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THE CHILD WOUNDED BY THE WATER

Alfred Carol

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She stopped by the tower, hiding herself behind the bushes of jasmine. she endeavoured not to breathe aloud for she was followed closely by a squad of Civil Guards. They could be understood cursing as they climbed up the abrupt path that ascends from the Albaicín to the Alhambra (the Red one).

Yerma obeying orders of the Antifascist Front, had been waiting for a message near the Darro, the slender brook that runs out at the bottom of the Albaicín. But when, instead of hearing the accorded signal of the whistle, she heard the noisy approach of the Civil Guards, it was obvious that something had gone wrong.

Her running away had been discovered, however, and although she had got a good distance ahead of her dangerous followers, she felt as she had fallen into a trap.

Looking over the bushes, she could see the austere shape of the Alcazar among the orange and palm tree that filled the garden. She ran swiftly towards the building that she entered through the Daraxa Garden. The dim moon light spreading over the outside gardens showed the threatening forms of the Guards coming near like a pack of hungry wolves.

Yerma was not to stop, but she crossed the "two Sisters" room and Stepped into the Lion's Court yard. Even then, within the dramatic circumstances that were going on, she was impressed by the charming beauty of the site: the lions were there in circle around the fountain, glimmering under the soft light and watching her like friendly dogs. Their sight strengthened her heart; when she got closer to the lions, as if thinking that they could conceal and protect her from the prosecutors, she discovered with amazement a well in the center under the fountain basin.

Considering that it was her only salvation, she went into the bucket hanging over the well, unknit the rope and started going down through the darkness. When at last she arrived at the bottom, she had gone down for about one hundred feet - she calculated.

The place was not completely dark; in front of her there was a small square light, as though a room was lit at the end of a long corridor. She pulled the rope down until it dropped, then she started towards the light. She walked cautiously, following the wet walls of the corridor by touching them with her hands.

The room she came to at the end looked like a secret old *hammam* (Turkish bath) where Nasri princess could make themselves isolated. The pool was at one end separated from the resting room by a horseshoe arc supported by half columns. The wall beyond the pool was covered with ceramics in square white, green and violet flagstones; at the opposite side the wall was pierced by a window framing a wooden screen of latticework.

Yerma felt better off now; the guards would never discover her unexpected way of escape, and sooner or later they would give up their research of her. She opened the screen, letting the fresh air and the moon light come freely into the room.

The beam of moon light against the wall over the arch became more intense and definite as she lay down on the floor attempting to fall asleep; it framed an ancient stucco work with carved Arabic characters disposed in a wonderful way.

Her mind, stressed by the dreadful recent events, became tranquil in the contemplation of the arabesques that got fantastically entangled with her dreams when she finally fell asleep.

Hours passed till the dawn broke the yellow darkness of the night and in the Albaicín cocks started crowing. Yerma woke up with the Arabic forms still waving in her memory. She took care of the situation from the window which now, let come in the first rays of the sun. The landscape under her eyes was peaceful, the San Francisco church, freshened by the dew of the night showed up as if welcoming her. The Civil Guards were gone and nothing would disturb her getaway.

- I will be safe in a few minutes - she thought, descending by the rope to the base of the wall where the window hung.

Once at home she discovered with a glad surprise the Arabic text was still strongly engraved in her memory. So, taking a piece of paper she drew it out accurately.

Some days later as she met a wise old man who knew the mysteries of Arabic writing, she asked him:

- Uncle Haali, may you translate these lines? The wise old man came up with the following translation, which I don't dare to translate in English:

"Quiero bajar al pozo
quiero morir mi muerte, a bocanadas
quiero llenar mi corazón de musgo,
para ver al herido por el agua"

Yerma told me the present story in 1980, when she was eighteen, five years after the facts happened, and gave me this scratchpaper with the original Arabic picture.

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