The Censors

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SHORT STORY

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This version of the selection alternates original text with summarized passages. Dotted lines appear next to the summarized passages.

NOTES

When the story opens, Juan is worried. After he finds Mariana's new address in Paris, he immediately writes her a letter. In his happiness, he does not think about the consequences of writing to her. Now he can't sleep at night, worrying about the letter he sent. Nothing in its contents will arouse suspicion, he thinks. But he also knows the people in the censorship office closely examine every detail of every letter, and very few letters continue on their way.

Usually it takes months, even years, if there aren't any snags; all this time the freedom, maybe even the life, of both sender and receiver is in jeopardy. And that's why Juan's so troubled: thinking that something might happen to Mariana because of his letters.

Juan's thoughts run wild. He knows the power of the *Censor's Secret Command.* Censors operate all over the world. Even though Mariana must finally feel safe, living in the city of her dreams, there is nothing to stop the censors from seeking her out and kidnapping her. In his desperation to help keep Mariana safe, Juan comes up with a plan.

This was Juan's sound plan when he, like many others, applied for a censor's job—not because he had a calling or needed a job: no, he applied simply to intercept his own letter. … He was hired immediately, for each day more and more censors are needed and no one would bother to check on his references.

The *Censorship Division* is probably aware that some workers, like Juan, try to catch their own letters. But so many letters come through the office that the people in charge are not particularly worried.

Soon, Juan begins to feel at peace at his job. He does everything he can to get his hands on his letter to Mariana. Juan remains at ease even when he is sent to *Section K,* where workers check packages for explosives.

It's true that on the third day, a fellow worker had his right hand blown off by a letter, but the division chief claimed it was sheer negligence on the victim's part.

The other employees must go back to work. Later, though, a group gathers to organize a labor strike. These workers want higher wages for the unsafe work they do. Juan does not join the group. In fact, he reports the worker who tried to organize the strike. As a result, Juan is promoted. He tries to reassure himself he will not make a habit of informing on his co-workers.

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Juan is sent to *Section F*, where letters are checked for poison dust. He works hard, and then he gets transferred to *Section E*. In that section, he reads and carefully examines letters himself. He figures his letter to Mariana might even be floating around in this section by now.

Soon his work became so absorbing that his noble mission blurred in his mind. Day after day he crossed out whole paragraphs in red ink, pitilessly chucking many letters into the censored basket.

Juan's enthusiasm for his work gets him promoted quickly. He soon finds himself in *Section B*. There, he reads the few letters that arrive, those that have passed through the other sections. He examines them with a magnifying glass and even a microscope. He smells them for anything suspicious. When he returns home he's very tired, but he feels "satisfied for having done his duty." His mother is worried about him. She knows he's headed in the wrong direction. She tries to tempt him to go out with his friends, even to drink wine, but Juan is determined to keep his mind clear. He wants to be the sharpest censor possible. He is eager to catch cheats.

Juan's success in his job continues, and he thinks he has found his mission in life. One day, his letter to Mariana reaches him.

Naturally, he censored it without regret. And just as naturally, he couldn't stop them from executing him the following morning, another victim of his devotion to his work.

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