

Soy un bravo piloto de la nueva China, by Ernesto Semán

Excerpt translated by Tara FitzGerald

PART I

THE CITY

When I opened the apartment door the light entered from the side, diagonally, even though it was already almost dark. This seemed odd. In the early morning, for example, the sunlight enters from the direction of the river and appears first in the sitting room, warping the furniture's shadows, stretching them out like giraffes. And although I don't usually give that kind of thing much thought, you end up having certain expectations about light and shadows at different times of the day. At that moment, the city's reflection shone clearly and artificially under low-hanging clouds, the orange hue of torrid stormy nights. So the legs belonging to the body that was hanging in the middle of the sitting room threw off an elongated shadow that crawled along the ground towards the wall and stuck to me, stuck to my body as I stood there on the threshold – half in, half out – with the door still ajar behind me.

For many years I had thought about the possibility of my father's suicide, or variations on the suicide theme. I had become so used to the idea that I wondered if the whole world was walking around with the same mental images, imbued with an identical insistence. Sometimes I imagined myself in the courtyard of an unidentified house, sitting in a hammock or on a sofa. I would hear a shot and run inside to find him, the warrior of the pen and the word, stretched out over the table that served as his desk. Other times the image was of a house that I entered after being out all day, and in the sitting room I

would find his dead body propped up on the sofa; and in some of those versions he had no visible injury, while in others, blood trickled down from his temple and seeped into his shirt.

Sometimes he would jump from the window of an office building in the Tribunales neighborhood, overwhelmed by something. And other times, he would simply not return home, vanishing without a trace, without leaving a message or anything. On some occasions, the way in which he killed himself remained vague, but at the center of the fantasy was one last long, intimate conversation that we shared. While on other occasions, the conversation was intimate but not comforting, and took place while he was drunk or high, cackling and waving a knife gripped in his right hand, his face distorted with fear.

Still other times the scene of the suicide was not clear, in fact I couldn't even see it properly, but it played out like a personal sacrifice to a higher cause, something indescribable leaving behind a heroic and onerous legacy. Or, in another imagining, I did not see the suicide, or the death, or the body, but instead received a phone call at work from some nameless official, a doctor or a lawyer, telling me something serious had happened to my father and I should go immediately to such-and-such a place – a hospital.

Of course, I had also imagined walking into my house and finding his body hanging in the center of the sitting room.

Now the deformed shadow of the legs shielded me from the bright light streaming in through the window at that hour. And because I had imagined it so often, everything seemed a little more normal in its own way. Except for the fact that the man hanging in my sitting room, my father, comrade Luis Abdela, had been dead for thirty years.