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English sample translation

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Catalina went further on. The layer of sinter crunched beneath her feet. The passageway grew wider. She found herself in the main chamber of the cavern, but she couldn't see the branches leading off it. Instinctively, Catalina edged her way along the left-side wall and eventually reached a dead-end. The light from the entrance suddenly disappeared as though gulped down by a thirsty throat. When Catalina reached what she believed to be the end of the cave (she had in fact penetrated only a tiny portion of those bowels of stone), she sat down. She imagined exhaustion would make her fall asleep immediately, but found instead she was wide awake.

Her senses put up a token fight. The peacefulness and the darkness however proved too powerful. Her sense of smell battled on a moment, but yielded as Catalina grew accustomed to the cold and musty perspiration of the stones. Pictures flooded her mind next: Miguel, a dog, boys, shouts, the word *ugly* hurled, a missing digit finger, the deserted harbour, Ursula's tresses, and then a face pressing in close, and once again Catalina could feel Beatrice's hands at her throat, strangling her and beating her, and again she clenched her fist, but tighter this time; inwardly Catalina was hitting back, striking that dull face and the realisation took her: she had not won the fight at the convent, far from it. Her mind experienced an onslaught of violence, the like of which she had never known before; with nothing to counterbalance it, she responded to each and every humiliation she had suffered, inwardly delivering punches, kicking, tasting a desire to lash back while simultaneously loathing herself for indulging this desire. The child inside her was kneeling, a grin on its face, that good, pious, contorted mask that had been her for years, and why? All at once she did not know why she had done it. Listened to the hymns of praise from the Abbess, sentences which had marked her like brands, sentences which had been her light and her reason for living. She distanced herself from her body with a rough shake. Regarded herself from the outside, viewed her actions, saw her constant smile, her all too willing, sweet, good-natured, humble smile, now evolved to a grin that she would have liked to cut out of her face. A damp cold shroud chilled her heart. Who was she? There was nothing left. Neither inside nor out. She could not even see herself anymore. She felt an urge to pinch herself, touch her skin, place her hands on her body, but sat there as though imprisoned. She felt like raising her voice, assuring herself there truly was a person sitting there, but she remained mute. Would it not be better to never leave the cave? Never walk out, stay here forever, rot, until the

outermost husk of the skin she could neither see nor smell, putrefied, grew mouldy, riddled with worms, until her flesh was eaten away, disintegrated, until even her skeleton, her teeth dissolved? She let out a scream. Her voice had freed her, and now her hands came to her aid as well, hands that touched her as though they weren't her own, hands which caressed her, assured her that, yes, here was a person made of flesh and blood, a living presence, a person, a living thing, that she was her, her, even if she no longer knew who "her" was, what would become of her and what she should do. She needed something to cling on to. Now. This very moment. The hands on her body needed to perform an inner role as well, drawing something within her towards the light. There was nothing there. And so she reached deep into that emptiness and snatched at the vacuum, dragged the nothingness by its invisible hair, gazed at all the missing and snuffed-out elements of what she had once been - and suddenly she caught a glint of something shimmering. Its power increased and offered her refuge. She hugged the void to her chest and held on tightly. It was something more than *nothing*. It was a physical sensation of limitlessness, of openness, she held *nothing* to her eyes and saw *everything*. There were paths, possibilities. She could see the void's end, the back of nothing's head, and it seemed to her she was standing on the crest of a hill; turning herself in every direction there was a constant variety, always something new in front of her. It was up to her to decide where she went, up to her which direction, her decision determined by nothing and no one else. She stood up. Feeling the clothes on her body, she undressed, casting one piece of clothing after another to the ground. She wanted to feel nothing at all next to her skin. She wanted to sample the new experience of being unhampered by any object, to sample the sensation of newness everywhere, her body in its entirety, inside and out. She stood upright in the cavern, naked, her eyes open, and mustered strength from her blindness, her mouth and ears open and receptive, she breathed in, listened to, and watched the nothingness. She wanted it to penetrate her ever deeper. *Creatio ex nihilo*, she thought. God created the world out of nothing. This is how he must have felt, this is how it must have been, standing in the blackness and the coming of white idea; experiencing a storm of emptiness and transforming it into something.

At once overwhelmed and filled with clarity and certainty, Catalina kneeled on the cavern floor. She felt dizzy. It passed quickly and she groped in front of her. She soon located her clothes. As she picked them up, a sharp pain pierced the palm of her hand. It wasn't the bite of a snake, but the prick of a needle. It was in a pocket, along with a spool of thread: two days earlier she had been told to do a sewing job for Beatrice, and a needle and thread were all she had left with. To Catalina this was more than sign enough, and what she did next took place in utter calm; in the darkness, she felt her way amongst the clothes with her fingers, and did what in those

days only a woman could do: she started to sew. She sewed for several hours, turning the blue woollen tunic into a pair of short trousers, the petticoat into a shirt and stockings; she took up material and tore strips, joined pieces together and created hems. She knew precisely what she was doing. She was starting from the very beginning, a new person, sewn together, created in the darkness. At last she stood up and stretched. It was good. It fitted well. It didn't dig in. She knelt down once more and felt the ground around her without finding what she was looking for. Her hands rummaged around in the dirt. She crawled back the way she had come, her right shoulder to the wall of the cave. Soon she was back in the main passageway and could make out the light from the entrance some distance away; turning back once more, she crawled along the right-hand branch and, a few metres on, it opened into the enormous gallery. There at last she found what she was looking for: a stone. It was in fact a blade of considerable archaeological importance. A flint which, 40 000 years ago, a Cro-Magnon man had not only made fire with, but also used to split the skull of a fellow Cro-Magnon man –out of sheer scientific interest incidentally: to find out what went on in a head, what was at work there, to discover the source of his urges, sometimes light in nature, sometimes darker, which sent his own blood coursing. A Cro-Magnon man, who, finding nothing to assuage his scientific thirst, raised the opened skull to his lips like a chalice and satisfied thirst of a different sort. Now Catalina pulled a fistful of hair as tight as she could and hacked at it, keeping the stone close to her head, until the hair fell to the ground. A massacre began, off with it all, lock by lock, and Catalina was an inverted Samson, gaining in strength as her hair fell. Eventually Catalina patted her head and found herself bristly as a dog. The fallen hair formed a pile around her; in the subsequent three and a half centuries this, like everything else that had really happened in the cave, would turn to dust. Layers of sediment were to cover the hair so that Rafael Rezabel and Andoni Albizuri – the two explorers who, on June 8 1969, thought they were the ones to discover the Ekain – found no trace of her although they did find the flint. But now Catalina was still clutching it. Before leaving, she peered into the darkness one last time. She stepped away from the wall towards the middle of the cave and gazed upwards. She wanted to know how high the cavernous room was. She arched backwards and launched the flint into the air, as high as she could. She listened in the darkness for where it would strike, whether it would reach the roof of the chamber before falling. But the stone didn't come down; it was as though it were suspended in the air or stuck fast on something – or as though someone had caught it mid-flight. Catalina waited a moment. Nothing. Stories came to her mind of the god Mari who dwelled in caves and could change his form. But the god Mari hadn't caught the stone; instead the flint had landed on a five-metre-high ledge of stone in the middle of the gallery. Catalina

couldn't see it of course. The stone was found by Rafael and Andoni, lies there to this day and is considered vital evidence for the theory that Cro-Magnon people had a ritual of scaling ledges, or the upper reaches of caves, so as to kindle a fire and thus pay homage to the sun-god.

*

Outside, someone was approaching the hill of Ekain, a man by the name of Juan Bautista de Artega. He knew the cave, the smaller part at least which lay open and he was drawn to it now with the sun beating down like hot fat from the sky. It was Juan's intention to sleep in the shade for an hour or two, sharing it with sheep if need be, until the worst of the heat abated. He tied his donkey to a tree and took several steps into the semi-darkness. The sheep were nowhere to be seen. Juan spread out his blanket, lay down and shut his eyes. While he was doing this, Catalina was on her knees deep within the Ekain cave, blackening her face with dust; she started crawling, and finally stretched out on her belly to wriggle the final metres to the entrance. Juan heard a noise. His eyes opened as Catalina's closed against the stabbing brightness of the sun. Juan was walking to the mouth to the cave as Catalina was pushing her hands and her head through the opening, blinded by light. And Juan Bautista de Artega's gaze was fixed on the stony rubble as it spat something out, a hedgehog-haired monster, a cave-person, which shot out to land at his feet: seized by fear, all Juan could do was to draw his sword and shout in a loud and terrible voice.

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A Second Baptism

“Who are you?” asked Juan.

Catalina stood there, still shaky on her legs, wet and filthy, an un-licked calf. She had reached a decision in the cave, but hadn't given any thought to what shape her life would take now, how she would be with people, how she would act, what she would say, what she would reveal of herself. She opened her parched lips to respond and didn't for a second consider altering her voice, which now, as a man, she would have to imbue with a darker edge; she forgot completely that her bright, girlish voice of prayer, trained through singing, now accustomed to cautious whispering, would betray her at her very first encounter. Her tongue moved clumsily as she said, “I...” and stopped, for she was frightened by this voice which of its own accord had settled in a deeper place. “I...,” said Catalina and flinched because the silent march, the period in the cave, the long silence, the thirst, the night just spent, because all this had so drawn her voice into the darkness that for a moment she, too, thought someone else was speaking.

“Who are you?” asked Juan.

Catalina did not rush. She allowed a little light into her head, collected her thoughts, until she could see things with more clarity. She was pleased that her own voice had come to her aid and reminded her of who she was, or rather who she wanted to be.

“I am...” she said, and stopped.

Did she have the slightest chance? Was it not ridiculous to try? What use were the tacked-together garments she was wearing? What good was any new name she might adopt? Would it not be easier to say “Catalina” and just explain? Yet while thinking the name “Catalina”, she had a sensation of distance from that person for the first time.

“...Francisco,” said Catalina.

It was worth a try. Catalina put all her strength and conviction into the name. Nonetheless she expected the tall, black-haired man facing her to destroy her weak, new, delicately transparent creation with a single word. “Francisco,” said Catalina – rough, dry, deep – and already she could hear the man laughing and saying, Francisco, that's not a girl's name. “Francisco,” said Catalina and waited for the judgement blow.

“Francisco...?” asked Juan. “And the rest of your name?”

There wasn’t a hint of disbelief in his voice. No doubtful tone. The man repeated the name she had given herself, and accepted it. When Catalina heard the name on his lips, it became curiously real, tangible and definite. If he believes it, thought Catalina, then others will believe it too. And if others believe it, I can believe it myself.

“Francisco Loyola,” she said.

That came from a hidden corner of herself, without her knowing why she had chosen that particular name. She cast off the bowed, cowering attitude she had adopted in front of the stranger, and stood up straighter, a plant reaching for the sun.

“What are you doing here?” asked Juan.

Her first impulse was to describe her escape from the priory – from which priory, the man would ask, from *San Sebastián el Antiguo*, she would have to answer, but that is a priory for nuns, he would say – no, impossible, the truth was barred to her. She’d have to reinvent her story; as she had the new set of clothes so she must piece together a new life. It would take more than snapping her fingers, but she did have to say something now, for the man was waiting for an answer.

“I was attacked,” her new voice proclaimed huskily, a little louder now and more assured; Catalina immersed herself in the sound, let it wash over her, began to discover the new voice, to play with it.

“Attacked?” asked Juan.

“Attacked,” said Catalina.

Everything was possible. Now that the man had accepted her new name, now she was able for the first time to believe in the person she wanted to be, now everything was possible. And anything could have happened.

“How? When?” asked Juan.

But *everything*, that was rather a lot for the moment. Too much for her. There would be no end to the questions. Catalina needed to gain some time, to gather her strength, to drink, to eat, to consider, to polish a story that wouldn’t seem so incredible that the man would grow suspicious and yet would arouse enough sympathy that he would want to help her. “It is a long story,” Catalina said, determined not to trip herself up in details. To deflect the stranger from further questions, she put on a show of exhaustion, clutched her forehead, pretended to be so dizzy she could collapse at any moment, until true dizziness overtook her, a dark blanketing faintness and she stumbled, sat down and planted her hands behind her. Juan fetched a water pouch. Catalina drank. That was good. It gave her strength. It soothed the cracks in her lips and dislodged the dust in her throat. Then Juan gave her bread and sheep’s cheese. After eating Catalina felt like lying down on the ground and

resting in the peaceful shade. But she didn't want to reveal how weak she was and pushed her exhaustion aside.

“Where are you travelling to?” she asked.

“To Vitoria,” Juan answered.

“That's where I'm going too,” Catalina said without thinking. She was about to add that an uncle of hers lived there, but she bit her lip in time, because she was no longer Catalina de Erauso, and if she was no longer Catalina de Erauso, her family no longer existed, and if her family no longer existed, that meant there was no uncle in Vitoria. That thought intoxicated her. It was an unimagined freedom that overrode all else, an independence the force of which swept away all doubt, fear, or uncertainty. She was no longer herself. She was someone else, and this someone else could do things Catalina could never have done, and say things that Catalina could never have said. There was no going back. Everything lay ahead. “Will you take me with you?” she asked and was frightened – if only for a moment – by this question, for it was an unthinkable question for a girl, an improper, whore-like question; the fear gave way to a sense of power: she wasn't a girl anymore, she was a man, someone not even she knew, someone who henceforth would surprise in all he did, for it all lay before him, all of it new.

“Yes,” Juan said immediately. “It is always better to travel with someone; it can be dangerous here.” The real reason for his swift consent was a different one. “The young man,” Juan wrote later, “sitting there in front of me at the mouth of the Ekain cave, was connected to me in some way, I had the sensation of something in him drawing me, what I couldn't say.”

“Where are your shoes?” Juan asked and pointed to Catalina's bare blue stocking-soles.

“They stole them,” Catalina said, relieved she had left her flat novice's shoes in the cave. Juan fetched a second pair from his belongings and handed them to Catalina. As Juan packed his things together, Catalina pulled on the large shoes and took a couple of steps as though gauging her balance. Her gaze fell on the man-sized opening of the cave she had entered by. She bent down to gather the stones she had dislodged and sealed the hole. It is difficult to say why she did that: out of respect for what had happened in the cave? Out of reverence for the god Mari whom, she believed, she had encountered? Out of the fear that what she was leaving behind could take on a life of its own and follow her? Perhaps it was a mixture of all three; what is certain is that Catalina left the mouth to the cave exactly as she found it, the state in which Andoni Albizuri and Rafael Rezabel were to “discover” the cave four centuries later. It happened to Rafael as it had to Catalina, the same draught touching him. He shouted to his companion “Andoni emen zulo bat zeok” which roughly translated

means “Andoni, there is a vacuum here.” They cleared away the loose stones as Catalina had once done, looked at each other and Rafael asked: “Ze egingo diau?” (“What should we do?”) “Aurrea!” was Andoni’s unhesitating response, a word that has become a battle cry for the archaeologists of the region: “Come on, we’re going in!”

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