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Cover Page Footnote

Translated from Spanish by Ted Kuster

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When Rodrigo Huertas opened his eyes the morning of October 24, he understood in a flash that he had exhausted all of his choices save one: suicide. He stayed in bed a few more minutes and observed every detail of his wife's nude body: the still-firm breasts, the strong thighs, the silken torso he had caressed so many times with genuine pleasure. But Rodrigo Huertas had for more than two years been unable to smile, to enjoy life's pleasures; he could not even make love, for all his wife's beauty. He caressed the back and the buttocks that for so many years had aroused him, found yet again that he felt nothing, and decided suddenly, if a bit sadly, that the time had come: he must commit suicide that very day. But first he would kill her. He could not possibly leave her alive: a beautiful and sexy widow, with a fortune to squander on other men; the very idea drove him crazy. He would put an end to it once and for all: life was worth nothing.

That morning, after she had gone to work, he put his papers in order and made a holographic will leaving everything to his mother. At noon he lunched on lobster at his favorite restaurant and then went into the San Judas Gun Shop. In a whisper, even though the place was deserted, he told the handgun salesman that he wanted to buy the best and most expensive gun of them all. The salesman pointed to a nickel-plated Magnum .357 lying by itself, on black velvet, on the second shelf under the glass countertop.

"A deadlier pistol is impossible to find, sir. In the whole world, on the entire planet, there is no better gun. Just let me get it out of the cabinet and I will let you feel it. Or if you like I'll whistle and it'll come on its own. Of course, of course, sir, just a joke. Don't take offense, eh? I like jokes. Here, take its weight, feel the balance. So, are you going hunting? Need protection from criminals? Perhaps you're going to shoot your wife? Caught her with another man, did you? Of course I'm joking, sir, of course I am. It doesn't really matter to us. As a matter of fact, you don't even look like a married man. You are? But so young! What was it, an arranged marriage? You were married off when you were a boy? Ha, ha. Come on, don't be so serious. I just like to lighten up my life. Ha, ha. Here, feel it, caress it. So young -- I can't believe it! How does it feel? We have every kind of bullet, you know, even silver ones, to kill the Werewolf and Dracula. We bought them from the Lone Ranger when he retired. Ha, ha. It's very easy to clean. It comes apart in a matter of seconds. How does it feel? Oh, but don't forget its looks. I always say a weapon is the last resort, don't you think? Look how fierce it appears. Because the tiger is not as fierce as its stripes. Get it? The stripes are fiercer because they're riding the tiger. Ha, ha.

That's a joke my kid told me last night. Ha, ha. The boy is extremely funny, just like his dad. Ha, ha. But around here we say looks don't lie. The gun looks fierce, and it is. It's intimidating all by itself, you know. You're face to face with a bandit and you say to him 'Don't move or I'll blow your brains to hell' and I guarantee you he'll piss himself. Because with one of the little ones, with a .22 or whatever, they look at you and break out laughing. But when they see this little animal I swear they'll fall to the ground and cry, and beg, and pray, and even recite poetry. Ha, ha. Pay no attention to me, eh? It's good to smile once in a while. This monster earns respect with her looks alone. Clothes make the gun, see? Ha, ha. And there's no better weapon for committing suicide. Look, it's very easy. In fact, the instruction manual explains how to blow one's own brains out. Ha, ha. That's a joke; I'm just kidding. You don't need instructions for that. Nothing to it. Place the barrel here at your temple, like so, and squeeze the trigger..."

The flash blinded Rodrigo Huertas. The gun salesman's brains splattered the ceiling and the walls and spilled all over the counter before the body, an enormous hole above its right ear, fell to the floor. When the smoke cleared and Rodrigo Huertas understood what had happened, he could not control the urge to laugh. He roared with laughter. He laughed as he had not laughed in more than two years. He laughed until he almost lost his breath, until he was doubled over, until his stomach ached and he tasted salty tears in his mouth. He laughed the rest of the afternoon at home, as he waited with a fierce desire to see his wife, as he listened to music and danced in the living room for the first time in more than two years. He opened the windows and let the sun in. And he was still laughing that night when he made love; and so contagious was his laughter that his wife laughed too, and they both laughed, and they made love laughing, and they could not sleep that night because every time Rodrigo Huertas remembered the extremely funny gun salesman he was overcome with an uncontrollable urge to laugh and to cry and to reach out for the pleasures of love.