

## Alcina Lubitch Domecq

(Guatemala-Israel, b.1953)



Born in Guatemala City, Alcina Lubitch Domecq, a remarkable Spanish-speaking Jewish writer, lived in Mexico and emigrated to Israel as a result of family feuds and of the economic instability in her native country. She studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and worked as a business consultant while writing her stories. Her two slim published books are the collection *Intoxicada* (Intoxicated, 1984) and the novel *El espejo en el espejo: o, La noble sonrisa del perro* (The Mirror's Mirror: or, The Noble Smile of the Dog, 1983). Lubitch Domecq is a master but also a *rara avis*—an artist of silence. She writes as a homeless Jewess possessed by dybbuks and other spirits, strongly influenced by Sholem Jacob Abramovitsh and the early Hebrew writer Dvora Baron. Her style, flat and self-referential, is also indebted to Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino. "Bottles," part of *Intoxicada*, is a metaphor of Jewish isolation.

### Bottles

Mom was taken away, I don't know exactly where. Dad says she is in a nice place where they take good care of her. I miss her... although I understand. Dad says she suffered from a sickening love for bottles. First she started to buy them in the supermarket. All sorts of bottles—plastic and crystal, small and big. Everything had to be packed in a bottle—noodle soup, lemon juice, bathroom soap, pencils. She just wouldn't buy something that wasn't in one. Dad complained. Sometimes that was the reason we wouldn't have toilet paper, or there wouldn't be any salt. And Mom used to kiss the bottles all day long. She polished them with great affection, talked to them, and at times I remember her saying she was going to eat one. You could open a kitchen cabinet and find a million bottles. A million. I hated them, and so did my sister. I mean, why store the dirty linen in a huge bottle the size of a garbage can? Dad says Mom didn't know anything about logic. I remember one night, after dinner, when Mom apologized and left in a hurry. An hour later she returned with a box full of wine bottles. Dad asked her what had got into her. She said she had been at the liquor store, and immediately started to empty

every single bottle into the toilet. All the wine was dumped. She just needed the bottles. Dad and I and my sister just sat there, on the living-room couch, watching Mom wash and kiss those ugly wine bottles. I think my sister began to cry. But Mom didn't care. Then Dad called the police but they didn't do a thing. Weeks later, we pretended to have forgotten everything. It was then that Mom began screaming that she was pregnant, like when my sister was born. She was shouting that a tiny plastic bottle was living inside her stomach. She said she was having pain. She was vomiting and pale. She cried a lot. Dad called an ambulance and Mom was taken to the hospital. There the doctors made X-rays and checked her all over. Nothing was wrong. They just couldn't find the tiny plastic bottle. But for days she kept insisting that it was living inside her, growing; that's what she used to say to me and my sister. Not to Dad anymore, because he wouldn't listen to her, he just wouldn't listen. I miss Mom. . . . She was taken away a month later, after the event with the statue in the living room. You see, one afternoon she decided that the tiny bottle wasn't in her stomach anymore. Now she felt bad because something was going to happen to her. Like a prophecy. She was feeling that something was coming upon her. And next morning, before my sister and I left for school, we found Mom near the couch, standing in the living room. She was vertical, standing straight. She couldn't walk around. Like in a cell. I asked her why she wouldn't move, why she wouldn't go to the kitchen or to my room. Mom answered that she couldn't because she was trapped in a bottle, a gigantic one. We could see her and she could see us too, but according to Mom, nobody could touch her body because there was glass surrounding it. Actually, I touched her and I never felt any glass. Neither did Dad or my sister. But Mom insisted that she couldn't feel us. For days she stayed in that position, and after some time I was able to picture the big bottle. Mom was like a spider you catch in the back yard and suffocate in Tupperware. That's when the ambulance came for the second time. I wasn't home, but Dad was. He was there when they took her away. I was at school, although I knew what was happening. That same day we threw away all the bottles in a nearby dump. The neighbors were staring at us but we didn't care. It felt good, very good.

TRANSLATED BY ILAN STAVANS