

You just can't write at home, she once said to her mother, not when it's full of your own crap. *They would slink up to the girl boarders like a two-headed snake.* Barcelona was full of crap too, but someone else's crap. Crap that had nothing to do with her. *Diego and Eduardo would be one and the same.* That was the good thing about living there: in Spain, she could write like a Mexican. *Diego's hair would be slathered in oil.* Writing like a Mexican meant being a waterfall with no river. *Eduardo would have eyes like a vulture.* Never had she been more aware of her own Mexicanness than when she first got to Barcelona. *Diego's eyes would look straight through things.* Never had the UNAM university's jingoistic motto, "The spirit shall speak for my race", made so much sense. *Short, dirty blonde curls would fall across Eduardo's brow.* In Barcelona she could write without having to prove who she was. *Vasconcelos was a real prick.*

She went back over to the bed and slumped down beside the blank page. *Circuses were dead metaphors.* The week before, she had deleted every last word of the sample she sent with her FONCA grant application. *Circuses were childhood.* Twenty measly pages, an entire Word doc of feeble lines in a voice that wasn't hers –all of it in the Trash, and not a jot of remorse. *She wanted to write from nothing.* Remorse was a strange word. *She wanted to write as if nothing were more than a hollow.* It came from the Latin *mordere*: to bite. To bite your conscience again. To sink your teeth into your conscience, as if it were gum. *She wanted to write as if nothing were a possible point of departure.* The circus was an uroboros, remorsefully biting its own tail. *But you couldn't write from nothing.* A novel could be an uroboros. *Why a pornographic novel? Why Nella? Why Diego? Why Eduardo?* It had to be possible to create a language that didn't regret itself, that didn't lead to remorse. Her intention, or her most honest intention, was to explore all that unsettles; to say what shouldn't be said. *Is there anything more human than the desires and fears – and an indifference to the desires and fears – of others?* Every kernel of creativity lay in the forbidden. *Literature can't go getting distracted by elephants. It has to push the elephants aside and observe the fallen acrobat, hone in on his suffering, on his grimace as they carry him backstage: because such pain is out of place, because it upsets the harmony, because it makes the show obscene.* There, nestled

timidly in the forbidden, lay the social syntax. *Writing only makes sense, she repeated to herself, if it looks beyond the elephants.* And yet, the room was a wall of refuge for reptiles where her voice echoed, indifferent to thousands of other voices, where her voice put out the others with a single puff, where she was deaf and blind, but not mute, and in that condition babbled to herself and bit her nails again and again (remorsefully), aware of being alone, unable to hear herself, unsure if the words were coming from her mouth or racing like trains in her imagination.

Three thuds on the door made her clam up.

“Who is it?”

Iván’s voice: a hand tugging her by the hair.

“Time to come out of your bat cave, man. They’ve beaten the shit out of Cuco.”

Translated by Sophie Hughes