

THE SEALED FIGURINE (LA FIGURITA SELLADA)

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Translation (2008) by Christopher Rollason

6.30 p.m., said my watch. I was crouching. The moment I'd stowed your brand-new pair of sky-blue baby-shoes in the cupboard drawer, a tremor seized me from head to toe. I could have sworn it! Something extraordinary was about to happen to me!

Softly, turned to one side, slowly, I sat down on the mattress with its white coverlet decorated with carriages and locomotives. At that very moment, four months pregnant, I decided I'd give you your first present. Julián, out of all the things I might choose, can you guess what ...? Something unbreakable, something very delicate. Not a fluffy animal, not a mechanical toy. Not something to touch with your hands but something to feel with the melody of a recollection. No idea? Let me whisper it in your ear: it's a story, made just for you.

My son, for some time now I've been wanting to tell you your story, my story, your father's story. It's so important to know where we're coming from ... and where we're going!

Shhh, even if most likely they'll fob you off with the gossips' tale that I was late in marrying. Don't you take any notice! One always gets there at the right time, why choose in a hurry? And now here's a surprise! You may not believe it, but one fine day and after a whole lifetime, in the middle of a chaste kiss I suddenly fell head over heels for my next-door neighbour.

People said he was a ladies' man, a stingy fellow, a confirmed bachelor. But even so, six months after that kiss he'd already bought this comfortable flat, and a ring for me, a-gleam with brilliants.

"Tick tock", says the clock on the table where your lamp is. My pulse beats faster. It's 6.45: just half an hour before he's through with his last patient and comes home, the man who fascinates me, the man whom I admire and love.

I hold my breath and turn up my ears as I listen out for the imperceptible turn of the key in the lock ... I put my hand on my belly. Mmm, where were we just now?

My son, I can't tell you anything but the truth! It wasn't easy, adapting to living together. We were both set in our ways in so many things...! And yet, let me tell you, we knew it was for us and we really did make an effort! Day in, day out, we practised that hardest of the virtues called patience. We learnt maxims like: 'We do have two ears and a mouth for a reason', or 'Negotiating means meeting the other half way'. And what was our reward? Well, if you want to know, here it is, right here when you, my darling, appear on the scene. Very soon came the pregnancy test, crying out 'Yes!'.

7 p.m. I'm looking without seeing, in front of your toy car-track with its bright colours. I'm imagining what you're going to be like, inside and outside. Will you be tall and blonde? Overweight? Intelligent, a good friend? Self-centred? Oh, my son! I get so anxious! What will be your fate in this world?

7.13. And just now, between one plan and another, a sigh escaped me: "Maybe you'll be a doctor like your father? Or a metalworker like your grandfather? Or most probably an original, not taking after anyone...?". Ah, with my heartbeat clattering like a toy train, here I am completing this unforgettable story, and at the same time ... uncovering the Sealed Figurine: What are we here in this world for? What gets bigger and multiplies if you share it? What is it that can't be bought and is ever sought? That's it...! That's what matters!

7.15. "Happiness!", someone whispered in my ear...

- Hello, dearest!, I heard your father greet me from the entrance door.

- Hurry up, my love, run! Come and feel Julián! Oh! He's moving inside me!