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DEAR GINÉS

By Franck González

Night. Yesterday Night. At night. The tide draws the misty foam from the rock. Undertow, a loss that sweeps, the traces of the last voyage down with the current. Shore that breaks images against the night. Wild gull's howl that carries old commands. They tell me I've returned...

Since this island surfaced Gines had attended, time after time, over and over again, tiresomely, all the ceremonies of farewell. Mechanic litany that returned his body unharmed to dawn. The water to the cold. Time had strolled along, precipitously, past his eyes. One could almost say that his own gaze had felt itself. That the passage of the moons had left in his eyes a strange shadow of light. That he was able to see the limits...

On an especially acrid midday he took an important decision: he'd put in a brief appearance. He didn't know when. Perhaps soon. Well, there wasn't that much of a hurry anyhow. Nobody was after him. And well, he'd show up from time to time. In the long run, he sentenced; nobody was going to find out. And as for me, he said with increasing self-assurance, I wasn't going to tell anybody. And well, his habits weren't going to change for this reason. No. He wouldn't stop caressing the blunt ribcages of the cragg lizards. Those dusty silhouettes would continue to be his midafternoon company. Earth, salt and lichen composed a strange essence over the cold scales through which he liked to listen to the aromas of arcane caresses. So old they were mere dust. So that the day when the news of his return arrived was going to be as short a working day as any since the launching of the island. Padrinos and serfs assented with their eyes. These in a tax-collecting silence. With measured words and having already paid the others...

It was never very clear where that sudden idea of an island-with-remote-control had come from. Why spend anything on voyages that sooner or later return to the same port, mused Cacique

Segundo? Why launch that which as it is born in the water has its rudder oriented only towards the past? Cacique Primero, always wiser than his son bellowed: We can't stop being what we have to be. The mirror in which we mirrored all the images of the Exterior World has for a long time no stimulated the minds of the young. Our social compromise is based on the provision of the necessary tools for their correct socialization in our, and he emphasized in our, culture. Island culture is not insular neither is it culture without a decent remote control that provides the absorption of zapping as a cultural model. Ginés was never able to remember what they told him afterwards nor how they were able to enroll him, deceitfully, doubtlessly, he muttered constantly to himself, and converts him into the official chronicler and tollhouse keeper. He thus could count the two highest honors that that society had in esteem. Honoured by the increased value of invested capital, he was for certain the sole and legitimate proprietor of the island, and with the increased value of the property deeds, none other than his own version of things would exist, the doors of a barren future were open to him.

When he read those four sentences in a tongue nearly forgotten due to an ever deeper silence, he was dumb struck. How, he mused, could his son Ginés have returned if he hadn't ever had any news of his very existence? Wait. He suddenly was able to remember old fishwife tales. Yes, it was that. Time ago some cliff dwelling fishermen had told him, though perhaps he hadn't understood them well, how he had never known his father. The story comes with a music he had never heard. Peppered with voices that required Juanito Maipoo's language in order to be understood by the Council. A whole life absent. Working on the banks of a long river. A river as large as the tide that swept him and suddenly shook him. An obscure profession in shady deals that proposed his return to confront an old man's tombstone. Unknown... Yet this isn't my case. I know that I have no children. I barely ever spoke to Reyes la de Rosarito. But I wasn't even able then to reach the counter at Dominguito's shop. No. That was nonsense. Surely the Pardelo del Sur was mistaken. He'd ask him tomorrow. Yet by night the same scene developed before his tired eyes. The sailor shored the boat as if the bruises on his fingers were mauve wings. Below its limited bottom the boat bobbed and the colours oscillated over the flotation line. The boat teemed with the laughter of the kids. Although Rosarito told him once and again that those things were witchcraft, the truth was that Ginés had the gift of upturning all the boats on the beach with his eyes. He awoke again to succumb to doubts. How on earth could he know who that boy was...

The day after receiving the news Ginés went down to the beach to ask the Pardelo del Sur. Yet what he encountered before him that day would perturb him irremediably. In the distance, yes, but hold on, yes, he was sure... yes there it was, off the stern, again. The broken mirror. The new flag of Cacique Tercero. From the coast hailed the golden echos of trumpets. Blue trombones twined with white boxes. Fireworks that reached him, spreading out their ringing and curling motion over the stretched canvass of the tide. Tumult. Crowds. Yes, something was happening down there. He couldn't quite make it out. The sun above now moved to the stern. Cacique Segundo, yes, was it him? Yes and he was about to deliver a solemn speech, no, it was Cacique Primero. He could remember what he was looking at out there. Something prevented him from seeing those houses, that miserable village. Once again, Night veiled his eyes to accompany his dream of an unfinished journey...

When dawn grounded the island against the cliffs a kind of panic run like a shiver his dry neck. A current that rose from his feet had left his back soaking in a along dirty yellowish sweat. Now it reached his neck and his veins began to jump together like dolphins battling against the waves. His eyes still, heavy. Searching what. That channel that now overflowed along the old creases of his neck made it certain. Since he could remember, this could only be for a motive. And furthermore an important motive. He sow his own existence turning to sepia. Byebye property deeds. Who but a madman can love an island that is no longer an island? How narrate a story when it is evaporating before one's eyes at this very instant?

A humid land swallowed by flames.

You've come back, Ginés, you know, to behold the remains of your own shipwreck. Yesterday you were a stoaway with wind swollen sails, now you reach the shore, spying, below the cove of memory.

As an impostor.

But above all as oblivious of your own direction.

You approach and read. And you read it, in those characters, to know that you have lived. The paper you hold between your fingers is what during all these years of wandering you were searching for. The proof, finally, that perhaps you did go and look for it. Then, when you tried to put in order your ideas, pondering, perhaps thinking, the south wind lifted at that very precise moment its healthy veil. And you were left in a void with your hand. Your gaze suspended and your fingertips bursting that until that moment had been the strong box of your existence. Suspended the sentence that for a new span of time the South brought in its last fainting vision. The paper suspended, swimming in nothingness. And the word returned to span the ether. To impregnate, who knows a new silence.

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