

*Elsinore*¹

by Salvador Elizondo

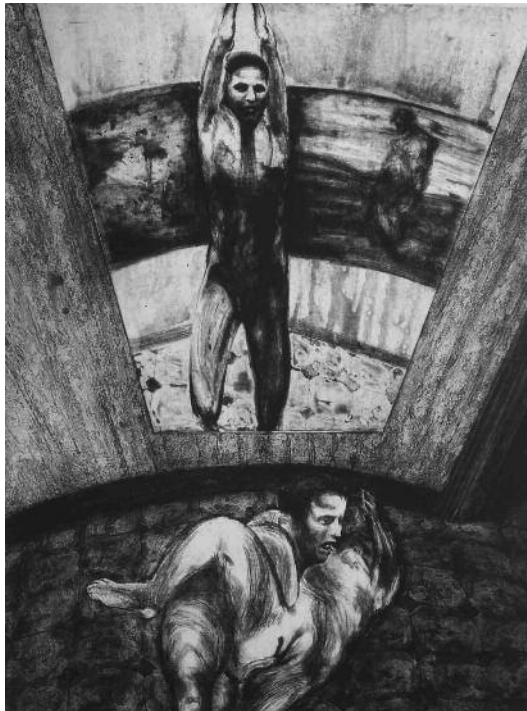


I decided to pay a visit to Mrs. Simpson...*drop in and see me*, she had said. 222 *Margaritas Drive*. I took a Yellow Cab. It wasn't far. An apartment building with *bay windows*. 301 H.S. Simpson...*dancing and stage coaching*. I went in. The carpeted lobby produced an impression of impersonal domesticity that smelled of Creolina disinfectant. I went up to the third floor. The door of 301 was just pulled to. I knocked...*Come iiiin!* ... I went in...*Be with you in a minute*....In the living room were the remains of a party. A half-full bottle of Black & White, some high-

ball glasses, one unfinished, the ashtray full of cigarette butts, the furniture in disarray. On a little table was a photograph of a man in Air Force uniform, but you couldn't see his face very well because it was at something of an angle in the corner. Mrs. Simpson was in the room next door. A mirror showed her reflection lying on a *couch* underneath a sun lamp...*Can't break my sunning time, you know...who is it?* I walked to the threshold of the sun room. She was dressed in scanty underwear, like a bikini, under her own personal sun...*Oh it's you, Sal!*

I'll be right with you... unless you want to cream me up my back. She turned off the sun lamp. I understood then the mystery of her golden skin. Speechless with admiration, I was rooted to the spot in a kind of ecstasy before her almost nude body that I had only dared to intuit when I watched it fully clothed during dancing class. Silently, like someone preparing to carry out a tribal ritual, I dipped my hand into the jar of Max Factor and began to caress that body that like an immense golden sea contained the turquoise islands of her gaze. She reclined on the couch in a pose that years later I would discover was that of the Villa Borghese hermaphrodite. In that position I began to spread the Max Factor cream on her back. Handfuls of it. I had never seen, touched, breathed in a cosmetic-heavenly emanation as sublime, as abysmal, as divinely to my taste. *You have a wonderful body, Mrs. Simpson. Your legs are magnificent!... Oh, dancing, you know...* Sweet mama! shouted my mind, body and soul all at the same time in Spanish.

Should I go over or under your brassiere, Ma'm? Just untie it. My hands shook and I had a very hard time undoing the knot. When I took the Max Factor to the upper edge of the lower part of the bikini, I didn't dare ask her the same thing in English, and skipping over that section, I went directly to the back of her thighs. *I'll do your legs now.* She lay face down and while I caressed her splendid thighs, she asked me if I had come to talk about private dancing lessons. My hands came and went like Porfirio Díaz's pruning shears over that stormy sea of beauty and harmony. I told her no. As though by mistake, my hand passed under the miniscule panty and, letting it rest in that Paradise, I said that



I had come to tell her that I loved her and wanted to marry her. *Don't be silly! I could be your mother, Sal!* All the better. *That's all the better where I come from... Don't be childish!... What's wrong with that?* I continued to caress her for a good while and we got enmeshed in an argument about the pros and cons of our marriage. That I didn't have any experience in life; that she did, and besides, there was the matter of her profession. *Spread your legs apart a little so I can do the insides.* That I couldn't even get a marriage license... *you don't need one in my country.* And money. *What about money?... My dad is in show business. I'm sure he could...* She was already set up. She was known in all of Riverside County and even in Los Angeles. *But I love you and I kissed the back of her knees. Don't be silly! Come on, behave yourself! Love is a very serious matter come my age...* *You could teach me. Real private tutoring, you know.* I invited her to spend Christmas vacation at my house. Imagine the look on my mother's

face! Even though she had said I could invite a friend... *What will your mother say? Oh, come on, just this once. Just imagine!* We could go to Acapulco for New Year's... *That would be wonderful I'm sure, but...* Suddenly we heard the front door open. *That you, Craft?... Yes!* said a ghostly voice from the living room. *My dancing partner,* she told me in a whisper and she hurried into her robe. *Make yourself at home, Craft. I'll be with you in a sec. Want you to meet a young friend of mine who came to ask about private tutoring, etc.* I was very aroused and at that age it's difficult to hide. We left the room. The visitor, impeccable in tails, stood up as we entered, disdainfully letting a splendid

Spanish cape lined with wine-colored silk drape over the back of the armchair. He had left the top hat and his immaculate kid gloves on a nearby chair, leaning an ebony, ivory-handled walking stick against the railing. He bowed deeply to kiss Mrs. Simpson's hand. *Craft, she said, I want you to meet Sal. He is one of my best pupils in Elsinore; and then, speaking to me, Sal, this is Professor Ebing, my dancing partner; we're Ebing & Brenda on the stage, you know.* The professor disparagingly nodded his head slightly, looking the other way. *Mr. Ebing used to be with the Royal Opera in Budapest before the war, you know...Oh, how thrilling!* I said. Mrs. Simpson excused herself. *I'll just put something on, and be right with you. Make yourselves at home.* Mr. Ebing sat back down on his magnificent cape. I don't know if it was because of the tails, but he looked a lot like the father of my fellow cadet, Lugosi. With exaggerated naturalness, he took a silver cigarette case out of his pocket and offered it to me. *Have one of these.* My hands were shaking, my fingers covered with cream. With a great deal of difficulty and without getting up, I stretched out my arm and picked up one of the oval, gold-tipped cigarettes he was offering me. They weren't the same cigarette tips as the butts in the ashtray. I took out my field Zippo and offered him a light. He refused it. He took a very long Dunhill out of his piqué vest and lit his own. He breathed in deeply and became pensive. Ah Vienna! He said, exhaling first through his nostrils and then through his mouth...Ah Vienna, he repeated...*You don't know what life was in Vienna before the war...I was assistant maitre de ballet to the greatest. I have Nijinsky's photograph dedicacée to me. His wife Remola is a distant relative of mine...Saw him do entrechat douze, but now nothing is left; all charm is gone out of life. We have nothing left but those abominable Latin rhythms...Tango is coming back it seems to me...Because of Gilda. Brenda and I are trying to do*

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our best with Amado Mio. He spoke in British English but with a strong Viennese accent. Mrs. Simpson came back after a while. She had put something on: an evening gown, sumptuous in its blood-colored silk folds and drapery, strictly outlining the contours and curves; identical to the one Gilda wears in the Amado Mio scene...*Well, how does it look?...You are absolutely ravishing, my dear,* said the count...*You look real marvelous in it, Ma'm.* She was gorgeous, better than naked. She bragged to us about the dress's label...*straight from Adrian!* The vampire proposed a toast. Later, said Mrs. Simpson, and told him that I had invited her to spend Christmas vacation at my house... Mexiko, huh? said Craft, throwing me a sarcastic grimace that showed his oversized, prominent canine teeth. He was as pale as a sheet. Mrs. Simpson asked me how she would look in that dress in Acapulco for the New Years Eve party. I said it would be marvelous. I imagined her strolling through the garden with her splendorous red dress or sitting on the big sofa in the living room in front of the fireplace. Dracula took a folded piece of paper out of his jacket. *I'm sorry to tell you, my dear,* but you have to decline *this young fellow's invitation. We're all booked for the Christmas season.* From the paper, he read summarily *Elsinore, Christmas ball, Brenda on the 19th, then we have Pirates' Den in LA on the 20th, Coconut Grove on the 21st and 22nd, and so on until New Year's.* So it was impossible. *So why don't we have a drink and do all well-wishing now.* But Mrs. Simpson said she didn't want to rumple her dress and that she would rather review the main steps of Amado Mio to see how the folds acted. She turned on the record player. Ebing put on the top hat and gloves and they danced for a good while. At least a quarter of an hour because the record played automatically at least three times in a row. *All right,* said Dracula. *I think we've quite got it.* Mrs. Simpson asked me how it looked. *Oh,*

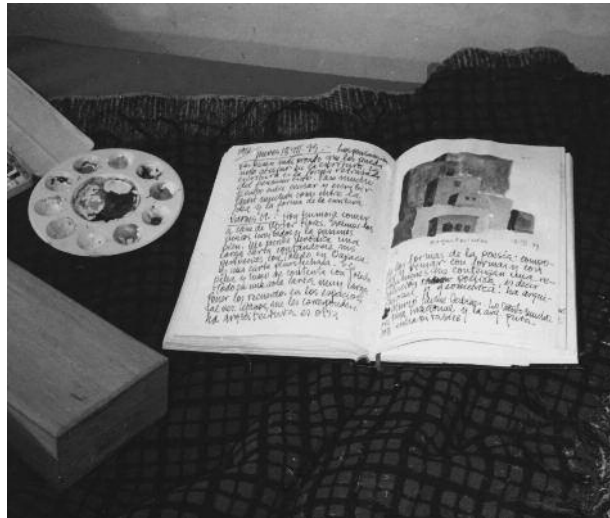
just wonderful, Ma'm... Well, take a last look! And she disappeared to change again. Greatly agitated, Dracula took off the top hat and gloves and served himself a highball that he drank in two or three gulps one after the other. Then he said a few words, in French, I think, that I didn't understand. He explained exaltedly that it was the first verse of a poem dedicated to Poe. *Poe, you know, eh?... Yeah, we had The Raven in class...* Ah! he said. And started to explain to me how only the dance revived him and made the blood flow through his veins. And it was true. He didn't look as pale any more, though his gaze seemed feverish. *It makes my blood boil and my head turn like the big Ferris Wheel in Prater...* He served himself another whiskey and sat down, caressing the ivory head of his cane. He took out his cigarette case. He offered me a cigarette without holding it out toward me. He put it away again; he lit it and breathed deeply. He exhaled a mouthful of bluish

smoke and said, *Listen to me, my young fellow, if you have any intentions about Brenda...* I assured him that my intentions were perfectly honorable, that I was in love with Mrs. Simpson and I wanted to marry her... He raised his cane and put its ferrule against my neck. *Listen to me, you little scoundrel, if you insist, you know what I will do?* I said I didn't have the slightest idea. *I will transfix you!* And he added that all he had to do was to press a little button in the handle and a blade would jump out of the tip of his cane. It was like the one in Gilda. He was going to count to seven for me to give up that sublime love, for me to forswear that immense passion... *Einz!*...for me to renounce the azure of her gaze... *Zwei!* The graze of her sun-drenched flesh... *Drei!*...the warmth of her heavenly skin... *Vier!*...

the culmination of the Eternal Feminine... *Fünf!*... *Please help me, Mrs. Simpson, Ma'm!*... And at that moment, she came in. *Hey! Hey! What's the matter with you guys!* Now she was wearing a simple tailored tweed suit and low-heeled shoes, which gave her a *motherly* look. *Put your damn stick away, Craft!* *Oh, no I won't,* and he smiled like a character from Psychopathia. All he had to do was press the little button for the stiletto to come out. *Stop it, I tell you!* shouted Mrs. Simpson. Dracula smiled his malignant smile again. I didn't care one way or the other. I was very happy to spill my blood and

give my life for the peerless Lenore. A moan could be heard, like something spilling, like a visceral abundance emptying, like an exhalation of the last breath of life. Then I heard a voice saying *Hey! Come on, you lazy bastard! Wake up! Wake up!* The final exhalation was the whining of the bus's pneumatic brakes. We had arrived in

Los Angeles. *We made it, BF! Here we are!* said Fred. When I got off the bus I didn't know if what I saw around me was part of the same dream. The longest night of my life continued... And now what do we do?... **MM**



The writer's day book.



NOTES

¹ Fragment of Salvador Elizondo, *Elsinore. Un cuaderno* (Mexico City: FCE, 2001), pp. 85. Translated by Heather Dashner. Given the main character's bilingual experience, the author originally included many English fragments in this Spanish-language book. In this translation, the fragments originally in English have been put in italics for the reader's identification. [Translator's Note.]