

Juan Rulfo (1917–1986) is the author of what is probably the most important novel in Mexican literature. *Pedro Páramo* was published in 1955 and went on to be translated into over forty languages, sell over a million copies in English alone and initiate an entire literary movement. Rulfo's other literary works are *The Burning Plain* and *The Golden Cockerel*. He also worked as an anthropologist and photographer.

Douglas J. Weatherford, Professor of Hispanic Literature and Film at Brigham Young University, has published extensively on Juan Rulfo, with particular emphasis on the author's connection to film. In 2017, Weatherford released the first English-language translation of Rulfo's second novel, *El gallo de oro* (*The Golden Cockerel and Other Writings*, Deep Vellum).

Praise for *Pedro Páramo*

‘A strange, brooding novel . . . Great immediacy, power and beauty’ *Washington Post*

‘With its dense interweaving of time . . . its surreal sense of the everyday, and with simultaneous and harmonious coexistence of apparently incompatible realities, this brief novel by the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo strides through unexplored territory with a sure and determined step’ *The New York Times Book Review*

‘A powerful fascination . . . vivid and haunting; the style is a triumph’ *New York Herald Tribune*

‘No reader interested in the vitality of twentieth-century Latin American fiction can afford to miss this work’ *Chicago Tribune*

‘The novel is pared down to the bone . . . He shows us he can tell a conventional story, and then deliberately subverts our expectations. His descriptions of the deserted village and his brief characterizations are masterly’ *TLS*

‘The silences yawn in Rulfo’s writing. Its rhythms seem to slow time, and reality’s edges fray into a strange gulf . . . *Pedro Páramo* is like hunting for a key in a building that is collapsing around you . . . one of the more remarkable journeys in literature’ Chris Power, author of *A Lonely Man*

Also by Juan Rulfo

The Burning Plain

The Golden Cockerel & Other Writings

PEDRO PÁRAMO

JUAN RULFO

TRANSLATED BY
DOUGLAS J. WEATHERFORD



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FOREWORD

by Gabriel García Márquez

Translated by N. J. Sheerin

My discovery of Juan Rulfo—like that of Kafka—will without doubt be an essential chapter in my memoirs. I had arrived in Mexico on the same day Ernest Hemingway pulled the trigger—June 2, 1961—and not only had I not read Juan Rulfo's books, I hadn't even heard of him. It was very strange: first of all because in those days I kept up to date with the latest goings-on in the literary world, and even more so when it came to Latin American novels; secondly because the first people I got in touch with in Mexico were the writers who worked with Manuel Barbachano Ponce¹ in his *Dracula's Castle* on the streets of Córdoba, and the editors of the literary magazine *Novedades*, headed up by Fernando Benítez.² Naturally, they

1. Manuel Barbachano Ponce (1925–1994): A highly influential Mexican producer, most notably of Luís Buñuel's *Nazarín*, he was also a director and screenwriter in his own right. Five years after García Márquez's arrival in Mexico, Barbachano Ponce would produce Carlos Velo's film adaptation of *Pedro Páramo*.

2. Fernando Benítez Gutiérrez (1912–2000): Widely admired Mexican writer, editor, and anthropologist. A champion of Mexico's Indigenous population, he is best remembered for his four-volume work *Los indios de México* (*Indians of Mexico*). Benítez was also famously generous and gave early advice to writers such as Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Monsiváis, and José Emilio Pacheco.

all knew Juan Rulfo well. Yet it was at least six months before anyone mentioned him to me. Perhaps because Juan Rulfo, contrary to what happens with most great authors, is a writer who is much read but little spoken of.

I lived in an apartment without an elevator on calle Renán in the Anzures neighborhood of Mexico City with Mercedes and Rodrigo, who was less than two years old at the time. There was a double mattress on the floor of the master bedroom, a crib in the other room, and a kitchen table which doubled as a writing desk in the living room, with two single-seat chairs which were put to whatever use was needed. We had decided to stay in this city which at that time still retained a human scale, with its diaphanous air and deliriously colored flowers in the avenues, but the immigration authorities didn't seem inclined to share in our happiness. Half our lives were spent in immobile queues, sometimes in the rain, in the penitents' courtyards of the Secretariat of the Interior. In my free hours I wrote notes on Colombian literature which I read out live on air for Radio Universidad, then under the auspices of Max Aub.³ These notes were so honest that one day the Colombian ambassador phoned the broadcaster to lodge a formal complaint. According to him, mine were not notes on Colombian literature, but against Colombian literature. Max Aub called me to his office, and that, I thought, was the end of the only means of income I had managed to secure in six months. In fact, precisely the opposite happened.

—I haven't had time to listen to the program—Max Aub told me—but if it's as your ambassador says, then it must be very good.

3. Max Aub Mohrenwitz (1903–1972): Spanish-Mexican writer who lived in Mexico in exile from Franco's Spain. A friend of André Malraux, he is most famous for the cycle of novels "El laberinto mágico," set during the Spanish Civil War.

I was thirty-two years old, had in Colombia an ephemeral journalistic career, had just spent three very useful and difficult years in Paris and eight months in New York, and wanted to write screenplays in Mexico. The Mexican writing community at that time was similar to Colombia's, and I felt very much at home there. Six years earlier I had published my first novel, *Leaf Storm*, and I had three unpublished books: *No One Writes to the Colonel*, which appeared around that time in Colombia; *In Evil Hour*, which was published by the publishing house Editorial Era shortly afterwards on the recommendation of Vicente Rojo,⁴ and the story collection *Big Mama's Funeral*. Of this last I had only incomplete drafts, since Álvaro Mutis⁵ had lent the originals to our much-loved Elena Poniatowska⁶ before my arrival in Mexico, and she had lost them. Later I managed to reconstruct the stories, and Sergio Galindo⁷ published them at the University of Veracruz on the recommendation of Álvaro Mutis.

So I was already a writer with five underground books. For me that wasn't a problem, since neither then nor ever have I written for fame, but rather so that my friends would love me

4. Vicente Rojo Almazán (1932–): A Barcelona-born Spanish-Mexican artist and member of Mexico's so-called Generación de la Ruptura (Breakaway Generation), he cofounded Editorial Era and would design the original cover to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

5. Álvaro Mutis Jaramillo (1923–2013): A Colombian poet, novelist, and essayist, and winner of the 2002 Neustadt Prize for Literature, his most famous work in English remains *The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll*. He was a close friend of García Márquez, who called him "one of the greatest writers of our time."

6. Elena Poniatowska (1932–): French-Mexican novelist and journalist, and winner of the 2013 Cervantes Prize. Her works in English include *Massacre in Mexico*, an investigation into the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, and *Leonora*, a biography of British-Mexican artist Leonora Carrington.

7. Sergio Galindo Márquez (1926–1993): Mexican novelist and short-story writer, erstwhile director of the Mexican Institute for Fine Arts, member of the Spanish Royal Academy, and honorary OBE.

more, and I believed I had managed that. My great problem as a novelist was that after those books I felt I had driven myself up a blind alley, and I was looking everywhere for an escape route. I was well acquainted with good authors and bad authors alike who could have shown me the way out, and yet I felt myself going around and around in concentric circles. I didn't see myself as spent. On the contrary: I felt I still had many novels in me, but I couldn't conceive of a convincing and poetic way of writing them. That is where I was when Álvaro Mutis climbed with great strides the seven stories up to my apartment with a bundle of books, extracted from this mountain the smallest and shortest, and said as he laughed himself to death:

—Read this shit and learn!

The book was *Pedro Páramo*.

That night I couldn't sleep until I had read it twice. Not since the awesome night I read Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in a down-at-the-heels student boardinghouse in Bogotá—almost ten years earlier—had I been so overcome. The next day I read *The Burning Plain*, and my astonishment remained intact. Much later, in a doctor's waiting room, I came across a medical journal with another of Rulfo's scattered masterpieces: "The Legacy of Matilde Arcángel." The rest of that year I couldn't read a single other author, because they all seemed inferior.

I still hadn't escaped my bedazzlement when someone told Carlos Velo that I could recite from memory whole passages of *Pedro Páramo*. The truth went even further: I could recite the entire book front to back and vice versa without a single appreciable error, I could tell you on which page of my edition each scene could be found, and there wasn't a single aspect of its characters' personalities which I wasn't deeply familiar with.

Carlos Velo entrusted me with the adaptation for cinema of another of Juan Rulfo's stories, the only one which I hadn't yet read: "The Golden Cockerel." There were sixteen pages of

it, very crumpled, typed on disintegrating tissue paper by three different typewriters. Even if they hadn't told me who it was by, I would have known straightaway. The language wasn't as intricate as the rest of Juan Rulfo's work, and there were very few of his usual literary devices on show, but his guardian angel flew about every aspect of the writing. Later, Carlos Velo and Carlos Fuentes asked me to read and critique their screenplay for a film adaptation—the first—of *Pedro Páramo*.

I mention these two jobs—the results of which were a long way from being any good—because they obliged me to dive even further into a novel which without doubt I knew better than even its own author (who, by the by, I didn't meet until several years later). Carlos Velo had done something striking: he had cut up the temporal fragments of *Pedro Páramo*, and had reassembled the plot in strictly chronological order. As a straightforward resource to work from it seemed legitimate, although the resulting text was vastly different from the original: flat and disjointed. But it was a useful exercise for me in understanding Juan Rulfo's secret carpentry, and very revealing of his rare wisdom.

There were two fundamental problems with adapting *Pedro Páramo* for screen. The first was the question of names. As subjective as it sounds, in some way every name resembles the person who bears it, and this is something that is much more obvious in fiction than in real life. Juan Rulfo has said—or is claimed to have said—that he takes his characters' names from the headstones of the graves in cemeteries throughout Jalisco. The only thing we can be certain of is that there are no proper nouns as proper—which is to say, as appropriate—as those borne by the characters in his books. It seemed impossible to me—indeed, it still seems impossible—that an actor could ever be found who would perfectly suit the name of the character he was to play.

The other problem—inseparable from the first—was that of age. Throughout his work, Juan Rulfo has been careful to take

very little care with the lifespans of his creations. The critic Narciso Costa Ros recently made a fascinating attempt to establish them in *Pedro Páramo*. I had always thought, purely through poetic intuition, that when Pedro Páramo finally takes Susana San Juan to the Media Luna, his vast domain, she is already sixty-two years old. Pedro Páramo must be around five years her senior. In fact, the whole tragedy seems much greater, much more terrible and beautiful, if the precipitous passion that sets it in motion is so geriatric as to offer no real relief. Such a great and poetic feat would be unthinkable in the cinema. In those darkened theatres, the love lives of the elderly don't move anyone.

The difficult thing about looking at things in this lovely, deliberate way is that poetic sense does not always tally with common sense. The month in which certain scenes occur is essential in any analysis of Juan Rulfo's work, something I doubt he was even conscious of. In poetic works—and *Pedro Páramo* is a poetic work of the highest order—authors often invoke the months of the year for reasons outside strict chronology. What's more: in many cases an author may change the name of the month, day, or even year solely to avoid an infelicitous rhyme, or some disharmony, without recognizing that these changes can cause a critic to reach an insurmountable conclusion about the work in question. This is the case not just with days and months, but with flowers too. There are writers who use them purely for the sophistication of their names, without paying much attention to whether they correspond to the place or season. This is why it is not uncommon to find books where geraniums flower on the beach and tulips in the snow. In *Pedro Páramo*, where it is impossible to be entirely sure where the line between the living and the dead is drawn, any precision is all the more unattainable. No one can know, of course, how many years death may last.

I wanted to write all this to say that my profound exploration of Juan Rulfo's work was what finally showed me the way

to continue with my writing, and for that reason it would be impossible for me to write about him without it seeming that I'm writing about myself. I also want to say that I read it all again before writing these brief reminiscences, and that once again I am the helpless victim of the same astonishment that struck me the first time around. They number scarcely more than three hundred pages, but they are as great—and, I believe, as enduring—as those of Sophocles.

I CAME TO COMALA because I was told my father lived here, a man named Pedro Páramo. That's what my mother told me. And I promised her I'd come see him as soon as she died. I squeezed her hands as a sign I would. After all, she was near death, and I was of a mind to promise her anything. "Don't fail to visit him —she urged—. Some call him one thing, some another. I'm sure he'd love to meet you." That's why I couldn't refuse her, and after agreeing so many times I just kept at it until I had to struggle to free my hands from hers, which were now without life.

Before this she had told me:

—Don't ask him for anything. Just insist on what's ours. What he was obligated to give me but never did . . . Make him pay dearly, my son, for the indifference he showed toward us.

—I will, Mother.

I never thought I'd keep my promise. Until recently when I began to imagine all kinds of possibilities and allowed my fantasies to run free. And that's how a whole new world started swirling around in my head, a world built on expectations I had for that man named Pedro Páramo, my mother's husband. That's why I came to Comala.

IT WAS DURING the dog days of summer, when the August winds blow hot, tainted by the rotting smell of saponaria flowers.

The road rose and fell: *"It rises or falls according to whether one's going or coming. For the person who's leaving, it rises; for the one who's coming, it falls."*

—What did you say was the name of that town down there?

—Comala, señor.

—You sure we've already made it to Comala?

—I'm sure, señor.

—And why does it look so sad?

—It's the times, señor.

I had imagined I'd see the place of my mother's memories, of her nostalgia, a nostalgia of tattered sighs. She was always sighing, mourning the loss of Comala, hoping to return. But she never came back. Now I've come in her place. And I come bearing the same eyes with which she saw these things, because she gave me her eyes to see: *"There, just beyond Los Colimotes pass, you'll find a beautiful view of a green plain, with a bit of yellow from the ripening corn. From that spot you'll see Comala, turning the land white, lighting it up at night."* And her voice was secretive, almost without sound, as if she were speaking to herself . . . My mother.

—And why are you headed to Comala, if I might ask? —I heard someone say.

—I'm going to see my father —I answered.

—Ah! —he said.

And we returned to our silence.

We walked downhill, listening to the cadent trotting of the burros. Our eyes swelling with fatigue in the intense August heat.

—He's gonna throw you quite the party —I heard again from the voice of the man walking alongside me—. He'll be glad to see someone after so many years with no one passing through.

Later he added:

—Whoever you are, he'll be happy to see you.

The plain resembled a translucent pool in the pulsing heat of the sun, dissipating in the distance where a gray horizon took shape. And beyond that, a line of mountains. And even farther still, a never-ending distance.

—And what's your father like, if I might ask?

—I don't know him —I said—. I just know his name is Pedro Páramo.

—Ah! You don't say.

—That's the name I was given.

I again heard the "ah!" of the muleteer.

I had met up with him at Los Encuentros, where several roads came together. I was there waiting, until finally this guy showed up.

—Where you headed? —I asked.

—Down that way, señor.

—You familiar with a place called Comala?

—That's where I'm going.

So I followed him. I walked behind trying to match his pace, until he seemed to notice I was following and slowed his stride. After that we walked side by side so close together our shoulders were almost touching.

—I'm also one of Pedro Páramo's sons —he told me.

A flock of crows passed overhead through an empty sky, crying caw, caw, caw.

After dropping down out of the hills, we descended even farther. We had left the hot air above and were now sinking into a pure heat that had no air. Everything seemed to be waiting for something.

—It's hot here —I said.

—It is, but this is nothing —responded the other guy—. Try to relax. You'll feel it worse when we get to Comala. That place sits on the burning embers of the earth, at the very mouth of

Hell. They say many of those who die there and go to Hell come back to fetch their blankets.

—Do you know Pedro Páramo? —I asked.

I dared pose the question because I saw a hint of understanding in his eyes.

—Who is he? —I inquired again.

—Bitterness incarnate —he answered.

He took a swat at the burros, without any need to do so, since they were well ahead of us and focused on the descent.

I felt my mother's portrait tucked away in my shirt pocket, keeping my heart warm, as if she too were sweating. It was an old photograph, worn along the edges; but it was the only one I'd ever seen of her. I had found it in the kitchen cabinet, in a clay pot full of herbs: lemon balm leaves, castilla blossoms, twigs of rue. I've kept it ever since. It was the only one. My mother was always opposed to being photographed. She said portraits were a form of witchcraft. And it seemed she was right, because hers was full of holes, like pinpricks, with one large enough to fit your middle finger through located right where her heart should be.

It's the same photograph I have with me here, hoping it might help my father recognize me.

—Look at this —the muleteer says as he comes to a halt—. See that hill over there, the one that looks like a pig's bladder? Well, just beyond that is the Media Luna. Now turn that way. You see the top of that hill? Look at it. Now turn and look this way. See that other hilltop you can barely make out for being so far away? Well, that's the Media Luna from one end to the other. As they say, every bit of land as far as the eye can see. And all that ground is his. The thing is, our mothers pushed us into this miserable world laid out on the ground on petates even though we were sons of Pedro Páramo. And the funniest part is he's the one who took us to be baptized. That's got to be what happened to you too, right?

—I don't recall.

—The hell you say!

—What's that?

—I said we're almost there, señor.

—I can see that. But what came through here?

—A roadrunner, señor. That's what they call those birds.

—No, I was asking about the town. It seems so alone, as if abandoned. As if no one were living here.

—It doesn't just seem that way. That's how it is. Nobody lives here.

—And Pedro Páramo?

—Pedro Páramo died years ago.

IT WAS THE TIME of day when children in small towns everywhere play in the streets, filling the afternoon with their shouting. When the black walls still reflect the yellow light of the sun.

At least that's what I'd seen in Sayula, just yesterday at this same hour. And I'd seen the still air shattered by doves flapping their wings as if they were breaking free of the day. They flew about, dipping toward the rooftops as the shouts of children fluttered about and seemed to turn blue in the evening sky.

Now here I was, in this town devoid of all sound. I heard my footsteps as they fell on the rounded stones that paved the streets. Hollow footsteps, echoing off walls tinged by the light of the setting sun.

That was the time of day when I began walking down the main road. I saw empty houses with broken doors, buried in weeds. What had that guy told me this weed was called? "La capitana, señor. A plague that waits for people to leave so it can overtake their homes. You'll see."

While passing a side street I saw a woman wrapped in her rebozo disappear as if she'd never existed. After that my feet resumed their march, and my eyes once again peered through gaping doorways. Until the woman with the rebozo once more crossed the street in front of me.

—Buenas noches! —she said.

I followed her with my eyes. Then shouted:

—Where does doña Eduvigis live?

She pointed with her finger:

—Over there. The house by the bridge.

I noticed that her voice was made of human cords, that her mouth had teeth and a tongue that would engage and disengage as she spoke, and that her eyes were just like those of anyone else alive on earth.

It had grown dark.

She said “buenas noches” again. And although there were no children playing, nor doves, nor rooftops shaded blue, I felt that the town was alive. And that if all I heard was silence, it was because I hadn't yet grown accustomed to the silence. Maybe because my head was still full of sounds and voices.

Yes, filled with voices. And here, with the air so thin, they were easier to hear. They settled inside you, heavy. I remembered what my mother had told me: “*You'll hear me better there. I'll be closer to you. You'll find the voice of my memories closer to you there than that of my death, that is if death has ever had a voice.*” My mother . . . The living one.

I would've liked to tell her: “You were all wrong about this place. You led me astray. You sent me out to chase my own tail. To an abandoned town. Searching for someone who doesn't exist.”

To find the house by the bridge, I followed the sound of the river. I knocked at the door, but to no avail. My hand swung in the air as if the wind had blown the door open. There was a woman standing there who said:

—Come in.
And I went in.

I STAYED IN COMALA. The muleteer continued on his way, although, before leaving, he said:

—I'm headed quite a bit farther, over there where you see the hills coming together. That's where I've got my house. You'd be more than welcome if you want to come along. But if you prefer to stay here, that's up to you. There's nothing wrong with looking around town, and you might even find someone still among the living.

I stayed. That was why I'd come.

—Where can I find a room? —I called after him, now almost shouting.

—Look for doña Eduvigis, if she's still alive. Tell her I sent you.

—And what's your name?

—Abundio —he replied. But by then I couldn't make out his last name.

—I'M EDUVIGES DYADA. Come in.

It seemed as if she'd been waiting for me. Everything was ready, she explained, and she had me follow her through a long series of dark rooms that appeared empty. But that wasn't the case. As I grew accustomed to the darkness and to the thread of light that trailed behind us, I began to make out shadows on both sides, and I sensed we were walking through a narrow opening between countless bundles.

—What's all this? —I asked.

—Just things —she said—. The house is full of things. Everyone who moved away chose my house as the place to store

their stuff, yet nobody's come back for it. But the room I've saved for you is way in the back. I keep it empty in case someone shows up. So, you're her son?

—Whose son? —I asked.

—Doloritas's.

—Yes, but how'd you know?

—She told me you'd be coming. Today, in fact. That you'd come today.

—Who? My mother?

—Yes, her.

I didn't know what to think. Nor did she offer any clues:

—This is your room —she said.

It didn't have any doors, other than the one we'd just come through. She lit a candle, and I saw that the room was empty.

—There's nothing to lie down on —I told her.

—Don't worry. You must be tired, and sleep is a good mattress for fatigue. Tomorrow morning I'll arrange a bed. As you know, it's not easy to have everything perfectly put together last minute. People need some warning, and your mother didn't say a thing until just now.

—My mother —I said—, my mother's dead.

—So that's why her voice sounded so weak, as if it had to travel quite a distance just to get here. Now I understand. How long's it been since she passed?

—Seven days now.

—Poor thing. She must've felt abandoned. We promised to die together. To leave this world at the same time, to give each other courage on that final journey, if any were needed, or if we were to have any problems. We were the best of friends. Didn't she ever mention me?

—No, never.

—That's strange. We were still young back then, of course. And she was just married. But we loved each other a lot. Your

mother was so pretty, or rather so sweet, that it was a pleasure to love her. You couldn't help but love her. So, she beat me to it, huh? But you can be sure I'll catch up to her. No one knows better than I do just how far we are from Heaven, but I also know a shortcut. God willing, it's about dying at a time of your own choosing rather than according to His time. Or, you might say, it's about forcing His hand a bit early. Forgive me for speaking to you as family, it's because I consider you my son. Yes, I often said: "Dolores's boy should've been mine." Later I'll tell you why. For now, let's just say I'm going to catch up to your mother on one of the roads that lead to eternity.

I was sure then that the woman had gone mad. Later, I wasn't sure of anything. It felt as if I were in a strange land, and I just let myself be dragged along. My body seemed to be floating, and then it gave way, and with its moorings let loose, anyone could've played with it as if it were a bundle of rags.

—I'm tired —I said.

—First come have a bite to eat. A little something. Anything'll do.

—I'll come. I'll come later.

WATER DRIPPING FROM the roof tiles was making a hole in the sand of the patio. It sounded: drip, drip, and then again drip as it landed on a laurel leaf that bounced around while staying stuck in a crack between the bricks. The storm had moved on. An occasional breeze would shake the leaves of the pomegranate tree, making them shed a heavy rain whose shimmering drops left a pattern on the ground before turning to mist. The chickens, crouching tightly as if asleep, suddenly flapped their wings and headed out to the patio, where they pecked furiously to grab worms forced out of the ground by the rain. As the clouds moved on, the sun threw its light on the rocks making them shimmer

with color; it drank the water from the earth and made the leaves shine as they played in the gentle wind.

—What's taking you so long in the privy, young man?

—Nothing, mamá.

—If you stay in there much longer, a snake will come out and bite you.

—Yes, mamá.

«I was thinking of you, Susana. Up in those green hills. When we'd fly kites during the windy season. As we played on top of that hill, we'd hear the sounds of life rising from the town below, and the string, pulled by the wind, would get away from us. "Help me, Susana." And soft hands would tighten around mine. "Let out more string."»

»We'd laugh at the wind and find each other's eyes as the string slipped through our fingers and ran with the wind before breaking with a faint cracking sound as if it had been cut by the wings of a passing bird. Then way above us that paper bird would flail downward, dragging its loose tail behind until it became lost in the green earth below.

»Your lips were moist as if kissed by the dew.»

—I said to come out of the privy, young man.

—Yes, mamá. I'm coming.

«I was thinking of you. When you stood there looking at me with your aquamarine eyes.»

He looked up and saw his mother in the doorway.

—What's taking you so long to come out? What're you doing in there?

—I'm thinking.

—And you can't do that someplace else? It's unhealthy to spend so much time in the privy. Besides, you should be doing something productive. Why don't you go help your grandmother shell the corn?

—I'm going, mamá. I'm going.

—**GRANDMA, I'M HERE** to help shell the corn.

—We're done, but now we're gonna grind chocolate. Where'd you take off to? We looked for you all through the storm.

—I was in the other patio.

—And what were you doing? Praying?

—No, Grandma, I was just watching the rain.

His grandmother looked at him with those eyes of hers that were half gray and half yellow and that seemed to know what someone was hiding inside.

—Well now, go clean out the mill.

«You've hidden yourself away, Susana, hundreds of meters high, way above the clouds, farther away than all other things. Hidden in the immensity of God, behind His Divine Providence, in a place where I can't reach you, nor even see you, and where my words won't find you.»

—Grandma, the mill's not working, the grinder's broken.

—That Micaela must have been using it to grind corncobs. I can't get her to break that bad habit, but there's not a whole lot we can do about it now.

—Can't we buy another one? This one's so old it hasn't been working right anyway.

—You're right. Although after what we spent to bury your grandfather and the tithings we gave to the church, there's no money left. Even so, we'll sacrifice somewhere and buy another one. Why don't you go see doña Inés Villalpando and ask her if she can't give us one on credit through October. We'll pay her out of the harvest.

—Yes, Grandma.

—And while you're there, ask her to add a sifter and a pair of pruning shears to round out the order. With how fast these plants are growing they'll soon run us out of the place. I wouldn't have reason to complain if I were still in that big house, with its open spaces. But your grandfather ruined that when we moved

here. It must be God's will: nothing turns out exactly as you want. Tell doña Inés we'll pay what we owe out of the harvest.

—Yes, Grandma.

There were hummingbirds. It was the season. You could hear their wings whirring among jasmine bushes that had bent over from the weight of their flowers.

He walked by the shelf displaying an image of the Sacred Heart, and there he found twenty-four centavos. He left the four centavos and took the twenty.

Before he could leave, his mother stopped him:

—Where are you headed?

—To see doña Inés Villalpando about a new mill. Ours is broken.

—Ask her for a meter of black taffeta, like this —and she gave him a sample—. Have her put it on our account.

—All right, mamá.

—On your way home buy me some cafiaspirina pills. You'll find some money in the flowerpot in the hallway.

He found a peso. He left the twenty centavos and grabbed the peso.

«Now I've got enough money for whatever I want,» he thought.

—Pedro! —they yelled after him—. Pedro!

But by then he couldn't hear a thing. He was already a long way off.

THAT NIGHT IT RAINED AGAIN. He listened to the bubbling water for a long while; at some point he must have fallen asleep, because when he awoke, the only thing he could hear was a faint drizzle. The windowpanes were dark, while on the outside, raindrops slid down in thick threads as if they were tears. "I watched the raindrops as they glistened in the lightning, and with every