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Altiplano

By Peter Brosens

Adored Virgin!
How beautiful. So shiny!
Thats right! So pretty and shiny!
Come.
Come!
Omar.
Omar.
Come, Auntie Grace. Come!
And whos coming? Whos coming?
- Are you coming for some champagne?
- Food is served!
The tart is coming.
- The tart, the tart!
- Here it is.
The tart, the tart...
Max... I wish you a good
trip to South America.
And as our father used to say in Iran...
- And I will look after my sister.
- Thank you.
To Max!
Now Id like that we
raise our glasses to Grace
who is a nominee for the
Pulitzer prize for photography.
You didnt say anything! Thats good.
Really? Which photo?
Her last picture.
- That of Omar?
- Yes.
Omar had been her
guide for years in Iraq.
I pulled out.
Why?
Because that photo shouldnt exist.
Mum, can I eat some tart?
Of course, darling.
Im giving up photography.
Whats happened to the great
photographer of conscience?
A photo has never stopped a war.
Independent photographers
are our only hope, Grace,
against image standardisation.

Omar died only because
I was holding a camera.
That picture denounces his sacrifice.
Thats why you must accept the
prize and bring this photo to life.

- How are you, Max?
- Good morning.
Do you want me to stay?
Of course not.
Saturnina.
Ignacio.
Saturnina is a virgin!
This Turubamba girl...
Lets make her dance.
This Turubamba girl...
Lets make her dance.
Lets roast a pig.
- Rufina.
- What?
Did your husband go to the
glacier to get blessed water?
Oh, yes.
That night was so delicious.
He started to eat my
body, slowly and sweetly.
I didnt want him to stop.
Are you afraid of the first night?
No.
Ignacio farts so loud.
Thats why shes scared.
What are you saying, you naughty woman?
You mean my son? He really can fart!
My son sure can fart!
I wonder how much this is worth.
Saturnina...
I dont feel well.
I must rest my eyes.
Mama?
Felix Caceres?
Here I am.
Hello.
I can see much better now.
Okay, now... How many
fingers do you see?

How many fingers?

- I see three.

- Three.

Very good. God bless you.

May God bless you.

May our mountain spirits reward you.

Listen.

Dont lean forward.

Do not lean forward.

Yes, sir.

Dont lift heavy things.

Yes, sir.

And try not to walk too far.

- Yes, sir.

- Thats all.

Take these. You must

wear them for three days.

- Will I see better?

- Yes.

Okay, sir.

If you get an infection, come back.

Yes.

Okay? See you.

May our mountain spirits reward you.

Don Angel, how are you?

Bickering like teenagers?

Ral, well go to 15.

Up to 17, I insist.

Two people walked for 7 hours.

I cant turn them away.

I hate you, Ral.

I love you, too.

Hi, Max!

Hey, Paul...

- How are you?

- Good, how are you?

How are you doing?

- Are you in a hurry?

- Always, you know.

- Can you deal with this?

- Sure, no problem.

The mail leaves in two days.

Thanks a lot.

- Todays our national holiday.

- Some Trappist beer...
I had forgotten. Long life to Belgium!
Well, whats left of it.
How is it going?
Gold is a difficult thing.
And you?
We found lots of gold, the
shareholders are happy, all is fine.
Good health.
- Cheers. Thank you.
- See you next time. Bye.
Llama!
Hold on you silly animal.
Ill get you on the head.
Llama!
Im going to knock you on the head.
I am!
I must go.
Hurry up. Or Ill marry someone else!
Ignacio!
Whats the matter?
Whats wrong?
My God! Blood!
I feel fine.
- Put your head back.
- Im fine, Saturnina.
My God! Blood!
Im fine.
Ill be back.
Hello, Senorita.
Good afternoon.
Is that for me?
Yes, I brought you corn beer.
Thank you.
Here.
The suns strong today.
Yes, but therell be wind later.
Whats your name?
Saturnina.
Saturnina...
Im the caretaker of the Virgin.
I see.
Will she have any scars?
Yes, inside.

How long will it take?
That depends on the glue.
Could you hurry?
Im getting married soon.
Whats his name?
Ignacio.
- He went to the glacier
- Ignacio...
He went to the glacier
to get blessed water.
Can you describe the
colours of the virgin?
Of course.
Her veil is blue,
like the reflection of
the morning sky in a lake.
Its...
Have you ever seen the colour blue?
I remember it from when I was a child.
Are you hungry?
Not now. Maybe later.
By the way, who are those two
fellows always hanging around?
You mean the sun and the moon?
The sun and moon?
Im in excellent company.
They cant take remove their
mask until youve finished.
Thats why theyre waiting.
Im so lucky.
Yes, you are.
My names Orlando.
Thank you, Orlando.
Thank you.
- The traffic is getting worse.
- I counted 47 trucks yesterday.
The gringos must have
found gold up there
and theyre dumping their waste here.
Their waste?
Are you crazy?
Its silver they spilled here.
Youre talking nonsense.
Its pure liquid silver.

Then why dont they claim it?
They didnt even notice
it fell off the truck.
Its looks nice but I dont trust it.
You worry too much.
It comes from the mines.
It must be valuable.
Wherever there are mines,
thats where the devil lives.
Nilo.
Nilo!
What do you want?
Mama has gone to see the healer.
For her eyes?
Yes.
Arent you worried?
A little.
The clinic is open now. Eusebio told me.
We should take mama. Many are going.
To that gringo clinic?
Why not?
No way. Im not going there.
Nilo.
Mama is really sick. We must take her.
What can those people do for us?
What have those people ever done for us?
Nilo, youre an idiot.
God is listening.
Mountain spirit, please cure her.
With this water take away her illness.
Mother Earth, I honour you.
Please grant us a good life.
May my beloved Saturnina
and I live happily.
I miss you, Grace.
I miss your scent.
I miss your breath, your
warmth, your presence.
And here it is, its magic...
our little clinic, lost
far in the countryside.
My other colleagues...
Joaquin from Buenos Aires, fast asleep.
What has he been up to last night again?

Ral...

Hi, Max. Good morning.

- Good morning, Ral.

- Had a good sleep?

Yes, thank you.

- Very cold.

- Very cold indeed.

Hello.

- Its me. How are you? Okay?

- Not bad. How are you?

Reza is such a devil! He bit
a girl in his class today.

- You must be kidding.

- No.

He eats sweets all day
so he must have passed
on the flavour to her too.

I adore him.

- Is that Maxs voice?

- Yes.

- He sent me a video message.

- Hes still sending you videos?

- Yes.

- Hes so nice.

Did you sleep last night?

No, I cant sleep. I cant
stop thinking of Omar.

You must accept that
this was his destiny.

There is no such thing as destiny.

You must start practising
communing with God.

God will always listen to what you say.

God wants you to approach Him.

I have nothing to tell him.

Dont be so hard on yourself.

Ill call you tomorrow.

- Love you.

- Till tomorrow.

Shes such a good mother, dear Virgin.

Please protect my mother.

I promise to keep your house clean.

And I promise to learn some Bach.

At least one song.

I know you must be angry with us.
Angry enough to punish us.
Forgive me. Forgive my mother.
Forgive my sister Saturnina,
too. Shes a good person.
She can act like a child...
but shes a good person.
And now... How do you feel?
Stay on the side.
Watch where youre walking.
I think I only slept two hours.
I miss you, Grace.
Heres our morning light and
heres our morning traffic.
I really didnt want to leave you
in this kind of silence, Grace.
I hope you sleep well.
P...
L...
O...
S...
Shut up, Nilo.
It smells awful in here.
They wont hurt mama, will they?
No.
Cant you just wait and get
married when mama is better?
Mama will be fine, Nilo. Shell be fine.
Look, theyre giving that guy a new eye.
No, theyre just fixing his old one.
I feel sick.
Shut up.
What did she tell you?
That she never had
problems with her eyes.
But now she has headaches
and sometimes her
vision gets all blurred.
Were only equipped to treat cataracts.
Just give her these pills.
Why cant you cure my mother?
Arent you eye doctors?
- Where do you live?
- Turubamba.

You must cure my mother, doctor.

- Theres nothing we can do.

- Then you arent eye doctors!

Useless.

Whats wrong with him?

- Whats wrong?

- I cant see well and my nose bleeds.

Hes losing his sight

and his nose bleeds.

Where does he live?

- Where do you live?

- Turubamba.

Hows she feeling?

Whats the problem?

I feel dizzy sometimes

and I cant see well.

Same thing. She gets dizzy

and shes losing her vision.

- Where do you live?

- Turubamba.

Butchers.

Fuck!

You havent come in days, Saturnina.

My mother went to the healer

but he couldnt cure her.

Then we went to the gringo doctors

but they turned us away.

They were too busy curing

the eyes of other people.

But they didnt want

to cure my mamas eyes.

Why did they give us aspirin?

I couldnt get cured either.

You must finish the Virgin.

I cant get married without her.

Cant Nilo help you?

He isnt doing anything.

You can help me by cleaning

the dust of the pieces.

Blow the dust off like this...

Blow the dust off, Satu...

... to clean all the pieces.

Ral, can you take care

of the blood samples?

Concentrate on the children.
Joaquin, you get water samples.
Ignacio!
What happened?
He was missing for days
and he turned up just now.
What did he say?
He was missing for several days...
Madam, Im very sorry.
Could we examine him?
What do you want? Get out of here!
You cant cure the dead!
Madam, were here to help you.
Dont touch him!
Rufina, be reasonable.
Let them examine him.
Are you with them too?
- Were only here to help.
- Go away! Go away!
Go away! Youre all butchers.
Go away!
Go away!
Lets go.
Go away! Butchers!
Go away!
Oh, my God!
I dreamt of you last night, Grace.
You were...
You were blind
It rather was a nightmare for me
but that didnt seem to bother you.
Strange...
It must be my job
triggering my subconscious.
But hey...
I dont know.
Im sure that if you were
here youd be inspired.
Anyway...
When Im back
I already know what Ill cook for you.
Can you guess?
Mussels and hot chips.
And also...

this year...
well walk the Sambre river.
Well do it this year, I promise you.
Now...
I must get moving because Im too cold.
Dont worry. Hes really a good driver.
Here.
Its for the altitude.
Thank you.
I cant take it anymore.
What?
I hate the altitude.
Im from the coast.
Where are you from?
I live in Belgium.
Belgium...
Saxophone...
Thats right.
Saxophone.
Where are you going?
Turubamba.
Turubamba?
Ive never heard of Turubamba.
What about you?
Were being mobilised.
There are riots in the mountains.
What type of riots?
Indians and mines.
Its a very old problem.
Get off our land.
Get off our land!
Damned murderers!
Assassins!
Damn you!
Assassins!
Go away!
Go away, murderers!
Go away!
Get off our land!
Get off...
Ignacio!
- Was that your dog?
- No.
- Is this your house?

- Yes.

Whats your name?

Mallku.

Mallku.

Im Grace.

Where are you going?

Up the mountains.

That area is closed
off. You cant go there.

Dont worry.

The wound is superficial.

He didnt really bite you.

Thank you, Mallku.

Take this.

The stone will carry your sadness.

I will not die in silence...

or invisibly.

Your poison will not kill me slowly.

Without an image there is no story.

Mother Earth will never
forgive your greed.

In the stones, my blood will
run forever like a warrior.

In the waters...

my shadow will run
forever, like a warrior.

Like a warrior!

Come my fellow men, lets play.

Where Saturninas soul go?

Will it go to heaven?

Or will it go to hell?

Throw your dice!

Its a tie!

Tie!

Its a tie!

There was once a bride,
a beautiful young bride,
who dreamed of a sunny life.

One day, poison came
tumbling into her village
and took away her loved one.

Have you lost a loved one?

Have you lost a loved one?

Yes.

Her sorrow was so deep...
deep as the veins of
gold in the earth...
Her wrath exploded...
Have you ever felt wrath?
Yes.
She marched to the fortress
where her enemies stood...
and she unleashed her wrath.
And then she broke...
And then God looked away...
Do you believe in God?
What are you doing?
If the image is restored,
their hope will be restored.
What happened here?
Poison came tumbling into the village.
You're blind.
I see what you cannot see.
The surface is defined from within.
Who are you?
Grace.
Grace...
- I'm a photographer.
- Photographer...
You must be very thirsty.
Oh, my dear.
I feel your sadness.
Rise up.
May your heart bloom again.
I will not die in silence...
or invisibly.
Your poison will not kill me slowly...
Without an image there is no story.
Mother Earth will never
forgive their greed.
In the stones...
my blood will run
forever like a warrior.