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# SUDDEN FICTION LATINO

SHORT-SHORT STORIES FROM  
THE UNITED STATES  
AND LATIN AMERICA

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION BY

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a cocksucker  
 a punk motherfucker  
 a fake-ass Dominican.

She claims:

you have a little penis  
 no penis  
 and worst of all that you like curried pussy.

(Which really is unfair, you try to say, since Laxmi is technically from Guyana, but Alma isn't listening.)

Instead of lowering your head and copping to it like a man, you pick up the journal as one might hold a baby's beshatted diaper, as one might pinch a recently be-nutted condom. You glance at the offending passages. Then you look at her and smile a smile your dissembling face will remember until the day you die. Baby, you say, baby, this is part of my novel.

This is how you lose her.

Ana María Shua

### 3 MICROSTORIES

#### CANNIBALS AND EXPLORERS

The cannibals dance around the explorers. The cannibals light the fire. The cannibals have their faces painted in three colors. The cannibals prefer the heart and brain, disdaining the tender flesh of the thighs and the leftover intestines. The cannibals consume those parts of the body they believe will instill in them the virtues they admire in their victims. The cannibals partake of their ritual banquet without pleasure or mercy. The cannibals don the explorers' clothes. The cannibals, once in London, deliver scholarly lectures on cannibals.

#### RESPECT FOR GENRES

A man wakes up next to a woman he doesn't recognize. In a thriller, this could be the result of alcohol, drugs, or a blow to the

head. In a science fiction story, the man would eventually understand that he exists in a parallel universe. In an existentialist novel, the lack of recognition could simply be due to a feeling of alienation, of absurdity. In an experimental text, the mystery would go unsolved and the situation would be handled with the turn of a phrase. The editors become more and more demanding, and the man knows, with a sense of desperation, that if he doesn't manage to fit himself into a genre soon, he runs the risk of remaining painfully and forever unpublished.

#### THEOLOGIAN

In the seventh century A.D., a group of Bavarian theologians debates the sex of angels. Obviously, no one admits that women are capable of discussing theological matters; after all, back then it was doubtful they even had a soul. Nevertheless, one of them is a cleverly disguised woman. She asserts emphatically that angels must only be male. She knows, but doesn't disclose, that among them there will be cleverly disguised women.

*Translated by Rhonda Dahl Buchanan*

Stephen D. Gutierrez

## CLOWNPANTS MOLINA

Clownpants Molina begs now outside the store in town. A lean figure no longer in clown pants but worn jeans and a workman's shirt blood-spattered and frayed.

"Got some change, man, so I can eat?"

"Sure, Johnny," you start to say, reaching behind you, shaky. You jumped him one time, you remember, three or four dudes from the neighborhood when he first moved in, nothing serious, just a little initiation welcoming him, wrestling him down to the ground and smothering him.

Stood back triumphantly and let him up. Slapped his back for him but still. Fuck. Punks.

"Anytime." And you press a buck into his palm and go off on your own, into your car parked at the curb and down the street,

which he would finally rest from his fears, from his destiny, from himself.

Three years in the country had given him a passing knowledge of the native languages. He tried something. He spoke a few words that were understood.

Then there blossomed in him an idea that he considered worthy of his talent and his broad education and his profound knowledge of Aristotle. He remembered that a total eclipse of the sun was to take place that day. And he decided, in the deepest part of his being, to use that knowledge to deceive his oppressors and save his life.

"If you kill me," he said, "I can make the sun darken on high." The Indians stared at him and Bartolomé caught the disbelief in their eyes. He saw them consult with one another and he waited confidently, not without a certain contempt.

TWO HOURS later the heart of Brother Bartolomé Arrazola spurted out its passionate blood on the sacrificing stone (brilliant in the opaque light of the eclipsed sun) while one of the Indians recited tonelessly, slowly, one by one, the infinite list of dates when solar and lunar eclipses would take place, which the astronomers of the Mayan community had predicted and registered in their codices without the estimable help of Aristotle.

*Translated by Edith Grossman*

Fernando Benavidez, Jr.

## MONTEZUMA, MY REVOLVER

**T**he first time I ever died, I was stabbed in the chest then set on fire by my friends on the bridge. It was late afternoon, and it seemed like the world was resisting the change of light, when everything looks the same peaceful gray, all one blurry shadow. As a kid, I thought, this is what heaven must look like—always dusk, just dark enough to fall asleep forever. The outlines of the American buildings merged seamlessly with the background of a flat Mexican landscape as if there were no border between us and them, no fence or armed guards, no difference between the United States and Mexico—at least, not at this time of day.

I remember thinking I was jealous of the old men and women making their way across the crowded bridge by foot, faster. They stared at us—three punks in a fancy black truck, practically stand-

ing still in the smog of the crossing. We inched forward one conversation at a time. The sun disappeared behind the edge of the world to my left, and to my right, *los viejitos* walking. The daylight was being swallowed by the stench that arose from the brownness of the Rio Grande in the summer, but I loved that smell.

Chuy was in the back seat and Bobby Loco in the front. These were my partners and best friends. Chuy got his name from his father, even though his mother called him Jesús, which he hated. And Bobby Loco, Roberto Garza to his mother, earned his name on the streets of Brownsville. We did almost everything together, even the dealing. Vicente Fernandez played loud as hell and the feeling of music pounded our chests. "El Rey" was like our anthem. We talked in raised voices about plans for that night. It always led to stupid shit that nineteen-year-olds talk about when they've got money and time—who we've fucked, who we wanted to fuck, who wanted to fuck us, and lies we told as truths. The trip across the bridge would be a slow one, and we knew it. But, it was finally Friday, and that's all that mattered.

Cano, our fat boss, sent us on a big delivery guaranteed to make us a lot of money. It was the reason we were still here, still doing this shit after high school. Chuy's cousin Carios was border patrol and worked on Fridays except when his ugly wife, Mona La Llorona, needed him to take care of their baby. She was a nurse always on call or some bullshit like that, so Carlos had to be ready to go when she needed him. We had it all figured out, though, when a delivery had to be made. Carlos was just an added guarantee, the kind of security we were willing to pay for.

Bobby Loco was also the only real American citizen in my truck and it made us feel safe too. Chuy was a *mojado* like me, but we both pretended we weren't, for the girls mostly. I could speak English because I graduated from a high school in Brownsville, where I met Bobby, who barely talked at all. Chuy, I met in a

Mexican jail when we were just *chavalones*. I graduated for my father, who died the summer before ninth grade, shot by Cano. I know. I was too angry to feel anything at the time. So at the funeral, my mother cried enough for the both of us. I just stared at *el jefe's* coffin even after everyone left. *Pinche* Cano pretended to be angry about my father's death, pretended he would seek revenge in his name, find out who did it, do what a son's supposed to do.

Cano was my *jefe's* best friend—partners with him, like me, Bobby, and Chuy. He even took care of me after my father died, out of guilt, maybe fear. Of course, I loved my father, and that's why I went to work for Cano after the funeral, selling dime bags to middle schoolers for candy money. I did it because I knew it was him all along—*pinche* Cano.

Working for that fat fuck was how I'd get my revenge, and I couldn't wait for the day to come when I could get close enough to pull the trigger. It took me five years to decide to do it. By then, I was nineteen and big time—it was harder to do because of the money. I told myself, just one more big deal and then Cano's dead.

Sometimes, I couldn't hold his fat ass up when he'd lean in on me, breathing hot, sour words in my face, high on coke, smelling of tequila.

"Yo quería a tu jefe, chingos, carnal. I loved your *apá*," he'd confess repeatedly. "I loved him, *chingos*."

"I know, Cano," I would tell him, "I know."

Every night he got drunk like that, I thought I'd do it. Kill him.

We knew we were on the U.S. side already. A dirty plaque stuck to the railing on the right marked the line. We were so high by then. I always carried a .357 Magnum on my waist, and I wore a gold cross, blessed by Padre Buendía for protection. Chuy, in the back, always sucked on his stupid lollipop, a nasty habit we all hated but tolerated because of his connection at the checkpoint.

Bobby carried a big knife in his boot, usually. He liked starting shit for no reason. He was famous for it, even. They used to call him “Animal”—in high school before he dropped out—in part because of his size, part of it because of his temper. Known throughout middle school for losing an eyeball while playing with bottle rockets, by the time he was twenty, he was the most feared *vato* in Brownsville. His glass eye had a red pupil, scary, but stupid at the same time.

Yeah, Bobby was a killer, or at least was fucked up enough to kill. That’s why Cano liked him. For about a month, the *chupacabra* was blamed for all Bobby’s fine work in Brownsville. It was all over the *Brownsville Herald*—pictures of Bruno Cano’s enemies, gutted—big dealers found dead in alleys, trying to hold on to their insides spilling from their bodies, eyes wide, open-mouthed, or just left thrown in their cars or the cornfields north of town. “The Chupacabra at Large,” the paper would say. Bobby Loco always made it look like an animal did it. That was his talent.

Right before I had left the house that night, my mother gave me a revolver that belonged to my father. It was all he left me, she said. It was all I was packing. Back at my place, I’d forgotten my .357, so this was good because I hated being without protection. I had put my *jefe*’s revolver in my right boot, where he used to carry it, where it belonged. Mamá was proud to see me handle it the way she said *el jefe* would. He never called it a gun, but a revolver, and he named it Montezuma. He used to say that he only used it for “special occasions,” like for revenge, mostly. One bullet at a time, for one target was his rule.

The fiery blue pearl grip fit perfectly in my hands.

I had my father’s hands.

The gun was engraved with the original nickel plate finish from 1948, a strong weapon, fucking beautiful. Montezuma was my baby

now, my revolver, and saving my own ass was always a “special occasion.”

I stopped drinking as soon as the sun went down and told Chuy and Bobby to shut up. It never took us this long to cross, I thought. Something was wrong and I lowered the volume to listen to myself for a moment.

We were stuck behind a dirty rig with mud flaps that were decorated with shiny naked women. The mufflers growled every time it moved a foot. I couldn’t see very good in either direction. Behind us, another rig blocked our view to Matamoros. *La migra* looked restless up ahead. Heads in uniforms moved in and out of car windows and made me nervous. Maybe Mona La Llorona had called Carlos to take care of the baby tonight.

“You think we’re fucked?” Bobby asked me.

“I don’t know, *vato*. Did Carlos tell you *qué no iba estar*?” I asked Chuy.

“No. *No me dijo nada*,” he said.

“You didn’t talk to Carlos o La Llorona *tampoco*?”

“¿*Cuál llorona*?”

“Your cousin’s wife, *baboso*—Mona La Llorona!”

“No. No. She didn’t call,” he insisted.

“Fuck!”

I saw two border patrol guys walking toward us, checking with their flashlights, hands on their shiny, government-issued Berettas, approaching everyone with caution.

This was no routine.

We’ll shoot it out with them, was my first reaction. No. We’ll make a run for it and do what Cano told us to do in a situation like this.

“We should burn the shit and run,” I said.

No one said anything back.

Bobby started to get paranoid, sweating on my leather seats, hand on his knife. Chuy spit his candy out the window and finished the line of coke carefully balanced on his left hand. We always carried five gallons of gasoline behind the third seat of my truck just in case we needed it, and it looked like we might. Chuy struggled with the tank, to bring it over. He washed the seats behind me with gasoline as fast as he could before I realized what Bobby was doing with his big fucking knife.

U.S. Customs reported that their hunch about us was bad information on their part. They didn't ask me any questions because Chuy had emptied the drugs before we left Matamoros, and I didn't know it. Fucking Cano. *La migra* found no drugs in my smoldering truck, just me, pronounced dead at the scene, stabbed and burned alive by those fucking *putos*. Montezuma was found and returned to my mother, unharmed. She told the authorities at the hospital that it was a family heirloom.

The first time I died, I was stabbed in the chest then set on fire by my best friends on the bridge. I checked out of Brownsville Medical Center two weeks later, unrecognizable from the burns, ready to settle the score with Bobby Loco, Chuy, and, most of all, Bruno Cano—ready to hold Montezuma once again and kill in honor of my father.

## Pedro Ponce

### VICTIM

The victim is not deaf to the soundtrack. She is not blind to the audience leering over popcorn cartons. She knows. As she unlocks her door and steps into the darkened kitchen, as she turns on the lights and shuffles through the day's mail (mostly bills she will never have to pay), she knows. She's about to Get It. She sets down her purse and makes her way to the bedroom.

She sheds her clothes, ignoring the scattered whistles coming from the theater seats. She covers herself in a short silk robe. The flimsy material is too slight for the weather where she lives, but she knows the rules. A sudden scraping sound gives her an excuse to look out into the middle distance at the eyes watching her. She cannot let them see her look. Whatever fear she feels can register only briefly, for as long as it takes her to realize that the scraping

Juan Martinez

## CUSTOMER SERVICE AT THE KARAOKE DON QUIXOTE

Customer service at the Karaoke Don Quixote is main thing we worry about. Because if customer doesn't go here, will go elsewhere, and soon no customers go here period. We treat them special. We feign bad foreign accent to make feel better. We not decide on particular region—because if customer is from said particular region, or customer's family is, is no good, no? No. Is no good. Is little Italian, little Polack, little bit here and there. Is good.

Because it gets customer singing. Customer service is number one priority for us. We say, You sing, you sing! Is person drinking? Yes! Is good, for beer and spirits make person sing, and people singing is good: They buy more beer and spirits. And intoxication

JUAN MARTINEZ

is good because is no cover charge. Is good, because people like singing great works of literature, and is good because they drink more, so more profits.

First we start with *Don Quixote*. But soon we branch to post-modernist stuff, because customers want, and customers is always accurate: They say, Barth! Barthelme! Pynchon! Coover! We say, okay. We say, is good. Also postmodernists drink. Minimalists, they don't drink so much. Is poetry good? No, is no good. Poetry karaoke, is like haiku, sonatinas—no good, no one sings. Classic is good: Melville and Tolstoy and some other peoples—big hits, big big hits.

Is reason for accent? Is annoying you? Logic? Logic is, these are shy peoples—literature peoples is shy. Is sitting around reading, no much dancing, maybe some drinking and then dancing, but stiff, you know? Is people reading travel, you know? The *New York Times* travel section? Also travelogues and such. Is dreaming of going elsewhere, maybe finding charming out-of-the-way spots with kindly innkeepers, lovely foreign women, also big motherly types that feed them exotic soups and ales and such. And maybe, in this fantasy of going places, they're thinking they might let go a little because no one knows them, right? So we feed that fantasy a little. Is good, is people happy. Is good business. People sing: They sing *Quixote*:

«En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor.»

Or sing dubbed international public domain version:

“In a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind, there lived not long since one of those gentlemen that keep a lance in the lance-rack, an old buckler, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing.”



Is good? Business is good. We have many franchises. As for matter of customer service—customers happy, is always happy here—service-wise we are number one. Soon we open in La Mancha—is ironic, no? Waiters feign heavy American accent. Talk loud. Slow. Is good. People feel okay singing. Is happy.

Soon: IPO. T-shirts. Web site. CDs. Is good!

**Carmen Boulosa**

## IMPOSSIBLE STORY

**T**hey were left alone. Laura suddenly felt tired. She sat on the edge of the bed to take her shoes off; made of stiff leather, they seemed to him more rigid than wooden clogs. “I’m going to put some music on,” she said to him. “You’ll love it. Wait a minute.” She went into the bathroom and shut the door. He remained alone, wondering at everything he saw: the transparent vase on the bedside table, the table itself, the shelves full of books, when the sound of music hit him, a blow that Montézuma could never have imagined, like a coup de grâce yet full of joy, something that deafened him at first and then filled him with emotion. What music was that? When Laura came out of the bathroom, he asked her, “What am I listening to?” “There are many instruments,” she explained, “interpreting the music written by a man called Vivaldi. I put it in

this box where it is being played for you because Vivaldi wrote an opera with your name. He made the music, which is the sound you can hear, to honor you, many years ago, much closer to the time when the captain of La Malinche landed here than to our present day." And she thinks, How could Vivaldi have ever imagined that one day Montezuma would hear it on tape? Never! While Montezuma wonders what artifices Laura employed to make so many musicians play such strange sounds. What kind of sounds are they? What does one hear in them?

But Montezuma is not thinking. At this point he no longer thinks. He no longer wonders "what?" and "how?" Does not say, "It can't be" or "I'm a Mexica Indian. I live differently from these people who have invented other ways of being." He says nothing, remembers nothing as if what he sees might affect his being, invade his body, enter his pores, consume him. No, not consume him. Montezuma is there present, watching, conscious without speaking or forming a judgment. As if he did not have a body, only eyes or, rather, as if instead of having eyes and a head, he were just a body that explores and sees. That is the only word I can think of: see. He does not order things, or explain them, yet he misses nothing. At lightning speed he has invented within himself a way to survive, this new way of being. Not for one moment does he say to himself: "I'm Montezuma, miraculously reborn in the same geographical space where once stood the great Tenochtitlán." He never thinks of what is happening, not because he shuts his eyes but because he opens them more and more. It is as if, abolishing his original vision of life and death, of the universe and nothingness, he arises a new being made up of wonder and observation. There he is, Montezuma, watching, feeling.

Why did Laura once again take him in hand like a child? She led him to the bathroom and placed him in front of the toilet. "Have a pee in there, pass water, if you prefer to call it that, and I'll

be back." And she shut the door. Standing alone by the lavatory, he undid the knot of his pants and pissed. An endless stream that could not be just the result of the chocolate drunk that morning; an ancestral flow of urine cut off (as the result of a wound?) on the day of his death and which by some stupid biological error had stayed in his body. Perhaps that was why he had been sent back to earth with his entire body, to release in this lavatory the urine he was not meant to keep in his death. With slow and ceremonial movements he once again tied up his pants, and she came back, pulled the chain, and let the water flow from two taps into the pink tile bathtub, mixing the two jets until it was full of warm water. She undressed him and helped him to get in, chatting all the time, "What a lovely bath, just for you, to calm you down and see whether you change that expression of yours and look more at ease." Montezuma got inside the bath and relaxed in the warm clear water and watched her pour a liquid in it, something that turned into bluish bubbles. Then she rubbed him with a very smooth sponge, rinsed him with clear water from the handheld hose, and helped him out of the bath, wrapping him in a soft towel.

Standing in front of him she undressed and gave herself a quick cold shower, to wake up and get rid of this hangover.

She then wrapped herself in a towel, got out of the bathroom, opened the door to the bedroom, and lay on the bed on top of the damp towel. Then she threw it aside and went naked under the covers. He watched her, let his towel slip down on the wet bathroom floor, and went naked toward the bed. Laura lifted the covers to let him lie beside her. What happened then had nothing to do with the power of desire. It would be foolish to think so; how could he desire her or she desire him? At first it was as if their bodies had stumbled, missed a step, and the sheer clumsiness had made them fall by each other's side and embrace. But after the first move, clumsy and accidental as it was, turning over at the same time from

their different positions, they allowed their bodies to fall into each other's arms as if they were alien objects.

The result was of such comfort—not entirely devoid of desire—and of such relief that they could no longer let go. They were releasing each other from their suffering, their painful situation. For her, the meaningless condition of a young woman full of life, at the end of the twentieth century, living in a city once the greatest and most beautiful in the world, now the most crowded, the most populated, and perhaps the most insane of them all. For him the uncomfortable feeling of waking up centuries after his death in the very place where his city stood, recognizing nothing except the skeletons of his temples. Nestling between two clean sheets, a light eiderdown filled with goose feathers and two pillows with embroidered edges also of white cotton, Laura and Montezuma inexplicably—and this is not an author's nonsense, because if you are to consider the act you'd soon call it incredible and even idiotic, but that's what happened, and what am I to do besides just say so—Laura and Montezuma inexplicably copulated, fucked, became man and wife. You choose the term, this is your privilege, name as you like the act they performed and which I am hurrying to recount before these pages be irremediably condemned (the story is pretty well finished) to come to an end.

FOR A WHILE they seemed not to be moving, or rather to be both trotting at the same rhythm, her two hands placed on his hips pushing him away from her ever so lightly—yet such a separation between their two skins—until his body fell again hard and strong, deeper into the hollow that Laura's thighs could not hold back. For a long while they seemed not to be moving, identical as they were in their movements (one-two, one-two, their repeated comings and goings), a canvas to which the skilled artist added final touches:

drops of sweat here and there, hair tossed away, muscles relaxing in a uniform, precise rhythm.

For a while they were firm as a statue balanced by the comings and goings of the wind, still, impeccable in the exasperation of the approaching climax. Every part of their body was pleasure, their teeth and ears, their nails and their flickering eyes. But they did not, could not know this because they were standing at the edge of the place where everybody gets lost. They did not know that they were feeling pleasure, as if they were never to come out of its unconscious state.

A new element intrudes like a dagger, which tears the perfection of the canvas; the voice of Laura scoring the picture they are forming, perfect, divine in their perfection within that image which nobody could understand just by looking, a drawing of flesh and spirit (if you could distinguish one from the other), an incomprehensible work perfected by a passion without name or explanation, whose only meaning lies there in that moment torn by Laura's voice, which says in a tone too feeble to be imagined, "I am coming, come with me!"

And after this voice, so new in her mouth, Laura's body dissolves like smoke arising from a burning corpse, like steam from water before disappearing into dispersed particles, which no longer remember or know that they had been water, that they had belonged to it.

And him? The same thing happens to him. What remains of him on the bed is his atrocious dejection, the white yolks of his semen, the senseless grayish thick stain, left behind, while he returns to the air, the wisdom of rocks and water, forgetting, perhaps forever, the uncomfortable verticality of the human body. All pleasure at last without distinction, turned into complete surrender where not time or language or custom watch over one's actions,

like the fattening of victims, measuring the warm fragile immensity of man, then to crash it, blunting out all flexibility, against the blind reality of the individual.

He dispersed into minute unidentifiable particles, in the fins of a fish, the bark of a tree, the bed of a river; wind and fire where the air that surrounds the earth ceases to exist. No memory, no city, immensely wise in his lack of knowledge, without wondering whether or not he would once again be called to duty or even whether he ever was. His consciousness lost in minimal deaf and blind fragments, finally exempt from pain, struggle, battles, and wars, from the vacuum and the absence of being, powerful or not, man or woman, free or slave in all the meanings of the word, like a nail in the wind, being nowhere, made of nothing, with no truths, altogether good, more good than bread, wise as a stone but without the misfortune of intelligence.

*Translated by Psiche Hughes*

Tomás Rivera

## EVA AND DANIEL

People still remember Eva and Daniel. They were both very good looking, and in all honesty it was a pleasure to see them together. But that's not the reason people remember them. They were very young when they got married or, rather, when they eloped. Her parents hardly got angry at all, and, if they did, it was for a very short time and that was because everyone who knew Daniel liked him very much and had many good reasons to like him. They eloped up north during the county fair that was held every year in Bird Island.

Both families lived on the same ranch. They worked together in the same fields, they went to town in the same truck, and they just about had their meals together; they were that close. That's why no one was surprised when they started going together. And,

## 4 MICROSTORIES

Raúl Brasca

### LOVE 1

She likes love. I don't. I like her, even, clearly, her taste for love. I don't give her love. I give her passion wrapped up in words, many words. She kids herself, believes that it is love and she likes it: She loves the impostor in me. I don't love her and I'm not fooled by appearances, I don't love *her*. What we have is very common: two who persevere together thanks to one feeling that is misunderstood and another that is mistaken. We're happy.

### LOVE 2

He claims that I'm in love while he is only interested in sex. I let him believe it. When his body arouses me, he attributes it to his many words. When my body arouses him, he puts it down to

RAÚL BRASCA

his own ardor. But he loves me. And I let him fool himself because I love him. I know very well that we will be happy as long as he believes that we do not love each other.

*For Marcelo Caruso*

### THE TEST

"Only when it is cut down will you have my daughter," the sorcerer said. The lumberjack looked at the tree's slender stem with a self-satisfied smile. His first, formidable blow lightly grazed the trunk. Another, in the same place, barely deepened the gash. Night had long fallen when the lumberjack collapsed, exhausted. He rested until daybreak, then hacked away all day. And so on, day after day. The cut gradually deepened, but the trunk kept getting thicker. Time passed and the tree's foliage grew lusher, while the girl lost her youth and beauty. At times, the lumberjack would look up to the skies, not knowing that the sorcerer was warding off gales, diverting lightning bolts, and casting away wood-eating blights. The girl's hair turned gray and he kept on cutting. He barely thought about her anymore. Eventually he completely forgot about her. The day the girl died didn't seem any different to him from the previous days. Old now, he continues his fight against the enormous tree. He wouldn't know what else to do: The axe's silence would fill him with terror.

*For Cristina Fernández Barragán, in memoriam*

### THE HOLE

He'd been digging in the sand for three minutes when the hole swallowed up his spade. Disconcerted, the boy looked to his

mother. The woman saw him sink in, ran over in horror, grabbed his hands, and sank with him. Before the other bathers could react, the hole was swallowing up a parasol. They looked at each other in astonishment, saw that they too were converging on the hole and, with an instinct that had been forever buried until now, realized that they couldn't save themselves. It was as natural as dusk: the world turning inside out. Many tried to flee, slowly, with the hopeless apprehension of animals seeking shelter from the storm. But the sand slipped faster and in they all meekly fell. In turn, the hole swallowed up houses, cities, mountains. Just as an unseen hand folds back a shirt sleeve, a powerful force dragged the skin of the world within, turning it inside out. And when the last frayed remnants of seas and lands had been gulped down, the hole swallowed itself. It did not leave so much as a fleeting gap in space: Only the void remained, homogeneous and silent, incontrovertible evidence that the world had always been the other side of nothing.

*Translated by Daniel Tunnard*

*Isabel Allende*

## OUR SECRET

She let herself be caressed, drops of sweat in the small of her back, her body exuding the scent of burnt sugar, silent, as if she divined that a single sound could nudge its way into memory and destroy everything, reducing to dust this instant in which he was a person like any other, a casual lover she had met that morning, another man without a past attracted to her wheat-colored hair, her freckled skin, the jangle of her gypsy bracelets, just a man who had spoken to her in the street and begun to walk with her, aimlessly, commenting on the weather and the traffic, watching the crowd, with the slightly forced confidence of her countrymen in this foreign land, a man without sorrow or anger, without guilt, pure as ice, who merely wanted to spend the day with her, wandering through bookstores and parks, drinking coffee, celebrating the