*Somos como esos viejos arboles, batidos por el viento que azota desde el mar. Hemos perdido companeros, paisajes, y esperanzas, en nuestra caminar…*We are like the old trees, battered by the wind that whips across the ocean. We have lost companions, places, and hopes in our path. Their names were Luis and Manolo, were Almeria and Barcelona, were dreams of marriages that were happy, surrounded by children who could be loved and caressed. We lost them young, we lost them early, we can only blame so much on the Fascists. Manolo we can blame on the Fascists, well, the Fascists and Manolo. He didn't have to go and see if there was anything that could be done for the truckload of people they were carting off, and everyone told him not to, but Manolo refused to believe that the Fascists would shoot an innocent man, and the Fascists refused to believe that a Communist was an innocent man. Manolo, my great-grandfather's kid brother, never came back. The Fascists did. They came right to Luis' door, demanding the middle brother, demanding Rafael. Perhaps they were hoping Luis would be home, that the mild-mannered town saint would be the one to answer the door. He wasn't. Paca answered the door, and she was the reason Luis could afford to be the town saint. Fierce where her husband was gentle, daughter of the town terror where Luis was the son of a would-be priest, Paca met their inquiry with a furious denial. *Two police officers saw him come in,* they said, *well he came and he left*, she said, *are you calling me a liar?* She was a good Catholic, Paca, at mass every Sunday, the crucifixes and statues exactly where they should be. So, I'd like to think that Christ Crucified and La Virgen stood witness as she lied to the self-appointed guardians of her Church, as she drove them from her doorstep. My mother was not impressed. "Anyone would have done the same," she said, when I told her the story my Abuelo told me.

They say my mother is very much Paca's granddaughter, and I don't know if my mother knows how to take that. To be called the granddaughter of Francisca Gomez in more than name and blood is the highest honor *la familia Díaz* could bestow upon its own, is to be called dutiful and loyal, *luchadora* and *feroz,* is to be everything the best of Spaniard women are. But it is also to be a candidate for canonization, an heir and incarnation of a legend largely written by the sons. *Paca,* Tía Isabel said, would never let anyone interrupt Luis or the sons in their reading, and would never let her daughters read. If Isabel had time to read, she had time to cook, and time to clean, and when it came time to discuss what the sons wanted to study in the university, nobody even asked Isabel what *she* wanted to study. She was the youngest daughter, and youngest daughters stayed home to bury their parents, and then, presumably, moved in with siblings to assist in raising the nieces and nephews. Not that anyone asked Isabel about that either; her brothers simply drove off the suitors. In the end, there wasn't any need to stay and bury Luis. He died of a brain aneurism a week after promising the sons a university education, a week after the hospital hired him to the job he had lost when the Fascists came. Isabel left for Barcelona, where the work was, and my grandfather followed with Paca soon after. But when Paca died, Isabel did not move in with her brothers.

The brothers: Luis, Antonio, and Francisco. It was Francisco, named for his mother, who could never be separated from her, who brought her to Barcelona, with the daughters of his sister, Trina. He stayed at her side till the end, and when it came, he carried her with him forever, reminding his wife day in and day out that she would never be Paca. No, she wasn't. She was Victorina Mairal Larrosa, the daughter and sister of soldiers, and she was nothing like that sentence would suggest. She was beautiful and charismatic, had dreams of being an actress, would one day read stories and plays to her children as though she were on stage. My grandfather, who could recite entire poems by heart, undoubtedly loved that about her, but he wanted a woman who could get up at the crack of dawn if need be to put food on the table, like Paca and Isabel. My grandmother needed a large pot of coffee and a handful of anti-migraine medication to get up at all, and there were days when she did not put food on the table, because she had been too busy helping her sons find leaves for their silkworms. Paca and Isabel had kept the family from starving during *La Guerra* with the head of the house unemployed. Victorina could not keep

the family fed for more than two weeks on a month's paycheck. When she finally walked out of the marriage, my mother assumed responsibility for the house and youngest brother. The paycheck lasted four weeks under the new regime, with money to spare for a blender.

There are things my mother wishes she had known, but who was going to tell her? In a world with no concept of mental illness, who was going to explain bipolar disorder and paranoid schizophrenia? When even the leftists believed that a woman's natural place is in the home, who was going to translate the grief and rage of a woman who had wanted more and would never live up to her husband's household deities? Not Isabel, who could not begin to understand why her sister-in-law would be so ungrateful as to resent the life Isabel would have killed to have (minus her brother, whom even Isabel considered impossible). Not the Church, who considered it a sin for a woman to avoid having as many children as God deigned to give her. My grandmother would have been as good a Catholic as Paca but for that, but for the sin she could not confess to the priest, having every intention of committing it again. Or perhaps I should say but for the guilt that convinced her that the Church had the right to separate her from her God. Because Paca, in all fairness, never confessed to harboring Communists and Masons in her house, yet alone swore to never do it again. She just kept going to mass. My grandmother decided that in good conscience she could not.

Pobre Victoria, inherently incapable of treading the path to godhood that her predecessors walked so effortlessly, of being *ama, Católica,* or even *correcta*, surrounded by those, her own daughter among them, who were legends worshiped by the sons and brothers, reminded of her failures with a consistency and cruelty a Calvinist could only envy, *no one* was ever going to declare *thou excellest them all* for her. No one, that is, except a daughter looking back, from a house that was not her father's, surrounded by a husband and children that loved her, and work that she loved as well. This was my grandmother's doing, for it was Victoria who repeated the mantra, again, and again, and again *What you see in this house is not normal*, *remember. You get that university degree, and you leave this house, and you never come back.* And just in case my mother should think that leaving was something you did only from your parents' house, Victoria had this lecture as well: *If a man ever raises his hand against you, you take the nearest chair, you smash it over his head, and you walk out and you don't apologize.* So adamant was Victoria on this last point that my mother was forced to swear she would do so, but in the end, she simply chose better than to require hurling the furniture.

It was a choice my grandfather did not approve of. Perhaps he thought she would stay, like Isabel, single and committed to the family forever. If so, he failed to consult his sister. *The prince of Spain would not be good enough for my brother,* Isabel snapped, *If you love that man, marry him.* Francisco fought back. His own marriage not evidence enough that *el amor no lo puede todo,*[1] and Elisa was young, much younger than the fool who'd married Victoria. Men could afford to be fools; it cost them nothing, the sort of life-long misery easily avoided at the office. Daughters…did she not understand, with a university degree to her name, did she not understand, that a woman who married an American placed an ocean between herself and the kinsmen who would protect her? That if her soldier husband raised his hand against her, there would be no sons he could send? Better she should listen, better she should be governed, by the judgment of those who understood-

My brothers have made my life bitter, and he will do the same to you if you let him. Years later, when my grandfather was old and words counted for too little too late, he spoke the ones his wife and

[1] Love cannot do all things. The proverb is in fact, *el amor lo puede todo,* love can do all things

sister died without hearing. *Me equivoque*[2]*,* he told me, *tu padre es buen hombre.*[3] Took him long enough, my mother snapped, her tone like the slamming of dishes and cabinet doors, the signature of her mother before her. He would never understand, would never acknowledge…even Tío Miguel had never understood, offering his niece his sincerest congratulations that all this studying had not distracted her from pursuing the one thing a woman really wanted: a husband. But Tío Miguel, at least, had welcomed his soon-to-be-nephew-in-law with open arms and unreserved regard, for Victoria's brother was a soldier also, a retired lieutenant in the Guardia Civil. Like my father, he'd enlisted young, both of them soldiers before they were properly men. And he, too, was the son of a poor man, the title of lieutenant owed to no one and nothing but his own study and sweat. Even Francisco, currently in the process of objecting to a carpenter's son with no studies, admired his brother-in-law for that.

My mother loved her Tío Miguel. Alone among the relatives, the *teniente* could be counted on to notice the way Victorina and Francisco favored the sons, cutting off the discussions of what was being promised his nephews this time with a cold *What about Elisita.* S*he always does well in school,* he'd point out, *and nobody ever promises her a bicycle.* Sometimes Tío Miguel would remedy the situation with his own wallet, and although it was never enough for a bicycle, it was always enough. He had no children of his own, the *teniente,* and so my mother often spent her summers in Jaca, hiking at her uncle's side among the mountains he loved and the shepherds he knew, or with Tía Julia at the market. The neighbors and shopkeepers used to say Julia looked so happy now that her niece was here, and Tía Julia would smile all the wider to hear it, for with Elisita at her side, she could be a mother, if only for the summer. And she taught my mother the things a good a Spanish housewife should know, the darning of socks, the cleaning of floors, and the invocation Elisa still utters upon the making of beds: *When my Tía Julia taught me how to make a bed, she would say…*

Four children gather in the house my mother keeps, when they come back again. Four children, one daughter-in-law, one grandson; the house grows crowded, the laughter echoes off the kitchen walls, the living room refuses to stay the sort of orderly Tía Julia would have approved of. It's the laughter that amazes her, I think; she's proud of the university degrees, of course, and the stacks of books and the jobs…but the laughter, *did I raise these children, these children who laugh with their heads thrown back, unguarded, never tensing at the opening of doors? Whose house is this?*

This, my mother, is a house built by a sister's resentment, and a mother's rage. *If you love him, marry him. When you get that degree, get out, and don't you dare look back.* By lessons learned too late, by the things that should have been said a generation earlier. *I will not let you, my brother, my spouse, she deserves to be happy.* It is a house built by contradictions, by women who favored their sons while teaching their daughters to fly. And my mother, it is a house built by those who remember how the song ends: Vamos a hacer con el future un canto a la esperanza.[4]

---

[2] I made a mistake

[3] Your father is a good man

[4] We will make of the future a song to hope.