

ALBERTO CHIMAL

THE  
TOWER  
AND  
THE  
GARDEN

# THE TOWER AND THE GARDEN

*Alberto Chimal*

# THE CREATURE (1967)

The door shuts behind them.

“There she is.”

The creature watches. She was born in here and has lived nowhere else. She has never known the outside world or glimpsed a pasture or a blade of grass.

“That’s her?”

She retains her instincts — those memories beyond memory — but has grown up wholly within the sunless chambers of her birth: where so many others have lived before.

“Yes.”

“Are you certain?”

“Do you see any others?”

As a result, if one were to lead her now into the open country, full of slopes and ponds, plants and trees; if high, snowy peaks rose up before her; if she found herself deep in a narrow valley beneath morning light . . . she would not know what to do.

“I thought she’d be smaller.”

“She’s not mean. Say something to her.”

“What do I say?”

“Whatever you like.”

Maybe she would remain as she is now: motionless, trembling . . .

“Come here.”

“Speak to her lovingly.”

Though, in all likelihood, she isn't actually trembling: she isn't afraid. She might very well not even be aware that the room is locked, that the air is stagnant, that the client is undressing and smells of sweat, that he now breathes heavily — like one more animal.

“What do you mean ‘lovingly?’”

«Blood pulses through the organs,» says the blue book, on a page Isabel has already read. «It rises like an invisible wave and all at once, without warning, it takes control of a man, of his arms and legs and torso and hair and head, of his guts and glands, nerves, bones and muscles, overpowering everything and making it one with his desire and his urgency.»

“Or don't say anything at all,” says Isabel.

“Come here,” the client calls. She has often heard that same harsh voice, trying to sound strong and fearsome like a president’s or a movie hero’s. At the same time, it is an anguished voice: the words are soft and wavering, and the final vowel always slips out of tune. It seems to Isabel that people who speak like that do not really believe in the power they are trying to present. But she has never said anything. And now she says only:

“Well, that certainly won’t work.”

But the man repeats:

“Come.”

He is naked now, with “everything ready” (as some of the other caretakers would put it). But Isabel resists looking at him and instead observes, just like he is, the creature, chained to the wall by the neck and front legs. Isabel comes to a conclusion: she cannot possibly imagine what will happen to her next.

“Come,” says the client one more time.

“Can’t you see she’s tied up?” Isabel begins to



say, annoyed, but then discovers that she *is* trembling. “We have to tether them because . . . Hey, anyway, you have to wait until I leave!”

The client wavers: he blinks, he looks at Isabel, then again at the creature; he stops looking at her; he makes a great sudden effort to suck in his stomach; he opens and closes his fists. Isabel has also already seen these same gestures made by other clients before, and she understands that this man was not expecting the failure of his own voice, nor a reproach like the one Isabel just issued.

«They do not expect anyone to be present,» says the blue book, «in those moments when their fantasy’s culmination is at hand, during which, during whose ten or twelve short, blurry scenes — doubtlessly born of long nights and countless minutes of boredom spent on toilets and streets and buses — there should be no witnesses, nor restrictions on their power, nor reminders of the money they have just paid at the door, nor awareness that their clothes and belt and all



their things lie behind them, on the floor, in a shapeless mound, waiting for when they finish and must return to the place from which they came.»

The man picks up a pair of high orange rubber boots from his side and puts them on.

“Get out,” he says, and Isabel realizes he is disappointed: he is not sure whether to continue or to turn around and forget the whole thing. But he’s already there, he must be thinking. Is he going to waste his money and leave a coward?

“My father is in charge here and will get mad at me!” Isabel complains, suddenly furious.

“Get out now!” the man yells, his voice much higher, as he advances toward the creature who now begins to baa.

“I don’t . . . ,” Isabel starts to say, as the client struggles to cram the creature’s hind legs into the openings of his boots, but a voice interrupts her from beyond the room.

“Isabel,” it calls.

“See? I told you,” mutters the girl, seething. She

heads away from the other two, leaves, and closes the door behind her. “I’m here, father,” she says to another man, dressed in a cheap suit, who stares at her firmly.

Inside, muffled by the door, the bleating turns into something different. Outside, the hallway stays silent.

Her father says nothing and begins to walk. Isabel follows.

“Where are we going?” she asks, but as they move towards the elevators she understands they are going to the top floor; they must already be waiting.

Isabel does not speak as they advance, for she recognizes the severe expression on her father’s face: she first saw it on that night, such a short time ago, with the child and the corpse.

Translated by books Lozano

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