THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE

STORIES

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GRANTA

Under the Black Water

The cop came in with his head high and proud, his wrists free of cuffs, wearing the ironic smile she knew so well; he oozed impunity and contempt. She'd seen many like him. She had managed to convict far too few.

"Have a seat, Officer," she told him.

The district attorney's office was on the first floor and her window looked out onto nothing, just a hollow between buildings. She'd been asking for a change in office and jurisdiction for a long time. She hated the darkness of that hundred-year-old building, and hated even more that her cases came from the impoverished slums on the city's south side, cases where crime was always mixed with hardship.

The cop sat down, and she reluctantly asked her secretary to bring two cups of coffee.

"You know why you're here. You also know you are under no obligation to tell me anything. Why didn't you bring your lawyer?"

"I know how to defend myself. And anyway, I'm innocent."

The district attorney sighed and toyed with her ring. How many times had she witnessed this exact scene? How many times had a cop like this one denied, to her face and against all evidence, that he had murdered a poor teenager? Because that was what the cops did in the southern slums, much more than protect people: they killed teenagers, sometimes out of cruelty, other times because the kids refused to "work" for them—to steal for them or sell the drugs the police seized. Or for betraying them. The reasons for killing poor kids were many and despicable.

"Officer, we have your voice on tape. Would you like to hear the recording?"

"I don't say anything on that tape."

"You don't say anything. Let's have a listen, then."

She had the audio file on her computer, and she opened it. The cop's voice came through the speakers: "Problem solved. They learned to swim."

The cop snorted. "What does that prove?" he asked.

"By the time stamp as well as your words, it proves that you at least knew that two young men had been thrown into the Ricachuelo."

Pinat had been investigating the case for two months. After bribing police to talk, after threats and afternoons of rage brought on by the incompetence of the judge and the DAs who'd come before her, she had put together a version of events on which the few final and formally obtained statements agreed: Emanuel López and Yamil Corvalán, both fifteen, had gone dancing in Constitución and were returning home to Villa Moreno, a slum on the banks of the Riachuelo. They went on foot because they didn't have money for the bus. They were in-

tercepted by two cops from the thirty-fourth precinct who accused them of trying to rob a kiosk; Yamil had a knife on him, but that attempted robbery was never confirmed, since there was no police report. The cops were drunk. They beat the teens almost unconscious on the riverbank. Next, they kicked them up the cement stairs to the lookout on the bridge over the river, then pushed them into the water. "Problem solved, they learned to swim," were the words that Officer Cuesta, the accused man who was now in her office, had said over the official radio. The idiot hadn't had the conversation erased; all her years as DA had also accustomed her to that, to the impossible combination of brutality and stupidity she encountered in the cops she dealt with.

Yamil Corvalán's body washed up a kilometer down from the bridge. At that point the Riachuelo has almost no current; it is calm and dead, with its oil and plastic scraps and heavy chemicals, the city's great garbage can. The autopsy established that the boy had tried to swim through the black grease. He had drowned when his arms couldn't move anymore. The police had tried for months to sustain the fiction that the teenager's death was accidental, but a woman had heard his screams that night: "Please, please! Help! They pushed me in! I'm drowning!" the boy shouted. The woman hadn't tried to help him. She knew it was impossible to get him out of the water except with a boat, and she didn't have a boat. None of the neighbors did.

Emanuel's body hadn't surfaced. But his parents confirmed he had gone out with Yamil that night. And his running shoes had washed ashore, unmistakable because they were an expensive, imported brand. He'd surely stolen them, and he'd worn them that night to impress the girls at the dance club. His

mother had recognized them immediately. She also said that Officers Cuesta and Suárez had been harassing her son, though she didn't know why. The DA had questioned her in that very office the week the teenagers had disappeared. The woman had cried; she'd cried and said that her son was a good boy although yes, sometimes he stole and every once in a while he did drugs, but that was because his father had left them and they were very poor and the boy wanted things, shoes and an iPhone and all the stuff he saw on TV. And he didn't deserve to die like that, drowned because some cops wanted to laugh at him, to laugh while he tried to swim in the polluted water.

No, of course he didn't deserve it, she'd told the woman.

"Ma'am, I did not throw anyone in the river." The cop leaned back in his chair. "And that's all I'm saying."

"As you wish. This was your chance to make a deal that could, maybe, lessen your sentence. We need to know where that body is, and if you give us that information, who knows, maybe you could go to a smaller jail or to the evangelist cell block. You know the evangelists would go easier on you."

The cop laughed. He was laughing at her, and he was laughing at the dead boys.

"You think they're gonna give me much time? For this?"

"I'm going to try to have you locked up for good."

The DA was about to lose her cool. She squeezed her hands into fists. She looked into the cop's eyes for a moment, and then he said very clearly, in a different, more serious voice, without a trace of irony:

"If only that whole slum would go up in flames. Or every last one of those people would drown. You don't know what goes on there. You. You have no idea."

SHE DID HAVE SOME IDEA. Marina Pinat had been DA for eight years. She'd visited the Villa Moreno slum several times even though it wasn't required by her job—she could investigate from her desk like all her colleagues did, but she preferred to meet the people she read about in the files. Just months before, her investigation had helped a group of families win a case against a nearby tannery that had been dumping chromium and other toxic waste into the water for decades. It had been an extensive and complex civil suit she'd spent years working on. There were families who lived by the water and drank it, and though the mothers boiled it to try to get the poison out, their children got sick, consumed by cancer in three months, with horrible skin eruptions that ate away at their legs and arms. And some of them had been born with deformities. Extra arms (sometimes up to four), noses wide like felines, eyes blind and set close to their temples. She didn't remember the name that the doctors, somewhat confused, had given that birth defect. She remembered one of them had called it "mutation."

During that investigation she had met the slum's cleric, Father Francisco, a young parish priest who didn't even wear the white collar. No one came to church, he'd told her. He ran a soup kitchen for the children of the poorest families and he helped where he could, but he'd given up on any kind of pastoral work. There weren't many faithful left, just a few old women. Most of the slum's inhabitants were devotees of Afro-Brazilian cults, or they had adopted their own doctrines, worshipping personal saints like George or Expeditus, setting up shrines to them on corners. "It's not bad," he said, but he didn't say mass anymore except when that handful of old women asked him to. It had seemed to Marina that, behind the smile, the beard,

and the long hair—his look of a militant revolutionary from the seventies—the young and well-meaning priest was tired, burdened with a dark desperation.

When the cop left and slammed the door behind him, the DA's secretary waited a few minutes before knocking on the door and announcing that someone else was waiting to see her.

"Not today, hon," said Pinat. She'd been left exhausted and furious, as always when she had to talk with cops.

The secretary shook his head and his eyes implored her.

"Please, Marina, see her. You don't know . . . "

"OK, OK. But this is the last one."

The secretary nodded and thanked her with a look. Marina was already thinking about what to make for dinner that night, or if she felt like going out to a restaurant. Her car was at the mechanic's but she could use the bike; the nights were cool and beautiful that time of year. She wanted to get out of the office, invite a friend out for a beer. She wanted that day to be over and the investigation too, and for the boy's body to finally turn up once and for all.

While she was putting her keys, cigarettes, and some papers into her purse so she could leave quickly, a pregnant teenager came into her office; she was horribly skinny and didn't want to give her name. Marina took a Coca-Cola from the small refrigerator she had under her desk and told her, "I'm listening."

"Emanuel is in Villa Moreno," said the girl between long gulps of soda.

"How far along are you?" Marina asked, indicating the girl's belly.

"I dunno."

Of course she didn't know. Marina calculated the pregnancy was some six months along. The girl's fingertips were burned,

stained with the chemical yellow of the crack pipe. The baby, if it was born alive, would be sick, deformed, or addicted.

"How do you know Emanuel?"

"We all know him. Everyone in Moreno knows his family. I went to his funeral. Emanuel used to be kind of my sister's boyfriend."

"And your sister, where is she? Did she recognize him too?"

"No, my sister doesn't live there anymore."

"I'll see. Go on."

"People say Emanuel came out of the water."

"The night they threw him in?"

"No. That's why I'm here. He came out a couple of weeks ago. He's only been back a little while."

Marina felt a shiver. The girl had an addict's dilated pupils, and in the half-light of the office, her eyes looked completely black, like a carrion insect's.

"What do you mean he came back? Did he go somewhere?"

The girl looked at her like she was stupid and her voice became thicker as she held back laughter.

"No! He didn't *go* anywhere. He came back from the water. He was in the water the whole time."

"You're lying."

"No. I came to tell you because you need to know. Emanuel wants to meet you."

She tried not to focus on the way the girl was moving her fingers, stained from the toxic pipe, interweaving them as if they didn't have joints or were extraordinarily soft. Could she be one of the deformed children, the ones with birth defects from the polluted water? No, she was too old. But when had the mutations started? Anything was possible.

"And where is Emanuel now?"

"He's holed up in one of the houses back behind the tracks. He lives there with his friends. Are you going to give me money now? They told me you'd give me money."

Marina kept her in the office a while longer, but she couldn't get much more out of the girl. Emanuel López had come out of the Riachuelo, she said. People had seen him walking through the slum's labyrinthine alleys, and some of them had run away, scared to death when their paths crossed his. They said he walked slowly, and he stank. His mother hadn't wanted to take him in. That part surprised Marina. And he'd gone into one of the vacant houses at the far end of Villa Moreno, past the abandoned train tracks. The girl yanked the bill from Marina's hands when she finally paid her for her testimony. The DA had found her greed reassuring. She thought the girl was lying. Surely some cop friend of the murderers had sent her—or they'd sent her themselves; they were only on house arrest and they certainly didn't comply with it. If one of the boys turned out to be alive, the whole case could collapse. The accused cops had told a lot of their colleagues about how they tortured young thieves by making them "swim" in the Riachuelo. Some of those colleagues had talked, after months of negotiation and outlays of large sums of money to pay for the information. The crime was corroborated, but a dead man who turned out to be alive was one crime less, and it would cast a shadow of doubt over the entire investigation.

That night, Marina was uneasy when she went back to her apartment after a quick and not very stimulating dinner at a new restaurant that had good reviews but terrible service. Her common sense told her that the pregnant girl was only after money, but there was something in her story that sounded strangely real, like a living nightmare. She slept badly, thinking of the

dead-but-alive boy's hand touching the shore, the ghost swimmer who returned months after he was murdered. She dreamed that when the boy emerged from the water and shook off the muck, the fingers fell off his hands. She woke up smelling the stench of dead meat, consumed with a horrible fear of finding those swollen, infected fingers between her sheets.

She waited until dawn to try to call someone in Moreno: Emanuel's mother, or Father Francisco. No answer. That wasn't strange; cell phone reception was poor in the city and even worse in the slum. She got alarmed when no one answered the phone in the priest's soup kitchen or in the first-aid clinic. Now that was odd: those places had landlines. Could they have gone out in the last storm?

She kept trying to get in touch with someone all day, unsuccessfully. She canceled everything that afternoon—she told her secretary that her head hurt and she was going to spend the time reading files, and he, ever obedient, had suspended all of her meetings and hearings. That night, as she cooked spaghetti for dinner, she decided that the very next day she would go to Villa Moreno.

NOT MUCH HAD CHANGED since her last time on that southern edge of the city, on the desolate street that led to Moreno Bridge. Out there, Buenos Aires gradually frayed into abandoned storefronts, house windows bricked up to keep squatters out, rusted signs crowning buildings from the seventies. There were still some clothing stores, sketchy butcher shops, and the church, which she remembered being shuttered and still was, she saw

now from the taxi; there was, though, a new chain on the door for extra security. This street, she knew, was the dead zone, the emptiest place in the neighborhood. Beyond those run-down façades, which served as a warning, lived the city's poor. Along both of the Riachuelo's banks, thousands of people had used the empty land to build their houses, which ranged from precarious tin shacks to quite decent brick-and-cement apartment buildings. From the bridge you could see the extent of the slum; it stretched out along the black, calm river, fading from sight where there was a bend in the water and it disappeared into the distance among the smokestacks of abandoned factories. People had been talking for years about cleaning up the Riachuelo, that branch of the Rio de la Plata that wended into the city and then moved off southward. For a century it had been the chosen site for dumping all kinds of waste, but especially the offal from cows. Every time Marina got close to the Riachuelo she remembered the stories she'd heard from her father, who for a very short time had been a laborer on the river barges. He told of how they'd dumped everything overboard: the scraps of meat and bone, the muck the animals brought from the country, the shit, the gummed-up grass. "The water turned red," he said. "People were afraid of it."

He also explained to her that the Riachuelo's deep and rotten stench, which with the right wind and the city's constant humidity could hang in the air for days, was caused by the lack of oxygen in the water. Anoxia, he'd told her. "The organic material consumes the oxygen in the liquid," he said with his pompous chemistry teacher's gestures. She'd never understood the formulas, which her father found simple and thrilling, but she never forgot that the black river along the city's edge was

basically dead, decomposing: it couldn't breathe. It was the most polluted river in the world, experts affirmed. Maybe there was one with the same degree of toxicity in China, the only place that could possibly compare. But China was the most industrialized country in the world; Argentina had taken the river winding around its capital, which could have made for a beautiful day trip, and polluted it almost arbitrarily, practically for the fun of it.

The fact that the crowded hovels of Villa Moreno had been built along the banks of that river depressed Marina. Only truly desperate people went to live there, beside that dangerous and deliberate putrescence.

"This is as far as I go, ma'am."

The driver's voice startled her.

"Where I'm going is three hundred meters farther on," she answered, distant and dry, the tone of voice she used to address lawyers and police officers.

The man shook his head no and turned the car's motor off.

"You can't force me to go into the Villa. I'm asking you to get out here. Are you going in alone?"

The driver sounded frightened, genuinely frightened. She told him yes. Certainly, she'd tried to convince the dead boys' lawyer to come with her, but he had plans he couldn't change. "You're crazy, Marina," he'd told her. "I'll go with you tomorrow, but today I can't." But she'd been single-minded. And what was she worried about, after all? She'd gone to Moreno several times before. It was the middle of the day. A lot of people knew her; no one would touch her.

She threatened to complain about the driver's behavior to the owners of the taxi service; what a scandal to leave a judiciary

official on foot in that area. She couldn't move the man an inch, which was the reaction she expected. No one went near the slum around Moreno Bridge unless it was unavoidable. It was a dangerous place. She herself had left behind her little tailored suits she always wore in the office and in court, opting instead for jeans, a dark shirt, and nothing in her pockets except money to get home and her telephone, both so she could communicate with her contacts in the Villa and so she'd have something valuable to hand over if she was mugged. And of course her gun, which she had a license to use, was discreetly hidden under her shirt. Not so hidden, though, that the outline of its butt and barrel couldn't be seen on her back.

She could enter the Villa by walking down the embankment to the left of the bridge alongside an abandoned building that, strangely, no one had decided to occupy. It was rotting away, corroded by damp, sporting ancient signs advertising massages, tarot readings, accountants, loans. But first she decided to go up onto the bridge; she wanted to see and touch the last place Emanuel and Yamil had seen before they were murdered by police.

The cement stairs were dirty and reeked of urine and rotten food, but she headed up them at a trot. At forty years old, Marina Pinat was in good shape; she went jogging every morning and the court employees whispered that she was "well-preserved" for her age. She detested those murmurings; she wasn't flattered, they offended her. She didn't want to be beautiful, she wanted to be strong and razor sharp.

She reached the platform the boys had been thrown from. She looked down at the stagnant black river and couldn't imagine falling from up there toward that still water, couldn't fathom

how the drivers of the cars passing intermittently behind her hadn't seen a thing.

SHE LEFT THE BRIDGE and walked down the embankment by the abandoned building. As soon as she set foot on the street that led into the Villa, she was disconcerted by the silence. It was terribly quiet. That silence was impossible. The neighborhood—any slum, even this one, where only the most idealistic or naïve social workers dared to tread, even in this dangerous and shunned place—should have been full of varied and pleasant sounds. That was how it always was. The different rhythms of music mixing together: the slow, sensual *cumbia villera*; that shrill mix of reggae with a Caribbean beat; the always-present *cumbia santafesina*, with its romantic and sometimes violent lyrics; the motorcycles with their exhaust pipes cut, roaring as they got going; all the people who came and bought and walked and talked. The sizzling grills with their chorizos and chickens, their skewers of meat. The slums always teemed with people, with running kids, with teenagers in baseball caps drinking beers with dogs.

The Moreno Bridge slum, however, was now as dead and silent as the water in the Riachuelo.

As she took her phone from her back pocket, she had the feeling she was being watched from the alleyways that were darkened by electrical wires and clothes drying on lines. All the blinds were drawn, at least along that street that edged the water. It had rained, and she tried not to step in the puddles so she wouldn't get muddy as she walked—she could never stand still when she talked on the phone.

Father Francisco didn't answer. Nor did Emanuel's mother. She thought she could find the small church without a guide; she remembered the way. It was near the entrance to the Villa, like most parish churches. In the short walk there she was surprised at the utter absence of shrines to popular saints—the Gauchito Gils, the Yemojas, even some virgins who usually had a few offerings. She recognized a small yellow-painted house on one of the villa's corners and was comforted to know she wasn't lost. But before she turned that corner, she heard faint steps that squelched—someone was running behind her. She turned around. It was one of the deformed children. She realized it immediately—how could she not? Over time, the face that was ugly on babies had become more horrible: the very wide nose, like a cat's, the eyes wide apart, close to the temples. He opened his mouth, perhaps to call her; he had no teeth.

His body was eight or ten years old, and he didn't have a single tooth.

The boy came up to her, and when he was beside her she could see how the rest of his defects had developed; the fingers had suckers and were thin like squid tails (or were they legs? She never knew what to call them). The boy didn't stop when he reached her. He kept walking toward the church as if guiding her.

The church looked deserted. It had always been a modest house, painted white, and the only indication it was a religious building had been the metal cross on the roof. It was still there, but now it was painted yellow, and someone had decorated it with a crown of yellow and white flowers; from afar they looked like daisies. But the walls of the church were no longer clean. They were covered in graffiti. From up close Marina could see that they were letters, but they didn't form words: YAINGNGA-

HYOGSOTHOTHHEELGEBFAITHRODOG. The order of the letters, she noticed, was always the same, but it still made no sense to her. The deformed boy opened the church door; Marina shifted her gun to her side and went in.

The building was no longer a church. It had never had wooden pews or a formal altar, just chairs facing a table where Father Francisco gave his sporadic masses. But now it was completely empty, the walls covered in graffiti that copied the letters outside: YAINGNGAHYOGSOTHOTHHEELGEBFAITHRODOG. The crucifix had disappeared, as had the images of the sacred heart of Jesus and Our Lady of Luján.

In place of the altar there was a wooden pole stuck into a common metal flowerpot. And impaled on the pole was a cow's head. The idol—because that's what it was, Marina realized—had to have been recently made, because there was no smell of rotting meat in the church. The head was fresh.

"You shouldn't have come," she heard the priest say. He had entered the building behind her. When she saw him she was even more convinced that something was horribly wrong. The priest was emaciated and dirty, his beard was overgrown and his hair was so greasy it looked wet. But the most startling thing was that he was drunk, and the stench of alcohol oozed from his pores. When he came into the church it was as if he'd poured a bottle of whiskey over the filthy floor.

"You shouldn't have come," he repeated, and then he slipped. Marina noticed the trailed drops of fresh blood that led from the door to the cow's head.

"What is this, Francisco?"

It took the priest a while to answer. But the deformed child, who had stayed in a corner of what had once been the church, said:

"In his house, the dead man waits dreaming."

"That's all these stupid shits know how to say!" the priest cried, and Marina, who had reached out her arm to help him up from the floor, recoiled. "Filthy, defiled retards! So they sent that *whore* they got *pregnant* to talk to you, and that was all it took to get you to come? I didn't think you were that stupid."

In the distance, Marina heard drums. The *murga,* she thought, relieved. It was February. Of course. That was it. The people had gone to practice the *murga* for carnival, or maybe they were already celebrating in the soccer field over by the train tracks.

"He's holed up in one of the houses back behind the tracks. He lives there, with his friends." *But how did the priest know about the pregnant girl?*

It was the *murga*, she was sure. The Villa had a traditional troupe and they always celebrated carnival. It was a little early, but it was possible. And the cow's head must be a gift from one of the neighborhood drug dealers, meant to intimidate. They hated Father Francisco because he reported them to the police or tried to rehabilitate the addicted kids, which meant taking away their customers and employees.

"You have to get out of here, Francisco," she told him.

The priest laughed.

"I tried. I tried! But there's no getting out. You're not going to get out either. That boy woke up the thing sleeping under the water. Don't you hear them? The cult of the dead? Don't you hear the drums?"

"It's carnival."

"Carnival? Does that sound like carnival to you?"

"You're drunk. How did you know about the pregnant girl?"

"That's no carnival."

The priest stood up and tried to light a cigarette.

"You know, for years I thought that rotten river was a sign of our ineptitude. How we never think about the future. Sure, we'll just toss all the muck in here, let the river wash it away! We never think about the consequences. A country full of incompetents. But now I see things differently, Marina. Those people *were* being responsible when they polluted that river. They were covering something up, something they didn't want to let out, and they buried it under layers and layers of oil and mud! They even clogged the river with boats! Just left them there, deadlocked!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb. You were never stupid. The police started throwing people in there because *they* are stupid. And most of the people they threw in died, but some of them found it. Do you know the kind of foulness that reaches us here? The shit from all the houses, all the filth from the sewers, everything! Layers and layers of filth to keep it dead or asleep. It's the same thing, I believe sleep and death are the same thing. And it worked, until people started to do the unthinkable: they swam under the black water. And they woke the thing up. Do you know what *Emanuel* means? It means 'God is with us.' The problem is, what God are we talking about?"

"You're talking bullshit, that's the problem. Let's go, I'm getting you out of here."

The priest started to rub his eyes so hard Marina was afraid he would tear his corneas. The blind, deformed child had turned around and now had his back to them, his forehead against the wall.

"They set him on me to guard me. He's their son."

Marina tried to piece together what was really happening: the priest, hounded by those who hated him in the Villa, had gone crazy. The deformed child, who'd surely been abandoned by his family, followed him everywhere because he had no one else. The neighborhood people had taken their music and their barbecues to the carnival festivities. It was all frightening, but it wasn't impossible. There was no dead boy walking around, there was no death cult.

But why were there no religious images? And why had the priest talked about Emanuel when she hadn't even asked?

It doesn't matter, we're leaving, thought Marina, and she grabbed the priest's arm so he could lean on her to walk, since he was too drunk to do it alone. That was a mistake. She had no time to react; the priest was drunk, but his movement when he grabbed her gun was surprisingly fast and precise. She couldn't even fight back, nor did she see that the deformed child had turned around and started screaming mutely. His mouth was open and he screamed without a sound.

The priest pointed the gun at her. She looked around, her heart pummeling her ribs, her mouth dry. She couldn't escape; he was drunk, he might miss, but it wasn't likely in such a small space. She started to plead, but he interrupted her.

"I don't want to kill you. I want to thank you."

And then he wasn't pointing the gun at her. He lowered it and then quickly raised it again, put it in his mouth, and fired.

The shot left Marina deaf. The priest's brains now covered part of the nonsense letters, and the boy repeated: "In his house, the dead man waits dreaming." He had trouble with the *r* sound, though, and he pronounced it "dweaming." Marina didn't try to help the priest; there was no chance he'd survived the shot.

She took the gun from his hand and couldn't help thinking that her prints were everywhere, that she could be accused of killing him. Shitty priest, shitty slum, why was she even there? To prove what, and to whom? The gun was trembling in her hand, now covered in blood. She didn't know how she was going to go home with her hands all bloodied. She had to find clean water.

When she emerged from the church she realized she was crying, and that the Villa wasn't empty anymore. Her deafness after the gunshot had made her think the drums were still far away, but she was wrong. The *murga* was passing right in front of the church. Only it was clear now that it wasn't a *murga*. It was a procession. A line of people playing the same loud snare drums as in the *murga*, led by deformed children with their skinny arms and mollusk fingers, followed by women, most of them fat, their bodies disfigured by a diet based on carbs. There were some men, just a few, and Marina recognized among them some policemen she knew; she even thought she recognized Súarez, with his dark hair slicked back and wearing his uniform, violating his house arrest.

After them came the idol, which they were carrying on a bed. That was what it was: a bed, complete with a mattress. Marina couldn't see the figure clearly; it was lying down. It was human-sized. She had once seen something similar during Holy Week, effigies of Jesus just taken down from the cross, blood on white cloth, something between a bed and a coffin.

She moved closer to the procession, though everything told her she should run in the opposite direction. She wanted to see what was lying on the bed.

The dead man waits dreaming.

Among the people walking quietly, the only sound came from the drums. She tried to move closer to the idol, craning her neck, but the bed was very high, inexplicably high. A woman pushed her when she tried to get too close and Marina recognized her; it was Emanuel's mother. She tried to stop her but the woman murmured something about the barges and the dark depths of the water, where the house was, and she pushed Marina away from her with a head butt right when the people in the procession began to shout "yo, yo, yo," and the thing they were carrying on the bed moved a little, enough for one of its gray arms to fall over the side of the bed. It was like the arm of a very sick person, and Marina remembered the fingers in her dream, the fingers falling from the rotten hand, and only then did she start running away with her gun drawn. While she ran she prayed in a low voice like she hadn't done since she was a child. She ran between the precarious houses, through labyrinthine alleys, searching for the embankment, the shore, trying to ignore the fact that the black water seemed agitated, because it couldn't be, because that water didn't breathe, the water was dead, it couldn't kiss the banks with waves, it couldn't be ruffled by the wind, it couldn't have those eddies or the current or that swelling, how could there be a swelling when the water was stagnant? Marina ran toward the bridge and didn't look back and she covered her ears with her bloody hands to block out the noise of the drums.