

TALL TALES



Tall Tales

by

Joan Serrano

TALL TALES

© 2012 Joan Serrano Vidal,
Monóvar, Alicante

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author.

Publisher: Angelina Books
Estación de Monóvar, Alicante

Introduction

It has always seemed a great pity to me that people from other countries that settle in the area should miss out on the literary secrets harboured in Monóvar. Most don't know the native Valenciano language – it's hard enough learning Spanish. Let this translation of one of the town's finest authors, Joan Serrano, be the beginning of a revelation.

Elaine Navarro
January 25, 2012

Dedicated to Valenciano



Just 'cause it's a tall tale
don't mean it ain't true.

Jonas Hacke
Tall Tails
1995

From the Author

The stories in this little book come from three anecdotes and a story that as a small boy I heard tell in my family's womb.

Now, after so many years, I have written them trying to contextualize the narratives for the simple reason of having remembered them, saving them from the shipwreck of oblivion; and because if, with the passing of years we continue remembering one thing and not another, it's because that thing coagulated inside of us, forming part of our being; and, converted into memories, will accompany us forever.

I was moved to do it by the joy of sharing them with today's potential

readers, in the same way that my ancestors did with me: for the worthy intention of passing them down. I have sought the predominance of oral tradition and relevance to the present day.

Of the three anecdotes, *The Comedian*, *The Priest from Salinas*, and *Fitokay*, I have no references other than my memory, nor have I encountered them in any collection of folk tales I could find. The story of *Peter and Catalina*, however, exists in different versions in our own region, as well as in the rest of the world.

Joan Serrano
February 13, 2012

Table of Contents

English Translations:

The Comedian7

The One about the

Priest from Salinas ...13

Fitokay21

Peter and Catalina.....29

Original Versions in Valenciano:

El comediant.....43

La del capellà de Salines...49

Comtevenen.....57

Peret i Catalineta.....65

The Comedian

Whenever Thomas and his mother passed by that opulent house in town, the poor mother would ask her son, “Do you see this magnificent house with so many windows and balconies, all factory made?” patting the façade as if to somehow corroborate her words. “Well, I was the housekeeper here before you were born, and they love me very much; because I worked here eight years as a maid until the war broke out. The master and mistress, especially the master, would do anything for me, if I asked, because they are very grateful to me.”

The Comedian

His mother's words, heard so many times, were engraved on his memory. Apart from that, Thomas grew up in total normality in the new family that his mother had created by marrying a farmer from Salinas that had left the countryside to become a shoemaker.

The poor child was the oldest of four brothers and sisters, with whom he shared the misery and the desire to live, but he couldn't stand the bad luck that his parents never bought him anything, because they were always confronted with the necessities of the littlest ones.

And so Tom (as his mother called him, shortening the name she had given him in memory of the brother she lost to the war) grew up, until a day came, that with 'a horse and four sheaves on his back' – fourteen years in his language – fed up with

The Comedian

going down to town and not being able to buy anything, he presented himself at that magnificent house, where his mother had been a housekeeper and was so loved, to do his first comedy.

A woman opened the door and asked him what he wanted. Thomas, a little self-consciously, introduced himself as the son of the beloved maid that had been the housekeeper in that house for eight years.

“You see, Ma’am, I need to tell you that my poor mother died of pneumonia and that I’m badly off.”

“Don’t cry, don’t cry, because your mother was a very good person and in this house we love her very much.”

“And now, without her, I don’t know what I’ll do to get along.”

The Comedian

“You can always count on this house because your mother was a very good person.”

“Thankyou, thankyou, Ma’am...”

“I’ll tell my brother when he returns from Valencia. He, too, will be very sorry.”

The woman, with her blood hot, gave him five cents, while continuing to console him, repeating time and again, “How good your mother was.”

Suddenly, on checking the coin he had in his hand, the sly boy stopped crying.

He bought tobacco, a jump rope for his little sister, and some new espadrilles, because the ones he wore were too tattered. And that was how, having gotten so much out of the five cents, he got hooked on comedy.

The Comedian

Encouraged by the results of the first show, he repeated it several more times; until one day the woman said to him, “I’m very upset, Thomas, stop the funny business and don’t try to trick us with more of the same comedy, because we are good people in this house, but we aren’t fools.”

“Ma’am, if I return to beg for more, it’s because of how good my mother was; and you know it.”

“Your mother, your mother...”

“She always spoke well of this house.”

“Don’t say another word, hush! Because last Sunday at the market I ran into your mother!”

The Comedian

“I don’t deny it, ma’am, but, as you know, my mother was so good that on Sundays they let her out of the cemetery.”

And because of that he got the nickname of the Comedian. And the town knew him by that moniker until the day he died in that magnificent house, where they caught him in a lie and discovered a truth, (so gross!) that it changed the poor life he had had up until then.

Note:

Unfortunately, I have not been able to illustrate this story with the house where it occurred, because the Comedian’s magnificent house doesn’t exist anymore, because years ago they demolished it, and now, in its place, there is an apartment complex with an elevator.

The One about the Priest from Salinas

The event I'm going to tell you about happened many years ago, when life didn't have at its disposal so many machines like now and cars didn't circumvent on the roads; and folks counted days by lines on the walls; hours, by sun clocks; and months, by moons, with the limitations inherent in such primitive ways. If it was cloudy, they didn't know what time it was. And if they forgot to make a line on the wall, they deducted it from the day at hand. Therefore only those meticulous and consistent persons knew good and well what day and hour in which they found themselves.

The Priest from Salinas

In cities, the authorities that be, conscious of such inadequacy and the corresponding discombobulations that came of it, tried to fix the situation by installing a mechanical clock in towers built especially for that purpose, or, taking advantage of an existing building, like in church bell towers, subsequently avoid major expenses; above all, however, they always attempted that each city, as small it may be, have its mechanical clock. — Time, that had always been sold wholesale, they began to sell retail. — And so, with the service of a mechanical clock, the neighbors would know at any given moment what time it was and could more accurately place a value on the time they bought or sold whichever be the case.

In some villages the goal wasn't achieved for lack of sufficient funds, and the neighbors continued counting time as well

The Priest from Salinas

as they could, or didn't count it at all, and nothing happened, outside of some anecdote, so unique, like the one about the priest from Salinas.

The printers, attentive to the need to count time, began to publish calendars of differing formats on which you could follow the passing of days without so many little lines on the wall, but those booklets cost money, and as if that weren't enough, one had to know how to read to understand what they said.

Another service given in many cities was that of the night watchmen – whose mission consisted in patrolling the streets at night singing out the hours and playing the role now done by alarm clocks. The neighbors communicated the time they had to be woken up by placing some rocks in the windows of the houses or marking lines on

The Priest from Salinas

the walls. And the watchmen alerted them at the agreed time, lambasting them with voices that proclaimed, "It's time to rise and shine!" or "Get ye to work on time!"

In the case of the town of Salinas, it's fair to say that it spent a long time without a clock, not because the authorities ignored the necessity, but because of other circumstances. The town, situated next to the lagoon, had suffered a catastrophic flood, and because of that had to relocate. The town of Salinas was built from scratch where it is now found. The enormous expenses that that relocation entailed didn't permit them, the Salinans, to install a community mechanical clock; and they spent many years in this fashion.

The priest back then was an old man who had gone through diverse parishes before they destined him to the one in

The Priest from Salinas

Salinas; his name was Father Vincent, he was a native of Catarroja, and previously had been eight years at the parish in Monóvar, from whence he had to leave because of “inconveniences” with the neighbors. That made him maintain a defective, nonsensical relationship of envy against the Monoverans.

And so arrived spring of the year that concerns us, when the inhabitants of Salinas débuted the new houses, new roads, new church and town hall, just like we know them today. But Father Vincent had a problem: he didn't know what day it was. And when mothers asked him about Palm Sunday he replied that it wasn't yet.

Unrest spread throughout the town faced with the uncertainty of not knowing if they were still in Lent or if Lent was over; each one had counted days his own way,

The Priest from Salinas

and, consequently, some claimed one thing and others something else, without there being any unanimity about the exact date in which they found themselves.

Confronted with that problem, Father Vincent ordered Tony, an older student who was an altar boy, to set off for Monóvar by the Esvarador path and find out how things were going, that is to say, if we were still in Lent, or, to the contrary, Lent had ended.

Tony left Salinas, took the path that the priest had indicated and arrived to Monóvar after two hours of nonstop walking. He washed his face with water from a fountain he found at the town's entrance and continued down Main Street until reaching the church. There he encountered a considerable amount of official goings-on and asked what they were preparing, and, in hearing the response, he

The Priest from Salinas

made the sign of the cross and exclaimed, “Oh, Mother of God Our Lord!” and turned to make tracks back by the same path that had brought him to Monóvar, now, going toward Salinas.

When he got to Salinas, the priest was waiting at the doors of the church, oh so tranquil, and smoking a cigarette.

“Oh, Father, sir, what a calamity – in Monóvar they are preparing the holy funeral procession of Our Lord, and us: without even having celebrated Palm Sunday!

“No problem, Tony, the Monoverans won’t beat us. We’ll ring the bells in glory and we’ll get ahead of them. Who do they think they are?!”

And that he did. Tony rang all of the bells to celebrate, in Salinas, Holy

The Priest from Salinas

Saturday, when in Monóvar they were still preparing the procession of Good Friday in the year of 1837.

Fitokay

Once in a while with the passage of time circumstances change a person's name, like in the case of the protagonist's name in the story I'm going to tell you.

Pepe was ten years old when becoming a muleteer at the farm on Salinas Hill. Now it may seem a bit outrageous that a ten-year old boy should leave his home and go to work as a slave from dawn to dusk, with only a Sunday rest every other week, but in those days it was a normal thing for the laboring class. Pepe knew that his work experience would start as a muleteer; and, if he diligently applied himself to his task, he would become a first class laborer, like his father, who had started as a muleteer and with time came to be a great expert in vine pruning and fruit

Fitokay

tree grafting. So he submissively accepted the kind of life it was his lot to live, and didn't protest or bellyache about having to leave the bed he shared at home for the stone bench and straw pallet full of chaff on which he would sleep from now on.

The separation from a mother at that age could have been traumatic in any other boy, but not in Pepe, who was in a hurry to grow up and help out at home, so his little sister wouldn't have to leave school to become a servant as was expected of her. Those desires to contribute his wages to his family gave him the necessary stimulus to overcome all the trials demanded of him by the job he was then commencing.

The arrival of a new muleteer on the farm always gave an excuse for amusement to the veteran laborers. He knew all about it because he had heard his father tell

Fitokay

stories to that respect. Like if they hid his espadrilles, and he had to work barefoot, like if they sent him to the foreman to ask for absurd things, like if they made fun of the high voice he still had, and a whole string of jokes in bad taste that he would have to put up with like a man to keep on.

The laborers that worked on the farm all year had a right to a monthly wage, scant as it always is, but a wage of slaves for those years; they also had rights to daily food, a bench to sleep on in the mule and horse stables, and a pair of espadrilles for each worker every six months. They took advantage of the day of rest every other week to visit family and to wash their clothes, which wasn't in the contract.

The first espadrilles they gave to young Pepe were rejects from the veteran laborers, who had removed the ones in his

Fitokay

size and left him with the largest ones made. He didn't protest. He picked up the new espadrilles and proudly put them on. The truth was that both of his feet fit into one espadrille. And as if the humiliation of walking around in those espadrilles where his feet danced around, hindering his way, weren't enough, on top of it, at every turn he had to put up with them asking ironically, "Do they fit okay?"

The torture that came of wobbling about in such preposterous espadrilles was escalated by the scorn of having to so often hear, "Do they fit okay?"

Sometimes he responded to the question by answering them, "A little loose."

This made matters worse, because they replied with sonorous laughter, "tie a good knot or you'll slip."

Fitokay

Finally, after so much asking if they fit okay, Fitokay stuck as a nickname. And everyone addressed him in such manner on that farm, where they never again called him Pepe, the name his parents had given to him.

With time he became an expert at walking barefoot. His feet got hardened and espadrilles weren't necessary to accomplish his job. The brackish water of a mine, with which he soaked his feet every night, helped him maintain the base of his body's pillars in good shape.

And, as there is always a straw that breaks the camel's back, the day came that his patience couldn't stand more shame and humiliation. It was a summer day, the day on which the farm completed the threshing; like every year, on finishing, the company offered them a first rate snack with lots of

Fitokay

wine, at the front door of the owners' home, who also were eating and drinking in the midst everyone.

“Fitokay, eat! Fitokay, drink!”

And Fitokay didn't feel like eating or drinking because his brain was somewhere else. He only wanted to get his month's pay and go home to be with his family for the days of rest coming to him, but the owner, like he usually did every year, didn't pay them until after finishing the snack. So, once again, he had to put up with the belittling of the older ones, who continued treating him like a circus monkey.

Finally, with the wages in his pocket and the bundle of dirty clothes on his shoulder, determined to do what he most desired: get out of there; unfortunately, one of the owners that had drunk too much

Fitokay

asked him, "Fitokay, do you know how to walk with shoes?"

He had seen shoes on occasion, but had never worn any; basically they were like espadrilles, but with a much better sole and leather instead of canvas.

"I'm in a really big hurry, sir."

The owner took out some new leather shoes and offered him to put them on and take a few turns around the threshing floor. The whole gang of workers began to roar, obliging him to put on the shoes and took him over to the threshing floor to have him make a few laps. And this is how it went: he put on the shoes and made two laps around the threshing floor amid the laughter of everyone, and, on the third lap, taking advantage of the impulse of the race, he took the road to town as fast as his legs would carry him, and left them

Fitokay

all standing there calling out like they were possessed:

“Fitokay, Fitokay...”

And Pepe happily answered them:

“Just right, just right...” while he ran toward home, with his wages, the sack of dirty clothes and the new shoes that make boys so happy.

Peter and Catalina

Peter and Catalina were brother and sister. They lived with their parents and grandparents in a cave with four plots of land at the foot of one of the mountains surrounding the village. Their family was very poor. Their father only had work as a farm hand if they were hiring, which wasn't always; and his kind of work was so ill paid that it wasn't enough to provide for the six mouths that depended on him.

Peter and Catalina, in spite of their indigent home environment, played and had fun running and jumping, oblivious to the family poverty. Peter was three years older than Catalina; so she clung to him like a leech and shared with her older brother the

Peter and Catalina

few things they had and the chores that he was assigned.

“Peter, go and bring a bundle of wood,” his mother ordered him.

“I’ll tag along.” Catalina, who wouldn’t leave her brother day or night, jumped up like a sparrow.

“Peter, fill the jug with water.”

“I’ll tag along.”

“Peter, bring some artichoke leaves from the terrace.

“I’ll go with him.”

“Peter, go look for sow thistle.”

“Me, too! Me, too!”

And so they lived in peace as happy as is possible when in hunger, until there came the most fatal day of her short life, on

Peter and Catalina

which her parents lost it, perhaps from malnutrition, or because of how short-sighted they were, and they behaved like savage animals.

That horribly tragic day mother made them a cup of soup with four stale pieces of bread and hot water for breakfast, like almost every morning, and on finishing it she told them, "Today you won't go together; you will each do a job: you, Peter, will take that basket of washed wool to the house in town where you picked it up the other day; you, Catalina, will go barter this jar of olives for half a dozen eggs at the house by the water basin. Whoever returns the soonest will get something.

And so it was. Peter, who knew that his distance was twice as long as his sister's, without wasting time and almost running went down to the village and delivered the

Peter and Catalina

basket of washed wool. Without amusing himself chatting with other boys, like he almost always did when going down to the village, he flew back to the cave like a rocket, obsessed by arriving first and getting whatever it was his mother had promised them.

Catalina also started her journey at a lively pace, but without getting close to running, confident of her advantage over Peter. She made her way without hurry, stopping from time to time and entertaining herself with the little animals that crossed her path. She accepted a glass of goat milk that the lady at the water basin house offered her, and in the same manner that she came, she returned, entertaining herself with the little animals that crossed her path.

Peter and Catalina

Peter with his own will power and that of his legs managed to get to the cave with his job done before his sister, and so broke all the predictions that everyone had made. “Mother I’m already here and I got here first. Will you give me that thing you promised us?”

“Come inside here.”

And poor Peter, expecting a gift, went in there, a dark room facing the corral, where his mother, if you can give that name to the person that does such a thing, killed him and carved him up putting all of the body parts in a vessel.

Later Catalina returned asking if Peter had arrived.

“Peter left and hasn’t gotten back yet.”

“Well you have to give me the thing you had promised us, because I got back sooner.”

Peter and Catalina

“You’ll have it when your father comes at supper time.”

Catalina was happy because she had beat her brother at fulfilling the job and because they would give her something only for her, which she was determined to share with Peter. She spent the whole time till dinner asking, every so often, her grandma, grandpa and mother if Peter had arrived, and everyone answered her with the same words, as if they had gotten in cahoots, “Peter left and hasn’t gotten back yet.”

And then came her father, dinner time, the table set, and Peter without returning. Only Catalina noticed the absence of her brother and so she continued asking them about Peter. Her father’s hoarse voice answered her saying, “You hush and eat in silence, a night like this, that we can have a good dinner of meat and vegetable stew.”

Peter and Catalina

Her mother filled five gathered plates worthy of a holiday, and when giving Catalina hers, says, "This is what I had promised you: a good dish of home cooking."

Catalina, on looking at the plate she has in front of her, sees a finger floating in the broth and discovers that they are eating her brother, Peter. Then, arming herself with courage, breaks the speaking ban risking her father's severe reprimands and says, "I don't want any, I will not eat my brother," immediately hiding herself under the table to cry, which was the only thing she could possibly do given the circumstances.

The father's mother and the mother's father, the mother and father, all four, without apparent remorse, ate their meal, while Catalina sobbed for having lost her brother, and retrieved each bone that the

Peter and Catalina

sinister diners were throwing underneath the table where she was.

The days went by, the saddest of poor Catalina's life, and one day each week they made dinner with the meat that was left in the vessel until it was finished. As long as they cooked Peter's meat for dinner Catalina didn't taste it and she continued finding refuge under the table from the macabre spectacle, and kept on retrieving the licked clean bones until getting her dear brother's whole skeleton.

Catalina, all alone and without anyone seeing her, dug a hole in a little plot close to the road leading to town, where her brother should have returned, and buried all of his bones without any ceremony or sign, but with, however, the firm promise to visit Peter's tomb and cry for him each and every day of life that God wanted to give her.

Peter and Catalina

Catalina's family situation got worse with every passing day. The prolonged drought left her father without work, and backaches left her mother without being able to do housework. The grandparents were quiet shadows that muttered now and then.

Meantime, while plants died of thirst on the plot where Catalina had buried all of Peter's bones, a pear tree was born and grew and became very tall – watered with Catalina's tears. Everyone made the sign of the cross and wondered how that could be such a graceful, resplendent pear tree what with such a drought. There was even talk about witchery, without being able to confirm it.

People visited the extraordinary pear tree out of curiosity and wondered how the pears would turn out when ripe. That day didn't take long, mind you, the pear tree,

Peter and Catalina

after flowering, was filled with healthy, meaty fruit. It was a real temptation in those days of such hunger that people, especially infants and the elderly, died prematurely.

Many people tried to pick a pear to feed themselves, but the pear tree didn't let them. It raised its branches, as if it were aware, impeding people from reaching the pears, which seemed entrusted to it. On some occasions persons explained to the pear tree, as if they were talking to a saint, the motives and circumstances that brought them to ask for one or several pears. In some cases Peter's pear tree granted the request, lowering its branches and permitting them to pick a few.

To avoid starvation, Catalina's family dared ask the pear tree for a pear on a day

Peter and Catalina

the tree beamed with the ripeness of the pears it had produced.

First off, was the grandpa, the father of Peter and Catalina's mother that directed these words to his grandson's pear tree, "Pear tree, would you give me a little pear?"

And the pear tree replied, "No, for having eaten me."

With the same words the grandma, the mother of Peter and Catalina's father asked, "Pear tree, would you give me a little pear?" And she got the same response from her grandson's pear tree, "No, for having eaten me."

The father and mother decided to stand together in front of their son's pear tree because the mother couldn't find the nerve to stand there all by herself to ask for a favor from her victim.

Peter and Catalina

“Pear tree, would you give us a little pear?”

“No, for having killed and eaten me,” he answered, accusing them of his death.

Catalina, who was also starving, ended the family procession of petitions saying, “Peter, would you give me a little pear?”

“All for you, all for you, because you didn’t eat me and you cried for me, too.” And the pear tree lowered its thick branches of pears to the height Catalina needed so she could pick as many pears as necessary so she wouldn’t die of hunger.

And the story is finished, up the chimney it flew. And a little honey candy for listening, too.

Original Versions

in

Valenciano



El Cuento de la Abuelita

POR

JUAN GORBI

El comediant

Sempre que Tomàs i sa mare passaven per davant d'aquella casa tan opulenta del poble, la pobra mare li deia al seu fill:

—Veus aquesta magnífica casa amb tantes finestres i balcons, tota de fàbrica? — pegant-li unes palmades a la façana per corroborar, així, les seues paraules— doncs aquí vaig estar en amo abans de néixer tu, i me volen molt; perquè aquí vaig treballar vuit anys de criada fins que va esclatar la guerra. El senyoret i la senyoreta, més el senyoret, farien per mi qualsevol cosa, si se la demanés, perquè estan molt agraïts amb mi.

El comediant

Aquelles paraules de sa mare, tantes vegades escoltades, se li van quedar gravades en la memòria. Fora d'això, Tomaset va créixer amb tota normalitat en la nova família que havia format sa mare, en casar-se amb un llaurador de Salines que havia deixat el camp per fer-se sabater.

El pobre xiquet era el major de quatre germans, amb els quals compartia la misèria i les ganes de viure, però no suportava la mala sort que mai no li compraren res, perquè sempre estaven davant les necessitats dels més menuts.

I així va créixer Maset, com li deia sa mare, acurtant-li el nom que li havia posat en memòria del germà que li havia costat la guerra, fins que va arribar un dia, amb un cavalló i quatre garbes a l'esquena –catorze anys en el seu idioma– que fart de baixar al poble i no poder comprar res, es va

El comediant

presentar en aquella magnífica casa, on la seua mare havia estat en amo i la volien tant, a fer la seua primera comèdia.

Li va obrir la porta una senyoreta que li va preguntar què volia. Tomàs, una mica emprat, es va presentar com el fill de la tan volguda criada, que havia estat vuit anys en amo en aquella casa.

—Mire vostè, senyoreta, li he de fer saber que la pobra mare meua ha faltat de pulmonia i estic passant molta necessitat.

—No plores, no plores que la teua mare era molt bona persona i en aquesta casa la volem molt.

—I, ara, sense ella, no sé com faré per seguir endavant.

—Sempre podràs comptar amb aquesta casa perquè ta mare era molt bona persona.

—Gràcies, gràcies, senyoreta...

El comediant

—Li ho diré al meu germà quan torne de València. Ell també ho sentirà molt.

La senyoreta, amb la sang calenta, li va donar un duro, mentre el continuava consolant, repetint-li una i altra volta “què bona era ta mare”.

De sobte, l'astut Maset, va deixar de plorar en comprovar la moneda que posseïa en la seua mà.

Va comprar tabac, un saltador per a la seua germana petita i unes espadenyas noves, perquè les que portava estaven massa anades. I així fou que, com que li havia tret tant de profit al duro, es va enganxar a la comèdia.

Encoratjat pel resultat de la primera funció, la va repetir unes quantes voltes més; fins que un dia, la senyoreta, li va dir:

—Estic molt contrariada, Tomàs, deixa't de romanços i no intentes enganyar-

El comediant

nos més amb la mateixa comèdia, que som bones persones en aquesta casa, però no som ximpls.

—Senyoreta, si li torne a demanar almoïna, és per tan bona com era ma mare; que vostè ho sap.

—Ta mare, ta mare...

—Ella sempre parlava bé d'aquesta casa.

—No me digues més, calla! Que el diumenge passat en el mercat me vaig creuar amb ta mare!

—No li dic que no, senyoreta, però, com vostè sap, era tan bona ma mare que la deixen eixir els diumenges del cementeri.

I per això se li va quedar el sobrenom del comediant. I amb eixe malnom se'l va conèixer al poble, fins el dia que va faltar en aquella magnífica casa, on el van agafar amb una mentida i li

El comediant

van descobrir una veritat, tan grossa! que li va canviar la pobra vida que aleshores portava.

Nota: Lamentablement, no he pogut il·lustrar aquest conte amb la casa on va succeir la història, perquè la magnífica casa del Comediant ja no existeix, perquè fa anys que la van enderrocar, i, ara, en el seu lloc, hi ha un bloc de pisos amb ascensor.

La del capellà

de Salines

El cas que us contaré va passar fa molts anys, quan la vida no disposava de tantes màquines com ara i els cotxes no circulaven pels camins; i les persones comptaven els dies fent ratlles a les parets; les hores, amb els rellotges de sol; i els mesos, per les llunes, amb les limitacions que tan primitives maneres hi comportaven. Si estava nuvolat, no sabien l'hora en què es trobaven. I si deixaven de fer la ratlleta en la paret, es descomptaven del dia en què estaven. Així que només aquelles persones acurades i constants sabien ben bé el dia i hora en què es trobaven.

La del capellà de Salines

A les ciutats, les autoritats, conscients de tal mancança i dels trastorns que ella hi comportava, van intentar esmenar-la instal·lant un rellotge mecànic en una torre construïda especialment per al cas o aprofitant alguna construcció existent, com els campanars de les esglésies, i evitar, així, majors despeses; tot i que sempre van procurar que cada ciutat, per molt petita que fos, tingués el seu rellotge mecànic. -El temps que sempre s'havia venut a l'engròs, es va començar a vendre al detall. - De tal manera, amb el servei d'un rellotge mecànic, el veïnat sabia en tot moment l'hora en què es trobava i podria valorar amb més exactitud el temps que venia o que comprava, segons fos el cas.

En alguns llogarets, no es va aconseguir tal propòsit per no disposar dels diners suficients, i el veïnat va continuar comptant el temps com bonament va poder

La del capellà de Salines

o no el va comptar, i no va passar res, fora d'alguna anècdota, tan singular, com la del capellà de Salines.

Les impremtes, atentes a la necessitat de comptar el temps, van començar a publicar calendaris de diversos formats, on es podia seguir el pas dels dies sense tanta ratlleta a la paret, però aquells llibrets costaven diners i, per si fóra poc, hom havia de saber llegir per entendre el que hi deien.

Els serenos, foren un altre servei que es va donar a moltes ciutats, la missió dels quals consistia en rondar per la nit cantant les hores i fer el paper que ara fan els despertadors. Els veïns comunicaven l'hora en què havien de ser despertats col·locant unes pedres a les finestres de les cases o fent ratlles a les parets. I el sereno els avisava a l'hora convinguda desvetllant-los

La del capellà de Salines

amb les veus que hi pronunciava: “Ja és hora de deixar el llit.” “Heu d’arribar puntuals al tall.”

En el cas del poble de Salines, val a dir que va estar molt de temps sense rellotge, no perquè les autoritats ignoraren aquesta necessitat, sinó per altres circumstàncies. El poble, situat vora la llacuna, havia patit una inundació catastròfica i, per això, van haver de canviar-lo de lloc. El poble de Salines es va construir de bell nou on es troba ara. Les enormes despeses que aquell canvi va significar, no els va permetre, als saliners, instal·lar un rellotge mecànic comunal; i així van passar molts anys.

El capellà d’aleshores era un home major que havia passat per diverses parròquies abans que el destinaren a la de Salines; li deien mossèn Vicent, era natural

La del capellà de Salines

de Catarroja, i anteriorment havia estat vuit anys en la parròquia de Monòver, d'on va haver de marxar per inconveniències amb els veïns. Això el feia mantenir una viciada relació d'enveges i despropòsits contra els monovers.

Així va arribar la primavera de l'any que ens ocupa, quan els habitants de Salines estrenaren les cases noves, els carrers nous, l'església nova i l'Ajuntament, tal i com els coneixem ara. Però mossèn Vicent tenia un problema: no sabia en quin dia es trobava. I quan les mares li preguntaven pel Diumenge de Rams, ell, els responia que encara no era.

L'inquietud es va estendre pel poble davant de l'incertesa de no saber si encara estaven en quaresma o si la quaresma s'havia acabat; cadascú havia comptat els dies a la seua manera, i, com a

La del capellà de Salines

conseqüència, els uns afirmaven una cosa i els altres, una altra, sense que hi hagués unanimitat sobre la data exacta en què es trobaven.

Davant d'aquell problema, mossèn Vicent li va manar a Toni, un escolà ja granadet que li feia el paper de sagristà, que marxés cap a Monòver per la senda de l'Esvarador i se n'assabentés de com anaven les coses, és a dir, si estàvem encara en quaresma o si, pel contrari, la quaresma s'havia acabat.

Toni va partir de Salines, va agafar el camí que el cura li havia indicat i va arribar a Monòver després de dues hores sense parar de caminar. Es va rentar la cara en una font que es va trobar a l'entrada del poble i va seguir carrer Major avall fins arribar a l'església. Allí, es va trobar amb un considerable moviment de

La del capellà de Salines

personal i va preguntar què estaven preparant, i, en escoltar la resposta, es va persignar i va exclamar “ Ai Mare de Déu Senyor” i va tornar a fer via pel mateix camí que l’havia portat a Monòver, ara, en direcció a Salines.

Quan va arribar a Salines, el capellà l’estava esperant a les portes de l’església, tan tranquil i fumant un cigarret.

—Ai, mossén Vicent, quina calamitat, a Monòver estan preparant la processó del Sant Enterrament del Nostre Senyor, i nosaltres sense haver fet la de Diumenge de Rams!

—No passa res, Tonet, els monovers a nosaltres no ens guanyaran. Repicarem a glòria i els avançarem. Què s’han cregut ells!

La del capellà de Salines

I així ho va fer. Tonet va repicar totes les campanes per celebrar, a Salines, Dissabte de Glòria, quan, a Monòver, encara estaven preparant la processó de Divendres Sant de l'any 1837.

Comtevenen

A voltes, el nom d'una persona canvia amb el pas del temps per alguna circumstància, com és el cas del nom del protagonista de la feta que us contaré.

Pepe tenia deu anys en entrar de muler en una finca agrícola del Collado de Salines. Ara, pot semblar-nos una barbaritat que un xic de deu anys deixés sa casa i se n'anés a treballar com un esclau de sol a sol, amb un diumenge de descans cada dues setmanes, però en aquells temps era bastant usual en la classe jornalera. Pepe sabia que la seua experiència laboral la començaria treballant de muler; i, que si s'aplicava de valent en el seu deure, arribaria a ser un jornalero de primera, com son pare, el qual havia començat de muler i

amb el temps havia arribat a ser un gran expert en la poda de la vinya i en els empelts fruiters. Per això va acceptar sumís la mena de vida que li havia tocat, i no va protestar ni va armar un esvalot en haver de deixar el llit que compartia en sa casa pel banc de pedra i la màrrega plena de pallús on dormiria d'aleshores endavant.

La separació de la mare a eixes edats podia haver estat traumàtica en qualsevol altre xic, però no en ell, qui tenia molta pressa en fer-se gran i ajudar en sa casa, per tal d'evitar que la seua germaneta deixés d'anar a escola per entrar de serventa com li pertocava. Aquelles ganés d'aportar el seu jornal a la seua família li van proporcionar l'estímul necessari que li va permetre superar totes les proves que el treball, que aleshores engegava, li exigia.

L'arribada d'un nou muler a una hisenda agrícola, sempre aportava un

Comtevenen

motiu de diversió als jornalers veterans. Ell això ho sabia, perquè havia escoltat a son pare contar històries al respecte. Que si li amagaven les espardenyes, i havia de treballar descalç, que si l'enviaven al majoral a demanar-li coses absurdes, que si es burlaven de la veu fina que tenia encara, i tot un rastre de bromes de mal gust que ell hauria de suportar com un valent per seguir avant.

Els jornalers que treballaven en la finca tot l'any tenien dret a un jornal mensual, escàs com sempre ho són, però d'esclaus en aquells anys; també tenien dret al menjar de cada dia, a un banc per dormir en les quadres de les mulles i els cavalls i a un parell d'espardenyes cada mig any. El dia que tenien de descans, cada dues setmanes, l'aprofitaven per a visitar la família i rentar la roba, que no entrava en el tracte.

Comtevenen

Les primeres espadenyas que li van donar al jove Pepe van estar les rebutjades pels jornalers veterans, els quals van triar les del seu número i van deixar per a ell les més grans que es fabricaven. Ell no va protestar. Va agafar les espadenyas noves i se les va posar devanit. La veritat era que en cada espadenya li cabien els dos peus. I com si fora poc l'escarni que li suposava haver de caminar amb aquelles espadenyas on els seus peus ballaven, dificultant-li el pas, encara havia d'aguantar les impertinències dels veterans que constantment li preguntaven amb ironia:

—Com te venen?

El suplici que li suposava aquell caminar insegur sobre unes espadenyas tan desproporcionades l'augmentava l'escarni d'haver d'escoltar sovint:

—Com te venen?

Comtevenen

Algunes voltes responia a la pregunta contestant-los:

—Un poc fluixes.

La qual cosa empitjorava les coses perquè els treballadors veterans li replicaven amb sonores rialles:

—Nuga-te-les bé o t'esvararàs.

Finalment, de tant dir-li com te venen, Comtevenen se li va quedar de malnom; i tots el van anomenar d'aquella manera en aquella hisenda agrícola, on mai no li van tornar a dir Pepe, el nom que els seus pares li havien posat.

Amb el temps va arribar a ser un expert caminant descalç. Els peus se li van endurir i no li van caldre espadenyes per a complir amb el seu treball. L'aigua salobre d'una mina, amb la qual cada nit remullava

Comtevenen

els seus peus, el va ajudar a mantenir en bon estat la base dels pilars del seu cos.

I, com que sempre hi ha una gota que fa vesar el got, va arribar el dia que la seua paciència no va suportar més burles i humiliacions. Va estar un dia d'estiu, el dia que en la hisenda finalitzava la trilla; com cada any, en haver-la acabada, l'empresa els va oferir un berenar de categoria, amb molt de vi, a les portes de la casa dels amos, els quals també van menjar i beure enmig de tots.

—Comtevenen menja, Comtevenen beu.

I Comtevenen no tenia ganes de menjar ni de beure perquè tenia el cap en altre lloc. Només volia que li pagaren el mes i anar-se'n a sa casa a conviure amb els seus els dies que li devien de descans, però l'amo, com solia fer cada any, no els va pagar fins que van acabar el berenar. Així

Comtevenen

que, un cop més, va haver d'aguantar les maledicències dels majors que el continuaven tractant com a un mico de fira.

Finalment, amb el jornal a la butxaca i el fardell amb la roba bruta al muscle, decidit a fer allò que més desitjava: anar-se'n d'allí; inoportunament, un dels amos que havia begut més del compte li va dir:

—Comtevenen, saps caminar amb sabates?

Les sabates les havia vistes en algunes ocasions, però mai no n'havia dut; al cap i a la fi eren com unes espadenyes, però amb millor sola i de pell en lloc de lona.

—Tinc molta pressa, senyoret.

El senyoret va traure unes sabates de pell noves i li les va oferir per a que se les posés i li fes unes quantes voltes a l'era. Tot el cor de llauradors va començar a

Comtevenen

bramar obligant-lo a que es poses les sabates, i el van portar fins l'era per a que li fes unes quantes voltes. I així va estar: es va posar les sabates i va fer dues voltes a l'era entre les rialles de tots, i, a la tercera volta, aprofitant l'impuls que havia pres en la carrera va agafar el camí del poble tan veloç com li permetien les seues cames, i els va deixar a tots plantats mentre cridaven com uns possessos:

—Comtevenen, Comtevenen...

I Pepe els va contestar content:

—Justetetes, justetetes...

Mentre corria cap a sa casa, amb el jornal, el fardell de la roba bruta i les sabates noves que fan tan feliços els xiquets.

Peret i Catalineta

Peret i Catalineta eren dos germans que vivien amb els seus pares i els iaïos en una cova amb quatre bancals als peus d'una de les serres que rodegen el poble. Formaven una família molt pobra perquè només el pare treballava de jornaler en el bancal si el buscaven que no era sempre; i la seua força de treball tan mal pagada no era suficient per a mantenir les sis boques que depenien d' ell.

Peret i Catalineta, malgrat la seua pobra família, jugaven i es divertien corrent i saltant al marge de la penúria familiar. Peret era tres anys major que Catalineta; per això, ella, se li apegava com una

Peret i Catalineta

llepassa i compartia amb el seu germà major les poques coses que tenien i les faenes que li encomanaven.

—Peret, ves i porta un garbó de llenya —li manava sa mare.

—Jo l'acompanyaré —saltava com una perpissa¹ Catalineta, la qual no deixava el seu germà ni a sol ni a ombra.

—Peret ompli la gerra d'aigua.

—Jo l'acompanyaré.

—Peret, porta penques de la riba.

—Jo aniré amb ell.

—Peret, ves a buscar lletsons.

—Jo també, jo també.

I així vivien en pau tan feliços com es pot ser en la fam, fins que va arribar el dia més funest de la seua curta vida, en el que els seus progenitors van perdre

¹ Ocell de camp. També cueta i titina.

l'oremus, potser per desnutrició, o per les curtes mires que tenien, i es van comportar com animals salvatges.

Eixe dia tan funest la mare els va fer per esmorzar una tassa de sopes amb quatre rosegons de pa i aigua calenta com quasi tots els matins; i els va dir en acabar-se-la:

—Hui no anireu junts; fareu un encàrrec cadascú: tu, Peret, portaràs eixe cabàs de llana rentada a la casa del poble on el vas recollir l'altre dia; tu, Catalineta, aniràs a baratar aquesta gerreta d'olives per mitja dotzena d'ous a la casa del bassó. A qui torne més prompte li donaré una cosa.

I així va estar. Peret que sabia que el seu trajecte era el doble de llarg que el de la seua germana, sense perdre temps i gairebé corrent va baixar al poble i va lliurar el cabàs de llana rentada; i sense entretenir-se

Peret i Catalineta

parlant amb altres xiquets com quasi sempre solia fer en baixar al poble se'n va tornar a la cova com un coet, obsessionat per arribar el primer i que sa mare li donés eixa cosa que els havia promès.

Catalineta també va engegar el seu trajecte amb el pas lleuger sense arribar a córrer confiada amb el seu avantatge sobre Peret. Va fer la seua anada sense pressa, parant-se de tant en tant i entretenint-se amb els animalets que se li creuaven. Va acceptar una tassa de llet de cabra que li va oferir la dona de la casa del bassó, i de la mateixa manera que havia fet l'anada va fer la tornada, entretenint-se amb els animalets que se li creuaven.

Peret amb la seua força de voluntat i amb la de les seues cames va aconseguir arribar a la cova amb l'encàrrec realitzat abans que la seua germana i trencar així

Peret i Catalineta

tots els pronòstics que uns i altres s'havien fet.

—Mare jaestic aquí he arribat primer. Me dona la cosa que ens ha promès?

—Passa aquí dins.

I el pobre Peret esperant un regal va entrar allí dins, a una cambra en penombra que donava al corral, on la seua mare, si és que se li pot donar aquest nom a la persona que fa tal cosa, el va matar i esquarterar posant tots els bocins en una gerra.

Més tard va tornar Catalineta preguntant si havia arribat Peret.

—Peret se n'ha anant i encara no ha tornat.

—Doncs m'ha de donar la cosa que ens ha promès perquè jo he tornat més prompte.

—La tindràs quan vinga ton pare a l'hora del sopar.

Peret i Catalineta

Catalineta estava contenta perquè li havia guanyat al seu germà en el compliment de l'encàrrec i perquè li donarien una cosa per a ella sola que estava decidida a compartir amb Peret. Es va passar tot el temps fins l'hora del sopar preguntant de tant en tant a l'avia, a l'avi i a la mare si Peret havia arribat, i tots li contestaven amb les mateixes paraules com si s'hagueren posat d'acord:

—Peret se n'ha anant i encara no ha tornat.

I va arribar el pare i l'hora del sopar i la taula parada i Peret sense tornar. Només Catalineta notava la falta del seu germà i per això els va continuar preguntant per Peret. La veu rogallosa del seu pare li va contestar dient-li:

Peret i Catalineta

—Tu calla i menja en silenci, una nit com aquesta que podem sopar una bona escudella de carn i verdures.

La mare va omplir cinc plats acaramullats dignes d'un dia de festa, i en posar-li el seu a Catalineta li diu:

—Aquesta és la cosa que t'havia promès: un bon plat de calent.

Catalineta en mirar el plat que té davant veu un dit surant en el caldo i descobreix que estan menjant-se el seu germà Peret. Aleshores armant-se de valor trenca la prohibició de parlar, arriscant-se a les severes reprimendes del seu pare, i diu:

—No en vull, jo no me menjaré el meu germà —amagant-se tot seguit sota la taula per plorar, que era l'única cosa que podia fer donades les circumstàncies.

Peret i Catalineta

La mare del pare i el pare de la mare, la mare i el pare, els quatre, sense remordiments aparents, es van menjar el seu plat, mentrestant Catalineta plorava per haver perdut el seu germà, i replegava cada os que els sinistres comensals anaven tirant sota la taula on ella estava.

Van passar els dies, els més tristos de la pobra Catalineta, i un dia cada setmana en sa casa van fer per a sopar carn de la gerra fins que es va acabar. Tant de temps com van guisar la carn de Peret com a menjar Catalineta no la va tastar i va continuar refugiant-se del macabre espectacle sota la taula, i va seguir arplegant els ossos repelats fins aconseguir tot l'esquelet del seu estimat germà.

Catalineta tota sola i sense que la veiés ningú va fer un clot en un bancalet

Peret i Catalineta

vora el camí que anava de la cova al poble, per on hauria d'haver tornat el seu germà, i va soterrar tots els ossos sense cap cerimònia ni senyal. Això sí, amb la ferma promesa de visitar la tomba de Peret i plorar-li cada dia que passés de la vida que Déu li volgués donar.

La situació de la família de Catalineta empitjorava cada dia que passava. La perllongada sequera va deixar al pare sense treball, i uns dolors en l'esquena a la mare sense poder fer quefers. Els avis només eren ombres quietes que remugaven de tant en tant.

Alhora, mentre les plantes morien de set, en el bancal on Catalineta havia enterrat tots els ossos de Peret va nàixer una perera i va créixer i es va fer molt alta, regada amb les llàgrimes de Catalineta. Tothom es feia creus i es preguntava com

Peret i Catalineta

podia ser això d'una perera tan esvelta i ufana amb tanta sequera; i es va arribar a parlar de bruixeria sense poder-ho confirmar.

La gent visitava l'extraordinària perera per curiositat i es preguntava com arribarien a ser les peres el dia que en fes. Eixe dia no va tardar, doncs la perera després de florir es va omplir de fruits sans i carnosos, tota una temptació en aquells dies amb tanta fam que les persones morien abans d'hora, sobretot els infants i els majors.

Moltes persones van intentar collir-li alguna pera per alimentar-se, però la perera no els va deixar. Aixecava les branques, com si tingués coneixement, impeditint que les persones arribaren a les peres, que semblava que les tenia encomanades. En algunes ocasions les persones li van explicar

Peret i Catalineta

a la perera, parlant-li com se li parla a un sant, els motius i les circumstàncies que els portaven a demanar-li una o diverses peres. En diversos casos la perera de Peret els va concedir la petició baixant les seues branques i permetent-los agafar-ne unes quantes.

La família de Catalineta va gosar demanar a la perera alguna pera per no morir de fam el dia que la perera lluïa madures totes les peres que havia fet.

En primer lloc va estar el iaio, el pare de la mare de Peret i Catalineta, qui li va dir aquestes paraules a la perera del seu nét:

—Perera, me dones una pereta?

—No, per haver-me menjat —li va contestar la perera. Amb les mateixes

Peret i Catalineta

paraules es va expressar la iaia, la mare del pare de Peret i Catalineta.

—Perera, me dones una pereta?

I la mateixa resposta va obtenir de la perera del seu nét.

—No, per haver-me menjat.

El pare i la mare van decidir presentar-se junts davant de la perera del seu fill perquè la mare no es veia amb cor de presentar-se tota sola a demanar un favor a la seua víctima.

—Perera, ens dones una pereta?

—No, per haver-me matat i menjat.
—els va contestar acusant-los de la seua mort.

Peret i Catalineta

Catalineta, la qual també estava passant molta fam, va tancar el seguici familiar de les peticions dient:

—Peret, em dones una pereta?

—Totes per a tu, totes per a tu, que no m'has menjat i m'has plorat.

I la perera va abaixar les branques atapeïdes de peres fins l'altura necessària perquè Catalineta pogués agafar tantes peres com necessités per a no morir de fam.

I conte acabat per la xemeneia se n'ha anat. I un caramelet de mel per a qui l'ha escoltat.



