La Torre del Fantasma de Buenos Aires

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When designing this apartment building, Álvarez took into account the particular shape and structure of the site and produced two easily distinguishable sections that can almost be considered as two separate buildings: a lower one, situated on the broader part of the plot, containing four apartments with separate entrances; and a narrower section with one apartment on each floor and a four-storey crenellated tower at one end. The fine Art Nouveau detailing, singular cornice and massive tower have made the building a local landmark and a fundamental part of the city’s architectural heritage.

The scene of a legend recounted for many decades, the building is known as the Torre del Fantasma, or Ghost Tower. Everyone in the district and even throughout the city knows that inside lies a mysterious event occurred there, the story of which has been passed down through the generations.

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Designed in 1915, the building was opened in 1923, and shortly afterwards — so the tale goes — a reclusive painter named Clementina moved in and set up her studio in the tower. Despite her solitary, unsociable lifestyle, she agreed to receive a journalist who wanted to photograph her work and write an article on it. The meeting went well but when the journalist returned home and set about developing the photographs he noticed something rather disturbing. Surprised, he immediately went to show the pictures to Clementina, who let him in and had a look at them: there, among the brushstrokes on her paintings, as if playing with the colours and forms, were a number of tiny men that she had not painted. Disconcerted and somewhat annoyed, Clementina refused to speak about the phenomenon to the journalist and merely snapped, “You weren’t meant to see them.”

A few days later a shot was heard in the artist’s home and the neighbours called the police. Although nobody had left the apartment in the meantime, when the police finally managed to force open the door they found everything in order, except that neither Clementina nor her paintings were anywhere to be seen. And nothing more was ever heard of her.

In the district of La Boca, in the south of Buenos Aires, there is one building that stands out above the rest for its imposing presence and beautiful features. Its architect, Guillermo Álvarez, one of the greatest exponents of Catalan Modernisme in Buenos Aires, could never have imagined that it would become the setting for one of the city’s strangest tales.

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