**The Colonel**

BY [CAROLYN FORCHÉ](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carolyn-forche)

WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD is true. I was in his house. His wife carried  
a tray of coffee and sugar. His daughter filed her nails, his son went     
out for the night. There were daily papers, pet dogs, a pistol on the  
cushion beside him. The moon swung bare on its black cord over  
the house. On the television was a cop show. It was in English.  
Broken bottles were embedded in the walls around the house to  
scoop the kneecaps from a man's legs or cut his hands to lace. On  
the windows there were gratings like those in liquor stores. We had  
dinner, rack of lamb, good wine, a gold bell was on the table for  
calling the maid. The maid brought green mangoes, salt, a type of  
bread. I was asked how I enjoyed the country. There was a brief  
commercial in Spanish. His wife took everything away. There was  
some talk then of how difficult it had become to govern. The parrot  
said hello on the terrace. The colonel told it to shut up, and pushed  
himself from the table. My friend said to me with his eyes: say  
nothing. The colonel returned with a sack used to bring groceries  
home. He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like  
dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this. He took one  
of them in his hands, shook it in our faces, dropped it into a water  
glass. It came alive there. I am tired of fooling around he said. As  
for the rights of anyone, tell your people they can go fuck them-  
selves. He swept the ears to the floor with his arm and held the last  
of his wine in the air. Something for your poetry, no? he said. Some  
of the ears on the floor caught this scrap of his voice. Some of the  
ears on the floor were pressed to the ground.  
                                                                                     *May 1978*