

¶1: In this plastic wallet he always carried the picture of her, dressed in a harem costume. On her night-table she kept the picture of him in his soldier's uniform.

¶2: Family, work, eating and sleeping schedules conspired to keep them from seeing much of each other, so their sporadic meetings were strict rituals and always took place in the winter. They would buy pastries, then savor them under the trees like kids with their afternoon snack.

¶3: Anxious participation is a form of happiness that nurtures lovers. Traversing a labyrinth of endless days, of cacophonous telephone calls, they would always choose as a meeting place, after discarding other possibilities, "The Dahlias" bakery, and always on Sunday. As an overcoat she would wear a shaggy Scottish blanket, which would come in handy. In front of the store window they'd greet each other without looking at one another, ceremoniously, embarrassed. People who don't see each other very often, don't know what to say.

¶4: "Perhaps in a dark room or in a fast-moving automobile," he thought, "I would not be so shy." "Perhaps at the movie, before the feature, or while following a parade, I would know what to say to him," she thought.

¶5: After this interior monologue they entered the bakery, as they always did, and bought eight slices of various cakes. One looked like the monument the Spaniards had erected, with many coloured cream rosettes and flower shaped glazed fruit; another looked like lace, mysterious and very dark, with shiny swirls of chocolate and yellow meringue, spattered with sprinkles; another looked like a marble pedestal in ruins: it was less beautiful but bigger, with mocha, whipped cream and diced nuts; another looked like a jewel case, with gems encrusted on the sides and snow on top. When they paid and the package was ready, they went off to the Recoleta Cemetery, to the shelter of the wall around the old people's home, where children hide after smashing street lights and beggars washed their clothes in the fountain. Beside a decaying tree, whose branches served as swings and as make believe horses for the children to rock on, they sat down on the grass. She opened the package and took out the cardboard tray where, a little flattened now, the cream, the meringue and the chocolate glittered. Simultaneously, as if each projected his or her movements upon the other (a mysterious unsubtle mirror!), they reached down with one hand first, then with both, for the slice of cake with cream rosettes (the Spanish Monument in miniature) and raised it to their mouths chewing in unison they swallowed each bite at the same time. With surprisingly identical harmony they'd swipe their fingers on the papers which other people had left discarded on the grass. The repetition of these movements connected them with eternity.

¶6: The first slice finished they contemplated the remaining slices on the cardboard tray. Lustfully zealous unless inhibited now, they took their second serving: the chocolate slices topped with meringue. Without hesitation, their eyes crossed, they raised the cake to their gaping, waiting mouths. Baby birds open their beak similarly to receive the food the mother brings them. More energetically and faster, but with the same enjoyment, they began to chew and to swallow again, like two gymnasts performing an exercise in unison. She turned round from time to time to see a car go by, more worthy of notice than the others because of its excessive smell of gasoline or its size, all raised her head to look at a dove, the symbol of love, fluttering languidly among the branches. He looked straight ahead, but perhaps savouring less consciously than she the taste of these delicacies, his overflowing cream fell upon the grass, upon the folded blanket, or upon some discarded wrappings nearby. Not until they could finish the contents of the little tray of yellowish cardboard lined with wax

paper, would a smile animate those lips in harmony. The last mouthful of both pieces of cake crumbled between thumb, forefinger, and third finger of each one's hand, and leisurely penetrated the mouths awaiting them. The crumbs that fell upon the tray, the skirt and the pants, were carefully gathered up and inserted by thumb and forefinger into their mouths.

¶17: The third slice of cake, more opulent than the others, looked like their material used to build some of those quaint houses at beach resort. The fourth slice, lighter but more difficult to eat because of its sponge like consistency (it was covered with powdered sugar), left them with wide moustaches and white spots on their noses. In order to insert it in their mouth they had to stick out their tongues and close their eyes. Not daring to take a large mouthful meant losing a good part of the delicacy where, disguised as a walnut or an almond, a peanut throbbed. She stuck out her neck and lowered her head; his position remained unchanged. The chewing continued its regular rhythm, as if accompanied by a stopwatch.

¶18: They knew that more delicacies remained in the cardboard tray stop after that first difficult moment the rest was easy. Their hands served as spoons. Instead of chewing, before swallowing, the mouth spackled with a cream and cake.

¶19: The contents of the tray finished, she threw away the festooned cardboard and took out offer pocket a little package of peanuts. With the gestures of a dressmaker she took a few minutes to crack open the shells, peel out the grains peanuts, give them to him, and keeping some for herself, which she raised to her mouth, to chew again in unison with him. Licking their lips they now there to engage in some timid conversation, related to picnics: people who died urine drinking wine after eating watermelon, a poisonous spider in a basket which was used to kill a hated daughter in law one Sunday afternoon; apparently delicious canned meats which had gone rotten, causing the death of two families in Trenque Lauquen; a storm that drowned the honeymoon of two couples who had been toasting with cider and eating sausages and bread on the banks of a stream into Tapalque.

¶10: When food and conversation were done with, she spread out the blanket and they covered themselves up as they lay down on the grass. They smiled for the first time since their mouths were now free of food on words. But she knew (and he also knew) that beneath the shelter of that blanket love would repeat its acts and that the hope of marriage -hope with its frivolous wings - would each day fly further away.

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