

Xavier Villanova

Excerpts from two plays

Acheron: The river of tragedy

I

(Mausoleum, Nicanor, a thirty-six year old man with the gaze of a winner and an impeccable stance is waiting, sitting, calm, in complete control of the situation; after a few seconds Leonardo enters, he's a young man, twenty two years old, sprightly, high-strung)

Leonardo: Hi... hello, good afternoon, or night I think... excuse me? Do you know the time? I'm sure it's past seven, which means it's night already. The last time I looked at my watch it was almost 5pm, and then nothing, darkness, like... I can't explain, can you? Can you tell me the time please? I always carry a pocket watch but I guess they took it at the hospital, or at the dumpster; I'm sure a thug is wearing my watch now. Nowadays thugs swarm around car accidents, in fact, ninety percent of thugs hide behind billboards on the roads, waiting for the innocent one who'll get distracted with the humongous thirty-six C boobs of the lingerie model on the sign and BAM! inevitably crashes into another car, and then another one, and another one, and another one, and well, the payoff can be endless; before the police or the ambulance arrive, there's a whole lot of loot right there. Some thugs even come dressed as Red Cross and pretend to be helping. I think that's how I lost my watch, on the road that goes from Mexico to Pachuca. I was arguing with Ana because... well, because she says that looking at other women's breasts in front of her it's rude, even if it's on TV, in a movie, on the radio or a magazine; I mean it's not like I'm a sexual pervert, or that I go around staring at the breasts of all the girls that go by, only the ones that are impossible to ignore and at that precise moment when the discussion was getting delightful, when I was winning with the most inabatable arguments... inabatable? Is that a word? Who cares? The thing is that I was winning and suddenly I see the ad for Beauty Bra and I thought that it was the perfect opportunity to prove my point, le touché, you know? The touch of grace, so I turned my head while saying, what's the worse thing that could happen if I look at the breasts of a woman trapped on a billboard...? It was like a fucking dream. That's when I screwed up. I don't remember anything else. Not even blinding lights, brakes, screeching tires, nothing. I always thought that if one day I ever had an accident I'd have one of those flashbacks that you usually see in the movies, but no. The last thing I remember are the breasts and the fabulous slogan: "And you, can you resist temptation?" I couldn't, I can't, it's... Excuse me, what's supposed to happen now? Somebody is going to pick us up and take us for a routine inspection ...? Because I guess there's gonna be a routine inspection, right? I'm saying, because, it's obvious

there must be a routine inspection. There's one at every border... Lucky me I just have the clothes I'm wearing. Well, actually I have a joint that I always keep in my pocket for special occasions. Yeah, that one's still here. I keep it inside this pen and nobody can tell. I look like a PHD with this pen on my pocket and the whole thing, but look, you open it and that's it... instant joint. Beautiful right? I hope that there, where we're going, it's not going to be too hot or too cold. Extreme things are too intense. Awful right? Not knowing what the weather will be like or if we should take shorts, or how long the trip's gonna be. At what time is this little boat leaving? Can I take the first one or do I have to wait in line? I hate waiting in line. One time I was waiting two hours to get on a ride on a theme park and when I get to the front of the line I didn't have the right height. They sent me back. It's always the same thing with me. I'm about to arrive, about to make it and something happens. Like now. I was about to arrive to my destiny, just a few damn miles to Pachuca and suddenly nothing, I'm here, with you. I think Ana is right; I can never finish what I start. It's probably because I start too many things and they're all impossible for me. Like when I tried to swim across the Canal de la Mancha. The reporters were very impressed that I lasted so long, floating, swimming doggy style. Can you imagine? Alright fucker are you gonna say something or I'll keep talking forever to the fucking nothing. It's you, right? You're the one who's gonna take me. Right, that explains the inexorable silence. Inexorable, that word is so... inexorable that one feels like putting it next to something terrible, something like... Yes. It's you. It can't be otherwise. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. If you prefer I can throw the pen away, I don't need it, we can pretend that I didn't tell you that... it's not like I'm a drug dealer or something, it's my friend's. I keep it for him. I don't even smoke. I carry it only to look cool to Ana. She's always saying that her ex boyfriend was always stoned and I don't even smoke menthol, you understand? That's why I carry the pen, to get courage, it's because of her, you see?

(Nicanor takes a pen from his pocket and writes in a little black notebook something that Leonardo can't see)

Leonardo: Excuse me; can I borrow your little notebook? I need to write down something I don't want to forget. One always forgets something when arriving in a foreign country. After a while one even forgets to think in your own language and then, then nothing from before matters anymore. I just need to write down a couple of things, to keep them always with me.

(Nicanor takes a sheet and gives it to Leonardo)

Leonardo: And a pen? Because you know this one has no ink, it's just an appearance.

(Nicanor gives him a pen)

Leonardo: And your little notebook, I mean, just to lean on it. I promise I won't read what you wrote about me. I swear.

(Nicanor gets up, and with punch leaves him unconscious)

II

(Closed room, a lamp is moving from side to side, Nicanor with sunglasses is looking carefully at a beaten and naked Leonardo regain consciousness.)

Leonardo: ... Where am I...? Please, tell me. I need to know. It's not fair to keep me like this and in this condition. I told you that the pen is just to impress... *(Nicanor gets up, rolls up his sleeves and approaches Leonardo.)* Besides, it's just a joint and it's not even good weed. I got it for twenty dollars at the beach. That's legal everywhere. Everybody knows that, they showed it on TV. It's not even fifty grams... How much am I allowed to carry? Fifty right? I'm sure and there's not even thirty in there and... it's because of the papers, right? I swear that I have them; I just have to go get them. Let me go and I'll bring them to you. Just give me a couple of days, one or two days and I swear...

(Nicanor exits)

Fuck, fuck, goddamn fuck, only I can think of bringing a pen with weed and tells the dude from immigration about it. You have to be stupid... What did your mother tell you? Don't get into that my son, it's dangerous, but there you go, without thinking, straight there to crash into the wall like an idiot, shit. Fuck, fuck, and now, how are you gonna get out of this one, eh? I'm talking to you fucking Leonardo, wake up, think, think... fuck... Hey! Somebody? This is illegal! I have the right to a lawyer and a telephone call!

(Nicanor comes back with Leonardo's clothes in his hands, grabs the shoes, removes the soles, two hundred grams of marijuana fall on the floor)

Leonardo: That's not mine, you stuck it in there, I've never seen those shoes in my life. Those are not my soles, I swear. What's the brand? You see? How would I wear such expensive shoes?... it doesn't make any sense, I just wear rubber shoes... I... *(Nicanor cracks his neck and looks at him menacingly)* Ok, ok, calm down, yes they're mine, but... I didn't know that thing was in there. I swear. How would I know? I bought them downtown, maybe... maybe somebody sold them not realizing that they were part of some cargo, please, I swear I don't know anything. The pen thing yes, but nothing else.

(Nicanor takes the suit jacket, rips off the liner and puts on top of the table, one by one, six flat bags of cocaine.)

Leonardo: I got paid to do it. You don't understand; I'm in a lot of debt. They told me there would be no trouble, that I was gonna cross just like that and then ...

(Nicanor takes off his glasses, gets a sheet and begins to roll a joint.)

Leonardo: Come-on, I'm a decent guy. If I was a druglord, do you think I would look like this? Seriously, think about it, I don't even look like a thug. Look at me carefully... come-on... You see? I don't have tattoos, no earrings, no scars, well, just one but they made that one to remove my appendix, that's it... well, here's another one but this one is from when I was a child. I can't even remember how I got it... (*Nicanor takes the pants.*) Okay, okay, look, I have nothing to do with this. I'm just a toy, a pawn, ok?

(Nicanor leaves the pants, he sits in front of Leonardo, takes off his glasses, takes a sheet, finishes rolling his joint.)

They just give me the merchandise. I'm there. I stay one or two years. I work it out and that's it. I'm not even thinking about staying. I swear, it's just back and forth smuggling ... It's a job like any other job. I don't even know if they use it for personal consumption because maybe they don't even sell it. I mean maybe they buy it and it's just for them. There's people like that. Not everybody is thinking about doing business with this and you see, every day it's getting more difficult to sell it; not that I know anything about this but that's what they say on TV and ...

Nicanor: You want some? (*Nicanor puffs and passes it.*)

Leonardo: ... So... no drama? Are you sure? (*Nicanor insists, Leonardo smokes*) I knew it. You're Micky right, fucker? Shit you scared me. I thought you were one of those agents that fuck you up and nobody hears about you ever again. Damn Mickey, fucker, you really scared the shit out of me. At the beginning I thought that...but nah, something was telling me this fucker is not what he looks like, something was telling me... I think it was your tattoo of the virgin. I saw it and I thought: this dude is one of us. Because... you are, right? Of course you are, come on bro, stop playing, take off my cuffs. Come-on I'm getting marks on my hands.

(Nicanor gets closer and removes his handcuffs)

Leonardo: Of course, the famous Micky. I'm sure you're full of awesome stories... Oh man, wait until I tell the guys that Micky saved me, they won't believe me, just wait until I tell them... Listen, and from here we take the boat or, what's the deal? I have a bunch of clients down there waiting for this stuff, fucker. We can split 50/50. Can you pass me my clothes?

(Nicanor passes the clothes to him)

[...]

Translated from the Spanish by Susana Cook

Loire

CHARACTERS:

Madeleine: *French, Caucasian, sea green eyes, 30 years old.*

Joan: *Mexican, latina, dark walnut eyes, 30 years old.*

I

(On top of a table, reminiscent of times past, lies Madeleine, staring into space. Joan awaits standing, holding a black leather briefcase. Long silence.)

Madeleine: I wished to drown in the Loire. Slide my feet into the riverside, get past the wall of apple trees, submerge neck high, take a deep breath, and abandon myself. *(Silence)* Sunday. Crowd. People. Boats. A merry yellow swollen hot air balloon and a barely audible buzz. For the rest of mortals: a breezy fun, calm, Sunday. *(Silence)* To commit suicide in front of a thousand tourists in broad daylight. Such a show. *(Silence)* An American will take a snap; he'll think of it as a picturesque moment, my depression, and he'll post it to Facebook with the title:

chemise mouillé contest gone wrong.

(Silence) That stops me. I don't want to be showcased on some bastard's wall. If I'm to be exhibited, I'd prefer a museum. *(Silence)* I am dry now. Thirsty?

Joan: Excuse me?

Madeleine: I was asking if you'd like something to drink?

Joan: Yes. Thank you.

Madeleine: Monifá left.

Joan: Who?

Madeleine: The help.

Joan: I see.

Madeleine: She was nice, and a person of color. *(Silence)* Like you, maybe a bit darker, not much.

Joan: I see.

Madeleine: *¿Qu'est-ce que tu veux? (Silence)* Pity visits bore me out.

Joan: He asked me to come. Because, of, your "situation" ... To be honest I don't know what to call it.

Madeleine: In French?

Joan: Politely.

(Silencio)

Madeleine: *Mort vivant.*

Joan: That.

Madeleine: ...

Joan: We are worried about you.

Madeleine: You are?

Joan: The both of us.

Madeleine: *Pauvre conne.*

Joan: I'm leaving.

Madeleine: Stay; maybe you can help me... regain color, strength, *joie de vivre.*

Joan: I came and I saw you. I was here. It's enough.

Madeleine: *Douze heures just to see me for cinq minutes?*

Joan: The trip didn't last that long, and I wish I'd been here for just five minutes.

(Silence)

Madeleine: How is he?

Joan: You should come visit.

Madeleine: *'ai pas d'argent, vous le savez bien.*

Joan: Brat.

Madeleine: How so?

Joan: No one taught you not to address someone in a language they don't fully understand.

Madeleine: Even Monifa spoke French, and she came from Nigeria.

Joan: This isolation has really affected you.

Madeleine: *Je ne sais pas comment dire ça poliment, mais, je t'emmerde.*

Joan: That's what this house smells like...

(Silence)

Madeleine: *Je vois que mon père ne parle pas en français.*

Joan: English, please.

Madeleine: It's a shame that my father doesn't speak French anymore.

Joan: He would if he had someone that spoke back. Sad, isn't it?

Madeleine: My family is sad.

Joan: Cut the crap, please.

Madeleine: I love your French.

Joan: He bid me give you this.

(She hands an envelope).

Madeleine: Money?

Joan: There's no excuse now.

Madeleine: Flying terrifies me.

Joan: Travel by boat.

Madeleine: I puke.

Joan: Spend it on therapy, then.

Madeleine: You think I'm crazy?

Joan: Those were his instructions.

(Silence)

Madeleine: What's the purpose of your visit?

Joan: Your father.

Madeleine: That brings him through you, but what about your intentions? What pushed you out the door, up to the airport, down to your seat, out of your seat, throughout the people, to gather your suitcase, take a cab, give him my address, talk to me? What do you want?

Joan: A mirror.

Madeleine: You came all the way here for a mirror?

Joan: Got one?

Madeleine: I stored them. They are in the attic covered by a gray cloth.

Joan: Thanks. I won't take long.

II

(Joan comes down from the attic with makeup on and wearing a different outfit from the one she wore when she arrived. This one is elegant and provocative.)

Joan: Thanks.

Madeleine: Meeting someone?

Joan: No.

Madeleine: Who?

Joan: I like to look good.

Madeleine: Blind date in France? *Oh là là.*

Joan: Don't be silly.

Madeleine: I'm going to tell on you.

Joan: It's part of the job.

Madeleine: Excuse me?

Joan: Taking you out.

Madeleine: By force?

Joan: And opening the curtains.

Madeleine: What for?

Joan: It's called light.

Madeleine: Oh, that.

Joan: How long has it been since you went to a nice place?

Madeleine: I went a lot as a kid.

Joan: I forgot you were born with silver spoons.

Madeleine: And mon père?

Joan: What about him?

Madeleine: He doesn't give you silver sheets?

Joan: He's generous.

Madeleine: And?

Joan: I love him.

Madeleine: Him or the nice places he takes you to?

Joan: Get changed.

Madeleine: Do you guys fuck?

Joan: Excuse me?

Madeleine: Papa is a bull. Strong, fast, violent.

Joan: I'm not sharing any details with you.

Madeleine: Does he look tired? Perhaps he's not aroused by you.

Joan: He's sweet.

Madeleine: Just what women our age need.

Joan: We are not all drawn to violence.

Madeleine: Mom loved it.

Joan: If you don't want to have dinner, let's hit a bar; let's go out.

(Silence)

Madeleine: I don't know any bars. *(Silence)* Coffee place?

Joan: Let's go.

Madeleine: It's on you.

Joan: Of course, Maddie.

Madeleine: Don't call me that.

Joan: I'm sorry.

III

(Secluded and shabby coffee place; retreat for those who are lost).

Joan: You have your coffee here?

Madeleine: When I have anything at all.

Joan: I see.

Madeleine: Un café pour moi, et un grand crème pour elle.

Joan: I'll have the same as you, please.

Madeleine: You won't like it.

Joan: Regular black coffee.

Madeleine: Our regular is not like yours. It's an espresso.

Joan: I like it strong.

Madeleine: Excusez-moi, la dame veut un café allongé.

Joan: What did you order?

Madeleine: Black coffee with double the water, a cup of joe.

Joan: Fine.

Madeleine: They have a new waiter now.

Joan: They do?

Madeleine: The one they had three months ago was far more handsome.

Joan: Why did you stop coming?

Madeleine: I prefer to be under a bridge.

Joan: It's free.

Madeleine: No one gets in my way, nor do they ask me what do I want or if they can sit with me.

(Silence)

Joan: Hungry?

Madeleine: No.

Joan: Order a croissant, it's on me.

Madeleine: And a baguette? Why don't you ask if they have Gruyere and a miniature Eiffel tower?

Joan: You don't have to be sarcastic.

Madeleine: Un croissant pour la touriste, s'il vous plaît.

Joan: Can you remind him of our coffee?

Madeleine: It's on its way.

Joan: It's late.

Madeleine: This is not Mexico.

Joan: And?

Madeleine: They are not at your command; they take their time.

Joan: You were the one who grew up with slaves.

Madeleine: Monifá was more than a maid. She was the sister I never had.

Joan: Why did she leave?

Madeleine: I never told her.

Joan: Of course.

[...]

Translated from the Spanish by the author
