

The Train

by Santiago Dabove (1946)

It was the daily train, at dusk, but it was slow in coming, as if sensitive to the landscape.

I was on an errand to buy something for my mother. It was a pleasant moment, the rolling of wheels a kind of tenderness along the slick rails. I got on, and set myself to capturing the oldest recollection, the first of my life. The train tarried so long that I found in my memory a maternal smell: hot milk, denatured alcohol. This until the first stop: Haedo. Then I remembered my childish games, and I was already on my way to adolescence when the town of Ramos Mejía offered me a street, romantic and full of shadows, with its little maiden disposed for betrothal. There I married, after visiting and getting to know her parents and the almost Andalusian courtyard of their house. We had already left the village church when I heard the bell ring; the train was underway again. I said good bye, and as I am rather agile, I made it aboard. I got off at Ciudadela, where my efforts worked to rupture a past that was perhaps impossible to resuscitate by remembrance.

The station agent, who was a friend of mine, betook himself to tell me that he bore good tidings, as my wife had sent a telegram

announcing such. I struggled to find a fear from my infancy (indeed I had them) that came before the hot milk and the alcohol. Then we arrived at Liniers. There, in that station so abundant in present time, as provided by the Western Railway, I was able to be reached by my wife, who brought the twins dressed in homespun clothes. We got off and in one of Liniers' resplendent shops we provisioned ourselves with standard but elegant clothing, and also with books and sturdy scholastic folders. At once we reached the same train on which we had been traveling and which had been much delayed because earlier there had been another train letting off a load of milk. My wife stayed in Liniers, but I, on the train, enjoyed seeing my boys so florid and robust, talking of football and making the jokes that youth believes itself to have inaugurated. But in Flores there awaited me the inconceivable: a delay because of a collision with freight cars and an accident at a grade crossing. The station agent at Liniers, who knew me, got in communication by telegraph with his counterpart at Flores. They gave me bad news. My wife had died, and the funeral cortege would try to reach the train, stopped as it was in this last station. Grieving, I got off the train, unable to let my children know anything, for I had sent them ahead to get off at Caballito, where the school was.

In the company of a few relatives and supporters we buried my wife in the cemetery at Flores, and a simple iron cross names and indicates the place of her invisible detention. When we got back to Flores, we found still there the train that would accompany us in such happy and fateful wanderings. At the town of El Once I said good bye to my political relations and, thinking of my poor

orphaned boys and of my dead wife, I went like a sleepwalker to the so-called Insurance Company where I worked. I couldn't find the place.

Asking the oldest people in the area, I found out that they had some time ago torn down the house of the Insurance Company. In its place was erected a twenty-five-story building. They told me that it was now a Government Ministry wherein everything was insecure, uncertain, from the jobs all the way to the decrees.* I got into an elevator and at the twenty-fifth floor I sought furiously for a window and threw myself out onto the street. I landed in the tufty foliage of a tree with leaves and branches as of a cotton-stuffed calabash. My flesh, as it was about to shatter, broke apart into memories. The flock of recollections, along with my body, made its way to my mother. "And I'll bet you forgot what I asked you to get," said my mother, making a gesture of comical threat. "You have the brain of a bird."

— *Translation: David Page*

* The translator wishes to note the close play between the Spanish word for "insurance," seguros, the singular form of which also denotes "security" (as in "safety and _"), and the word inseguridad, which means, of course, "insecurity" or "uncertainty." In short, the sort of thing that is impossible to translate.