

slowly, very slowly, as when someone trips in the street and manages to remain conscious of each one of his movements, anticipating the precise way his body will hit the pavement, even to the extent of predicting the parts of his skin that will be scraped by the friction, the endangered bones, the size of the bruises, and yet be unable to avoid any of it, the die is cast, the fall is interminable, yet everything happens in an instant. The first shot hit the girl who had asked the question, the little brunette, surely because she was standing. A thick red stain began to spread beneath her body. Next Gustavo fell: he felt no pain, only the impact on his thigh; a teacher yelled “Get down,” which wasn’t a good idea because the boy aimed at her and then downward, toward some of the bodies that were already prostrate on the wooden floor, but luckily not everyone obeyed the order, the screaming was fierce, piercing, deafening, in an enormous wave the sea of children ran toward the door along with the teachers and the librarian and a few parents, the boy with the scratched cheek stopped to reload, the others piled up in the doorway, many managed to escape, the shooter continued his work, shooting randomly at the crowd of bodies that pushed against each other at the library door, and when he stopped to reload for a second time, what Gustavo heard was not silence, but rather the sudden, startling reduction of noise, now one could hear only sobbing and the cries of the wounded, the word *Mama* repeated many times in different voices, in an astonishingly short span of time everyone who could had left the library, soon the police would arrive, and with his gun operational once more the shooter approached each of the wounded and finished them off with a shot to the head. The little brunette, who was no longer screaming or crying, shook with the impact. The teacher tried to say something but had no time. The detonations didn’t sound like explosions at all; they produced a dry, quiet noise. With each shot the boy rebounded, thrown backwards.

Gustavo Manzone felt the dull throb in his right thigh like a rhythmic hammering of blood. He pressed his hand firmly against the wound, trying to stop the bleeding. He attempted to stand, but his leg wouldn’t support him. He imagined the bullet had fractured his femur. He must be in shock, he thought, because the pain wasn’t terrible; it was there, present, but it hadn’t yet taken over completely. Somehow he managed to condense all his personal charm into a smile, and when the boy looked his way, he addressed

him in a voice that attempted to be firm: “It seems you didn’t like my stories much,” he said, trying to give his tone the sparkle and levity of a joke, even a touch of admiration.

The boy looked at him curiously.

“You’re the author,” he said, as if he’d just thought of it. “The author Gustavo Manzone. The one who wrote *Tales of Terror*.”

“Right,” Gustavo said. “That’s me.” And his smile grew even more dazzling.

“Yeah, in fact, I read one of them,” said the boy, his weapon still aimed straight at Gustavo. “It was good.”

“How’d you like to be a character in one of my stories? Wouldn’t you like me to write a story with you as the main character?”

The boy looked at him curiously.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I never thought about it.”

He walked over to where Gustavo half-stood, supporting himself with his arms. He placed the gun against his right ear and fired.

—Translated from the Spanish by Andrea G. Labinger

Ana María Shua (1951-) has published over forty books in numerous genres: novels, short stories, poetry, drama, children’s fiction, books of humor and Jewish folklore, anthologies, film scripts, journalistic articles, and essays. Her writing has been translated into many languages, including English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Korean, Japanese, Bulgarian, and Serbian, and her stories appear in anthologies throughout the world. She has received numerous national and international awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship, and is one of Argentina’s premier living writers.

Andrea G. Labinger has published numerous translations of Latin American fiction. She has been a finalist three times in the PEN USA competition. Recent translations include Lili-ana Heker’s *The End of the Story* (Biblioasis, 2012), Ana María Shua’s *The Weight of Temptation* (Nebraska, 2012), and Guillermo Martínez’s *Borges and Mathematics* (Purdue, 2012). Labinger’s translation of Alicia Kozameh’s *Eni Furtado Has Never Stopped Running* is forthcoming from Wings Press.

ED SMILEY

The Magic Mountain, 2013
title based on the book by Thomas Mann
acrylic and acrylic transfer on canvas, 24 x 20 in



courtesy the artist