

THE FINAL SOLITUDE OF THE POET ANTONIO MACHADO

(Memories of his Brother, José)

(Part 5)

ANECDOTES... (CONTINUED)

As I have mentioned in an earlier part of this work, ever since Antonio was a child he had an extraordinary fondness for the theater, a fondness which continued during his entire life. There were many times when he performed as an amateur actor in the house of some friends, and later in rented halls where they were able to charge admission. In the Salon Zorilla which was very popular at the time, he performed two very different types of role. One was that of the intransigent father of a young protagonist in the play “Sea and Sky” by Guimera. The other was that of a worried Don Juan in a comic piece by Don Miguel Echegaray, brother of the well-known Don José.

He did very well in both parts, and particularly in the comic play, since Antonio always had a natural sense of humor.

There was one occasion when this occupation took him to Getafe, a town near Madrid, to play the part of the King Don Pedro de Aragon in a drama of José Echegaray entitled “In the Bosom of Death.” The company was going to perform this somber drama on a Sunday afternoon. We thought that once the play was finished, they would at least pay for our return train tickets. But man proposes and...

So thinking that everything had been arranged with the theater owner, we set out for Getafe. However, it turned out that no one had spoken to him and, when we arrived, the theater was closed and dark. At once, an effort was made to find that important personage so he would open the theater—oh, the keys of the kingdom!—and we could perform the tragic drama. It was also necessary to take into account that another train would soon arrive bringing a large box and an immense trunk with all the costumes, the coats of mail, swords, helmets, etc., that were needed to present this intense tragedy. Just then the wig-maker arrived saying that all the efforts to find the theater owner had failed, so it would be impossible to hold the performance.

Exasperated and disappointed, we had to return to the train station. On the way, the frustrated King Don Pedro heard some townspeople whispering:

“There is one of the actors who is leaving so he won’t have to perform.”

The Monarch told us this on the station platform. And that was when another conflict broke out. When a check was made of all the money each person had, it became clear that most of us would be obliged to return to Madrid on foot. Only one young girl and the wig-maker, who was almost seventy years old, would be able to return by train.

And that was made possible by the generosity of the Poet who did not hesitate to give them his last three pesetas.

Then, shortly after they left on the train for Madrid—oh, irony!—we were forced to step back onto the sidewalk of the platform by the noisy arrival of the train carrying the trunks with the clothing and the weapons of King Don Pedro and Count of Urgelez, and all the props that were needed to present this historical drama in the town of Getafe. Just then, the theater owner came running through the door to the station platform, shouting loudly that we could perform the play. And in fact, we could already hear the beat of a drum accompanying the announcement that later that night Echegaray's drama, "In the Bosom of Death," would be presented.

King Don Pedro was dismayed when he heard the sound of the drumming and the announcement; he looked first at the trunks and boxes, which were now on the platform, then at the theater owner and, making a momentous decision, he started to depart while majestically whistling—I say whistling because he moved quickly down the tracks—followed by the Count of Argelez, the protagonist of the conflict of the drama which we were seeing in that moment. Of course, the rest of us vassals followed without a murmur.

The astonished theater owner collapsed bodily onto one of the boxes as he watched the theatrical exit of the entire company.

As we were making our rapid journey down the tracks night was beginning to fall. While stumbling, and sometimes slipping down the sides of the stony embankment which supported the tracks and, from time to time, colliding with telegraph posts, we all finally arrived in Madrid without performing the drama, which it would have been better to call "The Rigors of Misfortune."

It was incidents like that this that resulted from his fondness for the theater.

As a matter of fact, it was after midnight when we arrived at our destination and we still hadn't eaten a bite. That being the case, we decided unanimously to pawn a silver-handled cane belonging to the Director of our company, Ricardo Calvo. Even though he hadn't dedicated himself seriously to the theater he had this type of experience. As a result, we ate very well—we stuffed ourselves, eating lunch, dinner and supper all at once. And, we were thrilled with the adventure.

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In spite of his apparent seriousness, the Poet's nature was always welcoming and friendly. His natural openness was proverbial, as was his kindness. He used to joke with our family's seamstress, a very good woman whom we all remember since childhood. Her name was Mariana, and she was like family to us. Her parents once had a good position, and she would mention that whenever she had a chance, as a consolation for her present adversity.

Since she was very skilled, she got work in several different homes. In one of them there were several young girls of whom she always spoke with great praise and affection. One day she arrived at our house very upset. She said that the girls were soon to leave for Paraguay, of all places, where their parents were being transferred.

In order to get her mind off the subject of her preoccupation, Antonio said to her as a joke:

“Mariana, show us the picture of these wonderful girls—I remember they were very lovely.”

She immediately showed him the photographs. He regarded them for a few moments very solemnly and seriously and, since she was obviously waiting for him to praise them, he told her:

“And this is what is going to Paraguay? Let them go... with God’s blessing!”

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Our good mother used to tell the story of how, when he was little, Antonio used to strike the nursemaid who was holding him in her arms if she began to laugh very loudly. Of course, then she would laugh even more, and he would become even angrier.

Here we see already that, ever since he was a child, he already had this aversion and antipathy to certain rude types of laughter like uncontrolled guffaws or giggling. On many occasions he mentioned the unpleasant effect of this repugnant laughter, and he said it made him think of when he had seen a burro lying on the grass with its belly up, while it was braying and kicking its feet in the air.

In reality, when these people who, as in the vulgar saying “bust a gut laughing,” begin an uncontrolled shaking which goes through their entire body it becomes necessary to get away from them in order to avoid becoming a victim of what we might dare to call “animal dilation.”

Antonio thought this kind of, let’s call it “laughing electrification” in some people had a deleterious effect on their face since it would eventually cause them to have the unfortunate appearance of having aged prematurely.

Our mother remembers a time while he was little and had just begun to talk when one afternoon in Seville there was a very strong windstorm. He was listening, somewhat fearful and bemused by the noise of the wind that was rattling the doors and the windows, and she said to him: “Dear Jesus, what a hurricane!” Antonio repeated like an echo: “A cane, a cane,” and kept on listening.

How typical this is of Antonio who was always fascinated by sounds and listened to them with great attention. It was one of the things that helped him feel close to nature.

One must consider the air which is only seen when it appears in large quantities, like the blue sky which looks azure above the ground. It is something which continually surrounds us, but we don't see it.

When wind is violent it not only knocks at our doors but blows them wide open, producing in us a strange sensation of terrible power. At that time it would have been something that made Antonio cling to his mother, the door of salvation for every child. Although these experiences occurred during the Poet's early childhood, they made an indelible impression which will eventually appear very clearly in his work.

The air we feel when it becomes active, as it were, will become an important element in his work; this will help him give different shades of meaning to reality, as part of his unique interpretation of nature. At other times it will help elaborate the complex states of consciousness he is trying to express.

He will start by indicating those sensations that are related to nature:

.....
of the wind that is perfumed by springtime
.....
..... The wind was bringing
the smell of roses, the sound of bells ringing...

Then later, when fall arrives:

The warm breath of autumn winds...

Or in winter:

..... the freezing wind
and the coming of night...

And finally, there is the wind that resounds in a stanza from "Alvargonzalez":

Wind rattles the door,
the shutters tremble,
and a long, hollow moan
echoes in the chimney.

Here the voice of the wind, which echoes in the frozen darkness and disquiets the pitiless hearts of the evil sons who assassinated their father, is a tragic lament that enters through cracks in the doors and windows and moans in the hollow depths of the chimney, before it continues howling over the accursed fields of Alvargonzalez.

How different this is from "the wind that is perfumed by springtime." Not even Aeolus could have managed it better, or with more skill, than these winds of our Poet.

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Antonio never really had much sympathy for animals, and this explains why they awakened so little interest in him, as well as the annoyance they sometimes caused him. As for dogs, all his life he was their declared enemy. He said they were an animal whose servility was truly repugnant. An animal that barked at everything, and especially at those who have suffered a misfortune.

Neither did he have a much better opinion of their masters. And besides, these animals awakened a feeling of panic in him. He was terrified by the idea that he could be bitten, since in spite of the continued protests of these dog-owners, he was afraid that it could happen much more easily than they expected.

So when the owner of one of these animals would try to calm him, saying:

“Don’t worry, Don Antonio. He doesn’t bite.”

It never convinced him to feel safe.

And he would say:

“Of course he wouldn’t bite you, but as for... anyone else. Watch out!”

His aversion for them was so strong that whenever he would see a dog on his side of the street he would immediately cross to the other side. And this is because, in his mind, he had a terrible fear of the horrible effects of rabies that was spread by these animals. For that reason, he sometimes even hesitated to go out into the country for fear of running into a dog unexpectedly.

I will never forget the time he went to visit well-know singer; because his house was under construction, it was necessary to cross over a large plank which made a bridge that ended at the doorway. As he was trying not to loose his balance while crossing over the plank, a very large dog rushed at him barking furiously. You wouldn’t believe how quickly he crossed over and arrived at the door. He went through in a flash, while complaining loudly to the singer about the house and about the dog.

But even though he never felt any love for members of the canine race, he never wanted to see them mistreated.

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Here we must also make note of something which was very characteristic of him, which was the aggravation he always felt when he had to use any sort of mechanism. This was something that annoyed him very much. He felt great admiration for the usefulness and the cleverness of their inventors, but since in his hands they frequently malfunctioned he felt a certain dislike for them.

If, for example, there was some sort of lock where he was able to use a key to open it, after that he could not turn the key to close it again. Then, at other times, he would be able to close it, but then was unable to open it again.

One time when he was quite late for breakfast, I went to his room to see what was happening. When I asked him, he answered disgustedly that he had spent the last half hour struggling with “the accursed key” but, in spite of his efforts, could not get the door open. He finally had to slide the key under the door so it could be opened from the outside and free him from that nightmare.

These problems which would not have been so important for other people, for him assumed proportions that were almost tragic. I also remember how he struggled with the only collar pin of his shirt—the only one he never lost—that he could not get to coincide with the button holes. Then I would hear him exclaim desperately:

“Who was the crook that invented this piece of junk?”

Once when visiting a friend who, because of his financial problems was forced to occupy the highest part of the house (the attic), Antonio had to take the elevator, something which he did not relish doing. Shortly before we got to the upper floor, the mechanism in which we were rising stopped dead. Then, without thinking of what he was doing—the danger of falling, or that the elevator would suddenly start rising again—he leaped through the door and rushed to reach the landing of the stairway. After a while he calmed down, but he continued to complain about all the elevators that ever existed, or would exist.

On another occasion, while he was changing position in his bed before getting up, it collapsed. Hearing the noise it made, I rushed to see what had happened, and there on the floor he told me:

“These beds are a real wonder; the bedspring fits perfectly and is calculated with mathematical precision, but... God save us from having to sleep in them, and above all from making the slightest movement. Just as mathematically, a minute more or a minute less, you always end up on the floor.”

He called these beds: *the scientific beds*.

The conflicts caused by any of these mechanisms always upset him.

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And now I am going to relate the two most important anecdotes from the Poet's life. The first, which is the most fundamental, he tells us himself, and I will copy his words here verbatim:

“Another event of my life which was also important happened before I was born. It happened that several dolphins lost their way and, following the tide, entered the Guadalquivir River until they got to Seville. Many people from the city were drawn to the riverbank by the unusual spectacle; there were young ladies and young men, and among them were my parents who saw each other there for the first time. It was a sunny afternoon which I have thought or I have dreamed that I could remember.” The second event which he related some years after it happened, was the following;

“When he was a little boy he was struck by the horse of a private coach when he crossed the street in the center of Madrid. But it was his great good fortune that what could have been a terrible accident, did not do him the least harm... He said that it was almost a miracle that the horse had given him only a glancing blow so that when he fell the wheels of the coach only brushed him. He added that the owner of the vehicle jumped out terrified, asking if he was hurt. But he ran away as fast as he could so as not attract attention and cause a crowd to gather around him.”

To search for the true meaning of these events would take us far astray, so far... that we might never find our way.

But then, as a topic to rack your brains over—as Mairena would say to his students—it would not be a total waste of time.

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It was very natural of our Poet never to try to avoid the least effort in whatever he proposed to do. And with so much kindness and consideration for others, he always exercised the most rigorous discipline with himself. This meant that whenever he was trying to accomplish something that was important to him, he took every type of precaution imaginable so that it would have the greatest possible success. In what follows I will relate an anecdote which shows, or tries to show, how carefully he watched what happened to his work once it was given to the printer. I am referring to his real horror that there might be misprints.

It upset him so much when they appeared in his books that before each new edition came out he always asked to see all the galley proofs. And he would not give his approval until he was absolutely convinced that all the mistakes had been corrected.

In order to do this, he would read his words over and over again. He would start at the bottom of the galley and read until he reached the first line, and then he would repeat the process in reverse. Even then, it was sometimes not possible to avoid errors.

I remember once when he was correcting proofs he sat up and suddenly stabbed his pen into the paper. This misprint really “set him off”; instead of *juventud* (youth) they had put *jumentud* (stupidity). This occurred at the end of a paragraph which should read: “Therefore I have always said to young people: enjoy your youth.”

And now I want to mention one of his exams. This was for a course where he was usually quite well-prepared. It was an exam over a lesson on Natural Science where they were speaking of an animal, and the author of the text they were studying concluded by saying: "...because the mouth and the anus are both on the same side" and these were the only words he remembered.

And now here is what happened when the exam in his course came to this lesson. As he was struggling to remember the description of this animal which he had completely forgotten, in order to jog his memory the professor suddenly said to him:

"Yes, man, yes, this animal is distinguished because the mouth and the anus..."

"Are both on the same side," the Poet answered without the slightest hesitation.

This quick answer, given with such rapid certainty, pleased the professor so much he also had no hesitation in giving him a resounding A plus.

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We all know that there is no professor, teacher or assistant who in the course of his career has not sooner or later had to appear before the Ministry of Public Instruction. As might be expected, the Poet did not enjoy appearing in places like the Ministry; however, to support his colleagues he accompanied them on rare occasions. Of course, when this happened, he always tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, remaining behind the others and as far away as possible from the front of the delegation.

As I write these lines I can remember the ninth delegation of that day, of which Antonio was a member, which went to see the Honorable Minister of Public Instruction to request a salary raise for the entire teaching faculty.

This delegation was also combined with another delegation of female teachers who naturally supported the request for a raise in the salaries, but were also asking for something that I can't remember, regarding the seniority scale which, as we know, has been a nightmare for most teachers.

When the teachers of both sexes were (*finally!*) able to enter the office of the Minister, they had already waited in the lobby for more than two hours after eight other delegations which preceded us. I say "us" because I was also called upon to participate, modestly, in the group that was patiently waiting on that occasion.

The Minister who was *attending us*—if I may say it that way—had a booming voice which it was impossible not to hear from just about everywhere.

It had earlier been unanimously agreed that the female teachers would speak for the rest of us and also that the most curvaceous should stand in front, since we knew beforehand that the Minister liked well-endowed women. Among them were some that

were as ugly as the Eumenides. Unfortunately, these were precisely the ones who were able to speak most eloquently and persuasively when they presented our petitions.

The Minister who had already received eight previous delegations that morning, listened to our request practically lying down in his chair, with his hand on his cheek. He listened uninterestedly to the women teachers who, in spite of their ugliness, had been chosen for their greater eloquence. But the Minister's naughty eyes wandered around distractedly, fixing on the enticing attributes of the most attractive teachers. When the group lead by the ugly ones realized that the Minister was completely captivated by his perverse contemplation of their attractive companions, they raised their voices so they could get his attention. That was a big mistake! The Minister sat up in his chair and, resting his hand on the inkwell nearest him, he burst out in a stentorian voice, saying "That's enough! We're finished here."

The entire group of men and women teachers retreated toward the door. Antonio and I were the closest, and we were the first to hurry away.

When we reached the stairs and were somewhat recovered from the impact of that rejection, Antonio said to me:

"Did you see that jerk!"

In spite of the fact that he found it very unpleasant to be part of these delegations, as an official member of the teaching staff, this was something that helped him solve his financial problems (modestly, of course). And this only happened after several previous attempts to find a way of escaping from the Bohemian lifestyle which in some ways was imposed by his circumstances.

In those heroic times (I am referring to the time when his poverty was greatest) Antonio came to the realization that it was absolutely necessary to find some way of making a successful living.

He first decided to try to compete for a position in the Bank of Spain. However, the preparations that were necessary demanded a great deal of effort. He applied himself to the task with his usual good-will and self-discipline. But there was a serious problem: one of the essential considerations of being accepted for the job was to have an excellent handwriting, one which was almost calligraphic, as well as having the ability to copy the statistics for a receipt.

The Poet, who was always capable of accomplishing whatever he proposed, was eventually able to improve his terrible handwriting. That was how, when he later wanted to write clearly, he was able to use an acceptable cursive handwriting. In order to do this, he attended one of several preparatory Academies that had just opened in Madrid.

It must have been during the dead of winter, since the occasion I am referring to happened "On a cold and gloomy winter afternoon." I had gone to meet him in one of

the classes he was taking just as it was about to end, when the Director of the Academy entered with an article of clothing in his hand, saying:

“Gentlemen, who is the owner of this overcoat that was left on the coat rack yesterday?”

A complete silence filled the classroom following these words. Everyone looked at each other with puzzled expressions, but no one recognized it as theirs and the Director left to ask the same question in the other classes.

When we got home our mother asked him:

“Antonio, where is your overcoat?” and he answered very surprised, as though speaking to himself:

“Of course... that was my overcoat the Director of the Academy just showed us.”

What I am not able to remember for sure is, if he was ever able to reclaim it again. I think not, in spite of the fact that cold winters in Madrid are a serious matter.

And as for working in the bank, he eventually gave up the idea. It is obvious that it was not in a bank Account Book where the Poet was going to write his *Solitude*.

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I also want to mention a custom that he may have inherited from our paternal grandfather, of referring to certain persons and things in a colorful way which sometimes seemed rather arbitrary. Who knows by what mysterious path these capricious references entered his mind. But when one thinks about the persons who were re-baptized in this way, one can see that the nickname was often something which was just the opposite of the person's character.

I remember very well an old fellow who was a tailor and who boasted that he had made a frockcoat for a gentleman who was humpbacked. For this “expert of design” he chose the name, “Hyperbole.”

For a friend who liked to put on airs and boast that he was the patron of an actress he gave the designation, “The Great Protector.”

The automobile of our close friend Ricardo Calvo, the renowned actor of classical theater, he called “The Stradivarius.”

When he talked about a certain professor who was a member of the Teachers Conference, he always referred to him as “Not tomorrow,” a phrase that this gentleman often used to put off whatever was proposed.

He gave the name Don Lobsterback to a doctor with a red face who was the nephew of an older member of the Academy.

To what I have said previously, I will add that whenever it was possible he tried to avoid those who tried to invade his intimate privacy, and this was even more true of the tremendous bores who unfortunately show up so often in the life of those who are never safe in their Ivory Tower.

In the following anecdote we will see the way in which he was able to escape from one of these.

Often during the summer when it was getting dark he would go with me to walk down the Via Castellana, and we would sometimes sit down for a moment near the Hippodrome before continuing our walk.

On one of these afternoons we were approached by one of those bores who, once they are seated, refuse to leave. Since there didn't seem to be any way to avoid it, Antonio seemed to resign himself. But then he evidently came to a decision and he quickly stood up, saying:

“Let's go stretch our legs for a moment.”

And he proceeded to walk so rapidly that after a while our unlucky companion became quite exhausted.

When the poor fellow, who was sweaty and out of breath, finally said good-bye with a tremulous voice, Antonio said to him:

“Be sure to come by here again, and we'll take another nice walk. Good-bye!”

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Here we ought to make note of the Poet's great impatience, which eventually changed to anxiety if he had to wait for something. Nevertheless, he was sometimes able to convert these feelings into a patience without limits.

And now we must describe the great impatience Antonio and I felt one summer evening when we were waiting for our close friend Ricardo Calvo, who was always Ricky for us. I am speaking of none other than the incomparable Segismundo of Calderon's "Life is a Dream." A worthy actor who always was able to achieve the best and most sensitive interpretation of the greatest characters from our classical theater, and also in foreign theaters. Now that I am older and I remember the days of our youth, I only wish it were possible to relive the great satisfaction of those theatrical successes he was able to achieve, from that time to the present. I repeat, if only that were possible!

It happened that on one of those memorable summer nights when Ricky was to meet us in a café (Manuel was out of Madrid at the moment), we found ourselves in a very awkward situation when it came time to pay for what we had eaten. Between the two brothers we barely had enough to pay the exact amount of our bill.

However, we were partly relieved thinking that Ricky, who was of more ample means, would soon come to join us and would help us get out of the unfortunate situation we were in. And so, while we waited for him, talking of everything under the sun, we heard the clock—which we kept looking at anxiously—strike one and Ricky had still not appeared, which was not like him.

The café was becoming deserted and finally we were the only ones who remained. The waiters were now beginning to give us grim and meaningful looks, indicating that we should leave since it was time to close the establishment. Almost all of the waiters had removed the aprons they wore while they worked and had passed by us on their way to their respective homes. The only one who remained was the unfortunate waiter who was responsible for our table. In a state of desperation, he grabbed a broom and began to sweep, raising a large cloud of dust all around us, and then he began to turn the chairs upside down and place them on the tables. As this was going on around us, we felt like we were under siege. And finally, he turned out the light. This was the definitive sign that we must vacate the premises! And still no Ricky... Then, figuring the cost of our meal for the umpteenth time, Antonio said to me:

“Confound it! We don’t have more than five cents for the tip...” as he dropped the coins onto the marble table top.

We called the waiter to pay the bill. The latter came over to us like a wild beast who was chasing his prey. His expression was formidable. Then as Antonio paid him, I heard him mutter:

“You can shove your miserable little tip!”

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One of the things that most irritated our Poet were the “acclamations,” as it were, of some people at moments when the best thing they could have done was to be quiet and enjoy the beauty of nature.

I remember one evening high up in the Guadarramas; there was a little hut among the rocks where we were going to spend the night before continuing our excursion to the Poular on the next day, and on the way there we encountered a married couple we had never met, who told us they were going to spend several days in that area.

Since it was getting cold, they wrapped themselves in their blankets and loaned some others to us. We were making our way between rocks and crags. All of us were walking silently. Antonio was enthralled by the beauty of the sunset at the end of day.

Suddenly, the young couple burst into song, and at the top of their lungs they began to sing a song from Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*. I can't begin to describe the expression that came over the Poet's face.

When we were going to sleep, he whispered to me:

"Did you see what a pair of idiots they were! Imagine disturbing the charm of nature in these mountains with some bits of music. Even if it was good!" he added.

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Somewhere around the year 1900 the two poets, Antonio and Manuel, with another writer whose name I don't recall, were working on the "Dictionary of Related Ideas" that was then directed by the learned Language Professor, Eduardo Benot. It is this third collaborator—he was called "the Egg-seller" because of his trade—who is the origin of this anecdote I am about to recount, in which Antonio was hardly more than a spectator.

The two of us happened to be walking through the ascending and descending streets of the neighborhood of Madrid commonly referred to as Lavapies, when we met this friend of Antonio, the one he called "the Egg-seller." He was about to pass by without seeing us, but he had such a troubled expression that it shocked us. The Poet stopped and, putting his hand on the shoulder of his shabby coat, he said to him: "Where are you going with such a worried expression?" His friend came to a halt, somewhat surprised. He was a short, skinny little fellow, with a face the color of coffee with milk adorned by a sparse beard of indistinct colors.

Except that, at that moment, there was a strange light in his eyes.

"Oh, Don Antonio... I didn't see you... How glad I am to meet you! I need to ask your advice about something: but first I have to see my father-in-law to clear up a problem at the egg store..."

His father-in-law was a nasty man, a real brute with a very bad temper, and the bane of all the egg-dealers of Lavapies.

"I would be really grateful," he continued, "if you could go with me to the shop, if it wouldn't be too much bother for you."

"Okay, we'll go with you, but wouldn't it be better if we went to the café first? Don't you think that's a good idea?"

"No. It's just a matter of arriving and dealing with it. Right after that, I'll go with you. Just a moment, nothing more," he answered.

"All right... if that's the way it is, let's go!"

But as Antonio was already aware of the difficult relations between the friend and his father-in-law, while we were on the way in order to ease tensions he tried to calm his friend's bad feelings and grievances, recommending that he be resigned and tolerant in the face of the proverbial rudeness and bad temper of his father-in-law.

Finally, since what is begun must also have an ending, we arrived at the egg store and, crossing the narrow street where the shop was located, we told him we would wait for him on the opposite sidewalk.

"All right," he answered. "I'll take care of things right away. It will just be a moment."

Hardly any time had passed when we began to hear the father-in-law's loud and angry voice which was quite audible where we were waiting. Then, a moment later we were able to see that the father-in-law had given our poor friend such a tremendous kick he came flying out of the door so rapidly that his coat was lifted up into the air like a pair of wings.

Bruised and battered, he finally came to rest on the sidewalk where we were waiting, trying to put on his coat which had been dragged in the dirt. With a serious expression—while masking an almost irrepressible urge to laugh—Antonio asked him:

"But... what on earth happened? I said you shouldn't... But forget that... let's just go and sit down for a while in the café."

"Sit down, now? Antonio, that's impossible! Impossible!" he told us while he gingerly felt the area where he had received the colossal kick.

I will add here that this "Egg-seller" was also a very well-educated writer who had married the daughter of that *animal*, no one knows whether for her plumpness, or for her Papa's money. Probably... for the first.

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I also remember another friend of Antonio who, without knowing him very well, had the strange idea of wanting to make him the chaperone of his daughter, Rosita, on a trip when she was returning from Segovia to Madrid.

It was common knowledge that the Poet was teaching in that provincial capital near Madrid, and that he would travel every Saturday and on holidays to be with his family until Sunday. The good father hoped to take advantage of this situation.

I normally went to wait for him at the station, and then I would go with him to a café that was opposite the Royal Theater where we joined a group of friends.

On one of those cold winter nights in Madrid I was waiting as usual for the Poet's arrival on the train from Segovia. Almost all the other travelers had gotten off the train and started off in different directions when Antonio, who usually traveled in the final car, joined me and we walked through the door from the train platform into the waiting-room of the station.

We had hardly taken the first steps between the passengers who were waiting to board the next train when a thin gentleman with a sallow face using a cane, which to me looked more like a stick, broke through the line of waiting passengers moving quickly toward Antonio with an anxious expression.

"How was the trip, Mr. Machado?" and the anxiety changed to anguish, "but where is my daughter... where is Rosita?"

"Rosita?" answered Antonio, "Ah, yes... she'll be coming a little later..."

"But, didn't you get my letter?"

"Uh... no," Antonio replied.

With that, the impatient father rushed forward out onto the train platform through the crowd of passengers leaving in the opposite direction.

"What was that all about? What's wrong with that fellow?" I asked him, puzzled.

"Well, as a matter of fact, that gentleman (here he gave the name of the father) wrote to me, begging me to accompany his daughter on the trip to Madrid. But when I set out to fulfill that mission, I found she had placed herself strategically in a dark corner of the train car next to a young artilleryman with whom she was obviously madly in love. There were plenty of empty seats in the car, but frankly I didn't have the courage to take one of them. So I backed out cautiously and went to sit in another car; there was no way I was going to disturb that idyll. But now I'll tell you the worst part. The father of this Rosita is a very jealous man who, whenever he goes somewhere, leaves his wife and daughter under lock and key. I think that's the real reason he wrote to me; he wanted me to watch over his daughter and guard her safety. Of course she undoubtedly thought it would be hard to find a better guard than her artilleryman!"

"You did the right thing," I said when he finished, but I don't know why for some mysterious unconscious reason I remembered the father's cane which looked like a stick.

* * * * *

It was on one of those Sundays (now so far away) when we used to go and visit the distinguished Language Professor, Don Eduardo Benot, the former Minister of Public Instruction for the Republic, who was by then almost a hundred years old.

With the natural swiftness of youth which Abel Martin refers to with the words: “Hello, yesterday’s child,” Manuel, Antonio, and the present writer were walking with our close and inseparable friends, Ricky Calvo and Antonio de Zayas, the son of the Marques de Cavacelice, who later became the Duke of Amalfi and, as part of his diplomatic career, Ambassador. He was also a learned writer and poet who wrote interesting and unusual books of poetry, among which I can remember, *Byzantine Jewels* and the first one he published, *White Nights*, etc.

The vehement character of this close friend, which often led to heated discussions, stood out as quite the opposite of Antonio, who was quiet and reserved.

That afternoon (as on many other occasions) he was holding forth, commenting indignantly on the recent news that the shepherd-poet Salvador Rueda was going to be admitted to the Spanish Academy of Language. I think everyone will recall, some more some less, that Salvador Rueda once used to be a goat herder. This situation (which had just become known) created such a great state of indignation in the Royalist sentiments of our son of the Marques that he could hardly stand it. We were all listening to him, smiling at his vehement comments, when we arrived at the house of the Professor we were going to visit. Antonio, who had been walking silently by his side as though totally oblivious to what his friend was saying, suddenly stopped and with his usual tone of mocking seriousness told him:

“Look here, Antonio, all these things you have been saying are just fine, but what I don’t understand very well is why the members of this learned Society need a herder, when nobody there has any goats.”

ONE WINTER NIGHT

This happened very late one night during the prime of Modernism. We were all sitting around a large round table with a cold draft that seemed to be coming from every direction, since by that time the brazier had gone out and the tongs only stirred the ashes of a fire that was extinguished. The oil lamp was sputtering, sending shadows over the room that sometimes almost reached the ceiling and at others became rapidly smaller as they receded to the floor. Our bodies were also casting strange shadows on the wall, which first joined together and then gradually got smaller as though they were receding into the distance on a movie screen.

It must have been about three in the morning and those who were gathered in that room were the ones who were mentioned most frequently in the literary world of that time, and are still discussed in the present.

In that room of the Poets’ house that night were Manuel and Antonio, and with them was Valle-Inclán who was thin and pale in contrast with his very black beard and his high shirt collar. Also present was Paco Villaespesa with his dark face and with his long locks of black hair parted in the middle and falling on either side of his forehead.

Antonio was wearing his long, wrinkled housecoat and Manuel, who was more cold-blooded, wore a sheepskin jacket with the collar turned up, and he had also put on a black silk cap with a visor. And since I could not see myself from outside, I am excused from describing myself... fortunately.

Valle-Inclán had just finished reading us a passage from a book he was writing, and although the others had already praised it, he tried to tell them that it would receive even more praise when it was followed by, he said: "All this started with the death of Monsignor..." and so forth.

When he was finished reading, the others returned to their usual positions and continued their work. Antonio, always dissatisfied, read and re-read what he had written, and from time to time he erased and wrote something else... only to erase again. As usual, he was completely absent from everything that surrounded him. Villaespesa, with his face practically touching the papers, almost seemed to be writing with his red-rimmed myopic eyes. Every so often he became very enlivened and repeatedly dipped his pen into the inkwell. Manuel strained over the paper with a pen in his hand, struggling to find the one, definitive word that would conclude his poem, or perhaps to discover another that would open new horizons. Of course these words were signs of things that sometimes even he, himself hardly understood.

The cigarette smoke floated above their heads, blurring the outlines so that, seen from a distance, it would seem they were surrounded by the clouds of Mount Olympus... for Modernists.

All were taken up with their thoughts and oblivious to the cold that was filling the room... when... all of a sudden something unexpected brought them back to reality, a disquieting reality... A loud doorbell had just rung in the depths of the house and in the solitary silence of the night it made everyone feel unsettled. Following that there was a deathlike silence outside the room, which then was repeated inside it. We all looked at each other with a nervousness which was impossible to hide. Valle-Inclán exclaimed:

"Who on earth could be coming here at this time of night?"

Antonio remained in his inner kingdom and seemed not to have noticed anything; not so Villaespesa and Manuel, and it was obvious on their faces they did not like this unexpected arrival, so similar to that of the Comendador of Ulloa in Tirso de Molina's *Don Juan Tenorio*.

Everyone looked instinctively down the hallway which was as black as the mouth of a wolf. Suddenly, a tiny light appeared, carried in the outstretched hand of the maidservant who, with her unkempt hair and wrapped in a housecoat, was carrying a candle which she shielded so it would not go out before she could open the door.

We heard her unlock the door which was the only barrier to the untimely invasion of this phantom of the night. Then, as the door opened, standing on the threshold and

surrounded by the black shadows of the stairwell, was a very large man, his face partially concealed by a scarf wrapped around his neck, holding a lantern in one hand with a bunch of keys and a folded blue paper in the other, which he handed to the frightened young girl.

If you haven't guessed it by now, oh reader, it was the Night Watchman who was delivering an urgent telegram.

Manuel quickly took it from the hand of the servant and, on seeing the address, handed it to Villaespesa to whom it was addressed. With a clumsy and nervous motion the latter opened it and began to read, almost touching the lines with his myopic eyes.

“Look, Manuel, it's from Pellicer. Here's what he says: Work on Journal finished. Arriving there tomorrow.”

Then, Valle-Inclán said, laughing:

“I thought it was a ghost, or something... So now we can relax.”

And Manuel:

“But really, that idiot could have chosen a better time to announce his bloody accomplishment.”

“No, no, Manuel,” Villaespesa said, “that's the way Pellicer is. Yes, he's a good fellow! But just the same... he could have picked a better time!...”

Table of Contents:

http://armandfbaker.com/biography_toc.html