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The sustenance of the machine

de
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traducción de
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(fragmento en inglés)

III

A bell rings repeatedly. The last times, vehemently. Cristóbal appears, just awake, his face harsh because of the hangover.

CRISTÓBAL

Coming, coming! Who is it? (...) Ok, come on up.

He opens downstairs, then the flat's door. A few seconds later appears Oscar, somewhat unsettled.

ÓSCAR

But, how can you sleep at this time, with all the racket out there? *(After looking at the state of the apartment)* Sorry, have they already been here? *(He laughs)*

CRISTÓBAL

Very funny. This is from last night, the exhibition's opening party ended here.

ÓSCAR

Here! What about your parents?

CRISTÓBAL

They left for the countryside.

ÓSCAR

What's all these stupid things on the walls?

CRISTÓBAL

They all felt like playing the artist.

ÓSCAR

Not actually surprised seeing the kind of herd attending the openings. *(He looks out the window)*. Come on, get dressed, the showing off was yesterday. Today, out there, there's something very good happening, for real; we've got to take some pictures.

CRISTÓBAL

What's up?

ÓSCAR

I can't believe you don't know. The guy killed in the factory. The official version...

CRISTÓBAL

(Sharp). Where?

ÓSCAR

In the factory. It's impossible you don't know about it. The official version says he broke in and got electrocuted. Many couldn't resist anymore and have spoken out, although they know that sooner or later they will lose their jobs. Seemingly, the boy was already working several months without a contract. Are you OK? Your face is white. *(Cristóbal has become pale. He's nervous, starts sweating.)*

CRISTÓBAL

It's nothing.

ÓSCAR

They want to get into the factory by fair means or by force. Many people have arrived, very different groups and unions. While I was waiting downstairs I've heard the wailing of the police sirens. *(Cristóbal retches)*. What's wrong?

CRISTÓBAL

Nothing, I'm fine. I drank too much last night.

ÓSCAR

They are furious, it seems they are trying to get someone to receive them for several days. They say everything was very fast and that the police decided too soon that it was just an unlucky burglar, without listening to anyone else.

CRISTÓBAL

Today is a bank-holiday, there won't be anyone to talk to. *(He retches again)*

ÓSCAR

I think they don't care about that; if there's no one now, then they'll get there fast when they manage to break down the door.

Rosa comes in using her key. When she sees Óscar she freezes in the doorstep. They look at each other intently. Cristóbal gets up, searches for a handkerchief, dries the sweat off, sits down, cleans himself, gets up again...

ROSA

Hasn't Laura arrived?

CRISTÓBAL

She hasn't, no. *(To Óscar)*. The police won't allow that. The police will bar them from entering.

ÓSCAR

Maybe Laura can't get here either.

CRISTÓBAL

(To Rosa) Was it here, the meeting-point?

ROSA

Yes, it was.

CRISTÓBAL

Mum and dad aren't here.

ROSA

I know; they are in the countryside. *(Violently)*. I'll be back in a minute, I'm double-parked.

ÓSCAR

(The same as her) No need for that, I was leaving. *(Rosa is ashamed. To Cristóbal)*. Come on, we've got to be there, get in the shower and get ready. *(Rosa steps aside when Óscar approaches to leave. They look at each other again for a few seconds)*. Nice to see you again. You are as beautiful as ever.

ROSA

Than-you. *(Óscar exits)*. Were you talking about the factory's squabble?

CRISTÓBAL

Yeah.

ROSA

They are despicable. We know them well, it was many years issuing their labels in the printing press...and many dirty tricks.

Cristóbal retches.

ROSA

(Noticing he's not feeling well). Cristóbal!

CRISTÓBAL

(On the defensive). It's nothing, something didn't go down well on me last night. *(He opens the window for a breath of air. He looks out to the street)*. You can't compare.

ROSA

This is the limit, anyway. That poor immigrant kid.

CRISTÓBAL

(Turning around). I didn't know he was a foreigner.

ROSA

He was, Ukrainian. Besides, if it is who they say it is, we know him.

CRISTÓBAL

We know him?

ROSA

Yes. Well, maybe you don't. It's a friend from the couple living in the country house, we have met him there sometimes.

Laura enters. Cristóbal looks quickly out the window, he doesn't want her to notice his physical condition.

LAURA

What a racket down there! *(She looks around the room)*. What's going on?

CRISTÓBAL

We finished here last night. *(Laura stares at the drawings on the wall, over the floor)*. They are somewhat copies from the exhibition's pieces.

LAURA

Yes, I've noticed, I was in the exhibition. This one reminds me what I just saw at the door of the factory. But your characters have...how could I put it? A more dramatic expression. I believe there is something exhibitionist when showing the pain, but not from them, but from the author.

CRISTÓBAL

They are not my characters, I didn't invent them. They are flesh and blood people.

LAURA

I see. Are you going? To the factory, I mean.

CRISTÓBAL

(Stammering). I don't know.

LAURA

(Still looking at the drawings). It's only two streets down the road. It happens too close for you to be interested, doesn't it? *(Cristóbal suppress his retching)*

CRISTÓBAL

What?

LAURA

Nothing, never mind. *(She reflects on another picture)*. I remember this one too. The cute girl with the war face-paintings.

ROSA

Come on, Laura, I don't think cute is the word.

CRISTÓBAL

Neither were they war paintings.

ROSA

To be cute you need to be blonde and attractive, or a charming brunette, wear flirty earrings,

discreet make-up and have this air...somewhat absent-minded. This girl is something else, she's really beautiful.

CRISTÓBAL

Those face-paintings just stress the innocence they were surely trying to hide. In that sense they can be considered war paintings.

ROSA

Besides, it's like if she didn't live there, in that harsh, hostile environment. Yes, innocent, and at the same time, I could see her stark, shameless, I don't know what's the right word... transparent, showing off all her beauty, the one outside and the inner one. That face spoke volumes, it was much more than a cute face. It had an impact on me, that's for sure.

LAURA

Yes, you're right. She really looks like someone special, and I guess our artist has gone to any length to show it to the whole world. What I can't quite see is what makes her that special. Now that I think about it, I think I have seen this before in some of his photographs, taken in another places, faraway places from one another, and separated by many years. Photographs of some beautiful face standing out from the rest of the collection where it belongs, standing out almost insultingly, humiliating all the others and above all humiliating her own people.

CRISTÓBAL

Rosa, I really appreciate your perception on the atmosphere and the beauty...

LAURA

(Snapping). What could be our artist's intention? Fortunately, we have him here and we can ask him. Why throw oneself so much into just one person when the purpose, or at least what is sold as the purpose, is to portray a whole people? Or maybe you thought that detail was going to pass unnoticed? Do these group members stand out for some qualities they only show to the artist and that can't be revealed by an image?

ROSA

Laura, the debate about the war paintings is much more interesting.

LAURA

But we are speaking about that, haven't you noticed?

ROSA

Leave it, Laura.

LAURA

Why? This is very enriching, as you always say.

CRISTÓBAL

I spoke about all this yesterday, it's curious that some scrawl can draw your attention, but not the pictures themselves. Your sons asked many questions, they are quite well informed, I'm sure they can clarify all your doubts and that way, from one to the other, it all becomes...more enriching. I'm

tired, I almost haven't slept and my mind is a little bit thick, I could say things that would mislead you.

ROSA

I've got some information myself, I can tell you all while we have a snack. Let's go, I'll pay.

LAURA

(Ignoring what Rosa has just said). And what did you tell them? I'm very demanding. The stories they use to be the centre of attention for a while aren't good enough for me. Did you explain to them why someone who would have passed unnoticed inside the group becomes suddenly the star of your exhibitions? Or did you tell them that you know the way they breath in their sleep, that you have been so close as to decipher their dreams if you wanted to, that you are never going back to any of those places, that whatever they meant you'll never see them again?

CRISTÓBAL

I don't know what you are talking about. *(It's becoming harder to conceal his hangover. He dries his sweat, shivering, he has the handkerchief over the mouth nearly all the time to cover his retching.)* I'm going to tidy up.

ROSA

Laura, you're getting it wrong, this is not what we were meeting for.

LAURA

I'll help you. *(She tears one of the sheets from the wall, makes a ball of it and throws it to the floor).* Here. But wait, how could you have known their dreams? What if they reveal something important to you?

ROSA

Please, he's not feeling well. *(She helps Cristóbal).*

LAURA

And what if you appeared in the corner of one of those dreams? The horror! Isn't it? Look, that's it, they are back in the floor now, after the caricature they become debris, as usual. The dreams are trampled on, they are no longer dangerous. You can rest assured. You know what? You're right. I'm going to talk to the boys, I'm going to ask them to tell me your stories, from their mouths it will all seem different. Perhaps a piece of one the dreams you are piling up will appear briefly. Maybe there will be a story for them that doesn't end with packed suitcases, ready to go, and a one-way ticket only.

CRISTÓBAL

That's the best you can do, without a doubt. Leave now!

The mother enters. She carries a small suitcase. Cristóbal makes an effort to compose himself.

THE MOTHER

Morning, children. *(To Laura and Rosa).* I was not expecting to find you here.

CRISTÓBAL

They came to invite me to a snack.

ROSA

How come you are already here? Weren't you going to spend the whole weekend in the countryside?

CRISTÓBAL

Sorry about the mess, some friends came by last night. I was tidying up now.

THE MOTHER

Your father doesn't stand so much the countryside, lately. It's as if all that open space and silence overwhelmed him. He goes out of the house, and stands at the door, looking in every direction, and then comes in again. He could go so many places that he can't decide on one. In the other hand, I don't feel so at ease over there any more, sometimes I feel we are intruding. Do you remember Catalina and Nicolás?

CRISTÓBAL

Sure, the couple looking after the house. I don't know them but I know who they are.

THE MOTHER

Oh! They are lovely, you should meet them. They've got already two kids: the eldest, a girl, can't stop running around everywhere, trying to grab everything. It's wonderful, they fill the house with the joy it didn't have since you were little.

CRISTÓBAL

So?

THE MOTHER

Can't you see? They have made their home over there, now it's us who visit them. I know it's not right to have these feelings, it's not fair, it's not their fault, the only thing they have done is what everyone does: let life go on normally, take their chances. Besides, it was us who offered them to stay in the house.

LAURA

Has something happened, mum, have you argued?

THE MOTHER

No, not at all. Calm down, it's nothing like that. They are always very kind and they are grateful. It's just in my mind. Besides, they have come with us... At mid-morning some of their fellow countrymen arrived, and they spoke at length about what happened to that kid in the factory, and they decided to come over to the city. (*Cristóbal goes back to the window*). We have taken the chance to come back with them, in spite that Cati, who has stayed there with the children, insisted that we stayed. Nothing has happened, and nothing will happen. In our way I thought about something that soothed me: Cristóbal is here, he'll know how to deal with this situation so that we all feel fine, without hurting each other, he knows about all this.

LAURA

Yes (*Hurt by the confidence her mother thrust upon her brother*), he'll know what to do. What about dad? Where is he?

THE MOTHER

When we stepped out of the car, we could hear shouting and police sirens not very far away. He said he was going to see what was going on as he went for a walk.

ROSA

Mum!

THE MOTHER

I didn't want him to go, but he insisted.

LAURA

He must be in the middle of all the fuss.

ROSA

My God. It's dangerous. Precisely, we told you to go to the countryside this weekend when we found out that a demonstration was each time more likely.

THE MOTHER

But what's wrong?

LAURA

Things are heating up around the factory.

THE MOTHER

It's my fault, it was me who wanted to come back.

ROSA

It's Ok, you didn't know it. Let's go. Mum, you stay here in case he comes back. The first one to find him calls the rest.

CRISTÓBAL

(*Resentful*). He's not joining the people in the demonstration, believe me.

ROSA

All the same. What's that all about, Cristóbal? Dad is not well.

LAURA

Please, take off the blindfold, or at least stop playing the fool.

ROSA

We were meeting here to speak about it.

Laura. What is it? Have you seen so many things you think it's all OK?

ROSA

Laura, not like this.

LAURA

Not like this? How, then? Can't you see he doesn't want to open his eyes?

The mother begins to cry.

ROSA

There is no time now. Get changed and go. You know, if you find him, call.

Laura and Rosa get out. Cristóbal disappears calmly through the door. He comes back shortly after dressed to go out.

CRISTÓBAL

Stop crying, mum, dad's fine, he's just seeking attention. Start preparing some food, we'll be all back soon. *(He goes out)*

The mother stays alone on stage, crying. She opens the suitcase and takes a book. She turns the pages as she dries her tears.

THE MOTHER

(Reading) Food in this village is very colourful. They prepare it with great dedication and care but they never eat it at once, for them it is important to let it rest. That time spanning between preparation and the actual eating is not pre-established, it still remains a mystery.