

fiction

JULIO ESCOTO / HONDURAS

My Illusions Have Vanished!

Mrs. Danielou loved her little fool more than anything in the world. That's why when she fell in the well, she was grateful that it was he who should come down to help her.

*The Lady fell in the well!
Oh no! Oh God!*

The little moron had arrived one day at the ranch. He asked for a few hours' accommodation, but stayed there for life. The mistress, a widow truly by widowhood, accepted him like a son that she didn't remember not having. She loved him with all the ventricles of her old heart, never experienced in motherhood. The fool settled in right away, and was soon the uncontested owner of hallways and rooms in the mansion.

*Call the servants. The Lady fell in . . . !
Call Ruperto, Mariano, Rodimiro and the Sad
one.
Call them all.*

When he arrived he was torn from brain to shoes. But the Lady loved him with the last passion of her old years. She changed his old clothes for better ones; she herself mended his shoes, she mended his favorite sheet, for he wouldn't take another one. She couldn't mend his brain, though. She didn't want to, either. She loved the candid, without-malice simpleton. That's why, when she fell in the well, she was grateful that he would go down to help her.

*We need a rope to get her up!
Bring a rope, then!*

They used to walk together through the coffee plantation. Together they used to watch the sunsets and sunrises, sunsets and sunrises. When winter

arrived, she herself made a cape for him to keep warm while they supervised the work of the peons, while opening paths for the humid nature to run through. She loved him more and more every day, and the act of loving him was a good reason to keep death away. She took him to her table, and gave him the best room in the whole ranch. She ordered from the city sets of swings and children's games, bicycles and roller skates. Her heart was overflowing with love for the one who laughed and laughed, with a sign of idiocy eternally stamped on his face.

*Ruperto and Mariano are too fat, they
don't fit and I must hold the rope.
The Sad one is too nervous to go down.*

She tried to teach him to read. To no avail. Not even numbers written very small would fit in the inverted brain of the fool, like a broken watch on the floor. Give him lollipops, candy, cake, and butterflies. He followed the butterflies no matter how many kilometers they flew, his eyes wide open, dripping saliva from his lips set in a frozen smile as if engraved in stone. Even though they complained, the servants accepted the place that the lunatic had taken in the Lady's heart. They knew how much she loved him. That was why, when she fell in the well, she was grateful that he would go down to help her.

*The well is dark.
Here is a torch. It will give light.
We have no alternative. He will go down.*

The hired hands tied a rope around his waist, and gave him the end of another one, so that he could hold on to the Lady, and they could haul her up. The little lunatic stays a moment at the top of the well. When he descends, his shadow does not allow him to see the bottom of it. He descends holding on to the concave walls of the well. Slowly, as if he were a drop of milk in a test tube.

*Tie her well. Be careful, eh!
Let us know when to pull her up.*

A smile playing on his lips. He still ruminates his monosyllables while from the top they watch him move his hands very slowly. When the lady saw her little moron come down, she thought that at last he had recovered his sanity, because he was doing an act of charity and good will. Once he was well, the image that she had of his candidness would disappear. She would have to change her will, and not leave him everything. Once he was well, she

could die in peace; even though she was trying to control her selfishness, for it was apparent she could not conceive loving someone who was interested in her enormous wealth. Undoubtedly, once he became sane, he would appreciate wealth, he would covet it and he would no longer continue loving her for love's sake, but for the sake of money. Then, she lost consciousness.

*Ready? Do we pull now?
We can't see anything
Here they come. Come up slowly. Slowly,
so that she doesn't get hurt.
Then we shall bring the little fool.
Little moron, can you hear us? Did you
tie her well?
She is coming up. Just a little bit more.
Pull evenly, a little bit harder.
Yes, "Ha-Ha" . . . I tied her well . . .
From the waist?
What?
Pull her up more. She is almost at the top of
the well?
We can't see . . . It's dark . . .
Did you tie her well?
Yess . . . from her neck . . . it was I, "ha-ha" . . .
I tied her . . . from her neck . . .*

Mrs. Danielou would love her little fool more than anything in the world, beyond life itself, in the instant of eternity.

Translated by Nina Guilbert

DANIACHEW WORKU / ETHIOPIA

The Voice!

A dusty provincial road zigzagged across the hillock; the tops of the houses, trees, gardens, and animals in the area were covered with dust. Some of the trees were covered with more dust than others: the cactus and the *wanza*