

## Appendix A

### Passage from chapter “Dark Stories” from Pilar’s book: My Kitchen Table:

\*Note- The following passage may not be suitable for some students. Reading this passage is up to the teacher's discretion.

When I was a child, television was not even imagined, at least not in my world. On the long, dark winter evenings, there was a lot of visiting: to see friends and relatives, to talk, to hear the latest news, and, of course to gossip. The largest houses were best for those purposes; my grandmother’s house was a favorite place. She was already pretty old when I was a child and so did not go out very much, but she was a very popular, wonderful lady, and many people came to visit her. They would congregate in the spacious living room and talk for hours while sipping wine. Such talk was much more informative than the evening radio news, or even the daily paper, and it came with a pinch of salt and pepper.

The many children would go to the dining room for *una merinda*, a snack, and then play.

The house was very large. (It is now a small architectural college. In Spain, old houses like that are considered national treasures and cannot be altered.) There were *salones*, where we were not allowed, but the main- entrance reception room was very large and sparsely furnished, and we played there when it was raining or too cold to play outside.

There was also a secondary *tertulia* (gathering) in the house, that of the maids of the house plus other servants who had accompanied their master or mistress. They all got together in the sewing room and had a lively time telling all sorts of stories. Spooky ones were favorites and involved apparitions of saints and devils, or the ghosts that populated the attics of the old houses, pulling their clanking ankle chains in their nightly wanderings, doing penance for their transgressions. Tales of crimes of passion were also very popular, as were the interesting happenings between young men and women in the various households. These last stories were told in discrete language and suggestive tones if there were children present, so we immediately know that something naughty was being discussed. But the scariest tales were rumors of gruesome discoveries, infrequent for sure, but shocking and unforgettable. Those stories would be repeated again and again. They told of secrets that were eventually revealed, perhaps by a construction worker involved in the discovery who was unsuccessfully bribed to preserve the family’s honor.

Many of the townhouses were very old; in fact, my grandparents’ house must be more than six hundred years old by now. Sometimes, perhaps after an unusually long rainy season, a wall or bridge jacking a house across a street, like my own grandma’s, would collapse to the ground. I remember times when such a thing would happen, and some hidden treasures from the past were found among the rubble. But, other times, the discoveries were not valuable interesting objects, but gruesome, unspeakable and fragile skeletons of young women hidden in the recesses of ancient stone and adobe walls, where they had been entombed– some after their deaths, while others alive– left to die slowly over many years,

fed through a hole in the wall, to allow the culprit to avoid committing the mortal sin of murder, in an act more cruel than any murder could have been.

Those crimes were acknowledged with reluctance. Some were committed to hide a pregnancy; others to avoid paying dowries that would diminish the wealth inherited by the first-born male destined to continue the family line. I have heard of the same thing happening in Los Alamos, Mexico, where the families would announce that they were sending the girls to San Francisco to finishing school, and later would say they had been married there. Now, many years later, remains are being found in crumbling walls, pitiful witnesses to the avaricious cruelty that sometimes afflicts the human race.

In other cases, the disposal of bothersome girls would not be as drastic as entombing them. There were other means, after all. I very clearly remember when my mother took me to visit aunt, Violante. When Violante was ten, she was placed in the convent of Santa Clara, very close to our house in Palma. Santa Clara is a beautiful place with an ancient church next to the convent. [It] is a convent of *clausura*, which means that once a nun passes through its gates, her face will never be seen again outside its walls. [...] Violante spent her life there, from her most tender years to her death. When I visited her, I did not see her face. My mother and I entered a cell-like room with a wooden bench facing an interior curtained window and iron bars on our side. From the other side, a disembodied voice greeted us. It was a voice like that of an old child, meek and timid. I don't recall the conversation, but there were many references to God's will. We had brought her a present of vanilla and cinnamon, and some embroidery thread. She gave me an *escapulario*, a neck piece made of cloth and cord with one religious image hanging in front, and another in back so I would be completely protected. She also gave me a little silver thimble that had been her own. The *escapulario* is long gone but I still have the thimble.

The only part of Violante that I saw was her small hand, vulnerable and pale and covered with blue veins, which she stretched toward me to give my presents and retrieve hers. I believe we touched but it was an incidental touch, without meaning. She probably never had another human being touch her with any kind of affection after she entered the convent.

Another story I remember is that of Desolada. I knew Desolada and saw her many times, always dressed in black, going to church with her mother. She was my second cousin, but I spoke to her only a few times. Though she was much older than I, that was not the reason, for she did not speak to anybody.

Her family lived in a beautiful palace not far from my house, in the old part of town near the sea. Her parents were very conservative religious people and extremely reclusive. They visited only on special occasions, perhaps at weddings and, of course, at every funeral. Funerals were grand on the island because so many of us were related.

Desolada was the youngest of the family of five sisters and a brother, the heir. They did not socialize, but sometimes when we saw them in the streets they smiled and said hello. I

don't think they had any friends, and none of them married. But when the scandal happened I, like everyone else on the island, heard the story.

Desolada was pregnant! It was unheard of! To my knowledge it had never happened to an unmarried girl of one of the "best" families, the legendary seven, that had come to Mallorca with Jaime I, El Conquistador. Or, if it happened, it had never become public, instead remaining one of the dark secrets. The responsible party was the chauffeur, who wanted to marry Desolada. But that was unacceptable to the family whose honor would never allow such a union. He was peremptorily dismissed, if not incarcerated, and Desolada disappeared from the face of the Earth for a long time!

It must have been awful for her and also for her sisters. I can't even imagine what must have gone on inside those walls, or what her punishment must have been. Later on, it became known that Desolada had been placed in a home for unwed mothers. After the child, a boy, was born, the family sent him to an orphanage.

The family was very Christian, so they knew their duty: they gave a little money to the orphanage, and after some time allowed Desolada to visit her son once a year, without revealing to him that she was his mother. To him, Desolada was "la Señora," a lady interested in charitable acts. Was that not an admirable arrangement? Life went on....