Llévame a casa
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Spanish novelist Jesús Carrasco has published three novels, and their impact has been profound. His debut, *Intemperie,* won several awards, including the English PEN Award, and was translated into multiple languages. *La tierra que pisamos* won the EU Prize for Literature and also has several translations. If his third novel is translated into English, it will have an established audience of fans who have read Carrasco in translation, as well as an excellent chance at attracting new readers.

Llévame a casa is the story of Juan Álvarez, who leaves his independent life in Scotland to travel back home to Spain when his father dies. After the funeral, his sister Isabel informs him that, because of business obligations, she must leave immediately with her family to spend a year in the United States. Juan, who had expected to return to Edinburgh after a weeklong trip home, is now stuck in Spain as the primary caregiver for his mother, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The novel follows Juan's life in his hometown, his struggles with his late father's manufacturing business, and his efforts to mend his relationship with his sister while adjusting to his new role as his mother's caregiver.

Cast in a Biblical light as a prodigal son returning home in disgrace, Juan is out of step with his family from the beginning. Upon returning home, he feigns sleep to avoid talking with his mother. He infuriates his sister with his lack of interest in family happenings and his failure to keep in touch, which caused Juan to miss his father's final days. Slowly, however, he settles into the home environment as he brings his mother to medical appointments, navigates government bureaucracy for her pension, weighs whether to save or sell the business, and gets a friend to fix the family's old car so they can travel more easily. The car trips become a catalyst for Juan's mother to recount old family stories, and she seems more animated and happier in the car. Eventually, as Juan struggles with increasing financial trouble and his mother's mental deterioration, he uses the car to drive her to her childhood home, hoping that some spark of memory will miraculously improve her condition.

Carrasco describes his novel as a story about one aspect of family relationships: "Of all the responsibilities a human being takes on, having children is probably the greatest and most decisive. . . . On the other hand, we rarely speak about the responsibility of being children. *Llévame a casa* deals with this responsibility and the consequences of taking it on" (translated from the back cover). The children here, both adults who have moved away from their parents to stretch their wings, find themselves torn between their own lives and the need to care for their mother, whose dementia is clearly progressing. The siblings deal with this burden differently. Isabel has been flying cross-country regularly to help both parents and is finally burnt out. Juan, however, remains wrapped up in his own feelings, with little true understanding of his mother. His journey throughout the book shows growing awareness and, finally, desperate hope for a miracle rather than acceptance of reality.

The burdens of caring for an adult with dementia are beautifully illustrated in this novel, and American readers will find plenty of material to identify with. In a country with a large proportion of adults caring for their parents or for adult children, *Llévame a casa* should find a receptive audience. Carrasco's style is well-suited to his narrative, using a wealth of carefully worded details to illustrate larger concepts. Patients hospitalized due to heart attacks are people "whose gowns don't cover their backsides," evoking common images of hospitals and the emotions stirred up by being feeling uncovered and unable to care for oneself. A full dinner plate, untouched pills and a bed piled high with blankets tell the reader that the mother forgot to eat dinner and take her medication before going to bed.

The novel is also rich in detail about rural life in central Spain. Carrasco has set his novel outside of Torrijos, a small town near Toledo. His description of the area and its people mixes the universal – nosy neighbors, old friends sharing a beer – with the particular – El Greco's art on display in Toledo, and even the drinking glasses families collect when buying Nocilla, a Spanish version of Nutella chocolate spread. These details may need some additional explanation from the translator, but not so much as to disrupt the narrative.

Overall, *Llévame a casa* seems to be an excellent choice for translation into English. Its thoughtful treatment of family relationships complicated by a parent's mental decline, in the hands of a highly respected and successful author, would be an excellent addition to the US publishing market.