

ct

The sickness of stone

de
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traducción de
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(fragmento en inglés)

Inside the basilica of the Valley of the Fallen. The scene takes place in a passageway in the upper part of the basilica. The vaulted roof is covered with a large protective cloth and the walls are lined with scaffolding.

The powerful beam of a torch sways in the semi-darkness of the space. MIRANDA descends from one of the scaffoldings. She makes a little jump to the ground. She wears a blue work overall. She removes her helmet, gloves and face mask. She leaves the torch on a table which is covered in tools. Only now do we see ANDRÉS, standing opposite her, in silence. Surprised, MIRANDA backs away.

ANDRÉS

Called me, didn't you?

MIRANDA

What?

ANDRÉS

A while ago. You called me.

MIRANDA

Oh, yes.

Pause. They look at each other.

ANDRÉS

So?

MIRANDA

I thought you hadn't heard me.

ANDRÉS

You hear everything in here. There's an echo. Whatever you say here gets repeated everywhere.

MIRANDA

Right.

ANDRÉS

So?

MIRANDA

What?

ANDRÉS

You called me.

MIRANDA

Actually, it doesn't matter. *(Pause.)* Is that door there the one that goes straight through to the abbey?

ANDRÉS

The one at the back?

MIRANDA

It's the only door there is, isn't it?

ANDRÉS

The door at the back's the one that goes to the abbey.

MIRANDA

It's the only door, isn't it?

ANDRÉS

Why do you ask? *(Pause.)* I've not been here in years. Can't get through this way.

MIRANDA

I know.

ANDRÉS

What?

MIRANDA

So the door at the back is the one that goes through to the abbey, yes or no?

ANDRÉS

Yes. *(Pause.)* Something wrong?

MIRANDA

It's not that there's something wrong. Not that, exactly. Do you know what I'm doing here?

ANDRÉS

Here?

MIRANDA

Yes. Do you know?

ANDRÉS

Course.

MIRANDA

Do you think it's easy?

ANDRÉS

What?

MIRANDA

My work. *(Pause.)* My work takes a lot of concentration. Do you understand?

ANDRÉS

Yes.

MIRANDA

It's artistic work. Do you know what I'm doing? I'm analysing the sickness of the stone. I have to make a diagnosis.

ANDRÉS

The sickness of the stone?

MIRANDA

Exactly.

ANDRÉS

What does that mean?

MIRANDA

When I'm working on a restoration, it's just me and the stone. I disconnect from everything around me. I'm invaded by another world. It has to be like that. Restoration is like surgery.

Silence.

ANDRÉS

That why you called me?

MIRANDA

Yes.

ANDRÉS

Don't see how I could help you.

MIRANDA

I saw a man earlier. He was hiding behind the cloth. Between the wall and the cloth. Spying on me.

ANDRÉS

Really?

MIRANDA

Yes, of course. Really.

ANDRÉS

Seems very odd to me.

MIRANDA

And to me.

ANDRÉS

Who d'you think it was?

MIRANDA

One of the monks from the abbey.

ANDRÉS

They're cloistered.

MIRANDA

So?

ANDRÉS

Not allowed to mix with anyone.

MIRANDA

They must be a bit uneasy, what with all of this.

ANDRÉS

This what?

MIRANDA

I mean what's going on outside.

ANDRÉS

Doesn't bother them.

MIRANDA

How could it not bother them?

ANDRÉS

Nothing's gonna get them out of here, they know that.

Pause.

MIRANDA

It was a monk. He was wearing a habit.

ANDRÉS

In that case, there's absolutely nothing I can do.

MIRANDA

Isn't there?

ANDRÉS

No.

MIRANDA

I'm analysing the rock from the inside. It's a subtle process. Very delicate. That monk spends all day prowling around. He doesn't trust what I'm doing. Can you imagine what it's like to work like that? It's a constant feeling of harassment. Like my every movement's being watched.

ANDRÉS

You got many days left?

MIRANDA

Where?

ANDRÉS

Here.

MIRANDA

I'm not sure, with things the way they are.

ANDRÉS

They will go ahead with the restoration. You should forget all that shouting outside. Get on with your work. I'm more than used to it by now. Nearly thirty years I've been here, there's been aggro since the first day.

MIRANDA

Thirty years?

ANDRÉS

That's right.

MIRANDA

Wow... Thirty years.

ANDRÉS

Like my second home. I know every corner of this basilica, and all around. Have you managed to get out, take a walk 'round the Valley?

MIRANDA

I climbed the path the other day. Little track that goes up to the cross. I climbed right to the top and sat down on a rock. The views are astounding. I sat there for a good while. The landscape, it's hypnotic.

ANDRÉS

Wasn't there snow?

MIRANDA

Yes.

ANDRÉS

You climbed the path in the snow?

MIRANDA

I was wearing hiking boots.

ANDRÉS

It's dangerous.

MIRANDA

It was even more astounding in the snow and the ice. The air, sharp, frozen. It was like a diamond.

ANDRÉS

Brave girl.

MIRANDA

For climbing a snowy path?

ANDRÉS

It's not the usual.

MIRANDA

What isn't?

ANDRÉS

Some guards here never so much as gone for a walk in the woods. They come here, work, go back home. Not even a turn around the grounds.

MIRANDA

It's my job. I'm making a diagnosis. I wanted to see it from the outside.

ANDRÉS

What's that got to do with it?

MIRANDA

With what?

ANDRÉS

The diagnosis.

MIRANDA

Restoration is a very creative business. People don't realise. People think it's like being a builder. It's an art. And because it's an art, although it is very technical, I pay attention to other things too. Like the landscape. It inspires me. Do you understand? The landscape helps me sense all this space inside. Understand it more than just technically.

ANDRÉS

You enjoy it.

MIRANDA

What?

ANDRÉS

Your work. You talk with a lot of vocation.

MIRANDA

I'd suffocate without my work.

ANDRÉS

You like it that much?

MIRANDA

I wouldn't be able to breathe.

ANDRÉS

Thirty years now I've got up at six in the morning, gone down to the bar for a coffee, watched the morning news, climbed into the van and then spent the whole day here. *(Pause.)* Holidays feel long, mind. Always want to come back to work. But I don't need to sense the space inside to inspire me, I promise you that.

MIRANDA laughs. A short pause.

MIRANDA

You were criticising your colleagues just now. Saying they were lazy for not taking an interest in the surroundings.

ANDRÉS

Any guard worth his salt should know the area he's working in. What if there's trouble, you have to chase someone? Need to know every nook, cranny and pathway.

Pause.

MIRANDA

Do you live in El Escorial?

ANDRÉS

Certainly do.

MIRANDA

I had a look round there the other day. I'd never been before.

ANDRÉS

No?

MIRANDA

No.

ANDRÉS

You like it?

MIRANDA

It's a beautiful town.

ANDRÉS

Where did you go?

MIRANDA

I went to a restaurant in the square. I had the lunch menu. The Castilian soup was incredible. Then I went for a walk around the centre and to the monastery. And then I walked down through some gardens... What are they called?

ANDRÉS

The ones to the station?

MIRANDA

Yes, those.

ANDRÉS

Casita del Príncipe.

MIRANDA

There's some stunning trees.

ANDRÉS

I live on the opposite end. My house is in the country. Five minutes from the town by car. So you'd never been to El Escorial before?

MIRANDA

Never.

ANDRÉS

And to the Valley?

MIRANDA

No.

Long pause. MIRANDA backs away, picks up her case and begins to place the tools that are on the table inside it.

MIRANDA

I should've been gone two hours ago. It's the same every day.

ANDRÉS

You left much earlier yesterday.

MIRANDA

Oh, you saw me?

ANDRÉS

Yes.

MIRANDA

When I was leaving?

ANDRÉS

Yes.

MIRANDA

I've never seen you before. Actually, when I called you, I thought you were the other one. David.

ANDRÉS

David?

MIRANDA

Yes.

ANDRÉS

You know David?

MIRANDA

I spoke to him for a while.

ANDRÉS

He's only been here a few months... I don't think he'll last long.

MIRANDA

Why won't he last long?

ANDRÉS

He's had problems.

MIRANDA

At work?

ANDRÉS
Very impulsive.

MIRANDA
He seemed quite the opposite to me.

ANDRÉS
Troublesome.

MIRANDA
Why?

ANDRÉS
Did you tell him about the monk?

MIRANDA
No.

ANDRÉS
Don't.

MIRANDA
Why not?

ANDRÉS
Suit yourself. But he's trouble, that one.

Pause.

MIRANDA
I'm only here for five days. I'll be in the lab next week, analysing the samples.

ANDRÉS
Oh, you're only here this week?

MIRANDA
Once we've analysed the stone, we can make a diagnosis and then think about the treatment. Then we'll come back to administer it. He didn't seem troublesome to me.

ANDRÉS stares at the tools that MIRANDA is putting into the case. Then he stares at the pots full of stones that are on the table.

ANDRÉS
Those the samples?

MIRANDA
Yes.

ANDRÉS

And now you're taking them to the lab to analyse them...

MIRANDA

That's right.

ANDRÉS

How d'you do that?

MIRANDA

Everyone thinks that stone is something hard and strong. It's not. Stone's not as strong as it looks. It's strong. Very strong, yes. It is. But not as strong as it looks. In fact it's much weaker. A stone is full of fissures, pores, empty spaces. Full of crystals and microscopic granules. All fragmentation.

ANDRÉS

So?

MIRANDA

Some of the sculptures have serious fissures. If they were to break apart it could be very dangerous for visitors and for the people who work here. I don't know how they could excavate two hundred and seventy metres into a mountain and think it wouldn't end up falling down.

ANDRÉS

What?

MIRANDA

I mean...

ANDRÉS

You said it's gonna end up falling down?

MIRANDA

It was just a turn of phrase.

ANDRÉS

You said it's gonna end up falling down.

MIRANDA

This stone is very vulnerable to changes of temperature. Such dramatic changes... In the summer it can vary from sixty degrees in the day to two degrees at midnight, and in the winter the snow and the wind... They speed up the natural fragmentation that this kind of stone suffers from. It's a natural process. And then salt filters in from the water and other substances. It breaks the walls of the pores. We have preventative materials now. Materials that prevent the damage from occurring. They prevent the salts from crystallising and the damage from happening. *(Pause.)* I had a two-year grant from the university. We did some research. The aim was to prevent what had happened in the past. That is... applying treatments to cover up the problem.

ANDRÉS's walkie-talkie beeps and a moment later CHARLIE 2's voice is heard. MIRANDA begins placing the samples into the case.

CHARLIE 2
Charlie 2 to A1. Over.

ANDRÉS
Go ahead. A1 to Charlie 2. What's up? Over?

CHARLIE 2
Listen... Listen... *(A phrase is heard, rendered unintelligible by the background noise and interference.)* Is your pal David 2 up there? Over.

ANDRÉS
What's going on? Over.

CHARLIE 2
Hang on. Hang on a sec. It's getting bit dicey down here on the road. Over.

ANDRÉS
Is David 2 not down there? Over.

A loud background noise is heard, preventing the reply from being heard. ANDRÉS looks at MIRANDA.

ANDRÉS
There's another punch-up on the road.