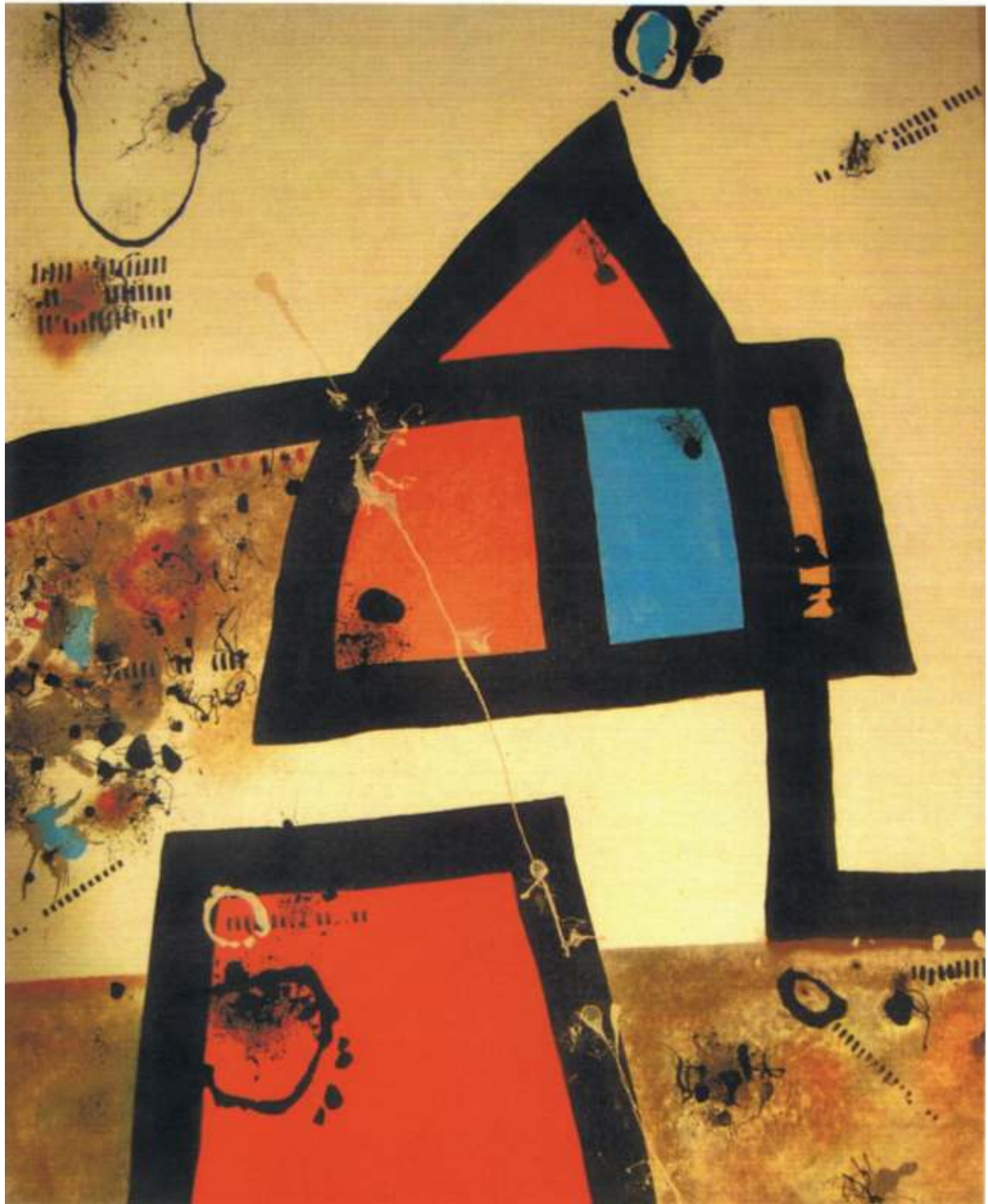


MARTIRICOS

MÁLAGA'S E.O.I. SHORT STORY JOURNAL
MAY 2008



MARTIRICOS is an annual publication of Málaga's E.O.I. English Department. Its sole purpose is to make public the short stories which each year are short-listed in Málaga's E.O.I. Short Story Contest, which can be entered for by all the students (any language) of all the Escuelas de Idiomas in Andalucía. In this edition, 2007-08, the first prize has been awarded to Inmaculada León Morales for the story *The Coin Lost or Gained?*, which will also be published in **SUR in English**; Marta García Villar (Fuengirola E.O.I. and 2007 winner – which says of her short story writing level) has been the runner up with *The Robin's Ghost*, while María Soledad Pino González has come in third with *The Grandfather*.

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MARTIRICOS Nº 6 – MAY 2008

Panel of judges of the VII Malaga E.O.I. Short Story Contest

Carmen Carmona, Lusi Castillo, Juana Romera, Ana María Sepúlveda,

Carmen Triviño (Málaga's E.O.I's English Department)

and **SUR in English**

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THE COIN LOST OR GAINED?

Inmaculada León Morales

Winner of VII Málaga EOI Short Story Contest

Inmaculada León Morales, who is currently on the fifth course of English in this E.O.I., was born in Málaga in 1976. She is a Business Administration high school teacher. As hobbies, she plays padel, dances salsa and reads (at the moment Punzet's last work).

My name is Cynthia, although my friends call me Cinderella, yes, like in the famous fairy tale, just because I used to see my life under the myth-element of unjust oppression and I am still waiting for my triumphant reward to come. I have two older sisters who did not bother to care about my mother while she was in hospital. I was the only one looking after her, every day, and every night. Poor Cinderella against two vile Stepsisters. She was always doing the hard work, meanwhile they only cared about themselves and the way they looked.

My mother was a wonderful person. She was very wise. She loved teaching us through stories. Every night she used to read us one of Aesop's fables. I particularly liked the one called *The Tortoise and the Hare*. She could also make up her own fables pretending she was reading them from a book. But I could see in her eyes, which did not move from side to side, that she was making us believe it came from someone famous, but it was all her imagination. She used to call me 'my little princess' and always said that I should not let anyone make me think I was not one or even the best in the world. I used to live in a magic universe of dragons, wicked witches, and other fabulous characters conceived by myself.

I felt very sad when the doctor informed us about her illness. He was like the evil wizard of my childhood tales. And she was the one eating the enchanted apple, not with a happy end, as I feared. It was not fair. I could not stop thinking about all those bad people living healthily in the world and she was the unlucky one who had to get ill. I promised myself not to leave her alone and I stood with her until the day she died. Sure

she did not want me to be sad, so I tried to look as joyful as I could under the difficult circumstances.

A few days before she passed away she gathered her three daughters in the hospital room. It seemed a dungeon. It was grey, cold and watched over by doctors and terrible torture machines. 'It is something very important to deal with', she said, and I guessed she was going to tell us about her will. She gave each of us one big brown bag, containing one hundred gold coins. We were not a rich family and that was all her wealth.

'I don't need anything from you, mum. All I want is you,' I cried.

'Don't miss me once I die, darling,' she answered.

'How am I going to live without you, mum?'

'That is something you need to find yourself. And the only thing I can do is to give you this bag. And I ask the three of you to carefully count the coins inside'

My sisters did so as soon as they got out of the room. Nurses and other people round there probably thought they were crazy. After a while, they confirmed there were exactly one hundred coins. I was so sad that I preferred to wait until she died and I did the same one evening in my room.

'One, two, three... ninety eight, ninety nine', I counted loudly.

And that was all, ninety nine coins. There were just ninety nine coins. I could not believe it. I thought I was wrong, so I counted again. But this time splitting the total in pillars of 10 each to make it easier. Each column was as high as the next one. All of them the same, but one, that was lower. I became furious. I had been the only one next to her during all those hard months in hospital and she had given me the least valuable bag.

I thought maybe someone in the hospital could have found it. I returned to my mum's room and asked the staff if they knew anything about it. But no one did. Although I was aware of the fact that the coin could not possibly be in that room, I looked for it under the bed, inside the drawers, in the wardrobe... nothing.

I wished I had been the princess of another of Perrault's tales and could forget about those two lucky sisters of mine. For example, the Sleeping Beauty, and wait for something good to come, while I was dreaming. Dreaming just not to feel the pain inside.

One early morning, I was lying on my bed. The coins were still in columns on the table next to me. The window was open, and a draft of fresh air came in through it. I could see the sunlight warming the place. The birds were singing. A car passing by, 'it must be the milkman', I thought. And I heard the tinkling of the bottles as they were left at the doorway. I felt well. I thought about all the good things in my life. I had a lovely little son, a loving husband (my Prince Charming), a cheerful dog, a job I liked, and a place to live. Everyone I loved was healthy. I realized that the coins were shining. Shining like my life was. I was not conscious before about how extraordinary my existence was. And I understood at that very moment what my mum wished for me: not to cry for the missing coin, but to be grateful for the ones I had. Not to shed tears for her, but to be thankful for sharing with her all that time.

* * *

THE ROBIN'S GHOST

Marta García Villar

Runner up 2008

Marta García Villar, last year's winner of this contest, has come in second by only one point. She does 5th of English at Fuengirola E.O.I. and second of Filología Hispanica at U.M.A. She has published several stories through contests (Villa de Mijas, Colegio Salliver, Caja Madrid). As a reader, she enjoys the classics and moderns, like Tolkien.

Nobody ever knew when the ghost first appeared. It is said that its presence was like a frozen dagger stuck into your heart, that its whispers could make you weep without reason and that it could force you to dig your own nails into your skin until blood drew a red line on it. Anybody could have experienced this torture. If its victim was he or she does not matter at all, because any of us could have the leading role in this story. It could be me, you, even the ones who have not been born yet. But, does a story without a hero make any sense? As the chosen one to immortalize the tragedy of an isolated heart and its remorse beyond death, as the troubadour who will narrate the story of a cruel loss, I ask you to forgive my daring to introducing myself also as the victim who suffered this agony.

The first memory that comes to my mind is a small nest. Have you ever seen robin eggs? They are intense turquoise pieces of sweet weakness which dream about the life they keep as a treasure, hoping that someday it will flow as a spring. When I remember the first time I saw one of these little wonders I also see an azure moon gazing at me, and this silver queen was even bluer than the eggs.

But suddenly I woke up. Routine hit me like a hammer as I turned off my noisy alarm clock and I hardly noticed the shadow of a sweet candy that lay upon the table. If I had realized what was happening about me I would have felt its presence also in the Tintoretto paintings that glanced at the horizon with dead golden eyes. But becoming aware of what floated beside me had always been very difficult for me. Everybody said that my mind seemed to be a prison where I locked myself in

frequently, and now I can admit that. At that moment, however, I had no idea of what the future had in store for me. My prison remained locked.

I spent the following hours engaged in my regular tasks like any other day, working among towers of papers, losing my patience at the usual traffic jam at rush hour and cooking dinner when I finally arrived home. As soon as every dish and saucepan was spotless, I sat in front of the piano and let my fingers flow upon its keys until music filled my room like a sacred aura that washed away my stressful day.

At first I could not appreciate the sounds of her crying, but it got louder as my music got more powerful. When I heard it, I stopped playing, but it ceased and I thought that it all had been a figment of my imagination. That is why I decided to go to bed immediately, but, as soon as my head rested on the pillow, when I had almost reached the frontier between dreams and reality, a dying scream froze my blood. A storm of trills broke around me and I felt like falling into a deep abyss as my yells suffocated in a dumb whisper and then, I saw the source of my nightmares. She wore her wavy hair down, caressing her ankles in a ghostly mist that embraced her body. Her eyes smiled with melancholy as she approached, and, in that moment I was able to recognize her face, long ago forgotten. Her cheeks used to be rosy, and her look frequently got lost into the sky, dreaming of stealing the moon.

I didn't feel scared, but guilty. At that moment, every detail of her last seconds pierced my soul and pulled frozen tears out of my astonished eyes. How she had insisted to climb that tree in order to bring me those robin eggs, how her left foot broke a weak branch, how her body rustled like the autumn leaves when she fell down, how her corpse looked serene and terrifying.

I knew it was time for me to ask for forgiveness. Pain had been so unbearable during those years, that I had forced myself to burn her pictures, to dismiss her name of my mind and to erase every memory of our time together. I knew that the reason of her presence by my side and her eternal crying was because of me, the one who had almost exiled her from the place that she used to occupy in my heart. Crying at her feet, I

knelt down and implored for forgiveness, although I was trying to fight the contradictory feelings of fear and relief that her smile provoked inside myself. The sound of my sob flooded my mind and I was not able to hear anything else until she bowed and kissed my forehead. I felt a winter breeze flying through my soul and, when I looked up, I realized that she was already gone. The sun was rising, a robin started its song for a new dawn and our souls were finally able to rest.

The ones that forced themselves to forget every feeling that their heart once craved could be us or them. As the narrator of this suffocating story I will never be able to know if the ghost was real or if everything was just a result of remorse and sorrow, but I will always remember that memories are impossible to subjugate, that they can always return and strengthen our pain and that facing the affair is better than resorting to oblivion.

* * *

THE GRANDFATHER

María Soledad Pino González

Third Place 2008

María Soledad Pino González (English 5 at Málaga's E.O.I.) was born in Córdoba. She has experience in publishing, but chemistry. PhD. in this science, she lectures on organic chemistry at U.M.A. Besides professional books and articles, she enjoys reading, especially historical novels.

Like every day, on his way home, David left the school and walked along the avenue. The palm trees, which stood in two lines near the road, did not seem to feel his presence, neither did he feel them. He seemed lost in his thoughts. His main worries were to get home, as soon as possible, and to begin playing on the computer or surfing on the Internet.

He was a shy and lonely boy, had a cold relation with his fellows, but at the computer, he was different. He was transformed when his fingers touched the computer board. He had a lot of 'friends' on the net and could talk with them, forgetting his limitations and his physical appearance. He had to communicate his experiences, but anonymously, without a face. He was ashamed because of his enormous glasses and his prominent nose. On the Internet, everybody could seem better.

That evening, his mother appeared different, absent-minded. At supper, his father told him: *David, grandma is ill; mom has to look after her. Tomorrow in the afternoon, you must leave home with mom, and go to the village where your grandparents live. It will be only for a few days, we hope. Mom is going to talk to your teachers and you could do your homework at your grandparents'.*

The arrival at the small village was very sad. His grandfather was waiting at the bus-stop with a serious face. His mother began to weep inconsolably. *Don't cry, my love, mom will recover from her illness, be brave.* Saying this, he embraced them and a tear went down his cheek.

David came into grandmother's bedroom. She was lying on a big bed with a bad look, which shocked David. Mom said she could stay with her overnight, so grandpa could have a good rest.

The next day, early in the morning, the boy heard steps in the kitchen. His grandfather was preparing breakfast and he turned his head when David was coming into the room. *Have a mug of good milk, dear!* The boy sat down and began to drink the milk. Suddenly, he touched his mobile phone in his pyjamas pocket; what the hell's happening? Not one message, nor a call in a day. *Grandpa, have you had any call on your cell phone?* His grandfather burst out laughing. *David, I haven't got a phone.* David was amazed, that was impossible for him to believe, someone without cell phone. *Moreover, I think they don't work properly here, but, what does that matter?* His grandfather added. *If I were you, I would run as fast as possible to enjoy myself in the country, and... I would forget the phone.*

That afternoon, grandmother was better and David's mother suggested they should go fishing while she was doing housework. There was a small river near the house; David had remembered it since he was just a child, when he watched his father and his grandfather fishing. He didn't agree with the idea, all that he needed was a computer to surf, but in that place... *If I had access to my messenger program, I could write to my friends.* However, that was not possible. He was annoyed, but silently helped his grandfather to prepare his fishing tackle not to displease his mother. *David, you'll need a pair of boots for fishing,* his mother said. *Don't worry about that; I'll borrow a pair of them from my neighbours,* the grandfather replied.

When they were walking along the track, only the bird songs could be heard. It was the first time David had paid attention to them. In a few minutes, they got to the river and began to prepare the hooks. While they were sitting, all was calm, the grandfather talked to him in a low, deep voice so as not to disturb the fish. He began to tell tales and funny stories with great ability. In the meantime, David was thinking: *this is not so*

terrible! His fellows had warned him against the common habit of grandfather's talking about their earlier days. But his grandfather was different. He was amicable, even amusing; and he had..., yes, he had a prominent nose too. *Grandpa, when you were a guy, did you have a complex about your nose? Yes, I did,* replied his grandfather, *but that didn't last long; I fell in love with your grandmother and she persuaded me to understand that her feelings about me wouldn't be stronger with a pretty nose.* Then, they burst out laughing, collected the fishing tackle and went back to the house, without any fish in the basket, but feeling happy and understanding each other.

The days were passing and David was learning to have feelings he couldn't ever imagine. His mother noticed that he was different, closer to her. She remembered he was disappointed when they came into the house the first day, when David shouted: *where is the computer, mom? It's all I need.* Fortunately, things had changed, David was friendlier, his grandmother was better and they could soon leave the village to go back to the city with David's father.

At home, two days later, David talked to his father about all of his experiences in the village: fishing, feeding the cattle, helping in the kitchen,... *But, what about your homework?*, his father said. *I did a lot of things, as well as the homework,* replied David proudly. After supper, he remembered: *I must have a lot of messages from the Internet, but that doesn't matter now. Tomorrow, I'll see them.* He began to prepare his school stuff and, when finished, went to bed. Tomorrow would be a special day; he had a lot of things to tell his friends. They would admire him and desire a grandfather as good as his. His prominent nose did not worry him at all, or perhaps a little? He had discovered a new world without computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices. He felt happy.

* * *

HAMLET TO BELIEVE

Sergio Márquez Bailón

Born in Málaga, Sergio Márquez Bailón studied in Córdoba, where he graduated in agronomical engineering. He reads on a variety of subjects; the two novels that have impressed him most are One hundred years of solitude, by García Márquez, and An essay on blindness, by Saramago. He enjoys swimming and playing basketball.

Alberto was a sceptic guy who lived alone in the centre of a modern dynamic city; he led the typical stressful life of people who work, study and have a full social life. This is what happened to him last November the second; it was the day after Halloween, which didn't have a special meaning for him.

As on every working day, he woke up early to go to work; he was really grateful that it was warm and sunny because living in the city centre allowed him to walk everywhere. He had to hurry up every day at lunchtime since he stopped working at three o'clock in the afternoon and took daily English lessons at half past four. Nevertheless, he had time to have lunch at home and to relax for ten minutes on his comfortable sofa.

That day he was especially tired. Therefore, he had a faster lunch to have a longer rest. He woke up at a quarter past four, just in time to put on his shoes, take the folder and leave home. When he got out, he noticed the weather had changed: the sunny day had turned into a dark cloudy one, and an annoying wind had appeared making it impossible for the few thin raindrops that were falling to reach the dusty road.

It was a strange lonely way to school. Although the language school was next to the town centre – it was a 10-minute walk – it was located in an under populated area of the city. As the dust in the wind made him keep his eyes half-closed, he only caught a brief glimpse of some distant people. However, a poster on a wall caught his attention; it was announcing that *Hamlet* was going to be played that day at the language school. That seemed strange to him because during his first year he had

tried to join the school theatre group, but he was told that there hadn't been any theatre activities since a tragic incident took place. Alberto had heard -- but never paid too much attention -- that a few years ago a member of the theatre group had lost his mind while he was preparing himself to perform *Hamlet*, and when he was told not to perform the play, he killed himself.

Moreover, Alberto had just read *Hamlet*, which fascinated him, among other interests because of the way Shakespeare uses the character Hamlet to exemplify the complex workings of the human mind; he indeed had spent many hours surfing the Internet looking for different interpretations of meaning. Consequently, he knew what a difficult performance it was.

At last, Alberto was standing in front of a solitary school, looking at a cold empty building and asking himself about the reason why the school was closed that day. Noticing there was a note at the main entrance and that the gate was opened, he drew near to see that it was the theatre Announcement again. He turned round absolutely determined to go back home when he heard the door opening behind him. He turned round again to discover an odd gloomy guy staring at him; he didn't have time to get scared because the guy said in a charming voice: "Excuse me! Are you coming to the theatre?"

Alberto: "Well... Not really... I'm supposed to have lessons right now."

Guy: "Would you like to see the play? *Hamlet* is just going to be performed!"

On the one hand, many things looked really strange: the language school seemed to be closed, he could not see anybody else in the building and the lights were off. On the other hand, the fellow's intentions seemed to be good, Alberto also wanted to get in touch with other students interested in theatre, and he was very curious about the performance.

The friendly guy insisted: "I would like you to come to see it."

Alberto: “Are you taking part in the play?”

Guy: “Rather, I’m the play. I mean, it isn’t the whole *Hamlet*, it’s an adaptation to a Hamlet soliloquy what is going to be performed, and I’m Hamlet.”

Alberto: “Oh! Really? I would love to see your performance.”

As they were entering the guy didn’t stop talking about how fascinated he was about *Hamlet*, the meaning of the play and its hidden keys. As time went by, Alberto noticed that a magic ghostly environment and soothing sounds were introducing him into an almost hypnotic trance. He had the feeling of being amazed at what was in the play that he had never heard about and didn't know was there. The last thing he remembered was being alone in a wonderful theatre, illuminated by several hundreds of candles that let him see an incredible set while he was watching the stunning *Hamlet* performance by the mysterious guy. Suddenly his mobile phone rang, he wished the ground would have opened up and swallowed him. His cousin had saved for him the tacky song of a soap opera called *Gominolas* as his ring melody.

Alberto realised immediately that he had been asleep and everything had been a dream. He woke up quickly to answer the phone call. It was his girlfriend to arrange a meeting for that evening. During his hurried way to the language school, he noticed that the weather had really changed in the same way as in his weird dream. Finally, he was shocked when he arrived at the school to find out that it was closed too. All became usual as he remembered that Friday was a bank holiday.

Waiting for his girlfriend that evening in a centrally located square, Alberto had that strange feeling that makes one think again about believing in those things we don’t understand. Then a mime in the street attracted his attention; the mime stood still, dressed up as a dark-age Saxon king. He was staring at Alberto and mouthed out: “to believe or not to believe: that is the question.”

* * *

WHEN THE SUN SHINES

Sámar Saber Rodríguez

Sámar Saber Rodríguez is on her fourth course of English at Fuengirola E.O.I. A biologist graduate, she has several hobbies, most of which are outdoor activities: trekking, skating, diving.

I'm not sure where I was born or who my parents are. My first memories of my childhood were of living with the family who took me into their home. Well, not really their home, it was a house where they were squatters. Maybe it wasn't the best environment to spend my childhood in or the most suitable family to raise me, but what are you going to do?

I can't blame them for that. I know they did what they could for me. I have forgiven them for my malnutrition and abuse which I still feel the side-effects of, but not all my memories are bad.

Hi, my name's Flipi!

One sunny day in July, my life made a 180-degree turn; the family abandoned the house where they lived and left me in the street. For many days I was begging in the streets of Barcelona, after that I lost the tracks of my family.

Ana, a young lady, walked up to me and saw me in that terrible state and she decided to take me to her house where I spent the night. The next morning, after we went to the doctor for a check-up, we went to her office where, fortunately, she works to find homes for poor things like me.

That same day I was adopted by a family who had a grumbling youngster named Rocko who, in the end, became my big brother. The first contact wasn't easy as I immediately discovered that Rocko was the jealous type and he saw in me someone who was invading his territory. My adoptive parents, Sámar and Jordi, seemed to be very good and affectionate people. With the passage of time, I discovered that I wasn't mistaken. We lived in the outskirts of the city in a little house surrounded by pine trees, I have great memories of that place. The smell of pine trees

still reminds me of the place where I discovered brotherly love. I had a brother to have good times with, and why not say it: love.

The next year, my family packed their bags, but this time we weren't going on vacation, nor was I to accompany them. Melancholic memories returned to my mind as I remembered how I had lived before, but instead of staying in the street I was left in the care of Pedro, a neighbour from Extremadura, a rural region that borders Portugal. He was a funny character because those who speak his language still have difficulty understanding his accent, so you can imagine my dismay! A month later, on a warm day in summer, Jordi and Rocko reappeared and we set off together on a journey to the South.

It was a hard journey in a cramped van where I had to compete for room with a washing machine and other random electronics. We arrived at last at a village, Alhaurín de la Torre, located in the mountains behind the city of Málaga. The smell of the South, the warmth, its people, Sámar, her food ... It was wonderful. But this time the happiness lasted a short time. Sámar and I embarked on a voyage to Albacete, in the southeast of Spain. At first, I thought I was on holiday, but finally, it turned out to be my home for the next four months. What a vagabond life I lead!

Villares, a little village in Albacete, is situated in the Sierra del Segura. There are only 60 inhabitants whose average age is 70 years old. Close to the village there is a stream and a fertile plot of land where Sámar's family grows almonds, olives and other various products. The smells of thyme, rosemary, almonds and olives provided a beautiful country landscape for my nose.

During the summer, Sámar's mother took care of me, it was great because I was never alone, we did lots of things together. Every morning we got up early to go to the orchard with her sister, Luisa, to pick different fruits and vegetables, after that we had lunch and we walked around the village for a while.

Unfortunately, the end of the summer arrived and so did the end of the days with Sámar's mother. She packed her bags and I stayed alone in the house. Like all the old houses, it's a stone house, so the warmth

provides comfort in the summer while the freezing cold invades your bones in winter.

Sámar's aunt, Luisa, took care of me after Sámar's mother left. We went together to the orchard during the day, but when I was bored I went into the village to lie in the shade and listen to the halting conversations of the old villagers. Sámar would come to the village on several weekends, and this filled me with a mixture of happiness and sadness. For as I was happy to see her, I knew that it would only be too soon before she left again.

The autumn passed between the corn stalks and persimmon. The days became shorter and the nights longer and colder. Some days I remember the hunger, at least in my youth I learned to store food so as not to starve, and I was able to stay happy. One day when the sun was shining brightly, Sámar appeared with her car full with her things, but fortunately, I found out that there was room enough for me! We returned to the South to be reunited with Jordi and Rocko and to live, the four of us, together at last!

In my soul, I am a squatter, my surroundings change frequently and I am pressed to feel at home wherever I may find myself. Thanks to the beauty of life, there's always someone to care for you and to love you. Nothing else is more important. We are what we are and we have what we have, I am a dog and for me, the sun always shines and I have all that I want.

* * *

THE SHADOW
Gloria Rojo Luque

Gloria Rojo Luque was born in Málaga, from whose university she graduated in French Translation. She is a student of English 5 at Málaga's E.O.I. At present she works at an enterprise as a coordinator of advertising and training.

There was a time when I was a young man, very poor and with no future. I dreamt about being powerful, famous, rich... But life was cruel to me. I was homeless and I didn't have any money. I had no means to improve my situation, and all I did was subsist, wandering around and doing just enough to survive.

One day I met an old man. He was very strange since he seemed to be nearly dead. However, he moved, walked and talked like an ordinary person. In spite of that apparent normality, he had a gloomy air that made anyone shiver just by looking at him. I was lying down in a dark street, trying to sleep, which was almost impossible due to the cold weather in that season. Suddenly, that man appeared in front of me. I hadn't heard him getting closer to me, but there he was. He talked to me in a very low voice:

-Are you happy?

-What? -I answered.

-I asked you if you were happy.

-Do I seem happy?

-I wouldn't say so, but I need to be sure.

I was starting to think that man was crazy, but I answered him.

-Sure about what?

-About your happiness.

-I don't understand you. Please, leave me alone.

-You'd better answer me.

-I don't know why I should do that, but no, I'm not happy, and I can't understand why that's so important to you! So, please, go away and leave me alone! - I shouted.

But he went on talking slowly:

-I would like to propose you something, but if you are already happy, then my proposal will not help you at all. -He continued-. I've been very lucky in life. I've had everything I have desired, but my life is about to end, and I would like to help someone else to have a fortunate life before I die.

-So what are you going to do? Are you going to give me a million pounds?

-No, that will be your task

-What?

-You must earn the money; I'm just giving you my good luck.

-Explain what you mean.

-It's quite simple, but I can't expect you to understand it. I'll give you my good luck. I don't need it anymore. In return, you will give me your shadow.

Then I realized the man was really crazy.

-Of course. -I added ironically-. I give you my shadow. It's yours. -I said it laughing and turned round.

-Ok, then. Goodbye.

The man disappeared. I thought I was going mad, so I tried to forget it and went to sleep.

The next day I woke up and remembered the man. I thought I had dreamt it, but when I looked behind me, my shadow was not there. It was not possible! I had no shadow! It had just disappeared! I couldn't believe it. After a while, I relaxed, and I resolved to find the man and demand an explanation, but just at that moment my luck started to change. I looked at the road and I saw a wallet. It was full of money. I spent a moment reflecting on it and then I decided that I had no choice but to believe the man.

As I have just said, my life started to change. First of all, I found all that money, a little time later I found a job and I could buy a car and a house. I advanced rapidly in my career. Soon after, I founded my own company and earned millions of pounds. I bought a bigger house, I travelled around the world, I could afford many luxury cars. In short, I

had all that money could buy, since I had all the money necessary to buy everything, so... why should I miss a shadow?

The years went by. I was an elderly man. I started to realize that I had become the man with that gloomy air I had once met in a dark street. I looked like that man. I was that man. And then I understood it all. The day I sold my shadow, I sold my soul. Actually, I sold my shadow and my soul was stolen.

At that time I was living the last days of my life and I knew I was going to die without a soul. What did it mean? Was I damned? Maybe doomed to hell? I didn't know it and, to tell the truth, I didn't want to know it, but I was afraid, and my fears grew more and more, so I took a decision.

I would do the same the old man did many years ago. I would give my good luck to anyone who gave me his shadow, and then I would be safe from hell.

I looked for them in slums, alleys, places where I knew I could find many people in need of good luck. One day I found a young beggar and I offered him the exchange. He didn't even listen to me. That situation repeated itself several times. I began to lose patience. As no one seemed to pay attention to me and I knew I would die soon, I did something really awful. One night, in a dark alley, I found a beggar lying on the ground. I told him my story and I made him the offer.

-My luck in exchange for your shadow.

Before he could answer me, I shot him. That's how I made the biggest sin in my life. Not only had I stolen his shadow and soul, but I had also murdered that man to be able to achieve my purpose. I had carried out my plan not to go to hell. At that moment, I understood that Hell was just the place which would be waiting for me after my death.

* * *

14, 26

Mariana Helena Escudé Prokofiw

Born in Argentina, Mariana Helena Escudé Prokofiw settled in Spain at the age of 9. She is an economist and enjoys reading, painting, writing and travelling. At present she doing English 5 and Italian 2 at Málaga's E.O.I.

It couldn't be true. Mary had been studying for so many years that the chance of failing hadn't even crossed her mind. After what looked as a whole life preparing her to be the best teacher in the world, the time to take the exam had finally arrived. When she heard the examiner say those fatal numbers, 14, 26, she couldn't believe her bad luck. They belonged to some of the few chapters she hadn't even looked at.

It wasn't that she hadn't devoted time to studying. She had seen her friends going out every weekend while she stayed at home cramming. But the topics about maths were so difficult that Mary decided she could skip them. Besides, the chance of running into them was really dim. To make things worse, she had run out of money, and her family could support her no more. Therefore, it was time to put an end to her life as a student, and start a new one as an employee.

Before the exam, she hadn't believed in bad luck. She used to think that believing in such things was only for the irrational and the gullible and she prided herself on being logical and cool. What made the difference in life was one's attitude, neither fairy tales nor chance circumstances. For that reason, Mary didn't give up and tried to stay calm, decided to "tame" those fatal numbers, 14, 26. She was going to do the opposite to what other people would in her circumstances: instead of avoiding anything that reminded her of those two digits, she would persistently look for them. Everywhere and every day.

The young woman started with the telephone directory. It took her ages to find any phone number that ended in 1426. Patiently she went through the entire book, and after reading it from beginning to end, she found 20 entries for her search. Some of the numbers belonged to companies, companies in which she wouldn't fit, and others were entries of old people's houses and invariably they hung up when they heard Mary

stammer out her intention. The purpose of her search wasn't even clear to her. What was she looking for?

The fifth number she dialled was that of a young woman, who patiently listened to her with empathy. Anne had failed another competitive exam the previous year, therefore she understood her perfectly. From that moment on they became very good friends, a friendship that was to last until Mark appeared in Mary's life.

Mark lived in Oxford Street, in a house where the number 1426 stood out in bright blue. Mary had started to wander all around the city, looking for buildings or houses with the famous digits on them. While she was walking down Oxford Street, Mark was locking the door. She approached him, made something up about a survey and they started chatting in a friendly way. Mary had a hunch about the tall man as soon as she saw him. And Mark found Mary very interesting; they had so much in common, their passion for pop music and books. "It was love at first sight", she told her new friend Anne when they met the following afternoon.

For the next month, the new couple met frequently, and they went to numerous concerts and theatre plays. Mary was enjoying herself so much, that she didn't want to think about her job prospects. Again, luck was on her side (although she kept on thinking they were her inquiries and hard work that had made everything possible): Mark worked in an electric company, and they were looking for an accountant. Mary had worked in that post 5 years ago, in a legal firm, therefore she was competent. Being sure about her abilities, she applied for the job. She started working a week later. Everything was too good to be true, what could go wrong? Now she had a boyfriend, a new girl friend and a job that she found interesting and fulfilling.

Mark, Anne and Mary met five weeks after the coincidence in Oxford Street. Mary was nervous; she wanted them to get on well, because they represented so much in her life. They had a nice evening at Anne's, cooking dinner and watching a Chinese film. Afterwards they went clubbing, and as the evening drew to an end, Mary thought about the future, how bright it looked.

A month later, everything changed for the worst. Mark had had an affair with Anne, and although they had tried to conceal it, a mutual friend sneaked on them. Mary was devastated and couldn't continue working side by side with his ex-hunch. Despite being almost broke, she quit the firm, left town and decided to start anew in her brother's house.

Mary became a sceptic from that day on. Being a rationalist hadn't worked at all, and all her efforts to change destiny had been unsuccessful. She started thinking (as Julius Caesar had previously quoted) that “the die is cast”. And there is nothing you can do about it.

Time went by slowly; she met a nice man, got married and found a different kind of job. She started working with a therapist for drug addicts. To her surprise, his boss explained that he had lived in her old town until recently, and then he began to explain some of his patients' problems. Mary was thrilled to find out that Mark and Anne had problems with drugs (she guessed it was them, because the therapist wouldn't tell her their real names). Later that year she discovered that the electricity company where she had been working had gone bankrupt.

It wasn't until then when she realized that all her beliefs were upside down; chance existed, but will and determination too, and what goes up must come down. Or the other way round. Let's call it quits! And 14 and 26 had been her lucky numbers from that moment on...

* * *

THE TEMPLE OF THE KING

Germán Heller Alonso

Born in Málaga, Germán Heller Alonso is a student of Filología Inglesa at U.M.A and English 4 at Fuengirola E.O.I. He enjoys reading historical novels, especially medieval and ancient.

“He’s back!” someone shouted.

Everybody began to rush, trying to gather around the old man. As I was a small child among frenzied and yelling adults, I could barely see what was happening. I was unable to find mother in the crowd. The only thought that came to my mind was to run away from there and cry for mother, and I think I started to sob, but then I realised that my brothers were with me. I was responsible for the ones younger than me, and I couldn’t let the older ones see me cry. Besides, my curiosity was strong, and we together tried to get close to the man, just as everyone, although we didn’t know how we would be able to reach him. I tried to crawl through the legs of the men and women there, and after much struggling I was finally able to gain a good watching place.

I knew him, he was our holy man. His name was Orthanach. He was quite old, we all knew that, although he didn’t seem to. His hair was still brown, and he didn’t have many wrinkles. My grandfather had a lot of wrinkles, but this man didn’t, and this one also still had his teeth, so I presumed he was old, but younger than my grandfather.

I noticed Orthanach was trembling and sobbing. He had a strong and well built body for his age, but he was now a vision of weakness and helplessness. Tears were running down his cheeks. His bearded chin was resting on his chest. His shoulders were down, as someone who surrenders to a stronger foe.

The mob was gathering around him. They all approached the old man, held his hands while they murmured something, and then left. Some left shouting and swearing, others left in a sad mood and with their heads down, speaking to themselves. We didn’t know what all that meant, but we wanted to go and hold Orthanach’s hands just like everyone else.

We were trying to reach him when mother came to us. “What are you doing, little ones?” She grabbed our hands and started to guide us home, despite our complaints.

“What happened, mom?”, we enquired, “What were you doing there?” “What will happen to Orthanach?” We assailed her with all sort of questions about the event.

“Let’s go home, Brannan. I will tell you later, Connigan. You don’t want me to tell your father that you ran away from me, do you Breasal?” Mother calmed us down, patiently, and finally promised that she would tell us later what had happened. So we spent the day wondering what all that had been about, and longing for mother’s story.

That afternoon, while my brothers and I were having lunch, mother came to us and told us the story.

“The holy man went into trance this morning, for he had received some omens the week before. He said he had dreamt about winter’s early arrival, and about a strange tolling of a black bell. So he underwent the ritual to foresee what is to come to our people.”

“What did he see, mom?”, we all asked. “What is it to come?”

“He received a vision while performing the ritual, and he shared it with all of us who wanted to see it. We only had to touch his hands...”

“Did you do it, mom?”, we were eager to know.

“...and everyone who did was able to see and feel the very same way”, Mother continued her tale relentlessly. “It was only a short moment, just a blink of the eye, but we saw everything he had witnessed, and we felt everything he had felt, just as if we had been there with him”

“What did you see?”, we were just itching to know. “What did you feel?”

“We saw a big temple, built in blood and sweat, decorated with ivory and gold. We saw a king, dressed in white long robes, ruling the land with iron hand from his throne.”

“Who’s that king, mom?”

“We saw his nobles, the purple lieges of that almighty king of kings, who spread his word and executed his justice”, my mother was nearly in trance talking about the vision.

“Who were they?”, we enquired. By that time we had long ago forgotten about our meals.

“We felt how the lords of the land ruled by fear and guilt. How they made people think they had to be thankful and how they allowed themselves to be worshipped and revered as gods. We saw how they herded the people; how they managed to change their minds to make them think it has always been that way, the only way, their way”

We were beginning to be a bit afraid, but we did want to know the ending, and who those kings and lords were.

“We felt the fear of those who believe that free will should rule mankind, and we felt the hatred of those who wholeheartedly swore allegiance to this new ruler; hatred for everything that was different. We saw the ending of freedom, and we witnessed the beginning of slavery of mind and spirit. And we knew there was no escape. There is no escape. Many have already perished, we will perish as well, and there’s more still to perish.”

“But mom, did you see their names? Who are they?” We had to know that, we didn’t want to face our fate unprepared.

“We have no name for them, for they are still unknown to us” mother whispered. “But they call themselves Ecclesia.”

* * *

FIVE MONTHS

Juan Carlos Vega Pérez

Juan Carlos Vega Pérez was born in Madrid. He has studied electronics, both analogical and digital and is willing to learn all that is related to modern technologies. He loves going to the movies, photography and a good chat over a coffee to save the world. He is doing English 5 at Málaga's E.O.I.

It was probably about half past six when Jack felt strong enough to get up and run away to the nearest shop to buy some goods and something which would help him to stop his terrible headache.

His bedroom looked like a battlefield: the shutters had been taken over by a lot of holes where the last evening sunbeams were breaking through. An amazing mirror, which probably was the family's treasure a long time ago, hung opposite something which held loads of clothes, sheets, a duvet and some underwear. Yes, it seemed to be the bed.

The paleness of three or four areas over the walls suggested that at one time there had been some paintings there. Next to these, an ancient wardrobe, which perhaps belonged to Napoleon or someone like this, rose up sadly on the left as thousands of ants walked along its surface and some of them enjoyed biting and making new ventilation holes. Inside, a few threadbare shirts of disgusting colours were used by some doves to rest quietly.

The room connected with the rest of the house through a wooden double door which anywhere would have had a better life because it had never known any varnish and several signs on its surface clearly showed where it was pushed or pulled. The thin door frame had lost some pieces due to a lack of maintenance and the fact that it was being continuously slammed. Two openings at the end of the corridor had the function of lighting up this place, allowing direct access to all kind of bugs like bees, flies, mosquitoes and creating enough draught to slam all upper floor doors (double ones included).

Long, cold and empty was the corridor; well, almost empty as there was a huge marble sculpture on the left which at one time could have looked like an important or famous person but now it was being used by

many cats to relax on perfectly, lying down on its different hollows or enjoying clawing it.

In the meantime, Jack had come back from the shops and, after a big hassle with his rounded key and the door lock, went directly to the kitchen to put away everything he had bought. Hopelessly he tried to keep his kitchen tidy, but it had been covered by tons of reddish ants and dark as coal beetles which were carrying some sugar or bits of fruit in an endless row along the furniture, the walls and the windows and which looked as if the glazed tiles were alive.

Jack's life had gone by calmly until a year ago. He worked in an important wildlife care association, of which he was one of the most active members. Due to long time of losses, the association had to make him redundant, so he was searching for another job and, finally, he was hired by a local academy, where he is teaching Spanish to foreign students. His new job allows him to have some free time in the morning and meet many people who come from such different cultures and nations as he had never imagined before.

But, since starting five months ago, he has felt strangely tired when getting up in the morning. Sometimes his head weighs like a stone and he feels terrible nausea and deeply dizzy, although his pain disappears during the day. He has taken some tablets that were prescribed by his doctor but, unfortunately, he goes on suffering his pain almost every day. Jack is desperate because, despite visiting many specialists in strange illnesses and hospitals where he has had a lot of tests taken, nobody has found out the reason of his morning disease.

Today is one of those days. Jack sat down in a metallic chair covered in cobwebs, trying to rest a bit as the way from the supermarket to his house had made him feel exhausted. Then, thinking of having breakfast, he suddenly remembered he had to turn on his computer to read his email because he was expecting to get one from a close friend, Fred, a workmate in the academy. With a great effort, he prepared a glass of coffee with milk and two eggs, cured ham and some loaves of bread. He fell in love with cured ham when on holidays in the South of Spain, where he could taste the most famous products of local cuisine and, of course, his favourite one turned out to be this.

After eating everything, he cleared the table and carefully placed the dirty dishes in the sink where a pile of dishes was waiting for someone to take pity on and wash them. Slowly, Jack went to a nearby room which he used to store anything: books, hobbies, tools, pets, and his computer. In fact, this is the favourite place in the house of Jack's goat as she can select among them the most pleasant food: book paper. When Jack got to the room, he moved his goat away and switched on the LCD monitor. As an expert in modern technology, he is hooked on Linux so his computer runs Fedora 8. Jack introduced his password and KDE window manager opened. He clicked twice on Kmail and this email manager showed him all his stored mail. Immediately afterwards, he connected to the Internet to search the POP3 server and check if there was some new one. An envelope icon below indicated him new mail had been downloaded from the server to the program. Yes, there was Fred's email which said there would be an Erasmus party that night in a well-known pub in the town centre.

For the first time this day, Jack smiled. A party... that night. Nobody would believe me if I told them I have been going out to Erasmus parties every day for the last five months. It's the best part of being a Spanish teacher in an academy in Malaga.

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