

Fear of Animals

Lying on a sun lounger, his head about to explode after three days of glugging alcohol, Evaristo looked through his dirty shades at the parachute that circled above Acapulco Bay. Even when the show provoked in him a feeling of vertigo and fear that the parachutist might crash against the rocks of Condesa beach, he could not take his eyes off it, his anxiousness being at the same time a morbid desire to smash himself alongside the glider. Or would a crash against the most expensive hotel of the bay, because of a sudden gust, be more cinematic? He imagined the impact on Floor 24, the explosion of his entrails, the highly alcoholic concentration of blood dripping down the façade on to those idle tourists surrounding the pool. Such an accident, tragic and silly, would have got him out of trouble at that moment, when the future presented itself like the mouth of an oven in which he was being dragged by an endless conveyor belt. He drank the third Bloody Mary of that morning like water and, before the waiter could lift his tray, asked for the fourth “to save him having to come round again”. He did not think about eating breakfast despite having puked blood the night before at a topless bar where he had been served adulterated whisky. Fuck being healthy. He wanted to drink to the point of saturation, to turn his death into a reproach against Dora Elsa, whom he had been calling every hour since he arrived at the port without her having the courtesy to pick up the telephone. It was now four o’clock and he had to try again. Without dreaming of success, just out of simple romantic masochism, he went up to the 18th floor and once again dialled her home number, that he now knew by heart.

“You are calling Dora Elsa Oleana’s house. If you would like to leave a message, please do so after the beep.”

“It’s me, my love. Please answer, I know you are there. When will you understand that I never had anything to do with that bloody Fabiola? Would I be calling you every minute if I was with

her? What is happening is that you don't love me anymore. Pick up and tell me straight, so I know what the score is with you, but don't leave me here talking to the bloody answering machine. I need you, me, shorty. I gave up the Feds and now I'm in big trouble. Now is when I need you the most...without you Acapulco is like a warm beer. Come here and be with me, even if for only one night, that would be enough, Maytorena can come and kill me later. Aren't you going to pick up? I smell a rat. You may have dumped me for a lesbian and right now you are both in bed, laughing about me. Didn't you say I was your greatest love? Didn't you want to have a child with me? Answer, you bitch."

He went back defeated to his seaside bed, where on a tray waiting for him was the fourth Bloody Mary of the day. To his right, a tourist with black shades and a Hawaiian shirt was reading *Excélsior*. He turned to the other side, fearing that he would see some item about Vilchis. The newspapers would have started to kick up a stink about his mysterious disappearance, but what did he gain by reading them? He had enough reason to be anxious about his own conscience, which flashed back at him every second the image of the corpse laid out in the cell, with its inexpressive gaze like a sea bass. He could only forget the stiff under the combined effects of alcohol and cocaine, when he could attribute Vilchis' death to Maytorena's mindless violence, ignoring the fact that he had denounced him without any proof. Looking for an indulgent euphoria that would allow him to believe his own lies, he had crawled – turned into a shameful drunk, dumb and violent – through all of Acapulco's dens of iniquity and discos, from elegant clubs where he had to bribe the porter to get a table, to the sordid dives of the red light zone. He remembered, the night before, having insulted a gringo singer at the piano bar of La Cucaracha – drop the mike, you fucking arrogant blond – driving his car on the sidewalk of Costera Avenue in front of a police car, so having to bribe them, and having tried to seduce his hotel receptionist, offering her money for a lay.

Thank God the vodka was starting to take effect and the most embarrassing moments of his bender, that when he had woken up he felt worse about than the hangover itself, began to look to certain extent like childish pranks and comical. After all, Acapulco was a place for having fun and he could not lock himself up crying, because even though Vilchis' death was bearing down on him he was also celebrating the recovery of his own freedom. He was like

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a horse that, after having been penned up, jumps the fence and leaves, terrified, galloping through the field with the risk of falling down a ravine. His uncertain future justified his propensity towards brinkmanship, because he could not stay cool knowing that someone had put a price on his head. He was free, but not for long, and everything around him – sea, sun, women in G-strings, snow traders posing as boatmen – invited him to spend his last hours at an orgy. Sick of tomato juice, he got up from bed and, at the pool bar, under the shade of a thatch, he asked for a submarine of tequila and beer. The change in drink infused him with optimism. Maytorena would never forgive him for the scene at the cells, but he was satisfied about having sent him to bloody hell.

“That gringa’s fit, isn’t she?” the barman said, talking about an American lady, middle aged but whose body was slender and youthful, who was getting out of the swimming pool with her bikini clinging to her body.

Evaristo had not seen her, even when he was looking in the same direction. When the barman winked, he examined the woman from head to toe: she was tall and her neck was long, her face freckled, her back wide but not manly, her waist thin, breasts firm, and her butt a little turned-up and overflowing from the bikini, asking for trouble. After having rubbed herself with a towel, she lay face down on a lounge opposite the aquatic bar.

“Yes, she’s really fit.”

He contemplated her for a period of fifteen minutes, between sips of tequila, gazing greedily between her legs, where from under her bikini, a line of golden hairs poked. He would have tried to get her into his bed, but with gringas what happened to him was what happens to the Mexican football team on its trips abroad: he chickened out because of his lack of international experience. Maybe another submarine could conquer the language barrier, because when he was drunk he could even speak Russian, but he would not know how to handle the situation if the gringa was a fitness freak, and her gymnastic body made him fear she was. What could he do to seduce her? Buy her a celery juice and talk to her about homeopathy, aerobics, bicycles attached to machines that measured how many calories you burned? Sporty and healthy flirting was not his thing, not even in Spanish. He had decided to look elsewhere when the gringa called a waiter to ask for a margarita cocktail. Good sign: that meant her body was not a temple but a regal deposit of toxins. When the blonde finished her

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margarita, Evaristo asked the barman to send her another one on his behalf. From the distance he toasted her, and she acknowledged with a smile. Free from prejudices, like the football team playing at home, he walked towards her, sucking in his gut.

"Hello. Shall we eat together?" he said in his best English.

"Please, have a seat. But don't speak to me in English, 'cause I'm Spanish."

God rewarded the audacious. Grabbing the occasion by the scruff of the neck, he bestowed on her, vivaciously and carelessly, a ton of compliments and corny, but effective, jokes that made the ritual of introduction much lighter. The lady from Spain wanted "to paint the town red", was lighthearted and celebrated his Mexican idioms – right now, bro, whassup, in a mo' – with a childish laughter that paradoxically made her forehead and dimples dance. Her name was Adela and she was an Iberia stewardess. At 40, after two marriages and a common-law relationship, she spent her time enjoying herself, seeing the world and going out with friends who would not request fidelity "because, let's see, man, whoever said that only men could fuck with whoever they please?" That was her problem with those bores from Madrid, who became such hard work after she came back from her trips, coming to annoy her with jealous scenes as if they didn't go out with other girls when she was away. What? Did they think she had been born yesterday? That's why she did not have a formal partner right now, just lovers who came and went, and whoever attempted to claim his right to exclusiveness she would tell to go and take a hike. Evaristo agreed with her in everything, he was also a happy deserter of monogamy and, since he had divorced, had lived a lot more happily, because in variety you find pleasure and, also, the Pope should not bother us: men are promiscuous animals and women too. So Adela was a lucky woman as she had found the understanding and liberal match that she needed. Laughs, arm squeezes, another margarita and the same for me please. Do you want me to spread sun lotion over you? His hand slid downwards on her back and stopped near the bikini, hot but cautious, while Adela told him about her accidents at work, the forced landing at Tegucigalpa when the right engine had malfunctioned, the decompression at twenty thousand feet while flying from Madrid to Montreal that had made them release the air masks and had killed an asthmatic passenger, "poor guy, he gasped like a fish caught in a net and later the relatives sued

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the company”, stories that Evaristo half listened to, concentrating on her warm and olive skin, liquid nearing the belly button’s equator, where his fingers traced slow circles and ellipses out of orbit from desire.

From the swimming pool, drink in hand, they went to a deserted and air-conditioned bar for “happy hour”. Evaristo continued with the submarines and Adela with her margaritas that by now were leaving empties piled on the table like a bouquet of glasses. With drunkenness, the Spanish lady’s resentments flourished. She detested the passengers, particularly those of economy class, because of their vulgarity and their tendency to believe that they were Arab sheiks, as if she didn’t know that they paid their trips in instalments.

“I am delighted to serve a first class passenger, because people with class deserve to be well treated, that’s why they pay for the seats, but those arseholes who travel like sardines and ring the bell up to eighty times per flight because they feel sick or they want a bottle for the baby, I feel like throwing them out of the hatch.”

Maybe to please them with something from the good old days, the bar’s DJ played Eric Burdon’s ‘Spill the wine’, one of Evaristo’s favourite songs. He took the stewardess out on to the dancefloor and, when he stood up, stumbled over one of the table legs, knocking over all the glasses. Not even this accident put him off wanting to dance. On the dancefloor he threw his whole body into the heat of the moment, jumping like a Sixties wild child, but when he came back to the table, now with the mess having been cleaned up and with four glasses awaiting them, he felt a cold sweat and dizziness, an unequivocal sign that he was getting ill. He remembered that he had not eaten anything since the day before. It was six o’clock and his body was asking for mercy. “Hey handsome, are you all right? You’ve gone as white as milk.” Yes, he was burnt out, but he still had half of the snow he’d bought the morning before at Icacos beach. I’m going to have a snort, do you want some? Adela looked him in the eye with admiration and tenderness. “You read my mind, are you a wizard or are you telepathic?” Each went to the toilet and when they came out their faces were red, their pulses fast, their nerves ready for pleasure and euphoria. Adela hung from his neck and kissed him on the lips. She was wearing a lace top over her bikini and when he felt her breasts he had an erection that rose liked a molehill in his

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swimming trunks. They danced close, to some corny songs by Bread and The Carpenters and drank until they got drunk again, petting each other without modesty among the guests who, as night fell, were beginning to fill the bar. Fearful of a setback, Evaristo invited her to his room, “to recharge their batteries”.

Two lines later, leaning over the balcony, Evaristo in his trunks and Adela bare breasted, having fun spitting towards the hotel terrace, where there was a group of gringo tourists drinking. They wanted to be seen by some neighbour and, to call attention to themselves, had lit the balcony lamp. On the carpet were spilled crisps, crushed peanuts and empty bottles they had extracted from the minibar. Evaristo was tapping his fingers on the rail, accompanying the rap blaring from the television. “Take this you pig, and you too, cretin, I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”, exclaimed Adela, hacking up and spitting a phlegm towards the terrace for each person in the Holy Trinity. The most comical thing of this game was that the American tourists, even when they looked up, could not locate where the baptismal water was coming from. As they looked at them wiping off the spit, Adela and Evaristo split their sides with laughter. They were like two high school kids bunking off for the first time, initiated in vandalism as they discover freedom. Evaristo felt the gratuitous offence to others charging him with a sexual energy that would soon explode, and he believed that the stewardess was feeling the same. Sons of a bitch, pygmies, ants, whoever gave them permission to creep down there below, as they looked at them from above, like gods, horny, side by side, exerting their exterminating power as if sprinkling lemon on a plate of living clams. Hosting a violent erection, he embraced Adela from behind, rubbing the crack of her arse with the end of his penis, at the same time as he touched her clitoris, without resistance, giving a slight moan that seemed more an invitation to go further. With a quick movement of his hand he pulled her bikini down, as she pretended not to notice, still spitting on the tourists, detached from what was happening behind her, where Evaristo, kneeling and sticking out his tongue, like an altar boy receiving a host, ate her arse bravely and with dedication, plunging into the totality of his *mapa mundi*. Adela could not pretend not to know for long. Defeated by pleasure, she started to collaborate with slow pelvic movements that aroused the prisoner of her crack even more, who, feeling her humid and

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open, then penetrated her with a clean thrust. She grew into the punishment and facilitated Evaristo's task with a thrust of her buttocks, cautious at first, then at an outrageous speed. More, she shouted, more, despite having it all inside. Bent over the banister as if she was going to jump into the abyss, she moaned and howled, not forgetting the tourists downstairs, whom she was now not just spitting at, but cursing, bastards, sons of a bitch, tacky shits, yes, I am talking to you, I am coming, get it, I am coming on top of you.

They came at the same time with a long, deathly rattle. Evaristo felt his knees bending and fell heavily upon a chair. It was not the sweet exhaustion following an orgasm but a comatose state, general physical collapse. He tried to light up a cigarette but the packet felt too heavy. With the little energy that he had left, he crept into the bed without turning the television off. He needed rest, the eternal peace of the grave, and as soon as he put his head on the pillow he turned into a blind bundle, like a piece of rotting flesh that falls from its skeleton.

He woke up six hours later, when it was still night. He extended an arm looking for Adela, not finding anything but the cold of the sheet, and when he lit the bedside lamp he discovered that she was gone. Despite the faint light, it hurt his eyes like a spotlight and he felt some kind of prickly ballbearing trapped in his cranium that bounced from ear to ear. With a titanic effort he managed to stand up, or almost, because he had just attained a vertical position when he again collapsed in bed, sweating and shivering. When he saw the sheet stained with a disgusting black liquid, he deduced that he had thrown up in his sleep. It was a miracle that he had not choked in his own puke, like Lupe Vélez and Tennessee Williams. He needed a snort urgently and to brush his teeth. But how could he look for it on the dresser, if even when he lifted his neck he shivered with vertigo and anxiety. Instead of fighting his nausea he was defeated by the spasms and threw up again, now over the carpet. He did not have anything in his stomach, just a yellow bile with a bitter taste that must have been, he thought, the famous gastric juice from the digestive system. His head now clearer, he dared to walk towards the dresser where he had the coke sachet. It was not in the drawer. Nor was his watch or wallet where he kept his money, and his credit cards were spilt over the carpet. Desperate, he looked among his clothes, behind the bedboard and below the desk.