

The Feather Pillow – by Horacio Quiroga

A Translation from Spanish to English by Angelica Furlong

About This Translation

I'm a bilingual literary translator working from Spanish into English. This sample is from “El almohadón de plumas” by Uruguayan author Horacio Quiroga — a haunting Gothic short story known for its surreal tone and emotional intensity.

I selected this piece because of its vivid sensory imagery and psychological atmosphere, both of which challenge a translator to maintain rhythm and tension in the target language. This translation represents my stylistic approach: careful attention to tone, flow, and emotional nuance while remaining faithful to the original voice.

The source text is in the public domain and can be found at:

https://ciudadseva.com/texto/el-almohadon-de-plumas/#google_vignette. This English version is my own work and has not been published elsewhere.

Translation Details

Original Author	Horacio Quiroga
Language Pair	Spanish → English
Genre	Gothic Short Fiction
Length	~1,000 words
Translation Type	Unpublished sample for portfolio purposes
Source Text	https://ciudadseva.com/texto/el-almohadon-de-plumas/#google_vignette

Translation Sample

Su luna de miel fue un largo escalofrío. Rubia, angelical y tímida, el carácter duro de su marido heló sus soñadas niñerías de novia. Ella lo quería mucho, sin embargo, a veces con un ligero estremecimiento cuando volviendo de noche juntos por la calle, echaba una furtiva mirada a la alta estatura de Jordán, mudo desde hacía una hora. Él, por su parte, la amaba profundamente, sin darle a conocer.

Her honeymoon felt like a long, cold chill. Blonde, angelic, and shy, her husband's harsh character had chilled her dreamy, girlish fantasies. She loved him deeply. However, now and then, with a slight shiver as they walked together at night, she would steal a furtive glance at Jordan's tall, silent figure—mute for the past hour. He, on the other hand, loved her profoundly, without ever showing it.

Durante tres meses -se habían casado en abril- vivieron una dicha especial.

Sin duda hubiera ella deseado menos severidad en ese rígido cielo de amor, más expansiva e incauta ternura; pero el impasible semblante de su marido la contenía siempre.

La casa en que vivían influía un poco en sus estremecimientos. La blancura del patio silencioso -frisos, columnas y estatuas de mármol- producía una otoñal impresión de palacio encantado. Dentro, el brillo glacial del estuco, sin el más leve rasguño en las altas paredes, afirmaba aquella sensación de desapacible frío. Al cruzar de una pieza a otra, los pasos hallaban eco en toda la casa, como si un largo abandono hubiera sensibilizado su resonancia.

En ese extraño nido de amor, Alicia pasó todo el otoño. No obstante, había concluido por echar un velo sobre sus antiguos sueños, y aún vivía dormida en la casa hostil, sin querer pensar en nada hasta que llegaba su marido.

No es raro que adelgazara. Tuvo un ligero ataque de influenza que se arrastró insidiosamente días y días; Alicia no se reponía nunca. Al fin una tarde pudo salir al jardín apoyada en el brazo de él. Miraba indiferente a uno y otro lado. De pronto Jordán, con honda ternura, le pasó la mano por la cabeza, y Alicia rompió en seguida en sollozos, echándole los brazos al cuello. Lloró largamente todo su espanto callado, redoblando el llanto a la menor tentativa de caricia. Luego los sollozos fueron retardándose, y aún quedó largo rato escondida en su cuello, sin moverse ni decir una palabra.

They had been married for three months — they experienced a rare and special happiness.

No doubt she would have wished for less severity in that rigid heaven of love, more expansive and unguarded tenderness; but her husband's impassive countenance always restrained her.

The house they lived in subtly contributed to their unease.

The whiteness of the silent courtyard—its friezes, columns, and marble statues—gave the impression of an enchanted palace in autumn.

Inside, the glacial gleam of the stucco, unmarked even by the slightest scratch on the high walls, intensified that sensation of unpleasant cold.

As they moved from room to room, their footsteps echoed throughout the house, as if long abandonment had sharpened its resonance.

Alicia spent the entire fall in that strange love nest. However, she had ended up drawing a veil over her old dreams, and she still lived asleep in the hostile house, not wanting to think about anything until her husband arrived.

It was not surprising that she lost weight. She had a mild bout of influenza that lingered insidiously for days on end; Alicia never recovered. Finally, one afternoon, she was able to go out into the garden leaning on his arm. She looked indifferently from side to side. Suddenly, Jordan, with deep tenderness, ran his hand over her head, and Alicia immediately burst into sobs, throwing her arms around his neck. She wept at length, pouring out all her silent terror, redoubling her tears at the slightest attempt at caress. Then the sobs slowed, and she remained nestled in his neck for a long time, without moving or saying a word.

Fue ese el último día que Alicia estuvo levantada. Al día siguiente amaneció desvanecida. El médico de Jordán la examinó con suma atención, ordenándole calma y descanso absolutos.

-No sé -le dijo a Jordán en la puerta de calle, con la voz todavía baja-. Tiene una gran debilidad que no me explico, y sin vómitos, nada... Si mañana se despierta como hoy, llámeme enseguida.

Al otro día Alicia seguía peor. Hubo consulta. Constatóse una anemia de marcha agudísima, completamente inexplicable. Alicia no tuvo más desmayos, pero se iba visiblemente a la muerte. Todo el día el dormitorio estaba con las luces prendidas y en pleno silencio. Pasábanse horas sin oír el menor ruido. Alicia dormitaba. Jordán vivía casi en la sala, también con toda la luz encendida. Paseábase sin cesar de un extremo a otro, con incansable obstinación. La alfombra ahogaba sus pasos. A ratos entraba en el dormitorio y proseguía su mudo vaivén a lo largo de la cama, mirando a su mujer cada vez que caminaba en su dirección.

Pronto Alicia comenzó a tener alucinaciones, confusas y flotantes al principio, y que descendieron luego a ras del suelo. La joven, con los ojos desmesuradamente abiertos, no hacía sino mirar la alfombra a uno y otro lado del respaldo de la cama. Una noche se quedó de repente mirando fijamente. Al rato abrió la boca para gritar, y sus narices y labios se perlaron de sudor.

-¡Jordán! ¡Jordán! -clamó, rígida de espanto, sin dejar de mirar la alfombra.

That was the last day Alicia got out of bed. The next morning, she awoke weak and fading.

Jordan's doctor examined her with great care, then ordered complete rest and absolute calm.

"I don't know," he told Jordan at the street door, his voice still low. "She has a strange weakness I can't explain — no fever, no vomiting, nothing... If she wakes up tomorrow like she did today, call me immediately."

The next day, Alicia was still worse. She had a consultation. She was diagnosed with anemia of extremely rapid progression, completely inexplicable. Alicia did not faint again, but she was visibly slipping toward death. All day long...with the lights on and steeped in silence. Hours went by without hearing the slightest noise. Alicia dozed. Jordan lived almost in the living room, also with all the lights on. He paced incessantly from one end to the other, with tireless obstinacy. The carpet muffled his footsteps. At times he would enter the bedroom and continue his silent pacing along the bed, looking at his wife every time he walked in her direction.

Soon Alicia began to experience hallucinations—at first vague and floating, then gradually descending to hover just above the floor. The young woman, her eyes grotesquely wide, did nothing but fix her gaze on the carpet on either side of the headboard. One night she suddenly froze, staring intently. A moment later, she opened her mouth to scream, and her nose and lips glistened with sweat.

"Jordan! Jordan!" she cried, rigid with fright, without taking her eyes off the carpet.

Jordán corrió al dormitorio, y al verlo aparecer Alicia dio un alarido de horror.

-¡Soy yo, Alicia, soy yo!

Alicia lo miró con extravió, miró la alfombra, volvió a mirarlo, y después de largo rato de estupefacta confrontación, se serenó. Sonrió y tomó entre las suyas la mano de su marido, acariciándola temblando.

Entre sus alucinaciones más porfiadas, hubo un antropoide, apoyado en la alfombra sobre los dedos, que tenía fijos en ella los ojos.

Los médicos volvieron inútilmente. Había allí delante de ellos una vida que se acababa, desangrándose día a día, hora a hora, sin saber absolutamente cómo. En la última consulta Alicia yacía en estupor mientras ellos la pulsaban, pasándose de uno a otro la muñeca inerte. La observaron largo rato en silencio y siguieron al comedor.

-Pst... -se encogió de hombros desalentado su médico-. Es un caso serio... poco hay que hacer...

-¡Sólo eso me faltaba! -resopló Jordán. Y tamborileó bruscamente sobre la mesa.

Jordan ran to the bedroom, and as he appeared, Alicia let out a blood-curdling scream.

"It's me, Alicia, it's me"

Alicia looked at him in confusion, then at the carpet, then back at him again. After a long moment of stunned stillness, she grew calm. She smiled and took her husband's hand in hers, gently caressing it with trembling fingers.

One of her most relentless visions was a humanlike figure, crouching low on the carpet, propped on its fingers, its gaze locked on her.

The doctors returned, but in vain. Before them lay a life that was fading away, bleeding out day by day, hour by hour, with no understanding of how. During the final consultation, Alicia lay in a stupor as they checked her pulse, passing her lifeless wrist from hand to hand. They observed her in silence for a long time, then quietly withdrew to the dining room.

He sighed and gave a discouraged shrug. "It's a serious case... there's not much we can do..."

"Just what I needed!" Jordán snorted, drumming his fingers brusquely on the table.

Alicia fue extinguiéndose en su delirio de anemia, agravado de tarde, pero que remitía siempre en las primeras horas. Durante el día no avanzaba su enfermedad, pero cada mañana amanecía lívida, en síncope casi. Parecía que únicamente de noche se le fuera la vida en nuevas alas de sangre. Tenía siempre al despertar la sensación de estar desplomada en la cama con un millón de kilos encima. Desde el tercer día este hundimiento no la abandonó más. Apenas podía mover la cabeza. No quiso que le tocaran la cama, ni aún que le arreglaran el almohadón. Sus terrores crepusculares avanzaron en forma de monstruos que se arrastraban hasta la cama y trepaban dificultosamente por la colcha.

Perdió luego el conocimiento. Los dos días finales deliró sin cesar a media voz. Las luces continuaban fúnebremente encendidas en el dormitorio y la sala. En el silencio agónico de la casa, no se oía más que el delirio monótono que salía de la cama, y el rumor ahogado de los eternos pasos de Jordán.

Alicia murió, por fin. La sirvienta, que entró después a deshacer la cama, sola ya, miró un rato extrañada el almohadón.

-¡Señor! -llamó a Jordán en voz baja-. En el almohadón hay manchas que parecen de sangre.

Jordán se acercó rápidamente y se dobló a su vez. Efectivamente, sobre la funda, a ambos lados del hueco que había dejado la cabeza de Alicia, se veían manchitas oscuras.

Alicia's life ebbed away in a delirium brought on by anemia, which worsened in the afternoons but always eased by morning. Though the illness did not seem to progress during the day, each morning she awoke pale, nearly fainting. It seemed that only at night did her life escape her, carried away on new wings of blood. Upon waking, she always felt as though a crushing weight pinned her to the bed.

From the third day on, that sinking feeling never left her. She could scarcely move her head. She would not allow anyone to touch the bed—not even to fix her pillow. Her twilight terrors advanced in the shape of monsters that crawled to the bed and dragged themselves heavily up the quilt.

She then lost consciousness. For the last two days, she whispered feverishly without pause. The lights remained funereally lit in the bedroom and the living room. In the house's agonizing silence, only two sounds remained: the monotonous murmur of delirium from the bed, and the muffled tread of Jordán's eternal footsteps.

Alicia had finally died.

The maid, now alone, entered the room to strip the bed. As she began her task, she paused, puzzled by something. She stared at the pillow.

"Señor..." she whispered, calling Jordan in a trembling voice. "There are strange stains on the pillow... they look like blood."

Jordan approached at once and bent over the pillow. Sure enough—on either side of the hollow left by Alicia's head, dark blotches marked the case.

-Parecen picaduras -murmuró la sirvienta después de un rato de inmóvil observación.

"They look like bites," murmured the maid after a long, still moment.

-Levántelo a la luz -le dijo Jordán.

"Hold it up to the light," Jordan ordered.

La sirvienta lo levantó, pero enseguida lo dejó caer, y se quedó mirando a aquél, lívida y temblando. Sin saber por qué, Jordán sintió que los cabellos se le erizaban.

She lifted it—then quickly let it fall and backed away, trembling, pale and silent. Something was horribly wrong.

-¿Qué hay? -murmuró con la voz ronca.

"What is it?" he muttered hoarsely.

-Pesa mucho -articuló la sirvienta, sin dejar de temblar.

"It's very heavy," said the maid, still trembling.

Jordán lo levantó; pesaba extraordinariamente. Salieron con él, y sobre la mesa del comedor Jordán cortó funda y envoltura de un tajo. Las plumas superiores volaron, y la sirvienta dio un grito de horror con toda la boca abierta, llevándose las manos crispadas a los bandós. Sobre el fondo, entre las plumas, moviendo lentamente las patas velludas, había un animal monstruoso, una bola viviente y viscosa. Estaba tan hinchado que apenas se le pronunciaba la boca.

Jordan took the pillow, unnerved, and tore it open. A cloud of feathers burst into the air—and from the base of the pillow, a bloated, monstrous shape rolled out. It was alive. Its legs twitched slowly. Its mouth gaped wide, slick and shining. The maid screamed. It was so swollen, so engorged with blood, that its mouth could barely open.

Noche a noche, desde que Alicia había caído en cama, había aplicado sigilosamente su boca -su trompa, mejor dicho- a las sienas de aquélla, chupándole la sangre. La picadura era casi imperceptible. La remoción diaria del almohadón había impedido sin duda su desarrollo, pero desde que la joven no pudo moverse, la succión fue vertiginosa. En cinco días, en cinco noches, había vaciado a Alicia.

Night after night, the creature had latched onto Alicia—its proboscis sunk into her temples—feeding. Its bite was nearly imperceptible, and her immobility had allowed it to gorge. The daily removal of the cushion had undoubtedly prevented its development, but since the young woman was unable to move, the suction was dizzying. In five days, in five nights, it had emptied Alicia.

Estos parásitos de las aves, diminutos en el medio habitual, llegan a adquirir en ciertas condiciones proporciones enormes. La sangre humana parece serles particularmente favorable, y no es raro hallarlos en los almohadones de pluma.

These bird parasites, tiny in their usual environment, can grow to enormous proportions under certain conditions. Human blood seems to be particularly favorable to them, and it is not uncommon to find them in feather pillows.