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The Key
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THE KEY

I lost my key, my hat, my head! The key came from Raul's general store in Temuco. It was outside, immense, lost, pointing out the general store, "The Key," to the Indians. When I came north I asked Raul for it, I tore it from him, I stole it in the midst of fierce and stormy winds. I carried it off toward Loncoche on horseback. From there the key, like a bride dressed in white, accompanied me on the night train.

I have come to realize that everything I misplace in the house is carried off by the sea. The sea seeps in at night through keyholes, underneath and over the tops of doors and windows.

Since by night, in the darkness, the sea is yellow, I suspected, without verifying, its secret invasion. On the umbrella stand or on the gentle ears of Maria Celeste, I would discover drops of metallic sea, atoms of its golden mask. The sea is dry at night. It retains its dimension, its power, and its swells, but turns into a great goblet of sonorous air, into an ungraspable volume that has rid itself of its waters. It enters my house to find out what and how much I have. It enters by night, before dawn: everything in the house is still and salty, the plates, the knives, the things scrubbed by contact with its wildness lose nothing, but become frightened when the sea enters with all its cat-yellow eyes.

That is how I lost my key, my hat, my head.

They were carried off by the ocean in its swaying motion. I found them on a new morning. They are returned to me by the harbinger wave that deposits lost things at my door.

In this way, by a trick of the sea, the morning has returned to me my white key, my sand-covered hat, my head—the head of a shipwrecked sailor.

Translated from the Spanish
by **Dennis Maloney** and
Clark M. Zlotchew