

## *Show Business*

By Marta Sanz

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### “APOCALYPSE NOW”

Valeria Falcón, a woman of spectacular, aerial name, and feeble, anodyne appearance, marched her way across the Puerta del Sol. She was heading, as she did every Thursday evening at around seven, to the house of Ana Urrutia, an aging actress who, like Greta Garbo before her, had the good sense to retire before her skin began to shed and her crowns wear down, even succeeding once or twice in making the public of a certain age ask themselves, “Is Urrutia dead or alive?” From behind the glass of her terrarium, Ana Urrutia, abundant Ana, was perhaps waiting for the right moment for her renaissance when Valeria zealously drove the heel of one of her boots into the grate of a vent. Then began the horror.

Conversations and helicopter engines. Gobbledygook. Gears boxes on the point of conking out. The squawking of a Romanian preacher and whores’ confidences. The gurgle of meat in its sauce. Mobile phone ringtones. Rattles. Background music—bump and grind, techno, electronica, Caribbean beats, Bachata, industrial harmonies, or advert music...—coming from shoe shops, or the waltz of the waves that escape from perfumeries, along with the wafts of soap. Bubbles. Amidst the commotion, it occurred to Valeria Falcón that she wouldn’t have been able

to make out the sound of her own footsteps on the pavement and, even though she was a young woman and not an old lady with Alzheimer's who'd escaped the watchful eye of her carer—"A sister-in-law who never loved me," the old dear would tell anyone who'd listen—, suddenly, there, at the very centre of one of the centres of the world, like Omonoia or Tiananmen Square, The Zócalo, Trafalgar or Times Square, Jemaa el-Fnaa, Valeria Falcón, wedged in the grate of an air vent like an animal with its paw stuck in the trap, felt lost. She didn't recognise anything around her, felt a momentary wave of amnesia, alienation, displacement. A fade to black. She had to stop and think. She asked herself who she was and where she was walking. Without moving from the spot where she was pinned, her eyes scanned the Puerta del Sol, like the needle on a compass. Paralysed from the waist down.

Everything started to spin around Valeria Falcón, who filed away in her retinas: a blood donation bus, donors open and close their hands laid out on their faux leather stretchers, altruists weighing in at over fifty kilos, good people who don't charge for their marrow. Spain is a pioneering country and champion of both the organs donation and stews made of gizzards, pigs' lungs, lamb's kidney. Valeria, frozen in the middle of the square, made a mental note: *illuminati* with no higher education, people who know what they know because life has taught them, Spanish speaking prophets who can't get their words out, untainted by the wisdom taught in universities or distance learning academies, worshippers of God the Father, surrounded by a steadily growing audience. At dusk, the Puerta del Sol begins to look like a film shot in the States. Valeria spun on her axis and took mental Polaroids of: a camp made of cardboard boxes and sailcloth swaying in the north wind, placard-wielding victims, a victim and a demonstrator aren't synonyms, although they have been known

to converge in the odd space-time coordinate, handcrafts, a stick and a piece of cardboard, the scrawl of a preschooler who doesn't put much effort into completing its writing worksheets, Clever Cat and Kicking King, an inexperienced, inexperienced, "The banks Rob us", "Crooks", "Give us Back What's Ours", "Institutional Scam", "Every single one of them the same",—and that's no cheated wife speaking—, "Robin Hood! What have you got yourself into?" "Give us our bread, but deliver us from evil, amen,"—and that's no believer talking—. Valeria took other dizzying photos in black and white; her pupils went *clickclick*: the beggars smile and polish off their cartons of cheap plonk, deformed beings with a flair for stressing their deformity beg with little cups, arouse pity, give the creeps, irritating, menacing, succubus, incubus...the leg between the bars twists several degrees per second and the eye gradually comes out of its socket...

Valeria even logged the vision that had stayed fixed in the corner of her eye as she came down Montero Street: sandwich-board men buy and sell gold and other minerals to craft false teeth, pawn shop promoters wearing high-vis yellow and orange vests—Why? Why? This zone is pedestrian only!—, leafleters—all three types, the sandwich-board men, promoters and leafleters, are the same—, male lottery ticket sellers, female lottery ticket sellers, police with sheep dogs primed to bite, secret policemen disguised as hip or hippyish young things, as if Serpico hadn't gone down in history, street hawkers flogging flying objects, purple things, crappy dragonflies that are tossed into the air, fly for a second, glimmer, then collapse back down to the ground, bookies and souvenir shops with white footballers shirts, their waxed torsos shine as if greased in oil, revolting: take one in your hands and it'd slip right out like a trout.

Valeria was about to die of an overdose of those bursts of light that bring on epileptic fits on the disco dance floor. But she went on

accumulating flashes: curious types search for the legendary TíoPepe neon sign or the horrendous statue of the bear and the arbutus and find instead opticians, opticians, opticians everywhere, the boom of opticians, to see what exactly? Straggling whores from Montera Street eat a banana perched on their platform boots, taut thighs in Lycra tights, miniskirts, very pretty girls, slaves, Africans, from Valdemorillo, from Pinto, from Valdepeñas or Coimbra, others scrape the last morsels of a tomato from a Tupperware in a doorway and smoke a cigarette for dessert, Japanese tourists takes photos of mobile phone store window displays with their smartphones—there’s something of *amortuary déjà vu* in the gesture, the photo and the repetition, the telephone inside the telephone...—, some of them wipe their mouths coming out of a hamburger joint or free buffet, almost free, “All you can eat for 9.95”, how revolting, scattered, misplaced visions, teenagers chew gum, suck sweets, kiss with tongues, lick lollypops, their mouths always busy, out of service, teenagers eat sunflower seeds and spit out the shells over Kilometre Zero, living statues switch their pose on hearing a twenty cent cointinkle against their collection plate, Minnie Mouse—the bobbies’ snitch—poses obscenely for photos, harried passersby stare at their feet and go down to take the metro or commuter train at the Sol junction.

“It’s apocalypse now,” thought Valeria, who, dizzy in the drain’s vortex, removed her heel from the crack with one firm yank and carried on her way, picking up the pace and turning up the collar of her parka, because she was freezing, and already late.

Too late.