

THE MEADOW

By Blanca Amelia Marques

In the shade of the holm oaks, sheltered from the midday sun, Rogelio remembers the pail of water knocking against his legs when he went to fetch water from the fountain in the square. That same pail from which his mother would scrub her skin almost red-raw every Sunday. That jet of water falling on her head, the suds from the homemade soap getting in her reddened eyes. Now her eyes are red with old age, tiredness and sadness. He knows he's the last one. His son Cosme went off to Cáceres to study and came back with airs and graces, disgusted by the smell of pigs.

Carmen never even entered his mind. What do the womenfolk know about the smell of the meadow? The smell of the broom bush and cork oak, wet grass, dew tangled up in the wool of the lambs as they nestle into the warm udders of their mothers. How many times have they sucked straight from those teats, with no fear of bacteria or any minor thing! The milk came out warm and slightly salty. Now it's all prohibitions, laws, and decrees that clog your mind.

If those lawmakers thought for one second about asking or coming over in person... Seeing the importance of pigs roaming in the meadow, of sheep grazing, of Benito's oxen continuing to pack the green field. But they know nothing. No one remembers this little green and brown corner of Extremadura.

He stands up to work, mops his brow and puts on his cap. He looks across the green expanse, infinite to his sun-damaged eyes. He sets off towards the house, thinking that maybe if Carmen stood before that incomparable beauty all might not be lost.