UNTITLED

1—The Beginning of the End

Don Antonio Sanfernando de la Hera, Count of Temuco and Sinergia, was a flesh-and-blood person—yet, in truth, he never existed.

On the morning of October 12th, he took a stroll through the garden of his neighbor's large estate. Since it had rained a little, he simply sprinkled some humus over the soil, allowing the plants to absorb the necessary minerals; this kept their stems upright and robust, and ensured their flowers displayed vivid, captivating colors. He was perplexed—time was running out, and the ruby from the pendant and the diamond bracelet belonging to the deceased were nowhere to be found.

After attending the Hispanic Day parade—and fulfilling the ritual of hissing at and insulting the socialist Prime Minister—he returned to his own villa and asked his butler (an inseparable friend of the Count, though no one in the neighborhood knew or even suspected it) to pour him a glass of Vega Sicilia Cosecha Especial red wine. Right then, before even tasting the drink, he made a definitive decision regarding a matter that had been weighing on his mind for some time: to put an end to his persistent and fruitless search. Once he had finished his glass, the two men headed to the Mercedes-Benz and drove away. None of the neighbors noticed anything unusual, as it was common for them to head out on holidays to dine at one of the capital's high-end, four- or five-fork restaurants.

2—The End of the Beginning

Don Antonio began assisting his troubled neighbor—who had recently been widowed—at the end of June. With tears in her eyes, she had mentioned that she would be spending a fortnight in Paris with two of her friends—a trip she needed to lift her spirits and soothe her anxiety—and she expressed deep gratitude for his selfless commitment and kind demeanor.

One hot day, after watering the plants, the baroque urn containing the ashes of her late husband slipped from his damp hands and shattered into pieces. Naturally, he became quite agitated, pacing back and forth while cursing and muttering incoherent words. At one point, he grabbed a brush, swept the mortal remains into a small pile, and—

Jesús Claver Giménez

using a dustpan—placed them into a plastic bag. (He had also picked up a watch from the floor and tucked it into one of his pockets.) Had the baron been able to look up and witness what was unfolding around his own remains, he would surely have suffered a massive, fatal heart attack—dying once more, though this time the end would have been swift and sudden rather than a slow, lingering passing.

Once everything seemed to be back in order, the count tried to calm himself, thinking, “I simply need to buy a new one.” He had to hurry; the lady would be returning from her trip in five days. With great patience, he glued the fragments of the funerary vessel back together and took a photo of it with his mobile phone. He visited several funeral homes and antique shops—he even thought he might find a solution to his predicament in one of the Chinese-run discount stores. It was to no avail; after scouring the entire city, the two residents of the villa returned home exhausted—one from a long day of driving, the other from visiting a hundred shops and scrutinizing over five hundred different objects. That same night, he logged onto the website of a major multinational funeral services company. He was in luck; what he was looking for was there, and thanks to the express shipping service offered by the company, he would have it in his possession on time. The sale of the watch—which, despite its great value, was still covered in tiny, ashy particles—did not even cover the expenses.

3- The Beginning

Arturo Monte Carcero—the widow’s husband—had purchased a noble title using the substantial profits he made from his money-lending business. While these loans might have started with a ten percent interest rate, borrowers often failed to meet the terms set out in the fine print—a common occurrence—causing the interest to balloon to such an unmanageable level that they could no longer pay. Consequently, they would lose the properties they had put up as collateral to the creditor. Thus, he became Baron Don Arturo del Monte y Carcero, and his wife, naturally, became a baroness overnight.

As Don Arturo lay in the final throes of a long and painful illness, our protagonist—the Count of Temuco y Sinergia—rented a villa in a mountain village, very close to the dying man’s large estate. When the inevitable end finally came, the Count approached the widow, offered his deepest condolences, and volunteered to assist her with whatever she might need. Both of them, no doubt, assumed that there would be a natural trust between fellow nobles and that everything would go smoothly. And so it happened that, due to the

Jesús Claver Giménez

Baroness's frequent travels, the Count began looking after her home—and, in particular, her garden.

4- The End

Antonio Sanfernando de la Hera—whose real name was Antonio Martínez García, and who lived in a neighborhood of the capital—worked for a clandestine organization that demanded high performance from its employees, as maintaining the organization's standards required a massive financial outlay.

After handing over the keys to the Mercedes, the fake count and his friend were sent to a country in the south. They had to disappear from the scene, they were assured, to cover their tracks for as long as necessary.

Upon arrival, however, they were to be met by a group of mercenaries. Just before closing his eyes, Antonio had the impression that he saw the smiling face of the baroness reflected in the station's glass.

What was the baroness's real name?

"Stories without Mufflers" (2006 -)

Jesús Claver Giménez