



BACK IN TIME

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ON THE EDGE

If you've never been to the edge and looked down into the abyss, you simply have no idea. My roommate, Larry, for example, had no idea. He once told me, in all seriousness, that he was down to his last thousand dollars and felt nervous to be so close to the edge. *His last thousand dollars?* Good grief, that's not even close!

I, on the other hand, had been living right on the edge for quite some time. It had all happened so easily, somehow. Oh, I knew all about living within one's means, of course. My parents had talked to me at great length about that before I left home a year or so earlier and moved to Madrid. Apparently—like that rather mysterious rule about leaving a little on your plate as a sign of politeness to your hostess—you were supposed to leave some of your salary in the bank every month and not spend it. It sounded simple enough but nobody had ever explained exactly how (or why) to do it. Financial niceties of this kind had never been my strong suit. Money had always burned a hole in my pocket.

Anyway, for quite some time, each month had found me a little short of funds. So I talked to the lady in accounts at the advertising agency where I worked, and she made me sign a voucher and advanced me a few pesetas against my next month's salary. It made all the difference to what she called my 'cash flow' and, since it was my money to begin with, it never occurred to me that I'd have to pay it back. So the next month I took another advance, and then another, and another, until finally I was drawing a whole month's

salary in advance. It would appear that I was actually living far beyond my means but, as I say, it just sort of crept up on me and caught me completely unawares. Well, one day the lady in accounts told me I'd have to pay back everything I owed before she could give me any more money. Which meant that I'd have to get through a whole month with no salary at all. Can you imagine? That's what I mean about living on the edge!

The following Saturday morning I was at my apartment with my other roommate, Juanín; a prince among roommates, by the way, who frequently provided the wherewithal to tide me over during those difficult days at the end of the month. We were in the kitchen with some friends who hadn't felt inclined to go home after the Friday night party, drinking coffee and eating the soggy oranges and lemons we'd fished out of the dregs of last night's *sangría* (following yet another excellent bit of parental advice, which was that citrus is so good for you). The mood was relaxed and somewhat confessional and, after someone lamented that her rent would be due in a few days, the conversation revolved around similar existential concerns. And then, just like in the best of stories, the phone rang.

Lots of movies were being made in Spain in the mid-1960s. Many of them were low-budget productions shot with unknown actors of all nationalities, then dubbed into various languages at sound studios in Madrid and sold as filler to networks and cable companies in other European markets. The phone call that



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Saturday morning was from a friend who worked in that business; he was looking for voice talent to dub a thirteen-episode TV series into English. The project was to begin immediately; he needed about seven voices; and the pay was, by my standards at the time, astronomical. I returned to the kitchen and broke the news to the assembled talent that, if they were interested, they could all be in the movies. Unbridled exuberance ensued, and we unanimously agreed to make a new batch of *sangría*, as it was obviously time to celebrate a truly historic reversal of fortune.

We worked at night and on weekends in a musty old studio in the old part of town. The episodes were all sliced up into short scenes with just a few words or sentences of dialogue. We were each assigned a part, and had to study the mouth movements of the actor or actress we were dubbing, trying to enunciate the English words so that it looked as though they were being spoken by the person on the screen. Not an easy task.

We stood in the darkened studio, the script and the microphone in a little pool of light in front of us. On the director's signal the projectionist ran the clip. As the scene flickered on the screen we watched the mouths and listened to the soundtrack. The actors might be from Turkey, or Latvia, or anywhere. Some spoke their lines in their own languages, which were usually unintelligible to us, but some tried to speak in English and that was even worse.

Then, when everyone felt ready, the sound was turned off, the mike was

turned on, the director said "quiet on the set" and the clip ran in silence. As each character's mouth moved we spoke our lines, trying to make the words fit and give them the right tone and inflection. The scene was then shown again, but now it had an English soundtrack and we could all judge how successful our efforts had been. It was a constant challenge, and we sometimes recorded what seemed like an endless number of takes before the director was satisfied.



Some weeks later the job was finished and we received our handsome fees. I paid my debts and still had a little left over. We naturally threw a party to celebrate, and in addition to the usual circle we also invited everyone at the recording studio. Remembering some advice my father had given me about leaving doors open behind you in case you have to walk through them again, I also invited the lady in accounts, whose name was Graciela. Good friends are important, especially if you're inclined to live your life on the edge.