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All translations from Spanish by the author

Hands

from a work in progress

She came in with a bird no bigger than a baby's fist in her mouth; perhaps it had fallen from a nest, and she had picked it up from among the stones at the foot of a wall covered in tall bamboo. The bird was already badly hurt—not chewed or bleeding, but with a broken wing and one leg nearly destroyed. I tried to help it. I did not even know how, but I would like to remember that I tried. When I pulled it from her mouth, she did not resist; she opened her jaws and let me slide my fingers almost entirely inside. I saw it in my hand, in the palm of my hand. I immediately thought it could not be saved. I do not know how I reached that judgment, and now I question it. I decided to kill it, not with an object, but with my hands. My deepest instinct told me that crushing it with my foot, or perhaps with a stone, was not reasonable. I wanted then to break its neck, as I had seen done with chickens. It seemed the easiest way—only because I had never done it. When I twisted its head completely while holding the body firmly in one hand, the animal seemed to remain alive—I cannot know if it was—so fear and pain made me tear its head off in a single pull. Both parts still moved for a few seconds. With its tiny head in one hand and the rest of its body in the other, I cried, the dog beside me watching, puzzled by my grief. I threw it in the trash, and I was never the same.

A Minor Gesture

from a work in progress

I have never had an epileptic seizure. I do not have epilepsy, so there would be no reason for me to have experienced one. If I had, it would have been discovered; I would have been diagnosed—diagnosed with something, I don't know what, but something that does something for that something no one fully understands. It is the first "episode," or "attack," that comes to mind when I try to find a comparison for the initial sensation. They say epileptics feel, for a few brief seconds, a peculiar "sensation," if it can even be called that—something before which nothing can be done, and which many forget afterward. I do not forget it. If I try, I can almost reproduce it. I rarely do, except when I want to feel unwell, when there seems no other way out but to prepare for the fall. It is not that I seek the sensation gratuitously when everything is already wrong, but when things begin to shift, when something rushes toward my unconscious and starts devouring it. It is a lack of oxygen—not of air. You can breathe deeply, and that helps only because it forces you to focus on something else, but your body stubbornly insists on telling you that you are not breathing, that you have become a large, flaccid fish out of water whose gills, of course, do not function outside it.

That is the minor gesture.

Then comes the darkness. A profound fear of everything—of anything—that stands like an immovable trench. Sometimes the word *calm* appears. If you are alone, it is less frequent. If you are with someone, it echoes inside an infinite cavern where repetition does nothing but make you close your eyes, hoping the world will disappear. But behind closed eyelids, nothing appears. No images. No visions. No bright colors like those that can accompany pain.

It is not pain. It is a warning. In my case, it is both warning and reminder. And I am grateful not to be holding a weapon. Your temperature drops, or at least that is what it feels like. As if facing an icy wind that does not push or move you, but freezes you entirely. Nothing accompanies you. An anxiety over an answer never received. A disappearance without explanation. A loss for which any response is absurd. Your legs tremble and weaken. The rational thing would be to sit down, but you prefer to feel yourself falling, expecting—of course—to crash against solid concrete. At least that would make sense. Because what you lose is lost for minutes, for hours, for days, for weeks, sometimes for a lifetime. And once you realize that time is passing and your skull is not striking the pavement, but that everything is slowly losing meaning, and a single thought obsesses you until it expels whatever rational instinct remains, you know you will never recover. That there are losses from which you will never be the same. That you will never again be whole. That pain, sorrow, and that hurried breathing have stolen everything you once considered valuable. One day you wake and remember water running over your body. Another day you taste metal. Microseconds before the end, your eardrums burst. Most of the time, you see your slow fall, and finally your head shatter against the sidewalk—but no one notices. If someone were standing across the street, they would see your life scattered over the concrete. They would see someone to whom the world has given the warning to renounce it, yet who remains compelled to stay in it—without belonging to it, and unable to abandon himself.

The Air That Awaits

from a work in progress

To walk around a minefield. To look at it from a distance, doubt in your feet and in your eyes. It is true that you will save yourself several digits in the percentage of being blown to pieces. But what is lost in going around?

First, the vanity of not changing course no matter how dangerous it appears. Because yes, you may indeed be blown into the air that is already waiting for you. But you may also step on a mine and, upon hearing the first click, never move again—waiting for the mine to grow tired of waiting, until bearing your weight becomes absurd and it decides to let you go. Another possibility: that it is a deactivated mine, and you stepped on it without fear, because you were moving so quickly that an explosion beneath your feet would only have propelled you forward. There is, of course, the option—far less probable—of running like a dart through the field and never even stepping on one. Not out of caution, but out of carelessness. Out of your capacity to run across a minefield smiling because someone, something, is waiting for you on the other side. Someone, something, for whom it would be worth the risk of ending up scattered in the air in pieces. And yet, if upon arriving what you believed was waiting were not there, it would have been better to burst like a balloon overcome by pressure, leaving for a few seconds the outline of its eternal shape before it vanishes, as quickly as the sound of its explosion dissolves into the air.

Before Tripa

from a work in progress

"You can go play now," he told the dog jokingly after putting two drops in each eye. The way parents say it once you've finished a chore, or your homework, the way a punishment is lifted and your freedom to do nothing is finally returned to you. The dog remained still, looking at him with her eyes still damp. She rubbed one eyelid with her paw, making a sound close to irritation, and walked toward a corner where she lay down on a red rug with black dots. She began licking one paw, gently nibbling at it, and rested her head softly on the rug, facing the garden window. C ran to the refrigerator to put the medicine away. The dog had a small infection that would disappear in a few days with those drops. Before Choya—the dachshund (sausage dog) with a mild eye infection who would be fine in a few days with just two drops in each eye three times a day—the family had Tripa, another dachshund. Tripa was black with brown paws; Choya is cinnamon-colored. C had always paid more attention than the others to the animals in his house. He simply liked their company and, spending long stretches of time alone, he spoke to them with an almost playful constancy. One day, when someone opened the door, Tripa ran out of the house and a motorcycle ran her over. Fortunately, Tripa died instantly, as one of the motorcycle's wheels passed over her head. C cried, and did not stop crying every day until they managed to adopt another dachshund, whom he decided to name Choya.

C has never seen Choya dig a hole in the yard, so he is certain she does not know how. Of course, he does not ask himself whether someone should have taught her, or whether all *Canis lupus familiaris*, as his illustrated dictionary said, ought to carry that knowledge somewhere in their deepest nature. C's thinking stops at the fact that the dog does not know how to do it, because he has not seen her do it, and so he decides that he will teach her.

For a boy C's age, there is nothing strange about going out into the yard and covering his hands and face with dirt while scratching a hole in the grass, with a sausage dog at his side watching attentively and jumping around him with noticeable excitement. It would be hard to say whether it is strange or merely coincidence that Choya immediately begins digging her own hole.

C's mother will arrive home later and complain that the dog is now making holes in the yard. She can see at least two and will ask C if he is aware of what she calls Choya's mess. C will be watching cartoons and eating a hot dog. He will deny any knowledge of the holes and give half of his hot dog to Choya. Or perhaps Choya will snatch the whole thing from his hand. We will have to wait for his mother to arrive to find out.

Turtle

from a work in progress

I had a turtle. I had several. Never more than two at a time, always in pairs. One always died first, and then the other, perhaps of sadness. The small notions store near my house sold gift boxes the exact size to serve as modest coffins for all my turtles. None went without a funeral. None endured the sorrow of attending her temporary companion's rites without a box to bury. Some were lined with black glossy paper. One box was buried empty, because its necessary inhabitant had simply disappeared from the plastic turtle pond—a horrid green circle with a mound from which a palm tree emerged. The garden of that house was so small that, when burying one of them, I would unearth another. But I buried her again, and thought it was better that way; they would depart accompanied. Around that time, I watched a

film in which someone “said a few words” before a coffin about to be lowered into the ground. I was surprised to realize that I had never said anything to say goodbye to my turtles. As if I had buried white whales, I learned that what is most beautiful refuses explanation.

The Uninhabitable

from a work in progress

The dust from the small white stones at the back of the space reminds him why it had been so long since he last ate in that part of the house. Air, rain, a footstep shift the stones slightly; perhaps they move on their own when no one is watching. When they touch, they barely graze one another—a minute contact that, over time, wears them down, that with enough time would leave them bright, polished: like any contact between two existences. With minimal encounters, both lose something; with many, they smooth each other, or wear away completely and disappear.They produce a fine whitish powder that travels, almost imperceptibly, until it settles over his fish fillet. The bite sticks to the roof of his mouth; he feels the dust on his tongue and along his gums. He sets the food aside, takes a drink from a tall glass. The first swallow rinses his mouth slightly and he spits it onto the terrace boards; the second clears it. He rises from the table and walks toward his studio. At the back hangs a blue painting his former brother-in-law painted and gave him. An abstract painting he considers the last remnant of his marriage, though it was given to them only a few years after they were wed. He still remembers when they decided to hang it in his studio because of its scale. Their second child had not yet been born when F arrived at the house with the painting on his birthday. After the divorce he could have sold it for a considerable sum, but he chose to keep it. His ex-wife never claimed it; she was occupied with other matters no less decisive. The afternoon light enters the studio with studied precision. Between curtains that filter an

opaque glow and a skylight set off from the center of the room, no natural light falls directly on his drafting table or on the painting. One of the large bookshelves receives a thin strip of sun, but he noticed it in time and left a vacant space there, without books. If one sees the empty gap on the shelf, it appears to be waiting to be filled. It is not. That space will remain empty. Perhaps filled with the immaculate presence of what once was there. Of what that space once contained, in some space within that space. Long ago there was a sculpture of a primitive lion carved in wood, but now it rests on a table in his bedroom. Since he shares that room with no one, he has moved there nearly everything that still means something to him.

He returns to the lines already begun. A wide sheet of bond paper now bearing the general idea of the house. Smaller drawings and sketches of details. A wall where the grain of the formwork will leave its particular striation. A window from which an interior garden can be seen. A beam crossing a doorway at the ceiling. Each room distinct. No modulation—only assembly. Separate pieces joined in their peculiar identity. He draws new lines and new walls rise. Double heights emerge. A staircase disappears with a single stroke. A window expands with the pressure of a second line. He removes columns and waits a second to see whether the house collapses beneath the weight of graphite. It holds. The entire house begins lifting itself from the paper. But the family that awaits it slips in. Unsettling. They place furniture where emptiness should remain, arrange the spaces as if they belonged to them, dismantle the house, alter the use of its territories. Tiny figures pass through curved lines that are meant to be doors. He wishes no one would enter. That the house could live on its own. That no one blur it. That it never be inhabited. That nothing disturb it. He wanted the entire project to fold in upon itself, leaving no trace. He wanted absolutely nothing of it to survive. That nothing emerge but vacancy—the clean whiteness of nothingness, the gratuitous perfection of

uselessness. A house that serves no purpose except that: that nothing remain of the one who imagined it, and that it never serve the function for which it was intended. That the emptiness of its spaces endure. That the useless prevails.

What Remains

from Impala. 2021.

Do you really want me to go to there? That common place of loss, of not belonging, or of belonging only within loss. Such an easy play on words—I always thought I would say it better. It sounded better in my head. Anyway, that formula of not being at home anywhere. No, it doesn't bother me. I only ask because it's the most common place people go when they meet a Chilean. Everyone asks you the same thing, or everyone has asked me the same thing. Me, who isn't even Chilean. Just like that: everyone asks me the same thing and I tell them all the same thing—I am no longer Chilean. I was for one year of my life. I am not anymore. Maybe I never was. And yet I am telling you what you want to hear. I am saying what I know you want to hear, in spite of everything. And I will tell you that Chile and my memory are places on the map of what has been lost, on the map of Latin America's dictatorships, of that map that reminds us we are the cone below the Equator. And you see, now I am going to tell you about my father, and Carlos, and Raymundo. And when I finish speaking I will be uncomfortable, uncertain, and I will think that life was fairer, and I will think that life was fairer at least to others. And life is fair to no one. Because if life were about justice, we would call things by their name. I have both passports, but I do not have both countries. I left Chile when I was very young. Very, very young. Sometimes I think I would like to go back and recover perhaps what once was—not my life, but my parents' life. But my parents are not willing to go back, because they think it would mean returning to the dictatorship, to bad

memories, to pain, to loss. And I respect that. Two of my father's brothers, Carlos and Raymundo, died during the dictatorship. Older than he was—not much older, but older. Carlos was shot in the head. Not executed. And my parents say that as if it were some kind of license granted to Carlos. And it was worse, I think, because he was shot in the street. During a demonstration the army did not fire more than three or four shots—warnings. One of those warnings turned out to be fatal for Carlos. The bullet entered at the base of his neck and came out almost through his forehead, a little lower, near the eye. I know this because my father tells it the way someone tells the anecdote of a small child, the way someone tells how a child once put his hand into the candles of a birthday cake and burned himself, and learned that fire was fire. And everyone laughs. And the child who is there now, and who is already eighteen or twenty years old, knows that that was when he learned what fire was. But Carlos did not learn what a bullet was. Carlos did not learn what death was. My father never learned it either. He never has. Death hurts him too much. Of Raymundo nothing remains. Well, my father sometimes says he may have gone on to live his life, that he is in hiding somewhere, that he no longer wanted anything to do with us. But I don't believe that. I am more cynical—or more realistic, if you prefer to see it that way. I believe that of Raymundo there remain, at most, some bones. A shoe in the Atacama Desert. Buried. That is all that remains of Raymundo. I know someone will come to me with the idea that what remains are the memories, that remembrance will always be there. Where is there? No, don't come to me with stories. No. Nothing remains. Of Raymundo nothing remains. There are some photographs. But a photograph is not a memory. A photograph is not remembrance. A photograph is a theft from memory, an assault on forgetting. It is abandonment itself striking us full in the mouth. It hits us hard, telling us this does not exist. It existed, yes—but it no longer exists. In other words, stop thinking of it as something that still has a physical referent. It once did. It no longer does.

A photograph, for me—of Raymundo or of Carlos, of my grandparents—is a photograph of death. With my father I never speak of this. We always end badly, always shouting. And afterward he ends up completely drunk and crying. And I get angry and leave the house, and return to my apartment, and there, I cry. And I know that everything I have said is a lie—that I return to the photographs, that sometimes I return to them. Because yes, they are forgetting, they are brutal thefts from memory. But they are what remains. And if we are not what remains, what are we?

All the Deer in the World

from Impala. 2021.

Así oscuro absolute brillante vacío ensordecedor.
Sin queja sin remordimiento.
—Rogelio Saunders

There is no case. If the definition does not correspond to the object, is it nonexistent? It exists, yes, but not under that name. It is then in the world, but not in language. And if language is the only possible world of existence? There is the case: it is. Worse still, for not corresponding to the definition: it is not a case, it is rather a very large leather bag with a zipper—definition over concept. Everything begins because the rifle for which the leather bag with zipper was made does not correspond to the weapon inside it. The difference between an assault rifle and a hunting rifle is considerable. The one for the bag is strictly for hunting deer. Does its name contain all its possible uses? Could it be used to hunt another animal? For something other than hunting? Perhaps, when one uses a rifle to hunt deer, anything done with it adopts the concept, the definition of use: hunting deer. Is anything shot with that rifle therefore a deer? Inside the leather bag there is a .270 caliber rifle for hunting deer. Mossberg, model 4x4 bolt-action: 24-inch fluted ported barrel with muzzle brake: 1 turn in 10” rifling

twist: matte blued finish: adjustable trigger system. Inside the leather bag is the rifle, and outside it there is a very long drawer in which it fits comfortably. It is only obvious now to ask whether every object, even if it has an inside, also has an outside. The bag has both: outside and inside. The drawer, with the leather bag, with a .270 caliber rifle for hunting deer, belongs to a very tall wardrobe. The wardrobe is the least important thing about the drawer. The drawer is the important thing about the wardrobe. In the wardrobe there are dresses that no one has worn in more than ten years. Someone has covered them with black plastic bags—trash bags. We face the same dilemma regarding the rifle for hunting deer. The wardrobe is locked, and we cannot know whether the black plastic bags are still there, much less the dresses inside them. Nor can we know whether the oval mirror on one of the doors remains immune to time and darkness. The room appears divided in two horizontally. Up to no more than a meter and a half it is a peach color already faded by time. From there to the ceiling, yellowing wallpaper with red lines is interrupted on one wall by a window that looks out onto the small rooftop where freshly washed clothes are hung. In the room there is a double bed with clothes piled on top, an old gray stool, a small wooden bench with a plastic-covered cushion, and a motionless rocking chair.

Julián enters the room and sits in the rocking chair, ready to kill a deer.

Impala

from Impala. 2021.

A partir d'un certain âge, on s'oberve moins au dos des grandes cuillères.
—Natalie Quintane

From the corner, the building looks like a flat, rectangular wall with no appeal whatsoever. Like almost everything that had brought her to that place, it is a simple optical illusion. With the slightest step to the left, what seemed to be a wall becomes an enormous concrete circle. It is only after she crosses the glass doors that she realizes the building could be compared to a donut. What appears to be a concrete circle is rather a concrete donut. In the central lobby stands a monumental iron sculpture. Eva must slowly lift her gaze to take it in completely. Its magnitude overwhelms her. Sara places a hand on her right shoulder. They leave their backpacks at the checkroom. They walk beside the enormous sculpture toward the escalators, and the gigantic piece of metal watches them. In her head, Eva hears waves crashing against the sculpture. None of them move it even a centimeter. It is an insurmountable obstacle, charming in its immobility. The escalators emit an almost imperceptible hum. Eva takes Sara with one hand and, with the other, the black, warm railing where the trace of the previous visitor who stood on that step remains. In a previous gallery there are more than twenty pieces that emulate a hand in different positions. They are life-sized, and the artist dipped her hand in hot wax, removed it, and made molds for the sculptures. In one of them, her hand holds her own hand.

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Marco enters the room. The museum is close to closing, and he is the last person inside the piece. A room that is a perfect cube. On the four walls and the ceiling, held only by pins, are hundreds of pages that could be imagined as coming from several identical notebooks. The sheets are smaller than a standard size. About five by nine centimeters each. The floor is also protected by such a peculiar tapestry, but there the pages are covered with wax. Marco left his shoes at the entrance of the piece, beneath a leather armless seat. He must enter barefoot so as

not to damage the floor of the work. In two upper vertices of the room, fans are turned on, moving slowly from side to side. The pages pinned to the walls move, creating a sound similar to the flutter of a small bird. At the center, a very large display case contains two heads of lettuce and more than thirty snails that have been feeding on them for over a week. Each page contains some piece of information important for the artist to remember. Birthdays, friends' names, quotations, old gatherings she does not wish to forget, paintings described in detail in order to remember them a little. Marco stands directly in front of the display case. On the floor he notices a trace of melted wax. He places his foot over the mark with the harmless intention of comparing their sizes.

*

They were not important. We all forget things as life advances. In some region of our brain, images are replaced with versions of the same memory. We forget last names, faces, casts of films we saw long ago. Ana has, for the first time, forgotten the name of an architect with whom she worked on an installation more than twenty-five years ago. She thinks she remembers a beard, but she is not certain. Was it also him with whom she once had a glass of wine in a café hidden on the corner of a park? Ana searches for the park, searches for the man's face, but nothing returns. Weeks later, she will not remember having lost that fragment of her life forever. She will forget more places, more people. She will come to forget her daughter's name.

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Sara sits on a small leather seat without a backrest and watches as Eva removes her sneakers. When she bends down to push them under the seat, Sara kisses the back of her neck, precisely

where she has an impala with long horns tattooed. Still bent over, Eva turns to look at her, her eyes bright with tears. She squeezes her eyelids tightly and stands up, determined. Sara watches her enter as if she were stepping into the void, as if the frame of the entrance were the open door of an airplane at thirty-nine thousand feet above the ground.

*

There are already dozens of notebooks in which she has been writing down everything she considers important to remember. She makes deep efforts to find, within her now fragile memory, information she begs not to lose. Her daughter's birthday is among the last pieces of information she writes down. She decides to stop, while her mind is still lucid, for one final task.

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Eva searches the walls. She finds her name next to her date of birth. She watches a snail devour, with absolute slowness, a minuscule piece of lettuce. She feels how her feet sweat over the wax.

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Ana walks to the nearby market. She buys the freshest, greenest lettuces she can find. She takes a long time choosing the snails.