



LA RUMOROSA

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Another woman calls herself his wife. When she hangs up his clothes, she searches for a strand of my hair abandoned on Lorenzo's coat. She tries to find my tears on the collar of his shirt. She needs to smell vestiges of a foreign perfume. She wants to hear the echo of my breathing sounding on the skin of his neck. She has to make sure. She knows. Lorenzo's eyes met mine, half way, in the airless dance floor and touch and she saw us. We were not careful. It happened during the *Jarana* Dance Festival in Veracruz, back in 1978. The three of us have known since then.

Children I've never seen hug him and call him father when he arrives at their home. They were conceived in a mistaken womb. Their pictures are not in Lorenzo's wallet. But I know they look like him. They are reflected on his face. They have his eyebrows in a permanent question gesture. His nose, thin, long, not needing to be more. On Sundays, while he takes

them to the zoo to recognize with their eyes closed the different smells of the animals, I stare at a trail of ants that insist on crossing the floor of my kitchen. After I die, every day will be a Sunday.

When he is with them, I appeal to the reliquary I keep on the shelf, behind my books. It's a tin box where I save his clipped fingernails, his hair, the stitches of his knee surgery. I lay these relics on the bedspread and pray. Last month I filled the rooms with photographs of him, kissing me at the edge of the ravine of Metlac, holding me in Fortín de las Flores. The picture where I'm dancing a *jarana* and he is playing the *marimba*. Our success at the Ballet Folklórico de México. The best dancing couple in an endless acrobatic seduction. The brochure with the photo of the whole group, wearing our dance costumes, his face in a circle drawn with red marker. Sometimes he is more dead than alive. Just there, on paper.

We have loved each other since our first tour to the United States. There we performed together making our dance contagious, creating an epidemic along our path. We made love in every motel, in the back of every stage. I have a list. It's posted behind my dresser's mirror. I had to tape a new piece of paper after our third tour to Spain.

The fragments of our life together have built and destroyed themselves without my consent. I always wanted to wear a white dress. He bought one for me. It hangs in my closet. Under plastic. Unused. I've held in my inner eyelids the moment we declared our commitment first priority forever, dancing by the cliff of La Quebrada in Acapulco. We felt we could jump off and make love in the air. And yet, I've never worn his wedding ring. He is always leaving. I am always stranded in my own prophecy without meaning.

Other men have waited for my promises, standing still, like iguanas in the sun. The first man who loved me threatened to kill himself. I told him I would not marry him. It was the day before my sixteenth birthday. I only wanted to have Lorenzo. I had just met him a week before at the first rehearsal of the tour. He was twenty five. That afternoon I saw the look of my father in his eyes. His arms stretched like my father's when he held me as a girl. I needed Lorenzo's embrace. "Mi bebé," were the first words he said when we spoke. We wrapped our bodies in the dusty velvet curtains of the stage and kissed for two hours. The next year he married a nurse.

But every other month I know he loves me. It has been like this for twelve years. He tells his wife it's another ballet tour and he comes home to me. We are so close for a week that all we see are each other's faces out of focus. Our bodies can't stop attempting to establish random contact. Thigh-elbow. Waist-neck. Nose-breast. Sweat-skin. I consistently surrender on the pillows, intuiting a dawn yet to be evicted. I have the barefacedness to play fiction all night, inventing each time a pyrotechnical ending to the encounter, just to start over again. I admit the urgency to speak beyond language. Beyond cumbersome words. I redefine the geography of our bodies. I rip the covers and don't notice. There is no axis of rotation in the cluster of limbs and torsos. From the moment he breaks into my being we become the testimony of oneness.

Then it's morning again and I close for inventory and count every pore, goosebump, freckle on his skin. I don't care about the neighbors watching us. The scars in my wrists are roads that go nowhere. I did want to die, but there was no point if I didn't take him with me. His hair is thinning. My breasts are not full anymore. We need to love each other in the dark.

I have never learned to share what is mine. But then, he has never been my possession. When we leave the city, the image of his wife and children follow us wherever we go. I know it will be this way as long as we live. We will travel together and he will return to his nurse. But during our next trip, coming back from San Diego, on our way to Mexicali, I will drive our car over the edge of the road at the highest peak of La Rumorosa. We will fall through the clouds trapped in the canyon. The walls will try to stop us. Owls and eagles will follow our vertical path. Nobody will see us go. We will disappear. To belong to me, he has to be dead, by my side.

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