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Wall

de
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*traducción de
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(fragmento en inglés)

“Like talking to a brick wall.”
(Popular saying)

“Fear is pain”
(Louise Bourgeois)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WOMAN

She and I.

She is blonde, bottle-blond; I am a brunette, with some grey hairs.

She is mature, I am not there yet. Am I?

She has a shapely figure, and a rhythmical walk. And she likes Rocío Jurado.

I have put on weight this summer. But I want to shed a few pounds. And I like Astrid Hadad.

She lives with her husband, two children, a dog... I live alone.

She looks after her grandson every morning. I hardly ever see my nephew.

She works as a shop assistant at the Corte Inglés. I...

She puts her washing out, does the shopping, scrubs the floors, cleans, fills the dishwasher, irons...

I pay a Bulgarian cleaning lady who comes here once a week.

She and I are neighbours.

MARÍA AMPARO

Me and her.

She, here, there's nothing special about her.

An ordinary girl who thinks only of herself.

She's no trouble, that's the important thing.

She pays her rent on time, doesn't get into trouble.

She has no family, family of her own, I mean.

At her age I'd already brought up my older child and was expecting the younger.

Paco – that's the dog –, she's scared of him, even though he's so friendly.

Truth is, I don't have much to do with her.

She lives here, next door, on the other side of the wall.

TIME

Now. Summer 2004.

SPACE

In the space between one apartment and another in a block of flats.

(Interior space, white, empty. On the white walls only a light shadow, memories of comings and goings. On the floor, perhaps, a closed cardboard box.)

WOMAN

In a few minutes, or a quarter of an hour, no more.
The end, the end of a home, a space, a time.
The landlord's niece will ring the intercom.
She will inspect the house, she will check the rooms.
She will bring the unpaid water and electricity bills.
We will sort out the bond.
I would like to think that we will not argue about the bond.
I would not like to have to argue about the bond.
Everything is in order, everything is clean, everything is working.
Only the passing of time can be seen as stains on the walls.
I have lived in this house for five years and it shows.
At the beginning traces of tobacco, later on simply the days.
I am also leaving a changed person, inside and out.

MARÍA AMPARO

The girl's leaving, she told me, as usual, looking away from me.
What are you saying? How come? I don't know, things, she's leaving, she hasn't told me anything.
I guess, in my opinion, that she's doing well and wants more.
Young people today are never satisfied, they want more and better.
Besides, in this house everything's breaking down, there are noises, pipes, complaints.
Remember what happened when the chimney of the Chinese restaurant exploded.
All the clothes hanging on the terrace were covered in ashes and black grease.
The grease of thousands of 'spling lolls', as they say, how disgusting.
Remember that broken pipe that made damp patches by the door in the entrance hall.
More than two months of plumbers, plasterers, dirt everywhere.
Remember the fuss about the flowerpots she put on the courtyard.
The manager of the building sent her a letter by registered mail.
She had to move the flowerpots from the courtyard, because it was for communal use.
Remember and he stops me dead, enough, don't remember so hard, woman.
She's leaving because she feels like it, he says, because she wants to, because people leave.
Not like your son, there's no bloody way to make him leave.
He says one thing, he says another, he thinks about it and it just slips out.
And a deadly silence grows between us, in this narrow corridor.

WOMAN

Too many things have happened here, five years, no less.
Since that Sunday in October, carrying my belongings on my back.
Moving house, the van, farewell to another city, here once again.
It seems that the landlord's niece is late.
I will check the drawers, turn the light on. Am I forgetting something?

I open the cupboards, look at the empty spaces, the shadows, I look at everything.
 There was a bottle of shampoo and one of shower gel left in the bathroom.
 My handbag is a trunk of unresolved, last minute problems.

MARÍA AMPARO

You ain't gonna do that now, he tells me after a while.
 You think that I do it for fun, I reply, and I start ironing.
 With this heat you could wait and do it later.
 At dinner time, I say, when the boy, Paco and you come home.
 It doesn't have to be at dinner time, bloody hell, when then.
 It's all about making one's life easier but there's a limit.
 One of these days cracks will creep in and my life will end up in pieces.
 I plug in the iron, put the water in and open the back door.
 Let's see if there's a draught, there's no way, in this airless flat.
 There's no breeze, only the noise of the run-down air conditioning.
 You open the windows at night and the noise comes in like you wouldn't believe.
 I'm leaving, nobody could stand the heat of that iron, he complains.
 Thank goodness it's me who does the ironing, who sweats away and I don't complain.
 And I think to myself, I'm so fed up with this flat, with arguing, with everything.

WOMAN

I am going to clean that dark stain on the wall with a damp cloth.
 The computer screen, so close to it, has left a mark on it.
 And here you have me, a Lady Macbeth, but in a domestic mood.
 Cleaning the stain left by thousands of words, thought and written.
 The stain is getting worse and it is getting bigger, it is more visible.
 The comparison to Lady Macbeth is hardly very appropriate.
 Let's see if because of the damned stain we are now going to argue about the bond.
 It would have been better to plead ignorance, what stain?
 Oh, are you talking about that little stain on the wall? It will come off with water, surely.
 That is nothing, as you can see everything is in order, clean, what were you saying?
 I will open the window, let the heat come in and dry the cursèd stain.

MARÍA AMPARO

You may as well look on the bright side, as the saying goes, business before pleasure, I must do my housework.
 The early bird doesn't always catch the worm,
 And a rested body can do twice as much and you can't take back what you give,
 And two can play at that game, and an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
 And a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush and the best way to solve a problem is to attack the cause of it. Believe me I want to attack him.
 (Pause)
 I might be fooled again, oh sure, for this, no way.
 The words weave their way through the creases on my clothes and the wrinkles on my face.
 Big drops of sweat, which look like tears, no crying, it's just the heat.
 I fold the sheet once, and again and once again and I put it away.
 Holding the corners together and it's so hot and there's so much to do and... I don't want to keep

going.

They wouldn't fool me again, I was young and had many dreams.

They wouldn't catch me now, no way, I've got my wages and a life, my life.

Don't fool yourself Amparito, they would hunt you out again and in the same way.

(Silence)

WOMAN

I take a few steps back and I study the stain on the wall with care.

I would love to give the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía a call.

Perhaps this is a conceptual stain, suggestive and revealing.

A stain that reflects my rich inner world, expressive.

I imagine myself at ARCO with the stain on display, smiling.

It is a stain rich in nuances of quality and texture.

The stain is unbelievable, you cannot get rid of it.

(Silence)

MARÍA AMPARO

In the same way, Amparito, through your good side and that's it.

Through your affection, because you're always putting others before yourself.

In the same way that they catch all good people like us.

All of us who've ended up working inside and outside the home.

But still, I don't know what to tell you, I've run out of choices.

What happened the other night was the straw that broke the camel's back.

If you had balls you'd pack your bags and leave.

(Silence)

WOMAN

But I am not, what was the name of that English artist?

Yes, the one who won the Turner Prize a few years ago, a woman.

Who put her bedroom on display at the Tate Gallery, just like that, quite brazenly.

An unmade bed, dirty clothes, cigarette ends, photographs, silk stockings.

Books, bottles, lots of bottles of vodka and the critics acclaiming her.

A combination of the public and intimate spheres, public and private.

I do not know, something like Tracey, Spencer Tracey, no, Tracey Chapman, no.

Something like Tracey Emin, something like that. I am not her and this is not London.

MARÍA AMPARO

And what would you get out of leaving? Leaving to go where? Back home?

To swallow your tears and keep yourself to yourself, what for?

Back home for what? More of the same and more.

More gossip and more nosey-parkers, I can see it coming.

From Carmina to Amparito, reeling it off parrot-fashion.

Some women are out to get me, they really want to get me.

The ones who stayed there, hypocrites, with nothing, the ones who never left.

And I'm too proud to hear 'I told you so.'

Well, telling me those things now, I'd rather not hear them.
 And I say this to myself and I'm ironing their shirts, their trousers.
 Their overalls, their white t-shirts, their boxers.
 I'm building a pyramid of clothes, ironed and folded.
 While I'm at it I may as well just iron my heart and fold it away.

(Images of the installation 'The Turner Prize 1999' by Tracey Emin are projected on the walls, but María Amparo cannot see them)

WOMAN

And what is the problem if there is a stain on the wall? What is the problem?
 They will not expect the house to be in perfect condition after five years.
 Because it is in perfect condition, there are only a few shadows, marks.
 Besides, if I start adding up all the faults...
 If I act like a perfectionist they will be worse off in the end.
 We are not talking about the neighbours, who throw cigarette ends in the courtyard.
 Nor about the postmen delivering junk mail, always ringing my bell.
 Nor about the insects in the courtyard, that creep in everywhere.
 Nor about the wear and tear, because the house is old and not properly looked after.
 And we are not going to talk about all the other things, because it is very disturbing.
(Silence)

I sometimes wonder how she can put up with it. Where she gets the strength from.
 The strength to resist and not spit on the floor, at the sky and to...
 I sometimes wonder how she got to this point. And why.
 I sometimes wonder if knowledge and education change people.

MARÍA AMPARO

I'll put some music on to see if I can cheer myself up a bit.
 And, while I put the clothes away in the wardrobe and the chest of drawers.
 I'll empty the dishwasher and start thinking what to cook today for dinner.
 No, I won't complicate my life, crumbed mince patties coming up.
 How awful, heat's also coming out of the dishwasher, it's burning hot.
 I'd better close it and wait a bit 'til the dishes cool down.
 Poor woman, she's so talented and she's suffered so much this summer.
 She's got cancer, she almost died, she's not coming out of hospital.
 It must be terrible to live shut away behind sunglasses.

WOMAN

I seal the last box for the move with packing tape.
 For days I used only to notice abandoned boxes.
 I used to rescue boxes of all sizes from the streets.
 An apartment so small and so many boxes piled up.
 The weight of the books, and everything I gave away and gave up.
 Everything that served a purpose and that now belongs to other people.
 I wonder who cares about anyone else's life.
 Turning your misery into a public exhibition.
 Exposing your failures, your defeats, your empty solitude.

Exhibited all day long before gallery owners.
 Critics, the public, students from Fine Art schools.
 While people go mad watching *Big Brother*.
 And couples who cannot stand each other, neighbours who never say hello.
 That deadly silence that we must endure in the lift.
 Without knowing where to look and the discomfort of the space.
 A “good morning” with a forced smile directed towards the ground.

(In the woman's space, the song Señora by Rocío Jurado is heard).

MARÍA AMPARO

You're here already, I tell him and I think to myself, can't you see he's here.
 You already know where his walks end.
 At the corner bar, watching Real Madrid play.
 And now with the damned Olympics everything on the telly is sports.
 Since the Games started he doesn't even go out to buy the bread.
 He doesn't give a damn about our daily bread.
 When I see him I want to busy myself with something, anything.
 Bring the washing in and put it away, that's what I do.
 Perhaps the emptiness I've felt for so long makes me nervous.
 Perhaps my only duty in this house is never to be still.

WOMAN

I tell myself that this would be the perfect moment to dance.
 Now that the living room is empty, I could do the things I never did at home.
 A farewell dance, an adiós muchachas, a tango.
 Something nostalgic with the taste of doors closing behind you.
 Of course there is not the right music to accompany me.
 Folk music is not my thing, I cannot catch the rhythm.
 Music always came into this house through the bricks of the wall.
 Azúcar Moreno, Camela, Rocío Jurado, Niña Pastori.
 And the hideous rave music from her bloody son, that guy.
 Now it's too late, Ma'am, sings Jurado, and I keep still.
 Music and screams at night always came into this house through the wall.

(Silence)

MARIA AMPARO

Turn that off, he tells me, while I put the ironing away.
 In this house the one who comes home turns the music off and takes the remote control away from the other.
 And I really feel like running away, like putting everything away.
 I finish folding the clothes and I open the dishwasher.
 The heat's given way to the dry smell of the salt and detergent.
 And I put away the soup dishes, the dinner plates, the glasses, the cups.
 Why are you making so much noise? he shouts from the living room.
 I don't move, thoughtful, holding the meat knives in my hand.

WOMAN

They say that energy lingers on in one's spaces.
And I think about everything that has pervaded this flat.
Music, days of study, readings, phone calls.
The radio on, the smell of essential oils.
Few celebrations, some quiet dinner parties, many candles.
The sadness of the days and some winter solitudes.
Walking back home one Christmas Eve because there were no taxis.
The central heating on high in the winter and afternoons ice skating in the park.

MARÍA AMPARO

What's for dinner, he yells out again from the dining room.
But I still haven't put the knives down, they're here.
They've stuck to my skin, still, I have no idea what they're doing here.
Why don't I leave, why do I put up with it here, why?
Aren't you going to say anything?, he asks me from the door.
Patties, I reply, and the knives peel away from my skin.
And I need to go outside for a while, and I pick up the rubbish bags.
The bag for plastic rubbish, the bag for food scraps, both of them, I leave.
Maybe outside I can at least breathe a bit.

(Silence)

WOMAN

Returning, always returning, my suitcase on my back.
The corner Laundromats, the sound of life returning.
The wet flowerpots, the already listened to answer-phone messages.
This house was always inhabited by returnings.
I always thought that it was a space for comings and goings and so it was.
More a place to return to than a place to stay.

MARÍA AMPARO

I go outside suffocating, I need to breathe, the doorway, the street, the pavement.
I place the bags inside the orange and yellow recycling bins.
And I feel like lighting a cigarette, for no particular reason.
Just an excuse to avoid explaining why I need to go outside.
But I see them, sitting on the pavement, in other doorways.
There are two, three, sometimes more than five, almost all of them are men.
They look like North Africans, some Russian guy, or who knows, maybe a Spaniard.
Their hands are black, worn out from scratching away at life.
They tip up the bins, they empty out the supermarket rubbish.
They keep the food that hasn't gone totally rotten.
What should be eaten by tomorrow can still be eaten today.
They stuff their trolleys and go home.
I guess that their home must be somewhere.
And I suddenly feel that I don't want to smoke.
They stare at me, I feel dirty.

I go in inside, minding my own business.
Mr. Alexander, the full time beggar, smiles at me.
And he says something I don't fully understand.

WOMAN

An exhibition pamphlet sticks out of the box.
Small useless things which did not fit in other boxes.
I take a good look at the pamphlet of a course at Menéndez Pelayo University.
It is about an Austrian artist, her name is Valie Export.
She wanted to travel around the world without the last names of her father or husband.
She used to say: "If women left their husbands and children and
society tolerated it legally as well as socially, as it does with men, their creativity would be as rich
as their male counterparts."
And I think about a life filled with more abandonment than regrets.

(Silence)

MARÍA AMPARO

I go back in and as I go upstairs, I look at the empty mailbox.
Only supermarket flyers, junk mail, bills.
It's been too long since I've received a beautiful letter.
He won me like that, with few words, he wasn't great with words.
He didn't dance either, he just used to look at me, from a distance, without coming up to me.
Until one day he did come up and told me that he was staying.
Just like that, if I hadn't said no, he'd have stayed anyway. And he stayed.

*(Images of the "Smart –Export (1967-1970)" exhibition by Valie Export are
projected on the walls, but María Amparo cannot see them)*