

The Marién Revelation

Miguel Santana

WORKS BY Miguel Santana

When Alligators Sing

Fátima Carnaval

The Marién Revelation

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To my mother

To the voices that rose up in dreams
to give their words to this story

Jesus told him what to do
and in the evening the youth comes to him,
wearing a linen cloth over his naked body.
And he remained with him that night,
for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Secret Gospel of Mark

A young man was following Him,
wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body;
and they seized him;
but he left the linen sheet behind and ran away naked.

Mark 14: 51-52

Prologue

Rain no longer burns under this crown of thorns; the wound on my side has grown silent; my hands and my entrails have died. O Father, how I begged you to stay away from me. Delirium trembles upon the lips that once bit my lips; it sours the mouth that in memory is pomegranate wine. Dressed in dew, death fools me. It captures me with its sweetest smell. Father, how I begged you to stay away from me. My body is weightless. My heart no longer throbs. I am no more than a tangible phantom, finite, my entire form dissolving. The blows to my face, the lacerations on my back, the convulsions of my soul are now a cataclysmic numbness. But I feel him, his arms sheltering me with the immeasurable tenderness of our first embrace, with the strength of his almighty love. His lips anoint my feet, a mixture of rage and devotion. His fingers press and sooth my muscles. He is so sad, so desperate to help me, so helpless. O Father, how I begged you to stay away from me.

I lived to lose myself in his eyes, to get lost in the gentleness of his sleep. It would be so easy to allow myself, once and for all, to sink in the nothingness, to escape this agony, to accept the confinement of his absence. But I see him, or I dream I see him, and the thirst of his lips chars my lips; the hunger for his weather-beaten skin sears my skin. I remember us alone, in silence, my flesh on his flesh. How I loved him, Father, more than the world I

loved him! And he loved me. He loved me so that my blood became his blood, that my pores distilled the salty honey of his sweat.

You don't hear me. My prayer grinds your ears sterilely, plunges itself into your chest and dies cold, petrified. Your silence stabs me like the pain of a starless night, one and a thousand times. Have you forgotten, Father, the leprous children we healed, the demons convulsing after our call, the blind, the paralytic, the insane we rescued from your punishments? At his side, the chimera was feasible. He, who invented a paradise with his mouth of flowers, who made love to me under breathless skies, who caused my flesh to storm with orange and apple blossoms, who kneeled down to savor the desolated blood of my thigh, who macerated our daily bread with the liquor of his saliva, he was my refuge, my voice. So many times I asked you, Father, how I begged you to stay away from me!

For us, life was a struggle between your design and our mischievousness. He brought back to me the joy I had lost along the road to your kingdom. I found it in his eyes the first time I saw him and, afraid of such feeling, sent him away; for I, the powerful one, the Messiah, felt unworthy of his purity. But he left and came back, his spirit chaste and innocent, his body strong, shaking with turbulent fear. "Let your will be done, not mine," he told me, and in that instant, his voice became my pursuit, my yearning. I kissed him, realizing that his beauty was the reason for my existence. How many towns we traveled, how many conversations we held, how I longed to rest at his side each night, to touch his eyelashes, the curls of his hair. He became mine, no one else's, the best of my

pupils during the day, my sanctuary by night.

On my deathbed now, he kisses me and that kiss is a spell that rains vigorously, that calms the swells in these lakes of fire. As he leans his head on my chest, the urgency of corresponding to that kiss runs through my body, the fragrance of sands and fields emanating from his hair resuscitate my sensations. Clouds burst open. The sky crumbles. Lightening resounds. Everything succumbs to the elixir pouring from his caress. At once I'm infused with images of the two of us together, far from here, reigning over immaculate cities in a world unknown.

Your defeat has been forged, Father. The sword has risen and the universe collapses weightlessly to its strike. Time converges, tears, shatters apart. The promise is broken. Your mysteries fall before me like the silks of a whore. No, the silent ones will never wake from the dust, nor will the torn, the mutilated, those who burn in hell raising pleas and the only response is their name read from the Book of the Dead. No, those will not awake, nor the others, the blessed, the faithful, the devoted, those who claim to have been created in your own image. Omnipotent, Universal God, Lord of Heaven and Hell, Highest of Lies, how I begged you to stay away from me!

The tambourines, the harp, the music of Cana, let my Beloved sing again our sublime lyrics. Let his song lift me over the whirlwinds of this mournful valley. Let his melodies wash over my wounds. His desire transfixes me. He is the one who saves me. My heart and soul fill with his hunger. I will fight this torture and I will clutch the sword. I will escape the catacombs of your plan. I will bite his mouth and cling to his words of linen and lily. I will

inebriate him, whispering and shouting, promising and swearing I will never abandon him. Soon, my Beloved, we will bathe naked in the rivers of Uphaz. We will ride the four winds upon the golden horses of Apollo. We will journey this and all the spheres and corners of time; you and I, my Beloved, full of wisdom, Ganymede and Pan. A new light shines upon me! His kiss grants me life! Let the head of my Father roll down to the most profound hell!

Mary

The sepulcher is narrow but long enough to accommodate the mourners. It is reached by a climb to the highest point of a hill that faces Jerusalem. A basket of figs and breads marks the entrance. No one knows who brought the offering. It is not important. Anxiety governs those gathered; it sticks to their faces like the cloudy smoke that rises from the candles and renders the air unbreathable. In the back, upon the blanket that covered him a few minutes ago, lies the Crucified. How static it all seems now. His voice, his presence, his divine beauty, the suffering of the last hours, all are a vision frozen in time.

The voice of the mother moves the day forward, “Not one more drop”, she says, and then she cleanses the bloody thread trickling from the mouth of her son. “Not one more drop of his blood must spill. The earth is not worth it,” her voice flows through the chamber like a blazing swell.

The other women cluster around the body, their silent cries reverberating upon the walls of the cave. They wash him slowly, wallowing in the sensual ceremony. One way or another, they have all loved him. They have been there through it all, committed, faithful, utterly faithful. They have no regrets. Mary knows these women, her pupils and owners of the Isis mysteries. She steps back

and watches the ritual. Her face still, eyes tightly fixed on her son. What a prodigy to have birthed him, and yet, how arduous. She has seen the water of the Jordan streamed down his cheeks, the salt of the Galilean Sea harden his hands. She has seen the universe rise and fall upon him. I wish I could have kept you from pain, my son. *I saw an angel come down from heaven, holding the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, that old serpent, the Devil, and bound him a thousand years. I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. You weren't among them. Stand up! Come unto me. Stand and return my bearings. I am so weak. My legs tremble. Hear my prayer. Listen to my cry for mercy. Be not deaf at my tears. Stand up, my son, I can smell your blood. It burns my clothes and my flesh. It rains on me like arrows. Spare me that I may recover strength before I go and be no more.*

The medic enters and makes his way to the Crucified. Mary greets him as he finds his place. He looks at the body and draws a deep breath. Enthralled in what seems to be the longest procedure, he mends the wounds. This is not the first nor will it be the last time. His willingness to help travels from one victim to the next. Sometimes he wishes he could let everything go, return to Egypt, and become lost in the disorderliness of Alexandria. Today is one of those days. As he treats the battered flesh, he studies his hands, shaky, stained with premonition. "The opium will subside by morning," he says, clinging to the alibi.

Unexpectedly, with the velocity of an illusion, the patient opens and shuts his eyes.

“He’s alive!” declares the mother, and rapidly moves toward her son. All of a sudden nothing is difficult; nothing stands between reality and prophecy. The pledge of her lineage solidifies over that pulsing hope. She prays, *“I will praise you, O Osiris; for you have lifted me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. Osiris, my God, I cried unto you, and you have healed me. You have brought up my soul from the grave. You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.”*

“God is great,” pronounces the medic.

“God is dead,” blasphemes the Beloved, the young man standing close to the one that loves him. He listens to the vulnerable beating of the heart, a heart that until now has been fire and flame, water and tear. He has seen this man tall, profoundly strong; his dark hair fighting the wind. He has also seen him uncertain, in the midst of a nightmare, clawing his fingers in desperation. They have shared many days together, struggled through them with conviction. At first, he had been intimidated; then, he understood. He had a role to play in the plan of the Savior. He has not acted cowardly. He did what he was told. He was guided and he followed, completely devoted, moored to his words, accepting him as anchor and vessel.

Mary brushes the hair of the Beloved away from his face. “All will be fine now. Let the good man finish his work.”

“Not much left for me to do,” says the medic with a raise of his brow. He forces a substance into the mouth of his patient. He spreads it around the oral cavity. The procedure is swift but

precise. He has exercised it numerous times, always accurately, no second thoughts. He stands up, cleanses his instruments, and carefully stores them in a leather case. He would gladly leave at this moment. He would wrap himself in his tunic and disappear.

Tonight everything is different. The medic moves away and glances at the mother. He tries to make eye contact. There is nothing certain, he wants to tell her. Many, stronger than her son, never return. Some who come back are never the same. That is the least he can do. He can almost hear his muted voice, longing, negotiating between profession and faith. Yet, as the mingled prayers of the others inundate the chamber, he remains silent, motionless, incapable of speech.

Mary reaches into a sack and extends payment, “Here,” she says. Her eyes, suddenly diminutive and old, gleam in gratitude. She can barely manage a smile.

The medic walks around her, ignoring the compensation. “You must take him from here,” he instructs.

Mary insists silently. She reaches for him. It’s been long since words are no longer a necessity between the two.

The medic retreats. “I am not worthy,” he explains.

Mary turns to the women. On her command, they cover her son with a clean blanket. With virtuous affection, they kiss his hands, his wilted face, each one of his lifeless fingers. They know how to touch him, how their lips should caress.

The Beloved also draws near. His feeble hope will not relinquish to fear and anguish. It struggles to overcome the images engraved deeply in his soul: the whip, the spit, the nails, the torment still puncturing that body. He wishes it would have been

him. In an instant he would have taken his place. *You turned my wailing into dancing. You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.*

The Beloved caresses the forehead of the man who loved him. He consoles him, “There won’t be anymore hurt; the calvary is gone.” His voice is soothing, a solace in the gloominess of the circumstance. As if they were sharing an intimate confession, he deposits a kiss. His last words together resonate determinedly, “*Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. For you are my strength, into your hand I commit my spirit.*” He lifts the broken body into his arms and shields it in them. The promise of new life beats for the two of them in one heart. They will go overseas, farther than Ararat, farther than North and South, than the eastern and western seas.

The other Mary, the younger one, the one with the beautiful olive skin and ocean-blue eyes, extinguishes the torches and exits the sepulcher. Outside, the last flashes of lightning reveal the bloodstained skies. Mary looks around cautiously. The storm has left the roads empty. The desert is a silent accomplice. *They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.* “They are gone,” she announces. “Everyone’s gone.”

With that message, the concealing moon closes her eyes and, as a shadow, the procession flees down the hillside. No one looks back. So certainly they follow each other’s steps, so undoubtingly they guard their secret.

Marién

Marién opens her eyes. Her sleep slides away through the crack under the door. She touches the aseptic sheets and recognizes a cold absence. There is no reason to relive the past hours. In the light of her mundane chores, days will become more palatable.

She gets up from the bed, walks to the window, and opens the curtains. Outside, the night sky crumbles into window-shattering particles. There are no vehicles on the streets. The sidewalks are empty. From where she stands, the angel that crowns one of the temple's towers and lifts his trumpet toward the lightning is her only companion. Silence, total silence, would be so welcomed.

She walks to the bathroom and digs up a plastic container from her vanity case. The chemical stupor of the sleeping pill will defeat her consciousness. It will carry her to that profound sleep that buries her nightmares. It veils them, substituting them with the impenetrable darkness. Maybe she should also take a painkiller. Her body aches. She's been so arrogant to disregard that negligible but persistent bleeding. There is penitence in corporal suffering, she resolves.

She studies herself in the mirror. She looks younger than she is. Her face has acquired a tasteful maturity, but age has not

altered her appearance. She has to appreciate her genes. In this regard, she has to be grateful; in other areas, she is not doing particularly well. It is her mother's legacy. At least, she looked beautiful until the day she died. How could she not? She was thirty-three.

Marién thinks of the two young women who interrupted her walk this morning: an Austrian who seemed better placed in a New York catwalk, and a robust Colombian, nearly an old maid, her eyes constantly wandering to the passing men. Faith dealers. Tourist harassers in Temple Square. She could almost see religious fervor foaming from their mouths. They had kidnapped her with and invitation to tour the compound's gardens and, suddenly, forced her into a talk at the Visitor's Center, one at each side, flanking her with the promise of eternal life. She had stayed unresponsive, mute, unwilling to speak. For a moment, she saw herself in them, just for a moment. Very early in her life she knew she would not follow that path. She took refuge in books, in all those readings of which her Church had warned her. As a child, she had always questioned rules, decrees that did not make logical sense; then, she went dormant. She became horrified of her thoughts, of her desire to flee that Mormon colony in Chihuahua, of her detachment from everything around her. Was it her mother's death? Was it seeing her get up one morning, put on her best clothes, fix her hair, and with tranquil composure, say goodbye before killing herself? Who could have blamed the woman? It was going to happen sooner or later. She wanted to be a competent Mormon. She waited peacefully to be called to the spirit world. Cancer had other plans. It had been a powerful enemy. Like a

demon, it had entered and possessed her against her will, rotting her entrails silently. The prayers, anointments, and blessings conferred by the elders of the holy priesthood, had all turned out to be useless. In Marién's eyes, it was the devil triumphing over those men, not, as her father explained, God's will that took her.

She was so young when the responsibilities of the world fell upon her. Who has time to read, to better oneself, when you have to take care of eight siblings? She learned to cook, to use the washer and drier, to iron, to maintain the house and tend to her father, who, to keep his reputation intact, secretly drowned his sorrows in whisky. How happy she had been when he had remarried, and when he had brought a second and a third wife. At last, she thought, she would have time for herself.

It did not happen. The new wives were no different than her mother had been. They started bearing children and taking care of their own. After all, it is what their Church instructs. There are so many souls waiting to come to this world and be tested in Heavenly Father's plan, that women go from one pregnancy to the next, collecting blessings and assuring a place in the Celestial Kingdom. Servant, nanny, hairdresser, seamstress, she had been all that for her siblings and remained as such, until Esteban, with his beautiful words and his amazing smile, had released her.

An ironic grimace sprawls across her face. She walks back to the window and closes the curtains. The shadows suit her better tonight. She can control that. The past is another story, just like the bothersome rain pounding the windowpanes relentlessly. She is tired of the rain. It is like the rhythmic cadence of an arbitrary march, as if the universe were following a violent and paradoxical

cally premeditated symphony. For the second time today, she is the receptor of a discourse in which she has no vested interest. She imagines a schizophrenic composer, given to his music, possessed by the effervescent tickling that embraces the soul at the perfect orchestration, that particular moment in which it is just he and his work, the audience has become irrelevant. She has never felt that way. She has never felt total complacency, those confirmatory assurances that defy the madness of an ordinary existence. She has never been powerful enough to address her own transitoriness. Up until now, she recognizes, all has been led by responsibility, by the outline of somebody else's rule.

She lies down and thinks about the two missionary women again. She would have enjoyed refuting their testimonies. How nice it would have been to pull them out of their own deception, to arm herself in the wisdom of her scholarship and plant in their innocence a molecule of doubt. All said and done, at any point of her life, she would have liked to have someone do the same for her. Can she thank Esteban for that? Unintentionally, maybe. But no, the world is full of lambs incessantly circling around the same fallacies. The others, the illuminated, are too busy to go about the streets trying to convert souls. It is better this way, she accepts reluctantly. Who needs a world full of rational people? How boring would it all be. Boredom, in her eyes, is every bit as sinful.

She sighs and concentrates on the rackety night. The struggle between her actions and her conditioning is a sharp nuisance. The warm daze of the sleeping pill has not completely embraced her. She closes her eyes to think of her husband, of her university colleagues, of the students who wrote a letter to the Dean

complaining about the classes she cancelled this semester. Now she doesn't have to invent any more excuses. The resolution had been reached without her accord. This is a pattern in her life, even right now, even as she touches herself and feels the emptiness inside. Was it really her will? Did she really have a choice in the matter? She does not understand why she has come to despise this feeling, why she has grown ashamed of it in the past few days. She detests this about herself, having to scrutinize her behaviors in such an agonizing fashion. Do others do the same? Do other people relive situations and evaluate them continually? Do they look for the lesson learned in each interaction, the higher meaning of each decision? Knowledge has embittered her, no doubt. And although she does not like it, she has come to expect the same self-discipline from everyone around her.

You know yourself very well, Marién. You will go through life dealing with the irrational oppression of your uncertainty, telling yourself a million times that you are a woman of the 21st century, a woman too intelligent to subject herself to any perception of guilt. Your course is one-directional. From the perspective of your forty years, you cannot allow yourself to deviate. It was your decision; it is your body. Let the night rain in concerto over temples and chapels in this holy city, over this day that marks the beginning of a new stage in your life, over the missionaries who chase after you, singing hymns and reciting liturgies, over the salt lakes, the death seas, and the thousand Mormon virgins who in your dream, jump over fences like spotless little white sheep.

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