



LOOKING FOR YOU (DESPERATELY)

A different love story

A NOVEL BY
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First edition: July 2020

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ISBN: 978-84-121867-5-8

ISBN digital: 978-84-121867-6-5

ISBN translation: 978-84-128873-0-3

Legal Deposit: B-9745-2020

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Víctor Ortigosa

A different love story

*The authentic story would be one that narrates
how a great intelligence liquefies in the
laziness, fear and anguish. Little by little it is lost,
like those lumps that disappear in the water and in
the end only a few bubbles are seen.*

Alejandro Rossi

1

The 1966 Cadillac Deville glides down the mountain adjusting its enormous hood to the sway of the ascending curves. The fresh morning air rushing in through the windows as I put on my Ray-Bans with green oval lenses. The July sun begins to set the atmosphere on fire and quite soon the heat will force me to turn on the air conditioning. I observe Roberto through the rear view mirror, lying like a tramp in the back seat, cramped and compact, his mouth open, his short, curly hair pierced by time. The cassette playing La Frontera, blaring, silences the snoring that is drawn in the rictus of his breathing... "On the edge of good, on the edge of evil..." I smile, but I'm not happy. I'm not sad either. I just am. Just that: I am. My hands grip the leather steering wheel of the fabulous yellow 1966 Cadillac Deville as the music of my youth continues to play in my middle age to the limits of life.

I skim the descent along the port of Los Alazores, broken by a single curve on its north side, and I succumb once again to the majestic landscape of grey mountains and green fields that stretches before me. I am forty-one years old, yes, but the feeling of fulfilment seems identical to the one I had back when I was ten, and twenty, and thirty. As if my chest widened and

the breaths of fresh air were now deeper, more noticeable. As if my eyes had finally met the wolf living within me.

As if my limbs had done so with the eagle that challenges it. As if the surroundings that are injected into the veins, circulated anxiously through the blood that fills them, fearlessly.

Joy.

That's the word.

A burst of joy.

This time, joy is matching the smile I don't want to suppress. Then you show up and it cannot be any other way: Olga at the end of anything lately. Also, at the beginning. Olga bent on the bar of the Café Madrid, bored, shooting a smile as she spots me.

Roberto wakes up shortly before we reach Zafarraya. I stop the car and he gets out to throw up, although he doesn't get to do it. He climbs huffing into the passenger seat, and he looks at me fleetingly and disoriented.

"I'm going to take a picture of you," I say to him.

I get out of the car, I open the trunk, and take out the camera you sold me, and I go back to my seat. Roberto is still lost somewhere. He looks at me suspiciously.

"What the hell are you doing?" he says, straining under his breath.

I laugh. I press the trigger button. I don't look at the picture. I turn off the camera.

At quarter past ten in the morning I park the Cadillac in front of my friend's house in Zafarraya, a fertile village, famous for the imposing gorge between the mountains that surround it. María Dolores soon shows up at the front door. First, she looks at the car with a hint of surprise and curiosity, but only for a second, then she looks into her husband's eyes irritated. We just got off.

"Well, tell me about it later," says Roberto. He looks at me resigned. A hint of embarrassment shows on his face. "Take care."

We hugged again, I've lost count of how many times we hugged this morning, the need to feel alive is plenty, but now his hands on my back only convey despair. Then he enters the house without even measuring his strength with his wife's gaze. I try to smile. I kiss her on the cheeks.

"It was my fault," I tell her.

She shuts her eyes, in hopes that the fury of her gaze does not hurt me, then she sighs and opens them again.

"Today was your fault," she says. "A week ago, it was Alfredo's fault. In three days, it will be Matías. My husband fell in with the wrong crowd, didn't he?"

I can barely hold that angry and disenchanted gaze. I want to tell her to be patient once again, that Roberto has bumped into a life he could not have possibly imagined, that he still has to come to terms with it and accept it as it is. But then his young son shows up in SpongeBob pyjamas, a football and the biggest smile, the resemblance of Roberto junior with his father, with the boy his father once was, hits me so hard in the stomach that it almost makes me lose my breath.

"Do you like football too?" I ask after lifting him in my arms and giving him a kiss. "Are you as good as Dad?"

"I want to be like Casillas," he assures with conviction.

"Okay, but don't ever forget to be you, okay?"

I put him down and ruffle his curls. María Dolores looks at me, "I'll take care of it," she says, and I think of all the mothers in the world, of their agonising resilience. Then she asks me about Elena, the children and about my flashy car. Later on, I kiss her goodbye. When I get in the Cadillac I see the camera. I take it. I take a picture of the kid. This time I do look at her. My friend's son watches me exactly as his father had done thirty-four years ago. I really want to cry. But I don't. I smile instead.

2

"I talk to my grandfather very often." That's what you told me while your head rested on my chest as both of us were lying on the bed in that hotel, near the airport. You told me that you tell him about your problems, that he listens to you attentively and patiently, and he reassures you. The truth is that this would be nothing out of the ordinary were it not for the fact that your grandfather is dead, Olga.

"It's not a matter of faith," you told me, "it's a fact." I was listening to you and thought that maybe your terrible experience, your encounter with death as a baby, had something to do with the whole thing. Apparently, now, you explained to me that you've met my grandfather. My grandfather and your grandfather died many years ago, but you told me that they were doing well, that my grandfather is a smiling, kind-hearted fellow, and that he got on very well with your grandfather. You also tell me that he protects me, and he watches me from up there. Well, my grandfather *was* a great man, that's true, a cheerful and generous man. In fact, for me he still is, despite the insurmountable distance that separates us, but I knew him, I talked to him, I received his caresses, I can still imagine his features in my memory.

So, amazed, I thought you live surrounded by kind

spirits, by beings of light that smile and bring comfort.

"Only a few of us, the best of us, gain direct access to that status, from the very first moment we become beings of light," you said. "The rest have to cross the threshold to atone for their sins, and only a few make it."

"The threshold? A kind of purgatory, isn't it?"

"Exactly."

"Why don't you come back to bed, and we can carry on committing adultery, blondie? Perhaps that will delay our departure..."

I smiled at you naked from the bed of that transient hotel where I had taken you. You too were naked; you were standing in front of the small bed. You were so strapping, your round sprinter legs, your breasts still firm, your golden, tousled mane, camera in hand. You had been taking pictures of the rumpled sheets. You wanted to reflect the sexual act through the imprints of our bodies on the elements. I found it both unusual and beautiful.

"Don't be frivolous about it," you said. "You know I don't like it."

"You don't like me smoking either and I'm doing it."

I snuffed out the cigarette still smiling. You gave me that pout that I like so much. Those puckered lips, those small, ajar blue eyes, your cheekbones, so marked that they sink even deeper into the granitic face; those wrinkles like small

asymmetrical scars drawing on the wide forehead, immeasurable from the inside. Desire tricks you and messes up your actions beyond repair. Attraction is not a cause, quite the contrary, it is the consequence. Love is a chimera that one pursues absurdly and constantly. Just love. Being the other and the other being you for at least a tiny fraction of time and space, where nothing else matters anymore, just the intimate connection of two souls. I laugh to myself. I laugh, I make a grimace of boredom and then I cry. I cry a lot.

You dropped the camera onto a beige armchair and climbed onto the bed on your knees. You came towards me, laid down, spread your legs and started flicking your clitoris. We were shagging all morning to the beat of INXS, *Suicide Blonde*, over and over again, but you didn't kiss me once. Your tongue was elusive just once and mine held back thereafter. Me and restraint. Intimate allies. We shagged pleasantly and dispassionately, surrounded by spirits that reminded me of all the agony and how quickly the urge fades, the innocence in the soul. Poison creeps in with every step of the way, with every elusive glance, with every thought that does not turn into a word.

Forget it.

About the author



Víctor Ortigosa (Málaga, 1971). Graduated in Law, a transport businessman by tradition, he has always enjoyed putting together one word after another, one phrase after another, one thought after another.

In the uncertain and dystopian time of covid19 and social confinement, he was finally decided to take the step, chase away doubts, misgivings, and present himself to readers, with a novel that he hopes will become the starting line of a solid literary career.