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FEMALES AND TORMENTS

by Pedro Peix

Talk to me about them,

there's plenty to be told about us, that we were a pair of ill-born bitches that we were nothing but whores, but we were much more than that, a bewitched lineage a hatchery of goliards heraldic aloes hillside mistletoe, we were much more than that, foliage of streaked souls on branches of disloyal tuberose, delirious pre-lascivious, they were famous without knowing it, unforgettable on purpose, daughters of a white man and a quadroon, they were resounding seed enlightened by the slime, more much more than that we were, one last glittering garment in the midst of the rubble, they don't see the halo of ancient branding irons, they don't see that unbound beast licking and relicking its empty gravestone, they can't see ahead of the night, its labarums and irons, inflicting the divine carrion abolishing cavern-dwelling deities, lifting in their razor-like edges slices of the dance, more much more than that we had been, deranged live coals remnants of a feast leftovers from plagues and despots, to others only a memory aflame in rancors to some a vain sortilege hedges of slashed clover

Tell me more,

they were called Bianca and Mónica, names we borrowed we heard them on the street night and day they were taken around in a cart you might as well tell them we were displayed naked in a cage you might as well describe to them the bustle the panting pandemonium of *caudillos* from the hills of barefoot troops gathered around the cage grabbing the bars above all damn it don't fail to tell them about the chaos of curious ogles about the taciturn and sinister travelers crawling out of valleys and gullies where lived river spirits despoiled by a maroon phallocide, even sinful women who received their fellow men in their shacks, healers of whores pimps gigolos and procurers coming from Lucerna, from Mata Palacio, from Cabayegua de Larimar, from Estebanía, to plunder the cart to tear down the tarpaulin to sniff the cage and its legacy of aromas to watch them embracing muddied soaking wet under wind dust and rainshowers, until when will we be a lethargy of moans of public secretions they leered at us touched us licked between our legs, they were pursued zealously by men and women it's just that everything in them was so developed so out in plain view not for nothing were we carried from town to town, until when will they be indelible in their fate I tell you that they remain yoked in the pitiless convergence of their being and because they come and go at will because so many people remain stagnant in their stream of serpents because they are in all places immune to my persecution I tell you no one has been able to pinpoint their

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chalices and caverns, bear in mind that only an island like this could have produced a Girl with Two Heads

Tell me everything you know,

No one ever knew if they traveled past unfurled by the beauty of their ire or if they went on with their entrails besieged fleeing the filth-wells of love as they sped past the railroad station, but through the cloud of steam they could be glimpsed with their faces resting against the window, dozing one upon the other, with an aura of dazzlement and a blood-stained neckline, perhaps spying each other's visions, dredging their brews under one sole sesame waist cat-like despite themselves, exhumed, babelical, bound to a perverse lethargy, march on lieutenant Roxy said when he heard the banging of the couplings, stop the train and besiege the darkness, nothing stirred, the iris of the fireflies did not gyrate nor did any worm dare cross the vague earth neither did the hawk flap its wings to drive a stake through its prey in the quaking bog, did you love them too?,

And who didn't?,

There, standing on the platform, I caught a fleeting glance of them through the glass their hair entangled like ivy to the wind, there, standing and alert to the siege, under the hissing rain zizzling on the cloaks of the Marines lining up a yard from the rails their muddied leggings their Springfield carbines hoisted against their heels, there, stern and stiff amidst the disciplined astonishment of the crowd, there, witnessing the impassively obstinate siege of lieutenant Roxy, erect on his horse like a colossus of hatred, and they moved on?,

no, the train stopped but they couldn't find them, they shoved the passengers off, tossed parcels and children to the air, searched underneath the seats at the point of a bayonet, underneath the train's huge serrated wheels, they went on brandishing their weapons all through the night, surrounded by a pack of hounds gnawing the semi-darkness as if the train itself had been an unburied carcass, and what became of them?,

they were there, their countenance remained there on the glass where? don't let them get away! barks plunders upbraiding a great agitation of desolate sunrises above the dawn where? there there don't touch them . . . Lower the bayonets, lower them I say! it's an order! where where the devil are they? there there the multitude broke ranks, grab the dogs . . . don't let them get near! the muzzles the muzzles! . . . put them on! the sun was high on the horizon because it was nearly noon when they discovered them, first a transitive oozing face, then the other in the glass as if diluted in its stupor, as if they had been transfigured by the ferocity of the arrest, spotlighted by the ominous brilliance of runaways searching for a path to escape there careful there you animals! so they had to dismantle the train window and bring her down between three Marines feeling the weight of the incubus on their shoulders the pressure of their heritage the enormous burden of their viscera and their clots of ecstasies, careful careful don't let her fall! thus step by step they carried the window across the station's esplanade almost slipping on the manure on the mud almost tripping on the roots snaking through the square on the cane residue on the

rusted debris piling up on the curbs just like that they carried her street after street asking for relief at the corners stumbling on the puddles on the gradings anxious and exhausted! “keep your eyes off them keep your eyes off them! clamored lieutenant Roxy forewarned distrustful of that window they had to cover with a regulation blanket so that neither one of them could flee in a glance or escape in a new sparkle, and where did they take them?,

where else? they kept lugging the window through swamps and ravines because the train froze on its rails creaked and suddenly rusted turning into scrap iron and they had to continue on foot up and down the hills on the way to Estefanía shrouded in a swarm of flies not only the marines, “if they only knew where their women where oh! and with whom!” but the patrol coming behind tense and infuriated “don’t listen to them, don’t pay them any mind!” awaiting their turn to receive more insults, more spit on the face, more scratches and bites “there comes the *guaragua* bird in a nosedive ouch! how hard the *guaragua* does prick men’s balls” all of them looking up, peeing unto their feet, feeling a growing rage spreading through their bodies, but still bearing the window “don’t let it fall, we’re almost there!” amidst a great pestilence they managed to enter the town, stick it into a pig sty they called jail a communal dungeon whose skylights they had to board up, and there was no sight of Lozada María?,

he and his pseudo-patriot gang were not the only ones going around day and night communicating with mirrors from hill to hill hoping to seize any flash of rage, every single Marine also scrutinized the point of his bayonet and the patrols were attentive to any spark that could erupt from the greenery from any crossroads standing at attention outside on permanent watch since only lieutenant Roxy entered the cell, with his dark glasses, riding crop in hand, dragging his spurs, his uniform and heart starched, first he would place the window against a corner of the wall, grab the by now tumid and fetid blanket, question the glass in a friendly manner, greet them in a cretinous Spanish and then ask one and the other what he already knew by heart, ambushing them in silence, provoking them with the bowl of food, tempting them with a sip of fresh water, while he patiently heard the laugh and murmurs “if you’re so macho why don’t you let your pants down,” unyielding to any curse or affront, “hey Roxy, which one of your men unravels his riding crop up your ass,” always leather-like in his harassment, indifferent to the feces that they hurled around the cell, to the draining out of an ire that became even more inciting at dawn, when lieutenant Roxy tortured them with kerosene lamps, with oil lamps and smoking torches hoping they would surrender before the heat consumed them, in any case his determination had no limit or attenuation, because he had not pursued them for the sake of following directions or discharging duties or routine missions, but more for the triumph of imprisoning them or confining them in the communal dungeon he was instigated by an obscure wish for revenge, for settling a pending score, as if he were ballasted by an urge for personal vengeance, by a corrosive longing for retaliation that despite all seemed insatiable endless without possible respite, an ill-will an affront that every underling every civilian every expatriate under his command assumed like a sacred hunt, lining up at all times in readiness for an insular redemption, closing ranks in their most sordid plunders,

inflamed by self-admiration at their mastery of cruelty, and if he didn't succeed with them, why didn't he search for Dorka Dukela?

She appeared without being summoned emerging from her lair of witches cleansing souls spawning fates abducting progenies, she appeared in Estefanía a month after lieutenant Roxy had decided to throw lime and acid into the cell and shut down the dungeon, just around the time he started to see them in the reservoir of his dreams, seeing them punctually in the glaring light of the camp, each morning as he shaved before the mirror, when he pinned his medals to his chest, as he poked the iris of cancerated violations, he saw them as he rode alongside the banks of any river shedding light onto his slaughterhouses, a moon and a half ahead of his insomnia, emaciated and rankless he was found by Dorka Dukela, kneeling before a credo of boulders in search of sanctuary, of some beacon of flames to fan the wings of the evil spell, some herbal potion that could unhex him, there in the swamps where the Obscene Virgin had lived, well, if you know so much, if you know them so well, speak for yourself,

they saw each other being born, one head came out, then the other as if they were fetuses stranded by the tangled skeins of an incestuous bellyful of guts, by a placenta worn out by ancestors by hereditary blights and larvated designs in the flora of an insane seed, they saw each other being born orchid-like above a womb still swollen and stretched out in a swamp which continued to push for fourteen days of rasping howls torrents of black gonads devouring their lymphs, they saw each other being born and heard each other's plaintive whines while they sprawled their mother's legs until they disjointed her until they devaginated her when they also saw emerge the head of a daring iguana which they lassoed without managing to extract not even when they tied up the woman's arms and found two mules to pull and debone her pelvis, they never succeeded in extracting the ravenous and gurgling reptile that went back to hide in her pubic bush as if gobbled down by an internal voracity, they saw each other being born between my hands, two heads for a single body that I wrenched from the breasts of the Obscene Virgin many days after they had persisted in sucking their dead mother's breasts,

tell more, Dorka Dukela, tell how you took us to the god Oliborio, a messiah in shirtsleeves who erected altars in the jungle and baptized animals harvests specters which appeared in the innards of the cult lamenting setbacks and agonies while he revoked commandments amended prophecies feeling on his back the grace of astonishment and the fervor of the flock which followed him gratefully through craggy peaks fanaticizing despairing women and those repentant souls convinced they have liberated themselves forever from the delirium of the heart the vomits of malaria and the fevers brought on by *dengue*, convinced they were fertilizing the fallow land with their sperm and that he was more ancient than the island and the fauna immolated to adore him would never suffice, convinced that he healed them without touching them, that he bottled astral roots to scare away the neighbors, settle debts, rush love affairs, and for those who wanted to save themselves from the city's sorrows and from the miasmas of progress by proffering him more provisions more packs of tobacco more casks of cane rum he had

a compass that would guide them to the promised kingdom, an officious and promiscuous eden, a clandestine paradise away from civilization without the official emblem of sin, a pagan and anarchic shore that he decided to trace between El Manchado and Larimar in perfect fellowship with mayors and hacienda owners who sought his indulgence his cinerary services his balms paid in cash or in legacies of cattle and plots of land, convinced that he was a *caudillo* of visions, even if he went around with a troop of convicts he called "Saintly Riders" to confer majesty onto the aide-de-camps of his cures mystic magnanimity to the bearers who bore his saddlebags with the tithes, in one way or another to exalt them as he went past the hamlets taking in his collection, tell us more Dorka Dukela, tell us about the god Oliborio presiding over a reencounter of ashes, tell us if it is not true that he would bury himself for six or seven days and be reborn without a maggot on his corneas,

it is true, that's how they all perceived him on those high regions of faith, building bridges distilleries and sanctuaries from palm fronds, proclaiming himself the last bastard heir of Christ while he made love marching ahead in great strides sweeping demons with his phallic rake soaking the wombs of village beauties filling the bellies of his flock of pubescent girls emerging from paddocks and hay fields to remove his shearling boots to bathe him in white lilies and dry the sixteen toes on his feet with their mouths preaching the Good News in peasant *conucos* and paddocks to a rabble of gentle peasants delivering his message to his sect of concubines proclaiming the action of the day to breastfeed foundlings and orphans any unloved newborn any victim of impieties with an assault nipple, all except us, the Girl with Two Heads, the bicephalous geovaric: daughter of a multigendered and puerperal mother, that Obscene Virgin that long ago made the dawn climb up to her eyes and whom the god Oliborio before coming across her in the swamps frolicking amidst an orgy of saurians had watched as the fish bit the bait of her breasts had smelled the fragrance she left behind braiding birds from the low skies of her hair, untouched pore by pore, not even in her most fragile fibers, beslimed by ganglions, as if illuminated by adamic bengal lights he had seen her very tall and sublime, he believed her born of an ancestral whirlpool knitted in her hair pins, he Announced her amidst protestations and dominations, he glorified her from province to province, he exhibited her under a canopy from one mountain to another dressed in organza, presented her simply as the Virgin, the Mother of the Lord, the one and only and all the virgins at the same time, hoisting her up on craggy rocks, making her appear on orange trees and acacias, bearing her across planted fields and yards, letting her be glimpsed in streams and waterfalls before the eyes of a multitude that began to invoke her on their own ranches and clay chapels to buy psalm tracts scapularies and prints with her venerable face from the god Oliborio, who after exalting her as free from passions and conceived in fruit, abominated her as being depraved and a reprobate, as a procuress of kinky-haired and bowlegged men, a concubine of studs, a sucker of hawks and other species of fertile satanism, condemning her to give birth to abominations and deviations without anyone of her descent ever breaching a path to eternity, tell us more, Dorka Dukela, you know, you spoiled us, you were the partner in orgy of the god Oliborio,

I say that just as I took them to the God with the hope of saving them from the hell in store for them once they were repudiated I sold them to Guardiola's Circus, they had behind them eleven or twelve years of nurturing of inquiries of idleness of savoring the polyps of good and evil on their body, but they had already buried the Obscene Virgin in her swamp jumping playing throwing excrescences on her grave by order of the god Oliborio when I took them to the dressing room for tamers and acrobats they put them up on the beasts' rumps trained them on the trapeze taught them to perpetuate furtive spasms they made them macrovulvous hydrodowny perhaps they took their names from them, yes, then they put them in the cage meant for the freaks for the demented for the cripples for the blue dwarfs, it was no business of mine, but of Guardiola's who amassed a fortune taking them all around the island even to the wharves where traders and hunters docked to exhibit them in the buff on that dusty cart, I don't know if later some of them remained there living with them in the cage or if they raffled them to the rumba dancers at the docks or if Guardiola himself sold them to the best whorehouse of El Manchado, I know no more because I didn't see them again until the Marines arrived, you were a tracker, Amarante, a bush guide, an up-the-ravines guide, what became of them?,

yes, it was around that time that I saw them for the first time, they were walking along the quay, their hands tied to their back, their breast bound, their feet shackled to a long chain they dragged behind them and which barely allowed them to walk, I don't know if people, moved to pity at seeing them so defenseless so worn-out, but yet aroused by the sight of them scantily dressed and maltreated, with their clothing disheveled and reduced to obedience, reached out to touch them to stroke them above all to pat their hooded heads over and over again and to tear their sleeves out as souvenirs like strips from a shroud with an anxiety so suffocating that it prompted me to take out a handkerchief to clean a wound that came from above, a thread of blood that flowed down their thighs without imagining that later that night or the next day the flagrant revelation of a bifid sex would remain on the handkerchief, and what were they accused of?,

of various crimes, of distributing leaflets against the Yankees, of smearing the walls of churches with diatribes and filthy slogans, of providing food to the *gavillero* rebels and not revealing their names or whereabouts or denouncing their hideouts, of many crimes that were nothing compared with their gravest misdeed, the assassination of sergeant Doberman, dead from a bullet on a roadside inn at Cabayegua, with no one but them in sight, and had they met before or did they meet by chance?,

no such thing, sergeant Doberman was Mónica's boyfriend, he preferred her because she was the dreamiest and most delicate, but everyone knew that it was because she was the whiter of the two, the most presentable in the eyes of his superiors, he had wooed her for a year, but Bianca forbade any wooing, any seduction, shaming him because of his invading credentials, gesticulating with distaste and sarcasm every time he came near, or burping in his presence every time he took Mónica's hand or enveloping him in a cloud of flatulence when he proposed marriage, that day at the roadside inn sergeant Doberman's despair reached such extremes that he took his pistol out and vowed to shoot himself, it seems there

was a scuffle between the three of them to prevent the deed or to take away the pistol, and the bullet went through his temple or his mouth, so they say, and they didn't hide?, they didn't flee down any gully or ravine?,

maybe they attempted it, but when they couldn't agree, when they continued to argue after firing the shot, they were apprehended and brought to the fortress at Larimar, they accused Bianka of murder and Mónica of complicity, that's why they were both shackled when I saw them on the quay, and how long did they spend in prison?,

almost no time at all, because Mónica testified against her sister, alleging not only that she had forced her to write pamphlets and harbor *gavilleros*, but also confessing that Bianka had been the one to fire against sergeant Doberman, so that the Provostal Judge, guided by certain indications, "a bullet through the temple or the mouth," he said, "a suicide's common target," and faced with the impossibility of cutting off one's head without harming or punishing the other, gave them their conditional freedom, placing them under the custody and watchful eye of lieutenant Roxy, you brought him into our life, Dorka Dukela, you held us as bait before his instinct,

I said then that he was a good catch, he took them to the officers' club, to the Red Cross picnics, to the Film Society, to the Aviation Field to see the planes, he helped Mónica become a stenographer and taught her English, but you became impossible, Bianka, and only learned curses to insult him, "another gringo in love with Mónica," people said mockingly, knowing that in her he saw the lady and in you he wanted the whore, knowing that no man could live without the two, and it was true, shortly thereafter lieutenant Roxy proposed marriage and you only accepted reluctantly to avoid another litigation, another scandal, but you spoiled his party, you shaved off your hair and defiantly let your swollen and daring breasts peek out during the ceremony, you smoked in front of the military chaplain, who at first refused to marry him to Mónica because "if there were two heads there were two beings and that was bigamy," you became intractable, Bianka, on the wedding night you laughed until you were about to burst when already in bed Mónica told lieutenant Roxy that she was a virgin, that no one but him had gone so far, and you went on laughing even more thunderously at feeling him kiss the flesh, on your sister's body which was your own, I can't feel anything, "I can't feel a thing," you said over and over, "not even vermin would ooze so much slime," and the day Mónica became pregnant you boiled a quarter of indigo and three new needles and made her drink the brew so you could both abort at the same time, "just in case," you said, "just in case it was mine too," and when Mónica got pregnant again, despite all your brews in cauldrons and finally gave birth to a scaly boy with an eyetooth in his genitals but viable, you awaited the slightest distraction, your sister's drowsiness to cover him and asphyxiate him with the lieutenant's hat, and you only thought "he won't enjoy him," say more, Dorka Dukela, fortune-telling procuress, you taught me to twist entrails, say more, don't lie, tell of how Roxy humiliated us,

it really wasn't that big a deal, there was no reason to grow into a rage when lieutenant Roxy set them down to clean his weapons, the gunpowder embedded in the barrel of the carbine or to polish the butt of his

regulation firearm, or to shine his boots with strips torn from the Dominican flag, "with the darkies' tricolor rag," as he used to call it, neither was it reason enough for you to tear ribbons from his flag in revenge, the Yankee flag, and use it between your legs, well padded every thirty days, and discovering one stifling morning that lieutenant Roxy had returned home after a failed expedition, his knapsack still on his back and his boots on, dragging his spurs, still on duty he came into the room and saw you both lying down and naked under the mosquito net, your sex bulging, almost bandaged deliberately with several strips of his flag tamponing the menstrual flood, and what was the punishment?,

for the first time he used the whip against the two of them, he flagellated them inside out, he split their skin, kicked their bellies and tits with his silver spurs and left them like a lump of blood tangled in the mosquito net, maybe Mónica would have forgiven the ill-treatment the beating and would have been reconciled with him, but Bianka urged her to join her in the common cause of hatred, they awaited his return for the space of almost two months, opening to him the doors to his home more than submissive repentant complaisant greedy, letting him fantasize, asking him to use the whip, begging him to place his saddle on their hips, well mounted on the bed well angled well reared on their hind legs so he could feel them anusjuicy anusimmense anusysmic so he could reach their deepest reservoirs with his first downpour of ecstasies, so he could remove the living iguana rinsing out its rootstalks within them and which in a matter of seconds gorged its prey, biting lieutenant Roxy's penis, writhing growing frightened while they put him on his back on the bed, pretending to salve his sore, burrowing into him with their lips, taking turns savoring him, sucking him by turns without reprieve, making him believe that venom already flowed in his blood, sucking his member for nine continuous hours until they gnawed it to the root, amputating it with their teeth, self-absorbed, fulfilled, victorious, they abandoned the house and fled with the dead phallus under their arm, and who else learned of this?,

all and none, none and all under his command wanted to talk about that dishonor, about the deadly bloodbath that lieutenant Roxy unleashed at the command of Company 44, crushing entire villages under his horses' hooves, studding seditions, congregating entire populations on the public square to starve them to discover who gave shelter and food to the *gavilleros*, who they were and where had they burrowed down into the hills he scoured impaling rebels through the throat, ordering the troops to violate women with the horns of dead cattle, sipping at intervals from a canteen overflowing with the blood of the children they had tossed up in the air so the troops could spear them on their bayonets, night after night setting prisoners on fire burning them just to light up the road, consumed by his imperial decree, by his quest of glory from killing blacks, lynching begetters of hide-outs, measuring common graves, demarcating its mournful cadastre through Mata de Palacio, Cabayegua, and there in Estebanía, in the shadow of the camps, refereeing feats of marksmanship against stockades, seeking to liquefy with slingshots the eyes of negligent lookouts or those of cunning informants or those of generals unfurling white flags before *gavilleros*, piercing them with a pitchfork, turning them very very slowly on the pit, roasting a leg or an arm just to hear their cries of agony, seated at

the table of any old hut, pompously unseeding fruits, inspiredly counting his homicidal abacus, taking out of his knapsack as a trophy the ears he had mutilated from the *gavilleros*, whom among them did you meet? you used to roam these parts, Amarante?,

I met Lozada María, and a bunch of others as well, they were a gang of heroes, a lyrical horde inhabiting inclemencies permeating the horizon, they burned the night, took away the roads, rationed their courage for other centuries, concealed in the rain the smell of their women, educated the silence, many became adults in the bush and let defeated dreams flow with the rivers, and you were not there with them, Jaguar Leroy, now tell me about them?,

I tell you that as far as I'm concerned they were cattle rustlers, highway robbers—attackers of *bodegas* and haciendas, dispossessed courting fame and heralding stupidities in the patriotic speeches typical of the day, an epic of arrivistes seeking rank in the disorder, itinerant and unemployed plebeians wanting to give the coup de grace to their miseries, they were more much more, that unruly mob, those guerrillas those outlaws did not matter so much to lieutenant Roxy, oh no, Dorka Dukela?,

no, you know it is not so, he wanted them, the Girl with Two Heads, he wanted to seize them even if he had to incinerate the island from beneath the earth to achieve it, he wanted them alive sweaty vibrating between his legs, he explored every corner, followed every path ruminating new atrocities new tortures, he wanted them with a rope around the neck so he could plunge them into sewage waters to watch them nuzzle in the troops' shithole, he wanted to hear them asking for clemency, he wanted them to lick his boots so he could kick them with rage and unrestraint, he wanted to hear them moaning at his feet imploring him to punish them to flay them to spew their ass with one of the camp's stakes, he traveled the road inch by inch nursing his bitterness kneading perversities as if night and day did not exist as if there was no other breath to life than the snorting of the horses in heat on the narrow paths, either led by the halter or in a mad rush, spurred into a full gallop at the sight of one looming fresh track, trace of a tacit deviation that lieutenant Roxy was just scrutinizing in all its detail when he saw them come out of the cane field terrified, and without even rising on their stirrups, he waited until they dragged them to the closest shed, ordering Company 44 to break the camp, to squelch bonfires, to leave him alone with the Girl with Two Heads and to call the hunter, the trapper to come in and take a good look, that he wanted an everlasting punishment, to choose what torture he would impose on them, to disfigure them with the mortar to husk rice?, it could be, to wrest their teeth with the claws of a captive *guaragua*? would it be too cruel to rip open their nipples with a can opener? would it be a thing of no account to unbraid their clitoris with the red-hot tip of a bayonet? did they deserve to have their womb ripped open to strangle with their guts the iguana they carry within? no, it is enough, it's too much, he didn't want anything, he told the trapper to leave the shed, to get away as far as possible and close the door, he didn't want to hear any more because he still loved them, and he embraced them brutally with an immense desire to mount them, with an impossible yearning to charge at them, and he let himself be caressed and undressed by them without looking without doing without

saying anything until he fell asleep in a long armistice with himself, anyone would have thought you were around, Dorka Dukela?,

far away from there, since it was the whistle of the train that woke him and he opened his eyes heavily, rediscovering himself naked, feeling himself tied from head to toe, gagged with his own shirt, beginning to understand that he had been beaten up and that he was numb that he had the taste of blood precisely there, less than two steps from Lozada María who looked at him scornfully, cracking his riding crop on his knee, lugubrious and alert, with a rifle hammered into shape upon his shoulder, tall without being so because the roof of the cave forced him to lower his head making him appear gloomier and more unpredictable until he heard the remote splattering of the horses' hoofs and the troops crying out to him in the midst of the hurricane and he there, shuddering like a debased and no-longer-beloved hostage, seeing Bianka and Mónica survey the tempest from the mouth of the cave, who knows how long they had been sniffing around, going in and out stealthily without pitying him, without even embracing him with a glance, interested only in the murmurs in the warbles in any raking of arms and animals, night after night nestled with Lozada María in the hollowness of the cave, cozying their two heads to his neck and rubbing against his body until dawn was upon them, watching them against the light quarreling over his member and sucking on it pantingly, while outside the gale blew more violently and all tracks vanished, the voices of Company 44 which never knew how they took the lieutenant out of the shed and then out of the cave, how they took him handcuffed to the rail lines and threw him upon the rails in a heap, perhaps not to have the train cut him into pieces but to make it stop and put the Girl with the Two Heads in any of its cars while Lozada María covered their retreat with his gang lost in the fog, it was more than that, Dorka Dukela, much more,

we loved Lozada María from the very first day the Marines arrived in Mata Palacio, and we went on loving him after Mónica married, we traveled from one garrison to another and no one dared question us since we were lieutenant Roxy's ladies, we were there to bring him what he wanted, what he didn't even know he was lacking just to watch him distribute supplies and provisions and then we would return to the house spilling on the path the fragrance of his memory, we went several times without Roxy having the slightest suspicion, not even when we were delayed in returning since we pretended to be worried or jealous and demanded to know where he had been where he had disappeared to insisting that we had been from one end of town to the other looking for him was it perhaps that he had another woman and we would sniff his clothes so he would feel flattered and think himself loved, but his presence irritated us we owed him everything according to him, one day he would take us away from this breeding ground for monkeys, he had given us a home a surname the honor of sleeping with a white man he had given us his stamp of approval and the privileges of freedom he made us genuflect on his going out and genuflect on his coming in, shine his boots, he drove us batty with his habit of shooing away mosquitoes with his riding crop his maniacal insistence on eating only canned goods we were fed up with his racial boasting his arrogance of rank we abhorred his swagger we couldn't stand any longer his monotonous and ostentatious ecstasis the

bad moods brought about by the disgraceful heat by the contaminated water by having reached the kitchen of hell, and we went along hating him patiently till the day we severed his sex organ with our teeth and buried it with our menstrual blood to distract the pack of hounds he had sicked upon us, lost barks vain scrutinies because the thicket protected our feet, and with Lozada María we remained from skirmish to skirmish, recruiting women or locating refuges or stitching scars rags or abutting premonitions demolitions, more, much more, Dorka Dukela,

we kissed each other in his absence we masturbated amidst the rocks and under the lean-tos we rolled in the hay with sentries with any lieutenant to pacify urgent copulations until he returned from other skirmishes, but you gave yourself up, Lozada María, without seeing the *guaragua* undulating against the propellers of the planes tearing the cloth wings hitting fuselages pecking cabins digging claws in the eyes of the pilots, you gave yourself up without seeing the stationary hurricane that remained over the island sweeping away patrols and encampments against the wildest bulks, you gave yourself up without seeing the frock-coated politicians put their speeches the rank the nutgalls in their pockets, you gave yourself up like so many, with the cartridge belt empty without a stone in your hand, running aground the boldness the fist the anus to climb the impossible, they left you your life only to humiliate you, like others who surrendered to a dispatch to an official insignia and were amnestied and then hanged in the courtyard behind the courthouse, why did you not burst into a flaming rage once again, Lozada María, why didn't you become hawk flame neigh bran dog-poison tallow for incantations or jaw of a beast, but they were more, much more,

they came paving the horizon, spanning vengeance devastations evil smells, spraying with turpentine the debris of the night, wading leagues of magic crisscrossed on the forehead of the centennial partridges in useless sunsets that forced them to abandon the path of scourge followed the rebels, to hand out harnesses and cutlasses in the shadows to hide the weapons in the animals in their rumps in their wombs in their hunches—to eat them slowly without killing them sleeping standing up leaving the war the nation tied to the mountain before them, you know that, Amarante,

yes, to the mountain ahead of us or the one beyond, to any corner where remnants of conflagrations could be found, to any mound of horse-dung or red-hot coals, to any mountain-top machine-gunned by warplanes, they were in any case foreseeable boundaries, a minor obstacle for lieutenant Roxy who indomitably continued decimating villages and hamlets already laid to waste, staking signs in every municipality advertising his deformity revealing its bewitchments, offering higher rewards for the necromancy of hovels, higher levies to the henchmen of his cavalry for the Girl with Two Heads or a piece of them, putting before a firing squad the mute the deaf who couldn't understand him the dimwitted who hadn't seen them, dismantling every train station through which they had passed incognito risking the insolence of coachmen or under the protection of fishwives religious zealots fanatics wrapped in starry yards of lace mantillas sometimes far from the parks the cockfights the churches searching for unpopulated redoubts like nomads from the mire or living one night with puisne judges or notaries or teachers

or limesucking old maids, but no, don't let them get away here there is camphor punch bowl zinc roofs blessed palm fronds coming and going from stifling barnyards waiting for lieutenant Roxy's persecution to wane and they betrayed them anyway going back to take the train in calcinated stations only to get off at dark stretches and get back on at unheard-of hours throughout weeks of pursuit more much more throughout months of premonitions until the final siege in Cabayegua, we were just about to give ourselves up, like you, fed up, swooning, inseminated by the void of the new day, in this abjured nation after their clamorings,

no, Mónica, we didn't desist, they came to collect us with their boots on, they took everything from us, gonorrhoea with their potassium bromide and our customs with their gunports, and while they taught us how to shit in latrines they turned the forest into canefields, they left us without lead without *caudillos* without balls with more bastards and more debts, no, Bianka, we didn't capitulate, we got fucked by the guardia civil, ours and their pack of stool pigeons, like you, Amarante, who were with both the gringos and us, I made you my second in command because you knew every mountain every whistle every anthill better than anyone else, and you taking reports to Estefanía, maps bastions indecencies secrets, that's why we burned your feet, we tied you to the horse's tail and shoved you down the hill so you could reach your traps faster, "prod the horse well, give him a good kick so he won't be around to pester us again," why didn't you go on hellbent into the midst of the shootout, Lozada María, carving your watchtower of chimeras with more than five stars on your forehead, why didn't you go on crossing incarnations omens insanities, for nothing, I say, what's the point of loyalty, ideals, principles, if the nation always ends up in the safe of some general or minister, in banks here and there, the nation is a pact between fellow conspirators, what is the good of the skeleton of that bolt of lightning?,

it matters a lot, Jaguar Leroy, there are many ways of looking at things, the nation fits into every fistful of earth that can sprout again, but you can't understand that because you are an unscrupulous adventurer, a degenerate mercenary who only wants to claim the reward for the Girl with Two Heads, and now you're going around retracing memories, weeding tallies, rereading epitaphs, gathering obituaries, asking everyone after the unburied and the vanished, sticking your hand into hiding places, into exhumations, washing skeletons like a bloodhound of the dead,

and what Dorka Dukela, don't strain yourself, remember that I met you praying by leaps and bounds, with outstretched arms in your pantheon of shrieking women,

I know why you say that, it wasn't the supplicating hand of lieutenant Roxy but the hook of the butcher who came looking for me in the swamps to help him purge him from evil love spells, I know that he used me to track the Girl with Two Heads among the new followers of the god Oliborio, and why did you help him, was it jealousy or were you too old to warm up messiahs?

there are many ways of looking at things, the truth is that lieutenant Roxy was not mortified by the scepter of arms raised by the god Oliborio against the yankees throughout the mountains of Lucerna, not even by the

martial crusade he encouraged in the name of the Lord absorbing murderers and deserters into his Salvation Army, slipping away from the Marines in the midst of a celestial visage of fronds, letting them fall behind and climbing mountains bearing a cross, with two Smith & Wesson pistols at his waist and crowned not with thorns but with cock spurs, invincible in the marathon of his calvary, ascending with enormous beams up a mountain that was beginning to grow, to rise with town and everything while the patrols and the beasts dispersed in a panic terrified, do you remember, Jaguar Leroy, you used to roam around these parts, and I, why?,

there are many ways of looking at things, you know that lieutenant Roxy wanted to gain time for his vengeance, to keep the effervescence of his punitive blood by pillaging hamlets and riding roughshod over the crowds while he searched for the Girl with Two Heads, once again for him it was nothing but a routine operation to hound the god Oliborio with his homicidal platoon through precipices and sinuous catacombs which had served him as arsenals silos harems of novitiates not only for him but for his most vigorous apostles of free love and the 400 mounted proselytizers who bore the trappings of the apocalypse to undertake the cavalcade against the White AntiChrist, long before Lieutenant Roxy cornered them in a temple of palm fronds while he celebrated a Last Supper with the idolatrous church ladies and missionaries of the Order of the Paranerves, or don't you remember, Jaguar Leroy? you were roaming around these parts, and where was I?,

around Lucerna, they all saw him leave the temple fingering the triggers of his two Smith & Wessons Hosanna in excelsis! My faith has more blood than my body Hosanna in excelsis! Don't forgive them They do know what they're doing Hosanna in excelsis! No one will dare abandon me To you I commend my spirit! and they all stood there watching lieutenant Roxy pierce him with his bayonet one two three ten times aiming the blade at his soul Hosanna in excelsis! Nothing has been consummated You are the sin of the world! and upon seeing that he continued to advance unhampered without lamentations without pain lieutenant Roxy had him crucified wrapped in rags and three hours later he came down from the cross with his boots on and two pistols on his belt Hosanna in excelsis! he became whip dart star Hosanna in excelsis! He is not He feels no thirst He feels no hunger He is another a nephew a godfather a holy rider isn't it so? and he took the 400 to graze in the abysses and unhorsed them one by one until he left them squashed under the tattooed penises of their horses Hosanna in excelsis! Soon they will be in my paradise Hosanna in excelsis! Neither before nor after did the earth tremble There was no thunder There was no darkness There was no one to witness the god Oliborio's agony until many days later when lieutenant Roxy displayed his corpse caged in Guardiola's Circus and then he paraded it up the hill from the settlement throughout the cult's territory, do you remember, Jaguar Leroy?, and why me?,

among other things, because lieutenant Roxy hung an amulet around his neck with Oliborio's sixteen toes so it could be seen that he was not anointed with immortality, sixteen toes that withered away and lost their skin and which he carried around his neck until the very same day in which he was apprehended by the Yankees' Military Governor, accused of pillagings and stonings to death and of having a private morgue at Mata Palacio, accused of nothing new and

never interrogated never publicly condemned because he committed suicide in his cell before being tried, but that you know, you helped him shoot that last bullet into himself by slipping a gun to him through the bars, or maybe not, maybe the high officers got rid of him so that the world would not learn who were his guys in khaki, I see that you believe everything they tell you, nobody knows anyone that well,

there are many ways of looking at things, I know it well, Jaguar Leroy, many rumors circulate about him, they say that he sold Lewis cannons with their tripods to the gringos and found them kegs of rum and tied whores to stakes for them, and who was to know that there were times of prohibition?,

there are many ways of looking at things, they also say that he was the hunter, the trapper, lieutenant Roxy's favorite torturer, and I once heard it said that that is why you showed up in the markets of Manchado in a humble little shop, face to face with the heads of the pigs freshly slaughtered for the morning sales, there's too much slander going around, you see how people like to denigrate others, what I do know is that you helped lieutenant Roxy consolidate his siege against Bianka and Mónica at that train station, when after transferring their fear to the glass window, they undertook their ablutions and ended up billeted on a streak of dawn lent to them by Lozada María when he saw them fleeing through the hidden trails near Estebanía, you're not telling me anything new, I know that, Dorka Dukela, here I have the rings, the bracelets, the bows the stench they left along the way, and from that moment on I swore to capture them even if you're all nothing but fossils of solitude,

there are many ways of looking at things, you no longer care for the reward but for the prey, a sign that you too love them, but you will never come across them, they grew old in discord and opprobrium, Bianka went around with a crutch because she could not bear the weight of both of them, and Mónica went blind, her hair became white and tangled, a leg an arm fell prey to gangrene and her neck grew so purplish and purulent that Bianka had to keep her covered with a shroud because her head slumped, oscillating, trembling on her sister's shoulder, suffering from a migraine that drove her to unstring taunts and from nocturnal secretions that wouldn't let the other sleep, until at last they succeeded in separating, they broke into two fleeing from themselves like any woman, some wanted to bury them in separate graves, but they laid them in the same coffin, because after all, she was the Girl with Two Heads,

tell more, Dorka Dukela, tell everything you may wish, but don't say that we keep our path a secret, irreconcilable untender epically bitter, although still set aflame sibylline unknown indemnified smelling each other's intimacies each other's glanders

and he came along riding more entranced more somber more abject than ever, any trace? . . . it doesn't matter, let's go lieutenant Roxy said, digging in his spurs, there's still time, we can still chase them beyond death.

Translated by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert