

## Plazoleta

*Eric Stener Carlson*

Macedonio sat in the wheelchair, facing the graffiti-covered wall of the *plazoleta*. Between the branches of the bushes, messages surfaced: “Boca Juniors are the Champions!” “El Presidente Menem is a Faggot,” and “El Vampiro.” Macedonio’s wool pullover was buttoned up to his neck, and his head lolled to one side.

Under his motionless legs, small pools of water formed between the rocks, the earth still swollen from last night’s storm. Here and there things floated that had been thrown to the ground. The remains of a nest, the fragments of a bright blue egg. From a tree, a robin screamed.

The woman seated on the bench behind Macedonio was speaking on a cell phone. “I swear, Verónica, if it weren’t for the financial situation, I’d leave him... I’d tell him to his face what a useless fuck he is... Like you say, I’m still young.”

Three sparrows arrived and began fighting over half a soggy croissant. One took off like a shot, and its wing scraped Macedonio’s hand.

The woman continued, “I’ve only got a few minutes to talk. He just went to the kiosk to buy some juice.” In nasal tones, she imitated, “‘An a-apple juice, because it’s Macedonio’s fa-avorite.’”

“No, there’s no favorite *anything!* It’s all the same for him. He eats his mash, sucks, shits, and that’s it. I don’t know why I have to put up with this nonsense. It’s not like he’s *my* brother.”

Her voice suddenly changed pitch, “But I wanted to tell you. We were there for the opening last night at the *Malba*. That guy, Fabrice Saint Michel, is a genius...”

Through a small crack in the brick wall, the black ants began emerging, forming a line towards the fragments of the egg. Suddenly, a gust of wind caused a few raindrops to fall from the tree, drowning some of them in the depression of a rock. The ones in front of the new pool kept marching towards the egg. The ones behind headed toward the wheelchair.

“Well... there was champagne, cucumber sandwiches and cherry tomatoes... yes, the little ones... Yes, he brought him to the *Malba*. I don’t know why I can’t go out alone, I said. But he told me, ‘He’s my bro-other.’ Luckily I was able to escape, get ahead of them to lose myself in the crowd.”

The ants curved up over the wheels. They crawled along the folds of Macedonio’s trousers, making their way up the crevices.

“And, well, I crossed to the next salon, and I stopped in front of the first painting, an enormous canvas. It was my favorite piece... ‘*Mort en l’autopiste #57*.’ So intense...and erotic, you know? Brush strokes so harsh, masculine. I was thinking, this artist is a real man, and he must rut like beast. What do you mean, ‘How do I dare?’ You said the same thing when we saw him on television.”

The ants climbed up the front of Macedonio’s sweater, circling the buttons. They arrived at Macedonio’s chest, interested in a yogurt stain.

“Well, I was standing there, watching the twisted metal, the bodies, you know. And someone approaches me, and he says something. I don’t answer, and I don’t turn around, because I don’t want to take my eyes off the painting. So this person, this man, says to me again, ‘It’s a little grotesque, no?’”

The ants began to fan out across his throat and headed for his ears, their antennas moving frenetically.

“So, I get angry, and I say, ‘I think it’s marvelous... simply marvelous.’ And I turn around, and it’s him, Fabrice Saint Michel. Yes, I swear... He looks at me like this, with those deep eyes, and says, ‘And I think you are a creature from Paradise,’ you know, with a slight accent. So strong, so tan... The guy’s one hundred percent macho. A god.”

The wind blew, raising and lowering Macedonio’s hair. Along the ground, a paper cup turned around and around, and a whirlwind of leaves began to form on the street corner. The skin on Macedonio’s exposed hands bristled with goose bumps.

The woman crossed her legs and adjusted her stockings, hugging herself because of the cold.

“I swear, at that moment, I was capable of joining his harem, kneeling down and doing it right there in front of all those people. I swear to you!”

“And what happened...? Just when Fabrice was asking me where I lived, what I did, out of the corner of my eye I saw *him* pushing the wheelchair, with a smile that went ear to ear. He even winked at me, the son of a bitch. And I thought, ‘I hate you, I hate you, you’re a total zero.’”

“From across the salon, he shouted, ‘*Quer-iii-daa*, we’ve got to go to the bathro-oom, to cha-ange hi-im, because he’s done it again.’”

As the wind began to blow in gusts, some ants moved across Macedonio’s chapped lips, and a slight flush rose in his cheeks.

“You know, Vero, how I hate those bathrooms, with those two rails, and there’s no space to move around... No, I’ve never changed him, but you know

what I mean... I turned around, trying to pretend I wasn't with them, and Fabrice had gone. He'd started talking with some young blonde with tits out to here. And that was it...

"Well, I've got to go, because I see my prince charming has returned with the juice. Ciao, Vero, ciao."

The woman turned around to take a look at Macedonio and saw a long thread of spit running from his mouth to the rocks below. "That's disgusting," she muttered, and turned away. "Someone else is going to have to clean that up. I'm not lifting a finger."

The sparrows, interested by the ants and the thread of spit, drew closer. They gathered, attentive. Eyes bright, beaks opening. But, all of a sudden, they scattered. Rising together, they flew towards Santa Fe Avenue, over the *plazoleta*, over the trees, over the penthouses of the buildings—three black spots in a blue sky, as if guided by a magic wand. ☪