

# SIDE GUYS

**EL CORRUPTOR**

## The Town's whore

Look at her, the town's whore, walking alone in the streets, early in the morning, coming from a house where she had no breakfast.

Look at her, enjoying herself too much, giggling alone, remembering the things she has done, ignoring that if she cannot be serious herself

who is going to take her seriously?

But she is stubborn, proud, capricious.

She does not listen to wisdom, she talks back to the advice, argues with the suggestions that only want to make her better, gives her opinion.

She is behaving like the town's whore .

Do you think sharing a bed for a night, keeping a man warm out of solitude, is intimacy?

Do you call listening to a man's thoughts until dawn, only to never see him again, knowing someone?

It is not, town's whore.

You lie to yourself to believe that, because you do not know something better.

With no commitment, there are no rights. With no benefits, there are no friends.

Empty people only lure emptiness.

Pitiful whore.

But maybe you deserve it.

You do not know how this world works, town's whore.

You do not know.

## The Easy Prey

There was a king, the owner of vast lands, who was concerned about his son's faculties to be the next ruler of his kingdom. Committed to making him worthy of the crown, the king forced his son into an intense regime of mental and physical formation, to turn him into the ideal ruler. For the mind, math and law, construction and engineering, languages and dissertations. For the body, hunting. Then, the king ordered a fortress to be built for the prince's formation, and in some forgotten lands stolen in a war, a brick wall was raised to surround a wild forest, with a small house closer to the entrance. It was the hunting garden, meant to be the private space for the prince, to nurture the mind and build the body of a worthy man.

The hunting garden never lost the wilderness of its past as a forest. It was an ideal place, protected from lumbering, where animals grew at their will, waiting for the moment when they would leave the boundaries of the wall as a corpse, taken by the prince's servants. For the prince, it was a mysterious land, an opportunity to leave his books aside and forge his own path between hillocks and old trees of dark wood, waiting for all types of animals to cross his sight and die by his arrow. It was a place to control, to decide, to take risks, and eventually, he became skilled in the arts of attracting prey, knowing their wishes, the garments he needed, the crucial silent movements to place the animals in the perfect spot to be crushed.

Every day the prince dedicated some hours to the physical arts of being a ruler. It was during one of those hours, after a strong shower, that in the middle of the dense mist of the forest, a young stag saw the prince for the first time coming out from behind a bush, with his dark hair and almond eyes, covered by a wet golden vest. He was a regular guy followed by a group of servants, whose eyes were absorbed in finding the smallest tremor of the bushes to turn his gaze into an arrow. The animals were not naive, by habit they had learned the rules of the hunting garden, and their instincts made them run after smelling the prince's scent. Yet, the stag could not find anything threatening in that little wet body, and he fell for him, the prince with the hairless skin who freely killed in the forest.

In silence, the stag followed the prince during his daily huntings, carefully watching him. He saw him kill the hare with a single arrow in the chest, both hiding from each other in the high grass of a clearing. He saw him finishing the boar with his knife after a long chase, stumbling between the mossy rocks, and diving into the boar's twisted body, already riddled with arrows, sparking shrieks of agony that pierced the peace of the forest. He saw him battle for a day and a half, sweating his body out, running out of arrows, lightning torches, leading an entire team, all for the sake of killing the brown bear who, until the very last minute, fought back fervently with animal instinct for survival. Yet, after all that cruelty, the stag was still in love with the

prince, and could not see anything threatening in that little sanguine body.

Compared to him, the prince was just a weak biped with a funny smell. Too slow to escape in times of need, too gawky to jump between roots without slipping, too clean to camouflage himself into the plants and mud. He had neither claws nor a thick furry skin, only arrows, but sometimes those were not enough to bring down a beast. It was the prince's self-assuredness, or the idea of it, that caused the stag to fall for him; the prince's belief that he was in control of an old forest of dark wood, that the animals were there for him as an endless resource, that he could understand everything, find a solution, mix with nature for a while, to go back to the comfort of a hot bath with essences, to take the smell of beast out of him. It was this will, which had possessed such a weak body, that made the stag love the prince, that made the stag jump out of the forest's shadows to be in front of him.

When the prince saw the stag, he stopped breathing. In awe, he admired the mud on the stag's shiny fur, his muscled body, and high proud head. Raising his bow, he thought about where in his house those magnificent antlers would be displayed. Then, the stag placed himself into position and looked directly into the prince's eyes. But, at that moment, the prince's expression turned angry. He dropped his bow and arrow and ordered his servants to move. For the following days, the stag buzzed around the prince, clattering,

making himself visible, but not a single arrow was shot. One afternoon, at the first glance of the stag, the irritated prince threw his bow, rode his horse, and left the hunting garden with the promise of not coming back again until the prying stag was killed. He granted permission to all his servants and all the commoners to enter the garden in the hunt of the prying stag, and only the prying stag. As a reward, the prince would allow the successful hunter to keep the head, the skin, and the meat of the beast.

That night, a wave of torches made its way into the garden, desperately looking for the stag that would give them the meat for the upcoming feast. Young men, carpenters, experienced hunters, and even old ladies with kids, all were armed with different utensils willing to put an end to the prince's annoyance, and their hunger. Nonetheless, it was four young servants of the prince's house, hunting assistants, who were the first ones to see the prying stag, each taking aim with their bows and launching their arrows. The stag took the first hit. He was seen with one arrow by the otter, eagerly crossing the river. He was seen with three arrows by the grey wolf, trying to jump between the roots. And he was seen with nine arrows by the stork and the swan, running around the bog. It was then the stag realized that, sometimes, enough arrows can put down a beast.

A buzz of voices expanded through the forest, some of them envious, some of them celebratory, but all looking to be as loud as needed to share the news. "The prying stag is

dead! The prying stag is dead!” screamed the servants and commoners who, with their permission expired, rushed out of the hunting garden in a vociferous wave of torches that lit the windows of the prince’s house. Nonetheless, the prince neither heard nor saw them. He was floating on the water of his hot bath, covered by flowers and the steam of essences, thinking where in his garden he would take his hunting assistants next to confirm in front of them, again, that he was a worthy man. Those same assistants who were carried as heroes beyond the boundaries of the brick wall, with the corpse of the prying stag follow them as their trophy

However, the young successful hunters wanted to extend their luck, and instead of cooking delicacies with the roasted meat of the stag, they sold it in the market as the curated product of an easy hunt. Nevertheless, in town, the servants and commoners could not understand why they should pay extra for something that was offered to them for free, or why the assistants did not want to eat what was given to their tables by the prince. After two weeks of poor sales, the young successful hunters abandoned the market and sold the stag at the price of giblets. Then, the head, the skin, and the meat of the magnificent prying stag of the hunting garden were crushed to feed the pigs.





I have come back to this park to rewrite a story that never existed. I have visited it, once again, to walk away from this knot, to find on its pathways a more gentle way to weave this mess, to make it warmer. If our love was not love because it was one-sided, if everything is only in my head and I am the only one to be held accountable; then, I come here today to make fiction of the fiction of love, to write a story that places me out of your scale of values, or at least, at your same level, lit by a brighter light. There, I will be responsible for my own figments. There, confined, by myself, fabricated. There, I will love you there.

I first step into the park expecting to face the hill where we had once lain. I do not find such a hill, but I find the place where we had lain down. On a spot that was two meters square, close to a family of six and surrounded by dog shit, you tanned the skin that would warm me up for the following months. Now, while my feet drown in the melting snow of this medium knoll, I wonder if time has magnified my memories, raising slopes, making your skin darker, your body bigger, and your voice deeper. If I cannot see a hill now, how should I see my memories? For once, I think that I agree with you, that I have been blowing things up. Yet, despite the height of things, my feelings stay the same. I realize, then, that time has made a hill of your absence, and it is my choice to let it change my memories too, turning them bitter.

That day, we drank beers while getting to know each other. We called it “doing nothing”. Today, I am still doing nothing, holding a bottle of water under the pouring rain. I find myself alone, as alone as I was with you when, almost overnight, you reserved for me all those time slots that were not long enough to make something productive, but too long to do nothing. I guess you had already known me by then. Since then, my situation has not changed, with or without you I am a loner, and my only expectation of you is how different I would be after loving you. Time will tell. Standing in the middle point of that knoll, I take the first sip from the bottle, and it tastes like pure lulo.

I walk up the non-hill until I reach the point where you had told me that story: the stag that ended up on the market as cheap meat. I take two consecutive sips and, disgusted, look back to the point I started walking. How long have I been doing this to spoil this water? All fruits of the tropics rot at once to make this drink. Then, I remember your eyes and their confident look while describing a tale of hunts and values, a world that was foreign to me, but I was part of it without knowing. My worthiness, already assigned: cheap meat. Still, a promise of salvation: *find your strong points, know your value, triple it, charge taxes, and sell yourself.* I could see the lights of the nearby airport, and looked at them without knowing how to find the words to make my confession.

-You know, I am a regular person. There is nothing special about me. I am neither brilliant nor dumb. I am not one in a million, and probably won't be. Clearly, you can sell an average rock as special, but why would you make that effort?

I remember your bland facial expression, maybe adding *dumb* to my already assigned value. Yet, if I have started as meat, there is not much room for improvement.

-I can label myself as a *smoked* or *curated* product, but it would set me above the others, which I am not. Guapo, I am not here to play the rules of your world, which I have never belonged to.

A ruffle coming from a lake distracted us. A male duck was chasing a female duck around the water, flying over the surface, disappearing behind the bushes, with a constant din of squawking as evidence that the harassment was still going. After a minute both ducks jumped from the scrub, and flying over us, fell to the grass not far from our feet and

started to copulate. I could see the blood coming from the bald head of the female duck, empty of feathers because the male duck used them to hold her into position. Now, with no feathers to grasp, skin was the only option. Is this nature? I struggle to remember why I have been coming here, why I am doing this, that this is my fiction. I forgot about the ducks and looked back to your face, stroked your eyebrow with my left thumb before kissing you. When I open my eyes you, again, are not there anymore. I am next to the sculpture of a deer, on top of a non-hill, gazing at an airport. I can taste your flavor on my lips, still. It was feijoa.

We held hands while walking down next to the wire fence. We stopped occasionally to peer at the animals on the other side of the fence. Us, begging for their attention. Them, intentionally ignoring us. When we reached the paved path, you asked me about my weekends.

- Well, I mostly work at the bar, but since I'm not super close to my new collegas, there is not much fun after that. Also, I think we're gonna open again on Sundays, so sunbathing with handsome guys is not going to be on the schedule for the near future. What about you?

It took you a while to understand. Laughing, you answered.

-Busy, busy. I don't know why, but my weekends are busier than my working days. I usually meet friends and drink until three in the morning. Sundays, when I'm not hungover I still meet friends for jogging or learning new things for my wood company. I think this is my most relaxing weekend in a while. Do you have many friends?

-Not really, not in this city at least.

-I think it takes time. Here you have to make more of an effort. It's not that you meet someone and you are friends. You have to go out, hang out, go to parties, invest time. It took me a while, but in the end, I figured it out.

-Mmm, I don't know if I have enough energy for that kind of effort.

- Lazy! But first, you need to focus on yourself. I'm sure you have many things to do now that you're settling here.

-Watching Sailor Moon and working on my old KTM?-  
You looked at me as it was not a moment for silly jokes.

-I am pretty sure you have better use of your time than watching Sailor Moon. How's your job hunting?

-Nonproductive

- You have to hurry up with that. I think it is pretty easy to tell what people want, you just need to present yourself as the thing they're looking for, and they're all gonna love you. Trust me, I got a job like that before finishing my studies. How are you living then? Is your mother still sending you money? When does your contract end?

I found my hand inside your underwear, my nose on your neck. A family was walking toward us.

-They're gonna see us- I said

-Help! He's gonna rape me! -you shouted sarcastically, fake-wrestling. You looked at me with the corner of your eyes, the same look that you gave me the first time we kissed, under the mill's shadow. Laughing, I pushed you into the bushes.

I must confess I am starting to forget the tone of your voice. I cannot imitate your accent anymore, and in my memory it is difficult to trace which were your words and which were the words of your world and concepts. Possibly, you do not remember me anymore, or I am just a short story that you tell to your future lovers, that person who has work to do before going public in the market. Maybe, you do

not think about me when you wake up or are trying to fall asleep; maybe you do not miss my skin, you do not see my silhouette on your sleeping lovers at night, or you do not recall how I move when you kiss them. Perhaps you do not wonder about my thoughts on *Heirs*, about my boring days, the dishes I have done, or my motorbike struggles. It is very likely that all this is happening in another fiction, one that still does not understand how nature works, how immutable the world is. One that, by any chance, is avoiding pricing itself, not playing by the world's rules, fruitless. A fiction that, potentially, wants to meet other fictions, without knowing how, reasonably, disposable it is.

I take a sip from the bottle, sugar and tamarindo fill my mouth while hearing stories from friends seated in an overseas city. I am in front of the stork's nest in the middle of the bridge. I try to find the hazelnut tree, but everything seemed dead a long time.

-That's the stork's nest- you said pointing to the human-made structure next to the canal- she, or it was he? I don't remember. He or she stays on that nest all year long, while the other goes to Africa. The one that stays waits until its partner comes back, who always does, knowing the exact location of the nest. Did you know that?

I shook my head, noticing the hazelnut tree.

-They're monogamous.



-Well, we don't know what the other is doing down there in Africa.

-They're all the same gender there- you said, condescendingly.

-Exactly!

I glance at the nest, which is empty, as it had been that day. Maybe the stork is looking for food, or it is in the south with its partner seeing new things. The whole structure was probably never used and it remains as a human-made relic for devotion and love. I wonder how she or he spends his or her time waiting for the other. Does she or he feel only part of a set in a play where the surrounding world moves and changes, while he or she remains stuck on a stork's nest as decor giving a wilderness vibe to a city park?

-I don't know if I'm a supporter of those long-distance relationships. Imagine how anxious you must feel about everything, from what had happened with the other to how ugly you appear to them the next time - I said.

-I think it is very romantic, the commitment. It's their nature.

-Yeah, but imagine spending the shittiest months of the year by yourself, looking at people running, hearing seagulls squawking, keeping the nest warm and clean. Then, the scoundrel appears in front of you -you're anxiously dying inside-, and without saying hi it's like "Ok bitch, let's eat!". And you are, there, eviscerating the fish like " uhu *Is that why you got in touch with me? I guess you must be running out of fools in Africa!*". Six months later, the other must go back again, and you're crying like " Are we gonna start this cycle again? We just ate, *and now you want to break my heart twice?*". The other being like "You know us, you know me. Peace!".

-It's nature.

-It could also be the other way around. The one that stays has all the fun, while the other is working its ass off abroad, flying over seas and deserts, dodging hunters' bullets, trying not to be a lion's lunch while doing... whatever a stork does there. And during the hot nights, it says to the image of its partner projected on the stars "*Baby, I miss you more and more with every day, I'll find a way back to when you were mine!*". All that to be back and find the partner, hotter than ever, with a fucking swan! "*Y tu que pensaste, que yo me iba a echar a morir?*"

-It's nature.

-It sounds very toxic.

-It's nature! You are only projecting your fantasies on them. Besides, swans are monogamous too.

It amazes me how vivid the memory of my hands on your back is, compared to how hazy the path that we followed to go out of the park is in my head. I feel my fingers walking up under your yellow jumper, and the warm feeling of each step brings back images that were leaping in time: together staring at a colorful fence, an old guy smoking, us looking at wooden houses, simultaneously hiding from a tram's light, a solitary teenager burning fireworks on a dead-end path, the old classmate I did not want to meet, a hot night when my body was too warm for you. A random list of events which this fiction is trying to tie together while I hear voices of women bringing comfort to my room. *I don't want to be your cigarette.* They have also rendered their memories to make a path *I don't want to be your ashtray* to find their ways out, or comfort themselves and the ones meant to come. *I don't want to be your doormat, Don't want to be ignored* Didn't they know their value then or is it how we see them now? *All o' sudden you're not into me.*

I am sorry for failing to communicate my fiction. This is an enterprise that could take longer than my lifespan. Nonetheless, I am determined to provide a good service, keeping my position, good performance, and a positive attitude until you no longer need me. I will leave my fiction as it is, ideas living in a delusional realm, where they are waiting for someone to pick them up, despite being odd, and give them shelter in a body until they feel natural. In parallel, they will live trying not to be silenced.

I looked out the small window. For more than a year, a plastic bag had been hanging from a tree. It was the only thing I could see until all the leaves fell and, with the mild weather, the bag was freed leaving a dead branch with a wall behind. I turned to look at you, seated on the grey sofa, gazing at the deep autumn hues of the park in front of your window. I could not see anything unique, marvelous, or particularly handsome in you. Yet, I could not stop looking at you. I remember your eyes and their confident look, believing blindly in yourself, your concepts, with no trace of doubt. However, in this story, you remain silent until the end, when I left your house to avoid embarrassing you with your friends.

-I want to keep in contact with you, I mean it- You said, with no trace of doubt in your eyes.

-Tot zo!- I said, foreseeing our future.

Since that day, I have not heard from you.

I find myself in front of my KTM, close to the point where I have started walking. I put on a yellow jumper that I have found in my room, with pen stains on the cuff that I have not made. I hop on the motorbike and rush to the market. It is getting dark. Between the avocados and oranges, I remember the bottle, and when I am ready to drink, gaze up, and I notice all the plastic bags trapped on the trees'

branches outside the market. I taste the drink's flavor. It is only water.

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El Corruptor

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El Corruptor

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