The Magic Dogs of San Vicente
Not just purgatory but hell awaits
those who could have done good and did not do it.

It is the reverse
of the beatitude that the Bible has
for those who are saved,
for the saints,
who could have done wrong and did not.
Of those who are condemned it will be said:
They could have done good and did not.

— Oscar Romero, July 16, 1977
crouched down behind some big rocks, a little dirt from the earth blown in circles by the wind, and another gust throwing small dry twigs and pebbles up in the air, the Flores brothers, still breathing heavily, they’d been running without looking behind them, using their legs for all they were worth, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, not far from San Esteban Catarina, a stone’s throw if you had a good arm, rallying the courage to lift their heads up from behind the boulder to look at a dapple-gray horse neighing, raising its head, lowering it, nodding like it was agreeing to something, the Flores brothers asking it with their eyes what’d happened to them, the horse returning their looks without saying anything, just nodding, it was a magnificent animal, a horse in all its majesty, not some mangy sway-backed creature out of a nightmare, and they thought that maybe, after all, it wasn’t agreeing to anything, it hadn’t been there a minute ago when they’d made for the rocks, so where’d it come from, the Flores brothers like crazy people straight out of the nuthouse, but the dapple-gray was there, standing on the other side of the rock, a really big stone, maybe part of a megalithic monument, or something a glacier had left in its tracks, nothing exceptional, really
big almost round boulders, no monument, but a lucky break, they’d found them not long after they took off running, a few minutes later, after they’d seen something they figured they’d never see again, finding a few large rocks gathered together, a sort of deposit of enormous stones, big enough to hide behind, and the Flores brothers, ready to throw in the towel right now and die where they were, crouched safely behind a boulder with a dapple-gray horse watching them under an early sun in the blazing heat of morning.

José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, Graciela Menéndez, Gustavo and Emiliano, Lucía and Concepción, Benavides and Alfonso, and little Margó, it was her birthday, Margó drinking from a bottle of orange soda, it was hot and she was thirsty, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, Emiliano and Lucía, Concepción and Gustavo and Benavides, Alfonso and Margó, no one saying a word, an angel passing overhead, a break with lots of suspense, then Graciela, what do you think you’ll get for your birthday, Margó? the Flores brothers, between sips and swallows, and Wilber Eduardo, a short recitation, Zan nican temoc y xochimiquiztli tlalpan, / aci yehua ye nican, “Here on earth the flowery death has descended, / it is coming near,” a couple of lines from a poem, José Matías, narrowing his eyes, that’s what we thought was happening to us, we all remember, don’t we, like it was yesterday, and Graciela Menéndez and the others, they all heard the words pitched at them, struck in the face both in Náhuatl and in translation, not questioning for an instant what they’d understood of the Uto-Aztecan language, relating directly to their own experiences, joined harmoniously with the two lines of poetry by Axayacatl, the son of a Mexica prince and a lady from Tlacopan, words confirming what they were thinking now, on account of what José Matías and Wilber Eduardo had just said, and what they’d been through, arrest and torture and round-the-clock fear that couldn’t possibly be the result of not sleeping with their feet pointing south to avoid the evil eye, “a man is no more free of his past than his body,” and Concepción, now’s not the time, mis amigos, it’s Margó’s birthday, and the rest of them agreeing, let’s forget about it, and Gustavo, you’re right, Concha, it isn’t the time or the place, our story isn’t meant for the ears of a child, what a fucked up world, all of them except Margó sighing a big choral sigh.

They were sitting outside under a hot sun — all the windows in the house were open and it was still so hot you could fry an egg on the tiled floor — neighbors and friends, a birthday celebration, each a welcome guest of the other, and everyone sitting as still as they could sit in the roasting afternoon, without a water hose to cool them off, Concepción smoking a cigarillo, a beer in Gustavo’s hand, Graciela Menéndez rubbing lotion on her arms, Margó, putting the bottle of orange soda down, clapping her hands, it was her birthday party, she’d come with Alfonso, an uncle like a second father to her, on account of Margó’s parents who were killed in San Salvador, not so long ago, an incompetent, messed up shoot-out between maras—la vida entre las maras— and the Sombra negra, another tragedy, in a long line of tragedies, with plenty of weeping, if it isn’t that it’s this, or is it the other way around, and Alfonso, Graciela’s neighbor,
always with a book in his hand, Benavides whistling at the branches of a tree, a bird maybe, and Lucía and Emiliano, Emiliano eating a pupusa revuelta of pork, beans, cheese, with loroco, called quilite, and a big spoonful of curtido, fermented cabbage relish, and a very spicy tomato salsa on the side, despite the fact that he couldn’t digest pork and chiles like he used to, they all agreed that you retain only what you think is significant, life is like that, not like retaining water, your body filling up, fattening up, it may be uncomfortable but it isn’t noteworthy, and Graciela Menéndez, so, mis amigos, our Flores brothers, let’s not talk about the past, we’ve been through enough, Margó’s been through enough, so scarred and urgently in need of repair, and Wilber Eduardo, it was just a little something by Axayacatl, Water-Face, an Aztec Emperor, shrugging his shoulders, José Matías putting his hand on his brother’s neck, gently squeezing it, reassuring him, voice definitely audible, it’s ok, mi hermano, leave the poetry for later.

Emiliano, with his mouth full, swallowing without chewing, knowing it’ll destroy his belly, talking about whatever came to his mind, kites heading north fly hundreds of feet above the earth, ducks never touch the ground, they just fly by, waving farewell, but nobody listening, Emiliano, a forceful voice with peppery breath, my guts are burning, hermana, speaking to no one, speaking to everyone, maybe a suicide attempt with a pupusa revuelta in my hand, you’ve got to hand it to me — and Concepción, interrupting him, hang on, El Puño, she always called him the Fist, don’t be so self-centered, thinking of yourself, inconsideration not indigestion is what you ought to worry about, keep your mind on why we’re here, not what’s in your hand, you knew those chiles would knock you out, TKO, and Emiliano, okay Concha okay, and Concepción, a cloud of smoke from a cigarillo, it’s Margó’s birthday, let’s sing another birthday song, looking at the others, and the others, laughter rising, tumbling to the ground, Graciela clapping her hands to a rhythm in her head, Emiliano, how about another mouthful instead, chewing slowly this time, smiling, nodding at Concepción, looking at Lucía for support, just kidding around, pequeña, winking at Margó, Margó winking back, and Emiliano, a column of confidence not a pillar of smoke on account of he’d swallowed a handful of Trumpet Brand Seirogan gastrointestinal pills from Osaka this morning after breakfast, Emiliano, I won’t deny myself some pleasure, not now, not ever, even if it kills me, and everyone laughing but Lucía, who couldn’t remember if they had more industrial-strength indigestion tablets waiting at home.

José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, crouching down behind some really big rocks, like there weren’t any strong and leafy tempisque trees to climb in order to stay out of the hands of trouble, but there were tempisque, and plenty of other trees, too, the tihuilote trees, maybe the big balsam tree — bálsamo del Perú—and its vanilla-scented resin, but no, they were far away from the western Pacific coast, so maybe a White Sapote, known as cochitzapotl, trees for them to hide behind standing just another two hundred yards away, which gave plenty of shade for anyone who bothered to run an extra two hundred yards, but not the Flores brothers, they were
out of breath, and José Matías, who smoked Delta Reds, so forget about him making another two hundred yards without dropping dead, and the barbed wire and stone fence, you could’ve hidden behind the stone fence, crawled on your hands and knees, the cadejos would’ve protected you from there on, the magic dogs appearing where they least expected it, maybe from San Esteban Catarina, or San Vicente, it was a secret, it was nothing, only the Flores brothers stopped at the big round boulders, short of breath, not knowing the cadejos were anywhere near them, they’d have to find José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, the cadejos up to the task, with weather eyes open, always, just sniffing them out, here’s one, there’s the other, and maybe Wilber Eduardo, breathing hard through his mouth, maybe he could’ve gone on, but he drew in the reins of endurance out of sympathy for his brother, who smoked like a chimney.

The magic dogs weren’t far away—unusual in daylight—they were resting beneath a rare Mexican yew, not thinking the Flores brothers were in trouble, at least nothing urgent, and so hot in the sun and dry wind that a siesta was the right thing, now for a few minutes, to close their eyes, two magic dogs that didn’t pay attention to the seasons, they didn’t know which season it was, this one or that one, the temperature was their guide, it didn’t seem to matter if it was day or night, a siesta, and the cadejos—instead of paws, they had hooves like a deer—a yawn, the cadejos were stretched out on the ground beneath an evergreen shrub, the Mexican yew, a landscape imagined or real, while the horse without a rider nodded its head at José Matías and Wilber Eduardo.

The Flores brothers and the silence of the sky above them, silence filled with unheard voices, then a bird gave a long high-pitched shriek to break the stillness, waking them from a frightened sleep with their eyes open, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, trembling and sweating extravagantly beneath the broiling sun, drawn back behind not-so-perfectly-round boulders with broad shoulders worn smooth by erosion, shrugging beneath an over-flying White-breasted Hawk, its dark upperparts almost black, thighs whitish-buff and under parts and cheeks entirely white.

The screeching hawk shot through the sky above them, as fast as it had appeared it was gone, and the Flores brothers squinted up to find it but saw nothing—wearing sunglasses but squinting just the same—so they got to thinking about the past, a thousand years ago, it was that far away, and they couldn’t help but remember even if they didn’t want to think about it, the bird’s shriek was like a man’s cry, it was a cry they’d heard before that had everything to do with men like General Juan Humberto Reyes Vehemente, and General José Enrique Embustera, to give a name to a couple of faces, maybe it was both of them, or it wasn’t them at all, it didn’t much matter to the Flores brothers, there were sergeants, captains, majors, lieutenant-colonels, a range of soldiers inflicting punishments on those who hadn’t done anything, who lived and believed correctly—and one of them had been there, maybe just Reyes Vehemente, at that moment Director-General of the Salvadoran National Guard, but who can say, and José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, a private interrogation, they were blindfolded and didn’t see his face, they might’ve recognized General Reyes Vehemente’s voice,
his polished boots, or maybe both generals were there, and if they were, then one had his hands clasped behind his back, and the other, José Enrique Embustera, his arms were straight down at his sides, but if they weren’t there, at least the orders had come from them, from Reyes Vehemente or José Enrique Embustera, shooting down from above like malevolent stars, and the orders were carried out to the letter, as it’s always said, by imbeciles, by soldiers who were fanatically willing to dish out pain, soldiers dirtying their hands with blood and piss and shit as if there was something powerful attracting them; if General Reyes Vehemente was standing nearby, out of sight but within range of hearing the goings-on, he glanced furtively at his pocket watch, waiting impatiently to eat his lunch.

The Flores brothers, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, captured and beaten, flown in a helicopter, on their way to El Paraíso, a garrison, before reaching the National Guard headquarters, together in a cell a hundred yards away from the room with a concrete floor and a long table and a metal bed-frame, a sort of parrilla, and a bucket of water as big as a tub, the room where interrogations were held, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, tortured, hearing the national anthem everyday at 6:00 a.m., they were witnesses, at first hand, to the burned corpse wrapped in a plastic sheet thrown out onto the cement floor in front of them, stinking like burned roast pork, nauseating and sweet, stop staring and pick it up you sons of a bitch, what are you looking at? don’t drop it, ¡pendejos! follow the sergeant out with it, ¡frágil! the lieutenant shouted, laughing, it was so funny, and now, hiding behind some big rocks, boulders, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo spoke the words without saying them: “They took out their knives and stuck them under his fingernails; after they took his fingernails off, then they broke his elbows; afterwards they gouged out his eyes; then they took their bayonets and sliced his skin all around his chest, arms, and legs; they then took his hair off and the skin of his scalp, and when they saw there was nothing left to do with him, they threw gasoline on him and burned him.”

José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, opening their eyes hidden on the back side of two pairs of sunglasses, large metal Ray-Ban Aviators, Wilber Eduardo smiling an uncomfortable smile, sunglasses reflecting the bright sunlight, the two brothers facing each other, blinking, crouched down behind some big rocks, a neighing horse nearby, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo saying in the same voice at the same time that it was a sin, a real sin, not one of those things you say when you mean that it’s a shame, but a real sin that goes straight up to heaven, written in a book up there for everyone to read who gets there, and they couldn’t forget a horror they’d seen and smelled, that stinking body burnt to a crisp, the smell, and that once-was-a-living-human-being that would stay with them for the rest of their lives with no chance of fragrant resedo flowers falling like tears from the sky.

They weren’t often easily frightened since the day they had to carry a body wrapped in a plastic sheet out to where they dumped bodies that nobody’d see ever again, it’d been enough for anybody to their dying day; now they were trembling on account of what they’d seen, overwhelmed by an anxiousness that weighed a ton, the oxygen held back in their lungs,
and what they knew and what they didn’t know about what they’d seen today was piled one layer on top of the other and stood as high as a skyscraper leaning into the bright sun; it wasn’t the same kind of fear, nothing like the torture and the body they carried away, but, still, it was more than they could bear.

So, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, talking without speaking, a kind of telepathy saying, the clock’s ticking, let’s think of everything we can and do nothing about it, no — so the clock’s ticking, and do we get up from behind these stones and get back up on the horse we fell off of? in a manner of speaking, and climb into the pickup truck and drive off to find a solution, straighten it out, once and for all, or do we stay here, shivering even though it isn’t cold, like we’re going to have a heart attack from fright, seeking answers to questions without answers, you and me, after all we’ve been through, brother, dropping dead, at the same time right here.

Like it could hear what they were thinking by means other than the known senses, the dapple-gray horse turned its back on them after fluttering its eyelashes, a flirting girl, the horse turned on its hooves and started to walk away, not slightly in a hurry, a slow gait — no trot, gallop, pace or canter — away from the Flores brothers hiding behind a few boulders, proof in capital letters that it knew exactly what they were thinking.

And what they were thinking now amounted to a plan of little genius but great necessity because José Matías had left his cigarettes in the glove compartment of the pickup and it was time for a smoke, you mean you really got to have a cigarette, now? and Wilber Eduardo, shaking his head, no way, brother, but knowing it was going to be that way if José Matías said so, and like that it was one two three and up off their knees and standing in the bright sunlight for all the world to see like they were being pursued in a Western, the pistols were loaded and they were going to shoot it out while making a break for it.

The *cadejos* were standing by, nothing and nobody told them to get up from lying beneath a Mexican yew to make the two hundreds yards in seconds flat, the blink of an eye, really, but that was how the *cadejos* worked when they were on the job, standing on their hooves just behind José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, who were signed up in two opposing parties, brothers divided by the desire of one over the reason of the other, one a minority of cautious timidity in disagreement with his brother, the other, an outspoken proponent of his own needs who proceeded to intone with a purposeful whisper that they’d better be going on their way, horse or no horse, to the pickup truck.

The Flores brothers fanned away the sweat that poured from their pores out of fear and the heat of the merciless sun, and the *cadejos* accompanied them around the boulders, dirt from the earth blown by the wind in circles and throwing small dry twigs in their faces, the four of them, dogs and man, Wilber Eduardo, and the guardian angel must watch over us, Wilber Eduardo crossing himself, believing in guardian angels, not seeing or hearing the *cadejos* walking soundlessly beside them on their deerlike hooves.
in a landscape straight out of the Bible, when was the last time you were in a church, and his brother meant it but said it sarcastically, I need a smoke, and you’re my brother.

The first sign straight out of the Bible, the first promise, the welcoming abundance of nature — the mystery of the world was a world of mystery, where forests once stood, now cleared and farmed land — a twenty-five-foot-tall jocote tree with its edible ripening red oval drupe, or stone fruit, eaten ripe with or without the skin — sometimes eaten unripe with salt and vinegar or lime juice — and José Matías and Wilber Eduardo walked around it, looking up at the fruit, while following in the walking gait of the horse, who kept on nodding its head as if to say they were heading in the right direction, don’t turn back, my brothers, have courage and you’ll be safe when you get to your truck and turn the key in the ignition to start it up, and don’t forget the pleasure of that first hit off the cigarette; and the second sign was a cica, a plant like a palm with hard palm leaves but not at all a palm tree, spreading its spiky long fingers out into the sunlight, with narrow, thick leaflets, it was often confused with a palm but it’s a cycad, and it reached out at the Flores brothers with paired, horny razor-sharp spines.

Wilber Eduardo turned his head to look back at the jocote tree, thought of the syrup made of panela, jocote and mango, and licked his lips, tasted the sweetness on his tongue, and when he looked at where he was going, straight ahead at the grasslands rolling out in front of him on the central high plateau in the eastern interior that lay between two mountain ranges, and maybe at the volcano San Vicente — Vince

is a prince, José Matías said, without missing a beat — known as Chinchontepec, Las Chiches, the Jiboa Valley stretching out northeast and north of the western summit, Wilber Eduardo immediately lowered his gaze, rolled his eyes, and realized the horse wasn’t there, they weren’t following anything but their own path toward the pickup, so he nudged his brother with his elbow, José Matías, marching for his cigarettes, chin up, Wilber Eduardo thrusting his own chin forward in the direction of the nothing-like-a-horse landscape, giving José Matías a frown from behind his sunglasses, his brother raised his Ray-Bans, shook his head, Wilber Eduardo smiled a smile of defeat, together they shook their heads, and they were wondering whether they’d imagined the horse in this land of enchanted and treacherous volcanoes that gave the earth its fertility and influenced the mood of stars and terrestrial bodies and humankind.

At that point, far away from their past, with Las Chiches watching them, proud or not they couldn’t tell from where they were walking with the volcano in the distance, quite a distance, the Flores brothers realized something serious was happening, and the ascending emotion of their immersion in a new kind of fear dropped on their heads with the weight of the three boulders they’d been hiding behind after what they’d seen sent them on the run, leaving a pickup truck, and what was in it, to stand in the broiling sun. Off-setting the worrying effect of a horse that either was or was not there a minute ago, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, finding fault with themselves for having seen or not seen but definitely thinking and believing they saw a horse leading them away from the jocote tree and some big rocks,
boulders to hide behind, boulders to help them forget or ignore the frightening thing they saw in the bright light of day—offsetting it all was José Matías’ concentration while champing at the cigarette bit that wasn’t yet in his teeth, and a thirst for something sweet on Wilber Eduardo’s part, after having tasted the syrup made of panela, *jocote* and mango, imaginary but saliva-inducing, the two of them knowing there was something like salvation waiting for them in the pickup.

José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, surveying the landscape, a look to the left, a look to the right, kicking up a little dirt with their Western-style boots, no horse, no hawk, no threat from the apparition they’d seen that made them take off like a couple of forest rabbits, tapetis, under the hot sun, and they thought they’d left the doors of the truck open wide on the wild landscape but they were shut and locked, so José Matías reached in his trousers pocket for the keys, Wilber Eduardo let his hand drop for a second onto the hood which burned him slightly before he snapped it away from the flame.

They settled themselves in the cab with an abundance of heat and a case of twelve-ounce cans of Kolashampan Bravo under a tarp in the bed of the truck behind them, half a dozen vacuum-sealed plastic bags of one hundred percent natural San Andrés brand *Jocote rojo* and several glass jars of Miguel’s Changungas, or nance fruit, in syrup on the floor in the front beneath the dash, a couple of packs of Delta Reds, not *mentolados*, on the seat, an open pack in the glove compartment, and almost smoking by themselves in the heat with the windows rolled up.

José Matías went for the glove compartment like a dope fiend, Wilber Eduardo didn’t pay his brother any attention, but sighed, craving something pleasantly clean, pure, and cool to drink, José Matías lit up, switched on the ignition and the air from the air conditioner shot out of the vents with a vengeance and behind the initial gust of counterfeit wind came the rancid smell of the burst guts of a public-domain mongrel, filling their nostrils, a gasp from the pair of them, they both started to choke, the Flores brothers feeling sick, despite the cigarette that hung from José Matías’ lips, burning cheap tobacco that could’ve hidden any smell but the smell of a dead dog.

So how did a dead mongrel decked out in moth-eaten fur land under the hood and downwind of the air conditioner where we’d smell it and choke to death, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, jumping out of the cab into the burning hot sun, pinching their noses shut, covering their mouths with a free hand and gagging from the smell; José Matías threw his cigarette away as soon as his feet hit the ground, Wilber Eduardo stomped his white shoes, shaking his long black hair slicked back on his head with Vaseline and Brylcreem.

They raised the hood of the truck and looked in at the corpse, wishing they’d found a pomegranate tree there instead, then checked their pockets by patting them down with the palms
of their hands — maybe they’d carried gloves in them — but
didn’t find anything, go get a newspaper out of the cab, José
Matías, I’ll keep an eye on it so it doesn’t disappear, by sleight
of hand, like it got there, and Wilber Eduardo, his brother,
after saying what he’d said, nothing more, kept on shaking
his head until his hair fell down in front of his face.

The newspaper didn’t really help them even though they’d
read it, the animal’s fur was stuck to the hot parts of the
engine and the underside of the hood that’d been sitting in
the blistering heat of the sun for more than an hour, but
they used the paper sheets to protect their hands and pried
the thing off what it was stuck to, top and bottom, each
turning his head away, tucking his chin into his chest to
keep out the direct get-the-drift of the rotten smell of burst
guts; they dropped it, and the mongrel made a thump when
it hit the ground; a whispered hissing sound, the air expelled
or the gas escaped.

There wasn’t a mountain pine or oak tree near the cleared
land where they’d left the pickup, not far from San Esteban
Catarina, a municipality in the department of San Vi-
cente — a parish priest, Alirio Napoleón Macías, was killed
there by a paramilitary group on August 4, 1979 — cleared
land where there wasn’t a dead branch from a dead tree to
scrape off the parts of the mongrel stuck to the engine and
underside of the hood, instead, an old wool plaid shirt be-
hind the seat in the cab, torn into rectangles and used to
wipe clean the foul surfaces.

José Matías, a grim expression on his face, the Sihuanaba
must’ve put it there, and Wilber Eduardo confirming his
brother’s words with a nod of his head, and the cadejos right
there but unseen, wearing clothes of daylight and air, invis-
ible and standing guard over the Flores brothers, Wilber
Eduardo crossing himself again, the guardian angels aren’t
protecting us, that’s pretty obvious, and José Matías giving
his brother a frown, a few words that were like a frown,
spirits that’re supposed to watch over and protect us are
around here somewhere, his reassuring voice, and just the
same, José Matías, disappointed and not convinced that a
mongrel cooking on the engine of the truck — the unmistak-
able work of a Sihuanaba — fell into the sphere of respon-
sibility for a guardian angel, maybe for the cadejos, it was
more than likely, but could they appear in daylight and
where were they? José Matías was convinced of nothing but
the craving he had for another cigarette, the first lost to the
stink of the moment and the need to get out of the truck, so
he lit another one, drew in a lungful and exhaled, truly
satisfied with the taste of the Delta Reds.

Wilber Eduardo, trying to remember if they’d seen a shape-
changing spirit in the form of a beautiful, long-haired
woman, maybe washing clothes, a Sihuanaba, who lured
men away from their planned routes only to lose them in
deep canyons before revealing her horse’s face, and José
Matías, leaning against the cab, worrying, the terrible fear
of everything after what’d happened to them, and the sor-
rows of having been born at all, worrying like only the
Flores brothers worry, José Matías, a creased forehead,
maybe consternation, smoking his cigarette.

They’d seen a dapple-gray horse, Wilber Eduardo knew this
because his heart told him so, and he was sure ever after,
and then José Matías confirmed it when his brother asked him, exhaling another cloud, but the horse they saw was a solid-hoofed plant-eating domesticated mammal with a flowing mane and tail, a real horse on four legs with hooves planted firmly on terrestrial ground—without profuse weeping, a sign of worry, no weeping at all, and to be sure to protect themselves from the Sihuanaba, whether they’d seen it or not, the Flores brothers, before getting into the pickup, the pickup’s engine running like a charm, the two brothers took turns biting the machete—not too hard, not too soft, and no chewing—that they kept under the seat in the cab.

José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, counting seconds that passed as they got further away from the mongrel’s corpse rotting in the merciless heat of the sun, and there was the Sihuanaba to keep in mind, whether she was following them or not—contrary to the legend which would have them following her—but the Flores brothers, José Matías smoking his third cigarette, and Wilber Eduardo drinking the syrup from an open glass jar of Miguel’s Changungas—he’d devoured the nance fruit faster than they’d left behind the dead dog with José Matías’ foot pressed down hard on the accelerator—the Flores brothers rode in the pickup headed southeast in the direction of Río Lempa, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo wanting to lose themselves and find themselves, they wanted everything at once, sitting comfortably in the pickup ranging the seismic bumps and curves in the road taking them away from the apparition that had frightened them.

The sun burns away our weakness, José Matías—you felt it like I felt it pouring down hot as lava from Las Chiches—and in our case, speaking for the two of us, impotence, fear, stress, and worrying, too, they’re our weaknesses, so I want the word to go out—are you listening?—okay, we’re cautious, it’s all right, this isn’t torture, not like what we went through, not shot in the left forearm, no alligator clips and electric shocks, we aren’t hung up by our hands—they called it the plane, like we’d ever forget!—what we’re afraid of won’t kill us, not today, so there’s nothing to worry about, maybe the heat of the sun burned our weakness away, but I don’t believe it, otherwise—really, this is too much for me—scared is for kids, so we aren’t kids, definitely, on account of our age, sixty, sixty-two—I’m making a speech, you don’t have to tell me, there are times I talk a lot, too much, maybe I’m nervous, but what I’m saying, what I’m trying to say is, well, what is this? and José Matías, we’re running away, the only words that came out of his mouth, José Matías, down-shifting, flipping his cigarette, the butt, through the crack of the open window, watching it tumble weightlessly in the air, eyes back on the road, seismic bumps jolting the cab, buckled up and safely in their pickup, the Flores brothers heading toward Río Lempa and far from what scared them.

Wilber Eduardo, waiting for more from José Matías, but not another word, his brother shifting into high gear, a grunt, that’s all he heard, Wilber Eduardo, high priest of yuca frita, wiping nance-fruit syrup from his lips with a handkerchief, looking at his watch, an imitation, the original costs a fortune, a birthday present from Gustavo, I can’t afford a real one, it’s the best imitation money can buy, you’ll have to take my word for it, and Wilber Eduardo, his birthday and
a big smile, you’re a real friend, I won’t take it off, never—unless I’m washing dishes in a sink full of water; and now, Wilber Eduardo, looking at his watch, and the time, one- forty, Wilber Eduardo, he looked at José Matías, saying, an additional fact to keep in mind, mi hermano—are you listening? — the sun like the flor de isote will beg our pardon, conclusively, for keeping our impotence, fear and stress for as long as we have to while we’re alive, so you and me, triumphant and wrapped in waves of applause, we’re going to find the exceptional detail which explains it, the apparition—in daylight! — so distant, and at the same time so close and distinct I can still see it.

The cadejos didn’t leave them, the Flores brothers didn’t know if they’d left them or not because they hadn’t seen them in the first place, but the cadejos were riding dreamily in the back next to the case of twelve-ounce cans of Kolashampan Bravo lying under a tarp, and the wind ripped through the back of the pickup, whipping the tarp which flapped like a big black wing, the magic dogs weren’t disturbed by the wind and the sound of the wind, and felt nothing but the sensation of flying through limitless time untold by man with their sleepy dog’s eyes closed, the bumpy ride didn’t bother them either, they just stretched out their legs, rested their chins on them, and tucked their noses under the edge of the tarp where it was tied down, out of the flow of wind.
some ghost or monster in a Mexican horror movie, maybe *El grito de la muerte*, or *El hombre y el monstruo*, it throws me off, and no matter what you think, I can tell by the way you’re concentrating on the road that it doesn’t put you on cloud nine either, no jumping for joy with life, not you or me—we’ve been through enough already, those fucking generals, fucking everybody serving the government, things are bad for people born here, and those generals, Reyes Vehemente and José Enrique Embustera, may they rot in hell when they get there, *mi hermano*, because they’ll send them back here, a judgement on their lives—at least one of them, what do you want to bet? and that’s better than nothing, deported like the worms they are, that’s what ought to happen, and the Department of Homeland Security, *en el Norte*—like it or not, and I don’t like it—they started the ball rolling, Reyes Vehemente and José Enrique Embustera, they lost the case in court, at least one of them will get sent back here—maybe then the *culíos* we’ve got now will fuck them up good, give them a little of their own medicine—but I won’t hold my breath, we know better than that, can you imagine? sent back here, that’s a laugh, but eight months ago, an immigration judge saying Reyes Vehemente can be deported on account of the rights charges against him—am I dreaming?—pinch me, *mi hermano*, from West Palm Beach to here, I read somewhere he lives in Palm Coast, Florida, the motherfucker, and Reyes Vehemente, he already paid out three hundred large, that’s three-hundred thousand six years ago, they lost the case in 2002, it was to the tune of fifty-four point six million, total—just try and count it on your fingers, *mi hermano*—I hope they shit their pants, both of them, who shit on honorable people like us, and I’ve really got to wash my hands, they’re sticky with *changungas* syrup.

José Matías, not looking at his brother, nodding his head, okay, you’re right, I feel like I’ve seen a ghost, maybe a monster out of a Mexican movie, I’m a bit sick in my stomach on account of it, okay? there’s something you can wipe your hands on in the glove compartment, and while you’re in there, get me another pack of cigarettes, will you? José Matías, keeping his eyes on *la Carretera Panamericana*, looking for a turnoff, maybe an off-ramp, but more likely a junction or an intersection, it wasn’t a big highway right there, just before they entered a small town, maybe a village, and slowing down enough to read the signs along the road, or no signs at all, because José Matías knew where he was going, turning off just before the Lempa on a secondary highway running north, and in due course they’d pass little San Lorenzo to the east, not the San Lorenzo north of Atiquizaya, the Flores brothers, they were heading toward the town of Lajas y Canoas.

* A document in the Flores brothers’ hands, not very long ago, it felt like yesterday, Wilber Eduardo, a printout, you can get your hands on anything these days, and José Matías, not volcanoes and a cure for old age, *mi hermano*, but thanks to our cousin, Luz, who’s as talented as a magician with these machines, and Wilber Eduardo, fumbling with the first page,
confirming what his brother was saying, computers, you’re right, it’s here in our hands faster than the mail and without a postman, one brother looking over the other’s shoulder, these pages, hang on, don’t turn them so fast, the pages sending words of contentment to weary eyes that open and shut with surprise, a surfeit of ¡Madre de Dios! and ¡Dios mío! their voices reacting to an orthodoxy of pleasure, it was the real thing, wasn’t it, absolutely authentic, in every respect, and Wilber Eduardo, it can’t be true but I’m reading it, so it must be true, José Matías, you can bet your life it’s true, mi hermano, proud of the cooperation on the part of the citizenry, and the Center for Justice and Accountability, on April 11, 2013, announcing for all the world to see, the release, at last, by the Justice Department, a document, and the exact words of immigration judge James K. Grim’s ruling, ordering the deportation of General Juan Humberto Reyes Vehemente (hereinafter Respondent) commander of the Salvadoran National Guard between 1979 and 1983, to El Salvador.

The broad outline of the ruling, known since the judge issued it in February 2012, and reaffirming it in August, his reasoning and supporting documentation, the breadth, depth and scope of it all, the decision, a finding ordering the former general’s removal, everything remaining a secret on account of the Justice Department, controlling immigration courts, which declined to release the information until now, and today, not very long ago, it felt like yesterday, it was in their hands, thanks to their cousin Luz, the Flores brothers, José Matías and Wilber Eduardo, trembling with excitement at the discovery that turned their eyes to saucers.

Extract:

VI. Conclusion

In summary, upon careful review of the entirety of the record, for the specific reasons discussed above, the Court sustains all the allegations in the charging documents, and finds Respondent removable pursuant to section 237(a)(4)(D) of the Act as an alien described in INA § 212(a)(3)(E)(iii)(II), on the following independent bases:

1) Respondent assisted or otherwise participated in the extrajudicial killings of Manuel Toledo and Vinicio Bazzaglia;

2) Respondent assisted or otherwise participated in the extrajudicial killings of American churchwomen Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan;

3) Respondent assisted or otherwise participated in the extrajudicial killings of Michael Hammer, Mark Pearlman, and José Rodofo Viera at the Sheraton Hotel;

4) Respondent assisted or otherwise participated in the extrajudicial killings of at least 16 Salvadoran peasants at Las Hojas, Sansonate;

5) Respondent assisted or otherwise participated in the extrajudicial killings of three individuals found on February 1, 1988 at Puerta del Diablo;
way to El Paraíso, a garrison, before reaching the National Guard headquarters in the big city, scratched and bruised but standing, and now, after a couple of days at headquarters, a room four by four feet — they didn’t have a yardstick or a ruler to measure it, their feet, maybe, but they were swollen and dirty and bleeding, and it wasn’t easy to walk on them, the Flores brothers, separate rooms, not the best hotel in the country, caged and suffocated by the length of their own arms and legs — you could hear the traffic in the street at midday, or it was screams from other men and women, a loud harsh piercing cry, like screeching tires, a lot of cuts, slices of skin shaved off with a machete, not enough to kill anyone, just a little skinning, and lesions and track marks from electric shock treatments, then vomiting tortillas and beans in a corner of the cell, and pain, plenty of that went along with it.

Not enough room for both of them, they shared everything except the cell they slept in, but standing in the corridor, catching a glimpse, making eye contact, maybe in adjacent cells, and the smell of someone shitting themselves, it wasn’t me you motherfucker! crawling, kicked and cursed, life sinking in the shit, but without giving up, and the weariness of absolute death that doesn’t come, count with your fingers while they still work, with the national anthem every morning, and cramps in the lower belly where they hit them, one at a time, shitting in their pants, you can sleep in your own shit, culero, or wipe it on your brother’s face.

José Matías, shivering and sweating, a body temperature out of its mind, rising and falling, José Matías crawling on
I want to thank Fermín Herrera, professor of Chicana/o studies at California State University, Northridge, who teaches Náhuatl, also known as Aztec or Mexican, the most widely spoken indigenous language of North America, for his contributions to my book. I also want to thank Hugh Hazelton, Associate Professor of Spanish (retired) at Concordia University, Montreal, author and translator, for his participation and support. My special thanks to Salvador Torres Saso, poet, novelist, and friend for his inestimable help, guidance, and a reader’s pair of sharp eyes.
Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1954, Mark Fishman has lived and worked in Paris since 1995. He attended the Bradford College of Art and Technology in Bradford, England, and studied filmmaking at the San Francisco Art Institute with George Kuchar. He has lived in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. While living in San Francisco, he participated in the movements supporting the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. His short stories have appeared in a number of literary magazines such as the Chicago Review, the Carolina Quarterly, the Black Warrior Review, the Mississippi Review, Frank (Paris), The Literary Review. He was the English-language editor of The Purple Journal (Paris) and Les Cahiers Purple (Lisbon).