

# TONY BÁEZ MILÁN

w r i t e r • f i l m m a k e r

## Swallowed

by

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It seems so long ago that this happened to me. Time, as abstract as it has always been, has become more so, with no way of telling how fast or slow the hours pass me, my mind bent, my body being eroded, absorbed.

I try to look around me, floating in this liquid, or in this gas, or in this—I don't know what you would call it. The only certainty is that I now float, constricted, when once, a week ago, maybe two weeks ago, a man on two legs I had been.

I can't remember what I looked like exactly. I have become a distant, hazy remembrance to myself. I raise my hand to be reassured that I still exist and doubt even that, or that I have ever truly walked the Earth, when my hand fails to show itself. I can feel it there, but now it is a ghost; I can feel its pain but I cannot see it. I cannot touch.

I cannot move. By myself, that is. For this thing, this monster, moves about as it pleases, letting glimpses of the world be seen by me and the others.

There are others. They have been here longer. By now they must not have thoughts. I feel mine escaping, leaving me behind to go and feed this thing. Thought must be the last to go. Consciousness is the last thing to abandon ship, like a good captain, like a foolish sailor.

My pain has blended with that of the others. Their pain has become my own. My former life comes back in spurts, bright flashes that blind me now, as I try to hold on to it with the last of my consciousness. My life. My family. My work. Myself. They are drained from me.

The monster found me while I was down, crying, desperate with a self-inflicted despair. Too much work, too many nights an insomniac, definitely too much time spent away from what used to be myself and from the ones I belonged to. It stalks, this monster, watches you falling down, falling down... It hopes you get up because it can taste the sweetness of you when you fall down again. And you will. The monster knows you will and it awaits patiently.

While I was down for the last time, on my knees, disoriented, the monster came for me. At the office. I

always knew I would get it at the office, but never imagined it this way. Heart attack—likely. Suddenly running out of air to the point of asphyxia and death were also a possibility. A bullet in the head—maybe some day. But what happened to me was impossible:

Late one night, as I worked on yet another urgent project, I heard the door open and close. I stood up from the desk, looked around at the rest of the office. The other desks, deserted, thirty in total, were accommodated in rows of ten. Everyone knew to finish the work the next day. All of them but me, alone again and about to meet my demise in this impossible fashion.

It was off to one side of the door, staring at me with one large eye that was merely a slit, a gash. The monster has no defined form. It is a dark, heaving mass, and it seems to glide and take steps at the same time. It was in front of me after a long while, for it took its time going in between the other desks, as if sniffing out future victims, figuring out who to stalk next.

Taller than me, this thing was. I did not move, did not take a step back or forth. Was I hypnotized or simply tired? Both, I now conclude. Both. It must have used some power, but I was ready. It must not have taken much.

A mouth opened and I walked to it. I bent over to look inside the gaping black and viscous and rounded hole,

perfect for a man to fall in, through, and I was sucked in.

Just like that. It gulped and I was completely inside.

No one will ever see me again. I expect that a search was mounted and the protocol is being followed. A missing person has to be searched for. I imagine they found no clues in the office. The cops would not have seen any signs of a struggle. The investigation is still on, I'm sure, a week, maybe two weeks later, but eventually they will desist, file me away. At the office they will place someone younger and meaner in my place; already have, most likely. At home, they will imagine I am just late yet again. I was never really there; they will not miss me.

Eventually, I will disappear completely, taken out of the rat race in the most unpredictable way. It is impossible. And yet here I am, floating, forgetting myself away, assimilated by the monster.

Eventually, I will cease to be.

That might happen sooner than I thought, for it is nighttime anew and the monster approaches some other poor bastard working late at night. I'm sure it could be daytime, or it could be indoors or outdoors, in an office, on the street or in an alley. It could be a miserable rainy day or gloriously sunny, and that you could be a man in shorts and a T-shirt or a woman in a business suit, and the monster, if it has been on the prowl and you are just too

stupid or numbed or busy to realize it, will approach and swallow you.

Now here this poor bastard stands, staring blankly at the impossible apparition. The monster has opened up the slit to let us see.

The man bends to take a look inside.

Soon after, I forget more things. My feelings leave me completely. The pain dissipates. I forget that I once had hands. It's not important now.

I can't remember what happened to me a week ago, maybe two weeks ago. Consciousness is no longer mine. I forget my being. I forget...