

# MADE IN SATURN

*Rita Indiana*

Translated from the Spanish  
by Sydney Hutchinson



SHEFFIELD - LONDON - NEW YORK

First published in English in 2020 by And Other Stories  
Sheffield – London – New York  
[www.andotherstories.org](http://www.andotherstories.org)

First published as *Hecho en Saturno* by Editorial Periférica in 2018  
Copyright © Rita Indiana c/o Schavelzon Graham Agencia Literaria, 2020  
English-language translation © Sydney Hutchinson, 2020

All rights reserved. The right of Rita Indiana to be identified as author of this work and of Sydney Hutchinson to be identified as the translator of this work has been asserted.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 9781911508601

eBook ISBN: 9781911508618

Editor: Bella Bosworth; Copy-editor: Gesche Ipsen; Proofreader: Sarah Terry; Typesetter: Tetragon, London; Typefaces: Linotype Neue Swift and Verlag; Cover design: Steven Marsden. Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

And Other Stories gratefully acknowledge that our work is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



*In memory of Milagros Dottin*

*Come down off your throne and leave your body alone  
Somebody must change  
You are the reason I've been waiting so long  
Somebody holds the key  
Well, I'm near the end and I just ain't got the time  
And I'm wasted and I can't find my way home.*

'CAN'T FIND MY WAY HOME', BLIND FAITH

Doctor's office light. Dull light, wet behind a hood of clouds that sank the shoulders of the horizon. Dull, like the orthopaedic shoes of Dr. Bengoa, like the folder on which the doctor had written the name of his new patient, Argenis Luna, who was just coming off a Cubana Airlines flight, dizzy and dripping a pasty, cold sweat. Bengoa was waiting for him on the tarmac in his wrinkled, champagne-colored *guayabera* shirt, both hands on a sign whose bold letters he had filled in impeccably.

As soon as he recognized Argenis, the doctor came over to take his pulse while looking at his wristwatch. As they walked down the tarmac to pick up his bags he introduced him to the young soldier escorting them, saying, "This is the son of José Alfredo Luna." The palm trees defied the lightning's flashes against the gray background of the clouds, and in spite of his malaise Argenis thought it was beautiful. The air was charged and he breathed with difficulty, his nose running like an open faucet. Now at the baggage carousel, Bengoa spoke again to the soldier, adding, "My comrade José Alfredo is a hero of the Dominican urban guerrilla war and a student of Professor Juan Bosch."

Argenis's bags dropped out onto the carousel just as Bosch surfaced into the conversation. They rode all the way around before he could be bothered to identify them,

before he could be bothered to interrupt Bengoa. The heroic attributes Dr. Bengoa was listing orbited eternally around his father's legend, and Argenis along with them, just another satellite, like the red fabric suitcases on the belt. He had no strength to grab them, full as they were of the stuff his mother had bought to outfit his detox treatment in Cuba. He pointed them out with his finger and pulled the hood of his jacket up to combat the air-conditioning and the embarrassment of his obvious weakness. For months he had been living on the sofas of those friends who could still stand him, his only property a green Eastpak backpack he used to hold his syringes, his spoon, and a Case Logic full of CDs. His mother had thrown everything into the trash except the CDs and the backpack, which now held a bottle of Barceló Imperial rum as a gift for Dr. Bengoa and a big box of Frosted Flakes.

The young soldier helped them carry the bags to the car, the muscles of his lower arms barely contracting from the weight of the luggage. He feigned enthusiasm for Bengoa's topic and looked at Argenis out of the corner of his eye, as if trying to find something of the heroic father in the 120 pounds of skin and bones his son amounted to that spring.

From far away Dr. Bengoa's brick-red Lada looked new, but now inside, suffering a chill of the sort that precedes diarrhea, Argenis calculated the real age of the car by the cracks in the dashboard. He had gone forty-eight hours without heroin and had thrown up in the airplane. The Cuban flight attendants with their anachronistic uniforms and hairstyles had seemed as absurd to him as the Alka-Seltzer tablets they offered to relieve his symptoms.

Dr. Bengoa opened the glove compartment with a whack of his hand and extracted a disposable needle, some cotton, a length of rubber, and a strip of amber-colored capsules

that said “Temgesic 3mg.” The strip fell onto Argenis’s lap and for the first time he noticed the dirt that had accumulated on his jeans. They were the same ones he had been wearing a little less than a month ago when he moved into his pusher Rambo’s house.

As he tied the rubber strap around Argenis’s left arm to make the vein pop out, Dr. Bengoa explained the details of his stay, and then, pushing the syringe into the ampoule, he said, “It’s buprenorphine, a synthetic morphine used to treat addiction.” Bengoa injected him right there in the José Martí airport parking lot, with all the tranquility and legality his profession permitted, and Argenis let him do his job like a girl in love while taxi drivers in Cadillacs from a bygone era came and went, full of nostalgia tourists. Argenis had assumed that his treatment would be one of pain and abstinence, but there he was on his way to La Pradera, a hotel-turned-clinic for the health tourists who came to Cuba from all over the world, completely relieved of his symptoms and feeling how the chemical made ideas and objects lose their borders, their sharp edges.

From the outside at least, the complex looked like a cheap all-inclusive resort, one of the ones that fill up with middle-class families during Holy Week in Puerto Plata. The walls along the hallway to the reception area were decorated with posters of communist solidarity. Argenis tried unsuccessfully to imagine a hotel like this in the Dominican Republic. Colorful prints with maps and flags representing the various peoples of the world paid homage to the medical profession as a revolutionary bastion. On one of them, orange liquid from an immense syringe was being injected into a map of Latin America, with Haiti as the fortunate vein. At any other time Argenis would have made a joke.

Right in front of the injection poster, an older woman with an Argentine accent was asking a nurse for information about Coppelia, the ice-cream parlor, and next to her a younger woman who resembled her sat in a wheelchair, hiding the baldness of chemotherapy under a Mickey Mouse cap. Haydee, as the ID badge clipped to the nurse's shirt read, was not in uniform but was wearing those rubber-soled shoes that only gardeners or health professionals wore back then – everything-proof moccasins that had come from outside the country, the product of a night spent with a European, a satisfied patient's appreciation, or the guilty conscience of a sister exiled in Miami.

The nurse watched Bengoa with smiling complicity as she told the women about the history of the famous ice-cream parlor. She pulled a heavy wooden key ring with the number nineteen painted on it from her pocket and handed it to the doctor, saying “the lock has a trick to it,” before helping the Argentines into a taxi.

The new chemical was entering his system to the hurried rhythm of Bengoa's conversation: a torrent of dates emblematic of the anti-imperialist struggle; recipes for detox shakes; bits of songs by Silvio, Amaury Pérez, and Los Guaraguaos; the Chinese economy; and baseball statistics. His mouth was dry and his pupils so dilated that everything around him was starting to look like a high-contrast photo. He held on to the doctor's arm as they walked around the pool to room nineteen. The room, which Bengoa had called a privilege, had a view of the pool and a sliding glass door, in front of which two men, one in pajamas and the other in a bathing suit, were playing cards at a little wrought-iron table topped with plastic flowers. The doctor struggled with the lock, unable to hit on the trick Haydee had mentioned, while Argenis took stock of the

*Made in Saturn*

furnishings of his new room through the glass: a ceiling fan, twin beds, a nightstand.

The door to his pusher Rambo's house also had a trick to it: you had to pull on it as you inserted the key. "Let me try," he said to Bengoa, and the doctor moved aside, satisfied with the noticeable improvement in his new patient. Argenis tried once, twice, wiggling the key in the lock like the tail of a happy dog until the door gave way and the smell of bleach and clean sheets hit them in the face.

Privilege. He could feel the word in his mouth, as it made the same movements it would make to taste and swallow a spoonful of frosting. He said it every morning after brushing his teeth and washing his face, as he put on the tiny Speedos his mother had picked out. Then he would swim a bit, not very athletically, doing a few laps of breaststroke. Bengoa had prescribed it to stimulate his appetite and it was working. Around eight a.m., Haydee would bring a tray of fried eggs, toast, and coffee that he'd scarf down in his room without being able to avoid thinking about the people outside the clinic, people who mainly breakfasted on a watery coffee of chickpeas and old grounds.

"Eat it all up, Argenis," Haydee would tenderly request as she filled her bag with paper from the bathroom trashcan to throw out. Argenis wondered if Haydee lived in La Pradera or if she took the patients' leftovers home every night. Her rubber-soled shoes were as hygienic as they were discreet and they didn't reveal much beyond the work that allowed her to have them. They would never let on what Haydee thought of the foreigners whose dollars gave them access to places and services Cubans couldn't even dream of. According to Bengoa, Argenis wasn't in La Pradera because of the dollars his dad had sent along with him in a diplomatic

pouch on the Cubana Airlines flight, but rather because of his father's revolutionary credentials, his political career, the expanding orbit of his attributes.

After breakfast, he would read a bit at the iron table from a coverless copy of Asimov's *Foundation and Empire* which Bengoa had brought, and a half-hour later he'd be in the water again. Arms spread like a cross, his back to the edge of the pool, he would bicycle his legs and watch how the hospital awoke little by little, how the ill would emerge from their rooms with lazy eyes and feet. He amused himself by thinking that the hotel was an old movie he was projecting with the movements of his legs underwater, and he would slow the bicycle down as if it was a crank that would make the scenes go by in slow motion. He always achieved the desired effect; it was a simple trick, since everyone in La Pradera moved as slow as hell.

If it was really sunny the pool would fill up by about ten a.m. and Argenis would get out, afraid of contracting some strange disease, or rather another disease, because Bengoa had made him see that he was sick, that addiction was a physical condition and that he was there to cure it. He would be cured of shooting up, although addiction itself had no cure. "Your brain will always have that hunger, that thirst for relief," Bengoa had said, as he handed Argenis a pack of Popular cigarettes.

Bengoa and Argenis had lunch together every day and they would smoke at the iron table before and after the meal, observing the staff giving a blond boy with Down syndrome water therapy. They would discuss Argenis's symptoms and then the doctor would return to the gravitational center of all his conversations, the Cuban Revolution. Bengoa had been in the mountains with Fidel and had met Argenis's father during the Latin American Solidarity Conference of

1967. He would speak of these events with the solemnity of a preacher, highlighting dates and the names of forgotten places where he'd cured the wounds, fevers, infections, and asthma of the revolutionaries' flesh. Each day Bengoa would extract a sample from his bottomless sack of anecdotes. Most of these memories were as precise as Argenis's dose of buprenorphine, and it was obvious that they filled the doctor with the same kind of calm that the medicine gave his patient. Remembering these events and their sensations, Bengoa's pupils would dilate, his pulse accelerate, and then the inevitable comedown would make him stare at the pool water and throw out a last, usually tragic, line to ease his forced landing just a bit.

"When your dad came I met Caamaño, who was training here so that he could sacrifice himself in the DR later on."

Argenis imagined the word "sacrifice" beating in Caamaño's veins and those of his companions, the dark euphoria that had made them disembark on a boggy beach on the Dominican Republic's north coast in 1973 in order to topple Balaguer's government with just nine men. A tremendous high. Cuba and its revolution had pricked their veins and those of millions of young people around the world.

When Bengoa finished his daily historical venting, it was usually just before four p.m., the time when, without fail, he would inject Argenis in his room. He could have done it by the pool, but Argenis preferred to lie down on the bed for a bit, looking at the ceiling fan or at a transfer of an Argentine flag someone had stuck onto the sliding door. Argenis had thought the flag was an allusion to Che Guevara, but Bengoa explained proudly that Maradona had once stayed in that clinic and pointed out the sticker as irrefutable proof of

*Made in Saturn*

the star's past presence. The sticker had started to peel off and air pollution had tinted the transparent edges the same amber color as the Temgesic capsules.