

from *Petrolier* by Anna Aguilar-Amat
English translation by Anna Crowe

ACT TWO

“To overcome fear
you allied yourself with fear,
made it your own,
sought protection from its dubious company.
Freeing yourself from it would have meant
giving up hope,
and that you never did.
Even though you knew full well
that it is hope that engenders fear.”

ÁNGEL GONZÁLEZ, ‘Glosa IV’,
Otoñas y otras luces/Autumns and other lights

The gold-prospectors (after James O. Curwood)

We are two photographs attached by drawing-pins
to the inquisitive notice-board of daily life.
By making a tremendous effort and squinting
we can make out our hands, and distance,
that sharp-edged rectangle that is our home,
from which we look out and it’s night-time.
Then we’re awake once more at crack of dawn,
which once more becomes day, little by little
with the rub of light, more mellow now,
the only kiss the eye will tolerate.
And there we’ll talk about how there’s something strange
in having found peace in that hole we were all afraid of,
love in what we hated, justice in treachery.
And wisdom under a mechanic’s filthy nails.
Because when searching for nuggets of a mineral,
each pioneer pans in that part of the river
that seems to glitter most. Because the sun glances off it.
Because we’ve had a skinful in the saloon.
Because a fish leaps out there, all silver.
Because when we were kids we made a slide
on a rotting tree-trunk in a place like that.
No theorem can tell us more about the footsteps
that will lead us to the dark place
where a small, coarse, yellowish scrap of earth called happiness
lies asleep.
For the prospector who finds and rubs it between his hands
there is not only a certainty, a poem, a syllogism, a gospel:
the gem belongs to him.

Neil Armstrong

A lie will get you a long way, but it won't take you home.

Anon.

You don't really know what carried you so far:
whether it was a lie, or that you didn't know where home was.
It has been lengthy and expensive, and the suffering of so many
has been consumed in the belly of the carburettor. You're here alone,
like a condemned man, but the one chosen
by the master with his cane, on the prize-winning side. Here, where the earth
for you has become the moon, you finally understand that engraving of the angel
and the devil, for without the blue of the sky and the red
of the clay and the green of the alfalfa fields, everything is in
black and white, an examination that spins and in which there are no winners.
Here at last you can demonstrate that yes, it is possible to enjoy
the sun and the stars, all at the same time.
And yet how far away they are, the buds of roses opening
at night in places parched by the sun, and the nests
and dormice and the owls that feed on them and the lights where
dreams would silence pain. Yes: I want the moon in a basket.
And now you have that moment to hold, and the end of wishing, and the wish
you have lost. Your painful weight, which now you miss.
Turn round, wave.
The camera homes in and takes your picture. You haven't cleaned the lens very well
and grains of white sand will be visible.

Adverbs

When you said that you wouldn't ever leave me
I was reminded of that summer evening,
when I hugged your dog.
What are feelings?
Four sheets of paper that could leave us,
stripped, on a marble-topped garden table,
any chilly evening when it looked as though it might rain.
Now I understand that when you say not ever you mean: 'no other *never*
had *ever* seemed so much to me.'
No one has ever seen me in such detail
when I comb my hair.
But don't say *not ever* to me.
Just say 'tomorrow'.
'Tomorrow I will probably love you. Tomorrow
will not yet be *never*.' And so I'm as happy
as a squirrel who breaks the jam-jar
that held the nuts. Thinking
that *never* has lost its way when it went for a pee
around some bend in the road, and that today, while I wait
for tomorrow, I'll have an *always* shortened like a curve I can
repeat, like a singsong with no verses. An
always like the tiny task of sewing a yellow buttonhole
to pass the time while I listen to Brassens
and other songs I don't altogether understand.
Just four pronouns and three verbal phrases
a slap in the face by time and which wrap up *feelings*,
people, *colours*, *heaven*, *meadow*, *more*.
Repeated, eternal expressions of love, that are
a heap of *always* like apples in the picnic basket in the shade
of the porch and waiting for you, since the crack of dawn.

My son

When you laugh

I hear the hoopoe call and see the cormorant
preening its feathers. From the winter I remember
the ringing of the ice under the roofs and
the crackling of the fire as it told stories.

When you laugh

I hear the transparent breath of streams that
reaches my blood and pours wine on to my hair,
like the coastal breeze, one day last May.

When you cry.

The palms of my hands ache with being
so empty. My heart goes small and lost inside
my pocket; it slips through a careless tear
left over from evenings weary with futility.

When you cry

the memory slides down my leg like an orange-coloured
spark that burns me between my sock and my foot,
and my eyes go inwards, inwards, where my stomach
longs to devour them.

When you cry

the corner of the table pokes me right between my lashes
and between the teeth I find myself on a day gone dark
like the cousin of the downpour I wept as you did, today,
because the Three Kings had gone off with the toy.

I wasn't crying for the doll in its pretty dress, but because
I had believed that they were wise and good and loved me,
and only they, and therefore nobody else, would be able to guess
my thoughts, would see right to the bottom of my dreams,
even those I didn't remember, with the wonderful magic,
so pure and universal, of desire that flies up into the air and
is indifferent and can overfly reality scorning
the details, like a model plane from which the world
is seen as small, and the sea, plasticine.