

Ann Patchett

Bel Canto

(fragmento)

Traducción de Mercedes de Vergara

When the lights went off the accompanist kissed her. Maybe he had been turning towards her just before it was completely dark, maybe he was lifting his hands. There must have been some movement, a gesture, because every person in the living room would later remember a kiss. They did not see a kiss, that would have been impossible. The darkness that came on them was startling and complete. Not only was everyone there certain of a kiss, they claimed they could identify the type of kiss: it was strong and passionate, and it took her by surprise. They were all looking right at her when the lights went out. They were still applauding, each on his or her feet, still in the fullest throes of hands slapping together, elbows up. Not one person had come anywhere close to tiring. The Italians and the French were yelling, "Brava! Brava!" and the Japanese turned away from them. Would he have kissed her like that had the room been lit? Was his mind so full of her that in the very instant of darkness he reached for her, did he think so quickly? Or was it that they wanted her too, all of the men and women in the room, and so they imagined it collectively. They were so taken by the beauty of her voice that they wanted to cover her mouth with their mouth, drink in. Maybe music could be transferred, devoured, owned. What would it mean to kiss the lips that had held such a sound?

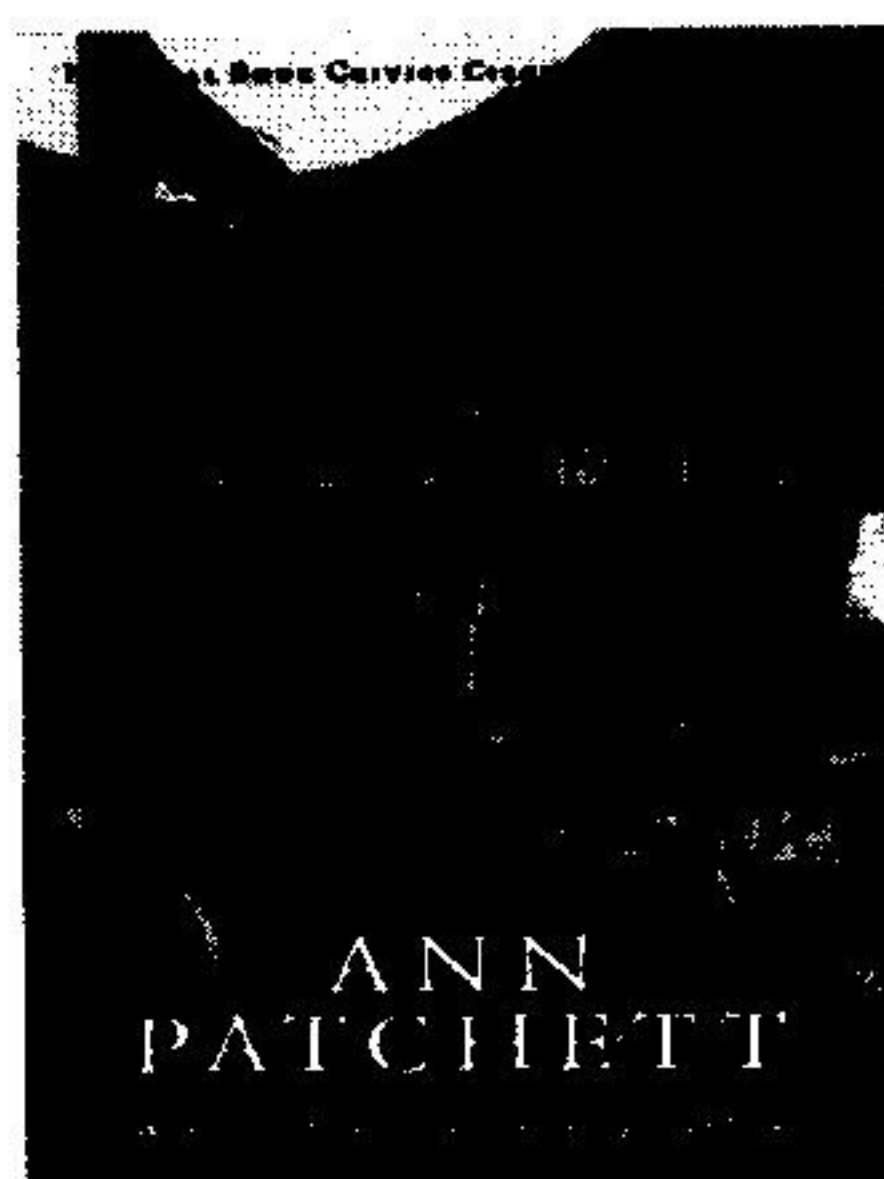
Some of them had loved her for years. They had every recording she had ever made. They kept a notebook and wrote down every place

Cuando las luces se apagaron, el acompañante la besó. Quizás se había vuelto hacia ella justo antes de que estuviera completamente oscuro, quizás estaba levantando las manos. Debe de haber habido algún movimiento, un gesto, porque todos en la sala, más tarde, recordarían un beso. No vieron un beso, eso hubiera sido imposible. La oscuridad que los rodeó era sobrecogedora y absoluta. No sólo estaban todos seguros de que había habido un beso,

también sostenían que podían identificar la clase de beso: intenso y apasionado, y la tomó por sorpresa. Todos estaban mirándola cuando las luces se apagaron. Estaban todavía aplaudiendo, de pie, todavía en pleno proceso de golpear las manos, con los codos levantados. Nadie mostraba el menor signo

de cansancio. Los italianos y los franceses gritaban «¡Brava! ¡Brava!» y los japoneses se alejaban de ellos. ¿La hubiera besado de esa manera si las luces hubieran estado encendidas? ¿Estaba su mente tan imbuida de ella que en el mismísimo instante en que se apagaron las luces, la buscó? ¿Pensó tan rápidamente? ¿O era que todos ellos la deseaban, todos los hombres y mujeres en la sala, y por eso lo imaginaban colectivamente? Estaban tan atraídos por la belleza de su voz que querían cubrirle los labios con sus labios, beber de ellos. Quizás la música se podría transferir, devorar, poseer. ¿Qué se sentiría al besar los labios que habían producido ese sonido?

Algunos la habían amado durante años. Tenían todas sus grabaciones. Tomaban nota de cada



they had seen her, listing the music, the names of the cast, the conductor. There were others there that night who had not heard her name, who would have said, if asked, that opera was a collection of nonsensical cat screechings, that they would much rather pass three hours in a dentist's chair. These were the ones who wept openly now, the ones who had been so mistaken.

No one was frightened of the darkness. They barely noticed. They kept applauding. The people who lived in other countries assumed that things like this must happen here all the time. Lights go on, go off. People from the host country new it to be true. Besides, the timing of the electrical failure seemed dramatic and perfectly correct, as if the lights had said, *You have no need for sight. Listen.* What no one stopped to think about was why the candles on every table went out as well, perhaps at that very moment or the moment before. The room was filled with the pleasant smell of candles just snuffed, a smoke that was sweet and wholly unthreatening. A smell that meant it was late now, time to go to bed.

lugar donde la habían visto, y anotaban la música, el reparto, el director. Había otros esa noche que no habían oído su nombre, que hubieran dicho, si se les preguntaba, que la ópera era una serie de aullidos de gato sin sentido, que preferían pasar tres horas sentados en el sillón del dentista. Ellos eran los que ahora lloraban sin pudor, los que habían estado tan equivocados.

Nadie tenía miedo a la oscuridad. Casi ni lo advirtieron. Continuaban aplaudiendo. Los extranjeros pensaban que aquí cosas como éstas ocurren a menudo. Las luces se encienden, se apagan. La gente del país anfitrión sabía que era cierto. Además, la falla eléctrica pareció dramática y absolutamente oportuna, como si las luces hubieran dicho: *No necesitan ver. Escuchen.* Lo que nadie se detuvo a pensar fue la razón por la que también se apagaron las velas de todas las mesas, quizás en ese mismo instante, o un momento antes. La sala estaba impregnada del agradable olor a velas recién apagadas, un humo algo dulce y completamente inofensivo. Un olor que significaba que ya era tarde, hora de irse a dormir.