

## “Because the Sky Is Blue” by Pablo Ramos

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“That’s how it is,” she says, her back to me, her head in the kitchen sink as she finishes rinsing her hair. “Without you even realizing it, time’s gone by.”

Making a turban out of a towel, she turns around, takes the *mate* from the table and sips from the *bombilla* until a sucking sound signals her to add more water. She does so and hands it to me. I take care to avoid touching her hand, to avoid breaking the spell without which I would, perhaps, never have made my way to her house.

“I’m so embarrassed. You caught me right in the middle of washing my hair,” she says. “I do sometimes see that girl from Santiago del Estero. Remember her? She dated El Turco. What’s become of El Turco, I wonder.”



*Mate with bombilla, kettle and pastries. Photograph by Cristina Erazo.*

She sits down. I assume that while she speaks of unimportant things, she is searching for that kid I was fifteen years ago. Surely she thinks something must remain: a sign, some remnant of hidden light from someplace. Or maybe she is trying to compose

herself, to absorb the shock of my visit. I'm sitting and still can't figure out how I came to be here. How it was that this afternoon I boarded a train, walked the few blocks from the station to her house with a package of pastries, knocked on her door—after so many years—and told her I dropped by for a few *mates*.

She is wearing a loose floral dress. The neckline is damp and the front is completely buttoned up. She's nervous. Sitting on the other side of the table, she hasn't stopped talking for an instant, and now she leans forward and picks out a pastry from the unwrapped package. I can see the shape of her breasts because the light from the window turns her dress transparent. She could have been my mother, I think, and remember that once I wished she had been my mother, and even told her as much.

"Mother Teresa," I say. But she doesn't hear, or pretends not to.

"You're still a wild one, huh," she says.

Then she asks me what I've been up to, where I've been. She must wonder what's become of that fourteen-year-old kid who thought a hooker was some sort of Olympian goddess.

"Time flies," she says. "You wanted to be a musician or a doctor. You don't look like either. You also wanted to be a pimp. Boy, you really cracked me up, remember? You were always so funny."

"I got married. I got separated," I say. "I have a son named Alejandro."

Now she hands me the kettle for me to do the pouring. I tap out a bit of yerba on a corner of the pastry paper and reposition the *bombilla*. In silence, I watch her rub her head with the towel, shake her blonde hair from side to side, and then brush it with her hand, her fingers spread apart to form a comb. Teresa does these things with excessive energy, as if abrupt movements will help her think better, help her conceive of the one question that encompasses all the others that must be running through her head. She stops. Then sighs with a trace of weariness and stands up.

"You must be needing a woman," she says.

I think about leaving. I'm not sure why I came, but it was certainly not to humiliate myself, or her. I suddenly feel scared, and sad.

"I'm going south; for some real work, you know," I say.

Teresa neatly tears a piece of pastry paper where the bit of wet yerba left a green areola. She wraps up the yerba, goes over to the wastebasket by the sink and drops it in.

"Hey, tell me about your kid. You said his name was Alejandro? Tell me, does he look like you?"

“He’s just like his mother,” I say, and her silence must be because of the soft tone in my voice, because of the common, everyday words I just uttered. Maybe she already noticed that I despise myself, my miserable way of thinking, of dealing with the world; because I am incapable of trust, always suspecting others of hiding secret intentions they dare not reveal.

“You were beautiful, you know,” says Teresa. “I mean the way you were, the person you were, the things you said.”

She comes up behind me, puts her arms around my neck and strokes my chest. She leans against my back, presses her body against mine. I remain seated. I feel her move away and I turn in the chair. She is unbuttoning her dress. Not rapidly, but also not so slowly as to leave room for doubt. She is about to undo the last button and I fear that that act alone will sadden the world forever. I don’t say anything and she must misinterpret my silence. Her hands move up to her waist and, opening her dress, she lets me see her bare breasts, her tight, black panties, her still beautiful legs. There stands Teresa, and there she remains, close to me, offering herself, a phantom in the half-light.

“Teresa,” I say.

Not wanting to gaze upon her body, I seek out her eyes just as the sun, from behind the wall in the empty lot across the way, colors the kitchen in an artificial orange, illuminating her wet hair smelling of apple-scented shampoo, her Polish-Jewish face, a fierce grimace under the delicate features of her nose. I remain immobile, my arms by my sides. She finally looks away.

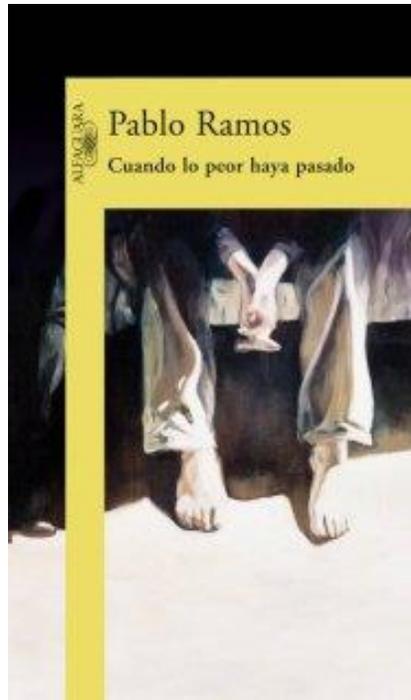
“Remember that record you gave me?” She’s turned around and is buttoning up her dress. “Remember?” she asks, her back to me. “I still have it, in its sleeve. It was when you started learning English. You were into translating songs. Sometimes I want to remember. It’s like having a splinter you can’t pull out, this not remembering.”

She goes to her room and, I can tell, she is pulling herself together so she can look me in the eyes when she returns. I can’t help but think it is part of her profession. Now she’s back, with the record in its sleeve, her eyes turned upward.

“It was about somebody crying over something stupid,” she says. “That I remember: some guy crying over something really stupid.”

“Because the sky is blue,” I say, “it makes me cry.”

“Yeah, that’s it. What a relief to finally remember, no? Because the sky is blue, it makes me cry,” says Teresa. “What a weirdo. What utter stupidity.”



*Translated by Dario Bard from “Porque el cielo es azul” as printed in Cuando lo peor haya pasado, published by Alfaguara, 2010, available from [Amazon](#). The title of the story refers to the song “[Because](#)” from the Beatle’s Abbey Road album.*

*Pablo Ramos is a writer, poet and musician from Avellaneda, Province of Buenos Aires. His short story collection, Cuando lo peor haya pasado, earned him both the 2003 Fondo Nacional e las Artes prize (Argentina) and the 2004 Casa de las Americas prize (Cuba). He has also published a collection of poems (Lo pasado pisado) and several novels, many of which are available in Spanish on [Amazon](#).*

*Additionally, Ramos is a frequent contributor to the literary magazine Lamujerdemivida. In this autobiographical [article](#), published soon after he won the Casa de Las Americas prize, Ramos discusses his life growing up in the rough streets of Greater Buenos Aires.*

*This episode of the Spanish-language public television program Animal que cuenta, features Pablo Ramos talking about his short story “Cuando lo peor haya pasado”, which deals with the act of writing. [Liliana Heker](#), his mentor, also participates in the discussion.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcvAyeKSnIY>