

Gonzalo GARCES

Excerpt from *El futuro trans*

1. Arriving at the Airport

This, then, must be my son. That was what I thought this morning, when I saw him, behind the immense glass panel, possibly a bulletproof Durex, 40 inches thick, like they started making after the terrorist attacks, this was in the early nineties, Gulf War, I can't remember if any bombs actually made it here, in the actual airport, but the French take care of their own, even of foreigners, even of newcomers, like me, I appreciate it even if it's just for form's sake, they may be impossible but they do have a real sense of etiquette, that she had been right about, my first wife, his mother. This must be my son, I thought. How he's changed, how he's grown. Marriage had given him distinction. Or maybe not, maybe no one ever changes, which does not prevent me from suddenly feeling intimidated. That has to be, that is my son. From that moment I know that the trip was a complete mistake. The fluorescent tubes were shining, they were well-distributed, I calculated two to three meters in between them. Nonetheless my arrival had been good, with that little triumph at passport control: You're a Chilean?, *oui*, buoyantly in carefree if rather imperfect French, I had said, hoping that the young lady with the long legs behind me would hear, yes but don't you worry, I want to keep being one, ha ha, very good, Sir, how much time do you plan to spend in France? Oh, just two weeks, you know, I'm coming to see my son, removing the pipe from my mouth, trying to make sure he noted the Burberry raincoat I'd just bought at the duty-free shop, let's just see if this asshole's taken me for an immigrant. I was about to pull out the company card, not a peep from the girl behind me. I'm coming to see my son, who got married without even informing me, yep, you heard me, just think, I haven't even met his wife yet, that's right, you heard me. And this had provoked such consternation, not only from the girl but also from the French controller himself, otherwise devoid of any sense of humor, unmistakable consternation at that filial negligence, and accordingly, approbation of me, that I left the place in full splendor, the world was cut to my measure, about like a good raincoat. But then I saw my son. Behind a glass I saw him, in his face I saw what he was thinking, and I knew what he was going to ask when he saw me. And I thought that this trip had been a mistake, but it was already too late.

"How are you?" he asked, purposefully, after we had embraced.

"Terrific, and you are elegant, let me see you."

"Mona bought me the coat."

"It's terrific, you really look elegant."

He then insisted: "How *are* you?"

"No, not that bag," I insisted, "take the smaller bag. Where are the taxis?"

As we traveled into the center of Paris, I tried to calm down and think. I mean, I talked with my son, and I also tried to calm down and think, fortunately something I'm good at, talking and thinking at the same time, without it I wouldn't have survived twenty years at the real estate business, two or three marriages, and life in general, which tends to be only barely endurable anyway, especially at times like these, when my damn sense of being ridiculous flattens me against my seat, fatigues my muscles, reduces my social skills to no, to yes, to what a beautiful day. Or they make me idiotically jovial. Or harsh and aggressive for no reason. It's not easy to explain. There had been nothing ridiculous about my arrival, there *shouldn't have been*, anyway, and obviously it was absurd that he would intimidate me, my son, okay, so we hadn't seen each other in almost three years, and that counts for something, and it was also true that there was something different about him, that indomitable look he had, that serenity, something he had acquired since the last time, when he'd still been single and still looked fragile, worried about his future, like all young people engulfed by the future. Now he still seemed young, but he had gotten married; and not only did he not seem overwhelmed by any future, but also his light gray coat suited him perfectly, even the shoulders and sleeves. But that serenity of his was not at peace with me, judging by that question he had dealt me right when I'd arrived. There was disquiet in his tone, but impatience, too: how are you? Why aren't you fine? I've aged, I think, quite a bit these last few years. I've come to favor older memories, or rather, to feel that the new ones don't really concern me. With respect to my son, this process was facilitated by his decision to move to France, it was unavoidable that seeing him less restored his initial image to me, the little blond toddler, the afternoon in the sand, his tiny eyebrows like they'd been painted with a brush. Before I knew it he was twenty-four years old and telling me he was going to get married, that I shouldn't trouble myself making the trip, that we would celebrate later. I protested, but not more than what was expected, because my own marriage was going to hell, and deep down I could not see myself getting on a plane to Paris. And then it was today, and here I was. Intimidated. By my son, before my son. How are you? Why aren't you fine, why haven't you been fine all these years? Exactly one month ago, after eight years, I separated from my third wife. I'd been expecting it for a long time, it wasn't the worst ending in the world, and nobody'd have any reason to butt in; in any case, that is the meaning of the "How are you"s of my son and, at least in part, that is the reason I'm here. Perhaps there always comes a day when the son is transformed into a judge. Maybe he doesn't even know it, it's enough for him to wear his well-cut coat, be good-looking and strong, and meet us at the airport. Maybe we're just imagining things, and there wasn't any purposefulness at all in his questions. He just grows, becomes a man, but it was foreseen that on doing so, in the secret order, he would be transformed into our judge. The son measures, judges, and condemns, and is also innocent; which doesn't mean, of course, that we ought not to defend ourselves.

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Translated from the Spanish by Jennifer Croft