



Emilio González Déniz is well-known for his vast literary and journalistic work on different genres, but, above all, he is a novelist. Some of his titles are *Bolero para una mujer* (Bolero for a woman) *Tirtaña*, *El llano amarillo* (The yellow plain) *El obelisco* (The obelisk) *La mitad de un Credo* (Half a Creed) *Bastardos de Bardinia* (Bardinia's Bastards) *Sahara*, *Habanera*, *El as de espadas*, (The ace of spades) *Hotel Madrid* (Madrid Hotel) and *El rey perdido* (The lost king).

As an author of literature for children and young people he has published several narrative works and plays for the theatre. *El Garoé* (The Garoé) *La nube transparente* (The transparent cloud) *Ico*, *La princesa blanca* (The white princess) and *La manzana dorada* (The golden apple) are outstanding, among others.

# Time trap

translated by María Isabel Padilla Santervaz

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I had just arrived in Madrid and was on the underground on my way to a hotel in La Gran Via. It was terribly cold for the people from Madrid and bitterly cold for a traveller coming from the Canary Islands. Getting into the underground entrance was a relief after having walked in the biting cold from the bus that I caught at Barajas airport. At that time there was no underground to the airport and travelling by taxi was very expensive for my pocket. When I got to the platform I could take off my woollen hat and loosen the scarf around my neck and on part of my face. People came out from work and the carriages were packed. I was in no hurry so I decided to wait for the next train just to prevent the mob from pushing me. They seemed as if they were getting into the last train in an evacuation. When the whistle for departure was heard, the platform was quite empty and the carriages full to bursting.

For a moment I almost thought that this train could be the last one, because for several minutes nobody came to the platform outside. I was alone in an underground station which a few moments before had looked like the Dunkirk port. It was as if the travellers tried to escape as soon as possible. Gradually, some people began to show up and scattered themselves on the platform. A train arrived soon and we got onto it in haste. Everybody knew where I came from because on my travel bag you could read the colourful publicity "Canaries, a warm nature" I stood up at the door and got out at Callao station while the people who were waiting on the platform got in.

At the carriage door I came across a woman who smelt of heaven and sandalwood and who must not be very scared of the cold, because she was not wearing a hat, gloves, or scarf; only a blue bag. She was wearing a coat of the same colour, undone, which showed her dress in blue pastel shades. Her coat suited her stylishly showing her half-heeled boots and her elegant legs. Her hands were also soft, harmonious. She had short dark hair and small eyes but so lively that they looked bigger. She was beautiful, I mean, I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

We exchanged glances. I had an impulse and tried to get in the carriage again but was stopped

by the crowd who were getting out. I saw she was trying to get out, but it was also impossible for her. The door closed mercilessly and she stood still, her face of disappointment. We were at less than one meter distance, separated by a glass door. I stared at her eyes and I immediately understood that she was the woman I had been looking for all my life. She smiled slightly without looking away. I do not know what my face was expressing, but she must have understood my feelings because I could read in her face that she was feeling the same.

The train left and she kept looking at me. It was a very long silent conversation for some seconds. And when we were about to lose eye contact, she did a windmill movement with her hand that I thought was a request to follow her to the next station, her other hand stretched out in a message I understood to mean that she would be waiting for me. My heart was pumping at such speed that I thought it would explode.

The new train arrived immediately. I got on and the time it took to get to Plaza de España, the next station, seemed an eternity. I got out in a hurry. She was not there. I looked around, I looked for her as if possessed but I did not find her. I took a deep breath to oxygenate my brain and concluded that I had misunderstood her message, that with her hand movement she had told me to stay there at Callao and wait

for her. I jumped upstairs and crossed the platform in a real race, avoiding the passers-by and hitting some of them with the “Canaries, a warm nature” bag, and I reached the opposite direction platform with almost heart failure due to the excitement and the effort. A train arrived at once which also seemed to me very slow when crossing the same tunnel as before but in the opposite way.

Again at Callao station I got off as quickly as I could. I ran through corridors and stairs and I reached the first platform where I had found the love of my life. I looked everywhere, and combed every inch of the platform, but I did not see her. I went outside. I looked in every direction and came inside again, I travelled back to Plaza de España in case the message was quite the reverse... I kept on for a long time until I got exhausted and gave up. I felt I was a victim of destiny, you come across the person you have always been looking for, whom you meet once in a lifetime, and she disappears because the door of the train carriage was closed a few seconds before. Those seconds that can make your future life different.

When I was in the hotel I reached the conclusion that everything had been a hallucination as a consequence of my tiredness. Perhaps my dream woman, if she was true, had got onto the train I stepped off, did those gestures as if she was playing because she

felt herself protected by the glass door. I told myself I was a stubborn romantic man and I went to the other end of Madrid to have dinner with a friend. I came back on the underground and again I got off at Callao. When coming outside I realized that at the platform entrance, on the glass covering the train map there was a sheet of paper which read: “This is a message for Canaries, a warm nature. We have been playing cat and mouse. Tomorrow morning at nine o’clock at Nebraska café”

So it was true, she had also felt the same and we had spent an hour travelling from Callao to Plaza de España, and the other way round, and we never met. If any of us would have remained quiet there we would have met at any of the two stations. I went to Plaza de España station and, as I had expected, I saw the same message on another sheet of paper stuck with cello tape on the glass of the map. I put the two sheets of paper with the same message into my pocket and when I got to the hotel I put them in the travelling bag which was already empty. My head was in the clouds and I could hardly sleep. I had finally met the woman of my dreams, love at first sight existed, and I denied my previous conception of love as a mixture of sex and convenience.

The following day I stepped into Nebraska café at ten to nine. I carried my traveller bag with the touristic publicity in case she would have any doubt.

It was nonsense because if she felt the same I did she would find my glance among a million eyes. But I did not want any more mistakes, I would do my best. I was even dressed with the same clothes as the previous afternoon. I waited in a strategic place at the bar overlooking the door. Half an hour went by and I started to get impatient. Forty-five minutes, my third coffee, an hour, nothing. The woman of my dreams had been playing with me. Maybe the cold weather had made me hallucinate the previous day, and I would even have seen the messages stuck on the station glass. Just to convince myself, I looked into my traveller bag. The sheets of paper were there. Definitely, she had been playing with me, and it was even possible that she had been watching me from a distance at the café bar, and had been making fun with somebody about my innocence.

-Please, the bill –I asked the barman, resigned.

-It is... -he looked at me surprisingly-, is that bag yours?

-Yes, it is mine, but it is empty.

-Oh I see, excuse me, it is nonsense, but a while ago a beautiful girl asked me if I had seen a man whom she described as yourself –the barman was very talkative and went on speaking; she told me she did not know him, the only thing she knew was that he came from the Canary Islands, and so when

I saw that tag on your bag I thought... Excuse me, as I told you it is nonsense, but I felt very sorry for her; she told me it was a pity not to see that man because she had to go back to her country and she was very short of time to catch a train.

-Then she does not live in Madrid –I thought out loud.

-Of course not, people from all around Spain pass through here, but I could not tell you where she comes from; but I can tell you she is a high-class woman.

-I am that man –I finally confessed to the barman- she left me a notice to meet here at nine o'clock.

-I can see you are unpunctual apart from stupid... and excuse me –he almost reproached me-, a beautiful woman makes a date with you at nine and you turn up nearly one hour later.

-One hour? –I was surprised-, I was here at ten to nine, look at my watch, I've been here for almost one hour, it's nearly ten now.

-Bad luck, my friend –the barman said. Your watch is just one hour slow, I think you haven't changed it and it is still on the Canary Islands time.

I had taken all the precautions and I had suffered the silliest of the lapses. Usually, when I travel from the Canary Islands and get to Barajas airport I put my watch one hour forward, but I failed to do so this time. The destiny consists of a chain of small

decisions, some lapses, one underground door which closes five minutes before it should and a watch keeping one accidental slow hour due to an oversight. There are thousands of clocks in Madrid but I had been guiding myself by my watch. I looked at the street devices showing 3 degrees and I did not see the hour being shown immediately after on the same digital box.

I have never heard from that woman again. She could have changed my life but this was prevented by five seconds of indecision in front of the underground door, my misunderstanding her hands signals and my inability to remain quiet waiting for her at a station. I had a new chance but as I had not adjusted my watch I was deceived by time gap, one of the many traps of destiny. Maybe she was not the love of my life, and if she was, it may be that destiny had worked in my favour avoiding my meeting her. Who knows?