VINTAGE

LAST EVENINGS ON EARTH

ROBERTO BOLAÑO

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About the Book

Ernest Hemingway once said that a good story was like an iceberg; what is visible is always smaller than the part that remains hidden beneath the water, which confers intensity, mystery, power and meaning on what floats on the surface. This is certainly true of the fourteen stories here, the first collection by the universally acclaimed Chilean author to be published in English. Imbued with 'the melancholy folklore of exile', as Roberto Bolaño once put it, and set largely in the world of the Chilean diaspora in Central America and Europe, the narrators of these stories are usually writers grappling with private quests (Bolaño's beloved 'failed generation'), who typically speak in the first person, as if giving a deposition, like witnesses to a crime. They are characters living in the margins, on the edge, in constant flight from nightmarish threats.

In 'Sensini' an elderly South American writer instructs another younger writer, also living in exile, in the subterfuges of entering work for provincial literary prizes. The title story tells of a journey to Acapulco that gradually becomes a descent into the underworld. 'Dance Card' provides the reader with sixty-nine reasons not to dance with Pablo Neruda. And the story 'Mauricio ("The Eye") Silva' opens with the following sentence: 'Mauricio Silva, also known as The Eye, always tried to avoid violence, even at the risk of being considered a coward, but violence, real violence, is unavoidable, at least for those of us who were born in Latin America during the fifties and were about twenty years old at the time of Salvador Allende's death.'

About the Author

Roberto Bolaño was born in Santiago, Chile, in 1953. He moved with his family to Mexico City in 1968, but returned to Chile in 1973, a month before General Pinochet seized power, when he was arrested. After his release he went back to Mexico before travelling to Europe and finally settling in Catalonia. He wrote ten novels, including *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile* (both published by The Harvill Press), as well as his two prize-winning works *The Wild Detectives* and *2666*. He died at the age of fifty in 2003.

Chris Andrews was born in Newcastle, Australia, in 1962. He teaches in the department of French, Italian and Spanish Studies of the University of Melbourne. His translation of Roberto Bolaño's *Distant Star* in 2005 won the prestigious Valle-Inclán Prize.

Also by Robert Bolaño

By Night in Chile
A Distant Star

ROBERTO BOLAÑO

Last Evenings on Earth

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY
Chris Andrews

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Sensini

THE WAY IN which my friendship with Sensini developed was somewhat unusual. At the time I was twenty-something and poorer than a church mouse. I was living on the outskirts of Girona, in a dilapidated house that my sister and brother-in-law had left me when they moved to Mexico, and I had just lost my job as a night watchman in a Barcelona campsite, a job that had exacerbated my tendency not to sleep at night. I had practically no friends and all I did was write and go for long walks, starting at seven in the evening, just after getting up, with a feeling like jet lag: an odd sensation of fragility, of being there and not there, somehow distant from my surroundings. I was living on what I had saved during the summer, and although I spent very little, my savings dwindled as autumn drew on. Perhaps that was what prompted me to enter the Alcoy National Literature Competition, open to writers in Spanish, whatever their nationality or place of residence. There were three categories: for poems, stories, and essays. First I thought about going in for the poetry prize, but I felt it would be demeaning to send what I did best into the ring with the lions (or hyenas). Then I thought about the essay, but when they sent me the conditions, I discovered that it had to be about Alcoy, its environs, its history, its eminent sons, its future prospects, and I couldn’t face it. So I decided to enter for the story prize, sent off three copies of the best one I had (not that I had many), and sat down to wait.

When the winners were announced I was working as a vendor in a handicrafts market where absolutely no one was selling anything hand-crafted. I won fourth prize and 10 000 pesetas, which the Alcoy Council paid with scrupulous promptitude. Shortly afterwards I received the anthology, with the winning story and those of the six finalists, liberally peppered with typographical errors. Naturally my story was better than the winner's, so I cursed the judges and told myself, Well, what can you expect? But the real surprise was coming across the name Luis Antonio Sensini, the Argentine writer, who had won third prize with a story in which the narrator went away to the countryside where his son had died, or went to the country because his son had died in the city – it was hard to tell – in any case, out there in the countryside, on the bare plains, the narrator's son went on dying, that much was clear. It was a claustrophobic story, very much in Sensini's manner, set in a world where vast geographical spaces could suddenly shrink to the dimensions of a coffin, and it was better than the winning story and the one that came second, as well as those that came fourth, fifth, and sixth.

I don't know what moved me to ask the Alcoy Council for Sensini's address. I had read one of his novels and some of his stories in Latin American magazines. The novel was the kind of book that circulates by word of mouth. Entitled *Ugarte*, it was about a series of moments in the life of Juan de Ugarte, a bureaucrat in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata at the end of the eighteenth century. Some (mainly Spanish) critics had dismissed it as Kafka in the colonies, but gradually the novel had made its way, and by the time I came across Sensini's name in the Alcoy anthology, *Ugarte* had recruited a small group of devoted readers, scattered around Latin America and Spain, most of whom knew each other, either as friends or as gratuitously bitter enemies. He had published other books, of course, in Argentina, and with Spanish publishers who had since gone to the wall,

and he belonged to that intermediate generation of Argentine writers, born in the twenties, after Cortázar, Bioy Casares, Sábato, and Mújica Laínez, a generation whose best known representative (to me, back then, at any rate) was Haroldo Conti, who disappeared in one of the special camps set up by Videla and his henchmen during the dictatorship. It was a generation (although perhaps I am using the word too loosely) that hadn't come to much, but not for want of brilliance or talent: followers of Roberto Arlt, journalists, teachers and translators; in a sense they foreshadowed what was to come, in their own sad and sceptical way, which led them one by one to the abyss.

I had a soft spot for those writers. In years gone by, I had read Abelardo Castillo's plays and the stories of Daniel Moyano and Rodolfo Walsh (who was killed under the dictatorship, like Conti). I read their work piecemeal, whatever I could find in Argentine, Mexican, or Cuban magazines, or the second-hand bookshops of Mexico City: pirated anthologies of Buenos Aires writing, probably the best writing in Spanish of the twentieth century. They were part of that tradition, and although, of course, they didn't have the stature of Borges or Cortázar, and were soon overtaken by Manuel Puig and Osvaldo Soriano, their concise, intelligent texts were a constant source of complicit delight. Needless to say, my favourite was Sensini, and the fact that I had been his fellow runner-up in a provincial literary competition – an association that I found at once flattering and profoundly depressing – encouraged me to make contact with him, to pay my respects and tell him how much his work meant to me.

The Alcoy Council sent me his address without delay – he lived in Madrid – and one night, after dinner or a light meal or just a snack, I wrote him a long letter, which rambled from *Ugarte* and the stories of his that I had read in magazines to myself, my house on the outskirts of Girona, the competition (I made fun of the winner), the

political situation in Chile and in Argentina (both dictatorships were still firmly in place), Walsh's stories (along with Sensini, Walsh was my other favourite in that generation), life in Spain, and life in general. To my surprise, I received a reply barely a week later. He began by thanking me for my letter; he said that the Alcoy Council had sent him the anthology too but that, unlike me, he hadn't found time to look at the winning story or those of the other finalists (later on, in a passing reference, he admitted that it wasn't so much a lack of time as a lack of 'fortitude'), although he had just read mine and thought it well done, 'a first-rate story', he said (I kept the letter), and he urged me to persevere, not, as I thought at first, to persevere with my writing, but to persevere with the competitions, as he intended to do himself, so he assured me. He went on to ask me which competitions were 'looming on the horizon', imploring me to notify him as soon as I heard of one. In exchange he sent me the conditions of entry for two short-story competitions, one in Plasencia and the other in Écija, with prizes of 25,000 and 30,000 pesetas respectively. He had tracked these down, as I later discovered, in Madrid newspapers or magazines whose mere existence was a crime or a miracle, depending on your point of view. There was still time for me to enter both competitions, and Sensini finished his letter on a curiously enthusiastic note, as if the pair of us were on our marks for a race that, as well as being hard and meaningless, would have no end. 'Pen to paper now, no shirking!' he wrote.

I remember thinking, What a strange letter. I remember reading a few chapters of *Ugarte*. Around that time the book dealers came to Girona to set up their stalls in the square where the cinemas are, displaying their mostly unsaleable stock: remaindered books published by firms that had recently gone bankrupt, books printed during the Second World War, romantic fiction and wild west novels,

collections of postcards. At one of the stalls I found a book of stories by Sensini and bought it. It was as good as new – in fact it *was* new, one of those titles that publishers sell off to the book dealers when no one else can move it, when there's not a bookshop or a distributor left who's willing to take it on – and for the following week I lived and breathed Sensini. I read his letter over and over, leafed through *Ugarte*, and when I wanted a little action, something new, I turned to the stories. Although the themes and situations varied, the settings were usually rural, and the protagonists were the fabled horsemen of the pampas, that is to say armed and generally unfortunate individuals, either loners or men endowed with a peculiar notion of sociability. Whereas *Ugarte* was a cold book, written with neurosurgical precision, the collection of stories was all warmth: brave and aimless characters adrift in landscapes that seemed to be gradually drawing away from the reader (and sometimes taking the reader with them).

I didn't manage to submit an entry for the Plasencia competition, but I did for the Écija one. As soon as I had posted off the copies of my story (under the pseudonym Aloysius Acker), I realised that sitting around waiting for the results could only make things worse. So I decided to look for more competitions; that way at least I'd be able to comply with Sensini's request. Over the next few days, when I went down to Girona, I spent hours looking through back copies of newspapers in search of announcements. Some papers put them in a column next to the society news; in others, they came after the crime reports and before the sports section; the most serious paper had them wedged between the weather and the obituaries. They were never in the book pages, of course. In my search I discovered a magazine put out by the Catalonian government, which, along with advertisements for scholarships, exchanges, jobs, and postgraduate courses, published announcements of literary competitions, mostly

for Catalans writing in Catalan, but there were some exceptions. I soon found three for which Sensini and I were eligible, and they were still open, so I wrote him a letter.

As before, I received a reply by return of post. Sensini's letter was short. He answered some of my questions, mainly about the book of stories I had recently bought, and included photocopies of the details for three more short-story competitions, one of which was sponsored by the National Railway Company, with a tidy sum for the winner and 50,000 pesetas per head (as he put it) for the ten finalists: no prize for dreaming, you have to be in it to win it. I wrote back saying I didn't have enough stories for all six competitions, but most of my letter was about other things (in fact I got rather carried away): travel, lost love, Walsh, Conti, Francisco Urondo … I asked him about Gelman, whom he was bound to have known, gave him a summary of my life story, and somehow ended up going on about the tango and labyrinths, as I always do with Argentines (it's something Chileans are prone to).

Sensini's reply was prompt and extensive, at least as far as writing and competitions were concerned. On one sheet, recto and verso, single-spaced, he set out a kind of general strategy for the pursuit of provincial literary prizes. I speak from experience, he wrote. The letter began with a blessing on the prizes (whether in earnest or in jest, I have never been able to tell), those precious supplements to the writer's modest income. He referred to the sponsors – local councils and savings banks – as 'those good people with their touching faith in literature' and 'those disinterested and dutiful readers'. He entertained no illusions, however, about the erudition of the 'good people' in question, who presumably exercised their touching faith on these ephemeral anthologies (or not). He told me I should compete for as many prizes as possible, although he suggested I take the precaution of changing a story's title if I was entering it for, say, three competitions that were due

to be judged around the same time. He cited the example of his story 'At Dawn', a story I didn't know, which he had used to test his method, as a guinea pig is used to test the effects of a new vaccine. For the first competition, with the biggest prize, 'At Dawn' was entered as 'At Dawn'; for the second, he changed the title to 'The Gauchos'; for the third, it was called 'The Other Pampa'; and for the last, 'No Regrets'. Of these four competitions, it won the second and the fourth, and with the money from the prizes he was able to pay a month and a half's rent (in Madrid the rents had gone through the roof). Of course, no one realised that 'The Gauchos' and 'No Regrets' were the same story with different titles, although there was always the risk that one of the judges might have read the story in another competition (in Spain the peculiar occupation of judging literary prizes was obstinately monopolised by a clique of minor poets and novelists, as well as former laureates). The little world of letters is terrible as well as ridiculous, he wrote. And he added that even if one's story did come before the same judge twice, the danger was minimal, since they generally didn't read the entries or only skimmed through them. Furthermore, who was to say that 'The Gauchos' and 'No Regrets' were not two different stories whose singularity resided precisely in their respective titles? Similar, very similar even, but different. Towards the end of the letter he said that of course, in a perfect world, he would be otherwise occupied, living and writing in Buenos Aires, for example, but the way things were, he had to earn a crust somehow (I'm not sure they say that in Argentina; we do in Chile) and, for the time being, the competitions were helping him to get by. It's like a lesson in Spanish geography, he wrote. At the end, or maybe in a post-script, he declared: I'm getting on for sixty, but I feel as if I were twenty-five. At first this struck me as very sad, but when I read it for the second or third time I realised it was his way of asking me: How old are you, kid? I

remember I replied immediately. I told him I was twenty-eight, three years older than him. That morning I felt not exactly happy again, but more alive, as if an infusion of energy were reanimating my sense of humour and my memory.

Although I didn't follow Sensini's advice and become a full-time prize-hunter, I did enter for the competitions he and I had recently discovered, without success. Sensini pulled off another double in Don Benito and in Écija, with a story originally called 'The Sabre', renamed 'Two Swords' for Écija and 'The Deepest Cut' for Don Benito. And in the competition sponsored by the Railways he was one of the finalists. As well as a cash sum, he won a ticket that entitled him to travel free on Spanish trains for a year.

Little by little I learnt more about him. He lived in a flat in Madrid with his wife and his daughter, Miranda, who was seventeen years old. He had a son, from his first marriage, who had gone to ground somewhere in Latin America, or that was what he wanted to believe. The son's name was Gregorio; he was thirty-five and had worked as a journalist. Sometimes Sensini would tell me about the enquiries he was making through human rights organisations and the European Union in an attempt to determine Gregorio's whereabouts. When he got on to this subject, his prose became heavy and monotonous, as if he were trying to exorcise his ghosts by describing the bureaucratic labyrinth. I haven't lived with Gregorio, he once told me, since he was five years old, just a kid. He didn't elaborate, but I imagined a five-year-old boy and Sensini typing in a newspaper office: even then it was already too late. I also wondered about the boy's name and somehow came to the conclusion that it must have been an unconscious homage to Gregor Samsa. Of course I never mentioned this to Sensini. When he got on to the subject of Miranda, he cheered up. Miranda was young and ready to take on the world, insatiably curious, pretty too, and kind.

She looks like Gregorio, he wrote, except that (obviously) she's a girl and she has been spared what my son had to go through.

Gradually, Sensini's letters grew longer. The district where he lived in Madrid was run down; his flat had two bedrooms, a dining room-cum-living room, a kitchen and a bathroom. At first I was surprised to discover that his place was smaller than mine; then I felt ashamed. It seemed unfair. Sensini wrote in the dining room, at night, 'when the wife and the girl are asleep', and he was a heavy smoker. He earned his living doing some kind of work for a publisher (I think he edited translations) and by sending his stories out to do battle in the provinces. Every now and then he received a royalty cheque for one of his many books, but most of the publishers were chronically forgetful or had gone broke. The only book that went on selling well was *Ugarte*, which had been published by a firm in Barcelona. It didn't take me long to realise that he was living in poverty: not destitution, but the genteel poverty of a middle-class family fallen on hard times. His wife (her name was Carmela Zadjman, a story in itself) did freelance work for publishers and gave English, French, and Hebrew lessons, although she had occasionally been obliged to take on cleaning jobs. The daughter was busy with her studies and would soon be going to university. In one of my letters I asked Sensini whether Miranda wanted to be a writer too. He wrote back: No, thank God, she's going to study medicine.

One night I wrote and asked for a photo of his family. Only after putting the letter in the post did I realise that what I really wanted was to see what Miranda looked like. A week later I received a photo, no doubt taken in the Retiro, which showed an old man and a middle-aged woman next to a tall, slim adolescent girl with straight hair and very large breasts. The old man was smiling happily, the middle-aged woman was looking at her daughter, as if

saying something to her, and Miranda was facing the photographer with a serious expression that I found both moving and disturbing. Sensini also sent me a photocopy of another photo, showing a young man more or less my age, with sharp features, very thin lips, prominent cheekbones and a broad forehead. He was strongly built and probably tall, and he was gazing at the camera (it was a studio photo) with a confident and perhaps slightly impatient air. It was Gregorio Sensini, at the age of twenty-two, before he disappeared, quite a bit younger than me, in fact, but he had an air of experience that made him seem older.

The photo and the photocopy lived on my desk for a long time. I would sit there staring at them or take them to the bedroom and look at them until I fell asleep. Sensini had asked me to send a photograph of myself. I didn't have a recent one, so I decided to go to the photo booth in the station, which at the time was the only photo booth in the whole of Girona. But I didn't like the way the photos came out. I thought I looked ugly and skinny and scruffy-haired. So I kept putting off sending any of them and went back to spend more money at the photo booth. Finally I chose one at random, put it in an envelope with a postcard, and sent it to him. It was a while before I received a reply. In the meantime I remember I wrote a very long, very bad poem, full of voices and faces that seemed different at first, but all belonging to Miranda Sensini, and when, in the poem, I finally realised this and could put it into words, when I could say to her, Miranda it's me, your father's friend and correspondent, she turned around and ran off in search of her brother, Gregorio Samsa, in search of Gregorio Samsa's eyes, shining at the end of a dim corridor in which the shadowy masses of Latin America's terror were shifting imperceptibly.

The reply, when it came, was long and friendly. Sensini and Carmela's verdict on my photo was positive: they thought I looked nice, as they imagined me, a bit on the

skinny side maybe, but fit and well, and they liked the postcard of Girona cathedral, which they hoped to see for themselves in the near future, as soon as they had sorted out a few financial and household problems. It was clear that they were hoping to stay at my place when they came. In return they offered to put me up whenever I wanted to go to Madrid. It's a modest flat, and it isn't clean either, wrote Sensini, imitating a comic-strip gaucho who was famous in South America at the beginning of the seventies. He didn't say anything about his literary projects. Nor did he mention the competitions.

At first I thought of sending Miranda my poem, but after much hesitation and soul-searching I decided not to. I must be going mad, I thought, if I sent her that poem, there'd be no more letters from Sensini, and who could blame him? So I didn't send it. For a while I applied myself to the search for new literary prizes. In one of his letters Sensini said he was worried that he might have run his race. I misunderstood; I thought he meant he was running out of competitions to enter.

I wrote back to say they must come to Girona; he and Carmela were most welcome to stay at my house. I even spent several days cleaning, sweeping, mopping, and dusting, having convinced myself (quite unreasonably) that they might turn up at any moment, with Miranda. Since they had one free pass they would only have to buy two tickets, and Catalonia, I stressed, was full of wonderful things to see and do. I mentioned Barcelona, Olot, the Costa Brava, talked about the happy days we could spend together. In a long reply, thanking me for my invitation, Sensini said that for the moment they couldn't leave Madrid. Unlike any of the preceding letters, this one was rather confused, although in the middle he returned to the theme of prizes (I think he had won one again) and encouraged me not to give up, to keep on trying. He also said something about the writer's trade or profession, and I

had the impression that his words were meant partly for me and partly for himself, as a kind of reminder. The rest, as I said, was a muddle. When I got to the end I had the feeling that someone in his family wasn't well.

Two or three months later Sensini wrote to tell me that one of the bodies in a recently discovered mass grave was probably Gregorio's. His letter was restrained. There was no outpouring of grief; all he said was that on a certain day, at a certain time, a group of forensic pathologists and members of human rights organisations had opened a mass grave containing the bodies of more than fifty young people, etc. For the first time, I didn't want to reply in writing. I would have liked to ring him, but I don't think he had a telephone, and if he did I didn't know his number. My letter was brief. I said I was sorry, and ventured to point out that they still didn't know for sure that the body was Gregorio's.

Summer came and I took a job working in a hotel on the coast. In Madrid that summer there were numerous lectures, courses and all sorts of cultural activities, but Sensini didn't participate in any of them, or if he did, it wasn't mentioned in the newspaper I was reading.

At the end of August I sent him a card. I said that maybe that when the season was over I would visit him. That was all. When I got back to Girona, in the middle of September, among the small pile of letters that had been slipped under the door, I found one from Sensini dated August 7. He had written to say goodbye. He was going back to Argentina; with the return of democracy he would be safe now, so there was no point staying away any longer. And it was the only way he would be able to find out for sure what had happened to Gregorio. Carmela, of course, is returning with me, he said, but Miranda will stay. I wrote to him immediately, at the only address I had, but received no reply.

Gradually I came to accept that Sensini had gone back to Argentina for good and that, unless he wrote to me again, our correspondence had come to an end. I waited a long time for a letter from him, or so it seems to me now, looking back. The letter, of course, never came. I tried to tell myself that life in Buenos Aires must be hectic, an explosion of activity, hardly time to breathe or blink. I wrote to him again at the Madrid address, hoping that the letter would be sent on to Miranda, but a month later it was returned to me marked 'not known at this address'. So I gave up and let the days go by and gradually forgot about Sensini, although on my rare visits to Barcelona I would sometimes spend whole afternoons in second-hand bookshops looking for his other books, the ones I knew by their titles but was destined never to read. All I could find in the shops were old copies of *Ugarte* and the collection of stories published in Barcelona by a company that had recently gone into receivership, almost as if a message were being sent to Sensini (and to me).

One or two years later I discovered that he had died. I think I read it in a newspaper, I don't know which one. Or maybe I didn't read it; maybe someone told me, but I can't remember talking to anyone who knew him around that time, so I probably did read the obituary somewhere. It was brief, as I remember it: the Argentinean writer Luis Antonio Sensini, who lived for several years in exile in Spain, had died in Buenos Aires. I think there was also a mention of *Ugarte* at the end. I don't know why, but it didn't come as a surprise. I don't know why, but it seemed logical that Sensini would go back to Buenos Aires to die.

Some time later, when the photo of Sensini, Carmela and Miranda, and the photocopied image of Gregorio were packed away with my other memories in a cardboard box that I still haven't committed to the flames for reasons I prefer not to expand upon here, there was a knock at the door of my house. It must have been about midnight, but I

was awake. It gave me a shock all the same. I knew only a few people in Girona and none of them would have turned up like that unless something out of the ordinary had happened. When I opened the door there was a woman with long hair, wearing a big black overcoat. It was Miranda Sensini, although she had changed a good deal in the years since her father had sent me the photo. Next to her was a tall young man with long blond hair and an aquiline nose. I'm Miranda Sensini, she said to me with a smile. I know, I said, and invited them in. They were on their way to Italy; after that they planned to cross the Adriatic to Greece. Since they didn't have much money they were hitch-hiking. They slept in my house that night. I made them something to eat. The young man was called Sebastian Cohen and he had been born in Argentina too, although he had lived in Madrid since he was a child. He helped me prepare the meal while Miranda looked around the house. Have you known her for long? he asked. Until a moment ago, I'd only seen her in a photo, I replied.

After dinner, I prepared one of the rooms for them and said they could go to bed whenever they wanted. I thought about going to bed myself, but realised it would be hard, if not impossible, to sleep, so I gave them a while to get settled, then went downstairs, put on the television with the volume down low, and sat there thinking about Sensini.

Soon I heard someone on the stairs. It was Miranda. She couldn't get to sleep either. She sat down beside me and asked for a cigarette. At first we talked about their trip, about Girona (they had been in the city all day, but I didn't ask why they had come to my house so late), and the cities they were planning to visit in Italy. Then we talked about her father and her brother. According to Miranda, Sensini never got over Gregorio's death. He went back to look for him, although we all knew he was dead. Carmela too? I asked. He was the only one who hadn't accepted it, she said. I asked her how things had gone in Argentina. Same

as here, same as in Madrid, said Miranda, same as everywhere. But he was well known and loved in Argentina, I said. Same as here, she said. I got a bottle of cognac from the kitchen and offered her a drink. You're crying, she said. When I looked at her she turned away. Were you writing? she asked. No, I was watching TV. No, I mean when we arrived. Yes, I said. Stories? No, poems. Ah, said Miranda. For a long time we sat there drinking in silence, watching the black and white images on the television screen. Tell me something, I said, Why did your father choose the name Gregorio? Because of Kafka, of course, said Miranda. Gregor Samsa? Of course, she said. I thought so, I said. Then Miranda told me the story of Sensini's last months in Buenos Aires.

He was already sick when he left Madrid, against the advice of various Argentine doctors, who never billed him and had even arranged hospital treatment on the National Health a couple of times. Returning to Buenos Aires was a painful and happy experience. In the first week he started taking steps to locate Gregorio. He wanted to go back to his job at the university, but what with the bureaucracy and the inevitable jealousies and bitterness, it wasn't going to happen, so he had to make do with translating for a couple of publishing houses. Carmela, however, got a teaching position and towards the end they lived exclusively on her earnings. Each week Sensini wrote to Miranda. He knew he didn't have long to live, she said, and sometimes he seemed to be impatient, as if he wanted to use up the last of his strength and get it over with. As for Gregorio, there was nothing conclusive. Some of the pathologists thought his bones might have been in the pile exhumed from the mass grave, but they would of course have to do a DNA test, and the government didn't have the money or didn't really want the tests done, so they kept being postponed. Sensini also went searching for a girl who had probably been Greg's girlfriend when he was in hiding, but he couldn't find her