

ct

An hour in the life of Stefan Zweig

de
Antonio Tabares

traducción de
Jim McCarthy

(fragmento en inglés)

Petropolis, Brazil, February 22nd 1942. A room in the Zweigs' house. A large room with few furnishings. A desk covered in papers and envelopes, a bookshelf with a few books and a small table with an unfinished game of chess on it. Seated at the desk, Charlotte Elizabeth Altmann, Lotte, aged 35, has just finished reading a document. She has a worn, somewhat sad expression. She is wearing a summer dress. Standing next to her is Stefan Zweig, aged 60. Aged face with a worn out expression and a lost look. He has been listening whilst drinking a cup of tea. Silence.

LOTTE

Do you want me to read it again?

ZWEIG

No.

LOTTE

So you'll sign it as it is?

ZWEIG

It's good as it is. I don't think it needs any more. What's the matter?

LOTTE

Nothing. I thought perhaps...

ZWEIG

What?

LOTTE

Sorry, I'm a bit confused.

ZWEIG

We've talked about it dozens of times.

LOTTE

Yes, yes, I know. It's just that...Suddenly...*(She is quiet.)*

ZWEIG

Suddenly you're afraid.

LOTTE

I'm afraid.

ZWEIG

(Very calmly) It will only be a moment. As I told you before. No longer than it takes a person to finish a cup of tea. *(He drinks.)*

LOTTE

I know. I still can't help being afraid. The last few days I've told myself over and over that when the moment came I wouldn't hesitate, but now...

ZWEIG

You know you don't have to do it. I don't want...

LOTTE

No.

ZWEIG

...you to feel forced. If you decide not to do it...

LOTTE

No, no. I want to do it.

ZWEIG

...You won't be short of money, if you want to carry on.

LOTTE

Of course I want to do it. I've made up my mind. But let me be a little bit shaky at least. It's only natural, isn't it?

ZWEIG

(Resigned) Yes.

LOTTE

(She moves closer to him, affectionately) But it gives me strength to have you at my side. To know you're so determined.

ZWEIG

Death doesn't frighten me. All I feel at the moment is sadness. I've enjoyed living. But life has turned into something sadder than death itself *(Silence.)*

LOTTE

Do you want to rest a little?

ZWEIG

No. Let's finish off. There can't be much left to do, no?

LOTTE

(Indicating a pile of envelopes and papers on the table) This pile here.

ZWEIG

I'd rather finish it now. That way we'll still have time for a walk in the garden. If you like. *(Lotte agrees)* It'll be a beautiful evening. Then we'll come home, lie down on the bed and everything will be finished.

LOTTE

(To herself) Everything.

ZWEIG

It'll be like a crossing.

LOTTE

A crossing to where?

ZWEIG

To a place where we leave pain behind.

LOTTE

You think so?

ZWEIG

What?

LOTTE

You think pain will end with death?

ZWEIG

Of course.

LOTTE

How do you know we don't take it with us?

ZWEIG

What?

LOTTE

How do you know that after we're dead we don't carry on feeling the pain that tortures us now, that we'll escape from the complete sadness that our life has become?

(Zweig shrugs. He doesn't know what to say.)

ZWEIG

Lotte, we can't know. Nobody can.

LOTTE

If we do, what a disaster, no? Even when we're dead we wouldn't manage to be safe from *him*.

ZWEIG

We said today we wouldn't talk about him. We'll never hear about him ever again.

LOTTE

Sorry. I'm not as strong as you think.

ZWEIG

Of course you are.

LOTTE

No. I'm not. You're saying that to give me courage. But you know it's not true. If only I had half of Friderike's strength.

ZWEIG

Why do you say that?

LOTTE

Because If you'd stayed with her you'd never have decided to do this.

(Zweig is stung by this. Silence.)

ZWEIG

There's nothing to be done about that.

LOTTE

It's better if we talk about it. We're putting everything in order, let's clear this up too.

ZWEIG

What?

LOTTE

Do you think I haven't thought about it? Everything would have been different if you were still married to her.

ZWEIG

It would all have been the same.

LOTTE

No, my darling.

ZWEIG

The war would be the same. Exile the same.

LOTTE

Yes. On the surface, yes. Perhaps it would all be the same. The war, exile, persecution...Perhaps you and she would also have come to Brazil, even lived in this same house, but I'm certain there wouldn't be a bottle of poison waiting for you in the table drawer. *(Silence. Zweig says nothing.)* And to think it was she who chose me to be your secretary. You know why she did it? You can imagine, no?

ZWEIG

She chose you because you were the best. She told me herself.

LOTTE

(Laughs sadly) I remember it as though it happened today. There were a few candidates, perhaps six or seven of us. I remember a girl from Vienna, very young, very beautiful. She spoke four languages. We were all convinced she'd get the job. But Friderike chose me. She chose me because I was the ugliest.

ZWEIG

Lotte, that's nonsense.

LOTTE

It's true. It never entered her head that someone like me could break up your marriage.

ZWEIG

You didn't break anything that wasn't already broken.

LOTTE

Anyway, if it weren't for me sooner or later you'd have gone back to her.

ZWEIG

You're wrong.

LOTTE

I'm certain. You would have returned to her.

ZWEIG

Why are you so certain?

LOTTE

Because you still love her.

ZWEIG

You're wrong again.

LOTTE

No. I realised it when we met her in New York. The way you smiled at her, how you looked at her.

ZWEIG

I'm still fond of her, it's true. But you have to understand. Love doesn't end suddenly. You can't wipe away twenty years of a shared life just by signing your name on some divorce papers.

LOTTE

My darling, I'm not blaming you for anything. I understand. I'm not hurt or jealous. It's just...I can't explain...In New York I sometimes felt that I was being your lover, while she was really your wife. Wait. I'm saying this for my own sake, not for you. Again, I'm not blaming you for anything. In any case, I blame myself. For not being able to offer you something strong that you could hang onto, something like a shelter in the midst of all this insanity. Sorry, I don't know how to express it any better...

ZWEIG

You express it perfectly.

LOTTE

I would've liked so much to know how to protect you from all this. To have avoided...At first, when...when I fell in love with you, this sounds selfish, I knew you'd grow old before me. And I was happy thinking that when the time came I would have to look after you. Instead it's been you who has had to look after me. I've not had the strength to do more than follow you.

(Silence.)

ZWEIG

I've never heard you talk like this.

LOTTE

I haven't talked like this before. It must be...*(She smiles)* the solemn occasion. The fact is that...it's difficult to accept that I've played such a sad part in your life.

ZWEIG

Lotte, how can you say that?

LOTTE

No...I mean...At times I've come to feel...like the crippled girl in your novel. The one for whom the lieutenant feels only pity.

ZWEIG

What I feel for you is not pity.

LOTTE

...I know, I know...I've never felt so loved as when I'm at your side. But somehow I wanted to return that love and I didn't know how. If there had been a single time when I could have truly helped you, been able to protect you from some danger, I don't know...that would've helped me not to feel a burden.

(Silence.)

ZWEIG

I don't know how you can be so hard on yourself. But perhaps I do. I can't help feeling guilty too, for having dragged you to this corner of the end of the world.

LOTTE

You didn't drag me. I followed you because I love you.

ZWEIG

And still you say you've done nothing for me. I thought Brazil would be the start of our new life but it turns out to be journey's end. And at the end of it all is you, with me. Nobody else would've been able to do what you're willing to do.

LOTTE

I wouldn't know how to carry on living without you. But I'd have wanted to be as strong as Friderike.

ZWEIG

Let's not talk about her. She's far away.

LOTTE

No. She's very close. She's been close all these years. Besides, she...gave me something for you.

ZWEIG

Friderike? Something for me? How?

LOTTE

In New York.

ZWEIG

And you've kept it all this time? What is it?

LOTTE

You'll know very soon. She asked me to give it you...at the final moment. It will help you. (*Silence. Zweig watches her.*) What?

ZWEIG

You see I was right.

LOTTE

When?

ZWEIG

When I said you were a strong woman.

(Silence. Lotte changes the subject.)