

# The Rhinoceros<sup>1</sup>

Juan José Arreola

For ten years I fought with a rhinoceros; I'm the divorced wife of Judge McBride. Joshua McBride possessed me for ten years with his imperious egoism. I knew his furious rages, his momentary tenderness, and, late at night, his insistent and ceremonious lust.

I renounced love before I knew what it was, because Joshua showed me with judicial allegations that love is just a story good for entertaining servant girls. On the other hand, he offered me his protection as a respectable man. According to Joshua, the protection of a respectable man is the highest ambition of every woman.

Ten years I fought with the rhinoceros, body to body, and my only triumph consisted in dragging him to divorce.

Joshua McBride has remarried, but this time he has made a mistake in his choice. Seeking another Eleanor, he met his match. Pamela is sweet and romantic, but

she knows the secret that helps to subdue rhinoceroses. Joshua McBride attacks head on, but can not turn about rapidly. When anyone gets behind him, he has to wheel completely around to attack again. Pamela seizes him by the tail, shakes it, and won't let go. Having to circle around so much, the judge begins to show signs of fatigue, relents, and gives in. His rages have become slower and more melancholic; his harangues, like a disconcerted actor's, no longer are convincing. He is like a subterranean volcano with Pamela sitting on top, smiling. On the seas with Joshua I was shipwrecked; Pamela floats like a paper boat in a wash basin. She is the daughter of a prudent vegetarian pastor who

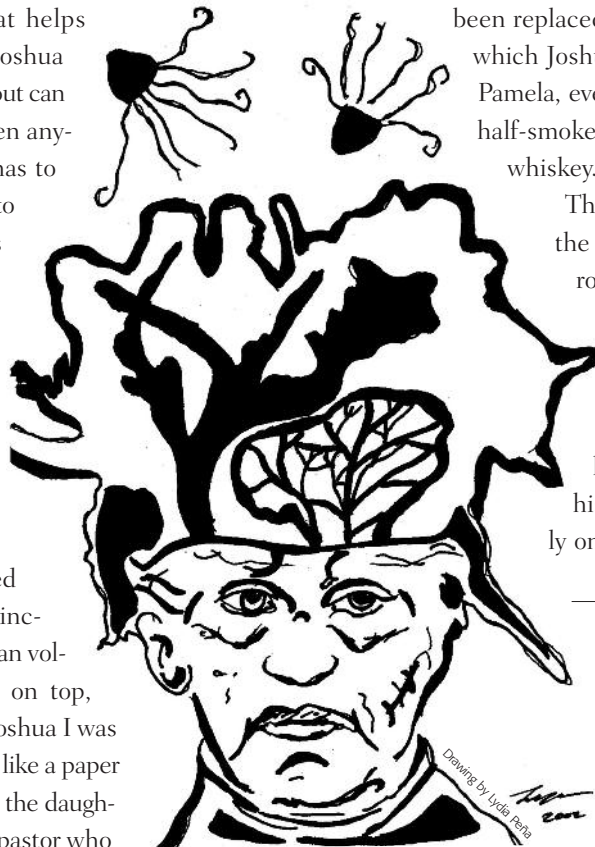
taught her how to make tigers turn prudent and vegetarian too.

Not long ago I saw Joshua in church devoutly listening to the Sunday services. He seems enunciated and flattened. Just as though Pamela, with her two fragile hands, has been reducing his volume and folding up his spine. His vegetarian pallor gives him a smooth, sickly cast.

People who visit the McBrides tell me surprising things. They speak of incomprehensible meals, lunches and suppers with no roasted beef; they describe Joshua devouring enormous platters of salad. Naturally, from such nourishment he can not extract the calories that made his former rages so impressive. His favorite dishes have been methodically altered or suppressed by grim and implacable cooks. Patagras and Gorgonzola cheese no longer permeate the dark oak dining room with their strong odor. They have

been replaced by insipid and odorless cream cheeses which Joshua eats in silence, like a punished child. Pamela, ever amiable and smiling, puts out Joshua's half-smoked cigar, rations his pipe tobacco and his whiskey.

That's what they tell me. I like to imagine the two of them alone dining at a long narrow table under the cold light of the candelabra. Watched by the wise Pamela, gluttonous Joshua sullenly munches his light meals. But I especially like to imagine the rhinoceros late at night, in his slippers, his great shapeless body under his robe, knocking timidly and persistently on an obstinate door. ■■■



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This story was included in *Confabulario*, first published in 1958. The English-language version was taken from *Confabulario and Other Inventions*, George D. Schade, trans. (Austin: University of Texas, 1964), pp. 69-71.