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## I dreamt yesterday that they were killing me

Yesterday I dreamt that they were killing me. It was the third time that I had the dream. First, there was the thundering sound. Then, they knocked down the door to my apartment followed by their shouting and screaming and, without giving me time to fully wake up or even scratch my ass, they stormed my room under the cover of darkness. I couldn't see their faces. The only thing illuminating the room was the fluorescent green being reflected on their eyes. One of them kicked me off of my bed, and while the others barked commands at me in strange languages, another aimed the barrel of his gun between my eyes and pull the trigger.

I couldn't feel the blood running down my face, flooding my right eye. I couldn't taste its dense salty-metal as it trickled down pass my mouth. After the bullet did its job, my body lied inert on the ground. The peaceful cold, which blankets the soul of a dying man and the quite whistle of a vanishing life, was all that was left. Their eyes, like lightning bugs, stared at me like stellar astral bodies, so far away, turning and turning around without ceasing.

Nobody heard the fatal shot. No one came to complain. No one asked for me. No one said a thing.

The newspaper published, in a little corner of section D, the sports section, a meager announcement of twelve letters (not even in bold) that I had killed myself. "Juan Guillermo Velez, prominent soccer player for 'Medellín,' committed suicide last night."

Only my mother came to the burial, but not a single prayer did she offer to "our Father who art in Heaven."

The night before last, I dreamt that I had scored a goal, a goal among goals. I had scored it off of an amazing backwards flying kick while surrounded by players of the "Nacional" ... but no one was cheering. I didn't hear the screams of the cheerleaders celebrating in uproar my athletic prowess. One could only hear a silenced lament. The birds stopped singing, the band ceased its jovial music, and the smell of dry flowers invaded the stadium. Suddenly, they began throwing things at the field because I had scored a goal against my own team.

I signed my death sentence with a kick... and because of that, I cannot stop dreaming that they are going to kill me.

### **Ayer Soñé que me Mataban**

Ayer soñé que me mataban. Es la tercera vez que lo soñé ayer. Primero, se escuchó un trueno. Llegaron tumbando la puerta. Luego gritos, y sin darme tiempo de quitarme las lagañas o de abostezar o de rascarme el culo, se metieron en mi cuarto con las luces apagadas. No les puedo ver la cara. Lo único que ilumino el cuarto fue el verde fluorescente de los ojos. Uno de ellos a patadas, me tumbó de la cama y mientras los otros me gritaban en lenguas extranjeras, otro me pegó un tiro arribita de la nariz.

Siento la sangre tibia correr por mi frente, me encharca un ojo y saboreo su espesor salado. Mi cuerpo yace inerte en el suelo. La áspera humedad, que cobija el alma y el agrio silbido de la vida, se van agotando lentamente. Sus ojos, sus ojos de cucuyos me miran como astros estelares, lejos, muy lejos dando vueltas sin cesar.

Nadie escuchó el disparo certero. Nadie vino a decir que se callaron. Nadie preguntó por mi. Nadie dijo nada.

El periódico publicó, en un rinconcito de la sección D, la de deportes, un anuncito de trece letras (ni en negritas siquiera) que me había suicidado. “Juan Guillermo Vélez, prominente jugador del Atlético Deportivo Medellín se suicidó ayer en la noche.”

Solo mi madre vino al entierro pero ni un Padre Nuestro me rezó.

Anteayer soñé que había metido un gol, un golazo de los golazos. De palomita y rodeado de jugadores Nacional, pero nadie se alegraba. No escuché los gritos de la porra celebrando en alboroto mis habilidades de deportista. Sólo se escuchó un lamento silencioso. Los pájaros dejaron de cantar, la banda paró su música jovial, y ese olor de flores secas invadió el estadio. De repente empezaron a tirar cosas a la cancha por “yo” haber metido un autogol.

Firmé mi sentencia de muerte con una patada y por eso es que no dejo de soñar que me van a matar.

## The Forest Path

I continued my excursion like a sleepwalker without a preset course, savoring the yellow bile that erupted from my entrails. With hoisted sails, the wind accompanies me in this immense ocean called life. Walking without a set destiny, I raised the fine August dust leaving prints with my sandals. The cheerful gust of your memory, the one that could not be stripped from me, continues to beat here, in the hollow place where I buried the truth of our history, our past life.

I walked a while by the sides of the hill of the Angels and the cliff of Judas, looking without eagerness at the gardens with flowers of ivy. I walked, completely set in extracting the poison-fanged serpent that nested itself within my heart. I walked thinking about the possibilities, about another opportunity, another life, a new beginning in another town, another place... but no, I couldn't; you ruined everything. That's the case, the sole truth that can't be viewed in the internal darkness but in the yellow bile that I vomit.

After passing the orange grove, I took the path that led to the other side of the forest, and I contemplated in astonishment the landscape as I stood by the edge of a half-dried creek, underneath a tall oak with noble arms. From here, I could make out a cabin with stone walls and a straw roof, almost timid and half-forgotten on one of the hills at the tip of the mountain of the Monks. A grey, opaque smoke was arising from its chimney. The sky produced a brilliant sunset accompanied by tri-colored clouds: grey, yellow, blue, and purple. I didn't see the orange color.

I had never ventured by these places, had never passed the Little Volcano. I had never seen this oak, never noted its branches, and naturally my gaze conquers this new territory.

The day, for August, was fresh and I hadn't felt as animated as I did today in a long while. Today was the first time in weeks that I had the energy to leave that little room on the second floor. Something had invigorated me with a newfound energy, and I ventured out to put my plan into action... and for that sole reason I arrived here today, without you and a very small amount of your memories.

I decided that it should be done late after lunch. Today I decided to do it: to end it all, to end you. Life is only suffering, agony, and pain.

I mull it over in my mind, and I can't, I can't find the reason for your departure: so abrupt, so sudden, without warning; just a letter that smelled like roses placed in my coat pocket.

I remember when you folded it and, in a moment of carelessness, placed it in my pocket and smiled at me as if nothing had happened, "something for later..." Three weeks I've suffered without you, without us, without your olive-green eyes and pleasant smile. Your strength is like rubidium, your complexion is of the color of a common flower in a sunny spring day.

I only encounter whispers of the past in the dusty, cobweb-littered objects placed in the darkness of my consciousness. If I live after putting the noose around my neck, someone will ask me one day, “and how did things turn out?” I know they will ask me, if I live that is. I will look them right in the eyes and then... I will remain silent. That is why I have to forget, so as not to lie but to tell them the truth that I did it because of you. No, I can't keep you in my memory. Here and now is the end of my life, and of yours too, as the stifling August afternoon wind gently swings my limp body from the crooked branch looming over the nearly dry creek. It will end.

## There She Was / The Garbage Can

There I was, on the dance floor, mixed up in the confounding racket of the *cumbia* and the tropical *guaracha*, salty, fat beads of sweat dripping down my face and diving into the abyss in slow motion and colliding star-shaped against the dirty, paper-covered floor only to be immediately trampled by the soles of free-roaming dancing shoes (trendy Italian trendy leather, high-heels, plastic-soled). They evaporated from the floor - mine, the ones that came off of my head, those which rolled down my face and flew off into the emptiness amid all of the activity. My drops of sweat.

The ecstasy of the dance - the bewitching rhythm like a chicken with its head cut off, like sweet sugarcane from the August harvest, like thick smoke of Caribbean tobacco, like a little high-pitched ringing bell - the Caribbean blood that empowers one's being, transporting it as if through a trance to an erotic world ruled by the rhythm of tambourines, trumpets, and cymbals. The vibrations of the body, of the bones, of the muscles, of those flexible hips in the tight-fitting skirts, to the rhythm of *pan, pan, poon, poon*.

The Main Stage was the name of the hole-in-the-wall on one of Tallahassee's downtown blocks. There on Park Avenue was that cave of nocturnal rats, that den of sleepwalking savages - Latinos in search of women; or dancing; or drinking; or escaping, getting away, changing the scenery - or simply being a little closer to their own.

Dark black tinted windows, neon lights, and a thick, heavy door guarded by two burly Puerto Ricans with a cash register covered on stickers, charging five dollars per stamp. It's Thursday, and that means it is Latin Night. We all congregate here, those of us that know where to find a little bit of our culture and also those who like the ambience of our race.

The walls seemed to have been painted sporadically - a little green here, an apple-red there, a little pastel-yellow over the main door, and sky-blue in the bathroom. Pieces of the wall were on the floor, red brick with little gray stripes. There was also a pink plastic curtain hanging from the all and a real cloth one covering part of the wall. Wilted flowers, along with a pretty one that was fake, adorned the bar counter.

Paintings, that had to have been purchased at a Goodwill store, littered the walls. They hung trembling in fear of falling to the floor. They had seen their best years of admiration in the seventies.

The tables were without centerpieces, and most of them would sway back and forth unevenly with the mere touch of a finger, or the magical waves of sound that emanated from Gabriel's metallic flute. The few lamps available, seemingly snatched from the city dump, let out just enough light to sufficiently illuminate the proud sponsors of this Caribbean atmosphere.

The chairs were covered with holes and some even had knife-carved graffiti on their surfaces. Nail heads were searching for freedom amidst cotton and fabric. Metal, wood, plastic; I felt it better to parade around, beer in hand.

I was sweating and the air was spoiled by the stench of nicotine. It was already past one thirty in the morning. The drinks, loud tropical sounds, non-stimulating conversation, and racket that accompanied nights such as this served only to augment the internal shame of this taciturn, waking nightmare.

It was in the middle of this gibberish – the red, yellow, white, purple, and blue lights; the "Excuse me," "What did he say?", "Come again?", "Sorry, hahaha," "Bring another round for the whole table!", "Cha, cha, cha, let's DANCE!", and "Oh, tell me more!" – that I saw her.

I saw you first, *gringita linda*. I saw you many times before around the university, locking up your bike, playing with your hair as you walked down one of the floors of Duffenbaugh. I saw you doing your homework in the library and when you were talking with your friends in the Student Union during Flea Market Wednesday. I saw you swimming in the pool. I even saw you after that horrible haircut, the one that made you look like a boy.

But this was the very first time that I saw you here in our cave, our subterranean temple, our cultural synagogue. You look so clean, so white, so dry, and so out of place. Your hair was so straight, so long, so golden. Your facial profile was so detailed – I like profiles. I liked looking at your nose, strong and not shy. Your chin with that little dimple in the middle gave you airs of a Roman empress. And those lips, so full and *provocativos*. Your skin with those freckles – those freckles really complimented the color of your skin. Your face looked so perfect from there.

Better take another sip of beer...

Our eyes finally met during the band's *salsa* song. You didn't dare to look into my dark brown *ojos*. I couldn't hear the music *embraquiadora*. Your eyes, *los tuyos*, *azules*, blue, *los tuyos*. *Mirame, mami*, look at me, don't be shy. I took another swig of the gold drink from Saint Louis, thinking "Should I get closer to her or not? If I do, should I talk with her? What should I say? What should I ask her? What if she ignores me?"

She went back to looking at me, smiling freely and flirtatiously. Don't be so bad, I thought, don't play with me. *Huerita linda*, you look at me and smile. "Where is she going? I think she's coming this way! She is! She is coming towards me! What do I do?"

"Hi!"

"Hola." The music stopped playing. There was silence. The people stopped screaming.

"Are you the guy, the playwright?"

"Playwright?" I couldn't think straight; what was she talking about?

"Yeah, the one who wrote that play? You know, the one presented by the Spanish TAs, the Grad Play?"

"Oh yes, THAT play – the one we did last spring." You smiled – you remembered my face, my play.

"I KNEW it was you! I liked your acting too!"

"So you liked the play?" You liked my play, my acting? I looked around, pretending to be busy looking at the people desperately waiting to hear more music.

"Yes. You are very talented."

"Thank you." Why was I ignoring her? Why was I playing so hard to get? She was the one who came to me. This was my chance, my opportunity to get to know her better.

"I liked your role. You played a very funny character."

"Thank you."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Ramón, Ramón Perez... but my friends call me Ray."

"I like Ramón. Can I call you Ramón?"

"Sure." Ray – what a plain name that is. Ramón sounded better when you pronounced it with your beautiful voice. I liked the way you rolled the R – Rrrrramón. It didn't sound natural, but it was beautiful.

"I'm Leann."

"Nice meeting you, *La Ana*."

"No, not *La Ana* – Leann. LEANN. L-E-A-N-N."

"As in *lean más*?"

"No, as in Li-An."

"Li-An?"

"Yeah, that's it! Leann!"

Silence. What should I say next? What should I say to keep the conversation going – this lively, energetic encounter? I couldn't let that energy die.

The music began to play again, the *cumbia*. I took another swig of beer.

"*Quiere bailar?*"

"What?"

"*BAILAR!*" I was almost screaming.

"WHAT?"

"Music, dance, you and me. *Bailar*, you know?" Movement of hips, passion, lovers.

"I don't know how!"

"Li-An," I say while looking into her blue eyes, "I'll teach you." More screams; I was almost deaf.

"What?"

"I... can... teach... you." I say it slowly as I accompany my words with my hands.

She put her hand on my shoulder and whispered into my ear. "Are you sure? I've got no rhythm!"

"Yes, here." I take her hand and hold it close to my chest and pull her through the crowd to the dance floor. She was in my arms, her left hand grasped by my right one and her waist, her waist secured by my left one. I couldn't believe it!

"Now what?" she says, screaming again. Gabriel the flautist was now playing the trombone. He greeted me, nodding his head in approval of my selection.

"Just feel the music and follow my lead," I said to her.

The awkward moments as well as time had passed by. They had gone by like smoke, like wind, like nothing.

Then it was time to leave. The cave was illuminated from the entrance, no longer opaque. There was light and the exhausted clients began to leave through the mouth of the cave, looking for another place to talk, to continue the party, hoping to rob the night of its life.

*Y tú*, Li-An, still there with me, holding my hand. You got closer, looked me in the eyes, then my lips... and I looked at those blue eyes glancing at my lips, the ones that were going to kiss yours. *Y los besé*.

"Everybody out; we're closed! Let's go, everyone out! Party's over!" two *boricuas* screamed as they picked up empty cups and beer bottles. "Get out of here, guys! Thanks for coming; don't forget to come back next Thursday!" they continued without lifting their eyes from the ground.

The refreshing outside breeze dropped me back into the reality of Tallahassee - the nocturnal silence, the clarity of the night, the tall oak trees, the distant rumbling of motors, the free chatter of the passersby, the clicking of heels on the sidewalk and the paved street, the sound of slamming car doors followed by blaring car stereos.

"Come on, Leann, it's time to go," said her friend, seemingly out of nowhere – a short, overweight girl with long, curly hair, long red fingernails, short eyelashes, and a fake freckle. She was the one doing the dirty dance to the sounds of a *guaracha*. She was the good friend of the two Puerto Ricans tending the bar. She was the one who came to steal my Li-An.

"I could take you home," I promptly stated.

"No, you can't," the short *gorda* replied quietly, thrusting her index finger in my face – the one with the long, red nail, while placing her left hand on her hip while pushing her shoulder back.

"I could, Li-An, if you want me to," I said, still holding her hand.

"C'mon, girl, let's go," the one with the fake freckle said, pulling Li-An's free hand. I let her go and looked, speechlessly, as she dragged her toward a red Honda Civic – two doors, sunroof, tinted windows, and chromed wheels.

"I'll see you around campus!" the blue-eyed beauty screamed to me as she got into the passenger's side of the little red car with the sunroof.



"I –" was all I had time to say before the fat, short-eyelashed girl whisked her away just before the clock struck a quarter past two. "I'll see you later, *gringita linda*," I thought to myself. "I'll see you around campus. I'll see you unlocking your bike. I'll see you playing with your hair walking down the sidewalk, or while you are doing your homework in the library. I'll see you talking with your friends in the Student Union during Flea Market Wednesday. I'll see you swimming in the pool or working out in the gym. I'll see you; I'll see you around."