Lo que sueñan los perros
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Lo que sueñan los perros (What Dogs Dream About)

This story takes place in the fictional town of Lútaca in Galicia in March 2015. Its main industry is fishing and it is the home of a major fish canning business built up by local entrepreneur Adolfo Santos. In the prologue, the local down and out Caracán and his beloved dog Cuca are taking refuge from a huge storm in the old hut Santos allows them to occupy. However they receive a visit from Señoriña, Santos' chauffeur and bodyguard who assaults Caracán and tells them to leave.

As the story begins, the narrator, Baltasar, is laboriously using a pencil to tap out messages to an online forum on a keyboard and we learn that on the night of the storm all the people in town were transformed into dogs and that this seems to have been a global event. Baltasar remains in his apartment partly through fear of the present and future and also due to grief and desperation after being left by his girlfriend Lola. When someone knocks at the door he opens it in the hope that it is Lola and is disappointed to find it is Bea, his young neighbour and that her single mother, Carla, left her home alone on the night of the storm. This is all communicated via written the written word, which is the medium for almost all communication between the former humans throughout the book. Baltasar is unwilling to kill himself in front of Bea and she attaches herself to him and eventually persuades him to help her look for her mother at a friend's house, with Baltasar propping the door of their building open with his type writer so they will be able to get back in. This turns out to be a wild goose chase and when they return, the typewriter has gone and they are unable to get back into their building. They stick together regardless and go in search of food, almost getting killed and eaten after being lured to the church with the promise of food by a pack of dogs lead by 'the Howler', the former priest who is the only dog able to produce anything reflecting human language.

Lo que sueñan los perros is a highly original and engaging book. As Castillo explains in his foreword, it is all written in the present tense on the basis that dogs live in the present, and this works well in terms of the conflict between the human's past identities and their new canine state and their uncertain futures. The bulk of the story is told by Baltasar in the first person and he has a coherent voice and personality, with third person narration for the segments focusing on Caracán, Carla and Señoriña.

Lo que sueñan los perros is likely to travel well. Although it is clearly set in Galicia, there is little in terms of culture that would need explaining and the overall themes of loss, identity, human nature and relationships are universal ones that are likely to appeal to a UK audience. On a thematic note, the author explicitly highlights loss as a key theme of the book, having written it following the death of a close friend. It is divided into five long chapters whose titles reflect the well-established five stages of grief and we see Baltasar progress through these stages, while other characters also grieve

for lost loved ones as well as their former selves. Although it is reminiscent of Lord of the Flies and Day of the Triffids in terms of the breakdown of established society and the fight for survival, the overall concept really is original and well-executed.

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