

ENGLISH TITLE

Alaska

AUTHOR:

Castillo Suarez

ORIGINAL TITLE:

Alaska

TRANSLATED BY:

Itxaso del Olmo

Introduction

Sooner or later, winter always comes. Not the snow, though; and you love snowfalls, since they lay bare no more than what is important. But that year it just rained, day after day. The rivers were overflowing, and you stayed in those days, boxing up the life you had had until then.

You decided to distance yourself from friends. Following a rule that is nowhere written, you decided that the friends you had in common would remain his friends after the breakup, as if the person to have known them first would be entitled to do so. That is why they still feel indebted to you in some way: the guilt felt by the one who abandons.

Together with the arrival of the rain, you moved into the guest room, into a small bed. In fact, when you change bedrooms, dreams also change. It seems like you are talking in the language of trees when you are falling asleep, quiet and single-sensed. When you wake up, however, your language is that of birds: you suddenly change direction and fly away.

You have heard that some birds can foresee the rain.

You are boxing up the books. You hold them from the spine and shake them. Purchase receipts fall out every now and then; as well as a dry flower or two. You used to retrieve wildflowers from the lines of recently cut grass, holding on to your uncontrollable tendency to store beauty. It is said that flowers are the last ones to come out in impoverished lands. You click on *Cofrentes* and *Trillo*, the two nuclear plants where your uncle once worked, those two and the word *flowers* next to them. Florist's shops are the first ones to pop up. Then the funeral homes come.

Humidity has softened the paper sheets on the desk. You know you will not be able to rewrite your life, but you are certain you will endure, since we carry on thanks to what hurts us. That is one of the lessons your mother has taught you, even if she has not realized. Suffering the same pain is what makes people grow apart, and it does not bring them closer, although it might seem otherwise.

This year it will not snow, it will at best be the sleet that melts before even touching the ground.

When you were kids, you would go all the way to the Alaska, on foot. The hotel parking lot used to be crowded with people passing through. One of the servers was a young ginger man. Dad would always tell you the same thing: the borderline is over there; in the past, there was a chain separating the provinces, which is why this place is called *Katealde*¹. Nowadays the abandoned hotel can be seen from the highway shoulder. One night, I saw that the neon lights were on, and I thought they might be showing the place to some potential buyer. You often have this dream where you are talking to the young ginger man. But you do not write down dreams.

Most times, dreams come to you while driving, without any means to write them down, looking at the rearview mirror, waiting for a wild boar to appear. You like highways and freeways, not so much the secondary roads, because, when you drive slowly, there is a risk of overthinking, of unintentionally recalling the memories; and, as you very well know, there is nothing we can do to forget what we do not want to remember.

You do not know for how long you have had this instinct not to get attached to anything. When your neighbor came with a sponge cake, willing to talk, you made a great effort to be attentive. She noticed the boxes and bags in the entrance, but she did not ask you when you were leaving the house. It had been a long time since she had last lived in that house, since that night she got off the car and left for the mountain.

1 *Translator's note: Name formed by the combination of words in Basque kate [ˈkæt.e], which means "chain", and alde [ˈæld.e] referring to a specific area or a certain space.*

When you empty a home the songs always remain; the friends who advise you to leave the house, those who tell you which house is best to keep; real estate advertisements; doctor's appointments; disappeared languages. When you love someone, you create a language you only use with that person. That language dies when the relationship is over.

We leave our life, our pieces, in people we will not see again. That is why living is about losing those who love us in order to look for them again, in brief. As a matter of fact, when we are loved we feel most strong, even more than when we are actually strong, if you will. But rain comes unexpectedly, just like the interesting people in life. And nothing can be done to stop the rain. In the same way, nothing can be done to hold back the person who decided to abandon you. And, maybe, we feel attracted by the person who is going to abandon us, or the one who has the intention to do so; but the ones who remain with us, whether they decide it or not, they are our prostheses: they are itchy, they also hurt now and then, but without them we would not be able to live.

Sometimes birds are flying all over us, even if we cannot see them.

You do the ironing in the garage. His working tools and uniform have disappeared. Objects disappear and leave an empty space, and we usually need time to get used to the emptiness left by those things, although it is true that what is gone makes room for something else. Life always provides a way to make up for what is lost. A song, for instance. Only in songs do you find someone who gives you everything you need.

You have dreamt about the ginger kid who used to work in the Alaska hotel; he was reading a book, *Orlando*, taking advantage of the fact that there were not many guests. The days you feel down you go to the Alaska, and, just like the Eastern truck drivers back in time, you feel that you are closer to home. You feel that life has fewer sharp edges. That you have all the answers ready, even if no one asks anything.

It is said that Virginia Woolf wanted to comfort her lover Vita Sackville-West with the book *Orlando*, because she had lost her long-time house: Knole House. You keep the paperback edition among the books that you have boxed up. You have two types of books: the ones you bought hoping they would bring you closer to someone, or the ones you got to avoid being fully aware of what was going on around you. You do not know whether to include Woolf's book in the first group or in the second one.

When you are on your own, you are more attentive and you read more books.

There is always someone who talks to you about what they are missing. You listen to them carefully, as if there was a way to fill your emptiness with that of their own. This happens with strangers. We all lose our inhibitions when making confessions at airports. And we have all thought about not taking the flight and staying in an unknown city for a long time. But, in the end, nothing happens in that type of journeys. You make the return trip thinking that you need to do something about the pain of your fellow travelers, as well as that of your own. You usually have a best seller in your hands, so that no one asks you anything. Normally, nothing happens in your life, and then, everything is happening simultaneously. Therefore, there is no specific moment to stop loving someone. You are on a scale, waiting, and there is someone at home who does not love you, even if you are not yet aware. We know nothing about what is happening to others.

From that moment on, our life is the life of those who have abandoned us. We spend the summers in their swimming pools. The Sunday evenings in their living rooms. It is too early to leave that place and too late to go away.

You have taken your pieces to your parents' house. You do not know how to get rid of what is no longer necessary, what is broken, cracked. You do not know what to do with the ones given to you as a present, and that is why you have invented a new rule: you have taken everything given by someone at some point, without exception. You have no intention of giving anything back, fearing that the fragile connection between words and things could break. You have

also kept the messages, which are now meaningless. Unthinkable. Alienated. *If you need me, call me.* Detaching from the objects would be admitting that no one will come back looking for them. A feeling like seeing the photographs of children whom you had not known until recently. Not having succeeded in making someone happy. The sound of raindrops on the window.

Without realizing it, you are looking for someone who has kept you in mind. In fact, we are connected to those around us by a sewing thread. The thread disappears; not the trace, though. And maybe discerning is accepting you cannot go back. And regretting it because, when you chose someone, you never thought that one day they would not be with you. That the young ginger man was not going to come looking for you in the Alaska parking lot when you got off your bike because it started to rain.

You remember it without a specific order. You do not like the end of winter, but you do like the things that happen during that time, such as the people coming back and forth in a hotel parking lot; without noticing that there is a swimming pool nearby, even if there is no diving board.

You knew he would not be there and yet you went to the Alaska swimming pool.

May it rain and may a small umbrella be enough.

Castillo Suarez

APPOINTMENTS

I don't want to attend doctors' appointments,
because I don't want to tell them I have green eyes
due to the beech trees I conceal in full humidity.
Tell them I fill up with fog the beds I don't own
and take away the sleep of those staying in my shadow.
Tell them I'm growing with low light,
in the exile of the things lost.
Tell them I'm constantly fighting with my poems,
because they pretend to be me,
because they attend the appointments instead of me,
even the doctors' ones.

LONELY CHILDREN

All lonely children are alike in one way:
they never utter words of love,
as if they were barren,
just like love itself.

They have an incomprehensible bond with queues
whether at airports or supermarkets,
since they love waiting.

It feels like they are not here.

They emanate an earthy aroma,
are the keepers of all unspoken things,
and write affectionless poems
in adulthood.

Damage is not the same to everyone,
but love poems do return.

They always come back
to rebuild the dictionary.

TO BE SOMEONE ELSE

I had my lungs filled up with bramble by the time I met you.
I was a beach hidden in high tide.
I couldn't undress before you,
for fear of your finding my inner depths.
I've always wished I were someone else,
renewing my skin every year and dropping the worn pieces.
I've always wished I were a tamed animal,
following straight lines,
finding comfort in safe spaces.
More docile than what I've been.
I've always wished
I could return the pieces in big waste bags
to those longing to live clinging on to me,
up to the point of becoming strangers.
Crying for once will turn me into someone else, you say;
that it leaves no trace,
unless it's on the scaled skin of fish.
That the loneliness of being great is not just mine.

A WHITE CALLA LILY

While holding a white calla lily,
I realize
that I love more and more nameless things,
that silence consumes my surroundings,
that I have my desk empty,
and I endure pain with no extra effort.
I even forget that my inner wetland is right here,
that enemies keep piling up in my journal,
that I lost a big war at home
and the traces of trenches remain there.

While holding a white calla lily
I realize
that no one writes about new loves,
but they do, instead, about the ones lost.

While holding a white calla lily,
I realize
that I too have a single flower,
a toxic one, if eaten raw.