

# A couple of spoonfuls

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## Short Stories

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At dinner time Lorena was eating vegetable soup out of a red bowl, on the corner of a tabletop, near the window of a busy kitchen. Beyond the window with yellow painted shutters she saw only garages made out of sheet metal. The cars which were inside them rarely made it to the city centre. She looked at the melted croutons then she took a spoonful. They were still hot. Her mind was repeating the sound that the second hand of the wall clock was making.

Anca and Maria, who were her flat mates, were sitting at each end of the narrow table which was in the middle of the same room. They were smoking slim cigarettes, which they put out in shiny black ashtrays with chipped rims. They were illuminated by the yellow light, which came from a light bulb covered with a paper lamp shade. From time to time, their words were interrupted by the sound of their lighters.

“So, we made our plan for the three days. I looked for everything,” Anca said. “It’s very easy. You find everything on the Internet. You don’t waste any more time there and, besides, I find it stupid to go to a foreign country without a plan.”

“Where are you going to stay?” asked Maria while reaching for the bottle of gin.

“There’s a hotel. It’s called *Los Pocos*. It looks really nice. It even has a photo gallery on its website. It has two swimming pools, and the water has 27 degrees Celsius, a massage salon, and a cool bar downstairs. Matei says he wants to sleep in the refuge. I told him to change his mind.”

“What do you mean?”



“Well...” You could hear her exhaling the smoke from her lungs.

Lorena stared blankly above the two girls’ table, in the direction of a black stain on the door which creaked every time someone touched it.

“What am I doing here?” she asked herself. “I should have been somewhere else now. I should have been doing something else now. I’m not fine. This is not good.”

She moved her spoon between the carrots, the bean pods, and the tomatoes.

“Eat,” she told herself. “Food always helps.”

She swallowed the liquid and together with it she swallowed the lumps that returned where they had come from, in the stomach.

“He discovered a mountain peak, but I don’t remember what it’s called. It’s about 3,500 meters high. And he wants to climb to the top of it. And if you make it to 3,000 meters, there’s a refuge where you can sleep.”

“I wouldn’t do that, but I guess it’s cool.”

“No, it’s not. I told him ‘you’re wrong if you think I’m travelling so that I can give up my comfy hotel room, the heat, the water, in order to spend one night in that stupid refuge’. There’s no place where you can buy a loaf of bread or a pack of cigarettes up there.”

“And what does he say about this?”

The black stain stretched until it almost reached the chandelier where it disappeared into the light. It’s been a while since they last painted the walls. But the furniture was new and it concealed any kind of sadness.



“He says he would visit whatever I want and I should go up 3,000 meters with the cable car and meet him up there. And if I don’t want to spend the night there, I might take advantage of it and take that trip to the South, like I was saying, because he’s not keen on buying anything.”

“Didn’t you tell him there were discounts? There are always discounts during the holidays.”

“I told him, but he’s not interested. He says that I have no idea what a fabulous view is up there, that the starry sky looks I don’t know how, that there are... that I don’t know what kind of vapors go up. If you hear him talking... He wasn’t like that. I don’t know where he got it from.”

The soup was too salty, but she was hungry and bored. She turned her head to the left and looked at the alley behind the houses which the spotted cats bypassed.

He was sitting again in the same place she had seen him all week. He was wearing the same track pants under the faded blue gown, which was buttoned up. He was gathering leaves from one side and moving them to the other one. He was saying something. He always said something. She never understood what. He saw her looking at him so he stood up, took off his cap, and crumpled it between his fingers. He put on a stupid smile and waved in her direction.

“If you go shopping, I want to give you some money so you can buy something for me.”

“Of course I’m going. I printed out a map with all the Pampas and Bonita shops.”

Sometimes Lorena felt Maria’s green eyes watching her. She was thinking about them, about their stare. She was also thinking about the retard in the alley who was sitting still and was saying something over and over again. She just saw the real him now. She has just realized that his hair was rather black than brown, and that he had a bottle nose, a bit of a belly, and that he had wide shoulders.

“My God,” she said to herself. “Lorena, he’s not crazy. Do you see him? Look at him. Look around you. You never look. Get out of your head! Get out!”



Three months ago when she first met him, a taxi stopped in front of the block entrance and she got out slamming the back door. She didn't remember why she was so upset then. And still, she hadn't forgot the sound of her furious heels on the asphalt, their rhythm full of anger, the pleasure with which she acted out her own strain.

He must have liked it too. He had heard her getting closer and abandoned the dried branches which the administrator cut that morning and which he had been carefully packing for a couple of hours. He kept only two in his arms. He was holding them like you hold a baby in order to rock it out of reflex, without affection. He gave her a big smile and his eye got wet. He started to talk to her. He was talking fast, incredibly fast, as if it was his only chance. There was a sort of despair in his voice, drowned in a liberty that Lorena just realized how much she envied, three months after that day.

He didn't want to prove anything to anyone.

Lorena put down her spoon. She pressed herself against the window and waved heartily at him. The hair on her arms stood on end just like it did when the wind went up her flax shirts on summer nights. She felt Maria's eyes on the back of her head and then she felt Anca's eyes turning all of a sudden. She almost saw their disgusted faces. But that boy looked directly at her. He was telling her something which she had never understood, something that sounded like hope and faith.

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