Oh, how hideous it is
To see three generations of one house gathered together!
It is like an old tree with shoots,
And with some branches rotted and falling.
Go out and defy opinion,
Go against this vegetable bondage of the blood...
meeting, to his sweetheart’s house. I don’t mind as long as he gets out of my way. I give him his bread, coffee with milk, and I scrub the bathroom so that when Ester wakes up she doesn’t freak out again because of the drops of urine on the toilet rim, the hairs in the drain of the shower, the soapy water and the rest of the filth that her father goes about leaving at every step through the world.

I put mommy’s sheets in to boil, I wash the pots, I put the bedspread on the floor — running around — but there’s not enough time.

Ester wakes up with a look of disgust, she smokes, drinks coffee, rocks in her chair, eyes fixed on the television that’s turned off. It’s imprudent to speak to her, but I don’t have any choice. I ask her to take care of her grandmother, to pick through some rice. I promise not to be long. She doesn’t even look at me, buried in her silence, in her ancient hatred.

Street, sun, people. I say hi to my neighbors. It has been a while since I stop to partake in the neighborhood gossip, to comment upon the day-to-day, the soap opera. I get in line at the doctor’s office. I wait for there to be two more people behind me so that I can tell them that I’ll be back in a moment. I run to the market, our daily bread, coffee, peas. In addition I buy half a pound of sausage paste (a supposedly meat-like mass that they sell alongside what’s rationed out, the only extra expense I allow myself, because of the taste). Then, in the cafeteria, a pack of cigarettes for Ester and what luck — a bag of soy yogurt for mommy. I ask who’s the last one in line at the pharmacy, then the same procedure of waiting for two more people to arrive so that I can go back to the doctor’s office.

The doctor writes out the prescriptions mechanically, he asks mechanically about my family’s health. Likewise, I respond as I do each morning. I rush back to the pharmacy. The line has hardly advanced. I reread the murals, deteriorated and shat upon by the flies, campaigns about AIDS, about herbal medicine, about breastfeeding, about the fight against mosquitoes. I try not to listen to the conversations of the people waiting for their turn. Nevertheless, I find out about more dogs that have appeared dead. What news. Alamar is a city that is full of stray, mangy, starving dogs. They roam around the buildings in packs, they reproduce, they die . . .

My daughter blasts hip-hop. She’s seated in front of her grandmother on the balcony, a pot of rice on her knees, she separates the bad grains, the rocks, she tosses them below. Neither of the two seems to take note of my arrival.

I lower the music. I get started cooking. Ester violently slams the door
Anna Lidia Vega Serova

to her room, locks herself in there, and turns the volume of the tape player back up. I try not to listen to it, but it seeps into my pores and poisons me. I bring mommy to her room, change her, wash her, inject her, put creams on her. If it weren’t for my brother that sends us money from Miami every month, I don’t know how I could do it all, what would become of us.

I put the wheelchair in front of the television. I turn it on so it keeps her company. I return to my tasks. I force myself to think of nothing, nothing at all.

When everything is washed again, the sheets hung, the house immaculate, mommy bathed and in bed and Ester almost relaxed weaving a bag that a guy on the street will then sell to tourists, I begin to prepare the balls of sausage paste. That lifts my spirit, like when as a young girl I used to make up my face before dates with Armando.

I approach the bus stop without paying attention to the pink camel-like buses that come and go through the desert, nor the nervous, sweaty people that come and go in a constant hustle and bustle. With infinite patience I feed the dogs that approach anxious in search of their portion. I speak to them with respect. I pass out the balls. I try to be just, making sure that none eats more than his or her share, but there’s never enough. There always remain some cubs that don’t get a bite.

Loose commentaries make it to my ears from the passengers, from the passersby moved by my altruism. All lasts less than ten minutes. My bag is empty. I distance myself from the animals with tenderness. I promise to return. I abandon them to go to the coast. I don’t take my time in front of the sea either, only just enough to say a prayer, to connect me with the divine light, to bless the miracle of twilight.

I return home slowly. The dogs ate my rage and the sunset charged me up with enough energy to say goodbye to one day more and wait for the next.

I know that when the door opens I’ll find Armando in front of the television looking through Granma, that mommy’s diaper will be dirty again, that Ester will have left so as to return at dawn in a semi-conscious state, that the house will be dark and that the only voices that I will listen to will be the television announcers’. I know that anguish will surface in whatever moment, but now I feel an infinite peace.

On the way I pick up all the broken glass that I find. Smashed up — the indispensable ingredient for preparing the balls that I kindly pass out among the poor stray dogs.