

# TREATS

BY

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Hannah pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose and looked into the garden with the same intensity with which she had answered James's question once he had popped it so unexpectedly. "Would it be 'yes'? We deserve a celebration after all this love, don't you think?" Over the second that the question had floated in her brain without an answer, she was able to determine that the inquiry of her beloved man was logical, poetic, and reasonably formulated. Since she had replied her choked "yes" three weeks ago, the torrent of emotions and preparations had channeled methodically. Every announcement, call, and order placed in beautiful harmonic tones like the mesmerized children who had followed the vengeful piper to their end.

This morning, among the foam of her satin sheets, Hannah looked out into the garden and realized that the flowers about to come will witness a very different woman from the one who had woken up this morning in a bed too big for her. The future carer of those imminent lilies will be the absolute queen of this house whose walls were papered in music sheets, love made graciously at odd hours, and the laughter of friends after so many parties.

Hannah arose from the bed, put on a cardigan that officially belonged to James but had been repossessed by the new order of facts and, despite the cold marble beneath her feet, walked barefoot to the dining room. The garden accompanied her through the infinite windows, showering her slim figure and her long black hair with the luminescent vapors of the morning sun. Hannah observed with baffled admiration the arrangement of sweets and unnamable delicacies that Lydia, Ruth, and Phyllis, her three older cousins, and the maid, Danila, had prepared the previous day for today's reception. Every single piece of colorful candy, every coin of chocolate, seemed to have been placed by the hands of the fairies that used to guard the cribs of little princesses in old tales. And perhaps Hannah's inception as the queen of the house was the reason why she had been blessed with the magic hands of her cousins and the extra magic wand of Danila to arrange the house for today, to place all the plates and glasses in their respective piles and rows. Danila, embodying the fourth fairy who saves princesses from unjust death, had also made the cake in the shape of James's piano, following the precise instructions he had given her regarding the number

of keys and pedals. He wanted all of the guests to have a morsel of sweet dough covered in the blackest chocolate as if they were able to nurture themselves with every key of his second love, the 1905 Steinway at the end of the room. Hannah did not care about cakes, but these events apparently seemed incomplete without the omnipresent treat.

Hannah walked toward the piano still savoring in her nostrils the vague temptation of chocolate and praline. To compensate for the talent of the man she loved, she only knew how to play the first notes of their song. James had taught her with some sense of urgency the magic formula: C, D, A, F. She did not distinguish the notes but could always recall his fingers caressing the keyboard with the same purity with which he touched the curve of her shoulders under the stars: "In case of emergency, Dear, so you can show any lousy pianist how our song starts. You just play that and even the most recalcitrant of my friends will recognize *Our Love is Here to Stay*. And, just in case of emergency, I will play it for you through his ghostly fingers if I am not around."

C, D, A, F played Hannah like invoking the spirits of all the dead composers of the world. Her eyes fell on the list of music to be played this afternoon. Hannah shuffled the pages left on the piano bench, scores that were destined to James' students, the fortunate selected to play during the reception. An eclectic deck of contemporary geniuses that James taught, played, and studied with furious passion: Stucky, Salonen, Auerbach. And also, for those who were too far away to swim from the shore of intellectual music, and for Hannah, sprinkles of delicious jazz, from Porter, to Coltrane, to Ravel's compositions created after the French had fallen in love with Gershwin's arabesques.

Hannah had to hurry up. Her chorus of cousins had become disheveled medusas when she had ordered them not to come this morning to help her get dressed. "Women need help on a day like today, Darling. What you want to do is unheard of. Putting on your own makeup today? How will you make sure that all the buttons of your dress are in the right buttonhole? How will you make sure that the subtle lines of your stockings are as straight as the traces of kohl embracing your gorgeous eyes?" But Hannah had triumphed, and the estrogen entourage had drowned its voices in a puddle of frustrated murmurs.

Back in her room Hannah picked every piece of clothing from the chair, lovingly left by Danila the night before. Her dress was made of the softest silk with intricate lace decorations at the hem and the end of the sleeves. The skirt and the sleeves followed the Chanelian recommendation to fall some millimeters below knees and elbows. No decent woman over a certain age should show these betraying joints. Coco Chanel had a draconian way to define

“certain age,” so Hannah followed the rules out of respect and elegance. Her shoes were too bright and inconveniently high for the occasion, but she knew too well how much James loved the contour of her calves when she walked sensually in front of a crowd, and this was not the day to deny any naughty moments of the past. Her last item was the tiny pill hat that had belonged to her mother. “Wear it once, Hannah,” she had said, “use it for that special occasion if you happen to live it, and don’t let the net cover too much of your eyes. Let people see your eyes on such a day because you will convey more through them more than with words.”

The bell rang apologetically. Whoever was ringing, the chauffeur for sure, was being respectful of the solemn hour. Hannah had just finished cleaning the excess of her mascara. Lydia, the older fairy, had asserted that it is not the mascara itself that gets messy when you cry. “Remember what Auntie said? The problem is that women put it all over their eyelashes. Just on the tip, Darling, just on the tip, and then you tell me.”

Hannah stole a chocolate from the impeccable table and headed to the door. She put it in her mouth to melt while the chauffeur opened the door of the car for her. He let Hannah take her time to enter the limo as if she were a fragile onyx piece about to be shipped far away. He was an expert at discreet parsimony and revering silence during such intense moments in the life of a woman. Hannah was aware of how strange it should seem that she would go to the church without any company but, as she and James had discussed, nobody should judge decisions in matters of love that only belong to the two implicated.

Hannah took one more look at the house that would be full of guests once she returned, a new mistress of her possessions. The black leather of the limo made her feel lost, like in the belly of an oblivious whale. Suddenly too dark, too scary. Because black seemed to be the color of this sunny day: her hair, the chocolate, the piano, the lace, the silk, the shoes, even the net almost covering her black eyelashes. The last piece of bonbon disintegrated on Hannah’s tongue as her bitter revelation took shape. We do not cry when we lose our beloved because of our own unused love rotting now in our hands. We do cry because nobody will ever love us as the departed did. We lose the uniqueness of someone’s love on us, we lose his voice, his laughter, and the cadence of his notes on the keys. Hannah’s mother had been right: “Treat your love as the most precious, ephemeral treat and taste its sweetness until the end. It will hold like mascara on the tips of your soul. You will see, Darling, till the very, very end of this silly party.”

*To my friend Heather Carlile with all my love, and to Jack Waldenmaier forever.*

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#### Author Biography

Fabiana Elisa Martínez is a linguist, a language teacher, and a writer. She speaks English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Italian. She is the author of the short story collection *12 Random Words*, and the podcast series and grammar book *Spanish 360 with Fabiana*. Other short stories of hers have been published in *Rigorous Magazine*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Ponder Review*, *Hindsight Magazine*, *The Good Life Review*, *The Halcyone*, *Rhodora Magazine*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *The Writers and Readers Magazine*, *Automatic Pilot*, *Lusitania*, *Heartland Society of Women Writers*, and the anthology *Writers of Tomorrow*. She is currently working on her first novel.