

Praise for *In the Night of Time*

"Immense, luminous panorama of the Spanish Civil War ... one of the many wonders of this novel is how Molina integrates the personal so closely with the political ... in the fine tradition of novels of everything, reaching back to Cervantes by way of Bellow and Hemingway ... He brings an encyclopaedic knowledge of the times to bear in a way that never drags on the narrative ... In a novel so concerned with the flow of memory and time, it seems fitting that the final chapters are set on the banks of the Hudson River, where Ignacio has been commissioned to design a library. This novel feels as vast as a library, and as compellingly seductive as a river" Gerard Woodward, *Independent*

"Exhilarating ... exceptional ... This is a necessary novel. Edith Grossman's translation compellingly captures its depiction of the ugliness of war and the remorselessness of human memory when many in Spain, nearly eight decades on, would like to consign the civil war to oblivion" Adam Feinstein, *Financial Times*

"Sweeping, magisterial ... an astonishingly vivid narrative that unfolds with hypnotic intensity by means of the constant interweaving of time and memory ... Tolstoyan in its scale, emotional intensity and intellectual honesty" *Economist*

"Spellbinding ... what distinguishes *In the Night of Time*—what makes it eye-opening new—is its meticulous reconstruction of Spain in 1936, its attention to detail, its fusion of history and imagination, its tension between love's surrender and war's stiff resolve. Let me put it this way: Antonio Muñoz Molina's novel is one of the most eloquent monuments to the Spanish Civil War ever to be raised in fiction" *Washington Post*

"Superb ... A simple love story at one level, a broad portrait of a nation in flames at another, and a masterwork through and through" *Kirkus*

"A *War and Peace* for the Spanish Civil War" *Publishers Weekly*

**LIKE A
FADING
SHADOW**

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LIKE A FADING SHADOW

ANTONIO
MUÑOZ
MOLINA

Translated from the Spanish by
Camilo A. Ramirez



TUSKAR ROCK PRESS

My days are like a fading shadow; and I am withered like grass.

— Psalms 102:11

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I awake inside his mind; frightened, disoriented from so much reading and researching. As if my eyes had opened in an unfamiliar room. Angst from the dream lingers. I had committed a heinous crime or was being pursued and condemned despite my innocence. Someone was pointing a gun at me and I could not run or defend myself. I could not move. Before thoughts can fully form, the secret novelist inside us all is already plotting stories. The room in shadows was concave and the ceiling low like a cave or basement or the skull that holds his brain, his feverish mind, exhausted from reading and solitary thinking, with all his memories, his physical features, the images of his life, his heart palpitations, the propensity to believe he had contracted a fatal disease, cancer, an angina, the routine of hiding and fleeing.

I woke up and for a moment I forgot where I was and I was like him, or he himself, because I was having a dream more his than mine. I was in shock that I could not recognize the room where I had fallen asleep just two hours earlier; was not able to remember the position of the bed in relation to the window and other furniture, or my location in a space that was suddenly unknown; I even struggled trying to remember what city I was in. This probably happened to him often, after sleeping in so many places while on the run, thirteen months and three weeks, five countries, fifteen cities, two continents,

not to mention all the nights in different motels and boardinghouses, the nights curled, shivering against a tree, or under a bridge, or in the backseat of the car, or on a bus that smells of tobacco and plastic and arrives at the underground parking of a station at three in the morning, or that night he was so anxious, flying for the first time, paralyzed by fear, looking out through the small oval window into that dark abyss, the surface of the ocean shining like wet ink under the moonlight. (He would fly overnight once more, crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction; this time in handcuffs and fetters; dozing off against the window, in a dream where the handcuffs transformed into vines and the weight of the fetters was the mud where his feet were sinking.)



My dream could have been his and, in any case, has everything to do with him, although he did not appear. I have spent too many hours immersed in his life, days on end since I arrived in Lisbon. It only takes a few seconds online to access the archives containing detailed accounts of almost everything he did, places he visited, crimes he committed, prisons where he was held, even the names of women who slept with him or shared a drink at a bar. I know the magazines and novels he read and the brand of salted crackers left open and half-eaten in a rented room in a boardinghouse in Atlanta where his name never made it to the register because the owner was too drunk to ask for it. Photocopies and scanned pages of old files list every article of clothing he took to a dry cleaner in Atlanta on March 30, 1968, and picked up the morning of April 5; or the forensic report on the trajectory of the bullet he fired the day before, April 4, in Memphis, from the bathroom of a boardinghouse, resting the barrel of a Remington .30-06 rifle on the windowsill; or a declaration from the plastic surgeon who operated on the tip of his nose in Los Angeles; or the copy of a fingerprint left on a mail order clipped from a photography magazine.

Even the most secret lives leave an indelible trace. At that time, advertisements in magazines often included mail order forms. The vastness of reality produces equal measures of astonishment and in-

somnia. It is amazing how much you can learn about a person and still never truly know him, because he never said what was most important: a dark hole, a blank space; a mug shot, the rough lines of a facial composite based on disjointed testimonies and vague memories. He survived on instant coffee, heated with a submersible heating element, powdered milk, canned beans, and French fries dipped in mustard or Kraft salad dressing. He frequented the cheapest diners and ordered his burgers with extra onion, bacon, ketchup, and cheese. He ate his fries by the handful. Some remembered him being left-handed, others were certain he always used his right hand to sign and smoke. In some of the police descriptions he has light brown hair; in others, black and graying on the sides. He had a small scar on his forehead and another on one of his palms. People remembered him smoking, holding the cigarette in his right hand, which displayed a gold ring finger with a dark green stone. But he was not a smoker and did not wear rings. A ring could be one of those details that make you easier to remember and identify. He never got any tattoos.

I stayed up late searching his tracks through the vast sleepless memory of the Internet. When I finally turned off the lights, my eyes burned from staring at the computer for so many hours, and my head turned with dates, names, and trivial events—a modicum of reality that was hard to imagine someone making up. In prison, to stay in shape, he learned to walk on his hands and do complicated yoga postures in the small cell. He could gain or lose weight easily. To the end, he took Polaroids of himself regularly: with sunglasses, without them, with eyeglasses, always foreshortened, never in profile because profiles were too distinctive, even after the nose surgery, also never directly from the front, as the big ears would surely set him apart. He would send different photos of himself to contacts in pen pal clubs, thinking this would confuse the authorities when they started looking for him. In a hospitality school in Los Angeles, he learned how to mix one hundred twenty different cocktails. For several months, he took a locksmith correspondence course offered by a school in New Jersey. Among his papers, they found a brochure about all the advantages of a career in locksmithing. When he was nine or ten, he would wake up to his own screams every night. He dreamed that he was blind. He

tried to wake up and open his eyes, but he still couldn't see because he had fallen into another dream of blindness. He was scared of falling asleep, scared of his nightmares. He did his best to stay awake through the night. In the dark, he could hear his father and mother snoring, both drunk on a bare mattress, using old coats as blankets. On straw mattresses across the dilapidated floor, his siblings huddled together, covered in lice and bedbugs, hungry, trying to keep warm during those winter nights in the one-room house, breathing smoke from the old wood-burning stove.

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I have learned so much about him that sometimes I feel like I am recalling his own memories, places he saw where I've never been: the Nevada desert on the highway to Las Vegas, the cobbled streets and low houses of Puerto Vallarta, the echoing corridors of a prison with stone walls and towers and Gothic vaults, the silhouette of the Lorraine Motel seen in the distance from a window in a bathroom, a putrid room in a boardinghouse surrounded by empty lots and heaps of trash, in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Memphis. I have decided I have no choice but to travel to Memphis. I have written down the address of the hotel in Lisbon where, forty-five years ago, he spent ten days while on the run. I googled the name and learned the hotel still exists and it is only fifteen minutes away from here. In this moment, a figment of my imagination suddenly becomes a tangible reality. I have woken up from a dream of hiding, danger, shame; a dream that could be his and that has without a doubt instigated my urge to discover him, to stay up late researching, fighting off sleep, hypnotized by the laptop's glow, leaning on the desk where I have been working for a few days, long enough to create a habit, in successive layers, the desk and the apartment, the street, the corner I see from the window, the streetcar that brakes as it goes downhill and rings a bell, the roofs of the city, the decaying walls of the buildings, the balconies with broken windows on the higher floors, the name I have not said with such purpose in so many years, Lisbon.

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My window faces the back of an abandoned building. Not much sunlight comes in. I can see a glass gallery and iron railings worn by humidity and rust. Beyond a broken door frame, a corridor extends into the dark and carries out the constant cooing of pigeons. The birds have colonized the abandoned building. They go in and out through the broken windows. Weeds grow between the tiles on the gallery. On my side, ruin has not encroached although our bedroom is only a stone's throw away. The building where we are staying was restored recently; it has the appeal of new amenities and the solidity of old architecture, thick walls, ample spaces. The gangrene of decay and collapse advances quickly in old cities by the sea. The building where the pigeons live and the rainwater seeps in through the cracks is the failed inverse of this one, it is that part of the city that the elements are claiming back. We have made this side our home in just a few days. High ceilings, airy rooms, sturdy floorboards creaking under our steps like the deck of a boat. The bed is big, the sheets are clean and pleasing to the touch, the pillows plump, the soft light from the lamps filters through paper spheres textured like thin parchment, your presence beside me and on the mirror, in the half-light you like to create, closing curtains, turning off lights, leaving some of the doors slightly open. Regaining a sense of familiarity, detail by detail, the horror of the nightmare begins to dissipate.



I feel my way through the walls. Leaving the dark bedroom allows me to escape the dungeon of sleep. I stand disoriented in the hallway, reaching a wall instead of the door I anticipated. My brain is not used to guiding my steps blindly. My imaginary map of the apartment is now out of sync. Nothing comes easier to me than the feeling of being suddenly lost. A sound behind me makes me turn: the refrigerator fan starts and the space begins to recover its true configuration. The world is a moving maze of signs, electric shocks, sound waves, brief flashes of light in the dark. The brain re-creates it entirely in its hermetic box, locked within its vault of bone. He believed that it was possible to guide from a distance the steps and actions of someone who has been hypnotized, order them to murder, plant a bomb, or rob a bank.

My hand now slides down the carved wooden doorway to the living room, and from this, like a fossil, I reconstruct with certainty the space in the dark, the desk to the right, the sofa to the left, and in front, the window facing the street. The dilated retina collects scattered light to complete the tapestry of perception, returning to it its three dimensions. The wind must have closed the window shutters. As my hand runs along the edge of the desk, my fingers touch the keyboard and the laptop turns on, a white beam of light suddenly illuminates the room. He liked using a typewriter. He had learned typing while serving a two-year sentence at Leavenworth federal prison in the mid-fifties. Somewhere in his vast file, there is probably a receipt of purchase listing the brand of the machine. He threw it from the car window while driving at full speed from Memphis to Atlanta, hearing or imagining police sirens in the distance. The typewriter, a Super 8 camera, a projector, several empty beer cans—he threw them all and watched them fall through the rearview mirror. I have the list of everything he took in the '66 Mustang with Alabama plates; in the blue gym bag he dropped along with the rifle before escaping; and what they later found in the trunk and the floor of the car, down to the bits of facial hair and dried foam on the blades of the disposable razor. I now know by heart the sequence of aliases he used and abandoned as they served their purpose, like old suits left behind in a hotel closet. I see his figure take shape before me, his shadow, his entire biography, composed of these minute details, one by one, like broken tiles in the mosaic sidewalks of Lisbon.

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It is a spring morning and I am walking on one of those sidewalks, Fanqueiros Street, with my map of the city and a piece of paper with some directions from Google Maps. I left the apartment without saying where I was going, with a feeling of secrecy and shame. The first steps in creating a story often feel childish, and in this case, I wasn't even there yet; I had just embarked on a search without a destination. I walk into a stationer with the intention of buying a notebook. I find one that I like very much and realize that I had been to this same shop just a year ago and bought an identical notebook in which I wrote only one thing, a date, December 2. I walk past ghostly fabric

stores, closed-down shops still displaying calligraphy from half a century ago; stands with wilted vegetables sold by Nepalis or Pakistanis; doors that smell of humidity and neglect; facades of dilapidated tiles; forlorn people standing by the entrances to their empty shops; pharmacies with marble counters and wooden shelves; clothing stores that become more contemporary as I approach Figueira Square, with its bronze king on horseback, surrounded by buildings with sunken rooftops overrun by weeds.

I see the narrow display window of a doll hospital I first saw twenty-six years ago. The square remains identical, the old streetcars, the soft morning sun of November, and that unmistakable scent of freshly baked bread and roasted chestnuts briefly dissolves my grasp of time. How strange is the sudden realization that I am the man with the graying hair and beard reflected in that window. But it is even stranger to have been that young man, back then, so much younger than I thought I was, father to a three-year-old son and a baby just born, my face probably unrecognizable to those who only met me recently, so nervous, so restless, lighting cigarettes and inhaling smoke with deep breaths, armed with a notebook and a map, just like I am this morning, and ignorant of what is to come—his destiny, your existence. What he and I have in common, this and that morning, almost thirty years ago under the same timeless light of this city, is that we walk through Lisbon searching for ghosts, his more fictitious than mine. The ghost I chase walked these same sidewalks, walked across this square, and turned that corner, João das Regras Street. It gives me chills just to look at the sign.

In a book, in a news article, the name and number of a street do not matter much, they are superfluous details. But being close to this place, and knowing that I can approach it, infuses wonder and reality in what was previously almost fiction. João das Regras Street, number four. As I walk up Figueiros Street, I imagine arriving at the Hotel Portugal, pushing the revolving door with gilded edges, treading the worn carpet, perhaps sitting on an armchair in the low light of the lobby. Just entering the hotel would anchor my speculations, making tangible everything that until now belonged only to dreams and the light sleep that followed my readings.

I have read online reviews by recent guests of the hotel. The

rooms are small, the facilities outdated, and from dawn till night-time, on the lower floors, you can hear the trains in the nearby metro station. He stayed in room number two on the first floor. There is an old dresser with a mirror and a marble ledge opposite the bed. I saw a photo of the room in the June 1968 issue of *Life* magazine. It must have smelled of old wood and dust when he opened the drawers. A hotel maid said he kept the room tidy. He slept badly and the train vibrations probably aggravated the insomnia. The surrounding buildings are tall and the sunlight that floods the nearby square does not reach João das Regras Street. I walk along, looking for number four, but I reach the end of the street and it seems the number does not exist. The world I was about to enter has vanished. I see an old hardware store with all kinds of keys, locks, and padlocks on the shelves. He would have seen it too, when crossing the street, with all the familiar tools from his locksmith course. The hotel sign, between the two rows of balconies shown in photographs, is nowhere to be seen. I ask a waiter standing by the entrance to a bar and he points to a facade covered with scaffolding and tarps. The old Hotel Portugal closed down and the building is now empty and under construction. It will become a luxury hotel.