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Lágrimas del Amor

Lágrimas de la Muerte

by Daniel Berthold

--Notes on the first several sessions with D.

--*Preliminary diagnosis:* post-traumatic stress disorder; obsessive-compulsive disorder; recovering from substance-induced psychotic disorder with delusions and hallucinations (DSM-IV 309.81, 303.3, 292.11)

In our first session, D. says he's come for just one reason: he needs to tell me a dream. I try to conceal my amusement when he hastens to inform me that he isn't interested in what I have to say about the dream itself; he is satisfied with his own interpretation. What he needs help with is to understand why he has become so obsessed with it.

This is the dream as he related it. I have taken the liberty of filling in some background I've since learned from D. over the course of our subsequent meetings.

My lover comes into the room.

I smile and whisper, "Melanie, my Melanie."

"Daniel." Her voice catches in her throat. I think it's because she's overwhelmed by love; then I think it's because she is shocked by my appearance.

I'm in a sort of trance from all the drugs.

D. admits he has been seeing things that aren't there, hallucinating. The line between the real and the not real is tenuous for him. But this, here, now – this seems real:

"Melanie."

He was in an isolation room in a leukemia ward. Everyone who came into the room had to wear a mask, gloves, a gown, so he wouldn't pick up an infection. His white blood cell count was at zero; he had no immune system.

He hasn't seen M. for two weeks. She was out in Phoenix for a week to watch her mother die, and then she's been teaching every day and it's hard for her to travel the hundred miles to get to the hospital. He has gone down hill in the last two weeks.

She sees me lying on the bed, hooked up to three IV machines delivering chemo and drugs to numb my pain. I'm looking out at the world through a daze, and I'm completely still. It hurts to move.

They've finally given him a device he can use to self-administer the morphine after days of pleading for more drugs for the pain. He had become completely dependent on his doctors. He felt he was only a body for them, broken, sick, without subjectivity or humanity. He had signed a consent form: he was at their mercy.

One doctor on the night shift found him curled up beating his head with his hands, his body crooked and degraded by pain. He claims he'd pushed the call button for the nurse's station maybe fifty times over the past two hours (although I'm not sure his word on this matter can be relied upon: I'm beginning to

suspect him of an inclination towards exaggeration). He was too weak to get out of bed and walk out to the hall, trailing the IV machines that were his lifelines, to find someone to help him. He tried yelling, screaming, but no one came. Maybe, he thought, they didn't hear him; his voice had become so weak, just a hoarse whisper.

The night shift doctor offered him Tylenol. She didn't think he could really be in that much pain just from having an infected tooth pulled out. She thought he was being histrionic, talking about feeling like a donkey had kicked him in the face or like savages were poking burning spears in his mouth.

She is the guardian of the drugs, his god, but she is a miserly god: she won't give him anything without a struggle, and between her and him – shriveled, desiccated, feeble – there is no contest. He needs her, but he can't figure out a way of convincing her. He was always so good at debate, at the art of persuasion, but now his pain has made an idiot of him. He doesn't want to cry in front of her, but he does: *lágrimas del idiota*.

He thinks she hates him, but he can't figure out why.

I see myself from above. The nurses have taken off my gown; I'm drenched in sweat from fever, lying on wet rank sheets. I've lost all my hair and my body is covered with dark blue, vivid orange, and blood-red patches from a skin infection, like surreal continents and wine dark seas on the map of some tortured world.

I think I'm a glistening nightmare. When I roll on my side, you can see that my back is covered with oozing pustules and scales of dead skin.

I've lost thirty pounds; I can't eat: everything tastes metallic and putrid. I'm becoming skeletal. I feel I must look a little like a lizard that has been roasted over green wood just short of death.

D. later told me that Nietzsche says green wood burns the slowest and causes the most pain, but I have not so far been able to trace the quotation.

I think I am someone's nightmare – my own nightmare; worse, my lover's nightmare.

Later, in the weeks that followed his discharge, D. tells me that this image of his body came back to him in hallucinations, during his too abrupt withdrawal from the morphine: orange and blue bodies burning at the stake, charred, but still barely alive; or black-red corpses strung up on the limbs of the trees outside his living room window, dangling and slowly rotating; or being sucked slowly, lovingly, down into quicksand; or being devoured by the Laughter; or shuffling up the stairs to his bedroom and lying down next to him, grimacing, reaching out to touch him.

He wrote M. a letter about a week before this visit takes place (that is, this dream of a visit – I have been unable to confirm that an actual visit occurred on the date D. reports). Or rather he wrote himself a letter to M. that he never sent. He tells me that he burned it in his wood stove a couple of weeks after he got home from the hospital, the same wood stove he stopped using shortly afterwards, since it was in the coals of the fire that he began to see bodies writhing in a crematorium.

He was going to give the letter to someone to deliver to M. if he died in the hospital. He tells me he no longer remembers what he said in the letter. He could never write it now. He had to be sick, helpless, skeletal, blue and red and black, to write that letter, to know what to say, to say it right – to make it perfect.

Evidently, D. was doing a lot of writing at this time. This was when he started his Morphine Diaries. After four months of treatment, just as he was entering the worst phase – in constant pain, unable to eat, losing his sense of reality due to his increasing reliance on narcotics, losing even his sense that death was something to be feared, driven more and more into a private space of dark, incoherent images – he got a message from his insurance company saying that they were unsure whether all the tests and procedures he was receiving were really necessary, and asking that he keep a daily log of them all. (I

have since verified this remarkable request.)

He was being seen maybe twenty times a day by nurses and doctors coming to take his blood, give him pills (he wondered if he was supposed to get the names of all the pills), adjust his IV machines, inject him with the Neupogen that would hopefully allow his bone marrow to start producing more white blood cells, clean the IV "port" that was dug into his chest, take X rays, perform bone marrow biopsies, bring a new bag of chemo or of platelets or red blood cells, check on his skin, his teeth, and whatever other parts of his body happened to be decaying.

He knew he was utterly incompetent to do what the insurance company was asking of him: he was losing his memory, becoming like an old shrunken senile man, uncertain of what he had said or thought or done a moment before.

I have become a lizard, a glistening nightmare.

But he opened a new notebook. He worried that maybe if he didn't comply, the insurance company would stop covering him. He tried to record every visit from a nurse or doctor and he did the best he could to remember to ask them for the details of what was being given him or done to him.

When he looked back at his journal after three or four days, however, he discovered that there were only shaky and disjointed marks on the paper, not a single decipherable word, just squiggly lines looking like the marks on an EKG printout, only not so regular, not even like hieroglyphs, impossible to decode – a perfect private language.

M. had joked that he should send his diary to the insurance company and tell them he was delighted they wished to see it and that they should look forward to many more volumes to come.

I have become my lover's nightmare.

This was also the time of his IV Diaries, which he started after he became aware that many of his experiences were hallucinations. The most notable entry, it seems to me, was made at a time when he had become convinced that the screens on his IV machines were displaying encrypted messages meant to kill him by infusing him with poison. He even saw the face of his executioner, sitting in front of a computer screen in some far off place, smiling. This was his first glimpse of the Laugher.

I asked D. to tell me about the Laugher, who seems a significant figure to me, but he said that would have to wait for another time; right now, there was only one dream that mattered.

He began by unplugging the machines, bringing nurses running at the alarm the machines emitted (he vaguely remembers wondering why they didn't come running when he called them in pain). Then he realized that he would be killing himself by removing the bags of chemicals they told him he needed to live. So he meticulously worked out the code the Laugher was using, an act he remembers as the single greatest intellectual achievement of his life, and discovered a way of pushing various buttons on the monitor of the machines, in precise sequence, that would thwart the Laugher's scheme. He scrupulously wrote down all these sequences and the series of inferences he had made that had led him to break the code, so that he could recall them later when he needed them again, and perhaps (here we see early evidence of his delusional mentality) even get his extraordinary feat of deduction published by some prestigious journal of cryptology.

After a dozen or so visits from angry nurses telling him to leave the machines alone, he finally realized it was all a hallucination. His IV diaries, like his Morphine Diaries, consist of aimless lines scratched out in ever more agitated swirls and scrawls, like a two year old's scribbles.

I have become my own nightmare.

The dream he tells me goes on forever: it is an epic. But the worst, he says, is that when he wakes up, he can't let it go. This is why he has come to me. He strains to remember every detail. And he's started to

write it down. He's begun to carry a notepad with him wherever he goes. He writes down a line or two driving to work, the wheel between his legs, working out at the gym, doing chores (stopping in the aisle marked "Baking Needs" to pull out his paper and pencil), playing his guitar, preparing his meals, and especially in bed at night.

The dream consumes him. He says he began to write with an eye to fidelity, seeking to reproduce the dream just as it was, but quickly realized this would bring no understanding. No, he needs to work it over, to revise it, to reshape it until it has become just right: crystalline, icy, unforgiving. He says he is trying to perfect the dream into an immaculate pain.

He seems to be succeeding. As the days go on, he feels more and more hollowed out by the dream, or rather by his attempted perfection of it. He has a blunt, predatory anguish in his belly, a cavernous nausea, all day long. He finds it hard to eat, to concentrate on anything but the dream. He wakes up at night in a sweat.

He tells me that it's like he has become Chaos: a gaping hungry hole without form or meaning. It's like he's wasting away, returning himself to that hospital bed in the leukemia ward.

I am a lizard roasting over green wood.

He is plaguing himself. But why does he do this? There's something different about this dream, he feels. It's not like all the others he had in the hospital and in the months that followed: the Laughter dream, the Crucified Woman in White dream, the Vigil dream, the Carnival Train dream, the Cancer Girl dream, the Four Seasons dream, the Crematorium dream, and the others.

I find it noteworthy that he gives all these dreams names. This dream he is telling me he calls the "Lágrimas" dream, although he sometimes gives it a more elaborate name: "Lágrimas del amor lágrimas de la muerte" – love tears, death tears. Maybe he thinks that by naming his dreams he can gain some power over them, reduce them to something that can be known, categorized, something that depends on him, his power of speech. Naturally, D. disputes my conjecture. He says it's just the reverse, that his dreams give themselves their own names: they insist on their own autonomy, their authority and reality as things in themselves, not mere constructions of his unconscious.

Like these other dreams, this one is monumental: vivid, complex, with several distinct acts and scenes, as though it had been written by a demonic playwright. But it has a different texture to it: it is not so gaudy, so surreal, so gory, so immediately terrifying. The other dreams just scared him; this one haunts him. He thinks that maybe if he could figure out this one dream, he'd be cured. But why does he feel that? Why *this* dream?

We can't even touch: strict doctor's orders – it's too dangerous; I can't risk another infection.

I want her to rub my back, to feel her hands massaging me, gentle hands giving me a moment of peace, of love, of the memory of pleasure.

Melanie has tears in her eyes. I used to call them "lágrimas del amor," love tears, when she would cry because she loved me so much, but now she's looking at the horror of my body. These tears are different, I think: they come from fear and maybe even revulsion. They are lágrimas de la muerte, death tears.

There's nothing left of her lover: I'm a lizard now. I want to tell her how beautiful she looks, even in the gown and mask, but I worry she might pity me, or be a little disgusted.

She speaks through her mask. She says she has something hard to tell me.

I almost smile. Nothing she could say would be harder than what I've heard in the last five months. But then I can't smile. Something could be worse. I feel tears wanting to come, and a terrible cold apprehension.

Please god, make this be a hallucination, a dream. But it isn't.

I struggle with my trance. I need to be alert.

"I love you, Daniel. You are everything to me."

I hear only the "but." I've become so habituated to disaster.

Her eyes have pinched up into a picture of pain. I wish I could see her mouth, her beautiful mouth. Is it trembling? I remember her mouth on mine.

"Melanie," I whisper.

"But I" She wipes at her tears. Her eyes look haunted. She's wrapping her arms around her chest.

Maybe, I think, this really is just another hallucination, like when I thought I was paralyzed and no sound came out of my voice when I screamed for help. The doctor said this was very common, not to worry. But it kept happening, every time with perfect reality.

I moan. Melanie starts to cry.

D. tells me that she had cried two years ago as they sat on his orange couch, the night he told her he had leukemia, that he had to go to the hospital in the morning. He says her body had started to shake; she couldn't look at him for a moment; she went inside herself, to a private place. "I'm going to lose you," she said.

"No, no my love."

He thought he was going to die, too. But he said "no." Then he lied again: he held out his arm: "Touch me, feel how strong I am. I'm going to make it." His arm was tanned, his muscles corded. He looked at his arm and thought, "it's beautiful."

I look down at my body. My arm is thin, flabby, chalk white with brilliantly obscene colors. Like war paint, except I'm losing the war. I am a ruin.

"But I Daniel, I can't go on. I can't cope any more with the uncertainty, with the constant fear. Even if you recover, I'll look at you and see this skeleton I'm looking at now. I'll see death. When I touch you, I'll be touching death, when I smell you and taste you, it will be the smell and taste of death, when I dream of you it will be a dream of death, a nightmare.

I am my lover's nightmare, I think.

We just look at each other for a while. I see my lover, my beautiful lover, but fading, disappearing. I think she sees a lizard, a rotting body; I think she sees death.

"I have something else to tell you. Something else hard."

Nothing else could possibly be hard; she has already said the only truly hard thing there is in the world.

"You remember I told you about James?"

J. had been her first true love, and they had lived together for a few years before she left him: he was drinking all the time and beginning to have affairs. It broke her heart.

I think I was wrong: it's possible this would be even harder.

"He's accepted a visiting poet position at the college."

M. and D. both taught at a small liberal arts college, she Latin American literature, he philosophy.

"He's arrived, and he has been such a good friend to me in the past few weeks, when I needed someone to help me cope. I was going to tell you about this before, but you were in such bad shape. And now I have to tell you, because I think this is going to be more than a friendship."

I have a flash image of them holding each other, naked, smiling into each other's eyes. Is it a hallucination? I wonder if you can have a microsecond hallucination.

I moan. I am paralyzed.

I know just what James looks like, although I've never seen him.

He has come to trust his visions.

He has a beautiful face, a graceful body; he is a beautiful man, strong, healthy. He is guapo.

M. used to call D. her "guapo," and he called her his "guapatista."

I feel I should hate James. I try hard to hate him: I expect to, and am surprised when I can't. I have a painful feeling of loving him. James is who I should be: sensitive, generous, wise, strong, exquisite. A lover worth loving. A poet.

Sometimes in the first couple of years of their relationship, after M. had told him about her life with J., D. tells me he used to think of her with him, loving him, desiring him, her look of passion, her hands stroking him, her tongue exploring him. He says he has no idea why he used to conjure up this daydream. He found it mildly curious, and even a little pleasurable, like a sweet melancholy. But now it's more than that: now it's come true.

When I point out that after all it is only a dream, D. looks at me in mock incredulity: "Only a dream? But Doctor, I'm surprised to hear you say that." When I ask him what he means, he only smiles. He is becoming increasingly sardonic with me, and I wonder why he's really come to me.

Whatever he may think, I know that here finally is the navel of this dream: it is a jealousy dream. When I suggest this to D., he actually laughs: "Doctor, is that what you get paid for? To make things so simple?" I'm growing accustomed to this sort of abuse from him by now.

"I know this is hard, Daniel. It is hard for me too, unbearably hard. I don't want to lose you. I love you. There is nothing false about the love we've had these past three years; it was the happiest time of my life. But I have to let you go. I just have to. I am going back to James, because he is here, because he's changed – he's clean now – because I remember my love for him, and because I need a love that won't be haunted by images of sickness and death."

I am immobilized. I think I have died: that is the only explanation for why I have no tears.

I am seeing Melanie through the veil of death, the veil that remains for a few moments after you die, which lets you see back for just an instant. She is talking to him, that one there on the bed; she is crying, lágrimas de la muerte, trying to get him to say something. But he can't say anything – he is dead. And as for myself, I no longer have the power of speech in the world of the living.

And then she leaves.

Here there is an abrupt change of scene. D. has made it through the stem cell transplant and has been

released from the hospital. He's back at home, where he lives alone. A nurse visits him every day to draw blood for testing, to clean the IV port that remained burrowed into his body like a stigmata, and to check that he has been injecting himself with Neupogen twice a day. Friends stop by with food. He can't leave his house yet; he's too weak and his immune system is still too frail. The smell of the food makes him sick, and when they leave he puts it into a garbage bag. He has lost another five pounds.

I'm lying on the inflatable bed I've set up in my living room, covered in blankets. It is so cold.

He can't sleep up in his bedroom yet: he gets dizzy and out of breath walking up the stairs, and he's convinced his nightmares are worse there, and there's no way to escape the house if he has to get out quickly, if the Laugher comes for him, or Cancer Girl or the Woman in White.

Also, in the dream, he can't go upstairs because he still has all those photos of himself and M. on the wall. They called it the "kissing wall": photos of them kissing on camping trips, on park benches, in Oaxaca, in Indianapolis, at the Hard Rock Café in Manhattan, on the orange couch in his living room. He can't explain to me why he would not have taken these photos down in the dream, but he thinks it may be the same reason he is obsessed with making this dream of his as impeccably painful as he can.

I have just called my sister Megan in California.

His sister is a clinical social worker, working with survivors of torture in Los Angeles, and she's helped D. incredibly through these nightmare months. He would call her when he surfaced from his worst times of terror, seeing another lynched body on his tree, or, like tonight, seeing the eviscerated corpse of a young child propped up on his living room chair, red and black and green with gore.

I tell Megan I've gone cold turkey off the morphine. The drug has become a demon lover, the Lord of Darkness, a seducer fiend, breaking me down, dehumanizing me, giving me only worse and worse nightmares. But I feel so sick all the time, shaking with chills and sweating, unable to read or watch TV or listen to the radio – everywhere I turn for distraction there is suffering and violence and death.

I tell her I lie in bed all day dreading falling asleep, dreading my next dream. I'm dirty and decrepit and I smell foul and I cry too much. I'm falling apart: I can find almost nothing inside myself that I recognize.

I tell her I know I won't really do it, but I've begun to fantasize about killing myself.

I lose the connection: the phone is dead. I lie there thinking again about what it would mean to kill myself, knowing I won't do it, but curiously savoring the thought as a sort of illicit, almost erotic pleasure.

Then I hear a knock on my back door.

D. leaves his back door unlocked in case he has to escape swiftly, he tells me. He's become paranoid: his visions have gotten the better of him, and only occasionally does he understand them to be unreal, and even then, how can he be positive? He feels he can't take the chance.

For a day or so he had his biggest kitchen knife at his side at all times for protection, the one with a long sharp blade made for slicing, until he realized there was no protection, and until he began to have those thoughts about killing himself.

He'd see himself slitting his wrists, committing hari kari, or maybe just gouging out his eyes, like Oedipus unable to look at himself any longer.

"Who is it? You have the wrong house. Please, please go away." My voice is a croak. I am a toad, a croaking toad.

"Daniel?" The voice is hesitant; maybe this voice isn't sure it really has the right place.

More croaking, this time a sort of sobbing croak: "No. I'm not Daniel." I am a weeping toad. I cry toad's

tears: *lágrimas del sapo*.

“Daniel? . . . Megan called. She said she was really worried about you.”

Who was this voice? After all the voices I had come to know and dread over the past months, it made me sick to realize there were still new voices.

I see a man come in to the living room, a shadow. Then I see it is the Shrouded Man, the Death Lover, come for me.

I yell, I scream, I reach out for the knife that isn't there. My eyes bulge out and saliva burns acidic in my mouth.

I feel hands on my body. The hands draw me gently back into reality.

James is holding me, speaking softly. He looks exactly like I had imagined him back in the hospital when Melanie said his name: “James.” He looks like perfection.

“Megan called us. Melanie wasn't home, so I came over.”

His voice is comforting, gentle, a sonorous melody, the antithesis of a croak: the voice of a poet, a perfectly beautiful voice.

In one of his many revisions of this part of the dream, D. has J. say: “Melanie loves you so much, Daniel. I feel I have gotten to know you, to love you too, from what she says about you. I know now it can't work out with me and her: I have only been a substitute, a memory of first love, a cipher. She talks about you all the time; she cries out for you in her sleep.”

But D. threw that revision into the fire in disgust. It was an act of cowardice, he tells me, a revocation of the plan: this dream must be flawless, uncompromising, a perfect pain. In what D. says is the best revision he's made so far, J. says only –

“I left a note for Melanie. She'll come over soon.”

“No.” But do I mean “no”? I no longer know what I mean to say. I should remain silent; that's the safest.

“We are leaving for Oaxaca in two days, Daniel, and I wish you could come with us. Melanie tells me how much you love it there. But it would be too hard for her, and you seem too sick to travel.”

“Oaxaca: that used to be our place,” D. tells me, “our sanctuary.”

I have visions of Melanie and me touching each other across the table at our favorite café, the place with the open courtyard and the hanging wisteria, our hands softly stroking, affirming our love, our desire; taking photos of ourselves kissing at Monte Albán, framed by the ruins of a majestic and tragic people; walking with our arms around each other in front of Santa Domingo; drinking cerveza on the balcony outside our room, the pink bedroom with the balcony and the noisy bed. Now I see Melanie with James being in those places and doing those things.

I try to swallow, but I can't. I can't even moan.

“You're soaking wet, Daniel. Let me help you get into dry clothes.” James takes off my clothes, sopping with sweat and the smell of sickness. He is so gentle. He shows no disgust, only tenderness. He brings a warm washcloth and wipes my body. Melanie sometimes did that after we had made love. He finds the massage oil Melanie had used to rub me with – Kama Sutra “Healing Blend” – and he tells me to lie down. He massages me. He is my lover: he brings me the memory of pleasure, and I love him for it.

But the peace is broken. I hear another knock on the door, and then the Woman in White glides in,

ghostly, carrying her crucifix.

D. claims he has no recollection of the original dream at this point, which seems suspicious since he professes such perfect clarity about everything else in the dream. All he is willing to offer me, though, is what he calls a “fabrication,” which he is adamant to distinguish from his “revisions,” which still have the original text of the dream as their source and certificate of legitimacy.

The Woman in White wants to crucify me so she will have company.

I scream.

Then I look up into haunted eyes, the eyes I remember that used to belong to my lover, and I know I am released from my hallucination: there was no Woman in White, but only the woman who was my lover.

I want to whisper “Melanie, my Melanie,” but I can’t speak. For some reason, it is important to me to say only the truth, but I don’t know what that is: it is safest to remain silent.

“Are you o.k.? Daniel, tell me you’re okay.”

I am silent; I am perfect silence. What would it mean to answer that question truthfully?

“Is there anything I can do?” – what is the correct answer? Yes? . . . No? Neither is true.

“Daniel, we’re all so worried about you. I think you need to go back to the hospital for a bit, just to pull yourself together. You’re not eating, you are terrified all the time, you talk about gouging out your eyes and worse. They can take care of you.”

It is suddenly important for me to be able to speak. I am surprised: I have found a truth, and I think I can say it. “I will kill myself before going back to the hospital. I am death – you told me so and you were right – and I will complete myself, draw the blade across my wrist until I perfect who I am.”

She turns away. Is she angry? Or just defeated?

James looks lovingly at me, then goes to Melanie and pulls her close to him, whispering something in her ear. I want to know what he is saying; I want to know this so badly it hurts.

She takes his hand. They leave.

This part of the dream ends with a final hallucination:

I hallucinate that I am asleep, and that I have a dream: there is a knock at my back door.

That was the whole dream. I emerge from out of the hallucination and know that it was a dream, a dream within a hallucination.

Actually, since precision is important here: it was a dream within a hallucination within a dream.

I sense that it was a dream with great meaning, with great promise, but inchoate, silent, incapable of interpretation.

These are just part of the first two scenes of D.’s dream. There are three more episodes, he tells me, but he is dissatisfied with them, and he says his revisions aren’t coming along well. There is too much weakness in the material of the dream, too much evasion of the flawless pain he wishes to craft. Apparently there are even fantasies of redemption. So we’ll end here.

At any rate, I must say that I'm losing my patience with this dream. D. knows none of it is true – “*what!*” he says to me, “*do you think I'm crazy?*” – but still he seems to wish to convince himself that in some sense it *is* true.

M. loved him through it all, like an angel. She loved him as a skeleton, as a lizard, as death. She loved him through all her own pain, which D. knew was much greater than his. She rubbed his scaled back with gentle hands, soothing him, loving him, her eyes filled with *lágrimas del amor*.

M. has been in Mexico now for a couple of weeks, and she's waiting for him to join her. They talk every night. They tell each other how much they love each other, how hard it is to be apart, how much they want to sleep with each other. D. knows all this is real. But he is possessed. His revisions of the dream are not meant to master it, to understand it and be able to let it go, but just the opposite: he means to make it unbearable, and then to see if nevertheless he can live with it.

And he doesn't know why. He's hardly eating, he only sleeps three hours a night, and his attention wanders away from everything else in his day. He is becoming sick again, with another sort of sickness. To speak in his way, I might even say he is becoming another sort of lizard.

But D. tells me that isn't right. He's off for Oaxaca in a few days, and he says he'll finish his *Lágrimas* journal before he goes. This is just a temporary setback, a flirtation with obsession. He has suddenly become very cavalier, but I have come to expect his mercurial shifts of mood. I can't trust anything he says.

Being with his lover again will cure him, he says, and when they return, he'll burn his manuscript in his wood stove.

I don't tell him this, because I'm worried about his delicate state, but I'm thinking that I'll believe it when he brings me the ashes. ✍

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