

¶11: In his plastic wallet he carried a picture of her dressed as a harem girl. She had a picture of him in his conscript's uniform on her bedside table.

¶12: Their families, jobs, the schedule of meals and bedtimes, all conspired against their meeting often, but those sporadic meetings were rituals and always took place in winter. First they would buy pastries, and then, sitting under the trees, they would savor them, like children with a snack.

¶13: Uncertainty is a form of happiness that works in lovers' favor. Through the labyrinths of their days, of crackly, seemingly endless phone calls, they would always choose Dahlias Bakery as their meeting place, and always choose Sunday as the day, but only after discarding other possibilities. Instead of a coat she wore a shaggy plaid blanket that always came in handy. By the bakery window they would exchange greetings without looking at each other, making a show of their confusion. Those who don't see each other often don't know what to say, no doubt.

¶14: "Perhaps in a very dark room or in a very fast car," he thought, "I would overcome my shyness." "Perhaps I would know what to say to him in a movie theater after the intermission, or while taking part in a procession," she thought.

¶15: After this interior dialogue, they went to the bakery, as always, and bought pieces of four different kinds of cake. One looked like the Monument to the Spaniards, cluttered with plumes of whipped cream and glazed fruit in the form of flowers; another looked like some sort of mysterious and very dark lace, with shiny decorations of chocolate and yellow meringue covered with sprinkles; another looked like a broken marble pedestal, less beautiful than the others but larger, with coffee frosting, whipped cream, and pieces of nuts; another looked like part of a box, with jewels inlaid at either end and snow on top. After paying, when the package was ready, they would go to the Recoleta, next to the wall of the old age home, where children hide after breaking the streetlights and beggars go to wash their clothes in the fountains. Next to a frail tree, whose branches act as swings and horses for the children who play in them, they sat down on the grass. She opened the package and took out the cardboard tray where the cream and meringue and chocolate glowed, though already a bit squashed. Simultaneously, as if their movements were projected onto each other (mysterious and subtle mirror!), first with one hand, then with both hands, they picked up the slices of the cake with plumes of whipped cream (the miniature Monument to the Spaniards), and lifted them to their mouths. They chewed in unison and finished swallowing each bite at the same time. In the same surprising harmony they cleaned their fingers on napkins that others had left lying on the grass. The repetition of these movements connected them with eternity.

¶16: After finishing the first slice they again contemplated the remaining slices on the cardboard tray. With loving greed and greater intimacy they took the second pieces: the slices of chocolate decorated with meringue. Without hesitating, squinting their eyes, they

lifted them up to mouths agape. Baby pigeons open their beaks the same way to receive the food brought by their mothers. With greater energy and speed, but with identical pleasure, they began chewing and swallowing once more, like two gymnasts exercising at the same time. She, from time to time, would turn to watch some passing car that was especially valuable, smelling excessively of gasoline, or very large, or would lift her head to watch a dove, the symbol of love, fluttering clumsily among the branches. He would look straight ahead, perhaps savoring the taste of those treats less consciously than she. The abundant whipped cream dripped on the grass, on the folded blanket, and on some bits of trash nearby. No smile would light up their harmonious lips until they finished the contents of the little tray of yellowish cardboard covered with waxed paper. The last bit of cake, crumbled between thumb and index finger, took a long time to reach their open mouths. The crumbs that fell on the tray, her skirt, and his pants were carefully picked up and lifted with thumb and finger to their lips.

¶17: The third slice of cake, even more opulent than the others, looked like the material used to build the older houses in beach resorts. The fourth piece, lighter but more difficult to eat because of its sponge-like consistency coated with sugar, left them with white mustaches and white spots on their lips. They had to stick out their tongues and close their eyes to clean their mouths. If they didn't dare to take large bites they missed the best part of the cake, covered with peanuts disguised as walnuts or almonds. She stretched out her neck and lowered her head; he didn't change his position. The chewing followed a regular rhythm, as if they were keeping time with a metronome.

¶18: They knew there were other treats left on the cardboard tray. After that first difficult moment, the rest was easy. They used their hands like spoons. Without chewing, they filled their mouths with cream and sponge cake before swallowing.

¶19: After finishing the contents of the tray, she tossed the festooned cardboard away and took a little package of peanuts out of her pocket. For several minutes, with the studied gestures of a model, she opened the shells, peeled the nuts, and fed them to him; she saved some for herself, putting them in her mouth and chewing in unison with him. Licking their lips, they attempted a shy conversation on the theme of picnics: people who had died after drinking wine or eating watermelon; a poisonous spider in a picnic basket one Sunday that had killed a girl whose in-laws all hated her; canned goods that had gone bad, but looked delicious, had caused the death of two families in Trenque Lauquen; a storm that had drowned two couples who were celebrating their honeymoons with hard cider and rolls with sausages on the banks of a stream in Tapalqué.

¶10: When they had finished the food and the conversation, she unfolded the blanket and they covered themselves with it, lying on the grass. They smiled for the first time, their mouths full of food and words, but she knew (as he did) that, beneath the blanket, love would repeat its usual actions, and that hope, flying farther and farther away on fickle wings, would draw her away from marriage.

¶11:

¶12: Ocampo, Silvina. *Thus Were Their Faces* (NYRB Classics) (pp. 217-219). New York Review Books. Kindle Edition.

¶13: