

Red Ink,
Black Tears

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Laura Marian

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I dedicate this book to a very special man, whom I admire incredibly for his many talents. A man with the natural gift of seeing miracles in the little things of life, that make life just a little more beautiful. A man who taught me to love poetry, introduced me to its grandmasters, and especially who ignited a love fire for the masterpieces of Pablo Neruda (sonnet 19 in particular captured my heart)

Thank you for giving me insight into your mind, for letting me tap into your eternal fountain of inspiration and fantastic ideas, and for always sharing your wisdom and eagle eye with me. Without you, this book would never have come about.

Forever in my heart, to the moon and far beyond, you know why.

Love, Laura Marian

Introduction

Coincidental encounters in random places. Everyone experiences this every day. People come together, interact, express themselves to each other with emotions, with language, with a gentle gesture. And suddenly there comes that warm wave, as if cupid shoots a well-aimed arrow into the heart. An unimaginably powerful feeling, but at the same time so painful. Souls that suddenly, find each other, still ignorant but connected. Present and past flow into, and through each other. The power of love, across national borders, beyond the barrier of culture or language, takes a person to unprecedented lyrical, poetic and emotional heights. But equally the lowest and worst. One can possess much, but love knows no owner. It overpowers and conquers, the only force that will last forever.

Laura Marian, a talented writer, brings a fantastic story of passion, sorrow, love and jealousy. Not bound by place or time yet where many elements in the story feel so familiar by many. The masterful depiction of the intertwined lives of the characters and the brilliant emotional expressions are one of a kind. Because of the fluency of how words and sentences flow together like cogs, the book reads like a high-speed train. Before one knows it, the last page turned, gasping for the sequel.

Samuel Amoral

To my beloved,
my rock,
my eternal muse,

In the twilight of the soul,
words flow, heavy as feeling,
red ink on perishable paper,
writes stories of sorrow and of four.
The pen drips slowly, as time passes,
each letter telling what the heart euphoria reaches,
a love lost, a dream fading,
when silence beckons the echoes of the past.
Black tears roll, when the night is deep,
under a starry sky, so full of loss.
They tell of pain, of shadows dancing,
of hopes fading, like a forgotten novel, an opportunity.
Red ink, radiant, but also so fragile,
you bear the burden of every broken gesture.
In the circles of sorrow, the truth comes to light,
that even the brightest love sometimes ends in struggle.
The tears fade, the ink remains,
a history that never quite decays,
and so they dance together, in the play of time,
red ink and black tears, a poetic struggle.
So I write on, pen in my hand,
an ode to love, which I don't burn anyway.
Red ink, black tears, they are one and the same,
a symphony of life, where truth and pain weave.

Fernando Garcia de la Fuente

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Oviedo, Saturday, June 8, 1940.

Like every day, young muscular fellow Fernando Garcia de la Fuente rides his motorcycle past the orchard, located just outside the hustle and bustle of the city. He looks up at the sun for a moment and blinks his russet eyes. His short-cropped black hair shimmers with gel. An incipient stubble accentuates his masculine jawline.

It is still early in the day, 10 a.m. or so, yet she is already burning. He enjoys the early rays on his body, it makes the world just a little more beautiful. The world has awakened in the meantime, here and there he sees a wild rabbit jumping by, or little birds regaling him with their most beautiful song ... to the cooing of doves in the trees. Heartwarming it is, the rose bushes along the side of the road in full bloom. He is startled by noise and stops for a moment.

"Surrender!" echoed bravely.

"Never, ever! I am Rey Pelayo, I will never surrender!"

Smiling, he rides on again, playing children portraying the battle of Don Pelayo. Secretly, he does sometimes dream of a family.

He drives along the gently rolling hills, his heart pounding, hoping to catch a glimpse there of the most beautiful blossom he was ever privileged to see. Her name resembles a beautiful symphony, one that goes straight to the heart: Maria Amor de la Celda.

Despite his noble heritage, he is enchanted by her. As usual, she is hard at work in her parents' orchard. Her father has numerous trees and crops, with which he raises his pigs. All stand peacefully in harmony, on the vast grounds. Often he dreams away about her habitat, which is in stark contrast to his own. In the distance, he sees the farm of her father, Francisco de

la Celda. She is simple. From afar, the farmhouse appears small, but is cozily furnished. The house is grey and white, with a red roof. The barn is built next to it, in grey stone, and as you walk by you can hear the pigs grunting. What a wonderful life it must be. The kitchen is small but cozy and comfortable. They still bake their own bread the traditional way.

His father belongs to the Oviedo aristocracy, and owns an arms factory in Oviedo. Here men are raised, knowing that they will become like their father. They have a butler, servants and maids. Melancholy, he thought back briefly to his childhood. His father was never there, always at work in the factory, or "at meetings with rich gentlemen who absolutely wanted to speak to him, at the gentlemen's club," it was called. His mother was so often alone, suffered so hard. Becoming like his father... The very thought of this repulses Fernando. His father, is a cold man, insensitive, and is known to like to indulge in carnal lust, preferably not in the marital bed. Due to his busy activities with the arms factory, he is rarely at home. Consequently, Fernando does not have a good relationship with his father. The latter considers him too much of a dreamer. An idler who likes music too much, is out too much on walks or away on motorcycles, and above all, that he gets involved too often with the rabble. Although he doesn't like to dwell on it, Fernando's fear of war is growing. More and more often his father is in conversation with General Franco's emissary.

Franco himself lets himself be noticed a little too often when he goes fishing around Oviedo, on one of the mountain rivers. It is as if he mocks and studies people then, and Fernando gets an uneasy feeling. The question "what if?" is rising more and more often in his mind lately.

Awakened from his gloomy thoughts, he looks longingly at Maria Amor again.

The sun caresses her lightly bronzed skin. Her long dark hair flutters wildly in the wind. It looks like a mixture of shades of brown, kissed by the sun. He admires her undulating forms in

her long blue dress. The blue makes her shine even more. She flatters the dress, the dress does not flatter her. Whatever she wears, it is as if she radiates light.

As always, she sings a song, going all in. Her almond-shaped blue eyes drive him crazy, he would like to kiss her eyes, get lost in her song. He who does not drown in her beautiful deep blue eyes is a blind man. Her deep blue eyes are like a wild untamable ocean, harboring countless deep secrets. Her skin is blessed by the fresh morning dew.

Maria Amor is the youngest daughter of three, two of whom are already married. Only Maria Amor still lives at home, and is known for her fiery character and temperament.

She has already turned down a few marriage proposals, in a brutal way that completely typifies her. She is elusive like the wind ... slipping through your fingers like sand, and untamable as the sea is fierce. She is like pure oxygen in your lungs, but also like a gurgling mountain river.....

The last person who tried to ask her for her hand walked out of the house spitting and cursing.

"Devil's spawn, it is!" he cried out.

"If I marry, it will be for love, not because I have to!" exclaimed a frenzied Maria to her father. "I want a man, not an animal who thinks he can own me, or chain me up. I deserve love, respect."

"Ach Maria Amor, that's not how it works! You have to think of a good party. How will you fare later when your mother and I are no longer here? The pigs' meat doesn't make enough, and you alone can't handle it!"

"Father dear, I cherish you and will respect and worship you forever, but I cannot but listen to my heart. Do I not bake the most delicious bread for you? Don't our crops yield enough? Do I not take good enough care of our little pigs? I work as hard as a man does father, but I beg you, do not force me to deny my heart."

Maria Amor was special, in every way. Every man in the area lost his heart to her, and she shattered it without mercy, with one look. She rejected officers, men high in rank and file, as well as simple peasants.

Only one man could charm her, so to him she had set her heart. "Are you peeping at me again?"

Fernando woke up from his trance and looked straight into the eyes of Maria Amor.

"I..." he stammered, "I didn't mean to..."

She laughed and moved closer, whereupon Fernando got off his motorcycle.

"I'm sorry. I just thought it was too funny how you seemed to get lost in your dreams." She gives him a kiss on his blushing cheek. "Someday I want to ride on the back with you." She looks at the motorcycle sparkling under the sunlight.

"Hard at work I see?"

"On the farm, there's always work. But for you I'm happy to make time, silly."

She looked at him in love, and he melted away again. He conjured up a bunch of wildflowers and she smiled gratefully.

"Thank you my love."

He took a rose from the bouquet, and draped it in her hair.

"Almost as beautiful as you," he whispered.

She looked at him shyly, and took his hand. He guided her to a tree, where they took a seat together. An ancient oak tree, with whose acorns she fed the pigs.

"Just by my favorite tree..." she muses dreamily.

The soft grass under the tree offers shade and coolness to the two lovers. He takes his pocket knife and shows it to her.

"May I?" he asks. She nods.

Deft as an artist, he carefully carved a heart into the tree, with both their initials inside. 'F & M'

"So that our love is sealed forever and ever, with this beautiful oak tree as a silent witness."

In response, she pressed her lips to his, kissing him eagerly.

The exotic taste of her lips entranced him. It was like tasting a sweet mixture of raspberries and blueberries, with a hint of peach. He licks his lips for a moment, trying to imprint the taste and feel of this greeting from her lips into his memories.

"If I were to die now, it would be with this wonderful feeling, a greeting from your lips my dear."

"Crazy, I don't want you to die! Then I'll have to miss you, and all the while I love you!"

"Not even death can stop me from loving you. Does not the sun rise every day in the east, scorching the earth with its fledgling rays? Does not the moon shine every night in the firmament of heaven? My beloved, I swear to you, what I feel for you is not only for this life, but for eternity. Nothing or no one, not even death in person, can extinguish the fire that burns for you in my heart."

"So sweet of you my love! Just a little more, and I would come to believe that you would overcome even the chill of the night, fight the battle with death for me! But I love you too, to the moon and back again."

He feels how the tender grass tickles and looks dreamily at the field flowers in the grass.

"I want to ask your father for your hand."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Don't you love me then?"

"Yes, of course I do. My love for you is deeper than the deepest mountain lakes, elusive as the wind. I hear every night how the wind whispers your name my love. Only... Am I good enough for your family?"

"Why wouldn't you be good enough?"

"I also hear the rumors. Papa acts very mysterious, he says war is going to break out, and then I have to flee with mother to the mountains around Covadonga."

"I don't believe war is coming. But I understand your fears. Father is also increasingly busy negotiating, but I prefer to keep out of it. The factory, that's not what I want to continue with. But

I do know that I want to make you my wife, and love you forever. Having a farm together with you, living self-sufficiently... Having a family..."

He takes both her hands, and kisses them tenderly, then his lips stir hers, and the world disappears in an endless kiss.

"Next week I would like to ask your father for your hand, if I may."

She nodded dreamily.

"But now I have to go back to work ... When I'm done here, I have to do laundry too."

Like a spindly hare, she took off again, working diligently.

Fernando looked at her in love. Despite his wealthy origins, he would give the world, give up his titles, merely to have her as a wife.

He got back on his motorcycle and rode home, down the long driveway. He greeted the gardener briefly, and rode on to the garage, where he would park his motorcycle. Smiling, still dreaming about his great love for Maria Amor, he stepped out of the garage whistling, and headed toward the front door.

Once there, he was brought out of his illusion. His father was waiting for him sternly.

"There you are at last. Come with me to the living room, I want to introduce you to someone."

Patiently Fernando follows through the large white hallway into the living room, which is lined with parquet, and on the marble fireplace there is a heavy ornament. In the corner of the room is a bust of his grandfather, the founder of the factory. At the heavy oak table sits a man with a glass of cognac in front of him.

"I take it you know this gentleman?"

Fernando looked and nodded, it was General Franco's right-hand man, his emissary so to speak, and that did not mean much good.

The man stood up and held out his hand, which Fernando shook doubtfully.

"Fernando, you will no doubt have heard of the precarious situation that is currently going on? Of course we stand as a block behind General Franco. By the way, please send my warmest greetings to el Generalísimo. You may count on our support, and we will gladly provide the necessary resources."

His father nodded his right hand in praise and took a puff of his cigar.

"In times of war, we must all make sacrifices, and it is no different here. We must stand as one behind our general, thinking of the future of the country, and our gender."

"What do you mean father, do I have to go to the front? Has war broken out then?"

"These are turbulent times, so we must make sacrifices and make sure we are strong. Spain needs us more than ever, and the General must be able to count on us. For that reason, it is important that we, the wealthy families forge lasting bonds."

"And that means father?"

"We have arranged a good wife for you, a fine marriage, which will offer certainties, and will re-establish ties. The general himself has chosen her for you, you may feel honored that a man of his stature thinks of you personally, and of the future of this country. What this country needs are strong sons, who will continue our bloodline, right?"

The envoy nods broadly, smiling.

"But," stammered Fernando, "I wanted to ask for the hand of Maria Amor de la Celda."

"De la Celda? That pig farmer's daughter? Over my dead body!" he roared. "I won't tolerate you seeing her anymore. She belongs to the lower class. The rabble. Forget her boy, I don't want you to ever see her again let alone speak to her. Maybe one more time to say you are marrying someone else."

He turns and straightens his chin upward.

"But father, I can't make that, can I? I promised her my heart, I gave my word. A man of honor does not break his word, right? You have always given me that message."

"A man of honor does not break his word to like-minded people. She is the rabble. You don't give your word to that, it's worthless! Just like her! I will not tolerate it, understood! No son of mine will ever wind up with a peasant woman of lower class. Over my dead body. I can't think about it. What will people say then. 'Oh look, a Garçia de la Fuente got screwed by a de la Celda.' The shame!"

"I love her, and will fight for her!"

His father turns around furiously. Fernando receives a hard slap in the face.

"Stupid, you put us to shame!"

In his youthful rage, hurt in his Asturian sense of honor, he storms out of the room, and sprints away through the garden, toward the garage, where he drives his motorcycle out with screeching tires.

On the way to Maria Amor's farm. In the distance, he hears a bang and a loud scream, as if fighting is going on. He accelerates even more so that he gets there faster. Once he gets there, he gets another cold shower of size.

Maria Amor's father appears to have "succumbed to a heart attack. At least, that's what the neighbor told him, although he did have a suspicion that this "heart attack" was caused by a "blue bean. That would explain the loud bang, and the scream. No doubt because he refused to offer the hand of his youngest daughter to Miguel Lopez Gallo, a wealthier farmer, from the Covadonga area, and in-law.

Miguel was a big man, with a black bunch of curly hair, and a firm mustache. He smoked away, and you could smell him, too. The cigarette smoke invariably hung around him. His broad shoulders made him look imposing, and his arm muscles strained in his clothes.

There are whispers that his family and he played a major role in Franco's coup. Corrupt as hell, that man. Of no small mind. A

man who would not take no for an answer, no matter what. He regularly did odd jobs, and when he showed up at the door, you had better pay up or hope you made it out alive.

There was some suspicion that he just shot Maria Amor's poor father and got away with it. Miguel was held up to scrutiny from above, because he did often "make something unwanted disappear." Even the police were afraid of him because he had powerful friends who could make things difficult for them.

Francisco's death would be labeled a natural death, due to a heart attack.

Since Francisco's wife had given birth to no sons, all possessions went to Miguel.

He knocked softly on the door; a neighbor opened and preceded him into the living room. It looked as if a skirmish had taken place. There were broken plates on the floor, chairs overturned, a broken vase. He looked around for a moment with an uneasy feeling, for he could not detect Maria Amor anywhere, saw only the body of the lamented Francisco lying on the brown cloth couch. On the floor there was a trace. Something dark brown. "Could that be blood?" he wondered.

He looked fleetingly at Francisco and thought "poor fellow, you were a good man, noble at heart.

"My sincere condolences," Fernando spoke demurely.

Maria Amor's mother looked at him bitterly.

"Maria Amor has agreed to marry Miguel. She will go with him to Covadonga."

She seemed pleased with the whole situation, as if she was happy to finally be rid of her husband.

His world collapsed. His eyes searched for his beloved. It took him a moment to discern her in a dark corner of the room, where she was huddled. He looked at Mary's tear-stained face, whose eye was half closed. Her whole face was swelling, and a tuft of dark hair on the floor, suggested she had been dragged across the floor by her hair. Her hands cupped in front of her

face to hold back the tears, showed the dark bruises around her wrists. She looked at the ground. She could only just hide a sob. Immediately he realized what horrible scene must have taken place here. Miguel must have asked for Maria Amor's hand, and she, in her well-known way, must have rejected him. Miguel, known for his aggressive behavior and hot temper, does not take kindly to rejection. Possibly here it came to a skirmish, a scuffle between him and her father. And she herself will have fought like a lion to protect her father.

Maria Amor's mother is a cold and unloving woman, any affection was always foreign to her. At the sight of this scene, Fernando wondered what Miguel promised her. A rich husband, no more smell of pigs? A job in the rectory? Women who betray their husbands in this way, who deny and even sell their child, are capable of anything. And believe it or not, but karma always does its work. She would still get her share.

The blood in his infatuated veins began to boil. He wanted so badly to save her, but what could he do now? He stood here alone, unarmed against a giant with the strength of a bull on hormones.

He looked at her questioningly; in his impetuous infatuation, he was ready to put up a fight for her. But her once in love look, now seemed hollow, dead. She shook her head as if to say "no, don't. Brutally she was straightened by Miguel. Docile as a lamb, she followed him, pursued by her grinning mother. Fernando struggled to control himself and balled his fists beside his body. Maria turned around one more time, lip-synching "I love you" to him.

"Off to Covadonga, then." Miguel ordered his valet to load some of Maria Amor's belongings, and a bewildered Fernando stared after her as the car left, with the love of his life in it, drained like a slave.

Like a broken man, he returned home, swallowing his tears, for real men do not cry....

He shuffled into the living room where, meanwhile, his father and the envoy sat on the heavy leather seats with a glass of cognac in front of them. Both were busily discussing while enjoying a cigar.

"I will marry father, and obey you."

"Fantastic, we'll make it a brilliant grand wedding. It will be a celebration to remember."

"I would rather have it small and modest father, just the civil service."

"Come come come boy, none of that, even before God you can get married. We are going to have the wedding on September 7. If that's not a good plan."

Like Maria Amor, Fernando steps into a loveless marriage, with the daughter of a wealthy business partner of his father, and also a confidant of General Franco.

Three months later the marriage was to be consummated. His father had arranged a nice home for him, a mansion in Oviedo, where he accepted a job in his father's factory as a bookkeeper. Already the day of the wedding, his spouse was grumbling.

"My dress is just ordinary, could there really not be a more expensive dress? I wanted a big party with more luxury and splendor. This is only plain. I don't like that band and that music."

It got so heavy and so much for him that conscious night of the wedding that he indulged in gallons of red wine, and ran away like a thief in the night of the party. Only to end up on the couch in the living room, falling asleep there on his wedding night. Carmen was ugly as night. She had a spindly nose like a hawk, a chin sharp as a witch's, and creamy white skin from dodging the sun. She shivered from the sun. In addition to all this, she was blessed with a substantial head of hair. She had jet-black curls, which she liked to keep short, and also quite a bit of fuzz under

her nose. Say a hefty mustache. She felt well enough that she paid no extra attention to being a woman, so armpit hair and hair on the legs was lush.

He dreaded having to sleep with this woman, waking up next to her. Doing his conjugal duty felt like under duress. It felt like someone was pointing a revolver at him. It was monotonous, like a robot, without emotion, without kissing her. In his mind, he had Maria Amor in mind, otherwise the soldier deserted before even a salvo had been discharged. Two months after completing the marriage, she was pregnant.

The news of pregnancy was a godsend, that way he didn't have to touch her anymore. Sleeping together was never an option for him, they never shared the bed. The deed happened, pants on and back to his own room. And he was spared that now, thankfully.

Carmen and he live side by side. She is a hollow woman, who never has enough. Gratitude for the sunrise, for all that is, it is foreign to her. She yelled at him several times a day, ranted at servants. He often couldn't hear it anymore. He was ashamed of her everywhere they went, of her hot-tempered nature. She was concerned only with luxury and ostentation. Often she was angry with Fernando about why he did not have a high position in the army, and also why he did not think about taking over his father's factory and building it further. He heard her tell it this way, "There is a future in weapons."

Fernando, however, was not a fighter; he did not like the gun business. He did accounting in order to have a job, and make a living, and increasingly he stayed longer at work, only to come home, and escape to the study. He did not smoke, but he enjoyed a glass of cognac or a glass of wine, with the door locked. Then he would take a book with it, or get lost in his music he made with his guitar. Carmen could not bear to have him locked in there, and banged on the door like mad. He closed the door inside and then chuckled.

"Bang all you want on the door you witch, you won't get in!"

It was his secret dream to have a simple life, in peace, love, but with the woman of his life. It would remain only a dream, for she was off to Covadonga.

Nine hard months, that's how long it usually takes for a baby to be ready to be born. Nine months in which the swear words fly around, in which there are cries like possessions, and everyone is at their wit's end. Carmen's pregnancy hormones did make the servants think they wouldn't make it through the morning, or that she is actually a werewolf in human form.

Oviedo, Thursday, Aug. 14, 1941

Finally the time came. The moment presented itself when his child would be birthed.

In haste, the doctor is called in. Carmen lies on her bed cursing and swearing. The doctor enters the room. The sheets are soiled with amniotic fluid and blood, and a maid stands ready, waiting for orders. The midwife puts on an apron, and sleeves over her dress. So does the doctor. He puts on gloves and feels her belly for a moment, and how much opening she already has.

"This is going to be a problem," he murmurs. "The pregnancy was already not so easy, but it turns out the baby is breech. She now has a 7-centimeter opening. The contractions seem to be tracking well."

"Then do something, weirdo!" Carmen screams like a lunatic.

"I'm dying! This hurts so much! Fernando, bastard, it's all your fault you worthless nothing! Damn it, get that bastard out of my body! I'm going to push now! Do you hear me? Now!"

Carmen starts laughing like a madman, only to cry like a dog a moment later. The midwife looks at her fearfully.

"Nothing to worry about, the lady is known to have mental problems as a result of her opium addiction. Pregnancy

prevented her from consuming opium, and that avenged itself, she has delusions because of it."

"What are we going to do doctor? Do we open her up with a C-section, or are we going to try to turn the baby?"

"For a C-section it will be too late, I fear. I can try to turn."

The doctor ties Carmen, who meanwhile lies frantically shaking on the bed, to head and foot ends.

"Carmen, listen, the baby is in breech, I'm going to go in with you for a moment to try and see if I can turn the baby, okay, look at the ceiling calmly and breathe deeply in and out."

Slowly the doctor enters and mutters.

"Try to turn with him on the outside, but I fear it's going to be too late, he's collapsed, and is breech."

Again comes a contraction.

"She has enough opening sister. Miss, can you get cloths, soft blankets, the baby clothes, and hot water? And towels please!"

The servant nods and walks to the kitchen to give the requested.

"The clothes are already ready in the crib in the room, and here is a bowl of warm water and the requested cloths doctor."

"Fine, thank you girl. Now you may come over here and help. Just put the bowl here on the table next to the bed, and come over here."

The maid does as she is asked.

"Carmen, listen carefully. Both ladies are going to pull your legs up and hold your knees. Now when a contraction comes, you will grab your legs, and bring your chin to your chest, and you will squeeze with all your might, understood, as hard and as long as you can! The baby is coming with its feet first, so it is important that it comes out as quickly as possible."

"Doctor, I think she is starting to make a fever, from the contractions and from the many hours of labor she has already had."

"It's vital that that baby gets there as soon as possible, that's what matters now."

The ladies hold her knees, and Carmen brings her chin to her chest and squeezes.

"Squeeze harder, I already have his legs attached, push through, come on!"

She gives up.

"Just a puff, come on, the next contraction is coming."

On the next contraction, she squeezes so hard she almost turns purple in the face, but the baby is far enough out that the doctor can gently pull it out.

"Congratulations, it's a boy! Nurse, will you change him?"

With a scream, the little man comes to life, while the midwife washes and measures and weighs him.

"A hefty guy he is, 51 inches and 3.5 pounds. Talk about a good guy!"

"Well done ma'am." The maid briefly strokes Carmen's hand, but she does not respond immediately. She lies down silent and white.

"Doctor, she's not responding." The doctor, meanwhile, stood by the baby for a moment, and comes walking up.

"Hell, the placenta isn't there yet, and she's gone white, she won't have gotten internal bleeding, will she?"

"Carmen, listen to me, hello, Carmen?" He taps her face for a moment. "Now you have to push out the placenta, come on girl." As if in a daze, she does what is asked, and suddenly the blood squirts out of her body, like a fountain. Part of the placenta comes out.

"Damn, the placenta is ruptured, she's going to have internal bleeding."

"What do you suggest doctor?" asks the midwife in the background.

"Quickly take my suitcase in the corner, I can try to sedate her, and perform a C-section."

He notices how the blood swells, and Carmen's breathing becomes slower and slower.

"I fear we are too late."

Two minutes later it had happened, Carmen dies in childbirth, as a result of heavy bleeding.
In short, everything that could go wrong went wrong.

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Fernando was pacing in the living room while the doctor and a midwife were busy upstairs in the room. The noise seemed to quiet down.

He mused about the whole thing.

'What if this had been with Maria Amor... Suppose she gave him a son... Or a daughter whose beauty would reflect hers? He would be at the maternity bed with Maria Amor, holding her hand in his, whispering to her how well she was doing. Eagerly looking forward to his baby, praising her to the heavens with her hard work. Certainly Maria Amor would not be so difficult throughout the pregnancy.'

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Moments later, the maid comes downstairs with the baby on her arm.

"Congratulations sir. It's a son. The doctor is still a little busy with your wife."

The baby looks just like him. It is a cloud of a boy, with big russet eyes. Enthralled, he looks at the little miracle.

"Hello little guy, welcome to the world. I'm going to christen you Emilio. And I promise you, little friend, that I'll be there for you... Anyway... You're never going to experience the coldness of a father who wasn't there... I'm going to play with you, and you're going to grow up to be a neat and loving young man. And when you grow up, we'll go fishing together in one of the rivers around Oviedo."

Moments later, the doctor comes downstairs wearing a dirty bloody apron.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid I have some bad news."

He looks at the doctor absently. "What do you mean?"

"The baby was breech, and during delivery, the placenta ruptured, causing intense bleeding. Because of the pains, she

also developed a violent fever. I did what I could, but I couldn't save her, I'm sorry."

The doctor bowed his head down.

"You did what you could doctor," is all Fernando could utter. Actually, he wasn't even mad about it, that he was finally rid of that ghost.

He cannot even say he is mourning the loss of his wife because his heart has already stopped beating for some time.

"For feeding the baby, and caring, I suddenly think of Louisa. She lost her baby two days ago in childbirth, but she could nurse this baby so he can grow into a strong young man."

As if in a daze, Fernando let it wash over him for a moment, and nodded. The doctor left, to find himself a moment later in the room with a young woman who introduced herself as Louisa. Almost instinctively, he placed little Emilio in the arms of Louisa, who would take care of him. Eagerly, little Emilio gulped, and drank. He was not a noisy baby, did not make too much noise and was happily quiet, basically everything his mother was not. Louisa put a shawl over him, and Fernando gave her privacy so she could suckle his son in peace.

The joyous news soon reached his parents. Fernando's mother in particular was so happy for her grandson.

.....
The same evening after the birth, his parents suddenly showed up on his doorstep.

"May I come and admire my grandson?" his mother asked eagerly. She kissed her son on the forehead, and followed him into the living room, where the crib stood with little Emilio in it. Next to the crib, Louisa sat embroidering. She embroidered sheets and blankets, with Emilio on them in ornate letters, in the distinctive blue of Asturias.

Enthralled, she looks at him. "What a beautiful little fellow you are... With your big beautiful brown eyes... May I take you now that you are awake?"

Enthralled, she takes him out of the crib, into her arms and sits down with him on the couch.

His father looks at him, as always, studying him, and pulls his mustache for a moment. "Where's the mommy?"

"Carmen did not survive childbirth unfortunately. God rest her soul."

"Oh, but that's a good thing, that means you inherit everything from her. Now you are a rich man my son, you should never worry about your little man again, he is a rich man now. You can let him study, anything you want."

.....

At the same time in the region of Covadonga, a woman is puffing along the street. Her bulging belly weighs down, and she is lugging a heavy bag of potatoes.

"But Maria Amor anyway! You're almost nine months pregnant, dragging such a weight up the hill shouldn't you? Wouldn't you be better off getting some rest?"

"Dear Doña Mercedes, if I don't do it, no one will. And then I'll get it again that there are no potatoes."

"But going to the market to buy all those things is too much for you anyway, especially now that you are heavily pregnant. Your husband has a car, he can ride with you, right?"

She sighs for a moment. Doña Mercedes knows better by now. She remembers the wedding, about a year ago. It was a terrible day. It seemed like heaven was weeping for this poor young woman. Already from the moment she arrived here, she was covered in bruises and had a thick face from the blows.

Throughout the months, Doña Mercedes often witnessed terrible beatings, screaming, swearing. But the day of the wedding, it defied all imagination. The poor child entered the church, dragged by her wrists, jaws thick, one eye closed, tears running down her cheeks, and the moment she was almost at the altar and wanted to flee, he dragged her by the hair. The poor child lay soulful in the aisle, and no one dared to react. That

conscious wedding night she heard screaming, crying, shouting, but no one dared to do anything. A few months later, the poor girl turned out to be pregnant, but still she was full of bruises. Not a day passed without her going to pray in the Covadonga cave, in the chapel of La Santina de Covadonga.

"My faith is all that keeps me going," was the reply.

"Come girl, hand that bag over, I'll help you."

Maria Amor hands the bag to Doña Mercedes and remains standing for a moment.

"What's wrong girl?"

"Pain, in my lower abdomen. Stitches."

The neighbor looks at her for a moment, then looks at the ground.

"I think it has started sweetie, you are going to be a mother. Your water just broke, what you are having now are contractions."

"Oy, now what?"

"Don't panic, come, I'll help you inside. Can you still walk? Just lean on me."

Maria takes Doña Mercedes' arm and shuffles along. She occasionally grabs her stomach and has to gasp violently.

"Damn, those are getting fierce exactly, and it's going fast. We're almost there."

They arrive at the house, and go inside. Maria Amor barely claps in half.

"Ooooh that pain!"

"Puff girl, puff! Come, we'll go to your room on the bed. Do you have cloths? Towels? Are the baby things ready?"

Maria Amor nods.

"The baby stuff is ready in the crib, as well as the cloths. Towels are in the bathroom."

"And a tub for hot water? Get on the bed, and take off your underclothes. I'll go get a bowl of hot water. Is he home?"

Maria Amor shakes her head.

“Great. We’re pretty secluded here, so there’s not going to be a doctor, I can quickly rustle up another neighbor if you want, but I’m going to check on the progress before I leave here, understand? I’m here. She gently pulls open Maria Amor’s legs, noticing full dilation.

“Okay, listen carefully. I’m going to get hot water quickly now, keep puffing quietly, I’ll come right away. Apparently you have a very high pain threshold, because the dilation is complete. As soon as I’m back, and you have another contraction, we’re going to push together. I’ll be right there!”

Mercedes runs like mad to the kitchen for hot water and returns. She places the bowl of water on the night table and quickly fetches towels as well.

Maria Amor lies sweating and puffing.

“I feel something coming Mercedes.”

“I’m here girl. I’m watching, you pull both your knees up to you, and bring your chin to your chest, okay? Can you do that for me? I’m going to feel at your belly, when I call ‘push,’ we’re going to push together, as hard as you can, and puff away the pain in between.”

She nods.

“Push, now!”

Maria Amor clenched her teeth, grabbed her legs and squeezed as if her life depended on it.

“Okay, well done, just a puff because the next contraction is coming.”

She takes a good gasp, and squeezes again.

“One more time and the baby is here, come on!”

She squeezes one more time as if it were her last gasp.

Then a soft cry echoes.

“Congratulations girl, you gave birth to a beautiful daughter.”

She wraps the baby in a blanket and places her on Maria Amor’s chest.

“Now you have to push one more good time to push out that placenta, and then we’ll cut the umbilical cord. What is she going to be called dear?”

“Ana. She will be named Ana.”

Maria Amor looks endearingly at little Ana, who eagerly gasps at the breast and drinks. Meanwhile, Mercedes cuts the umbilical cord.

“Good for you, a big eater.” Mercedes smiles. “And there’s the mother cake. I’m going to freshen you up right away dear, feed the baby first, and then wash her, and dress her. You did a fine job. I’ll put the bloody towels and sheets here for a while, then I’ll take them to wash. And then I’ll just change everything for you.”

“Thank you Doña Mercedes, how can I ever thank you.”

“Girl anyway, I know you would do just the same for me.”

When little Ana is done drinking, Mercedes takes her to the tub of water, and washes her. Then she gets a cotton diaper on, and a onesie. Mercedes puts her in the crib for a while, under her sheet and blanket, and smiles again.

“What a beautiful wicker crib you have here.”

“It was a gift from my sister. I wonder how my family will react to this news from Ana, I haven’t heard from my mother in a few months. No news is good news right?”

Mercedes goes to the kitchen for a moment, and takes clean water.

“So, and now we’re just going to fix up the mommy.”

Carefully, she refreshed Maria Amor.

“You did that well girl. Do you have any bandages for yourself? Clean nightwear, underwear?”

“Over there in the closet.”

She walks to the closet and takes a clean nightgown and underwear, as well as bandages.

“You’re going to need those now, you’re going to be flowing for a while.”

She helps Maria Amor get dressed.

“Will you manage to get up for a moment? Then I’ll take off the bedding too, and put clean sheets.”

Maria nods and shuffles to a seat in the room, which is next to the crib.

Mercedes puts clean sheets and takes the soiled linen, as if nothing happened.

“Shall I make you something else to eat? You must see that you eat well and vigorously, that that little licorice there can grow big and strong.”

She smiles.

“I even believe I have another big pot of soup. I made a potent vegetable soup today with meat in it. That with a good hunk of bread should already help get you back on your feet a bit, and nice errano ham of course. I’ll take the laundry out already, I’ll be back with food for you soon.”

.....

Mercedes walks out of the house with the linen under her arm, arriving at her own cottage, where her daughter Luiza is visiting with her husband.

“So visit?”

“Hello mom, we’ve been here for a while, but you weren’t here.”

“The girl next door gave birth to a daughter, I helped there for a while. I’m going to take her food away now, and then cook off that laundry here, hopefully I’ll get everything clean.”

“Can I help with anything mother?”

“No, it’s okay, but how are you?”

“I have great news mom.”

Her husband beams.

“Take a good look.”

“Oh dear, I’m going to be a grandmother! If only your blessed father could have experienced that! What a miracle, so much baby luck in one day! I’ll bring out some food soon, and then I want to hear all about it, okay?”

She takes a large basket, in which she places a bowl of soup, a French bread, eggs, bacon, and a large hunk of ham.

“With this she can continue today, then she can eat well and vigorously, and then rest a bit.”

“Give her some cassoulet too mom, I made a big pot.”

“That graces you so dear, I am so proud of you.”

She scoops some of the cassoulet into a smaller pot, and puts it in the basket as well, then quickly goes to Maria Amor, leaving the food in the kitchen. She walks upstairs one more time, to make sure everything is okay.

“I’ll come down, then I can eat some food, and then get some rest.” Maria Amor is visibly affected, but strong as she is, she manages to get by.

“You’re doing fine, and if you need me, you know where to find me, just remember that.”