



Muñecos de Plastilina

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It was long after being ordained deacon — messenger of the word of Christ — shortly after a meeting in a school, with some of my colleagues. All belonged to the different archpriestries of the province where I had been assigned from the time I was ordained up until just a few weeks ago. We attended the closing ceremony for the academic year in the school's auditorium with a showing of Don Tancredo.

I went up after the curtain and applause to the improvised dressing rooms to congratulate them. I shook the hand of the show's coordinator and I addressed the students. I embraced the leading man. I noted something uneasy, jealous, in him after I had given more embraces among the rest of the cast: I felt positively alive. The meeting ended later with a lunch with people who had been at the deacons' meeting.

As we were leaving the restaurant, and down a pedestrian street, I heard the voices of two boys — too “all grown up” for my favorite pastime — talking about movies. “It's an awesome movie. I liked it a lot,” said one. And I, for my part, liked them. I remembered then too how hard it had been for me to forget them. All of them. Their innocent, immature smiles. Perverse smiles. Intensive therapy for a while. Of these specifically I loved especially the way they had of seducing me, so different. They are sinners, like all of us.

The movie they were discussing told the story of a group of characters who didn't know each other that didn't know how they had woken up inside that room with no doors or windows. In that Seminary of Our Lord, I taught the two boys during the day to tally complex accounting — how to prorate the bread and fish — as well as paranormal events — the Red Sea opening as the Jews marched forth, etc. — the history of the king of Egypt, acrostic of virtual monarchies as it happens, also medicine and pharmacy, also hospitality — the side effects of cooking for thirteen. At that stage I combined it with classes for deaf-mute children in a special education school. At night, my cell, the bucket, my hands, the play dough. I lost them a few blocks later. I tried to make eye contact with them. It was impossible. At that moment the archpriest's car passed by me. He also acknowledged my presence with a

wave. I crossed the street. A panel showed the temperature outside a pharmacy, in an arcade, where I bought a bottle of Nenuco.

Well, it's not that hot, I thought. Then I walked into a computer store. I bought a pen drive. As I was leaving I waved to Pepiño, the newspaper seller, and a couple of policemen patrolling the center. Also at parishioners I met at the stoplight. As my superior had already done, and then Pepiño and the policemen, they smiled at me and then looked immediately away: they went on their way.

When will all this construction be finished? I asked myself facing it while I walked across a park: it was so sad looking so empty without all the commotion it usually had. Workers everywhere from a town hall contract. At the other end, another crosswalk: I helped a blind man cross, more waves. I remembered then that Consuelo, the woman who cleans the church, told me we needed to buy insecticide. I stopped to pick up some bags of gummy worms, just two blocks from the church. Soon after I continued walking to the sacristy, just a few steps from it, now within the house of God. As I walked by the baptismal fount I crossed myself and I passed those three fingers of holy water across my lips. I dipped them in a second time. I kept going, now between the wooden pews - and in the pews, souls on straight up to the ceiling, and in the souls, women in black, and in the women, comfortable minds: they also looked away after smiling and greeting: another season of perfect faith: a master's in holy water -. As I arrived at my space, I settled with the Virgin of Los Remedios, and of Guadalupe, and of La Moreneta, and toasted to ten tense stout saints and their ten tall tents, and with St. Jude Thaddeus, and with him who is everything else who are three. I pounded my chest in sacrosanct farewell: mea culpa, my holy guilt.

I went to the sacristy's pantry. I looked for my pills. I hadn't taken them in a long time. At least not in the sacristy nor beyond the rule of law. It looked like Consuelo hadn't bought insecticide either. Well, from what I saw, there was only one cockroach. Or two. Why worry then. There was a painting of St. John the Baptist there among others that I didn't know what wall to hang from. We had done some renovations not long before and bought new furniture. After getting Viagra-happy and comfortable, I walked out with the painting. In my office I left it on my table while I chose a wall and a little while later I sat down to my only hobby: play dough, ever play land. Its soft feel, the lively anarchy of its colors, its ductility, its purity, and its creative potential have always driven me wild.

Its naiveté, its tenderness, its smile, its baby talk, its cheeks, its bribable will in exchange for candies, its nape, and, above all - which happens right after opening the package-, that...stimulating smell, it's plasticine, that.. stimulating smell, it's plasticine, that.. stimulating smell, it's plasticine, that.. stimulating smell. Pleasure house after pleasure house after pleasure house. The taste of its lips — and at the same time the Eucharist. Its bribable will: I take its candies afterwards. Its cheeks, its baby talk, its smile, its naiveté, its tenderness, its creative potential, and its purity. I picked up the painting of the saint after turning it right side up. Where should I hang it? My body shimmered with moisture. And, in my head, a thought that I could, even so, withstand. I laid the painting back down on the table. I put on my white collar and black cassock and I walked towards the pulpit to give the morning sermon:

instructing and exhorting the people, leading the worship and prayer of the faithful, reading them the holy scripture, and describing the Eucharist.

In my disarray, a ball of play dough fell from my garments to the floor. Instinct led me to pause in my sermon and stoop to pick it up, and I began to knead it until I remembered the eyes of my parishioners. I then discarded the ball, as if it were a little girl.