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# Bookcrossing

de  
Antonio Tabares

traducción de  
Jim McCarthy

*(fragmento en inglés)*

*'There are no questions more urgent than the naïve ones.'*

Wisława Szymborska

#### Characters

Fernando

Mariana

Patricia

Cris

Leo

Lola

Esteban

Pablo

Sergio

Doctor

Nurse

Luis

Tatiana

Andrés

#### Characters in the novel

Stepan Arkadyich Oblonsky

Konstantin Dmitrich Levin

Anna Karenina

Alexei Kirillovich Vronsky

And

Leo Tolstoy

## Chapter I

*Art Gallery. MARIANA, an attendant, enters. She notices something on one of the benches. She approaches it hesitantly. Behind her, FERNANDO, a security guard, enters.*

FERNANDO

Stop!

MARIANA

Aah!

FERNANDO

Don't touch it!

MARIANA

My god, Fernando, you frightened the life out of me. *(She laughs.)*

FERNANDO

Wait. Stand back.

MARIANA

It's a book.

FERNANDO

Don't touch it, I'm telling you.

MARIANA

Someone's left it behind. *(She laughs.)* What are you doing? Can't you see it's a book?

FERNANDO

Now. Let's check this out.

*(He examines it carefully, not daring to touch it.)*

MARIANA

It must have been that couple. The one with the boy in the wheelchair. I think the girl was reading to him. They were here a good while looking at that picture. I don't know what they see in it, to be honest. Too much Virgin and too much little angels.

FERNANDO

It's ok. You can go ahead now.

MARIANA  
Stop showing off.

FERNANDO  
You think it's a joke, but you've got to be careful. You never know what you'll come across.

MARIANA  
Aah. It's not lost property. They left it here on purpose.

FERNANDO  
Obviously. Who'd want to pick up a doorstep like that?

MARIANA  
No. Look at this note.

FERNANDO  
*(reads)* 'I'm not lost. I'm part of a global book club. Read me and pass me on.' What's all that about?

MARIANA  
It asks you to visit a website and enter the book number.

FERNANDO  
Best leave it in the office in case someone claims it.

MARIANA  
I thought I'd keep it.

FERNANDO  
But it's not yours.

MARIANA  
Don't you get it? They've left it here so that whoever comes across it, will read it.

FERNANDO  
Yeah, right.

MARIANA  
Yes.

FERNANDO  
And you're going to read it?

MARIANA  
Yes. Well, I don't know. I'll see what happens.

FERNANDO

Let's see. A thousand . . . a thousand and fifty pages. And look at the print size. You could use it for weight training.

MARIANA

Very funny.

FERNANDO

Or to crack nuts.

MARIANA

Stop.

FERNANDO

Ok, ok. I'm joking. My god, a thousand pages and that print. You'd need a magnifying glass.

MARIANA

*(opens the book and reads)* 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' Sounds like my life story.

FERNANDO

Happy or unhappy?

MARIANA

Both.

FERNANDO

If you'd let me try, I could make you happy.

MARIANA

*(laughs)* Oh, when are you going to give up?

FERNANDO

And when are you going to give in? *(MARIANA carries on laughing.)* You drive me crazy when you laugh. Your eyes sparkle.

MARIANA

I wonder how many other women have heard that spiel?

FERNANDO

OK, I've had other women.

MARIANA

Lots.

FERNANDO

Ok, lots. I don't deny it. But I never felt even half of what I feel for you.

MARIANA  
Blah blah blah . . .

FERNANDO  
You don't believe me?

MARIANA  
(*amused*) Not a word.

FERNANDO  
You know I wait for you every evening at the pergola in the park. The day you turn up will be the happiest day of my life.

MARIANA  
You're persistent, aren't you? You never give up.

FERNANDO  
Why not go out with me just once? See each other outside this building. Cinema. Romantic dinner. Glass of wine. See you home.

MARIANA  
All very flattering, but you know it's not on.

FERNANDO  
At least admit that if you weren't married, you'd give me a chance.

MARIANA  
(*laughs*) What?

FERNANDO  
Admit it.

MARIANA  
No.

FERNANDO  
Why don't you just accept it?

MARIANA  
Ok, maybe. I don't know.

FERNANDO  
Ah. I knew it.

MARIANA  
I said I don't know.

FERNANDO

Ok. If the problem's your husband, I know how to sort it.

MARIANA

Oh yes?

FERNANDO

Do I have permission to kill him?

MARIANA

*(laughing)* No! Poor thing.

FERNANDO

You like the idea, don't you?

MARIANA

You couldn't harm a fly.

FERNANDO

You don't think I'm capable?

MARIANA

No. Even though you carry a gun.

FERNANDO

You're right. Not with a gun, but I could make it look like an accident. *(MARIANA laughs.)*

You're laughing. I can think of a hundred ways to finish him off. I know a colourless liquid that can't be traced in food. Three or four drops and in a couple of weeks, job done.

MARIANA

*(laughing)* Oh, be quiet.

FERNANDO

I've got it. I can hit him on the head with that book. It'd be an illustrious death. Or you could persuade him to get into a bath full of hot water. Then just drop a live wire in it.

MARIANA

Oh, that's horrible. *(She laughs.)* Anyway, we haven't got a bath.

FERNANDO

In that case I can throw him on the railway tracks. Just a little shove in the middle of rush hour and nobody'd be any the wiser. I know how to do it. It wouldn't even be caught on security cameras. It'd look like he fainted or jumped. Then we pack a suitcase and we're on our way to Martinique.

MARIANA

You don't even know where Martinique is.

FERNANDO

Doesn't matter. I'll look on Google Earth.

MARIANA

The things you think of.

FERNANDO

You think I'm joking cos you're scared to believe I'd be capable of doing anything for you. And when I say anything, I mean killing or dying. Don't look at me as if I'm a madman. I'm mad, but about you. I know there's a power that pulls us together and it's futile to resist. And you know it too. *(Silence. MARIANA has been staring at him throughout his speech. Suddenly she breaks into uncontrollable laughter. FERNANDO thinks she's laughing at him. He leaves, offended.)*

MARIANA

*(tries to stop laughing)* Oh. No. Wait. Fernando. *(Annoyed with herself for putting her foot in it.)* Oh shit. *(She laughs again, nervously.)*

*(She picks up the book and leaves. From the opposite side of the stage various people enter immediately, ghostly figures who cross the stage in semi-darkness and exit after her. The sound of trains leads us into the next chapter.)*

## Chapter II

*Railway Station. People coming and going. Noise. Tannoy announcements. PATRICIA waits on the platform with her suitcase. She wanders up and down anxiously. She checks her phone. She makes a call. No answer. She sits on a bench. She finds an abandoned book. She leafs through it, interested. Her phone rings.*

PATRICIA

Hello (. . .) Yes, I'm here. I arrived a few minutes ago (. . .) Where are you? (. . .) I'm on the platform (. . .) What? Not that station. (. . .) Of course. You're so forgetful. I told you in the email (. . .) Yes. In this downpour (. . .) No, you come here, come on, I'll wait for you in the station café (. . .) Of *this* station. Yes (. . .) Ok. See you soon. Yes. I . . . love you too. *(She hangs up. She looks at the book she's holding. She opens it and reads. Loud thunder. Rain.)*

## Chapter III

*Park. CRIS shelters from the rain under the pergola. She has a small umbrella. She waves to someone.*

CRIS

Leo! Here! I'm over here! Run!

*(LEO runs on, protecting himself from the rain with his shirt pulled over his head.)*

CRIS

My god, you're soaked. Look at you!

*(LEO kisses her passionately.)*

CRIS

Hang on, you're making me all wet. You'll have to change your clothes.

LEO

In this heat they'll be dry in a second *(He kisses her.)*

CRIS

Calm down. Wait. Tell me what they said.

LEO

What who said?

CRIS

Leo.

LEO

Nothing. Everything's perfect *(He kisses her again.)*

CRIS

What?

LEO

They took me on.

CRIS

Ahhhh! *(She hugs him.)* I knew it! I knew it! Tell me all about it. How was it?

LEO

I still can't believe it. I turned up like a bag of nerves. I went to the wrong building, and I had to run. I was almost late. But then, during the interview I was totally calm. I start on Monday.

CRIS

At the opera, Leo. That's amazing.

LEO

Come on, I'm only an usher.

CRIS

So what? It's the opera!

LEO

*(sings aloud a fragment of La Traviata) Aaaaamame, Alfreeeedo!*

CRIS

*(covering her ears) Agggghh! Now I know why it's pouring down!*

LEO

I'm absolutely starving. Shall we go and eat? *(CRIS cries.)* Hey, what's all this? I've just landed a job.

CRIS

I know. I know. It's just that . . . I'm an idiot. I think I'm the happiest girl in the world. I was convinced that everything was going to /

*(The sound of a train is heard. LEO freezes when he hears it, but CRIS doesn't notice and carries on talking. The train sound makes them inaudible. Suddenly, she notices LEO is completely absorbed in thought. The train sound fades.)*

CRIS

Leo? What's the matter?

*(LEO reacts by suddenly kissing her on the eyes.)*

LEO

*(as if nothing has happened) Come on, let's go and eat and get drunk.*

CRIS

*(laughing) How are you going to get drunk when you only drink Coca-Cola?*

LEO

*(laughing) No problem. You drink and I'll eat.*

*(They hug each other.)*

CRIS

Oh, look.

LEO

What?

CRIS

In the tree. See?

LEO

What? Wait, you'll get drenched.

CRIS

It's almost stopped. Because you've stopped singing. *(She goes to the tree, takes a book from inside a hole in the trunk and runs back to LEO.)* Look.

LEO

What is it?

CRIS

Someone left a book in the trunk. How cool is that?

LEO

Why?

CRIS

So we'd find it. It has to be an omen. *(She kisses him.)* I love you.

LEO

I love you.

CRIS

I love you.

LEO

Let's go. It's clearing up. And I'm starving.

*(They leave. LEO sings La Traviata. CRIS laughs. The storm moves away.)*