

Final Written Project

The Bitter-Sweet Spice of Life

‘Como agua para chocolate’

May 2021

Master's dissertation written by

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Supervised by

Dr. Carlos da Silva Cardoso Teixeira



MASTERS IN PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION

UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

TARRAGONA, 2020-2021

Plagiarism disclaimer

I declare that the assignment here submitted is original except for source material explicitly acknowledged;

I also acknowledge that I am aware of University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and of the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations, as contained in [the University website](#).

FULL NAME: ANTHONY ALEXANDER BAINES

DATE: 21/05/2021

SIGNATURE:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Baines', written in a cursive style.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARIASM DISCLAIMER	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
I INTRODUCTION	1-3
1.1 Literary translation decision	
1.2 Translation application (Spanish)	
1.3 The chosen work and translation methodology	
II LITERATURE REVIEW	4-7
III TRANSLATION COMMENTARY	8-11
3.1 Relationship with client	
3.2 Reflection on the translation process	
3.3 Reflection on translation difficulties	
IV BUDGET (in Spanish)	12
V INVOICE (in Spanish)	13
VI BUDGET AND INVOICE COMPARISON.....	14-15
VII CONCLUSIONS	16-17
VIII REFERENCES	18
IX ANNEX	19-62
9.1 Original text in Spanish (Capítulos III & IV)	
9.2 Translation in English (Chapters III & IV)	
9.3 Pupil Report (self-evaluation)	

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Literary translation decision

Initially I was not successful in being accepted to conduct a literary translation due to the offer already being filled. However, I was delighted when my tutor contacted me later the same day informing me that there was another literary translation opportunity available. Of course, I accepted with pleasure.

Literary translation has always been of particular interest to me. This stems both from my prior experience in studying literature and also studying literary translation on this master's — albeit translating into Spanish. I have also received positive feedback for literary translations I have undertaken on the master's; including successfully translating parts of novels. I felt it important to choose a translation area that I would enjoy working in, produce a good end product and also learn something from the process. I have also been able to utilise this literary translation opportunity to practise my skills in this discipline. This is pertinent as I intend to continue conducting literary translations in my professional career in the future.

I believe literary translation to be one of the most challenging and satisfying translation ambits. Firstly, as the source text (referred to as ST hereinafter) transmits an author's personal style in the original language, a translation can only ever be an interpretation. This means that the translator has the important job of taking informed decisions about how to translate. How to translate falls under two principal headings: foreignisation: being as faithful as possible to the ST and its culture; and domestication: bringing the text as close as possible to the target culture. I will elaborate further on this in the literature review.

I chose to translate: 'Como agua para chocolate' (Laura Esquivel, 1989). It is internationally recognised and has been translated into more than thirty languages. Furthermore, as an official English translation already exists, I intend to compare my translation attempt with the official published one upon completion of this thesis. I would like to do this as a means of continuing my professional linguistic development in translation through noting differences in translation decisions between my work and the published version. I plan on doing this in order to question my techniques and make informed judgements about how to translate similar texts in the future. I would like to add that I did not consult the official translation whilst completing my translation.

1.2 Translation application



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17 de enero de 2021

Tema: Solicitud para la oferta de trabajo de traducción (REF MPT202113)

Estimados señores:

Escribo en relación a la oferta de trabajo para la traducción de literatura universal contemporánea latinoamericana para su editorial en Valencia. Me gustaría agradecerles de antemano por considerar mi solicitud. Adjunto mi currículum vitae actual donde encontrarán información más detallada respecto a mi perfil profesional y personal. Soy nativo inglés con un nivel C2 certificado por la Universidad de Cambridge y también tengo un nivel C2 universitario de español, por lo tanto poseo altas capacidades lingüísticas en los dos idiomas. Reproducir traducciones de la mejor calidad es muy importante y considero pertinente la atención al detalle. Me gustaría destacar, a continuación, por qué creo que soy el candidato más apropiado para este trabajo:

Primero, me apasiona el ámbito de la literatura, como alumno de idiomas y también como traductor. También poseo experiencia previa en este ámbito, fue durante mis estudios superiores de Grado cuando estudié la literatura latinoamericana, concretamente la novela 'Como Agua para Chocolate' de la autora Laura Esquivel, mencionada en la oferta de trabajo. Me entusiasma trabajar con las obras de Laura Esquivel, así como otros/as autores/as latinoamericanos/as como Isabel Allende y Gabriel García Márquez. Considero que al tener la oportunidad de poder traducir las obras de estos/as autores/as sería un proyecto muy gratificante para mí, del cual disfrutaría mucho.

Segundo, como alumno de traducción he recibido muy buena crítica por las traducciones que he realizado del español al inglés y también en la asignatura de traducción literaria he realizado varias traducciones de novelas con éxito. Además es mi intención seguir traduciendo material literario una vez termine el máster en traducción y me gustaría adquirir experiencia en este campo.

Finalmente, mi tarifa para este tipo de traducción es de **0,0808 euros por cada palabra nueva**. Además ofrezco **un descuento de 50% por cada repetición y/o coincidencia (0,0404/palabra)**.

Gracias de nuevo por su tiempo. Deseo recibir noticias tuyas respecto a esta oportunidad.

Atentamente,

Anthony Baines

1.3 The chosen work and translation methodology

The literary translation area was contemporary universal Latin-American literature, in particular the work of Laura Esquivel. 'Como agua para chocolate' published in 1989 is a romantic novel that portrays the lives of women in Mexico during the Mexican revolution (1910-1920). The novel tells the story of the characters through the medium of magic realism. The novel highlights the importance of cooking and through traditional Mexican recipes, the author transmits the characters' emotions. This puts the reader in touch with the supernatural and transports them to another world or paradigm.

Linguistically, there are a number of areas that the novel explores which provide the reader and translator with a rich language experience. These include: usage of certain words only used in Mexican Spanish, cultural historical terms about the Mexican Revolution and culinary references to traditional Mexican recipes. These items transport the reader to the world that the novel describes and succeed in creating both a literary-focused and culturally rich educational experience. I will elaborate further on these themes later in this thesis.

My role as translator was a complex one. I wanted to be able to interpret and attempt to transmit accurately the original message of the Mexican author to a British English-speaking audience. Therefore, I used British spelling and was mindful of how to translate appropriately metaphors, cultural terms and double meaning from the ST to the target text (referred to as TT hereinafter).

Before starting, I made the informed decision of not using a CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool. I am not against the use of CAT tools, however in this case I wanted to stretch my linguistic capabilities as a translator. I also wished to utilise the skills acquired and developed during the master's. Moreover, although translation memories enable repeated terms to be sourced easily, I did not want to be influenced by vocabulary suggestions as this can limit creativity. I also believe that text segmentation within a CAT tool can take the focus of the translator away from the overall context of a section. In turn, this encourages you to translate sentence by sentence and can lead to loss of meaning, especially in literary translation. However, although I did not use a CAT tool, I did consult numerous online dictionaries and language resources. These assisted me in reaching conclusions on how to translate many items, as well as using my own personal linguistic knowledge.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I wanted to investigate a variety of areas I deemed important both to my linguistic and cultural understanding of the ST. I intended to draw on this knowledge to produce a high-quality translation into British English. The areas I reviewed included macro translation strategies (foreignisation and domestication), micro translation strategies in cultural transposition, the importance of the Mexican recipes in the novel and their role in transmitting the emotions of the characters through the recipe ingredients and the significance of the novel's historical time period.

Firstly, foreignisation and domestication are the two principal macro translation strategies that form the linguistic and cultural basis for translators when deciding how to translate a text, or in the case of literary translation, particular sections of the text. The understanding and usage of these strategies dates from the 1970s and was initiated by Mary Snell-Hornby. In the 1950s and 1960s translation was understood from a linguistic and political angle. The 1970s brought a seismic change which saw the introduction of the importance of culture in translation. According to Eugene Nida (Świącicka, 2017) “for truly a successful translation, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of cultures in which they function”. Lawrence Venuti (Świącicka, 2017) described foreignisation and domestication with the words “you can bring the author back home...(or)...send the reader abroad” respectively. Indeed, the main differences between these two macro strategies concern what to do with culturally specific original terms such as personal names and national cuisine for example. Foreignisation retains the original terms, whereas domestication minimises the strangeness by transposing the terms into the target language (referred to as TL hereinafter).

Secondly, a translator must adopt micro strategies when translating. A particular module on this master's that I took was entitled *Translation strategies and problem-solving (Spanish-English)* (Costello, 2020). In this module I studied both cultural and grammatical transposition. For the purposes of this literature review, although I used grammatical transposition strategies in my translation, I will focus below on the principal cultural transposition strategies which include cultural borrowing, calque, *équivalence*, translation labels, translation couplets and cultural transplantation (adaptation). I will include some examples of using these strategies in this literature review and also elaborate in more detail on this area in the section of this thesis entitled ‘Reflection on translation difficulties’ (pages 10 and 11).

Cultural borrowing means “that the translator makes a conscious choice to use the same word in the target text as it is found in the source text. This is usually the case when there is no equivalent term in the target language...English also borrows a lot of words from other languages. For example: abbatoire, café, passé and résumé from French; hamburger and kindergarten from German; bandana, musk and sugar from Sanskrit” (Grassilli, 2015). However, cultural borrowing on its own is only effectively used when the original term is widely understood in the TL. On the contrary, it has to be used in tandem with another micro strategy in order to work for the target reader such as translation couplets, as will be explained below.

Calque or loan translation “is a phrase borrowed from another language and translated literally word-for-word...examples that have been absorbed into English include standpoint and beer garden from German Standpunkt and Biergarten; breakfast from French déjeuner” (Bosco, 2021). Using calques can be a very successful translation strategy as long as the word-for-word translation makes sense in the TL. If this is not the case, calques can cause confusion or sound unnatural.

Équivalence “has been considered as the essence of the translation process. Almost all definitions of translation advanced by various theorists employ one form or another of this concept...equivalence is related to the ability of the translator to maintain at least some of the same features of substance indicated in the original text...Catford distinguishes between two types of equivalence: formal equivalence, which is the occupation of the same place as in the SL text; and textual equivalence, which can give a probable indication of meaning” (Kashgari, 2010). Indeed, *équivalence* is a useful strategy to deploy in some contexts as without it the target reader would not understand the cultural significance of terms in the ST. One particular example explained on Kevin Costello’s course concerns the use of ‘presidente’ in Spanish as opposed to ‘prime minister’ in English. These words are cultural equivalents as they mean the same thing in the Spanish and British political systems respectively. It would be unwise to translate ‘presidente’ as ‘president’ for a British English-speaking reader because there is no such thing as ‘president’ in the British political system (Costello, 2020).

Translation labels are approximate equivalents of words or phrases that do not exist in the target language or culture. Kevin Costello, on his course on translation strategies uses the example of ‘alioli’ in Spanish translated as ‘garlic mayonnaise’ in English.

This is a clear example of how a translation label works. ‘Alioli’ is an established concept in Spanish cuisine, however to the majority of a British English-speaking audience it has no meaning, unless they have ordered something with ‘alioli’ in Spain. Even so, they may not fully understand what ‘alioli’ contains. Note ‘alioli’ is not the same as mayonnaise to the Spanish and it contains garlic, salt and olive oil. The literal translation of the word in the languages of Catalan and Valencian is ‘garlic and oil’. In the end the job of the translator is to research the term, understand its meaning and find a suitable term in English that is close as possible to the original. ‘Garlic mayonnaise’ is the most appropriate term to use in this situation as it communicates the idea that ‘alioli’ is similar to mayonnaise and serves a similar function, although not perfect. Kevin Costello also comments “translation labels are often placed within inverted commas to show the reader that they are non-standard or non-conventional terms in the target language and culture” (Costello, 2020).

If the translator uses translation couplets in the translation in the TT they use two translation strategies. Firstly, cultural borrowing (explained above) ensures the term is kept in the ST language, however the translator also uses a second strategy to help the reader to comprehend the term in the TT language. In many cases this second strategy is a definition or explanation of the ST term. Again, Kevin Costello explains the particular example of the term ‘Generalitat’ in Catalan. Although, the term is understood both in Catalonia and Spain, it is doubtful that the general British English-speaking reader would comprehend it or understand its significance. Therefore, the preferred method here would be ‘Generalitat (autonomous government of Catalonia)’ (Costello, 2020).

Finally, cultural transplantation (adaptation) is explained by Kevin Costello as “a shift in cultural environment that sometimes provides excellent solutions to thorny cultural translation problems...a feature that is specific to the SL (source language) culture is expressed in the TT in a way that is more familiar to TL (target language) culture”. An example of this would be ‘Los cien mejores chistes de Lepe’ translated into British English as ‘The 100 Best Irish Jokes’ (Costello, 2020). This strategy is very useful for translators wanting to enable the target audience to understand the quality and nuance of a cultural reference in the ST by translating the reference using an idiomatic expression in the TT. However, this can be argued to be going too far on the part of the translator, as they are making use of what could be referred to as ‘poetic licence’ in changing considerably the ST language to suit the target audience’s comprehension of the TT.

I would like to highlight one particular example where I used one of the micro strategies. In chapter 3 (page 21) it concerned the term *pitaya*. *Pitaya* is a common fruit grown in Mexico, however is eaten around the world as a result of globalisation. In this case I could have left the original term in Spanish without translating it; ensuring maximum foreignisation and using cultural borrowing. However, in this case as well as cultural borrowing, I used a translation couplet. I left the original term *pitaya* due to its cultural significance in the ST and also decided to add an English translation, ‘dragon tree fruit’ (Aragon, 2021) as well. I did this so that the British audience would understand the fruit’s origin. Indeed, in my personal experience my mother would not understand me if I had a conversation with her about *pitaya*.

Thirdly, as each chapter begins with a Mexican recipe, I wanted to explore the use of the recipes throughout the novel. In Chapter 3 (page 21) roses are highlighted as the main ingredient of the quail recipe. The roses provoke an intense aphrodisiac emotion in the characters, especially in Gertrudis which is very powerful. The author transmits a feeling of immense heat, the colour red and scent of roses through her description of the recipe (Castets, 2020). This formidable literary technique is used throughout the novel and accentuates the potency of the recipes.

Fourthly, I felt it important to gain a basic historical understanding of the time period — The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the personal cost to families like Tita’s. The novel “mirrors both the authoritarian dictatorship of (Porfirio) Díaz and the passionate revolutionary zeal of a new nation finding its own modern identity, with the former symbolised by Mama Elena and the latter by Tita and Pedro’s great love...the extravagant excesses of the very wealthy and the concentration of goods and capital in the hands of few people, many of them foreigners, set the stage for the Mexican Revolution of 1910” (Rosenthal, 2021). The tensions and emotions that run throughout the novel are set against a backdrop of a country in the throws of revolution. Indeed, one particularly important historical reference in the ST concerns a *Villista* revolutionary. The term *Villista* refers to supporters of Pancho Villa. “Jóse Doroteo Arango Arámbula was the original name of Pancho Villa, who was born in 1878 in Durango, Mexico. During his youth he was part of a group of bandits and he joined the carpenter movement of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. This faction sought to bring down the government of Porfirio Díaz and combat the inequality that there was in the country (translated from Spanish)” (OKDIARIO, 2018). Due to the historical significance of the term *Villista* I left it in Spanish. However, I added ‘revolutionary’ after it so a British audience would understand the link to the Mexican Revolution, using a translation couplet.

III TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

3.1 Relationship with client

I would like to put on record that my experience of working with Dr. Carlos da Silva Cardoso Teixeira was a pleasure. I am very grateful to him for his time, expertise and patience. It was the first time I had engaged in this type of project and therefore I naturally felt slightly daunted at the beginning. However, Carlos enabled me to grow quickly in confidence and I soon felt at ease.

In January, I initiated our first contact in Spanish in the role of translator and client when I initially applied for the translation offer. In the following weeks, we discussed and agreed the prospective work to be translated. Carlos gave me a certain amount of freedom in my choice of work by Laura Esquivel which I appreciated. I believe it important to engage with material of personal and professional interest where possible. I was able to transmit my passion for the particular work to Carlos and explain the rationale behind choosing it. This included my background in studying the author, my personal intrigue in Mexican gastronomy and also the idea of magic realism in the novel. We had our first online meeting in February in our professional roles in which we discussed the particular work, the translation process and calendar. Subsequently, I proposed a budget and also answered some questions about my understanding of the work and my methodology as requested by Carlos.

I conducted the translation within a period of ten working days (part-time) and sent the completed translation to Carlos on 24 February. On 1 March, in our second meeting we discussed the translation and any necessary changes. At this point we changed our communication language to English in order to discuss the translation in the TL, which made sense.

In March, I proposed my thesis plan to Carlos and he gave me feedback on the structure and content before I started writing. In April I sent the finished thesis to Carlos. In our final meeting we discussed any changes to be made in the final month before the final deadline in May. We also discussed the defence of the thesis and how to prepare the presentation.

In conclusion, the overall communication with Carlos as my tutor was well-structured, fluid and constructive and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

3.2 Reflection on the translation process

I had never taken on a translation of such length before and I was well aware of the potential challenges of undertaking such a task. However, I drew some comfort from the fact that I could translate a novel I was familiar with. Also, I was pleased with the translation genre, a source of personal enthusiasm and I was able to translate into my native language, English.

At the beginning I informed my tutor that due to work commitments, I would only be able to complete the translation according to a part-time schedule. This was key as I know the importance of adhering to deadlines so as to not put my professional image in jeopardy, albeit a simulation. As previously mentioned, I conducted the translation of approximately 9000 words during a period of 10 working days. I will comment further on the success of this in my comparison of the budget and invoice.

My first linguistic task of this process was to determine which other chapter to translate, as well as chapter 3, already stipulated. Firstly, I read up on the content of chapters 1,2, 3 and 4 including the storyline, characters and events in the ‘Summary of *Como Agua Para Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel’ (translated from Spanish) (Benitez, 2021). It is clear that chapter 3 (March) and chapter 4 (April) portray the amorous interest Pedro has for Tita, the protagonist. This is in spite of the fact that Pedro’s wife, Rosaura, is pregnant. ‘March’ characterises these events through the imagery of roses and blood and a recipe that provokes sensual and explosive reactions in the characters. This is especially seen in the other sister of Tita and Rosaura; Gertrudis. The themes of nudity and madness are explored as Gertrudis is captivated by the heat and power of the gastronomical elements. ‘April’ continues the depiction of these themes but somewhat calms the previous events and describes Tita breast-feeding Rosaura’s baby due to the mother being unable to. However, Tita’s role in the baby’s life is short-lived with the news of Pedro and Rosaura moving away, a decision incited by Mama Elena. The chapters are perhaps two of the most striking and captivating of the entire novel.

Chapter 3 contained a total of 4236 words so before making the final decision, I performed a word count of the other chapters. I found that chapter 4 contained 4808 words and both chapters equated to 9044 words in total. This played a part in deciding to translate chapter 4, as well as ensuring continuity for the reader.

3.3 Reflection on translation difficulties

The first decision that I had to make regarding this project concerned the translation of the title of the novel ‘Como agua para chocolate’. The existing translation is ‘Like Water for Chocolate’. However, this does not transmit the intended original message as the title refers heavily to Mexican culture. I consulted an online discussion (WordReference, 2006) in order to understand the original meaning of why the novel is entitled this way. I came to the conclusion that the original title is a very common phrase in Mexico. The temperature of water needs to be boiling to be able to make good chocolate. Unlike many other countries, who use milk to make chocolate, the Mexicans use water, which must be very hot. This symbolism of the characters being at the height of their emotions but unable to express their true sentiments is seen throughout the novel. The concept of human passion boiling over like the water to make chocolate is an underlying theme throughout. I would have liked to have maintained the references to water and chocolate. However, I do not believe a British audience would understand the meaning of the reference. With this in mind I eventually settled on ‘The Bitter-Sweet Spice of Life’. I wanted to convey the idea of life’s sweet and amorous passions felt by the characters combined with the opposite bitter aspects of anger and frustration.

Below I will explain some of the linguistic difficulties I encountered within the text and how I dealt with them. Although not an exhaustive list due to space available in this thesis, I have included a variety of issues I found and the solutions I adopted. In the end a translator has to take decisions on how to translate although there may be several possibilities at their disposal.

I will outline in detail some of the translation problems I faced below:

Firstly, in Spanish when instructions are given in a recipe the passive is deployed. This can be seen on page 21 “Se desprenden con mucho cuidado los pétalos de las rosas...”. In English it sounded more natural to make the verb active. Also it is common to use the imperative to describe what to do with the rose petals. I opted for “Take off the rose petals carefully...”. This makes the text more easily read and tells the reader that to ‘take off’ is an instruction.

Secondly, there are several culturally specific terms such as names of people or things in the ST that would not be understood in the TT. The micro strategy I used is difficult to categorise, however it could be argued that I have used *équivalence*.

I found an approximate equivalent in English to the Mexican term whilst exercising caution so as to not offend. An example on page 25 concerns the use of the term gringo. Upon conducting some research it appears that the term means a ‘person from the United States of America’ or ‘Yankee’ or ‘Yank’. However, it can also be used in Latin America as a general term when referring to foreigners. Taking all of this into account, I decided to choose the most least offensive option and translate the phrase in the ST “Años después los gringos le pagaron una bicoca al primo por su invento...” as “Years later the North Americans bought the invention off the cousin for peanuts...”. Also, the term gringo is best translated using a neutral term, North American (WordReference, 2021).

Thirdly, on several occasions I took advantage of my native language expertise and translated ordinary phrases in the ST utilising idiomatic expressions in the TT. I deployed the micro strategy of cultural transplantation. I did this in order to allow the reader to feel as domesticated as possible when reading the translation. Some examples of this included: “sin piedad” (page 22) as “with no expense spared”; “en sus terrenos” (page 23) as “on her own turf”; and “sudaba copiosamente” (page 25) as “sweating like a pig”.

Fourthly, I found examples in Spanish in the ST of single verbs or nouns used to convey a message. Although common in Spanish, sometimes English requires more of a description of the action or concept and the use of just the verb or noun does not suffice. This is another example of using the micro strategy of cultural transplantation. Some examples of this in the ST include: “Un cosquilleo” (page 24) as “a tingling sensation”; “trastes” (page 25) as “bits and pieces” and “pretextando náuseas y mareos” (page 23) as “excusing herself as feeling sick and dizzy”.

Finally, some culturally specific references in the ST caused an issue when translating into English. I used the micro strategy of calque or loan translation here as this is no exact equivalent in English. If the reader wanted to understand better this reference they would need to do their own research through using the exact words in an internet search. One example was “¡Maldito manual de Carreño!” on page 27 used when the author is describing the manners and decency of Pedro. My research made clear that the reference concerned the ‘Manual de urbanidad y buenas maneras’ (Carreño, 1853), translated into English as ‘Manual of courtesy and good manners’. To my knowledge this manual does not exist in English.

IV BUDGET (in Spanish)



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PRESUPUESTO NO 0802/2021

DETALLES DEL CLIENTE		DETALLES DEL ENCARGO	
CONTACTO	Carlos Teixeira	FECHA	08/02/2021
IDENTIDAD	Q9350003A	VALIDEZ	10/02/2021
DIRECCIÓN	Calle del Doctor Manuel Candela, 62 46021, Valencia (España)	TIPO ENCARGO	Traducción Literaria
		NOMBRE ENCARGO	'Como agua para chocolate'
EMAIL	carlos.teixeira@urv.cat	IDIOMAS	ES-EN
TELÉFONO	Desconocido	RECuento TOTAL	9044 palabras
		FECHA ENTREGA	*24/02/2021

INFORMACIÓN ADICIONAL

*N.B. Para poder realizar la traducción en el plazo establecido (10 días laborables), por favor, devuelva el presupuesto firmado y fechado antes del día 10 de febrero de 2021. Muchas gracias.

SERVICIOS CONTRATADOS

ARCHIVO	TOTAL CONTEO PALABRAS	PALABRAS NUEVAS	TARIFA PALABRA NUEVA	REPETICIONES/ COINCIDENCIAS	TARIFA REDUCIDA	TOTAL
Cap 3	4236	4141	€0.0808	95	€0.0404	€338.43
Cap 4	4808	4700	€0.0808	108	€0.0404	€384.12

BASE TOTAL	€722.55
IMPUESTOS	
IVA (+21%)	€151.74
IRPF (-7%)	€50.58
TOTAL A PAGAR	€823.71

FECHA: 09/02/2021

FIRMA:

Carlos S. C. Teixeira

V INVOICE (in Spanish)



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FACTURA NO 2402/2021

DETALLES DEL CLIENTE		DETALLES DEL ENCARGO	
CONTACTO	Carlos Teixeira	FECHA	24/02/2021
IDENTIDAD	Q9350003A	PLAZO DE PAGO	30 días
DIRECCIÓN	Calle del Doctor Manuel Candela, 62 46021, Valencia (España)	TIPO ENCARGO	Traducción Literaria
		NOMBRE ENCARGO	'Como agua para chocolate'
EMAIL	carlos.teixeira@urv.cat	IDIOMAS	ES-EN
TELÉFONO	Desconocido	RECuento TOTAL	9044 palabras

RESUMEN DE SERVICIOS CONTRADOS

PALABRAS NUEVAS	TARIFA PALABRA NUEVA	REPETICIONES/ COINCIDENCIAS	TARIFA REDUCIDA	BASE TOTAL
8841	€0.0808	203	€0.0404	€722.55

IMPUESTOS	
IVA (+21%)	€151.74
IRPF (-7%)	€50.58
TOTAL A PAGAR	€823.71

CONDICIONES DE PAGO

Por favor, el pago del importe total se hará por transferencia bancaria en un plazo de 30 días naturales desde la emisión de la factura.

Los datos bancarios son:
ES17 0049 6034 1426 1605 2981

MUCHAS GRACIAS POR SU CONFIANZA

VI BUDGET AND INVOICE COMPARISON

I planned on completing the translation in 10 working days (part-time) from 11-24 February. A full-time working week is understood to be 8 hours a day over 5 days. Based on the total amount of approximately 720 euros I quoted, the hourly rate of approximately 9000 words was 18 euros.

In reality I began the process on Thursday 11 February by reading the two chapters and highlighting potential difficulties, a necessary step in the translation process. Therefore, I did not begin translating until Saturday 13 February (I was unable to do any translation on Friday 12 February due to full-time work commitments). In effect, the total time I spent translating and proof-reading was 12 days (13-24 February). In truth, on the four non-working days I worked for around 6 hours and on the working days I spent 3 hours. In total I worked for 48 hours at an average of 15 euros per hour. This means a loss of 3 euros per hour on the working time of 40 hours above.

On average experienced professional translators not using CAT tools can translate and proof-read around 2000 words per day (250 per hour). Based on this data, a professional translator at full capacity, without holidays, working 40 hours for 5 days (10,000 words a week) at a rate of approximately 0.08 euros per word, would stand to earn up to 800 euros per week, approximately 3200 euros per month or 41,600 euros per year. My personal performance does not differ greatly compared to these figures. Based on this 9000-word text, a professional translator would be expected to complete 225 words per hour. My average was 187.5 words per hour, a decrease in performance of 37.5 words per hour. In effect, I would be able to complete 7500 words per week instead of 10,000, giving me a maximum income of approximately 600 euros per week, 2400 euros per month or 31,200 euros a year.

I used a word counting tool to determine how many original words I could charge at full rate. It also told me how many repetitions and coincidences there were, charged at 50% of full rate. There were a total of 203 repetitions (2.24% of the whole text), enabling me to charge my full rate of 0.0808 euros per word for 8841 words. Therefore, according to my experience with this text, literary translation can be a lucrative area as the majority of the text can be charged at full rate. Had I charged the total 9044 words at the full rate, the total amount would have been 730.76 euros (before taxes). The quoted amount on this invoice was 722.55 euros (before taxes), only a small decrease in income of 8.21 euros.

Although it can be a lucrative genre, I appreciate that not every literary translation is and less so when a translator is asked to translate much larger volumes, be it a significant amount of a work or indeed an entire book. Also, if the translator is unable to conduct a word count of the ST, charging by page may be the most convenient option. Consequently, literary translation can be charged per page as opposed to per word. According to the website of a graduate translator in her article on this subject *How are the costs of literary translation calculated*. She comments the following “I assume a page of 1,500 characters. Multiply the number of pages by 25 (euros) and you will have an approximate final (net) price” (Neidhardt, 2021). At 25 euros per page of 1500 characters or approximately 250 words this translator is charging 0.10 euros per word. My fee for literary translation is 0.0808 euros per word and therefore would equate to 20.20 euros per page.

In terms of the translation of Chapters 3 and 4 of ‘Como agua para chocolate’ the total number words was approximately 9000 or 18 pages of around 500 words each. According to the aforementioned model 1500 characters (with spaces) or 250 words per page, the total number of pages would actually be double, at 36. Therefore, the total possible amount that could be charged (without repetitions) based on my word fee would be 727.20 euros. In this case, as my fee per word equates to the same as my page fee, there is no difference in charging by word or page.

However, it is important to note that the aforementioned translator charges differently per word of general translation “my basic fee for general translations from English to German is 0.25 euros per word” (Neidhardt, 2021). According to her 25 euros fee per page, she would have been able to charge up to 900 euros for the 36 page translation. Yet, if she had been able to quote per word, she would have been able to charge a much higher fee of 2,250 euros.

As a result of my research in this area, I can conclude that the if a translator’s fee per word is considerably different to their fee per page, literary translation is not necessarily the most lucrative market. On the contrary, if your word and page fees are similar or the same, there is very little difference in monetary terms and literary translation could indeed be as profitable as other genres.

VII CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have addressed several points of interest regarding the translation I conducted of chapters 3 and 4 of ‘Como agua para chocolate’ by Laura Esquivel. These points include: my reasoning for wanting to complete a literary translation; a synopsis of the chosen work and my translation methodology; a literature review of key sources; a description of my relationship with the client; a reflection on the translation process; a reflection of particular translation difficulties found when translating and solutions deployed to remedy these problems and a comparison between the original budget drawn up, actual time taken, performance and whether this particular type of translation was financially viable.

Furthermore, I have extremely enjoyed this translation project both whilst completing the translation and also making my commentary afterwards. It has taught me how to approach this kind of translation genre and has given me food for thought when conducting future literary translations. I have gained an appreciation for the complexity of literary texts. I am also well aware of the care that must be taken when translating an author’s personal words and portraying the meaning behind the words. Although literary translation can be a daunting ambit to work within, it is also a most gratifying one as I have found out.

Moreover, I would like to compare my initial expectations in February before starting the translation with how things turned out. Carlos asked me to provide a brief description of my understanding of the novel, the literary genre, characteristics of the work and its language (dialect, register and tone).

Firstly, in my answer I commented that the role of women was discredited during the historical period in Mexico. I also demonstrated my understanding of the principal theme of the novel: forbidden love and how the emotions of the characters are communicated through the Mexican gastronomy through the medium of magic realism. The secondary themes were: cruelty, infidelity, death, eternal love, spirits and family tradition. I believe that I understood these themes well in the context of the novel and worked hard to transmit them to the target reader.

Secondly, I remarked upon the use of standard or neutral Spanish throughout the novel but was aware of the use of vulgar language in Mexican Spanish. There were several instances in the novel when I came up against dilemmas of how to translate certain culturally specific terms.

I reflect on this in detail in the section on *translation difficulties*, however one particular example that is a good indication of the care that I had to take over these terms concerns ‘gringo’ (North American) as previously explained.

Thirdly, I also showed my intention of adapting the translation to the British English-speaking audience, maintaining British spelling and grammar. I am confident that I have achieved this. Furthermore, I also showed my awareness of the importance of translating the traditional Mexican recipes appropriately for a British audience so that the message behind the ingredients would be understood and appreciated in English. Consequently, I had to treat each recipe ingredient with caution so the meaning was not lost. One particular example of this was ‘pitaya’ (dragon tree fruit).

Fourthly, I demonstrated my attention to the metaphors used in the novel and the importance of conveying their meaning aptly to the target reader. Possibly the most pertinent example of a metaphor concerns the title of the novel ‘Como agua para chocolate’ and how the existing English literal translation does not do justice to the significance of chocolate in Mexican culture, nor does it communicate the double meanings of the emotions of the characters.

Finally, I am pleased that I chose to conduct a literary translation. I have learnt more about this particular novel from a different perspective; the vantage point of a translator as opposed to just a reader. This has enabled me to analyse the linguistic devices running through the text as I looked for the most appropriate way to transpose Laura Esquivel’s words. Furthermore, I have been able to develop my translation skills even further as a direct result of encountering difficulties in this text and finding solutions. I have also been fortunate to work with a competent and open-minded tutor in Carlos who has helped the process to run smoothly. Finally, I am pleased with my turnaround time for a novice translator in this field compared to a professional level of performance. I feel this stands me in good stead for conducting future translations within this translation discipline as well as others. Overall it has been a very gratifying and positive process which I will take with me into my professional future career.

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IX ANNEX

9.1 Original text in Spanish (Capítulos III & IV)

pages 20-39

Capítulo III: Codornices en pétalos de rosas (III. Marzo)

Capítulo IV: Mole de guajolote con almendra y ajonjolí (IV. Abril)

9.2 Translation in English (Chapters III & IV)

pages 40-59

Chapter III: Quails in rose petals (III. March)

Chapter IV: *Guajolote* (indigenous Yucatán Peninsula turkey) in traditional Mexican *mole* almond and sesame sauce (IV. April)

9.3 Pupil Report (self-evaluation)

pages 60–62

9.1 Original text in Spanish (Capítulos III & IV)

Codornices en pétalos de rosas

III. Marzo

INGREDIENTES:

12 rosas, de preferencia rojas

12 castañas

2 cucharadas de mantequilla

2 cucharadas de fécula de maíz

2 gotas de esencia de rosas

2 cucharadas de anís

2 cucharadas de miel

2 ajos

6 codornices

1 pithaya

Manera de hacerse:

Se desprenden con mucho cuidado los pétalos de las rosas, procurando no pincharse los dedos, pues aparte de que es muy doloroso (el piquete), los pétalos pueden quedar impregnados de sangre y esto, aparte de alterar el sabor del platillo, puede provocar reacciones químicas, por demás peligrosas.

Pero Tita era incapaz de recordar este pequeño detalle ante la intensa emoción que experimentaba al recibir un ramo de rosas, de manos de Pedro. Era la primera emoción profunda que sentía desde el día de la boda de su hermana, cuando escuchó la declaración del amor que Pedro sentía por ella y que trataba de ocultar a los ojos de los demás. Mamá Elena, con esa rapidez y agudeza de pensamiento que tenía, sospechaba lo que podría pasar si Pedro y Tita tenían oportunidad de estar a solas. Por tanto, haciendo gala de asombrosas artes de prestidigitación, hasta ahora, se las había ingeniado de maravilla para ocultar al uno de los ojos y el alcance del otro. Pero se le escapó un minúsculo detalle: a la muerte de Nacha, Tita era entre todas las mujeres de la casa la más capacitada para ocupar el puesto vacante de la cocina, y ahí escapaban de su riguroso control los sabores, los olores, las texturas y lo que éstas pudieran provocar.

Tita era el último eslabón de una cadena de cocineras que desde la época prehispánica se habían transmitido los secretos de la cocina de generación en generación y estaba considerada como la mejor exponente de este maravilloso arte, el arte culinario. Por tanto su nombramiento como cocinera oficial del rancho fue muy bien recibido por todo el mundo. Tita aceptó el cargo con agrado, a pesar de la pena que sentía por la ausencia de Nacha.

Esta lamentable muerte tenía a Tita en un estado de depresión muy grande. Nacha, al morir, la había dejado muy sola. Era como si hubiera muerto su verdadera madre. Pedro, tratando de ayudarla a salir adelante, pensó que sería un buen detalle llevarle un ramo de rosas al cumplir su primer año como cocinera del rancho. Pero Rosaura —que esperaba su primer hijo— no opinó lo mismo, y en cuanto lo vio entrar con el ramo en las manos y dárselo a Tita en vez de a ella, abandonó la sala presa de un ataque de llanto.

Mamá Elena, con sólo una mirada, le ordenó a Tita salir de la sala y

deshacerse de las rosas. Pedro se dio cuenta de su osadía bastante tarde. Pero Mamá Elena, lanzándole la mirada correspondiente, le hizo saber que aún podía reparar el daño causado. Así que, pidiendo una disculpa, salió en busca de Rosaura. Tita apretaba las rosas con tal fuerza contra su pecho que, cuando llegó a la cocina, las rosas, que en un principio eran de color rosado, ya se habían vuelto rojas por la sangre de las manos y el pecho de Tita. Tenía que pensar rápidamente qué hacer con ellas. ¡Estaban tan hermosas! No era posible tirarlas a la basura, en primera porque nunca antes había recibido flores y en segunda, porque se las había dado Pedro. De pronto escuchó claramente la voz de Nacha, dictándole al oído una receta prehispánica donde se utilizaban pétalos de rosa. Tita la tenía medio olvidada, pues para hacerla se necesitaban faisanes y en el rancho nunca se habían dedicado a criar ese tipo de aves. Lo único que tenían en ese momento era codornices, así que decidió alterar ligeramente la receta, con tal de utilizar las flores.

Sin pensarlo más, salió al patio y se dedicó a perseguir codornices. Después de atrapar a seis de ellas las metió a la cocina y se dispuso a matarlas, lo cual no le era nada fácil después de haberlas cuidado y alimentado por tanto tiempo. Tomando una gran respiración, agarró a la primera y le retorció el pescuezo como había visto a Nacha hacerlo tantas veces, pero con tan poca fuerza que la pobre codorniz no murió, sino que se fue quejando lastimeramente por toda la cocina, con la cabeza colgando de lado. ¡Esta imagen la horrorizó! Comprendió que no se podía ser débil en esto de la matada: o se hacía con firmeza o sólo se causaba un gran dolor. En ese momento pensó en lo bueno que sería tener la fuerza de Mamá Elena. Ella mataba así, de tajo, sin piedad. Bueno, aunque pensándolo bien, no. Con ella había hecho una excepción, la había empezado a matar desde niña, poco a poquito, y aún no le daba el golpe final. La boda de Pedro con Rosaura la había dejado como a la codorniz, con la cabeza y el alma fracturada, y antes de permitir que la codorniz sintiera los mismos dolores que ella, en un acto de piedad, con gran decisión, rápidamente la ultimó. Con las demás todo fue más fácil. Sólo trataba de imaginar que cada una de las codornices tenía atorado un huevo tibio en el buche y que ella piadosamente las liberaba de ese martirio dándoles un buen torzón. Cuando niña, muchas veces deseó morir antes que desayunar el consabido y obligatorio huevo tibio. Mamá Elena la obligaba a comerlo. Ella sentía que el esófago se le cerraba fuerte, muy fuerte, incapaz de poder deglutir alimento alguno, hasta que su madre le propinaba un coscorrón que tenía el efecto milagroso de desbaratarle el nudo en la garganta, por la que entonces se deslizaba el huevo sin ningún problema. Ahora se sentía más tranquila y los siguientes pasos los realizó con gran destreza.

Tal parecía que era la misma Nacha la que en el cuerpo de Tita realizaba todas estas actividades: desplumar las aves en seco, sacarles las vísceras y ponerlas a freír.

Después de desplumadas y vaciadas las codornices, se les recogen y atan las patas, para que conserven una posición graciosa mientras se ponen a dorar en la mantequilla, espolvoreadas con pimienta y sal al gusto. Es importante que se desplume a las codornices en seco, pues el sumergirlas en agua hirviendo altera el sabor de la carne. Éste es uno de los innumerables secretos de la cocina que sólo se adquieren con la práctica.

Como Rosaura no había querido participar de las actividades culinarias desde que se quemó las manos en el comal, lógicamente ignoraba éste y muchos otros conocimientos gastronómicos. Sin embargo, quién sabe si por querer impresionar a Pedro, su esposo, o por querer establecer una competencia con Tita en sus terrenos, en una ocasión intentó cocinar. Cuando Tita amablemente quiso darle algunos consejos, Rosaura se molestó enormemente y le pidió que la dejara sola en la cocina.

Obviamente el arroz se le batió, la carne se le saló y el postre se le quemó. Nadie en la mesa se atrevió a mostrar ningún gesto de desagrado, pues Mamá Elena a manera de sugerencia había comentado:

—Es la primera vez que Rosaura cocina y opino que no lo hizo tan mal. ¿Qué opina usted Pedro?

Pedro, haciendo un soberano esfuerzo, respondió sin ánimo de lastimar a su esposa:

—No, para ser la primera vez no está tan mal.

Por supuesto esa tarde toda la familia se enfermó del estómago.

Fue una verdadera tragedia, claro que no tanta como la que se suscitó en el rancho ese día. La fusión de la sangre de Tita con los pétalos de las rosas que Pedro le había regalado resultó ser de lo más explosiva.

Cuando se sentaron a la mesa había un ambiente ligeramente tenso, pero no pasó a mayores hasta que se sirvieron las codornices. Pedro, no contento con haber provocado los celos de su esposa, sin poderse contener, al saborear el primer bocado del platillo, exclamó, cerrando los ojos con verdadera lujuria:

—¡Éste es un placer de los dioses!

Mamá Elena, aunque reconocía que se trataba de un guiso verdaderamente exquisito, molesta por el comentario dijo:

—Tiene demasiada sal.

Rosaura, pretextando náuseas y mareos, no pudo comer más que tres bocados. En cambio a Gertrudis algo raro le pasó.

Parecía que el alimento que estaba ingiriendo producía en ella un efecto afrodisíaco, pues empezó a sentir que un intenso calor le invadía las piernas.

Un cosquilleo en el centro de su cuerpo no la dejaba estar correctamente sentada en su silla. Empezó a sudar y a imaginar qué se sentiría al ir sentada a lomo de un caballo, abrazada por un villista, uno de esos que había visto una semana antes entrando a la plaza del pueblo, oliendo a sudor, a tierra, a amaneceres de peligro e incertidumbre, a vida y a muerte. Ella iba al mercado en compañía de Chenchá la sirvienta, cuando lo vio entrar por la calle principal de Piedras Negras, venía al frente de todos, obviamente capitaneando a la tropa. Sus miradas se encontraron y lo que vio en los ojos de él la hizo temblar. Vio muchas noches junto al fuego deseando la compañía de una mujer a la cual pudiera besar, una mujer a la que pudiera abrazar, una mujer... como ella. Sacó su pañuelo y trató de que junto con el sudor se fueran de su mente todos esos pensamientos pecaminosos.

Pero era inútil, algo extraño le pasaba. Trató de buscar apoyo en Tita pero ella estaba ausente, su cuerpo estaba sobre la silla, sentado, y muy correctamente, por cierto, pero no había ningún signo de vida en sus ojos. Tal parecía que en un extraño fenómeno de alquimia su ser se había disuelto en la salsa de las rosas, en el cuerpo de las codornices, en el vino y en cada uno de los olores de la comida. De esta manera penetraba en el cuerpo de Pedro, voluptuosa, aromática, calurosa, completamente sensual.

Parecía que habían descubierto un código nuevo de comunicación en el que Tita era la emisora, Pedro el receptor y Gertrudis la afortunada en quien se sintetizaba esta singular relación sexual, a través de la comida.

Pedro no opuso resistencia, la dejó entrar hasta el último rincón de su ser sin poder quitarse la vista el uno del otro. Le dijo:

—Nunca había probado algo tan exquisito, muchas gracias.

Es que verdaderamente este platillo es delicioso. Las rosas le proporcionan un sabor de lo más refinado.

Ya que se tienen los pétalos deshojados, se muelen en el molcajete junto con el anís. Por separado, las castañas se ponen a dorar en el comal, se descascaran y se cuecen en agua. Después, se hacen puré. Los ajos se pican finamente y se doran en la mantequilla; cuando están acitronados, se les agregan el puré de castañas, la miel, la pithaya molida, los pétalos de rosa y sal al gusto. Para que espese un poco la salsa, se le pueden añadir dos cucharaditas de fécula de maíz. Por último, se pasa por un tamiz y se le agregan sólo dos gotas de esencia de rosas, no más, pues se corre el peligro de que quede muy olorosa y pasada de sabor. En cuanto está sazónada se retira del fuego. Las codornices sólo se sumergen durante diez minutos en esta salsa para que se impregnen de sabor y se sacan.

El aroma de la esencia de rosas es tan penetrante que el molcajete que se

utilizaba para moler los pétalos quedaba impregnado por varios días.

La encargada de lavarlo junto con los demás trastes que se utilizaban en la cocina era Gertrudis. Esta labor la realizaba después de comer, en el patio, pues aprovechaba para echar a los animales la comida que había quedado en las ollas. Además, como los trastes de cocina eran tan grandes, los lavaba mejor en el fregadero. Pero el día de las codornices no lo hizo, le pidió de favor a Tita que lo hiciera por ella. Gertrudis realmente se sentía indispuesta, sudaba copiosamente por todo el cuerpo. Las gotas que le brotaban eran de color rosado y tenían un agradable y penetrante olor a rosas. Sintió una imperiosa necesidad de darse un baño y corrió a prepararlo.

En la parte trasera del patio, junto a los corrales y el granero, Mamá Elena había mandado instalar una regadera rudimentaria. Se trataba de un pequeño cuarto construido con tablones unidos, sólo que entre uno y otro quedaban hendiduras lo suficientemente grandes como para ver, sin mayor problema, al que estuviera tomando el baño. De cualquier manera fue la primera regadera de la que el pueblo tuvo noticia. La había inventado un primo de Mamá Elena que vivía en San Antonio, Texas. Tenía una caja como a dos metros de altura con capacidad para cuarenta litros, a la cual se le tenía que depositar el agua con anterioridad, para que pudiera funcionar utilizando la fuerza de gravedad. Costaba trabajo subir las cubetas llenas de agua por una escalera de madera, pero después era una delicia sólo abrir una llave y sentir correr el agua por todo el cuerpo de un solo golpe y no en abonos, como sucedía cuando uno se bañaba a jicarazos. Años después los gringos le pagaron una bicoca al primo por su invento y lo perfeccionaron. Fabricaron miles de regaderas sin necesidad del mentado depósito, pues utilizaron tuberías para que funcionaran.

¡Si Gertrudis hubiera sabido! La pobre subió y bajó como diez veces cargando las cubetas. Estuvo a punto de desfallecer pues este brutal ejercicio intensificaba el abrasador calor que sentía. Lo único que la animaba era la ilusión del refrescante baño que la esperaba, pero desgraciadamente no lo pudo disfrutar pues las gotas que caían de la regadera no alcanzaban a tocarle el cuerpo: se evaporaban antes de rozarla siquiera. El calor que despedía su cuerpo era tan intenso que las maderas empezaron a tronar y a arder. Ante el pánico de morir abrasada por las llamas salió corriendo del cuartucho, así como estaba, completamente desnuda.

Para entonces el olor a rosas que su cuerpo despedía había llegado muy, muy lejos. Hasta las afueras del pueblo, en donde revolucionarios y federales libraban una cruel batalla. Entre ellos sobresalía por su valor el villista ese, el que había entrado una semana antes a Piedras Negras y se había cruzado con ella en la plaza.

Una nube rosada llegó hasta él, lo envolvió y provocó que saliera a todo

galope hacia el rancho de Mamá Elena. Juan, que así se llamaba el sujeto, abandonó el campo de batalla dejando atrás a un enemigo a medio morir, sin saber para qué. Una fuerza superior controlaba sus actos. Lo movía una poderosa necesidad de llegar lo más pronto posible al encuentro de algo desconocido en un lugar indefinido. No le fue difícil dar. Lo guiaba el olor del cuerpo de Gertrudis. Llegó justo a tiempo para descubrirla corriendo en medio del campo. Entonces supo para qué había llegado hasta allí. Esta mujer necesitaba imperiosamente que un hombre le apagara el fuego abrasador que nacía en sus entrañas. Un hombre igual de necesitado de amor que ella, un hombre como él.

Gertrudis dejó de correr en cuanto lo vio venir hacia ella. Desnuda como estaba, con el pelo suelto cayéndole hasta la cintura e irradiando una luminosa energía, representaba lo que sería una síntesis entre una mujer angelical y una infernal. La delicadeza de su rostro y la perfección de su inmaculado y virginal cuerpo contrastaban con la pasión y la lujuria que le salía atropelladamente por los ojos y los poros. Estos elementos, aunados al deseo sexual que Juan por tanto tiempo había contenido por estar luchando en la sierra, hicieron que el encuentro entre ambos fuera espectacular.

Él, sin dejar de galopar para no perder tiempo, se inclinó, la tomó de la cintura, la subió al caballo delante de él, pero acomodándola frente a frente y se la llevó. El caballo, aparentemente siguiendo también órdenes superiores, siguió galopando como si supiera perfectamente cuál era su destino final, a pesar de que Juan le había soltado las riendas para poder abrazar y besar apasionadamente a Gertrudis. El movimiento del caballo se confundía con el de sus cuerpos mientras realizaban su primera copulación a todo galope y con alto grado de dificultad.

Todo fue tan rápido que la escolta que seguía a Juan tratando de interceptarlo nunca lo logró. Decepcionados dieron media vuelta y el informe que llevaron fue que el capitán había enloquecido repentinamente durante la batalla y que por esta causa había desertado del ejército.

Generalmente, ésta es la manera en que se escribe la historia, a través de las versiones de los testigos presenciales, que no siempre corresponden a la realidad. Pues el punto de vista de Tita sobre lo acontecido era totalmente diferente al de estos revolucionarios. Ella había observado todo desde el patio donde estaba lavando los trastes. No perdió detalle a pesar de que le interferían la visión una nube de vapor rosado y las llamas del cuarto de baño. A su lado, Pedro también tuvo la suerte de contemplar el espectáculo, pues había salido al patio por su bicicleta para ir a dar un paseo. Y como mudos espectadores de una película, Pedro y Tita se emocionaron hasta las lágrimas, al ver a sus héroes realizar el amor que para ellos estaba prohibido. Hubo un momento, un solo instante en que Pedro pudo haber cambiado el curso de la historia.

Tomando a Tita de la mano alcanzó a pronunciar:

—Tita...

Sólo eso. No tuvo tiempo de decir más. La sucia realidad se lo impidió. Se escuchó un grito de Mamá Elena preguntando qué era lo que pasaba en el patio. Si Pedro le hubiera pedido a Tita huir con él, ella no lo hubiera pensado ni tantito, pero no lo hizo, sino que montando rápidamente en la bicicleta se fue pedaleando su rabia. No podía borrar de su mente la imagen de Gertrudis corriendo por el campo... ¡completamente desnuda! Sus grandes senos bamboleándose de un lado a otro lo habían dejado hipnotizado. Él nunca había visto a una mujer desnuda. En la intimidad con Rosaura no había sentido deseos de verle el cuerpo ni de acariciárselo. En estos casos siempre utilizaba la sábana nupcial, que sólo dejaba visibles las partes nobles de su esposa. Terminado el acto, se alejaba de la recámara antes de que ésta se descubriera. En cambio, ahora, se había despertado en él la curiosidad de ver a Tita por largo rato así, sin ninguna ropa. Indagando, husmeando, averiguando cómo era hasta el último centímetro de piel de su monumental y atractivo cuerpo. De seguro que se parecía al de Gertrudis, no en balde eran hermanas. La única parte del cuerpo de Tita que conocía muy bien, aparte de la cara y las manos, era el redondo trozo de pantorrilla que había alcanzado a verle en una ocasión. Ese recuerdo lo atormentaba por las noches. Qué antojo sentía de poner su mano sobre ese trozo de piel y luego por todo el cuerpo tal y como había visto hacerlo al hombre que se llevó a Gertrudis: ¡con pasión, con desenfreno, con lujuria!

Tita, por su parte, intentó gritarle a Pedro que la esperara, que se la llevara lejos, a donde los dejaran amarse, a donde aún no hubieran inventado reglas que seguir y respetar, a donde no estuviera su madre, pero su garganta no emitió ningún sonido. Las palabras se le hicieron nudo y se ahogaron unas a otras antes de salir. ¡Se sentía tan sola y abandonada! Un chile en nogada olvidado en una charola después de un gran banquete no se sentiría peor que ella. Cuántas veces sola en la cocina se había tenido que comer una de estas delicias antes de permitir que se echara a perder. El que nadie se coma el último chile de una charola, generalmente sucede cuando la gente no quiere demostrar su gula y aunque les encantaría devorarlo, nadie se atreve. Y es así como se rechaza un chile relleno que contiene todos los sabores imaginables, lo dulce del acitrón, lo picoso del chile, lo sutil de la nogada, lo refrescante de la granada, ¡un maravilloso chile en nogada! ¡Qué delicia! Que contiene en su interior todos los secretos del amor, pero que nadie podrá desentrañar a causa de la decencia. ¡Maldita decencia! ¡Maldito manual de Carreño! Por su culpa su cuerpo quedaba destinado a marchitarse poco a poco, sin remedio alguno. ¡Y maldito Pedro tan decente, tan correcto, tan varonil, tan... tan amado!

Si Tita hubiera sabido entonces que no tendrían que pasar muchos años

para que su cuerpo conociera el amor no se habría desesperado tanto en ese momento.

El segundo grito de Mamá Elena la sacó de sus cavilaciones y la hizo buscar rápidamente una respuesta. No sabía qué era lo que le iba a decir a su mamá, si primero le decía que estaba ardiendo la parte trasera del patio, o que Gertrudis se había ido con un villista a lomo de caballo... y desnuda.

Se decidió por dar una versión en la cual, los federales, a los que Tita aborrecía, habían entrado en tropel, habían prendido fuego a los baños y habían raptado a Gertrudis. Mamá Elena se creyó toda la historia y enfermó de la pena, pero estuvo a punto de morir cuando se enteró una semana después por boca del padre Ignacio, el párroco del pueblo —que quién sabe cómo se enteró—, que Gertrudis estaba trabajando en un burdel en la frontera. Prohibió volver a mencionar el nombre de su hija y mandó quemar sus fotos y su acta de nacimiento.

Sin embargo, ni el fuego ni el paso de los años han podido borrar el penetrante olor a rosas que despide el lugar donde antes estuvo la regadera y que ahora es el estacionamiento de un edificio de departamentos. Tampoco pudieron borrar de la mente de Pedro y Tita las imágenes que observaron y que los marcaron para siempre. Desde ese día las codornices en pétalos de rosas se convirtieron en un mudo recuerdo de esta experiencia fascinante.

Tita lo preparaba cada año como ofrenda a la libertad que su hermana había alcanzado y ponía especial esmero en el decorado de las codornices.

Éstas se ponen en un platón, se les vacía la salsa encima y se decoran con una rosa completa en el centro y pétalos a los lados, o se pueden servir de una vez en un plato individual en lugar de utilizar el platón.

Tita así lo prefería, pues de esta manera no corría el riesgo de que a la hora de servir la codorniz se perdiera el equilibrio del decorado. Precisamente así lo especificó en el libro de cocina que empezó a escribir esa misma noche, después de tejer un buen tramo de su colcha, como diariamente lo hacía. Mientras la tejía, en su cabeza daban vueltas y vueltas las imágenes de Gertrudis corriendo por el campo junto con otras que ella imaginaba sobre lo que habría pasado más tarde, cuando se le perdió de vista su hermana. Claro que su imaginación era en este aspecto bastante limitada, por su falta de experiencia.

Tenía curiosidad de saber si ya tendría algo de ropa encima, o si seguiría así de... ¡desabrigada! Le preocupaba que pudiera sentir frío, al igual que ella, pero llegó a la conclusión de que no. Lo más probable era que estaría cerca del fuego, en los brazos de su hombre y eso definitivamente debería dar calor.

De pronto una idea que cruzó por su mente la hizo levantarse a mirar al

cielo estrellado. Ella conocía, pues lo había sentido en carne propia, lo poderoso que puede ser el fuego de una mirada. Es capaz de encender al mismo Sol. Tomando esto en consideración, ¿qué pasaría si Gertrudis miraba una estrella? De seguro que el calor de su cuerpo, inflamado por el amor, viajaría con la mirada a través del espacio infinito sin perder su energía, hasta depositarse en el lucero de su atención. Estos grandes astros han sobrevivido millones de años gracias a que se cuidan de no absorber los rayos ardientes que los amantes de todo el mundo les lanzan noche tras noche. De hacerlo, se generaría tanto calor en su interior que estallarían en mil pedazos. Por lo que al recibir una mirada, la rechazan de inmediato, reflejándola hacia la Tierra como en un juego de espejos. Es por eso que brillan tanto en las noches.

Y es por eso que a Tita, le entró la esperanza de que si ella pudiera descubrir entre todas las estrellas del firmamento cuál era la que su hermana veía en ese momento, recibiría por reflejo un poco del calor que a ella le sobraba.

Bueno, ésa era su ilusión, pero por más que observó una a una todas las estrellas del cielo no sintió absolutamente nada de calor, sino más bien todo lo contrario. Estremecida regresó a su cama plenamente convencida de que Gertrudis, dormía plácidamente con los ojos bien cerrados y que por eso, no funcionó el experimento. Se cubrió entonces con su colcha, que ya para entonces se doblaba en tres, revisó la receta que había escrito para ver si no se le olvidaba apuntar algo y añadió: «Hoy que comimos este platillo, huyó de la casa Gertrudis...».

Mole de guajolote con almendra y ajonjolí

IV. Abril

INGREDIENTES:

¼ de chile mulato

3 chiles pasilla

3 chiles anchos

Un puño de almendras

Un puño de ajonjolí

Caldo de guajolote

Un bizcocho (1/3 de concha)

Cacahuetes

¼ cebolla Vino

2 tablillas de chocolate

anís

manteca

clavo

canela

pimienta

azúcar

semilla de los chiles

5 dientes de ajo

Manera de hacerse:

Después de dos días de matado el guajolote, se limpia y se pone a cocer con sal. La carne de los guajolotes es sabrosa y aun exquisita si se ha cebado cuidadosamente. Esto se logra teniendo a las aves en corrales limpios, con grano y agua en abundancia.

Quince días antes de matar a los guajolotes, se les empieza a alimentar con nueces pequeñas. Comenzando el primer día con una, al siguiente se les echan en el pico dos y así sucesivamente se les va aumentando la ración, hasta la víspera de matarse, sin importar el maíz que coman voluntariamente en ese tiempo.

Tita tuvo mucho cuidado en cebar a los guajolotes apropiadamente, pues le interesaba mucho quedar bien en la fiesta tan importante a celebrarse en el rancho: el bautizo de su sobrino, el primer hijo de Pedro y Rosaura. Este acontecimiento ameritaba una gran comida con mole. Para la ocasión se había mandado hacer una vajilla de barro especial con el nombre de Roberto, que así se llamaba el agraciado bebé, quien no paraba de recibir las atenciones y los regalos de familiares y amigos. En especial de parte de Tita, quien en contra de lo que se esperaba, sentía un inmenso cariño por este niño, olvidando por completo que era el resultado del matrimonio de su hermana con Pedro, el amor de su vida.

Con verdadero entusiasmo se dispuso a preparar con un día de anterioridad el mole para el bautizo. Pedro la escuchaba desde la sala experimentando una nueva sensación para él. El sonido de las ollas al chocar unas contra otras, el olor de las almendras dorándose en el comal, la melodiosa voz de Tita, que cantaba mientras cocinaba, habían despertado su instinto sexual. Y así como

los amantes saben que se aproxima el momento de una relación íntima, ante la cercanía, el olor del ser amado, o las caricias recíprocas en un previo juego amoroso, así estos sonidos y olores, sobre todo el del ajonjolí dorado, le anunciaban a Pedro la proximidad de un verdadero placer culinario.

Las almendras y el ajonjolí se tuestan en comal. Los chiles anchos, desvenados, también se tuestan, pero no mucho para que no se amarguen. Esto se tiene que hacer en una sartén aparte, pues se les pone un poco de manteca para hacerlo. Después se muelen en metate junto con las almendras y el ajonjolí.

Tita, de rodillas, inclinada sobre el metate, se movía rítmica y cadenciosamente mientras molía las almendras y el ajonjolí. Bajo su blusa sus senos se meneaban libremente pues ella nunca usó sostén alguno. De su cuello escurrían gotas de sudor que rodaban hacia abajo siguiendo el surco de piel entre sus pechos redondos y duros.

Pedro, no pudiendo resistir los olores que emanaban de la cocina, se dirigió hacia ella, quedando petrificado en la puerta ante la sensual postura en que encontró a Tita.

Tita levantó la vista sin dejar de moverse y sus ojos se encontraron con los de Pedro. Inmediatamente, sus miradas enardecidas se fundieron de tal manera que quien los hubiera visto sólo habría notado una sola mirada, un solo movimiento rítmico y sensual, una sola respiración agitada y un mismo deseo. Permanecieron en éxtasis amoroso hasta que Pedro bajó la vista y la clavó en los senos de Tita. Ésta dejó de moler, se enderezó y orgullosamente irguió su pecho, para que Pedro lo observara plenamente. El examen de que fue objeto cambió para siempre la relación entre ellos. Después de esa escrutadora mirada que penetraba la ropa ya nada volvería a ser igual. Tita supo en carne propia por qué el contacto con el fuego altera los elementos, por qué un pedazo de masa se convierte en tortilla, por qué un pecho sin haber pasado por el fuego del amor es un pecho inerte, una bola de masa sin ninguna utilidad. En sólo unos instantes Pedro había transformado los senos de Tita, de castos a voluptuosos, sin necesidad de tocarlos. De no haber sido por la llegada de Chenchá, que había ido al mercado por los chiles anchos, quién sabe qué hubiera pasado entre Pedro y Tita; tal vez Pedro hubiera terminado amasando sin descanso los senos que Tita le ofrecía pero, desgraciadamente, no fue así. Pedro, fingiendo haber ido por un vaso de agua de limón con chía, lo tomó rápidamente y salió de la cocina. Tita, con manos temblorosas, trató de continuar con la elaboración del mole como si nada hubiera pasado.

Cuando ya están bien molidas las almendras y el ajonjolí, se mezclan con el caldo donde se coció el guajolote y se le agrega sal al gusto. En un molcajete se muelen el clavo, la canela, el anís, la pimienta y, por último, el

bizcocho, que anteriormente se ha puesto a freír en manteca junto con la cebolla picada y el ajo.

En seguida se mezclan con el vino y se incorporan.

Mientras molía las especias, Chenchá trataba en vano de capturar el interés de Tita. Pero por más que le exageró los incidentes que había presenciado en la plaza y le narraba con lujo de detalles la violencia de las batallas que tenían lugar en el pueblo, sólo alcanzaba a interesar a Tita por breves momentos. Ésta, por hoy, no tenía cabeza para otra cosa que no fuera la emoción que acababa de experimentar. Además de que Tita conocía perfectamente cuáles eran los móviles de Chenchá al decirle estas cosas. Como ella ya no era la niña que se asustaba con las historias de la llorona, la bruja que chupaba a los niños, el coco y demás horrores, ahora Chenchá trataba de asustarla con historias de colgados, fusilados, desmembrados, degollados e inclusive sacrificados a los que sacaban el corazón ¡en pleno campo de batalla! En otro momento le hubiera gustado caer en el sortilegio de la graciosa narrativa de Chenchá y terminar por creerle sus mentiras, inclusive la de que a Pancho Villa le llevaban los corazones sangrantes de sus enemigos para que se los comiera, pero no ahora.

La mirada de Pedro le había hecho recuperar la confianza en el amor que éste le profesaba. Había pasado meses envenenada con la idea de que, o Pedro le había mentado el día de la boda al declararle su amor sólo para no hacerla sufrir, o que con el tiempo Pedro realmente se había enamorado de Rosaura. Esta inseguridad había nacido cuando él, inexplicablemente, había dejado de festejarle sus platillos. Tita se esmeraba con angustia en cocinar cada día mejor. Desesperada, por las noches, obviamente después de tejer un buen tramo de su colcha, inventaba una nueva receta con la intención de recuperar la relación que entre ella y Pedro había surgido a través de la comida. De esta época de sufrimiento nacieron sus mejores recetas. Y así como un poeta juega con las palabras, así ella jugaba a su antojo con los ingredientes y con las cantidades, obteniendo resultados fenomenales. Pero nada, todos sus esfuerzos eran en vano. No lograba arrancar de los labios de Pedro una sola palabra de aprobación. Lo que no sabía es que Mamá Elena le había «pedido» a Pedro que se abstuviera de elogiar la comida, pues Rosaura de por sí sufría de inseguridad, por estar gorda y deforme a causa de su embarazo, como para encima de todo tener que soportar los cumplidos que él le hacía a Tita so pretexto de lo delicioso que ella cocinaba.

Qué sola se sintió Tita en esa época. ¡Extrañaba tanto a Nacha! Odiaba a todos, inclusive a Pedro. Estaba convencida de que nunca volvería a querer a nadie mientras viviera. Claro que todas estas convicciones se esfumaron en cuanto recibió en sus propias manos al hijo de Rosaura.

Fue una mañana fría de marzo, ella estaba en el gallinero recogiendo los huevos que las gallinas acababan de poner, para utilizarlos en el desayuno. Algunos aún estaban calientes, así que se los metía bajo la blusa, pegándoles al pecho, para mitigar el frío crónico que sufría y que últimamente se le había agudizado. Se había levantado antes que nadie, como de costumbre. Pero hoy, lo había hecho media hora antes de lo acostumbrado, para empacar una maleta con la ropa de Gertrudis. Quería aprovechar que Nicolás salía de viaje a recoger un ganado, para pedirle que por favor se la hiciera llegar a su hermana. Por supuesto, esto lo hacía a escondidas de su madre. Tita decidió enviársela pues no se le quitaba de la mente la idea de que Gertrudis seguía desnuda. Claro que Tita se negaba a aceptar como cierto que esto fuera porque el trabajo de su hermana en el burdel de la frontera así lo requería, sino más bien porque no tenía ropa que ponerse. Rápidamente le dio a Nicolás la maleta con la ropa y un sobre con las señas del antro donde posiblemente encontraría a Gertrudis y regresó a hacerse cargo de sus labores. De pronto, escuchó a Pedro preparar la carretela. Le extrañó que lo hiciera a tan temprana hora, pero al ver la luz del sol se dio cuenta de que ya era tardísimo y que empacarle a Gertrudis, junto con su ropa, parte de su pasado, le había tomado más tiempo del que se había imaginado. No le fue fácil meter en la maleta el día en que hicieron su primera comunión las tres juntas. La vela, el libro y la foto afuera de la iglesia cupieron muy bien, pero no así el sabor de los tamales y del atole que Nacha les había preparado y que habían comido después en compañía de sus amigos y familiares. Cupieron los huesitos de chabacano de colores, pero no así las risas cuando jugaban con ellos en el patio de la escuela, ni la maestra Jovita, ni el columpio, ni el olor de su recámara, ni el del chocolate recién batido. Lo bueno es que tampoco cupieron las palizas, los regaños de Mamá Elena, pues Tita cerró muy fuerte la maleta antes de que se fueran a colar.

Salió al patio justo en el momento en que Pedro le gritaba buscándola con desesperación. Tenía que ir a Eagle Pass por el doctor Brown, que era el médico de la familia, y no la encontraba por ningún lado. Rosaura había empezado con los dolores de parto. Pedro le encargó que por favor la atendiera mientras él volvía.

Tita era la única que podía hacerlo. En casa no quedaba nadie: Mamá Elena y Chenchá ya se habían ido al mercado, con el propósito de abastecer la despensa pues esperaban el nacimiento de un momento a otro y no querían que faltara en casa ningún artículo que fuera indispensable en estos casos. No habían podido hacerlo antes, pues la llegada de los federales y su peligrosa estancia en el pueblo se lo había impedido. No supieron al salir que el arribo del niño ocurriría más pronto de lo que pensaban, pues en cuanto se fueron Rosaura había empezado con el trabajo del parto.

A Tita entonces no le quedó otra que ir al lado de su hermana para

acompañarla, con la esperanza de que fuera por poco tiempo. No tenía ningún interés en conocer al niño o niña o lo que fuera. Pero lo que nunca se esperó es que a Pedro lo capturaran los federales injustamente impidiéndole llegar por el doctor y que Mamá Elena y Chenchá no pudieran regresar a causa de una balacera que se entabló en el pueblo y las obligó a refugiarse en casa de los Lobo, y que de esta manera la única presente en el nacimiento de su sobrino fuera ella, ¡precisamente ella!

En las horas que pasó al lado de su hermana aprendió más que en todos los años de estudio en la escuela del pueblo. Renegó como nunca de sus maestros y de su mamá por no haberle dicho en ninguna ocasión lo que se tenía que hacer en un parto. ¿De qué le servía en ese momento saber los nombres de los planetas y el manual de Carreño de pe a pa si su hermana estaba a punto de morir y ella no podía ayudarla? Rosaura había engordado 30 kilos durante el embarazo, lo cual dificultaba aún más su trabajo de parto como primeriza. Dejando de lado la excesiva gordura de su hermana, Tita notó que a Rosaura se le estaba hinchando descomunadamente el cuerpo. Primero fueron los pies y después la cara y manos. Tita le limpiaba el sudor de la frente y trataba de animarla, pero Rosaura parecía no escucharla.

Tita había visto nacer algunos animales, pero esas experiencias de nada le servían en estos momentos. En aquellas ocasiones sólo había estado de espectadora. Los animales sabían muy bien lo que tenían que hacer, en cambio ella no sabía nada de nada. Tenía preparadas sábanas, agua caliente y unas tijeras esterilizadas. Sabía que tenía que cortar el cordón umbilical, pero no sabía cómo ni cuándo ni a qué altura. Sabía que había que darle una serie de atenciones a la criatura en cuanto arribara a este mundo, pero no sabía cuáles. Lo único que sabía es que primero tenía que nacer, ¡y no tenía para cuándo! Tita se asomaba entre las piernas de su hermana con frecuencia y nada. Sólo un túnel oscuro, silencioso, profundo. Tita, arrodillada frente a Rosaura, con gran desesperación pidió a Nacha que la iluminara en estos momentos. ¡Si era posible que le dictara algunas recetas de cocina, también era posible que le ayudara en este difícil trance! Alguien tenía que asistir a Rosaura desde el más allá, porque los del más acá no tenían manera. No supo por cuánto tiempo rezó de hinojos, pero cuando por fin despegó los párpados, el oscuro túnel de un momento a otro se transformó por completo en un río rojo, en un volcán impetuoso, en un desgarramiento de papel. La carne de su hermana se abría para dar paso a la vida. Tita no olvidaría nunca ese sonido ni la imagen de la cabeza de su sobrino saliendo triunfante de su lucha por vivir. No era una cabeza bella, más bien tenía forma de un piloncillo, debido a la presión a que sus huesos estuvieron sometidos por tantas horas. Pero a Tita le pareció la más hermosa de todas las que había visto en su vida. El llanto del niño invadió todos los espacios vacíos dentro del corazón de Tita. Supo entonces que amaba nuevamente: a la vida, a ese niño, a Pedro, inclusive a su hermana, odiada por

tanto tiempo: Tomó al niño entre sus manos, se lo llevó a Rosaura, y juntas lloraron un rato, abrazadas a él. Después, siguiendo las instrucciones que Nacha le daba al oído, supo perfectamente todos los pasos que tenía que seguir: cortar el cordón umbilical en el lugar y momento preciso, limpiar el cuerpo del niño con aceite de almendras dulces, fajarle el ombligo y vestirlo. Sin ningún problema supo cómo ponerle primero la camiseta y la camisa, luego el fajero en el ombligo, luego el pañal de manta de cielo, luego el de ojo de pájaro, luego la franela para cubrirle las piernas, luego la chambrita, luego los calcetines y los zapatos y, por último, utilizando una cobija de felpa le cruzó las manos sobre el pecho para que no se fuera a rasguñar la cara. Cuando por la noche llegaron Mamá Elena y Chenchá acompañada de los Lobo, se admiraron del profesional trabajo que Tita realizó. Envuelto como taco, el niño dormía tranquilamente.

Pedro no llegó con el doctor Brown hasta el día siguiente, después de que lo dejaron en libertad. Su retorno tranquilizó a todos. Temían por su vida. Ahora sólo les quedaba la preocupación por la salud de Rosaura, que aún estaba muy delicada e hinchada. El doctor Brown la examinó exhaustivamente. Fue entonces que supieron lo peligroso que había estado el parto. Según el doctor, Rosaura sufrió un ataque de eclampsia que la pudo haber matado. Se mostró muy sorprendido de que Tita la hubiera asistido con tanto aplomo y decisión en condiciones tan poco favorables. Bueno, quién sabe qué le llamó más la atención, si el que Tita la hubiera atendido sola y sin tener ninguna experiencia o el descubrir de pronto que Tita, la niña diontona que él recordaba, se había transformado en una bellísima mujer sin que él lo hubiera notado. Desde la muerte de su esposa, cinco años atrás, nunca había vuelto a sentirse atraído hacia ninguna mujer. El dolor de haber perdido a su cónyuge, prácticamente de recién casados, lo había dejado insensible para el amor todos estos años. Qué extraña sensación le producía el observar a Tita. Un hormigueo le recorría todo el cuerpo, despertando y activando sus dormidos sentidos. La observaba como si fuera la primera vez que lo hiciera. Qué agradables le parecían ahora sus dientes, habían tomado su verdadera proporción dentro de la armonía perfecta de las facciones finas y delicadas de su rostro.

La voz de Mamá Elena interrumpió sus pensamientos.

—Doctor, ¿no sería molesto para usted venir dos veces al día, hasta que mi hija salga del peligro?

—¡Claro que no! En primera es mi obligación y en segunda, es un placer frecuentar su agradable casa.

Fue verdaderamente una fortuna que Mamá Elena estuviera muy preocupada por la salud de Rosaura y no detectara el brillo de admiración que

John tenía en la mirada mientras observaba a Tita, pues de haberlo hecho no le hubiera abierto tan confiadamente las puertas de su hogar. Por ahora el doctor no le representaba ningún problema a Mamá Elena; lo único que la tenía muy preocupada era que Rosaura no tenía leche. En el pueblo, afortunadamente, encontraron una nodriza que se encargó de amamantar al niño. Era pariente de Nacha, acababa de tener su octavo hijo y aceptó con agrado el honor de alimentar al nieto de Mamá Elena. Durante un mes lo hizo de maravilla, hasta que una mañana, cuando se dirigía al pueblo a visitar a su familia, fue alcanzada por una bala perdida que se escapó de una balacera entre rebeldes y federales y la hirió de muerte. Uno de sus parientes llegó a dar la noticia al rancho, justamente cuando Tita y Chenchá estaban mezclando en una olla de barro grande todos los ingredientes del mole.

Éste es el último paso y se realiza cuando ya se tienen todos los ingredientes molidos tal y como se indicó:

Se mezclan en una olla, se le añaden las piezas del guajolote, las tablillas de chocolate y azúcar al gusto.

En cuanto espesa, se retira del fuego.

Tita terminó sola de preparar el mole, pues Chenchá, en cuanto supo la noticia, se fue inmediatamente al pueblo a tratar de conseguir otra nodriza para su sobrino. No regresó hasta la noche y sin haberlo logrado. El bebé lloraba exasperado. Trataron de darle leche de vaca y la rechazó. Tita trató entonces de darle té, tal y como Nacha lo había hecho con ella pero fue inútil: el niño igualmente lo rechazó. Se le ocurrió ponerse el rebozo que Lupita la nodriza había olvidado, pensando que el niño se tranquilizaría al percibir el olor familiar que éste despedía, pero por el contrario, el niño lloró con más fuerza, pues ese olor le indicaba que ya pronto recibiría su alimento y no comprendía el motivo de su retraso. Buscaba su leche entre los senos de Tita. Si hay algo en la vida que Tita no resistía era que una persona hambrienta le pidiera comida y que ella no pudiera dársela. Le provocaba mucha angustia. Y sin poderse contener por más tiempo, Tita se abrió la blusa y le ofreció al niño su pecho. Sabía que estaba completamente seco, pero al menos le serviría de chupón y lo mantendría ocupado mientras ella decidía qué hacer para calmarle el hambre.

El niño se pescó del pezón con desesperación y succionó y succionó, con fuerza tan descomunal, que logró sacarle leche a Tita. Cuando ella vio que el niño recuperaba poco a poco la tranquilidad en su rostro y lo escuchó deglutir sospechó que algo extraordinario estaba pasando. ¿Sería posible que el niño se estuviera alimentando de ella? Para comprobarlo, separó al niño de su pecho y vio cómo le brotaba un chisguete de leche. Tita no alcanzaba a comprender lo que sucedía. No era posible que una mujer soltera tuviera leche, se trataba de

un hecho sobrenatural y sin explicación en esos tiempos. En cuanto el niño sintió que lo separaban de su alimento empezó a llorar nuevamente. Tita, de inmediato lo dejó que se pescara de ella, hasta que sació por completo el hambre y se quedó plácidamente dormido, como un bendito. Estaba tan absorta en la contemplación del niño que no sintió cuando Pedro entró a la cocina. Tita era en ese momento la misma Ceres personificada, la diosa de la alimentación en pleno.

Pedro no se sorprendió en lo más mínimo ni necesitó recibir una explicación. Embelesado y sonriente, se acercó a ellos, se inclinó y le dio un beso a Tita en la frente. Tita le quitó al niño el pecho, ya estaba satisfecho. Entonces los ojos de Pedro contemplaron realmente lo que ya antes había visto a través de la ropa: los senos de Tita. Tita intentó cubrirse con la blusa, Pedro la ayudó en silencio y con gran ternura. Al hacerlo, una serie de sentimientos encontrados se apoderaron de ellos: amor, deseo, ternura, lujuria, vergüenza... temor de verse descubiertos. El sonido de los pasos de Mamá Elena sobre la duela de madera les advirtió oportunamente del peligro. Tita alcanzó a ajustarse correctamente la blusa y Pedro a tomar distancia de ella antes de que Mamá Elena entrara en la cocina. De tal manera que cuando abrió la puerta no pudo encontrar, dentro de lo que las normas sociales permiten, nada de qué preocuparse. Pedro y Tita aparentaban gran serenidad. Sin embargo, algo olió en el ambiente que la hizo agudizar todos sus sentidos y tratar de descubrir qué era lo que la inquietaba.

—Tita, ¿qué pasa con ese niño? ¿Lograste hacerlo comer?

—Sí, mami, tomó su té y se durmió.

—¡Bendito sea Dios! Entonces, Pedro, ¿qué esperas para llevar al niño con tu mujer? Los niños no deben estar lejos de su madre.

Pedro salió con el niño en brazos, Mamá Elena no dejaba de observar detenidamente a Tita, había en sus ojos un destello de turbación que no le gustaba nada.

—¿Ya está listo el champurrado para tu hermana?

—Ya mami.

—Dámelo para que se lo lleve, necesita tomarlo día y noche, para que baje la leche.

Pero por más champurrado que tomó, nunca le bajó la leche. En cambio Tita tuvo desde ese día leche suficiente como para alimentar no sólo a Roberto sino a otros dos niños más, si así lo hubiera deseado. Como Rosaura estuvo delicada algunos días, a nadie le extrañó que Tita se encargara de darle de comer a su sobrino; lo que nunca descubrieron fue la manera en que lo hacía,

pues Tita, con la ayuda de Pedro, puso mucho cuidado en que nadie la viera.

El niño, por tanto, en lugar de ser un motivo de separación entre ambos, terminó por unirlos más. Tal parecía que la madre del niño era Tita y no Rosaura. Ella así lo sentía y así lo demostraba. El día del bautizo, ¡con qué orgullo cargaba a su sobrino y lo mostraba a todos los invitados! Rosaura no pudo estar presente más que en la iglesia pues aún se sentía mal. Tita entonces tomó su lugar en el banquete.

El doctor John Brown miraba a Tita embelesado. No le podía quitar los ojos de encima. John había asistido al bautizo sólo para ver si podía conversar con ella a solas. A pesar de que se veían a diario durante las visitas médicas que John le hacía a Rosaura, no habían tenido la oportunidad de platicar libremente y sin ninguna otra persona presente. Aprovechando que Tita caminaba cerca de la mesa donde él se encontraba, se levantó y se le acercó con el pretexto de ver al niño.

—¡Qué bien se ve este niño, al lado de una tía tan bella!

—Gracias doctor.

—Y eso que no es su propio hijo, ya me imagino lo bonita que se va a ver cuando el niño que cargue sea el suyo.

Una nube de tristeza cruzó por el semblante de Tita. John la detectó y dijo:

—Perdón, parece que dije algo incorrecto.

—No, no es eso. Lo que pasa es que yo no me puedo casar, ni tener hijos, porque tengo que cuidar a mi mamá hasta que muera.

—¡Pero cómo! Eso es una tontería.

—Pero así es. Ahora le ruego que me disculpe, voy a atender a mis invitados.

Tita se alejó rápidamente, dejando a John completamente desconcertado. Ella también lo estaba, pero se recuperó de inmediato al sentir en sus brazos a Roberto. Qué le importaba su destino mientras pudiera tener cerca a ese niño, que era más suyo que de nadie. Realmente ella ejercía el puesto de madre sin el título oficial. Pedro y Roberto le pertenecían y ella no necesitaba nada más en la vida.

Tita estaba tan feliz que no se dio cuenta de que su madre, lo mismo que John, aunque por otra razón, no la perdía de vista un solo instante. Estaba convencida de que algo se traían entre manos Tita y Pedro. Tratando de descubrirlo, ni siquiera comió, y estaba tan concentrada en su labor de vigilancia, que le pasó desapercibido el éxito de la fiesta. Todos estuvieron de acuerdo en que gran parte del mismo se debía a Tita, ¡el mole que había

preparado estaba delicioso! Ella no paraba de recibir felicitaciones por sus méritos como cocinera y todos querían saber cuál era su secreto. Fue verdaderamente lamentable que en el momento en que Tita respondía a esta pregunta diciendo que su secreto era que había preparado el mole con mucho amor, Pedro estuviera cerca y los dos se miraran por una fracción de segundo con complicidad, recordando el momento en que Tita molía en el metate, pues la vista de águila de Mamá Elena, a 20 metros de distancia, detectó el destello y le molestó profundamente.

Entre todos los invitados ella era realmente la única molesta, pues curiosamente, después de comer el mole, todos habían entrado en un estado de euforia que los hizo tener reacciones de alegría poco comunes. Reían y alborotaban como nunca lo habían hecho y pasaría bastante tiempo antes de que lo volvieran a hacer. La lucha revolucionaria amenazaba con acarrear hambre y muerte por doquier. Pero en esos momentos parecía que todos trataban de olvidar que en el pueblo había muchos balazos.

La única que no perdió la compostura fue Mamá Elena, que estaba muy ocupada en buscar una solución a su resquemor, y aprovechando un momento en que Tita estaba lo suficientemente cerca como para no perder una sola de las palabras que ella pronunciara, le comentó al padre Ignacio en voz alta:

—Por cómo se están presentando las cosas padre, me preocupa que un día mi hija Rosaura necesite un médico y no lo podamos traer, como el día en que dio a luz. Creo que lo más conveniente sería que en cuanto tenga más fuerzas se vaya junto con su esposo y su hijito a vivir a San Antonio, Texas, con mi primo. Ahí tendrá mejor atención médica.

—Yo no opino lo mismo doña Elena, precisamente por cómo está la situación política, usted necesita de un hombre en casa que la defienda.

—Nunca lo he necesitado para nada, sola he podido con el rancho y con mis hijas. Los hombres no son tan importantes para vivir padre —recalcó—. Ni la revolución es tan peligrosa como la pintan, ¡peor es el chile y el agua lejos!

—¡No, pues eso sí! —respondió riéndose—. ¡Ah, qué doña Elena! Siempre tan ocurrente. Y, dígame, ¿ya pensó dónde trabajaría Pedro en San Antonio?

—Puede entrar a trabajar como contador en la compañía de mi primo, no tendrá problema, pues habla inglés a la perfección.

Las palabras que Tita escuchó resonaron como cañonazos dentro de su cerebro. No podía permitir que esto pasara. No era posible que ahora le quitaran al niño. Tenía que impedirlo a como diera lugar. Por lo pronto, Mamá Elena logró arruinarle la fiesta. La primera fiesta que gozaba en su vida.

9.2 Translation in English (Chapters III & IV)

Quails in rose petals

III. March

INGREDIENTS:

12 roses, preferably red

12 chestnuts

2 tablespoons of butter

2 tablespoons of corn starch

2 drops of rose extract
2 tablespoons of aniseed
2 tablespoons of honey
2 garlies
6 quails
1 *pitaya* (dragon tree fruit)
Preparation method:

Take off the rose petals carefully, making sure not to prick your fingers. The prick is very painful but the petals can also become coated in blood. As well as altering the flavour of the dish, it can cause an extremely dangerous chemical reaction.

But Tita was incapable of remembering this small matter faced with the intense emotion she felt when she received a bouquet of roses, courtesy of Pedro. It was the first profound emotion she had felt since her sister's wedding day, when she listened as Pedro declared his love for her and tried to hide it from prying eyes. Mama Elena, aided by her quick and sharp thinking, suspected what could happen if Pedro and Tita had the opportunity of being alone. Thus, getting up to her old tricks, until now she had been able to keep them apart from one another effectively. But a small matter had escaped her: as a result of Nacha's death, Tita was the most prepared woman in the whole house to take up the vacant post in the kitchen, where the flavours, odours, textures and anything else created were completely beyond Mama Elena's rigorous control.

Tita was the latest in a line of cooks who, since the pre-Hispanic time had passed down their cooking secrets from generation to generation. She was considered the best example of the wonderful art of cooking. Thus, her designation as official ranch cook was very well received by everyone. Tita accepted the position with pleasure, in spite of feeling sorrowful about the absence of Nacha.

Her unfortunate death had caused Tita to fall into a state of severe depression. As a result of her death, Nacha had left Tita very lonely. It was as if her very own mother had died. Pedro, trying to help her to move on, thought that it would be a nice gesture to give her a bouquet of roses on completing her first year as ranch cook. But Rosaura, pregnant with her first child, did not share the same opinion, and as soon as she saw him appear with the bouquet in his hands and give it to Tita instead of her, she stormed out of the room and burst into tears.

Mama Elena, with just one look, ordered Tita to leave the room and

get rid of the roses. Pedro realised his wrong quite late. But Mama Elena, returning a fitting glance, let him know that he could still right his wrong. Therefore, excusing himself, he left in search of Rosaura. Tita pressed the roses so hard against her chest that, when she reached the kitchen, the roses, originally pink in colour, had become red as a result of Tita's blood-stained hands and chest. She had to think quickly what to do with the roses. She had to admit that they were really beautiful! Throwing them in the bin was not an option, firstly because she had never before received flowers and secondly, because they were from Pedro. Suddenly she heard Nacha's voice clear as day, dictating her a pre-Hispanic recipe which used rose petals. Tita had half forgotten it; in fact it required pheasants and the ranch had never reared that type of bird. The only thing that they had at that time were quails, so she decided to slightly alter the recipe so she could use the flowers.

Without another thought, she went out to the courtyard and got on with chasing quails. After catching six she brought them into the kitchen and got ready to slaughter them, nothing too easy after having cared for and fed them for such a long time. Taking a deep breath in, she grabbed the first one and broke its neck like she had seen Nacha do so many times, but she did it with such little force that the poor quail did not die, instead it pitifully ran around the kitchen struggling, with its head hanging off on one side. This image horrified her! She understood at once that she could not be so weak with the killings: she had to do it meaningfully or it would only cause her more pain than necessary. At that moment she thought about how good it would be to have Mama Elena's strength. Mama Elena killed them by cutting their throats with a swift blow, with no expense spared. Well, in fact it was not quite like that. However Tita was an exception to the rule. She had been killing the quails ever since she was a girl, bit by bit, and she still wasn't able to make the final blow. Pedro and Rosaura's wedding had left Tita like the quail, with a fractured head and damaged soul, and before she let the quail suffer the same misery as her, in an act of pity she decisively finished it off. With the remaining ones it was a lot easier. She only had to imagine that each quail had a soft-boiled egg stuck in its crop and that she was pitifully relieving them of the agony by giving them a good twist of the neck. When she was a girl she often wanted to die before having a same old soft-boiled egg for breakfast. Mama Elena made her eat it. She suffered as her oesophagus would close up tightly, really tightly, making her unable to swallow anything, until her mother gave her a smack which miraculously got rid of the knot she had in her throat. From that moment on she was able to stomach the egg with no problem at all. She then felt calmer and was able to move forward with dexterity.

It seemed as if Nacha herself had returned in Tita's body doing her job as she always had: plucking the birds with her bare hands, disembowelling them and putting them on to fry.

After you have plucked and hollowed out the quails, collect them up and tie their feet together, to maintain them in an attractive position while you brown them in butter, dust them with pepper and salt to your liking. It is important to pluck the quails dry, as immersing them in boiling water alters the taste of the meat. This is one of the uncountable cooking secrets that you only acquire with practice.

As Rosaura had not wanted to participate in the culinary activities ever since she burned her hands on the griddle, she understandably ignored the secret we have mentioned previously and many other food tips. However, who knows whether through wanting to impress Pedro, her husband, or wanting to establish a rivalry with Tita on her own turf, on one occasion Rosaura tried to cook. When Tita wanted to give her some helpful advice, Rosaura became incredibly annoyed and asked her to leave her alone in the kitchen.

Obviously the rice was a step too far for her, the meat was too salty and she burned the dessert. No one at the table dared to show any sign of their displeasure, apart from Mama Elena who in way of a suggestion commented:

“Being the first time Rosaura has cooked, I do not think that it has gone too badly. What do you think Pedro?”

Pedro, making an extra special effort, replied without wanting to hurt his wife:

“No, for a first time it is not too bad.”

Of course that afternoon the whole family fell ill with stomach ache.

It was a real shame, but of course not as bad as what had happened on the ranch that day. The fusion of Tita’s blood with the rose petals that Pedro had gifted her turned out to be explosive.

When they sat down at the table there was a lightly tense atmosphere, but it did not get out of control until the quails were served. Pedro, not happy enough with making his wife jealous, not able to contain himself, on taking his first bite of the dish, exclaimed lustfully closing his eyes:

“This is to die for!”

Although Mama Elena recognised that it was an exquisite stew, she showed her discontent with the comment:

“It is too salty.”

Rosaura, excusing herself as feeling sick and dizzy, could not eat any more than three mouthfuls. Whereas something strange was happening to Gertrudis.

It seemed that the food she was ingesting produced an aphrodisiac effect, as she started to feel an intense feeling of heat which overwhelmed her legs.

A tingling sensation in the middle of Gertrudis' body prevented her from sitting properly in her chair. She began to sweat as she imagined what she would it would be like on horse back, followed by a *Villista* revolutionary, such as the one she had seen a week before coming into the town square. He smelled of sweat, earth, an uncertain and dangerous new dawn, life and death. She was on the way to the market accompanied by Chenchá the servant, when she saw him coming up Black Stones Road. He was leading from the front, obviously in charge of the troop. They exchanged glances and what she saw in his eyes made her shudder. He had spent many nights by the fire desiring the company of a woman he could kiss, a woman he could embrace, a woman... like her. She took out her handkerchief and tried to rid herself of all sinful thoughts along with the sweat on her brow.

But it was useless, something strange was happening to her. She tried to find support in Tita but she was absent, she was sitting on the chair, quite correctly as a matter of fact, but there was no sign of life in her eyes. It even seemed that in a strange alchemy phenomena of purification her being had dissolved in the roses sauce, in the quails' body, in the wine and in each of the distinctive odours of the food. All of this permeated voluptuously, aromatically, sizzingly and completely sensually into Pedro's body.

It seemed that they had discovered a new code of communication in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver and Gertrudis the one lucky enough to synchronise this unique sexual relationship, through food.

Pedro did not resist it, he let it consume ever part of his being unable to take his eyes off Tita. He said to her:

"I have never tried anything so exquisite, thank you very much."

It has to be said that it is a delicious dish. The roses give it a highly refined taste.

When you have taken the petals off, ground them in the mortar together with the aniseed. Separately, brown the chestnuts on the griddle, shell them and boil them in water. After, make them into a puree. Finely ground the garlicks and brown them in butter; when they take on a transparent look, add the chestnut puree, honey, ground *pitaya* (dragon fruit), rose petals and salt to your liking. To thicken the sauce a little, you can add two teaspoons of corn starch. Lastly, sieve it and add only two drops of roses extract, no more, as you run the risk of it being very strong-smelling and having an overpowering taste. As soon as you have added seasoning take it off the heat. Only immerse the quails for ten minutes in this sauce so they are coated in the flavour and then take them out.

The aroma of the roses extract is so intense that the mortar

you use to ground the petals will be coated with the sauce for several days.

Gertrudis was the one in charge of washing the mortar as well as all the other bits and pieces that were used in the kitchen. She always did this chore after lunch, in the courtyard, so she could take advantage of feeding the animals what was left at the bottom of the pot. Also, as there were quite a lot of kitchen bits and pieces, she found it easy to wash them in the sink. But the day of the quails she did not do that. Instead she asked Tita if she would do it for her as a favour. Gertrudis really did not feel herself as she was sweating like a pig all over her body. The beads of sweat that appeared were pink in colour and had a pleasant and intense odour. She felt an irresistible need to have a bath and she quickly went to prepare it.

At the back of the courtyard, next to the pen and the barn, Mama Elena had had a basic shower room installed. It was a small room made with connected wooden planks, however in between each of them there were cracks large enough that you could see quite easily who was taking a shower. In any case it was the first shower room the town had ever had. Mama Elena's cousin, who lived in Sant Antonio, Texas, had invented it. Two metres above it had a forty litre capacity tank, which you had to fill up with water beforehand, so it worked by gravity. It was hard work taking pails full of water up the wooden steps, but in the end it was a real pleasure turning the key and feeling the water pour all over your body in one go and not in dribs and drabs, unlike having a bath by the cupful. Years later the North Americans bought the invention off the cousin for peanuts and perfected it. They manufactured thousands of showers without the need for the famous tank, as they used plumbing to make them work.

If only Gertrudis had known! The poor girl went up and down ten times filling those pails up. She was close to passing out as the unforgiving task intensified the blazing heat that she had to work through. The only thing that encouraged her was the wonderful prospect of having a refreshing wash. However, unfortunately she was not able to enjoy it in the end as the drops that fell from the shower did not reach her body: they evaporated before coming into contact with anything. The heat that her body gave off was so intense that the wooden planks started to crackle and burn. Faced with the prospect of being toasted alive by the flames she ran out of the pigpen, without a single care, completely naked.

By that time the odour of roses that her body gave off had travelled a long, long way. All the way to the edge of town, where revolutionaries and the police were waging a cruel battle. Amongst them that *Villista* revolutionary stood out for his bravery, the one that had come into town a week before along Black Stones Road and had crossed paths with her in the square.

A pink cloud appeared before him, it completely engulfed him and made him make

swiftly towards Mama Elena's ranch. Juan, the name of the individual, abandoned the battle ground leaving behind a half-dying enemy, without knowing why. A higher power was controlling his actions. What drove him was a powerful need to reach something unknown in a vague destination as soon as possible. It had total control over him. The odour of Gertrudis' body guided him. He arrived just in time to discover her running around in the middle of the field. At that moment he knew what he had gone there for. This woman badly needed a man to put out her blazing fire that was burning at her core. A man equally in need of love like her, a man like him.

Gertrudis stopped running around as soon as she saw him coming towards her. She was completely naked, with her hair loose and flowing down to her waist and giving off a dazzling energy, she represented what could only be described as a combination of an angelic and hellish woman. The delicateness of her face and the perfection of her untarnished and pure body contrasted with the passion and lust that hastily came out of her eyes and pores. These elements, combined with the sexual desire that Juan had restrained for so long while fighting in the mountains, made the encounter spectacular for both of them.

Without breaking his gallop in order to not waste time, he leaned towards her, took her by the waist and put her up onto the horse in front of him, sitting her face-to-face with him and whisked her away. The horse, apparently also under the influence of a higher power, set off galloping as if it knew exactly where the final destination was, despite the fact that Juan had let go of the reins to be able to passionately embrace and kiss Gertrudis. The movement of the horse became mixed in with the movement of their bodies while they enjoyed their first moment of pleasure at full gallop, albeit with great difficulty.

It all happened so fast that the ones charged with locating Juan were unsuccessful in their task. They were disappointed and turned around. They reported back that the captain had suddenly gone mad during the battle and for this reason he had deserted the army.

Generally, that is the way that history is written, based on eyewitness accounts, but they do not always match up with reality. In fact, Tita's point of view regarding what happened was completely different to the revolutionaries. She had watched everything from the courtyard where she was washing the kitchen bits and pieces. She did not miss a thing in spite of her vision being blocked by a cloud of pink vapour and the flames from the bathroom. By her side, Pedro was also lucky enough to witness the spectacle. In fact, he had left the courtyard to take a ride on his bicycle. Almost as if they were silent film spectators, Pedro and Tita were moved to tears, seeing their heroes make love which for them was forbidden. There was a moment, a particular instant when Pedro could have change the course of history.

Taking Tita by the hand he plucked up the courage to say:

“Tita...”

But that was all. He did not have time to say anything else. The sad reality of the situation prevented him. Mama Elena was heard shouting asking what was happening in the courtyard. If Pedro had asked Tita to run away with him at that moment, she would not have even given it a second thought, but she did not do it. Instead in a flash he was on his bike pedalling away his anger. She could not get the image of Gertrudis running around the field out of her head... completely naked! Her large breasts wobbling around from one side to another mesmerised him. He had never seen a woman naked. In the most intimate moments with Rosaura he had never felt a desire to see her in the nude or caress her. In these cases he always used the bridal sheet, which only left the appropriate parts of his wife visible. When it was all over, he distanced himself from the bedroom before she would realise. Whereas, now, he found himself curiously wanting to see Tita naked, for an extended period of time. He was sniffing around, attempting to find out what every inch of her spectacularly stunning body was like. Surely it was similar to Gertrudis', no surprise they were sisters. The only part of Tita's body that he knew well, apart from her face and hands, were her rounded calves that he had managed to see on one occasion. That memory tormented him at night. He longed to put his hand on that particular area of her skin and then all over her body just as he had seen the man do to Gertrudis: passionately, without restraint and lustfully.

Tita, for her part, tried to scream at Pedro to wait, to take her far away, where they would be able to love one another, where rules that had to be followed and respected had not been invented yet, away from her mother, but her throat did not produce such a sound. Her words were tied in a knot and they drowned each other before coming out. She felt so alone and abandoned! A typically Mexican stuffed *nogada* chilli left on the tray after a great banquet would not feel worse than her. The times she had found herself alone in the kitchen eating one of these delicious chillies so it did not go bad. If you do not eat the last chilli on the tray, it is usually because you do not want to appear greedy although you would love to devour it, but you do not dare. This is how a stuffed chilli containing all the expected flavours: the sweetness of the candied cactus, the heat of the chilli, the subtlety of the nutty *nogada* sauce and the freshness of the pomegranate goes to waste. A marvellous typical Mexican *nogada* chilli! Absolutely delightful! Inside it contains all the secrets of romance, but no one will be able to unravel the mystery because of the importance of decency. Bloody decency! The bloody *Carreño* manual of good manners! Because of its existence people do not use their bodies for what they are supposed to be for, instead let them wither away little by little irredeemably. And bloody Pedro is so decent, so correct, so manly, so... so beloved!

If Tita had known then that she would not have to wait so long

to become acquainted with romance she would not have been so exasperated at that moment.

The second time Mama Elena shouted, she did it with great worry in her voice in rapid search of answers. Tita did not know what she was going to tell her mama first, that the back of the courtyard was on fire, or Gertrudis had run away with a *Villista* revolutionary on horseback... and she had been naked.

She decided to give a version in which, the police, who Tita detested, had come in droves, set fire to the bathrooms and kidnapped Gertrudis. Mama Elena believed the whole story and became ill with sorrow, but she was about to die when she was filled in a week later by father Ignacio, the parish priest — who knows how he knew — that Gertrudis was working in a brothel on the border. Mama Elena forbade the name of her daughter being mentioned and set about burning her photos and birth certificate.

However, not even the fire nor the years that have gone by have been able to get rid of the intense odour of roses that the place where the shower was before gave off, but is now a departmental building car park. Pedro and Tita were also not able to erase from their mind the sights they had seen which had made an impression on them forever. Ever since that day the quails in rose petals became a silent memory of the fascinating experience.

Tita used to prepare the dish each year as an offering to the freedom that her sister had achieved and she took extra care with the quail decoration.

You can put the quails on a large serving plate, pour the sauce over them and decorate them with an untouched rose in the middle and the petals on the sides, or you can serve it on individual plates instead of the serving plate.

Tita preferred it like this, as by doing it like this she did not risk spoiling the delicate decoration of the quails when serving them. As a matter of fact she specified this in the cooking book she started writing that same night, after knitting a good section of her bedspread, as she did daily. While she knitted, the images of Gertrudis running around the field went round and round in her head, as well as others about what she imagined must have happened afterwards, when she had lost sight of her sister. Clearly her imagination was quite limited in that respect, through lack of experience.

She was curious to know if Gertrudis had put on some kind of clothes, or if she was still naked... completely exposed! She was worried that Gertrudis would catch a cold, the same as she would, but she came to the conclusion that she probably would not. It was most likely she would be next to the fire, in the arms of her man and that would definitely keep her warm.

Suddenly an idea crossed her mind which made her get up to look up at

the starry night sky. She knew, as she had experienced it first hand, how powerful fire can be to the human eye. It is capable of producing as much light as the sun. Taking this into consideration, what would happen if Gertrudis looked up at a star? Surely the warmth of her body, ignited by love, would be able to travel along with her gaze through space without losing her energy, until she settled on the bright star that she had been drawn to. These great stars have survived for millions of years thanks to the fact that they take care not to absorb the burning energy that all the lovers of the world transmit them night after night. If they did let this energy affect them, it would generate enough heat to break them into a thousand pieces. Therefore on receiving the gazes, they reject them immediately, reflecting them back to the Earth like a maze of mirrors. For this reason they continue shining so brightly every night.

For this reason Tita had faith that if she could discover what her sister was seeing at that moment amongst all the stars in the sky, she would receive a bit of the heat that Gertrudis did not need.

Well, that was the hope, but no matter how much she looked at each star in the sky she did not feel any kind of heat, rather quite the opposite. Disconcerted she went back to bed thoroughly convinced that Gertrudis was placidly sleeping with her eyes firmly shut and therefore, the experiment had not worked. She covered herself up with the bedspread, as it was three layers thick by that point, looked over the recipe she had written to see if she had forgotten to note down something and said: “Today is the day we ate this dish, the day that Gertrudis left us.”

***Guajolote* (indigenous Yucatán Peninsula turkey)
in traditional Mexican *mole* almond and sesame sauce**

IV. April

INGREDIENTS:

1/4 *mulato* chilli (dark coffee colour)

3 *pasilla* chillies (black colour)

3 *ancho* chillies (reddish coloured against the light)

A handful of almonds

A handful of sesame seeds

Guajolote broth

A sponge cake (1/3 traditional *concha* Mexican traditional sweet bread)

Peanuts

1/4 onion wine

2 bars of chocolate

aniseed

vegetable oil butter

clove

pepper

sugar

chilli seeds

5 cloves of garlic

Preparation method:

Two days after slaughtering the *guajolote*, wash and boil it in salt. The *guajolote* meat is tasty and still exquisite if it has been fattened up carefully. You can achieve this by keeping the poultry in clean pens, fed on a lot of grain and water.

Fifteen days before slaughtering the *guajolote*, start to nourish them with small walnuts. On the first day start with one (walnut), the next pop two in their beaks and continue like that successively until the ration gets larger, until the eve of the slaughter when it is does not matter how much corn they decide to eat for the remainder of the time.

Tita was very careful to fatten up the *guajolote* carefully, as she was very interested in making a good impression at the most important ranch festivity: her nephew's christening, Pedro and Rosaura's first son. This event deserved special food with traditional Mexican *mole* made with chillies and spices. For the occasion she had adorned a special clay dinnerware with Roberto's name on it, as this was the name of the charming baby. Family and friends could not keep their eyes off the little boy and gave him numerous presents. Totally against Tita's previous expectations, she felt intense affection towards the boy, completely forgetting that he was the result of the marriage of her sister and Pedro, the love of her life.

With sincere enthusiasm she went about preparing the *mole* the day before for the christening. Pedro got wind of the fact that she was cooking up something new and interesting. The sound of the pans clanging against one another, the odour of the almonds being browned on the griddle, the sweet-sounding voice of Tita, singing while she cooked, had all awoken his sexual desire. Almost as if

lovers know that the moment of an intimate encounter is approaching, in the presence of the closeness, the odour of being loved, or the mutual caressing in previous foreplay. In this way these sounds and odours, above all of the browning sesame seeds, made it clear to Pedro that a true culinary pleasure was being cooked up.

Brown the almonds and sesame seeds on the griddle. Also brown the stemmed *ancho* chillies, but not a lot so they do not become bitter. You have to do this in a separate pan, in a little vegetable oil butter. Afterwards ground them with a stone together with the almonds and sesame seeds.

Tita, on all fours, leaning towards the grinding stone, was moving in a rhythmic fashion while she grounded the almonds and sesame seeds. Underneath her blouse her breasts were wiggling freely as she never used a bra. Beads of sweat dripped off her neck and rolled down between her cleavage which was flanked by her round and hard breasts.

Pedro, not being able to resist the odours that emanated from the kitchen, moved towards her, becoming mesmerised in the doorway upon seeing Tita in such a sensual posture.

Tita looked up without stopping what she was doing and her and Pedro's eyes met. Immediately, their arousing glances became transfixed in such a way that anyone who had seen them would have only noticed a single glance, a single rhythmic and sensual movement, a singular agitated breath and an identical desire. They stayed transfixed on each other in a moment of love ecstasy until Pedro looked away and started staring at Tita's breasts. She stopped grounding, straightened herself up and proudly pushed her breast out so Pedro could clearly see it. This encounter changed their relationship forever. As a result of that penetrating look that transcended her clothes, nothing would ever be the same again. Tita knew first-hand why being in contact with fire changed the composition of the elements, why a piece of dough changes into a pancake, why a breast that has not experienced the passion of love is a lifeless one, a completely useless ball of dough. In only a few instants Pedro had transformed Tita's breasts, from pure to voluptuous, without even having to touch them. If it had not been for the arrival of Chenchu, who had been to the market to get the *ancho* chillies, who knows what would have happened between Pedro and Tita; perhaps Pedro would have completely smothered Tita's breasts, but unfortunately, it was not like that. Pedro, lying about having gone to get a glass of water with lemon and chia seed, drank it quickly and left the kitchen. Tita, her hands trembling, tried to continue making the *mole* acting as if nothing had happened.

When the almonds and sesame seeds are well grounded, mix them with the broth which you cooked the *guajolote* in and add salt to your liking. In a mortar ground the clove, cinnamon, aniseed, pepper, and lastly the

sponge cake which you will have fried in vegetable oil butter with chopped onion and garlic.

Mix and fold it all in with the wine straight away.

While Chenchá grounded the spices, she tried in vain to get Tita's attention. But however much she dressed up what she had witnessed in the square and narrated it in the greatest detail, she only managed to keep Tita interested for short periods. She even gave great detail about the violence of the battles that had taken place in the town, but to no avail. Today, Tita could only think about the emotional episode she had just experienced. Furthermore, Tita knew exactly what stimulated Chenchá to tell her these things. As Tita was no longer the girl that got frightened by the stories about the weeping woman, the witch that sucked on children, the bogeyman and other horrors, now Chenchá tried to frighten her with stories of hangings, executions, dismembered bodies, throat cutting and even sacrifices of people who were unlucky enough to have their heart taken out in the middle of the battlefield! In some ways she would have liked to have fallen under the spell of Chenchá's funny stories and ended up believing her lies, including the one about Pancho Villa, a famous revolutionary leader, who took out the bleeding hearts of his enemies to eat them, but it was not the right moment.

Pedro's glances had made her regain confidence in the love that he had for her. She had spent months haunted by the idea that, either Pedro had lied to her on the wedding day when he declared his love for her just to make her suffer, or over time Pedro had truly fell in love with Rosaura. This insecurity had surfaced when he had inexplicably stopped congratulating her on her cooking. Tita went to a lot of effort in great angst to cook a bit better every day. Hopeless, at night, obviously after knitting a good amount of her bedspread, she came up with a new recipe with the intention of recovering the relationship between herself and Pedro which had emerged as a result of food. During this period of suffering her best recipes were born. Almost how a poet plays with words, she played with the ingredients as she pleased and also with amounts, achieving amazing results. But in the end, all her efforts were in vain. She did not manage to get a single word of approval from Pedro's lips. What she did not know was that Mama Elena had 'asked' Pedro to abstain from praising the food, as Rosaura suffered from insecurity, for being fat and deformed because of her pregnancy. As if this was not enough, Rosaura did not want to have to put up with hearing comments Tita received about her delicious cooking.

Tita felt so lonely during this period. It was such a surprise to Nacha! She hated everyone, including Pedro. She was convinced that she would never love anybody else while he was alive. Of course these convictions vanished into thin air when she first held Rosaura's child in her arms.

It was a cold March morning, she was in the chicken coop collecting the eggs that the hens had just laid, in order to use them for breakfast. Some were still warm, so she put them down her blouse, holding them close to her breast, to reduce the chronic cold that she suffered from and had lately been getting worse. She had got up before everyone else, as ever. But today, she had risen half an hour earlier than she normally did, to pack a suitcase with Gertrudis' clothes. She wanted to take advantage of the fact that Nicolás was leaving to round up the cattle, to ask him if he could please get the suitcase to her sister. Of course, she did this behind her mother's back. Tita decided to send the suitcase in spite of the fact that she could not get the image out of her mind of Gertrudis naked. Of course Tita would not accept that as a result of her sister's job in the brothel on the border she was required to be naked, rather because she did not have any clothes to put on. Quickly she gave Nicolás the suitcase with the clothes and an envelope with the address of the club where he would possibly find Gertrudis. Then Tita returned to her work. Suddenly, she heard Pedro preparing the carriage. It surprised her that he was doing it so early, but when she saw the sunlight she realised that it was already very late and preparing a case for Gertrudis, with her clothes which were a part of her past, had taken up more time than she could have imagined. It was not easy filling the suitcase with the clothes of their first communion, the three of them together. The candle, book and photo outside the church fitted in no problem, but she could not forget the taste of the traditional Mexican *tamal* (filled corn leaves) and *atole* (cornflour drink) that Nacha had prepared for them and they had eaten afterwards in company of their friends and family. There was enough room for the little sweet yellow apricots, but not the laughs when they used to play altogether in the school playground, nor our teacher Jovita, nor the swings, nor the odour of her room, nor the odour of the recently whipped chocolate. The good thing is that there was not any room for neither the beatings nor the scoldings of Mama Elena. Tita closed the suitcase firmly before they were able to sneak inside.

She went out to the courtyard right at the moment when Pedro was desperately shouting for her. He had to go to Eagle Pass to see Doctor Brown, the family doctor, and Pedro could not find Rosaura anywhere. Rosaura had started having labour pains. Pedro asked Tita to attend to Rosaura while he was away.

Tita was the only one who could do it. There was no one left at home: Mama Elena and Chenchá had already gone to the market, with the intention of stocking up the pantry as they were expecting the birth in any moment and they did not want to be short of anything essential. They had not been able to go before, due to the arrival of the police and their worrying stay in the town had prevented them from going. They did not know that while they were away the boy would be born more quickly than anyone could have imagined, in fact as soon as they left, Rosaura had gone into labour.

Tita was left with no other option but to be by her sister's side to

accompany her, hoping that it would be for a short time. She was not interested in the slightest in meeting the new baby boy or girl or whatever it was going to be. But she had never expected the police to detain Pedro preventing him from getting to the doctor. Nor had she expected Mama Elena and Chenchá to be unable to return home due to a shoot-out in the town which resulted in them having to take refuge in the Lobo family's home. Therefore because of all of this the only one present at the birth of her nephew would be Tita, just her luck!

During the time she spent at her sister's side she learnt more than she had during all the time she had studied at the town school. She cursed like no tomorrow her teachers and her mother for not telling her at any time what had to be done during labour. What good was it knowing the names of the planets and the *Carreño* manual of good manners from start to finish if her sister was about to die and she could not do anything to help her? Rosaura had fattened up 30 kilograms during her pregnancy, which made it an even more difficult job to deliver a baby for an inexperienced Tita. Leaving aside how fat her sister was, Tita noticed that Rosaura's body was blowing up enormously. Firstly her feet and then her face and hands. Tita wiped the sweat off Rosaura's brow and tried to give her some words of encouragement, but Rosaura did not seem to be listening.

Tita had seen some animals being born, but those experiences did not help her at all in those moments. On those occasions she had only been a spectator. The animals knew exactly what they had to do, whereas she knew absolutely nothing. She had prepared the sheets, the hot water and some sterilised scissors. She knew she would have to cut the umbilical cord, but she did not know how or when or at what point. She knew that she had to pay attention to the new born creature as soon as it arrived into the world, but she did not know what was required. The only thing she knew was that he or she had to be born, and she had no idea when! Tita got down between her sister's legs to have a look as much as she could but she saw nothing. There was only a dark, silent and deep tunnel. Tita, on all fours in front of Rosaura, in great desperation asked Nacha to shine a light on the situation in those moments. If it was possible for Nacha to dictate cooking recipes, it was also possible for her to help during these difficult moments! Someone had to help Rosaura from the great beyond, because the people on the ground did not have a clue. Tita did not know how long she was down on her knees praying, but when she finally opened her eyes, the dark tunnel had completely transformed all of a sudden into a red river, an uncontrollable volcano on ruptured paper. Her sister's flesh opened to make way for new life. Tita would never forget that sound or image of her nephew's head triumphantly coming out fighting for his life. It was not the most beautiful head, rather it looked like a sugar cone, due to the pressure that the bones had been under for so many hours. But to Tita it was the most beautiful head she had ever seen in her life. The sound of the boy's crying filled all of the empty space in Tita's heart. From that moment she knew she would be able to love once again: life, this boy, Pedro, even her sister, although she had hated for

so long. She took the boy in her arms, she carried him over to Rosaura, and they cried together for a while, both cuddling him. Afterwards, following the instructions that Nacha gave her in her ear, she knew the exact steps she had to follow: cut the umbilical cord in the correct place and at the right moment, clean the boy's body with sweet almond oil, tie up the belly button and dress him. She had no problem in knowing how to firstly put on his t-shirt and then his shirt, bandage the belly button, put on a sheet fabric nappy, then a corn nappy, a flannel to cover his legs, a small blouse, socks and shoes and lastly, using a plush blanket to cross his arms against her breast so he would not scratch his face. When Mama Elena and Chenchá arrived that night accompanied by the Lobo family, they were impressed with what a professional job Tita had done. Wrapped up like a *taco* (corn pancake), the boy was sleeping peacefully.

Pedro did not arrive with Doctor Brown until the following day, after being freed. His return calmed everyone. They feared for his life. Now they just had to worry about Rosaura's health as she was still very fragile and swollen. Doctor Brown examined her thoroughly. It was at the moment that they knew how dangerous the birth had been. According to the doctor, Rosaura had suffered a eclampsia pregnancy complication that could have killed her. He was very surprised that Tita had helped her with such composure and decisiveness in such unfavourable conditions. Who knows what stood out to him more, the fact that Tita had attended to Rosaura alone with no prior experience or the fact that he had discovered all of a sudden that Tita, the girl with the wonky teeth, the way that he had remembered her, had completely transformed into a beautiful woman right underneath his nose. Ever since the death of his wife, five years previously, he had not felt attracted to any woman. The pain of losing his spouse, only just recently married, had left him numb when it came to love during all these years. He felt a strange feeling when he looked at Tita. A tingling sensation came over his whole body, awakening and stimulating his dormant feelings. He looked at her as if it were the first time he had ever done so. Her teeth now seemed very pretty to him, they now occupied a grand proportion of her perfectly formed and subtle facial features.

Mama Elena's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Doctor, would it be a problem for you to come twice a day, until my daughter is out of harm's way?"

"Of course not! In the first instance it is my obligation and in the second, it is a pleasure to visit your wonderful home."

It was true luck that Mama Elena was so worried about her daughter's health that she did not pick up on the special interest

John showed in Tita, as if she had noticed she would not have opened so confidently the doors of her home to him. For the moment the doctor did not present any kind of problem to Mama Elena; the only thing that worried her was that Rosaura was not producing milk. In the town, fortunately, they found a nursemaid who took care of breastfeeding the boy. She was a relation of Nacha, she had just had her eighth child and she happily accepted the honour of feeding Mama Elena's grandson. She did it marvellously for a month, until one morning, when the woman was on her way to the town to visit her family, she was hit by a wayward bullet that had gone astray from a shoot-out between rebels and police and died from her injuries. One of her relations informed the ranch of the news, just as Tita and Chenchá were mixing together all the ingredients of the *mole* in a big clay pot.

This is the last step and you do it when all of the ingredients are grounded as indicated:

Mix them in a pot, add the pieces of *guajolote*, the bars of chocolate and the sugar to your liking.

When it is thickened, take it off the heat.

Tita finished the *mole* preparation on her own, as Chenchá, as soon as she received the news, immediately went to the town to try to get another nursemaid for her nephew. She did not return until nightfall and had no success. The baby cried, infuriated. They tried to give him cow's milk and he rejected it. Tita then tried to give him tea, just as Nacha had done with her but it was no good: the boy rejected that as well. It occurred to her to wrap him in the shawl that Lupita the nursemaid had left there, thinking that the boy would calm down when he smelled the familiar smell from it, but in fact, the boy cried even more, as the smell reminded him that he would be fed soon and he did not understand why there was a delay. He looked for milk in Tita's breasts. If there is anything in life that Tita was not able to resist it was when a hungry person asked to be fed and she could not help them. It made her very distressed. And as a result of not being able to contain herself any longer, Tita opened her blouse and offered the boy her breast. She knew it was completely dry, but at least he could suck on it and it would keep him occupied while she decided what to do to relieve his starvation.

The boy became hooked on her nipple with desperation and sucked and sucked, with such enormous force, that he managed to get milk out of Tita. When she saw that the boy regained little by little an element of calm on his face and she heard him swallow, she suspected that something extraordinary was happening. Was it possible that the boy was feeding off her? To make sure, she took the boy off her breast and she watched how some milk squirted out. Tita could not understand what was happening. It was not possible for a single woman to produce milk, it could only be

a supernatural occurrence and there was no explanation at that particular moment. As soon as the boy realised that they had taken him away from his food he started to cry again. Tita immediately started breastfeeding him again, until he was not hungry anymore and he was placidly sleeping, like a holy child. She was so engrossed in watching the boy that she did not realise when Pedro came into the kitchen. At that moment Tita was Ceres personified, the God of food.

Pedro was not at all surprised nor did he need an explanation. Captivated by what he saw and smiling, he came closer to them, leaned in and gave Tita a kiss on her forehead. Tita removed the boy from her breast, as he was already satisfied. Then Pedro's eyes contemplated what he had really seen before underneath her clothes: Tita's breasts. Tita attempted to cover herself up with her blouse, Pedro helped her without making a sound with great affection. As they did it, they felt a series of emotions which took them over: love, desire, affection, lust, embarrassment... fear of being found out. The sound of Mama Elena's footsteps on the wooden flooring opportunely warned them of the danger. Tita managed to adjust her blouse correctly and Pedro take a step back from her before Mama Elena came into the kitchen. In such a way that when she opened the door she could not find, within what social norms allow, anything to worry about. Pedro and Tita pretended everything was hunky-dory. However, there was a strange atmosphere that made Mama Elena sharpen her senses and try to discover what was causing her to be unsettled.

"Tita, what happened in the end with that boy? Did you manage to get him to feed?"

"Yes, mama, he had some tea and fell asleep."

"Thank God! So, Pedro, are you not going to take the boy to your wife? Children must not be far away from their mother."

Pedro left with the boy in his arms, Mama Elena did not take her eyes off Tita, she saw a glint of embarrassment in Tita's eyes that she did not like at all.

"Is the *champurrado* (Mexican chocolate rum drink) ready for your sister?"

"It is already made mama."

"Give it to me and I will take it to her, she needs to take it day and night, to help with the milk production."

But regardless of the amount of *champurrado* Rosaura drank, the milk never came. Whereas Tita had enough milk every day not only to feed Roberto but two other children, if it had been necessary. As Rosaura was fragile for a few more days, no one found it strange that Tita took charge of feeding her nephew; what they did not know was the way in which she did it,

as Tita, with Pedro's help, was very careful that no one saw her.

The boy, thus, instead of being a reason for separating Tita and Pedro, in the end helped them to be together. It was almost as if Tita was the mother of the boy and not Rosaura. She felt this way and acted like it. The day of the christening, she showed all the world how proud she was of taking care of her nephew! Rosaura could only be present at church as she felt under the weather. Therefore, Tita took her place at the feast.

Doctor Brown stared at Tita, entranced. He could not take his eyes off her. John had only attended the christening to see if he could talk to her on her own. Despite the fact that they saw each other daily during the medical visits that John made to Rosaura, they had not had the opportunity to chat freely and without anyone else present. Taking advantage of the fact that Tita was walking past his table, he got up and went over to her using the excuse of seeing the boy.

"Such a beautiful boy, next to such a beautiful girl!"

"Thank you doctor."

"And to think that he is not even your son, I can imagine how pretty you will look when you have your own child."

A sense of sadness appeared on Tita's face. John picked up on it and said:

"Forgive me, I appear to have spoken out of turn."

"No, it is not that. The fact is that I cannot marry, nor have children, because I have to take care of my mama until she dies."

"How so? What folly!"

"But that is the way it is. Now I hope you can excuse me, I am going to see my guests."

Tita moved away quickly, leaving John completely bewildered. She also felt the same way, but she recovered immediately when she felt Roberto in her arms. What use was thinking about her fate while she had that boy close to her, who was more hers than anyone else's. Actually she acted as his mother without the official title. Pedro and Roberto belonged to her and she did not need anyone else in her life.

Tita was so happy that she did not realise that her mother, the same as John, although for another reason, had not lost sight of her for even an instant. Her mother was convinced that Tita and Pedro were up to something. Trying to discover what it was, she did not even eat, and was so transfixed on her surveillance job, that the success of the party went unnoticed. Everyone agreed that for the most part the success was due to Tita, the *mole* that she had

prepared was delicious! She kept receiving congratulations for her achievements as cook and everyone wanted to know what her secret was. It was truly unfortunate that at the same moment that Tita gave an answer to the question saying that her secret was that she had prepared the *mole* with all her love, Pedro was nearby and the two of them looked at each other for a fraction of a second too long, arising suspicion. They remembered the moment when Tita was grounding the ingredients, which caused Mama Elena to look over like a hawk, 20 metres away and allowed her to pick up on the glint in their eyes, resulting in her being deeply disturbed.

Among all the guests she was the only one that was disturbed. Curiously, after eating the *mole*, everyone had fallen into a state of euphoria that made them suffer the most uncommon emotions of great happiness. They laughed and became very unsettled like never before and they would not do for a long time afterwards. The revolutionary fight threatened to lead to hunger and death all over the place. But in those moments it seemed that everyone tried to forget that the town was riddled with bullet wounds.

The only one that did not loose composure was Mama Elena, who was very preoccupied with looking for a solution to her resentment. Making the most of the moment when Tita was close enough so she would not miss any of the words she was about to say, she said to father Ignacio out loud:

“Due to how things are playing out father, I am worried that one day my daughter Rosaura will need a doctor and we will not be able to locate one, just like the day she gave birth. I think the most convenient thing to do would be that when she is stronger she leaves us with her husband and little son to live in San Antonio, Texas, with my cousin. There she will receive better medical attention.”

“I am not of the same opinion, lady Elena, precisely because of how the political situation is, you need a man at home to protect you.”

“I have never needed one for anything, I have been able to live on the ranch alone and with my daughters. Men are not that important in order to live father” she stressed. “Nor is the revolution as dangerous as they make it out to be, I would rather have hotter chillies without access to water!”

“No, well you may have a point!” he replied laughing. “Ah, what a woman you are lady Elena, always so witty! And, tell me, have you thought about where Pedro would work in San Antonio?”

“He can start working as an accountant in my cousin’s company, he will have no problem, as he speaks English perfectly.”

The words that Tita heard resonated like cannon shots inside her brain. She could not let this happen. It was impossible that they would take the boy away from her now. She had to stop it from taking place. For the time being, Mama Elena had managed to ruin the party. The first party Tita had ever enjoyed in her life.

9.3 Pupil Report (self-evaluation)

Studying this *Master's in Professional Translation* in 2020 has been a most gratifying experience. As the course draws to a close this summer, I can't quite comprehend how quickly time has passed since I started the course last October and am very grateful for a number of things I have had the opportunity of benefiting from. I have learned, developed and perfected a wide range of skills, grown both personally and professionally as an individual and ultimately provided myself with another string to my bow, the profession of a translator. Translation is always something that I have kept in mind ever since I studied translation, interpretation and subtitling in the final year of my degree. I took another professional path in 2015 and became a teacher. However, I never relinquished the possibility of returning to translation. As a direct result of taking this master's, it is now my intention to engage professionally with this highly stimulating profession.

Logistically, I have to admit that the autumn months from October to December were some of the most involved and active working months of my academic life. The high quantity of translation assignments and pressurised turnaround times made for an intense experience, however I understand that professionally a translator must be prepared for the fast pace of the market and able to deliver a high quality job in the stipulated time frame. Having 'dipped my toe in the water' this year, I now truly comprehend the complexity of the profession.

I am most appreciative of all the professors on the course who have provided me with a window on their professional experience of the world of translation, delivered dynamic and informative classes, given informative feedback in order to improve and also facilitated enlightening and thought-provoking discussion with the other students on the course. I would like show my gratitude to each professor and show my appreciation for their particular expertise.

Firstly, Judith Cortés Villarroja afforded me the opportunity to develop the business side of translation through her courses *The Translation Profession* and *Business Management*. Some of the tasks I practised on these courses included learning useful functions in Microsoft Word, writing a translator's CV and cover letter, creating a bilingual website, producing budgets, invoices, spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel and drawing up my fees. Judith also imparted a course on revision from English to Spanish entitled *Revision, Editing and Post-editing of Translated Texts (English-Spanish)* in which we covered linguistic revision including style correction and spelling and grammar, style guides, text edition and comparison of documents.

Although in a professional capacity I will be translating from Spanish to English, the course enabled me to develop considerably my linguistic knowledge in the Spanish language.

Secondly, María Rosich Andreu, delivered the modules *Translation and Problem Resolution Strategies (English-Spanish)* and *Literary Translation (English-Spanish)* and gave me the chance to develop skills in translating parts of novels of different genres, acronyms, film scripts, artistic articles and writing of a book review. She also gave me an opportunity to improve some of my translations as a final task, something I found to be a useful process in reviewing my own work. Also, the texts she selected to translate were of wide variety and engaged me as a pupil.

Thirdly, Anthony Pym delivered the modules *Specialised Translation Tools* and *Tools for Subtitling*. Both modules were of great interest. The first one enabled me to develop skills in CAT (computer-assisted translation) tools including but not limited to ‘MateCat’ and ‘Wordfast’. I had never come across either of these CAT tools previously and therefore I hugely benefited from familiarising myself with them. In addition, in order to evaluate our skills in this ambit we were asked to complete a timed test using one of these tools, engage in post-editing and pre-editing and reflect on the technology in the form of a short essay. I found the subject to be succinct but detailed and have taken a lot from it. Anthony Pym also delivered a course on subtitling tools which involved subtitling into and from English. I had had a previous experience of subtitling in my university degree as I have previously mentioned, however this master’s degree provided me with the opportunity of refreshing and developing my skills further. I will evaluate my professional options as a translator in subtitling for the future very carefully. All in all, engaging with subtitling was of great interest to me.

Fourthly, Kevin Costello delivered the module *Translation Strategies and Problem-Solving (Spanish-English)* and also *Revising, Editing and Post-Editing Translated Texts (Spanish-English)*. Although I have found all the modules of great interest, I regard Kevin’s as being most beneficial to my future career as I have been working into English, something that I will be doing professionally. Moreover, I have gained an in depth understanding of a variety of translation strategies and techniques including cultural transposition, grammatical transposition and translation theory. I have practised translation of a menu, an information sheet, a sports article and a culturally specific article. Furthermore, in the revision module, I have learnt about the differences between different types of English e.g. British and American, copy, style, structural and content editing.

I have developed an understanding of what is required in light, medium and heavy editing of a document. As well as the content being applicable to translation, I have also been able to develop my language skills even further which I have found to be of great benefit.

Fifthly, Nune Ayvazyan delivered the module *Financial Translation*. In this module I have gained understanding in micro and macroeconomics, money and inflation, financial statements and business structure. Although I did not believe economic translation to be the most interesting module before starting, I have to admit that I found the ambit to be something I could see myself engaging with in the future. I was also able to develop my glossary skills and was actively encouraged to do this. Developing of banks of terms is important for a professional translator in order to recall words easily and quickly to maximise time. It also ensures continuity in translation.

Sixthly, Judith Raigal Aran delivered the module *Legal Translation*. In this module I have gained an insight into various different types of legal documents including contracts and how to translate subject-specific terms appropriately including being mindful of the danger of anglicisms. I have been given access to legal dictionaries to assist me in my translation and also covered acronyms and differences in various legal systems. I have also been encouraged to develop glossaries which, as I have mentioned above, will be advantageous in future translations. I enjoyed learning about legal translation and how to best operate within this field. It is a very specialised translation area both focusing on the technical nature of the subject as well as the practical.

I have also connected with many of my student colleagues outside of class time in order to collaborate on specific group tasks, point each other in the right direction when doubts and questions have arisen and also share general opinions and ideas about translation. It has been a truly enriching experience to be able to connect with so many different nationalities based all around the world from South America, North America, Europe and Australasia. This experience has been afforded to me in the most part to the fact that the course has been delivered completely online during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as the course was originally planned to be partly in person I believe that the university has adapted well online and the result has been a most positive one.

In conclusion, I have developed both my translation and linguistic abilities during this master's and am very pleased with the knowledge I have gained, the practice I have engaged in and regard everything I have learnt to be of great importance as I move into the next stage of my professional life, as a professional translator.