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The idea of my father as a number of parts upon a table is a recurring one: each of his lives with points of contact and parallel lines gaining more and more light in the depth of night when they flow into Lorena's body: the arch of her instep, her Roman nose, her long hair like an extension of her shadow.

This story begins on a certain day, one cloudy Sunday this autumn when a man in his thirties feels that everything is about to begin. I return to be held in my father's arms, just like the times, almost certainly made up, when I remember myself galloping on his knees, discovering the smell of his mouth, his long hands with their slim fingers and rounded nails. Afterwards all is one great pit: my mother's strength, the school playground, some sad friends and the room where my childhood grew silent.

I'm the son of Enrique Salerno, one of the writers the Government commemorates with a plaque on the house where he was born. However, if I were to go out into the street and ask five hundred people at random if they know him, not more than one would say with certainty that they did. Only a few but good ones, my mother would say. She wouldn't now though, she wouldn't say anything, she'd just look at my eyes with indifference.

My father was run over by a white van when I had just turned six. These are the words I repeated when I was growing up. Whenever my mother tried to unravel what exactly had happened, all she would do was retrace her steps, unable to find consistency in anything. It was late at night. A neighbour saw the van disappear. Sometimes I fantasised that the neighbour was actually myself, I had drawn nearer to see the blood turning black on my father's face. I knelt by his side, I shouted, my head uplifted and felt for a moment that I was leaving, that I wasn't there, not among the bare branches of the plane trees, nor hearing myself howl. Everything was immediately engulfed in silence such as I've only heard at the bottom of a swimming pool.

My mother must have screamed like the neighbour in my fantasy when some of my father's friends, mumbling their words, woke her up with three half-hearted knocks on the front door. I can't remember. I imagine she must have sat next to me then, and I can certainly affirm she hasn't got up yet. She tried to make my body look like his, to the point that I might become part of her. My mother became my shadow, and the other, the one she was until that moment, must, for sure, have turned into the hot liquid that spilled down her legs when she

heard the news, dying in the course of the next few days so she might start climbing, to get closer to the old man in the improbable chance of a promised heaven.

My name is Agustín Salerno, son of Enrique Salerno, who wrote three novels, two collections of short stories and two books of poetry. The idea of my father as a heap of things on a table is recurring. I know his work by heart. When I was a teenager I refused to read any but as I approached my twenties and thirties I felt the need to hear him speak through his work.

The girl with the long black hair is my father's second gift to me. She turned up looking for the details only artists' families know of and seldom confess in order to sustain the legends that many times develop around them. I have come to think that there were in fact two gifts: the girl tracking my father and the manuscripts we found a few months ago when my mother decided to move out of the house we had lived in for thirty years. This is the bait I use to keep Lorena close to me: a diary of my father's, which appeared to interest his last publisher at first, and some uncollected texts which according to some critics had been deliberately left out of his books.

My name is Agustín Salerno, radiology technician, son of Enrique Salerno, writer. When I met Lorena I entreated her to call on me in the next few days on the first floor of the Hospital de Clínicas, and walk to the end of the passage. I was waiting for her. Her hair was done up in a bun which made her eyes look larger. We went in. She left her purse on the table and stood in front of the machine. I took seventeen X-rays. Four of them didn't come out properly, so I couldn't get her full body. She had moved, not held her breath. These thirteen X-rays showing Lorena's bones are stuck onto a shower screen. I placed it in my bedroom in front of an electric lamp. She liked this eccentricity. In all of my twenty years I've never been photographed so deeply, she said.

I thought it would be another way of keeping her close.

My father wrote a short story titled "The Blind Virgin." I showed it to Lorena on the afternoon she turned up at the flat. A pile of pages with doodles on them, with which I fanned emptiness, not moving even a single metre away from them, acting as if they would disintegrate if they touched the floor. On the previous day my mother had given me a crumpled bit of paper with her telephone number on it. Although for many years my mother had been proud to be the executor of my father's work, in the last few months she had decided that I should take charge. That's why when the girl told her that she was researching his work, that at the age of fifteen a story by Enrique Salerno had made her hands twitch and her legs tremble, she understood that Lorena was seeking my father's shadow and that it was me who should guide her to it.

I only allowed her to read the first paragraphs. I said I couldn't give her the originals, but that she could come whenever she liked, promising to read them to her. I suggested that she could make a recording, or take notes. Lorena kept quiet; she played with strands of her hair. She accepted the rules of the game and either because of shyness or fascination, or perhaps because she was sure luck was on her side, she opened her mouth and once more quoted

the final lines of the poem my father had written about lost time with Proust playing the role of a newspaper seller on 18 de Julio. We laughed. I poured coffee and looked at her from the kitchen, her hands in a knot on her lap.

I gave her a dozen photographs of my father, the photographs not included in the two books written on his work which Lorena confessed to having gone through on many afternoons hoping to discover something in that calm gaze of his. I thought, meanwhile, that anyone interested in a specific work of art had to be interested in its creator. Whosoever loves man loves God, I said to myself. And also vice versa. If she worshipped my father she must feel, somehow, inversely, that I too could dazzle her, at least while I showed her these things of his only known to my mother and myself. The long road behind my father grew greener. The girl he was sending me smilingly celebrated him, as evening deepened into night.

There was one photograph of my father sitting next to one of the cannons on the Cerro Fortress. In another photograph, taken just minutes later, my father and mother embraced.

Lorena scrutinised it carefully, her eyes half closed. She noted the longish hair outlined by the wind, the position of his crossed legs, cigarette smoke like a blurry line over the city. She waited for me to hand her another one for her pile, one on top of the other. She was looking for the chance to slip one away, unnoticed, a photograph no-one else had, which she wouldn't see anywhere else. If I had allowed her to choose one, I'm sure she would have chosen the picture of my father asleep by his radio cassette player. To me that photograph always seemed to be charged with something I can't quite explain, even now. The mattress, the creased sheet, the bit of the radio ...The light, it must be the light that makes it different.

I returned from the kitchen with two small glasses and poured some brandy. Lorena said she found it strong but I felt my look intimidated her. She assured me that she would only wet her lips. At twenty, girls can go from being like little girls to women from one moment to the next. As if they weren't really in control, as if every now and then they were back in the childhood they left behind when their crotch was first stained with blood, and they surprise us with the demeanour of women who cross long rivers, their hair never getting wet. But at other times they seem to feel like castaways in their fifteenth birthday party frocks, paper boats tossed by storms.

She asked me for the original once again. She re-read the first paragraph, insisting she wished to keep it, once again getting a cordial negative answer. Then she asked where the bathroom was, knocking against the table on the way there, on the way back, but always smiling, and phoned for a taxi.

I moved up to the window and watched as she leant forward to speak to the driver, saw the taxi move away along the avenue. As I poured myself another glass of brandy I noticed she had written her address on the same piece of paper my mother had noted down her telephone number. Palacio Díaz, I repeated. I knelt down and smelt the chair, the cup-handle. The image of myself doing this shamed me. I thought of my father as I stood up.