabitants of the village. Not in vain he flaunted the unenviable nickname of "The Executioner". Had addressed the bus shortly after us and had been installed in the seats on the bottom, while maintaining

visual domain on all passengers.

My sister continued her equitable distribution of preaching indignity, immune to the harassment of the brooding character.

The thick vegetation blocked at times the exhausting sun's rays given us a small oasis of freshness and shadow. Through the glass panes of the window breaded of a dense layer of mud, I looked to the imposing and magnificent spectacle of the summits picking the cotton-clouds on the carpet of the celestial sky. A whistling noise of breeze ruffled my curly hair jumping by the rudeness of the road and by the inebriation of the wind. A bustling climbing slightly in intensity led me out of my lethargy and realized that we had arrived in the village. We disembarked from the unit.

The terminal was a procession of bales and packages that seemed to come alive, coming and going in all directions, of all sizes and colors. That bustle! Big and dark bales! As obese ladies belted by rods, dragged by starving and tired passengers; ladies embedded in broad skirts, crowned with head scarves that ended with a small loop lacing the neck; long bales and sharp, wrapped in paper or plastic to hide its contents to the prying eyes that settled along the landing platform. Small bales festooned with delicate color papers, ribbons and tapes, hiding, no doubt, some glittering jewel or ostentatious clock, for a girlfriend, wife or fiancée.

The first thing I noticed, in addition to the feverish activity inconsistent with the size of the town, was the hostility of their inhabitants; they looked at us as if a flying saucer had been landed sharply in its beloved San Isidro Plaza. They looked at us from the front, without dissimulation and with such an insistence that began to be annoying.

For the inhabitants of this tiny village, the world was confined to the four cardinal points stated in their geography, that is to say, to the north and east the mountain chain formed by the Monte Glaslo, to the west the Black Ranger, also called the Belt of the Devil, and to the south, a handful of smaller hills known as The Mininas. The next thing I noticed was that no one had gone to pick us up and this first snub was an indication of what would be the treatment that we would receive from our political relatives when we got to the residence.

The community of Saint Andre was not accustomed to the great changes. The strenuous monotony was exactly as their residents wanted it to be and will want for many years. The bakery of Mrs. Tula was exactly the same as her great-great-grandmother founded at the beginning of the century and was still selling the same baked pastries, with the anise donuts in the form of a circle and the candies lined with cellophane.

The drugstore of Mr. Anthony had the same bottles with heavy aqueous

syrups and colored pills piled under the Jose Gregorio Hernandez stamp which was hanging on the wall, next to the handwritten sign of "Today we do not sell on credit", that his grandfather, Domingo, had nailed sixty years ago; and the grocery of Mr. Eustaquio, boasted the same leather furniture, worn out and deflated where his customers expected sitting the orders of steaks and pork, bent its legs by the weight of the years and of Mr. Ramon, the cobbler.

In addition to the slinky monotony, Saint Andre was remarkable for its claims. By the opprobrium of the nature that took away the natural wealth it might boast, it concurred with using the ominous resource of the exaggeration, to exalt what the mercy of God and men had denied. In this way, thanks to the magic of the hyperbole, the crystal clear water of "The Cowgirl", was baptized with the bombastic name of "Big River", despite the thinness of its flow and that even though it was not big neither was river; on the other hand, the miracle of the multiplication came also to the four walls of Father Tobias's church, christened as the "Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Conception of Saint Andre", with the subsequent problem that when they went to refit the nickname in aluminum golden letters, there wasn't enough wall or there was too much letters.

Those houses, painted with the pesky earthy colors that were used by the founders in the days of the colony, looked at the firmament with the simplicity and the nostalgia of things from another time: with its red carnations of silky and curly head that sprouted in bunches, well in pots, either of the subsoil, in the gardens filled with cut ball-shaped hedges, all stringed and always looking toward the west, as soldiers guardians waiting for an invasion.

The cobbled streets, the lanterns of moribund lights and also the tiring air were the same, and never would have thought that in that remote locality the events that put us in contact with the magic would happen.

We resigned to expect sitting on one of the lengthwise benches in the boarding room. There, Mariana, my youngest sister, haggard for the onslaughts of fatigue and uncertainty, rested delicately her head on my shoulder and then sighed; Ah! That sigh! What significance! What a sigh! Her emotional exhalation expressed what thousand words could not have said. Mariana, timid and demure, never effusive, neither with the sentences neither with emotions... Ah! But she did wonders with the facial expressions and with the monosyllables. Her sigh, plenty of character and significance, marked the ending of a cycle and the beginning of a new life for us, full of uneasiness and disenchantments. In comparison, Beatrice was all effusiveness and dramatics. By Beatrice, the words acquired unsuspected meaning; she invented unseen words that the Real Spanish Academy was never heard of, with so outlandish

pronunciations, worthy of some African dialect. This sonorous inventiveness seemed to surface in her quotidian conversations, let just said that a person was wrong about the utilization of some term or word, she, rather than recognizing her mistake, she referred to the imaginary word, attributing its origin to the Latin or to some foreign idiom that the person was ignorant of, not having other remedy that to accept her eloquent rhetoric.

While we waited, I tried to remember my step-grandmother Gertrude's physiognomy, there had passed a few years from the last time that we saw her and even then her treatment to us had been frugal and tasteless at those times, but all that was coming to my mind was her image like an amorphous improbable mass without human known features, which is why I desisted of the idea and made a decision to wait until the original version arrived. My grandfather Gennaro never talked about his former woman, except on certain occasions that he received mail in and, as he went to the reading, his face went away turning more and more scarlet. What cynicism! – He cried out - What foolishness! What a cheek! ... And after uttering a collection of words that began with “what”, heatedly he kept still and pensive, without ever communicating us the cause of his misfortune. When we were going to live definitively with him, because of the death of our parents, he already had separated from her. For that, so much her image like her collection of cheeks went away blurring in the time.

Many hours passed and our step-grandmother did not show up in the terminal, well then, exhausted, we decided to take a taxi to The Borrascosa. The field was a vegetable yellowish extension, sprinkled of chiaroscuro spots and on the trees a thrushes' gale was frolicking and making good use of the shade of the few shrubs that even had leaves. Not even a small leaf moved, only quietness and sun, an infernal heat gushed forth of the insides of the land searing the tasteless pasture and dumbfounding the surrounding small brooks, and more quietness and sun. The vapors that were sprouting from the ground were regurgitating a familiar smell of grass and cattle dung, diluted, almost, for the scarce breeze that was threading way through the moving car's window.

The mansion was far away from the town and formed part of a handful of houses that was sprinkling the roomy country sides, little parades now in the fiery summer. Right after some minutes of the journey, we perceived the irregular peaks of the characteristic rooftop of the architectonic structure of The Borrascosa at last.

I must clarify that before that infamous moment when our grandfather died and the later journey to Saint Andre, we were convinced of that the world turned around us, that way the facts held it, that way our grandfather's mimes held it, and so held it the attentions of our

caregivers. In this way, I can say properly and without fear to shame, that at that time we were very conceited and spoiled girls. But not for being vain and spoiled we lacked a minimal legacy of virtues, no. As for me, I possessed the easy and eloquent art of the word managing, and to the prolixity of the words came together the art of the facial expressions; so in the ecstasy of my conversations I always accompany my words with the assistance of the hands, trained with the mastery of a ballerina in ballet, useful tip when a further explanation is needed or when English was not sufficient. Beatrice, for her part, walked her beauty in the streets of life and for so many shopping centers as possible, with the solemnity of a queen without a kingdom, asking for nothing else than an adulating submission, and when this unrealistic aspiration was not attained, a circumstance that happened frequently, she resigned herself to the silent admiration that produced in the subordinates on duty. Mariana, on the other hand, free of all obfuscation and vanity, transposed her likings in her three big passions: Animals, food and art, and in this strict order.

Not even Saint Francisco in all his glory had saved so many puppies, little cats and little parrots like Mariana in her ministry. Her abilities for painting surfaced to a very premature age. She counted on three years only when the nursemaid's panicked shouts informed our grandfather than something very serious was going on. The screams came from the studio, where Gennaro had piled up some religious objects that were expecting the transportation to the church; these included an oil painting of the renowned Spanish artist Matthew Santander, received on loan and brought to the house by the own hands of the painter. Mariana's tiny hands in the ecstasy of a surpassed creativity had transferred a wide range of little puppets and little animals, decorated with the pastel shades of a watercolor. Nevertheless, unsatisfied with this, she had stripped also of her sacred garments the Blessed Virgin, our Lady of Coromoto, who from her pedestal looked pained to the perpetrator, in her new role as Venus of Olympus. Since then, we have had to moderate the impetus of her art toward more creative ways of expression.

We arrived around three o'clock in the afternoon, the house seemed deserted; without the trails of Gertrude neither her granddaughter Leticia. The facade looked very much alike as the one of my memories, although it showed already the havoc of the attacks of time. On the surface of the entrance paved with stones had grown a green coarse moss which gave a carpeted silky aspect to the front. I tuned my knuckles and knocked at the gate; my sisters, to my side, looked at me impatient, with a face of annoyance and with the collection of suitcases knocked down by the porch. The door looked very dry and aged.

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A "toc-toc" rumbled from the other side and a few hurried steps approached. The housekeeper, Ño Josefina, came to our meeting. Our first impression was not good; she was enormous and with terrifying proportions. The most noticeable feature of her face was an immense and long hair surprisingly black that gave her several turns to the head, as if a crown of snake were resting on her quiet front and a flattened nose convincing informers of her African roots. Her white apron was too starched and it rose up in the tips giving her a flying novice's air. A head full of little black curls appeared behind her, and then the body appeared. The girl, as twelve years old, had a big smile with teeth as large that seemed to be the grain of a cob which covered half of her face; the other half was adorned by two great eyes.

-You must be the grandchildren of Mrs. Gertrude - Said in a conciliatory tone giving signs that they were awaiting us and opened the wide door, urged us to enter. However, she offered no explanation as to why they hadn't gone to pick us up at the terminal and we did not demand an answer.

-My name is Ño Josefina and this girl - Se said, pointing out to the owner of the black curls and the cob teeth - is my daughter, the bold face Salome.

The girl advanced two tiny steps and greeted to us with a gentle reverence without stop smiling. This small gesture of sympathy would weave irredeemably the loom of the friendship that we would share for the rest of our lives. And that way, giggle and all, she timidly went back to hide behind the mass that was her mother.

-I would like to express my condolences to you. I regret very much the death of your grandfather. By these lands he was very much appreciated, at least by the members of the servitude - Said with sorrow while lying down her voluminous figure to the edge of the door. Her expression seemed sincere.

-And I regret very much that you had had to leave the comforts of your home to come here. A place so far as this! Where even the jack lost his breeches - She looked at our faces looking for any sign of assent but she found none, so she continued with her outlandish monologue.

-But who would say that someone might die of a simple cold, right? I am so glad that you inherited that pile of money, so Mrs. Gertrude will be able to cope with the expense of having you here! To say the truth - Said lowering the tone of her voice, almost whispering - She was a little short of funds! She was lucky that your grandfather died and had not declined her as guardian of all of you in the testament, after the whole sordid affair of the divorce.

-Wow! - She said at the end sorry - I did not mean that it was a good thing that Mr. Gennaro died! Away from my thought such a thing! -

Then she tried to amend and explain her reasoning but the only thing she got was more mess, so at the end she just said:

-Please, forget what I said! After a certain age we all started to say foolishness! That is why older people are deposited in nursing homes!

The mere mention of my grandfather raised a stir of nostalgia in me. Mr. Gennaro, as was named by his employees, was a little old man, with the red face of the Andalusian people and the belly rounded by the sausages and black pudding that he liked so much and used to eat with extreme satisfaction from the populous trays of his dinner, lunch and breakfast.

He was dressed in khaki, always, with a convincing gray hat with the wing tips screwed up, and a pair of black moccasins that squeaky when he walked through the elegant salons of the house and that betrayed his presence long before his body was seen.

His pants and shirt, perennially starched, awarded him a crunchy touch to his hugs. His lack of enlightenment neighbored sometimes with ignorance, but in the absence of letters compensated with cunning and with heart. The fortune came to him almost by chance, in the figure of a French investor with a score of boats and no manners for business, and Gennaro with his score of manners and no boat for business.

In this way, in agreeing symbiosis, formed an association that allowed him to amass a large fortune with the importation of alien species, and these followed by grains, chocolates, jewelry and appliances.

It seems that, in matters of business, Mr. Gennaro was very capable, the success was instant and soon found him enjoying the benefits of the privileged class. But in spite of the pleasures that provided the money, nothing was equated with the great pleasure provided by the demonstration of our affections, which he returned with more affections, and with the flow of his love and furbelows, came his ration of wisdom, a little of anecdotes and his pile of principles. And is that all the love that we learned of this world came through his person! So much love for so little body! - I thought with nostalgia.

I was joined to Beatrice, in addition to the family connection, in a relationship of mutual disappointments, and it was because Beatrice was foolish, and foolish with uppercase "F". And her folly was always accompanied by rebellion. From there, our eternal struggle, I, trying to drag her into the ground of my rationality and her pulling at me with equal force in the opposite direction; only the sweet soul of the interposer, the peaceful Mariana, achieved placing ourselves in a midpoint of tense co-existence. Did we really hate each other? Yes! No doubt! Did we love each other? Obviously! That was the reason why we were seeing ourselves like a necessary evil that should support until the circumstances arrange the opposite.

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The housekeeper stuck at her diaphanous diatribe of sentences and sentences. I, that was having the soul opened for rhetoric and investigations and the heart closed for the reproaches, looked for Gertrude's figure or Leticia with a policeman's alert look, but neither one nor the other one appeared on the horizon. In the meantime, Ño Josefina and her little daughter finished the welcome ritual as we remained safe and hungry next to the doorstep. Having complied with the presentations, we passed the door's chink, and once inside, I felt sufficiently confident to speak:

-We would like to freshen up, if there is no problem!

-And eat! - Added Beatrice hastily and with impatience.

The fatigue had drained the courtesy cliché that is customarily said in these cases, so we were replying with monosyllabic on the questions that we were asked by the lady, in an effort to demonstrate how exhausted we were after nearly fifteen hours of travel.

-Ouch! But what charming children! – She said inadvertently with a tinkling tone.

I was going to replicate by saying that we were not "children", since I will soon be completing the eighteen years and my sisters continued with ages of sixteen and twelve, but I reserved the commentary so as not to appear too impertinent in the first encounter. A weak "thank you" came out of my lips.

-Follow me; little children (again the blessed word) - She said - Raise your bags! Mrs. Gertrude does not like scratching the floor - And began to move her exaggerated humanity with the liting step of an elephant, the bold face Salome was still trying to emulate her steps but to a lesser degree. Mariana did not fail to observe the hair of snakes that moved upon her head, as if it were to attack at any moment.

The lobby and lounge were very big, overflowing with furniture and works of art in a variety of sizes and styles; valuable without doubt, but placed so incongruous that altered significantly the overall harmony of the whole. It smelled of confinement and moisture and this strange smell was gushing out of all the objects in the house. Enormous wrought iron windows bear the weight of heavy red velvet drapes, perhaps in an attempt to give the room a French style. A ladder also French-style amounted to the upper floor where the rooms of the family were gathered; already we were going to climb up when we saw that the mulatto was bound for a side where a long and winding corridor, secluded from the rest of the house, ended up in a fifteenth century's uneven oak gate.

-Mrs. Gertrude regrets that there are no available rooms - Continued by saying - and the temporary accommodation is in the basement while she finds a better place for you.

The basement? We looked at each other. What had happened to our rooms? Although for years we had not visited The Borrascosa, I recalled that mine was on the top floor, overlooking the lush gardens surrounding the residence, and to the sides, my sisters' rooms. Stringed, parallel to the immense corridor, was the rest of the rooms that completed ten, and at the bottom was a small seating area studio type where our grandfather used to gather to play and have tea in the afternoon, with chocolate, juices, almonds and raisins cokes. Those were the most pleasurable evenings of my life. The fun was the order of the day.

Indoors, we played board games: Monopoly, bingo and lotto where Beatrice, by force of constant and tenacious efforts, managed to pluck up a tricky person's solid reputation.

Outdoors, among the countryside full of flowers and the stooped large rocks that were sticking up from the vegetable bark, we drained our bubbling infantile energy in racing games, hide-and-seek and all of an ample males' repertory of entertainments. We were ignorant of, in those remote times and as we found out later, that the activities had gender, that way games for exclusive use of young ladies and a similar amount for gentlemen existed. We were in the prehistory of our infancy, ignorant of this sublime truth and became absorbed with all the impetus of our ignorance in such activities without the lightest indication of remorse or guilt caused by the gender issue.

On the wall opposite to the rooms a long window ran from end to end the entire aisle, embellished the environment with greenish shades of the pine trees and acacias that prowled in the surrounding thick grove, which were reflected in the spacious windows. It was not possible that all the rooms were occupied. The housekeeper was lying, and lied blatantly, and I could ensure that she was doing so with the consent of our Machiavellian step grandmother!

-Are the ten rooms occupied? For who? – I asked with incredulity. Mariana and Beatrice dropped the bags as a sign of disapproval, and with their hands on their waists, expected an explanation.

Nervousness was evident in the woman; she walked rapidly so as to not give time for more questions. She certainly didn't expect to be addressed by three angry teenagers.

-I fear myself that you would have to wait for your grandmother to talk about the subject. She will surely explain! I only follow her instructions – Said evasively.

What a cheek! What a nerve! What foolishness! Now all those words that my grandpa was exhaling every time he read the incisive missives received from Gertrude, came to my mind and now appeared in my tongue's tip. This time I was the one who distilled indignations, this

time I was the one pronouncing the words beginning with "what" but I contained my eloquence and tried to diminish my sisters' protests for the sake of preserving the good manners with the staff of service of The Borrascosa, that in the last analysis were having no fault for her matron's mandates. Beatrice expected an explosion of my dissatisfaction or disapproval, however she got surprised when I kept dumb like an oyster and walked behind the old woman like a robot, for which she was left with no other remedy that to retake the suitcase and to follow me along with Mariana.

Ño Josefina seemed to have no age; when she reached the fifty, she said, refused to continue adding years to her body and in this way she was made immortal; since then, the time had been parked behind her and her body ceased to produce gray hair and wrinkles. Beatrice looked at me with disbelief and even though I could not hear what she was saying as her lips moved without beeping, I recognized the gesture which indicated that the madam was crazy as hell.

The corridor was huge and at the end was topped with a heavy gate that sealed the entrance to the place. That huge cloistered door between two wooden columns tempered the passing of two worlds; the top and the bottom, as effectively as if an imaginary line had been drawn that separated by range of possessions the most affluent from the poorest. Well, those from "above", in other words, Gertrude and Leticia, governed on "the bottom" as omnipotent gods of Olympus, with the same toughness and folly that their Mediterranean counterparts. In this arbitrary classification, we stayed irretrievably encased in the group of "the bottom", flush with the whole of beings inhabiting The Borrascosa, namely, butler, gardener, maid, Ño Josefina, Juancho, bold face Salome, barnyard animals, rats and insects; all grouped under the same genetic label, as if a mischievous gene of "poverty" had been placed in our DNA strings, and conferring upon us all the same destination.

On the surface of the worlds' divisive door, there was a snakelike iron bolt screwed in and above two incrustations with the heads of two winged cherubim which in its time must have had the faces clean and polished, own of the heavenly beings, but now, as they were covered by a thick layer of soot, looked like two beheaded black little angels in search of their mutilated bodies by the suburbs of heaven or hell.

-Only the gargoyle is missing -whispered Beatrice in my ear. I cleared my throat to drown the scathing commentary of my sister. Beatrice, away from the subtleties that education and "femininity" impose, always used to say what she thought, and this peculiar feature of her personality seemed to flourish in the most inopportune moments. That way, if a person was known for his not much disposition to draw money from his pocket, her outlined little mouth attached him the pejorative epithet

of “ruin”, instead of “thrifty”, and in front of an ill-favored woman's sight, she promulgated it to the four winds like “hair-raising” instead of “not-pretty”. The housekeeper seemed not to listen to the commentary, and if she did, she ignored it. Mariana choked back a little shout than was cutting short his laugh.

We opened the door with difficulty. A dark deep attacked us. Mariana tightened my hand at the time that the old lady was groping the switch, when she turned the light on, it barely illuminated the compound. We took a brief look at the dark basement. A small ladder fell into that world of frets and boxes where a musty odor denoted a lack of cleanliness or poor ventilation. The same smell of humidity that was riding in the living room grew there with more forceful. In the center there was a clear and three little overstuffed mattresses and three blue wash-out wool blankets had been stacked.

In the background, almost stuck on the roof, it was seen a rectangle window blackened by dirt, where just three anemic sun rays had weathered the path to be reflected in prism on the wet surface of the floor. The insistent sound of a drop falling denoted the breaking of a pipe.

-Please get comfortable! - Said the housekeeper painfully - After I finished my work, I will come back to bring you something to eat.

She seemed like a good woman and was very distressed by the situation that we were passing. We went down the ladder with extreme care; hang on to the handrail which dangled incessantly, dragging the heavy suitcases by the wet rungs that blended to our step; already down, Beatrice and Mariana first toured visually the broad space, and then ventured out among the crates for a more detailed inspection.

-How can we be comfortable in this dump? - Bellowed Beatrice behind a cabinet which concealed her silhouette.

I was planted beside the housekeeper, trying to get more information about my relatives.

-When do we see... - I was going to say our grandmother but the word was blocked in my throat - Mrs. Gertrude?

The woman hesitated, ignorant of Gertrude's intentions regarding the girls. Ño Josefina was surprised by her reluctance to fit them into the principal rooms, given the fact that very few of the superior rooms were occupied. Besides the ones used by Gertrude and Leticia, the rest held old or decomposed furniture, out-of-use artifacts, that the old lady preferred to put aside in her particular furniture cemetery than to discard or donate to the charity, where they could, with some minor arrangements, continue, resurrected, lending valuable services. She settled the apron while responded:

-I don't know. Today it is bridge time and the madam is often absent

for a long time, - replied closing the door and taking the bold face Salome by force.

This indefinite world of privation and scarcity that now opened its doors with overwhelming rudeness, contrasted enormously with the snob opulence that, until now, we had enjoyed, in order to embark us, like lost tourists, in an excursion of poverty that would last for exactly six months, time stipulated for the lawyers for the delivery of our properties as soon as I got the age of majority.

-This smells horrible! – Beatrice said vehemently, with her insufferable air of superiority, with her perfect face framed in a flow of chestnut hair that seemed to float accompanying each of her movements. Her worldly spirit little endured the onslaughts of injustice.

And it was that this injustice was the first of which we ever had. Perhaps that was why we found it so fulminating and atrocious. It is not the same the injustice to others, seen from the distance, tolerated for other bodies different from ours, which started, no doubt, our most humane expressions of sympathy and understanding, than the injustice on us, the one that gets embedded like an annoying small stone in the shoe and taps us insistently the cause of our woes.

Beatrice frowned, wrinkled the mouth and raised an eyebrow; wrapped-up in that expression that always preceded her more sarcastic comments when something inconvenienced her.

-And do they pretend that we live in this? – She said accompanying her words with a skeptical look and a facial expression of open hands that reflected the exaltation of her spirit clearly.

I retained my laughter, I was amused by Beatrice's expressions of nausea in front of so much filth, considering that, certainly, the scab of dirt that extended to all measured like five centimeters. However, I had the good sense to abstain from the profusion of my laughter, sure as I was that this event would complicate the situation, so I decided to give an optimistic tone to my words and expressed:

-For the time being this is all we have! Let's clean this warren and try to see the positive side to the situation!

Beatrice grumbled between teeth as if she wanted to contain the words that were pulsating to leave. Then, becoming adapted more to the desires of her temperament than her sociability; she considered it better and said:

-There is nothing positive in this, dear sister! - She said with anger, dragging the words, as are told the things that poison the soul and when shared, also, poison the soul of others. Then, lost in her thoughts, ranked with her eyes the room looking for a moderate clean chair to sit and continue by downloading on my person the venomous phrases of her discontent.

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