

After the Season
Mike Shafto
February 9, 2015

He and the woman stepped into the dark cafe. He was drunk and the *policia* were watching the streets and plazas.

It was not Harry's Bar & American Grill, but the waiter Miguel always took good care of them. Miguel knew they were not with the Germans. There were too many Germans even in late September, after the season.

"*Amontillado, gratis,*" said the waiter, placing two large shot-glasses on the table.

"*También me llamo Miguel.*" He and the waiter laughed because they had the same name, and it was a bond between them. But in the village he was called, *con respeto*, "*El Tonto Tinto.*"

He drank the sherry and said, too loudly, "*Dos Rioja -- para mí.*" The woman frowned because he was drunk.

Her eyes met the waiter's and they shared an understanding. It was good that the waiter was *un maricón*. They would not have to fight. He wanted not to fight, and he needed the message that the waiter would bring.

"*Paella mixta,*" said the woman.

When he got the note they would go and buy *fino* and Rioja and take it to the house on the north side of town where David and the other woman were, and they would drink and laugh about the dogs and goats and burros and how they were turned back at the gates of Ronda la Vieja within sight of the Roman ruins. They would talk of the search for food in the streets of Algodonales and about the fight up the main road in Olvera to the plaza of Nuestra Señora, below the Arab castle, firing the cannon forty times or more, and how they shot across the gorge from the *puente nuevo* near the bull ring that was empty now except for the Germans. They would drink and laugh about the escape from Zahara, where the black touring car plunged down the cobbled streets like a raft through rapids with David at the wheel and the two women in the back seat, frowning.

When he got the note from the waiter he would know what to do. They might double back north toward Zafra or drive east toward Cómpeeta or split up, he and the woman going south along the dry river bed through Sala de Espera and San Roche to the outskirts of Algeciras, eating blackberries and sleeping in caves far from the rail line, while David and the other woman took the black car into the hills above Grazalema.

He woke to clanging church bells, lifting his head from the paella and wiping the rice on his shirt sleeve. He saw the white paper on the table, crushed it in his fist, and pushed it into his pocket, as he looked toward the door. The woman helped him stand.

In the plaza he squinted at the searing blue and yellow and white, and his eyes burned as he opened the note and read, "*Gracias por su visita.*"